

## Video Transcript: Mr. G's Introduction to "Objectionable" Things in the Bible

Hey guys, I want to introduce you to our next section, which I've entitled "Objectionable Things in the Bible." There are certain things in the Bible which are often particularly upsetting to non-Christians and which they will often point to and say, look how terrible this is. This is the God you believe in? Or look how ridiculous this is. This is the book you say is God's Word? And if we're honest there are some things in there that we as Christians might find hard to read, hard to understand, and we might feel like we don't know how to view it ourselves, much less how to explain it to skeptics.

Some examples of such "objectionable things" might be the violence we see from Israel against Canaanites, which seems to even be commanded by God and involve killing all the women and children. Or having the death penalty for things that seem silly to our modern ears, like working on the Sabbath Day. Or condemning as evil behaviors that some modern people see as acceptable or even something to be celebrated. Or I've heard some atheists talk about how God is too into Himself, all He cares about is having people pay attention to Him and worship Him. Or why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery? And doesn't the Bible put down women? I could go on and on.

So we're going to talk about some (but not all) of these topics in more detail in this short section, but in this video I just wanted to give you some general principles to consider when you're dealing with objectionable or difficult things like these, whether it's for yourself or you're talking with a non-Christian about it. Now, I don't have all the answers, and none of us should pretend that we do, so it's always good to begin by acknowledging that we don't know everything, and that the best thing to do with any of these issues is to approach it with humility and to ask God for wisdom. Also realize that if someone is approaching the Bible with the presupposition that the Bible is silly or evil, there might not be much you can do to change their mind. It's not going to be like, oh, you explained that so clearly, now I get it. So the main point of these general principles I'm going to give you is for you to understand more clearly yourself, for your relationship with God, and so that you can answer questions and objections...but not necessarily so that you can convince people of anything.

So, when confronted by something in the Bible that seems difficult or offensive to you or someone else, here's what we should NOT do. We should not pretend it doesn't exist, or try to hide it from unbelievers, or deny that it may present a difficulty. And we also shouldn't dismiss it by saying things like "They didn't know then as well as we know now." "Some of the stuff in the Bible is just from men, not from God." Remember our lesson on the authority of the Bible? If you start saying this or that is not really from God, then after awhile none of it is really reliable, and any of it can mean whatever you want it to mean, and so it becomes meaningless.

So, here are four general principles to keep in mind:

1. Look at context. Try to learn the context of the passage – what was the situation? How does it relate to other parts of the Bible? Obviously, this is easier said than done if

you're not very familiar with the Bible. But God is our teacher and He will teach you if you're reading a little each day and asking Him to. It would be very helpful to have a Bible with cross references, so you can look up related verses. So an example of this might be an atheist who asks you why you don't obey all the dietary laws in the Old Testament, trying to get you to see that the Bible can't really be taken seriously. But we know that in the New Testament, Jesus declares all foods clean for His followers (Mark 7:19), so we have the Lord Himself overriding a previous commandment with a new principle that actually fulfills the intent of the old law in a new and deeper way. Another type of context to look at if possible is the historical and cultural context. Sometimes we read the Bible with our 21<sup>st</sup> century Western understanding of how things are or should be, and project it onto the text, and then get upset or confused when it doesn't match.

2. The next thing to keep in mind is that we need to be careful to avoid the assumption that we know best, that God should act like we would act, and that if we can't see a good reason for something, there must not be one. We saw this with the problem of suffering earlier, right? This is a fallacy that a lot of atheists fall into, that because God doesn't do as the atheist would do, that God is wrong, and therefore a loving God could not exist. One example is death; we would normally think of death as something that is just bad, and we want to avoid it. But for those who are God's children, it's a blessing that happens in God's perfect timing. I was struck by these verses, in Isaiah 57:1-2. It's especially striking in the NLT:

Good people pass away;  
the godly often die before their time.  
But no one seems to care or wonder why.

No one seems to understand  
that God is protecting them from the evil to come.

<sup>2</sup>For those who follow godly paths  
will rest in peace when they die.

In Isaiah 55:9 the Lord tells us that "my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And to be honest I'm glad that He is the one in control, and not me, because He knows everything and has all wisdom.

3. Another thing to keep in mind is that God views sin differently than we humans often do. We might define sin as "missing the mark," and that's true, but it kind of makes it sound not as bad as the way God sees it. God is perfect and holy, and no sin can be in His presence. But He loves us, and wants us to be with Him, and He knows the death and destruction that sin brings into our lives. He knows that sin is a matter of life and death, like a deadly cancer. And He'll deal harshly with it, like a doctor would dealing with cancer, because He loves us. He loves His people, and if He sees them in danger from sin, He takes action, because of His love.

4. So this leads us into the last and probably the most important principle: We need to view things in the Bible through the lens of God's love. We know that God is love, that He so loved the world (John 3:16), and that He loves His people, whether they are the Israelites or the non-Jewish believers, whether the nation of Israel in the Old Testament or individuals, He loves His people. We need to see everything that He does in the Bible through the lens of His love. His actions are motivated in one way or another by love, even the things that seem bad or harsh to us. His plans, the way He works many things out all at the same time, are motivated by His love. This is something that my wife Lee talks about a lot in some of her teachings, especially when dealing with some of the harsh stuff in the Old Testament. It might be hard to see at first, but it's His motivation in everything He does. Also we need to remember that His love might look different than human ideas of love. His love is always wanting what is best for His creation. It's not just letting people go their own way and do what they want.

So to sum up the four principles:

1. Consider context
2. Avoid assuming that you know best
3. Sin is deadly
4. View everything through the lens of God's love

I hope these general principles will help you deal with some difficult things you read in the Bible. We'll look at how some of these things apply to specific cases in coming lessons.