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If I'm Not Being Persecuted, Does That Mean I'm Not Living a Godly Life?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether a lack of persecution means you're not living a godly life, what to think about your faith if your suffering doesn't bring you closer to God, whether we need to nurture the fruit of the Spirit, and characteristics that separate a disciple from a new convert.

* Second Timothy 3:12 says that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," so if I'm not being persecuted, does that mean I'm not living a godly life?

* I often hear that people wouldn't trade their suffering because of the closer relationship with God it produced, but my relationship with God didn't improve after I had cancer, and I wish it had never happened. Should I be worried about my faith?

* Are the fruits of the Spirit automatically received, or do we get a seed of them that we're supposed to nurture and grow to maturity?

* What characteristics separate a disciple from a new convert?

Transcript

Once again, it's time for the "#STRaskpodcast," so thank you for joining us. We appreciate you. We appreciate hearing your questions, so make sure you send us your questions so we can do the show, because we can't do without you.

We're going to start with a question from Fiona today, Greg. Okay. Second Timothy 3, 12 says, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

I'm not being persecuted. Does this mean I'm not living a godly life? Well, it's funny. The first time I heard that verse John MacArthur was preaching and he mentioned it.

And the way he characterized it then was just like that. He says, all who desire to live a godly life will suffer persecution. And then he said, well, you know, people say, well, I'm not suffering

persecution.

And he said, guess what? That's kind of the way he left it. So I think it is fair to ask that question. Okay.

Now, people have to keep in mind that all doesn't always mean all, without exception. I mean, I learned from JP Moreland that you have to you have to consider the frame of reference. So we had, you know, like, we had Thanksgiving dinner and everyone was there.

Well, who's everyone who's all? Well, it wasn't, you know, 8 billion people. It was it was everybody from our family. It's the frame of reference.

So in this particular case, though, it does seem like this is a characterization or standard characterization of what. It was like certainly for all those at that time, because Christians were being persecuted. And if you don't go along with the world, you're going to suffer persecution.

Now, those are people who are largely living in the world, or to have not to be of the world. But now we have a massive kind of a post Christian culture that's largely anti Christian in ideologically, but still there is this leftover background radiation kind of thing that I'm thinking is a big bang that there's this glow that's still there as a result. This is why Richard Dawkins can say, I live in a Christian country and I like that.

He's talking about Great Britain and the Muslims are coming in and messing that up. You know, there's a Christian country. And he's living in the globe asking in the after effects of that.

So a lot of times when you are living in a community, when you're mostly with Christians, then they're not going to persecute you for being Christians if you are just living in that community. But if you are forced out into the world and are living your life visibly as a Christian, it doesn't mean that you're making a lot of noise necessarily. But if you're visibly as a Christian, visible as a Christian, then the likelihood is you're going to get pushed back and that can look different at different times depending on the nature of the culture and your proximity to the culture.

Okay, and back in with a Richard Bonhoeffer, wow, that to live out as Christian faith, that meant because of the nature of that culture, lots of persecution. If you're, you know, in the States, since Christian had hegemony for so many years, that wasn't quite the case, certainly not like that in our country in America. Now it's ramping up more.

And so when people are living visibly as Christians inside of very hostile environments, they're going to get the pushback. Unless they're not living visibly as Christians, I think that was Joe MacArthur's point. Maybe you aren't living godly in an ungodly culture.

Maybe they can't tell you as different from others, you know, and the behaviors, you are kind of going with the flow. In ways that you shouldn't be going with the flow, but you're kind of going along with it because, well, everybody's doing it, and I don't want to stand out, be different in that sense. Well, then you're not going to get any pushback for the culture if you're not

standing out.

And this is where, and I don't know about Fiona, but I think that Christians, when they read that verse, they have to ask themselves, am I not getting pushed back from the culture, a level of persecution? Well, maybe not. Well, why not? Well, it might be because you're isolated from those who would push back. It might be because you are not living distinctively as a follower of Jesus in the midst of a worldly situation.

That's a different matter and more of a concern. Yeah, I suspect, I don't know, maybe all of us have a little bit of each of that in our lives, but I don't even think, maybe you're thinking in terms of, I'm not out there preaching the gospel or whatever. I think this verse even applies to simply the idea of living a godly life.

We talked in the last episode about how people react to seeing someone living a godly life. They can react very strongly to that if they feel condemned by it. They don't like to see their own sin and they want to bring people down so that they don't look bad.

And this is what the Pharisees were doing to Jesus. And this is what people tend to do. I think we all do this to some extent, if we're honest with ourselves.

When somebody is better than we are, it's very easy to want to bring them down so you don't feel bad about yourself. And I'm thinking about, this isn't 1 Peter 4. For the time already passed is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lust, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation and they malign you.

So I think a lot of it is coming, if you are trying to do what's right and you are living in a Christian morality, which is getting farther and farther away from the culture, people are going, they're going to think you're weirdo, like you're not living with your boyfriend. What's going on with you? You're still a virgin? Yeah, they're going to freak out about that. So that's the kind of, I think that's the kind of persecution that we can expect if we are living according to Christian morality.

The farther Christian morality gets from the culture's morality, the more you will have people maligning you because you're not joining in with what they're doing. And they don't like that. Well, I can think of my daughter, Eva, who is a volleyball player and she was in a club last year.

And there was all this talk about abortion, pro-abortion conversation with the other girls. And somehow she was, I don't know exactly the details, but they knew that she was pro-life and she was somewhat pursuing non-grata because of that view. Like, what's the matter with you? You're the bad person because you don't let us kill our babies, you know, is what it amounts to.

So anyway, that would be a little example. In the current culture, the current issues that would be maybe an example of Christians being persecuted. And of course, I mean, it also depends on

how you're defining persecution because, again, depending on how far a morality is from the people around you, it could be as little as people just not talking to you or making jokes about you up to people killing you.

I mean, it depends on what the culture around you is doing. And this is where it comes back to your point about the glow of the Christian morality still hanging around in a lot of ways. But just imagine what it must have been like for the early Christians.

It must have been really difficult. Well, they were obliged to acknowledge Caesar as a God, and they could do this. This is why Christians didn't go in the army at the time, not because they were pacifist, but because they couldn't pledge fealty to Caesar as a God.

And that's one of the things that spurred massive persecution of them. All right, let's go on to a question from anonymous. I often hear that people wouldn't trade their suffering because of the closer relationship with God it produced, et cetera.

My relationship with God didn't improve after having cancer, and although some good came out of it, I wish it had never happened. Should I be worried about my faith? Look, everybody's an individual. They respond differently to these things.

And even in the midst of them, I would be concerned about that. I think of difficulties that I've gone through and how they've helped me. And some of them, it's very, very obvious.

And I would not want that to change. It isn't so much that I felt closer to God. I wouldn't say that's the case in every case.

It's what the key here is what God did in my life through that hardship. And they were substantial things that needed to happen for my good and for my own personal flourishing and for other things, places that God placed me. Like in my role at Stanford reason, for example, and I looked back historically at things that happened that I did not want to experience at the time.

But I realized that was preparation for me. I can't say that. Those are the things that brought me closer to God.

Now I feel really close to God as a result of it or something like that. But I can definitely see the value of those things and I wouldn't trade them. There's some other things where I think, I don't know what I gained out of that.

And I would rather not have gone through that, whatever, sometimes physical pain when you have physical ailments. Boy, I could have done without that one. So we don't know.

That's in God's hands. And we just have to give that to him. My encouragement here for Anonymous is don't beat yourself up about that.

Yeah, I wouldn't beat yourself up either. I think it's different in different cases. Sometimes it

takes a long time to see what has happened.

I can think of two instances in my own life where it took several years before I looked back and said, Oh, now I get how that has brought me here and why I needed for that to happen. But that took a long time and distance. So you just won't see every time and that's when you have to trust God in the times where you can't see.

You have to trust that he is doing something. So we'll see certain examples where we can see it clearly and we'll see other examples where we don't see anything. And that's where the trust comes in because he's already proved himself.

He's already proved that he cares about us and he loves us on the cross. That's objective reality. And that's what I hang on to when I can't see why something is happening.

But maybe in 10 years, you'll feel differently about it. I know I always bring up Johnny Eric's and Tada. She's just such a great example of this.

How a diving accident has been paralyzed for 50 years. Now says she wouldn't trade her wheelchair for anything. But I doubt she said that in the first 10 or 15 years.

It takes a long time to see what God is doing and why. And some of it we won't see until the next life. So again, if I were you anonymous, what I would do is focus on trusting him that he did have something good even if you can't see it.

And the way you do that is you look at who he is and what he's done for us and what he's done in history. And you hang on to that and you trust him. All right, Greg, here's a question from LSJ.

Are the fruits of the spirit supposed to be all automatically received or do we get some kind of seed of them that were supposed to nurture and grow to maturity? I asked because my patients enjoy seem to need a lot of work. Well, it's so interesting. Today, driving here, I was praying about this very thing in my own life because, first of all, the fruits of the spirit are fruits.

I think it's an appropriate metaphor because of fruits don't happen instantly. They become. They are the result of a process of healthy growth and maturation of a plant that's nurtured properly and then the fruit forms.

And I think that if you think of the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, man, those are big deals. And for many, many years, I prayed for gentleness, self-control. Well, those two, I'm trying to click through.

There were three that I was praying for. But and over a long period of time, I would see these things become more evident in my life. Now I'm praying for love, joy, peace.

I said, those are the first ones, Lord. I said this today. This is what I want to see more evidence of in my life because they are fruits of the spirit.

However, you know, I planted a polished water, God caused the increase. So notice there's another agrarian kind of metaphor, but there is a mystery of the growth, but there's still is human activity that's involved. One plants, the other one nurtures that plant by watering, but the increase comes from God.

So there's a partnership there. And I think there's a partnership in where the fruits of the spirit are manifested in our lives. God is the one mysteriously responsible for those fruits, but there are things that we can be doing that will nurture the growth of those things.

We are to be exercising those things, pursuing them, praying for them. So when I pray for patients or gentleness or self-control, you know, I can pray for God's help in that, but I also am obliged to seek to exercise those virtues as I'm able. And it's the exercise in a certain sense of that virtue, that virtue muscle that strengthens that muscle, but still there's a mysterious spiritual element of it that also is involved.

It's not either or it's both and what I've said in the past is 100% God and 100% man. God is 100% responsible for his side, which is critical, and I'm 100% responsible for my side, which is also really important. Paul talks about this in Romans 7 and 8. And the good news for us is that we don't just have a rule, be patient, because that is no power to make us patient.

All that can do is frustrate us as we try to become patient. So what Paul notes is that we have the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit enables us to kill our sin. So we are actively killing our sin, but we have the Holy Spirit who is giving us this power.

So we have, and this is just speaking to your comment, Greg, about God's role and our role, we are killing our sin. We are asking for these things, but it's the Holy Spirit who makes this possible, and we don't just have a rule that can't give us any help or hope. You know, there's an interesting verse in Philippians 4, well-known, be anxious for nothing.

But in everything, anxious anxiety, whatever would be the, maybe the opposite of peace, right? Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, be anxious for nothing. So there is a command not to feel, not to do that. It gives you a means by which you can lessen the anxiety that you're feeling.

Be anxious for nothing but by everything with prayer in everything, by prayer and supplication, with Thanksgiving. Interesting addition there. Let your request be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So now, peace is a fruit of the Spirit, but here it's a directive of how to generate more peace in your life. In fact, he follows that by seeing whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and a good repute.

Now, I know this first because I have to repeat it so often to myself. If there's any, if there's any excellence or anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things and the things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. So there's a formula in that Philippians 4 from verse, actually

starting in verse 4, rejoices in the Lord always all the way to the bottom of verse 9 that is meant to be an antidote to anxiety.

But it's something we do to facilitate the growth of peace in our life, which is a fruit of the Spirit. So once again, you have that interaction between us and God. All right, Greg, let's go on to a question from Timothy.

What characteristics does a disciple have that separate them from a new convert? Well, I'm not sure if I can delineate them. You know who does that a bit is John Newton. I know I was just thinking that.

Yeah. And the problem is when I see his characterization of young men and men and then fathers, I don't even qualify for any of them. Actually, when I read Newton's characterization, but in any event, the, the, in Hebrews chapter six, you have this passage that every straining out to see whether this means you could lose your salvation or not.

But the context start in chapter five and Paul is complaining that you should be adults kind of in the faith and you still need milk. Okay. And then he has a reference there to a characteristic of somebody more mature as you have, knowing the word of God, you have your senses trained to discern good and evil.

So there is a characterization of a, of a more mature Christian that Paul gives, or not Paul, the writer of Hebrews. I don't think it's Paul personally, but the writer of Hebrews gives that distinguishes between a, a younger, less mature Christian and an older one. We also see it in Galatians where Paul talks about, I, I want to be speaking to you as older Christians, but I have to speak to you as babes in Christ because your behavior, it's carnal, it's fleshly.

Okay. So a babe in Christ is going to be more prone to be giving in to kind of pedestrian sins than an older Christian, because an older Christian is learning to put to death, the deeds of the flesh. And that's Romans eight.

And so, which is what Paul means by being led by the spirit, just point of information in that passage. So, yes, I think there are a couple of places that we could go to that make it clear that the behaviors are going to be different where the younger Christian is one that's less educated about the truth. I mean, younger, I mean, spirit, less spiritually mature, not necessarily chronologically younger, because Paul says, Hey, you've been around for a long time in Galatians, but you're still carnal.

And there's that same reference in Hebrews by that author. So, but those who are less mature in Christ are more characterized by fleshly carnal behavior, where those who are older who've been around for a while, they are learning more to more effectively, as Paul says in Romans eight, put to death, the deeds of the flesh. I think that's one of the biggest elements.

And I think there's also, look at a kind of, if you think of young men, young men are young people in general are kind of capricious and brash. But older people, you know, hopefully are at

least characteristically slower to judge and wiser, slower to speak, okay, characteristically. So, I think that this is something that's true here too, that you see contrast, by the way, in 1 John, someone could go to 1 John and read what John says about my little children and the younger brothers and the older and stuff like that.

There's comparisons there. But I think those are a couple of things that are going on. Craig, I basically wrote down the two exacts.

I mean, no, not, I use different words, but I think what I was thinking was the same thing. The first thing I wrote down was wisdom. And that is applying what we learn from the Bible, the truth about what's good and bad and the truth about God applying those to reality into your life.

So, that's why I said wisdom. And the second thing I said was steadiness. And I think what happens is you get a new Christian, there are a lot of spiritual highs, spiritual lows, maybe you're a little bit brash when you're telling other people about Jesus.

But the older you get, the more you trust that God's going to be there for you, that the high is great, but it's not going to last. That's okay. And the low, same thing.

It's not going to last. And you get through it. Yeah.

So you get a certain steadiness where you, you aren't dependent on any sort of kind of dramatic things or, but you're, you're just trusting in God and you're continuing on and you're just steady and everything that you're doing. And you're not ruffled by, by any crazy thing that comes up. You know, Proverbs says that the glory of young men is their strength and the glory of old men is their gray hair.

And I think this is meant to capture that as personification of these qualities, their strength, their vigor, their energy. Okay. But older guys, they're smarter, they're wiser.

And I think that's the reference to gray hair there. That's why it's a glory because you're older. And so you have something that younger people just don't have.

Well, thanks so much for your questions. And we hope to hear from you soon. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.