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Since God Values Humility, Is He Against Certainty?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether God is against certainty because it breeds arrogance, the difference between fearing God and living in fear, and why Solomon, who was given wisdom by God, had so many wives.

- * What are your thoughts on someone who says that since God so clearly values humility, then he wouldn't expect certainty from us because that would breed arrogance?
- * What's the difference between fearing God and living in fear?
- * If God gave Solomon wisdom, then why did he have so many wives?

Transcript

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[Music] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl is here with me. We're going to answer your questions.

Hello, Greg. Let's start with one from Ethan. An ex-vangelical Instagram post said, "In the upside-down kingdom of heaven, a paradigm in which God so clearly values humility, I can't imagine God would expect certainty from us that would grow arrogance.

God requires faith, not certainty." Thoughts? Well, yeah. Well, first of all, with regards to Scripture, that person is wrong. God uses the word "no" regarding issues of faith all through the Scripture.

So I'll give you some illustrations. So we have the 10 plagues. All right? 10 plagues? Why are the plagues given back in the book of Exodus? So that they shall know that there's a God in Israel.

Knowledge is certainty. Now, certainty, by the way, is that strictly speaking is a psychological thing. You could be certain about things that are false, things that one

knows are true.

So, and I'm just taking certainty for knowledge here. Now, is it possible that certainty can breed arrogance? Of course. So can uncertainty, like is being suggested here? God doesn't want us to be certain.

He wants us to be filled with faith. Okay, well, then you who are filled with faith, do you think there's any liability of being proud about the faith that you have over and against those awful people who want certainty? Oh, I mean, the human condition is such that either a side can breed immorality or an attitude regarding it that is inappropriate. But as to the attitude itself, 10 times with 10 plagues so that you will know that there is a God in Israel.

It's right there in Exodus. Okay? From chapter 3 and up until the Exodus proper. Okay, fast forward to the first Kings 18 and this is Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

And that's when there's a contest between the gods and Yahweh wins. But the prayer that the prophet offers is very short and very simple. And it entails the notion so that they shall know.

All right, fast forward to Mark chapter 2. There's Jesus, paralytic. Your sins are forgiven. Who can forgive sins but God alone in order that you will know that the son of man has the authority for give sins? I say to you, arise, take up your pellet and walk.

Knowledge again. Fast forward to Acts chapter 2, Pentecost Sunday. Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has caused him to be Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Notice in every single one of those circumstances, we are invited to know with a certitude in the last example that our beliefs are actually true. Okay, and one final thing in 1 John chapter 5, he who has the son has eternal life. John writes, "I am writing these things to you who believe in the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." So from the beginning to the end, time and time and time again, Scripture itself affirms that eternal life and the reality of God are things that we can have the highest level of confidence in, even that we could have the level of confidence that accomplishes knowledge for us.

And there is nothing at all wrong with that, unless you want to affirm a contradiction between the verse that was cited in the application that was made of it, because the Scripture doesn't make that application. The only concern is, well, people who are certain can get arrogant. Well, and people who are certain may not be arrogant, and people who are uncertain but exercise faith, leap of faith, they can be arrogant too.

So you're not getting any safety here by abandoning certainty. What you're doing is you're abandoning what the Scripture actually enjoys you to embrace. Mm-hmm.

And just to follow up on that, Greg, here's a passage from Hebrews 10, 32 through 36, because it talks about the purpose of having this confidence. So here's what it says, "But remember the former days when after being enlightened," and earlier it says, where does it say? What does that mean? Receiving the knowledge of the truth. So after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Knowing. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward, for you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Wow. So it combines the idea, our confidence is what helps us to endure. Right.

And so that confidence is morally neutral. It's not, it can be used for bad or for good. It enables you to endure what you're doing and endure all sorts of sufferings and to persevere, to keep going to work hard.

So the problem is not the confidence. The problem is not the certainty. The problem is what is your confidence in.

So if your confidence isn't bad ideas, then you will do bad. If your confidence isn't good ideas, then you will do good. So what we, where we need to fight back is the bad ideas, not the confidence.

We should be strengthening confidence in order to increase the good that's done in the world. I just thought of a tactical move here. Yeah, that questions that could be asked for somebody makes this point.

And the question could be, are you confident that this is the right way to see this? Yes, I am. Of course, I am. I wouldn't be telling you.

Are you certain that it's the right way to think, see it? Yeah. Well, is your certainty then an example of arrogance? No. Okay.

Well, how is it that your certainty can avoid being arrogant who are not contesting their claim here that it's not, they're not arrogant? And, but certainty of another view, an alternate view is going to be arrogant. How does that work? Now, let them explain it. Now, the answer is it doesn't work.

Mm hmm. So, but it just occurred to me. Those are some questions that might be used.

That, that was actually going to be my next point because what I found is that a lot of

times the people who say this are very confident and have a lot of certainty about their ideas. And what this becomes is it's a way of undermining the ideas they disagree with. If they can undermine your confidence and your certainty, then they can, they can decrease your effectiveness effectively.

That's what's happening. And that's what I've seen a lot of, especially postmodernists will do this. They have their postmodernist view of reality.

And they're very sure of that view. Absolutely. But they spend a lot of time trying to lessen the, the convictions of those who disagree with them.

That way they can get their own ideas out there. And I don't know, maybe they're doing that realizing it or maybe not, but that's effectively what happens. But I, I came across this quote by G.K. Chesterton, Chesterton, Greg, that I wanted to read.

That's on this very topic. Here's what he said. "What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place.

Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth.

This has been exactly reversed. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping. Not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on.

For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether. Wow.

We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. Oh my goodness. Magnificent.

And by the way, that was a hundred years ago. Yeah. Can you believe that? He created Lewis.

Yeah. Yes. Yeah.

So, this has been a problem for a while. And I just wanted to point out one last thing on this, that William Wilberforce actually said it was his certainty that he was right, that kept him going. Yeah.

He specifically said that about his work against the slave trade. So, we don't want to fight confidence and certainty. We want to fight false ideas, bad ideas, harmful ideas.

Okay, Greg, here is a question from Jane Gordoner. What is the difference between fearing God or just living in fear? Well, just living in fear, I'm just presuming here that

she's referring to living in fear of God, because it just seems pretty obvious that if we're fearing all kinds of other things, that's not a good thing. We are enjoying, rather, to fear God and not to live in fear of God the way she is characterizing it.

And the difference here is a perfect love casts out all fear, all right, for one on the one hand. So, if the fear is a fear of judgment or a fear of recrimination of some sort or condescension or all kinds of these things that we might fear from a greater power, this scripture specifically tells us that this is not what we are to understand from God. Jesus says, "Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, I will give you rest for I am gentle and humble of heart." All right, my burden is light.

You will find rest for your souls, kind of thing. But the scripture does speak, especially in the Old Testament, about a fear of God, and this is an awareness of his awesomeness, his greatness, and his power. So, we can be, and I'm trying to think of the best analog here for people, we can have a relationship with a very great and powerful figure and be awed by that figure who provides at the same time a place of safety for us.

Now, that place of safety for us, though, does not give us latitude to treat this great and mighty and powerful individual as a peer, as a buddy, as a chum, because there's a big difference between us and them, even though we have safety and acceptance by them. This, by the way, as Justin decided, is one of the things that I was troubled by in the relationship of John the Baptist and Jesus in the series *The Chosen*, because on the one hand John the Baptist is saying from the text, one's coming after me, "Who standal, I'm not even worthy to untie. I'm not even worthy to touch his feet is what John the Baptist says." And then there's a scene in *The Chosen*, which is extra biblical, where John is getting in an argument with Jesus, and when Jesus is trying to give him some counsel, and he's pushing back, and they're completely and utterly on a peer level, and it's characterized that John thinks he's right, and he's correcting Jesus.

So, on the first case, you do have this sense of awe of the individual of the Messiah, the Lamb of God, or takes away the sins of the world, in the biblical account, but then in the extra biblical material in the movie, that is completely superseded in an inappropriate way, this relationship that John has with Jesus. You know, their contemporaries, their peers, their colleagues, and, you know, they're banging back and forth. And that I thought was, this is an example of John the Baptist not fearing in the sense that I'm talking about.

Jesus, in light of Jesus, exalted office and exalted self. Remember, John said, "He existed before me." John is six months older than Jesus in an earth age, but he existed before me. So he was aware of the deity of Christ, but here he is banging away.

So this is what I think is captured here in this concept of being afraid of God on the one hand, and the fear of the Lord. Non-Christians ought to be afraid of God. It is dangerous to try to even approach a morally perfect being.

This is why we only approach under the cover of the cross. That's what it means to come in the name of Jesus. That's what that means.

We are covered by him. We have an advocate in the Father, with the Father in Jesus Christ, John says in 1 John 1, 2. So we got all of this, but if we're not a Christian, we're in trouble. If we are a Christian, we're adopted sons, but Dad is still Dad.

Like to the max. I think most people have had some sort of interaction with someone who had a lot of authority. You knew you were loved by them, but you also were aware that you should not mess with them.

It could be a dad, it could be a teacher, it could be anything like that. So I think we have that category. If we think back, we can understand what that is.

So I think it's an awareness of the person's authority. It's an awareness of their authority. You don't have the right to mess with them, but at the same time you know that they love you.

So what came to mind for me was in 1 Peter, in chapter 1, right after Peter, he makes a big point that salvation is all by grace. And he says, "Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So he's doing this in the context of grace, but here's what he says right after that. If you address as Father, the one who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth, knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things, like silver or gold, from your futile way of life, inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

In other words, even though we know we have been redeemed, we are completely, we're forgiven, we're God's children, we're adopted. We conduct ourselves in fear knowing that God is judge, because that is the appropriate response to authority. And we don't take advantage of that.

In fact, we do better because we know we've been redeemed by something that can't fail. So those are all the points he makes there, and I think all of those are important understanding what it means to fear God. All right, let's see here.

Let's throw in a short one, Greg. The short questions do not guarantee short answers. Okay, so let's see what we can do here.

If God gave Solomon wisdom, then why did he have so many wives? Well, it's a great question. And a person with wisdom can still make unwise choices because he's fallen. It's as simple as that.

In fact, he was commanded. The kings were commanded not to multiply wives to

themselves. And I think David had six or seven or eight.

I'm in Second Samuel right now, and they keep adding up. You know, I think the last count ahead was eight. So between wives and concubines, that isn't what God had in mind.

And we haven't got the best she be yet, so that would be another one, or I happened in my reading. So God told him not to do this. And one of the reasons why is when you, especially when you marry foreign women for political purposes, you end up getting their gods with them.

And so Solomon did this stupid thing. And by the way, he did not end well, just FYI. Forget about the, I mean, the many wives.

That is a problem, but he had other problems too. So he had all this wisdom given by God, and he still made very poor, not just poor choices, unwise choices. He made immoral choices.

So I think what that shows us is the capability of everybody or anybody of making really bad decisions if they're not careful. If they're not obedient to the law or to God's commands and or not. So that's the first thing.

I mean, basically just got to obey. That's part of wisdom. What we are just talking about here, the Lord, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord.

All right, that's in the beginning of Proverbs. But then also in non-moral matters, just to consistently try to be smart. And I read Proverbs a lot because there's so much of Proverbs that applies to us on a regular basis.

They're not promises, but they're smart. You know, don't be dumb. Do the smart thing.

That's why we have Proverbs. And unfortunately and tragically, Solomon did not take his own advice on a lot of things. Sin ruins everything, even even a person's wisdom.

It's just it's a testimony to the power of sin, the power of our own bad desires and rebellious desires against God and all those things. So our capabilities are not enough. Our sin will still find ways to corrupt all of our capabilities.

Unfortunately, that's the case. Luckily as Christians, we have the Holy Spirit to help put our sin to death or we would be hopeless. Right.

Well, thank you for your questions. We really love hearing from all of you. Send those on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk.

We hope to hear from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.

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