

# OpenTheo

## Is It Okay to Ask God for the Repentance of Someone Who Has Passed Away?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about asking God for the repentance of someone who has passed away, how to respond to a request to pray for a deceased person, reconciling Hebrews 9:27 with people who have died twice, and whether we'll be judged according to the revelation we received.

- \* What are your thoughts on asking God for the repentance of someone who has passed away?
- \* When asked to pray for a friend's deceased mother's soul, what is a compassionate response that may lead to an opportunity to share the gospel?
- \* How do we reconcile Hebrews 9:27, which says it's appointed for each of us to die once, with people being raised from the dead by Jesus, Peter, and Paul and then dying a second time?
- \* Are people judged differently by God according to the revelation they received?

### Transcript

Welcome once again to the hashtag S-T-R-S podcast. I'm Amy Holland. I'm here with Greg Cokal to answer your questions.

And Greg, the first question comes from Lonnie. Lonnie? Lonnie. I recently heard of some believers, or those claiming belief, asking God for the repentance of the sins of someone who has passed away.

I was wondering if you were going to ask God for the repentance of someone who has passed away? I was wondering what your thoughts on this subject are? It frustrates me to hear this question because of this to me is a little bit of a carryover from Roman Catholicism and in a certain sense, from Mormonism and Roman Catholicism because of their doctrine of purgatory, which is a place that if you, I guess for lack of a better word, qualify for heaven according to their system, so to speak, their soteriology. Even so, you're not cleansed of your sin. You can't go into heaven unless you're holy, and when we die, we're not holy, even if we don't have a

mortal sin on our account that's been dealt with, we still have all kinds of venial sins.

We don't have the biggie that sends us to hell, but we have smaller sins that compromise our purity. We can only enter heaven pure, and therefore we have to go to some place to get purified. Now, in my mind, this is a direct contradiction to a number of concepts of scripture and especially to the statements in Hebrews chapter 10, which says, basically, we're purified once and for all we can go fully into the holy of holies as it were with no fear.

So, and there's only one verse that I know of in the New Testament in the scripture that can be leveraged in support of the doctrine of purgatory, and I think that's grotesquely misapplied even in that case. There is no such thing, but nevertheless, if there are people in purgatory, eventually other way to heaven, but being purified, there are prayers that people can pray on this side that would eventually or result in a reprieve of sorts in purgatory, so there's less time. In fact, these indulgences, this is what they call them, these specify the number of days off of purgatory, as I recall, I was raised on the Catholic.

You get the card and you pray these prayers so that people would have fewer days off in purgatory. No, that's not exactly praying that someone who died would repent, but it's certainly a prayer for somebody who's died as if the circumstances postmortem can be changed by our prayers on this side. And I have no reason biblically to expect that, in fact, quite the opposite.

The writer of Hebrews says, it is pointed to man once to die, and then comes the judgment. Pretty straightforward, it seems to be. When Jesus was talking about the rich man in Lazarus, and I don't know that this was a parable, I think it might have been a characterization of a and after death, existence and intermediary period, that might have been the case before the resurrection and death and resurrection and Pentecost, you know, occasions where the new covenant is kicked in.

But in any event, actually, it's probably the death of Christ that kind of opened up in a certain sense, the holding area, because he did say to the thief of the cross, today you will be in paradise. So there's some other reasons that we've talked about in the past where we think this is the case, but in any event, that's the day people will vow. So when Jesus is talking about the rich man in Lazarus, rich man being in Hades and torment the Lazarus, and Lazarus the poor man being in a place of comfort called Abraham's bosom.

This may be a somewhat accurate characterization of what happens after death. There may be symbolic language and everything, but it's meant to communicate something true. And in that case, the rich man said, he said, you know, tell my brothers and tell me that they said, even if you, if you say a person comes back with the dead, they're not going to believe.

Now, I just realized that's why I was pausing that that's that's trying to make an effect in the other direction, like from the dead man to the living people. But the, but I think what we see there is that there is no such communication possible. And so it won't work from the living people to the dead people either, that the living people are acting in such a way as to effect the

eternal destiny of those who have already passed away.

And well, it also says you cannot go from one place to the other, doesn't it? I don't remember the exact words. Let's see here. Besides all this between us and you, there's a great chasm fixed so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able.

He's talking because he asked for Lazarus to come and dip the tip of his finger. But that's in the Netherlands from one part of the Netherlands to another part. It's not from life to death.

In other words, it's a different direction. The separation is between Abraham's bosom and the rich man. He can't pass over that.

Right? Yeah, those those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able and that none may cross over from there to us. Those are both dead people. Right.

But it's both directions. It's to you can't there doesn't seem to be any repentance where you can say, Oh, now I wish I was over there. Because if anyone was repenting, this would be Lazarus right now.

Well, I don't know the rich man. Sorry. Yes.

He is anguished. There's no question that he's anguished. He's even you could even say that he is repenting, but it's too late now.

And that doesn't mean he's it just means he doesn't want to be there. It doesn't mean any sort of spiritual repentance necessarily. Yeah, we yeah, I'm an agony in this place kind of thing.

So there just is no biblical warrant for the idea that our person this size changes anything about the fate of those who have already passed on. There's none. And by the way, any suggestion of that, it's curious, takes the pressure off of people making the decision here.

Oh, I don't have to worry about that. You know, and that just sounds suspicious to me because it seems like today is the day of salvation, not two days after you die or anything like that. And by the way, I was going to mention in Mormonism, you have something similar that is maybe you could speak to this.

And that is baptism for the dead. So this is why Mormons are all into the genealogies because they're going back in their family histories and they're baptizing their ancestors who have already died, obviously baptism for the dead to somehow secure a better future for them in virtue of this proxy baptism they do on their behalf. And it's a very similar kind of circumstance here, but there is no reason to believe any of that works.

And that baptism for the dead, one verse on it in 1 Corinthians 15, and it seems to have a pagan reference. It's not a theological detail of New Testament soteriology, salvation. Every time Jesus talks about this, he has a sense of urgency and his parables do indicate that this is it.

You don't get a chance afterwards. I was thinking about the parable of the virgins with the lamps and the bridegroom comes and the door shut. They weren't ready.

He talks about the thief coming in the night and his Jesus coming will surprise everyone and it doesn't sound like, and then you can make up your mind when you see that, there is a sense of finality to death and or the coming of Christ that puts an end to all of this. Yeah, one other factor to keep in mind is when you have even a potential for a soft or a hard interpretation of a passage, particularly when it deals with salvation, it's always better to go with a more severe interpretation, because what I would rather have happened is that there are more people in heaven than I thought based on my communication, my best read of the text, rather than fewer people in heaven than I thought, because that means I have taken the softer interpretation and have given hope, false hope to people for whom no hope is available. And that's what I don't want to do.

So it would it's safer just to go with the all things being equal to go with the more severe take. Well, that leads into our next question from Joel. My friend and it starts off the same way, but then the end is a different question.

So here we go. My friend who has no religious background recently lost her mother and asked me to pray for her deceased mother's soul because she chose a hard way of life. What is a compassionate response that may lead to an opportunity to share the gospel? Well, if a compassionate response means something encouraging, I don't think there's anything you can offer.

What we can offer is the truth of communicated gently. And I guess the way I would forward a role play that now, what I would say is, I can't do that. I'm sorry, but nobody could do that.

Once a person dies, their fate is fixed. The only one whose fate can be changed at this moment is yours, not your mothers. I'm so sorry to have to say that, but that's a fact of the matter.

It's a hard thing to say to somebody, but I think you could also follow that up with something like, and I know what your mother would want for you more than anything right now is to turn to Jesus because it doesn't matter how bad you are or what you've done. His sacrifice pays for everything and he will not turn you away. So I just urge you to come to him so that your children will be able to look forward to seeing you and being with you.

And so that's how you can turn it, I think, to the gospel. You know, Amy, that's a great point, and it has biblical warrant because it's exactly what the rich man who died and was lost said when he was there, as Jesus characterized this account. He said, tell my brothers, warn them of what's here.

And for you to say, here's what your mom would say to you, warn him. That's great. And I think because I think what people tend to do in that moment when they hear that, and this is something to anticipate when you're talking to them, they tend to say, well, then if she's not

there, I don't want to be there.

And so that's why I if she's not in heaven, then I don't want to be there. I want to be with her. And I think that is the moment to really emphasize the fact that she would want to warn you.

She would not want you to be with her. She would want you to be with God. Yeah.

And people who say that, I understand the motivation, but they have absolutely no sense of what they're talking about. Even to put it in more human terms, if you're if you had a loved one in the concentration camp, being brutally abused, in a way that you couldn't have prevented at all, would you want to be in the same concentration camp with her and be brutally abused, even though there wasn't going to be any interaction between you and your wife in a personal way. Anyway, no, of course not.

Nobody would want that. But I think there, but imagine, imagine you were there with your brother and they're separating you and you have the option to walk away and let him go off alone. I'm sure people had some sort of sense of loyalty.

There's there's a certain sense of loyalty to the person that you don't want to leave them to suffer alone. And so I could see that happening even in that situation. That's a limitation of violence for sure.

Yeah. Okay. So that kind of that inclination to join in and of loyalty, which I think to address that, I think adding that idea that she would warn you and she would want you to turn to God, I think that helps so that you don't feel this, this need to reject God out of loyalty to your mother.

And there is not any, I have no reason to believe that there is going to be companionship in hell so that you can commiserate together. Well, at least we can put our arms around each other and comfort each other. There is no comfort there.

The scripture uses language that I think is analogical but is still meant to communicate a truth that it's the utter out her darkness, fire and brimstone of the fire that burns forever wailing and gnashing of teeth. You're not going to find comfort and fellowship in a circumstance like that. Well, Greg, you mentioned the passage in Hebrew.

So we're going to go to question from Greg about that. Hebrews 9:27 says that it is appointed that each of us will die once. But Jesus, Peter and Paul all resurrected people from the dead who presumably died a second time.

How do we reconcile this? Well, notice he says once and then comes the judgment. And so again, this is frame of reference kind of thing. He's talking about the nature of salvation, the whole passage.

7, 8, 9, 10, these in Hebrews are all talking about the dynamics of the work of the cross, especially as compared to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Okay. Yes, there are going to be

exceptions.

Now, Jesus was raised from the dead but not to the judgment. He wasn't in that system. All right.

Others had resurrections. We see that in the New Testament particularly. And I think it was one in the Old Testament.

And so these were temporary affairs. But the exception doesn't change the rule. The rule is people are dying ultimately to judgment.

And the purpose of the resurrection in those cases when it happened wasn't to retrieve them back from damnation. So now they could be saved. It was for a different purpose.

And in the case of Lazarus, Lazarus was already a companion disciple of Jesus. So there was no salvific element there. It was for the sake of showing the glory of God and to demonstrate Jesus' messianic calling and the other occasions where there were resurrections, it was for the sake of beating of a great human need in the moment.

And it was just basically a fairly immediate death. Although the graves did open at Jesus' death, we read about that Matthew. But these are only temporary situations.

It doesn't change the broader calculus, which was the focus of that passage in Hebrews, which is talking about death and salvation and etc. And he said, look, you die. That's it.

Then judgment, you've got to deal with your business on this side and decide some biblical examples of short-term resurrections. Jesus doesn't count for this issue. But the short-term resurrections, it doesn't in any way undermine the force of that passage.

Yeah, it's certainly not a usual thing. It was very rare and exception. So it doesn't, if you're going to state that we die once and then there's judgment, it would seem odd to say, but there are a handful of people who will be resurrected.

You might get resurrected before you get judged and we'll see. Maybe you'll get lucky. I don't count on that.

Okay, and on that note, here's a question from Janna. Are people judged differently by God according to the revelation they received? Well, that seems to be the case. We know there are different levels of rewards in heaven based on merit.

I mean, this is clear. Salvation isn't based on merit, but rewards are based on merit. That's always the nature of a reward, except for nowadays when everybody gets a participation trophy.

But that's not the way God works. There are different things that the text identifies as being things that will earn us a particular reward often characterized as a crown in heaven. And in the

same way, there are different levels of punishment.

All right. Now the duration of the punishment, which is banned from the presence of God forever. This is 1 Thessalonians 1. That's going to be for everyone forever.

Duration is the same, but the intensity of the suffering is different. And this comes out in a number of different passages. Jesus is speaking to the cities where he works these miracles and people are not responding in many cases.

He said, look, if I would have worked this miracle in Son of Agabor, they would have repented sackcloth and ashes. Therefore, the punishment you will receive will be greater than Son of Agabor. And notice the equation.

It's not just greater than, but why? Because of the manifestation of God's power in their midst, they have greater revelation. And we see a Jesus trial when Jesus is being questioned by Pilate. Jesus says to Pilate, the person who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.

Now that's not Judas because Judas didn't deliver Jesus over to Pilate. Judas delivered Jesus over to the chief priests who delivered Jesus over to Pilate is probably making a reference to the high priest. And the high priest has all the revelation, all the scriptures, everything, everything should have known better.

And so this one has the greater sin, at least greater than Pilate who participated in the execution. So we have biblical warrant for that. And it's common sense too, which by the way, maybe one of the reasons, it's kind of conventional wisdom.

This is one of the reasons that the parables were guarded. They were confusing. They weren't clear.

And Jesus explained them later to the disciples and partly to protect people from getting more revelation that they'd be judged for when he knew many of those would not respond anyway. He also tells the parable of the servant who knows what the master wants and doesn't do it will be punished with few blows. And those who know and don't do it will have many blows.

So he does give that idea that the greater your knowledge, the greater the sin of rejecting it. However, what I don't want people to conclude from that is that there are people who don't know and therefore will go to heaven because Paul is very clear in Romans 1 through 3 that we are all under God's judgment and we've all rejected what we've been given. So whether we've rejected the general revelation or we've rejected specific revelation or we were in front of Jesus and rejected him, those are all worthy of death and we're all under God's judgment.

That's the whole point of Romans 1 through 3. So I think we tend to say tend to use this as some sort of comfort, but I don't think it's any sort of comfort to us unless you're looking for justice for people who have say persecuted Christians or whatever it is. But yeah, so there is a difference, but in the end it doesn't prevent you. It doesn't mean you are not responsible

before God for rejecting what you've been given.

All right, Greg, we're out of time. You can send us your question on X with a hashtag SDR. Ask or if you go to our website at [SDR.org](https://www.sdr.org), just look for our hashtag SDR.

Ask podcast page and you'll find a link there to send us your question. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.