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Is Post-Mortem Salvation an Orthodox Doctrine?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether post-mortem salvation is an orthodox doctrine, reconciling a verse about God removing our transgressions from us with verses about each of us having to give an account to God on judgment day, and how to recognize true conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.

* Is post-mortem repentance and salvation an orthodox doctrine?

* How do we reconcile Psalm 103:12, which says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us," with Matthew 12:36 and Romans 14:12, which speak of each person having to give an account of himself to God on the day of judgment?

* How do we tell the difference between conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and feelings that are just either scrupulosity or the devil's accusations?

Transcript

Welcome, the love it listeners. Thank you for joining us on the hashtag, S-T-R-S-C-R-S podcast. Oh, Amy got delicious.

She's just trying to mix it up so it doesn't sound so boring. We just jump in real quickly anyway, so. I think that's Greg's way of saying, try.

I was like, no, that was a good one, right? No, but we really do, we really do appreciate you listening. We appreciate you sending in your questions. We love you so much.

Yes, so let's- We never met you, but we love you. Let's start with Andre. Andre.

Here's his question. Andre, we love you. Is post-mortem repentance slash salvation an orthodox doctrine? No.

Oh, God, leave. On a recent unbelievable podcast, there was a debate between two Christians. Both believed in post-mortem repentance.

Both claimed that it is within the bounds of orthodoxy to believe in post-mortem repentance. What do you think? Well, I have never encountered anything in my reading of scripture that gave me the slightest hint that that was the case, quite the opposite. Famously, for example, the book of Hebrews said, it is appointed for men to die once and then comes the judgment.

Okay, so all of the emphasis about communicating the gospel is within this lifetime. Okay, and I'm just going, I haven't done a deep dive in this. I mean, I probably can develop a stronger case than just those things that are kind of right off the top of my head here, but there's a certain kind of immediacy that is the case in many circumstances where the gospel is preached.

You know, if Jesus sends out the disciples, for example, and he says, preach this message, and if they receive you, find your blessing stays, if they don't receive you, take your blessing back and, you know, dust off your feet and move on. Notice how there's a sense there that they are making a decision in this life that against Christ, and then that's kind of it. Now, that doesn't mean they can't change their mind in the future, but there's no sense is, well, do your best now, but if they don't make it this life, there's post-mortem repentance that's possible.

There's no hint of such a thing. Paul said to be absent from the bodies to be present with the Lord. Now, there may be some intermediate state that we don't really know about.

The thief on the cross, Jesus said to him, today you will be with me in paradise. I mean, it doesn't seem like you go somewhere for a while and think about, gee, now I'm dead. Gee, okay, well, I think I'll repent.

Repent of what? If you're talking about sin. Now, if you're just saying repent, change the mind, which is really what the word means, that it's foundation. Okay, I'm gonna change my mind.

Now I'm dead, I've lived this profligate life. Now I can change my mind and go to heaven. Okay, I just, I can't even imagine how that would look.

Now, that would not be a liability if the thing was actually taught in scripture like the Trinity. I can't imagine on the Trinity would look, but that's not an argument against it if the details are clearly taught in scripture which they are. This one, it's not taught.

And in fact, the emphasis seems to be different. And the Hebrews passage strikes me as being definitive. It is appointed to men to die once and then comes to judgment.

Doesn't it sound like that the door is death? Once you're on the other side, that's it? You don't get another shot? I don't know anything about the history of this doctrine but I don't, it's just something that I've heard people suggest. Now, of course, the LDS, they have a version of this because you can actually, on their view, baptize from the dead

based on a presumption of verse, the meaning of a verse in 1 Corinthians 15. I think they totally misunderstand that but now they say, well, we can baptize you by proxy now and your baptism is going to get you into heaven but baptism doesn't get you into heaven by the New Testament standards anyway.

That's not even the sound teaching. But so the only other group that I know that as a group promotes some version of post-mortem repentance has a false gospel. So, I mean, why would anybody want to advance this? Look at, even if there was a chance, this was the case, why communicate that message rather than the message that is communicating the book of Acts and by Jesus, now is the day of salvation kind of thing, choose now.

Now, if we're wrong about that and there's another chance, great. But what if we're lackadaisical about it because we think there is a second chance and there isn't? So that's not good. So what I'm suggesting is we, if there's a question, if it's a toss-up, go with the smart answer that has the least downside.

But I don't think there's any question. I don't think there is either. It seems like something would be said about it if it were the case.

So I don't know what they're basing it on except speculation but even if you're basing out a speculation, I think there are things that indicate the opposite like you mentioned with Hebrews. Another one that comes to mind is when Jesus is telling the parable where he says, there are a couple parables. One of them, he's saying, make peace with the person taking you to court before, you know, every, before the, before your, it's too late.

You're before the judge. Right, so there's this sense of you, you know, the wise virgins, they have the oil, the other ones don't, but the door closes and that's it. Every, it's just the sense of you have a certain amount of time and then the door will close and then you'll come and you'll, you'll want to be redeemed, but you won't.

There's another one with Lazarus, the parable. So here's what he says and of course this is a parable. So he's not teaching a doctrine that necessarily in this but there's still this sense of the door closes and that's it.

So here's, he's talking about the rich man who's, who dies and then he's in flames and he says, let's see. And Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham experiencing comfort. Right, so Abraham says to him, child remember that during your life, you received your good things and likewise, Lazarus bad things of sorry, Lazarus was the poor man.

Sorry, the rich man. Okay, so, but now he's being comforted here and you are an agony and besides all this, between us and you, there is a great chasm fixed so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able and that none may cross over there from there to us. In other words, the rich man was saying, let someone come over here

and at least give me some relief and Abraham's like, you can't come here and they can't come there.

That's it. The time is over. Now I have a suspicion on unbelievable Justin Briarley's fabulous and we've had him in the show a number of times, but that those who held this view had some way of answering those biblical points, all right? Well, that doesn't mean this, it could have been this or it could have been this or it could have been this or whatever.

That's not enough. You can't just look at the clear case examples or what appear to be and then find some way to, well, I could read it differently. You read it differently to do what? To support a doctrine that's not even mentioned? No, that's not gonna work.

Yeah, it's one thing to try and harmonize if it were actively taught in there to try and make sense of how these would fit with that. It's another thing to not have it taught at all and then still try to read these so that it makes sense with that. All right, let's go to a question from Dina.

How do we reconcile Psalm 103 12 as far as the east is from the west? So far does he remove our transgressions from us with Matthew 1236, on the day of judgment, people will give an account and Romans 14 12. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Well, there's one aspect of this that's easy to answer.

Okay, there is a generalized, there is a sense that we are all accountable to God. Okay, and if you notice, if you look at the Great White Throne Judgment and that's kind of the place to go, if you wanna get the most precision and detail about that event, that it says the books are open and there's another book, The Book of Life. Now I call these books in the story of reality, I call them the books of death because these are the books that determine, no, these are the books that are the basis for the execution of justice by a holy judge who is Jesus in that particular case, okay? But what is meant to show is that everyone is fully guilty.

All right, so there's a judgment, but with regards to some, that judgment is not held against them because their names are in the Book of Life and we have some more detail in 1 John where it says that we have an advocate with Jesus. So Jesus is our defense attorney, so to speak. So when the judgment, this is in principle, is made against believers, Jesus can say in principle here, Father, that has been already covered.

I've taken care of that. They're with me, they're in me. Okay, they've been justified.

So the sins in forgiveness, and this is a feature of the new covenant mentioned both in Jeremiah and in Ezekiel where it talks about this, I think Ezekiel 37 talks about this and also Jeremiah 31. Those sins are completely forgiven, okay? That doesn't mean there isn't in a certain sense a showcase of those sins in some circumstance to demonstrate

God's justice in judging those who have not been forgiven and then demonstrating his mercy towards those who have been and that's the more precision there. There is a judgment, okay? But the judgment is one that we survive in virtue of Jesus because our names are written in the book of life, okay? So I'm not sure what the Matthew passage was.

On the day of judgment, people were given account and then the Romans was, so then each of us were given account of himself to God. Yeah, I'm not exactly, the Romans passage, I'm not exactly, I'd have to look more at the passage, but I think the broader point is to understand that a judgment is coming and everyone's accountable and because everyone's accountable and the deeds are there in the books that then we are all guilty and the exception, the gavel falls upon the guilty with the exception of those whose names are written in the book of life. Now, and so there's a general warning that Paul has given that we're going to have to give an accounting, okay? But those who are under the blood, so to speak, will be forgiven even though they're guilty.

I have to look more on the Romans passage. I'm not sure whether the passage is about people having different views on the law or having different views about what they need to do in terms of what to eat and not to eat. And he says, you don't judge him because we each, we stand before God and we'll each give our own account.

Well, there may be, and there may also be something like that where we're giving account for our lives, even for believers know that not as unto condemnation, and there's a beam of seed judgment too, one for a rewards. But even though I own mind that that's a little hazy, I'm not sure exactly what to do with that. This is why I have to go back to these other passages that make it clear that we are not destined for wrath, for Thessalonians five or, yeah, we're not destined for wrath but obtaining of salvation, okay? He who believes is not judged, John chapter three, but he who does not believe is judged already because he's not believed in the name of Son of God.

So this concept of judgment is used in different ways in different passages. There is an accountability we all have before God. This is why we need to be rescued because that accountability results in our condemnation straight up unless it is Jesus who's taken that punishment for us.

Okay, then let's go to a question from Carter. How do we tell the difference between conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and feelings which are just either A, screw velocity or B, the devil's accusations and how do we make sure we don't put ourselves in the position of writing off real conviction as A or B so we can just do what we wanna do? Yeah, that's a good question for practical living and I don't know that it's always easy to discern. I have an idea about how to do that but just to share sympathy, personal sympathy with the challenge, I think that I have a very sensitive conscience as it turns out.

And so I end up sometimes feeling really bad about something and that I should not be feeling so bad about. And then I think people feel bad sometimes like that because they have a sensitive conscience and they may end up making bad decisions. Like they make disclosures about their sin in ways that they shouldn't be making disclosures, okay? Confessing their sins to certain people because they feel, oh, I feel so bad about this.

When in fact their sin has been resolved and repented from and taken care of but then there's this screw velocity or whatever it is that he mentioned and this then causes a person to go above and beyond what's appropriate. Here's the way I would manage it and the way I've tried to manage my own feelings about this and that is to let the text determine what I should do. On the one hand, what is sin and what isn't and secondly, what I should do in the cases of sin, okay? Those are two things that are critical.

Sometimes we feel guilty about things that aren't sin. Like food and drink and whatever, Jesus talks about that and so does Paul and days of the week and it's not, let every man be convinced his own mind. Now sometimes we're not convinced and so this is why we have to go back to the text and say, well, what actually is morally required here? And is it wrong for me to do that? Certainly there are people with a weak conscience who think things that are morally acceptable are not.

And then of course in that circumstance, Paul says follow your conscience, don't sin against your conscience but it's not a wrong to try to have your conscience properly informed by what the text says and I think that's the way to do it. Go back to the text and by the way one person, I'm sorry, last thought before I forget it. One of my early teachers said and the way to avoid legalism is to have a clear text identifying the thing that you think is wrong.

Have a clear text that says, if you don't have a clear text to say it, then it probably as your assessment that this is wrong is maybe a cultural thing, kind of a legalistic thing or something. Always go back to the text at this point. One thing I think to one filter to put on this, if there's something you have done that's not an ongoing thing that you're doing but it's something in the past.

And if you continue to feel accusations about it and you continue to feel that I would say that's probably not the Holy Spirit if you confessed it to him and he has cleansed you of that. It could be that you're not accepting the forgiveness he's already given and you just keep beating yourself up over it. That I don't think is the way the Holy Spirit acts.

So if you're looking backwards, that doesn't seem like if that would be the way it was more. I'll talk about this in second Corinthians, the early parts of that book about the man who has about the... Forgetting what's behind and... No, no, that's in Philippians. No, about the, I can't remember the language of it now but it's a certain type of conviction that leads to death, not leads to life or something.

Oh, yes, right, yeah, yeah. He says there's a repentance that leads to death. Yeah, it's not a repentance is the word he uses.

He uses something else. But if you understand what we're talking about, you just have this awful feeling. Like go ahead, I'll look it up, see if I can find it.

So if you're looking backwards, what was the one I said? Oh, yes, in Philipians, he talks about forgetting what's behind. He's talking about the fact that he is not yet perfect. So forgetting what's behind and pressing forward to what's ahead.

He moves on, he continues to kill his sin with the Holy Spirit. So if you're looking backwards, I would say that's a danger sign. If you're looking ahead, that's when I think, especially what you are talking about comes into play, Greg, where if you're trying to determine if what you're feeling guilty about is actually a sin, that's where you go to the text and you have to figure it out.

You don't just go by your feelings because I don't think that's that can necessarily be counted on. So Greg, which sorrow I think is the word, a sorrow that leads to repentance or anguish in the first couple of chapters of second Corinthians, folks can look that up if they want to. But anyway, there is a sorrow that is associated with the Holy Spirit and then there's a sorrow that's not and it's fair.

And he discusses those details. I just can't find the exact reference here. It's probably somewhere in chapter two, the beginning of chapter two.

That's what he's talking about. I don't know. Anyway, hopefully people get the idea there.

Yeah, so the last part here, how do we find out if it's just what we want to do? It sounds like he's specifically not talking about something in the past, but something he's actually doing now that he's feeling guilty for. And this is where not only do you look at the text to figure out what is right and wrong, and this is where you can get the help of a pastor or a friend or whoever knows the Bible well, but then the conscience thing that you mentioned comes into play, where if you cannot do it to the glory of God, then you just stop doing it for now until you are convinced one way or the other. Because we should not ever go against our conscience, because when we do that, we're not actually doing something to the glory of God.

I think Martin Luther said maybe this is apocryphal, but it's a good point. He said, trust God had sinned unboldly. And his point wasn't that we should go sitting.

The point is that there's safety in the grace of God. We are not required to be perfect in all our assessments because of the grace of God. And that concept has helped me a lot in my own spiritual life.

Well, thank you Carter and Dina and Andre. We love hearing from you. Send us your question on X with the hashtag STRS.

Or go to our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.