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Why Would God's Spirit Cause People to Loathe Themselves and Be Ashamed?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why Ezekiel 36:31–32 would say, contrary to Ezekiel 39:25–26, that putting God's Spirit into people will cause them to loathe themselves and be ashamed and whether or not it's biblical to say that the closer you are to God, the more sinful you feel.

* Why would Ezekiel 36:31–32 say that after God puts his Spirit in his people, they will loathe themselves and be ashamed for their sins when his Spirit is supposed to give us hope and joy in Christ as children of God, and doesn't this contradict 39:25–26?

* Is it biblical to say that the closer you are to God, the more sinful you feel?

Transcript

Thank you so much for joining us on the hashtag STRask Podcast. I'm with Greg Koukl today. You are.

I am, and I'm Amy Hall. And today, Greg, we have, I'm not even going to try to describe this group of questions, but we'll just start with the first one. This is Krista.

Here's her question. Ezekiel 36, 31 and 32, says that after God puts his Spirit in his people, they will loathe themselves and be ashamed for their sins. But I thought that when God's Spirit dwells in us, we are supposed to have hope and joy in Christ as children of God, not shame.

And 39, 25 through 29 seems to contradict this. I'm confused. Okay, let me just going to read the verses that seem to be contradictory, and then we'll look at the larger context.

Okay, the first one is Ezekiel 36, what? 31 and 32. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. And then 32, I am doing, I'm not doing this.

No, he's not doing what it hasn't been mentioned yet that we'll get to that for your sake,

declares the Lord, but let it be known to you, be ashamed and confounded for your ways or house of Israel. All right, be ashamed and confounded. Later on, verse or rather, chapter 39 and verse 25, therefore the Lord says, now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name.

They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery, which they have perpetrated against me, and when they live securely in their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know I am God, and because I made them go into exile among the nations and then gathered them again to their own land, and I will leave them, none of them any longer will not hide my face, etc.

So, yeah, you have a little bit of contrast, but you have a shift in time here, and this is, I think, really important. So we're going to go back to Ezekiel 36, and we're going to look a little bit above here, because this is one of the passages like Jeremiah 31, 31, and following, which talks about the new covenant. Verse 24, I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean, and I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart, put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you a second time, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe all my ordinances.

You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers, so you will be my people, and I will be your God. Okay, this is what's going to happen. What is the precondition? He says, that's when you, you, well, I'll just keep reading so I don't have any ellipsis here.

Verse 29, moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness, and I will call you, I'm sorry, call for the grain and multiply it. So this, all the prosperity that's going to come because of this new thing that God is going to do in their hearts. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the fields so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will load yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abomination. He says, I am doing this for my own say on that day, I will cleanse you from all your iniquities, and I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the waste places to be rebuilt. We have a couple of things going on here.

This is a promise of details of the new covenant, which means complete forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit as a permanent possession of all the people, not just for special people like prophets or kings. But the Spirit will turn their hearts and they will turn. One of the things that's going to happen is part of this.

And I think probably the mistake is trying to read everything in a sequential fashion. First, this is going to happen, this is going to happen, this is going to happen. These are all the things that God is going to do.

But part of this whole package is their awareness of their sinfulness. And they're going to see it like OMG, look at how bad I've been. They're going to loathe themselves.

I don't know, I mean, I can just appeal to the experience of people listening that are followers of Jesus, that are Christians that are regenerated. And I would be surprised if as a Christian, you did not look at yourself at different times and different things you've done in the past or even in the moment and loathe what you've done or what you've just been doing. Paul says, there is nothing good in me that dwells in me, that is in my flesh.

So he's acknowledging that there's something about himself, even when he's writing there in Romans 7, that is deplorable, that is loathsome. So our awareness of that sinfulness that we are, that condition we are always in and we are fighting, we ought to be fighting, being loathsome of that is not a bad thing, it's a good thing. All right, but there's more to the story.

And then when they are aware of this, I think this is kind of embodying their repentance, their awareness and their repentance. Paul says in later in Romans that that all Israel will be saved. Well, it's going to be saved not by a different system.

It's just that they are going to come to their senses and characteristically see that Jesus is their rescuer and Jesus rescued them from the sin. That they're going to be aware of, and that's part of what's being talked about here. Once that happens, now this brings us a couple of chapters later, we see this described.

Now I will remove the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel. I will be jealous for my holy name and all the other things I just read a few moments ago, that all applies here. This is the fruitfulness and the goodness and the flourishing that will result from the new birth that is being described there.

It's new birth is New Testament language, but he describes it. He offers it descriptively. I'll give you a new heart, a heart of flesh, not a heart of stone, and I'll give you my spirit, et cetera, et cetera.

But it's accompanied with a sense of repentance, a different view. A lot of times people think, oh, repentance means turning from sin. That isn't what the word means.

It might apply to sin, repent from sin, which is to have a change of mind. But this change of mind is going to happen with them towards God, and they're going to realize the abominations they participated in, and they are going to mourn those activities that they were involved in. Remember, as Zachariot says, they will look upon him whom they have pierced and they will mourn, as if for an only son.

So there is going to be a mourning, a realization of sin that the prophet is talking about here, that will then result in all the restoration that is being spoken of here. Yeah, he's just describing how he's going to change their hearts. And he says, you will move from loving your sin to hating sin.

So he's just describing the total change in their direction. I think that's why he's using those words, I think. Yeah, I don't think there's a contradiction at all.

We have a sequence. In fact, you can see the sequence in your own life, like myself, you became a Christian as an adult or a young adult. You look back in the old ways, they say, oh my goodness.

And by the way, I am more aware after half a century about how bad that stuff was than I was soon after I became a Christian. I've shaped my head and I think, holy cow, that was not good. And so I think that's an awareness that comes with time, but it has to be initial awareness because that's what turns you to Christ.

And if you say you don't have sin, then you're a liar and you make God out to be a liar. But if you say that you have sin, if you confess your sin, and I think he means there in 1 John 1, if you confess that you're a sinner, then he's just a righteous to forgive you and cleanse you. So that's the sequence.

And this follows directly from him saying he's going to give them a heart of flesh. So this is all illustrating just the change of heart that will happen. Right.

The change has got to come first. God working in them. I will cause you.

And that phrase has used a couple of times here. And the consequence is this awareness of their own abominable behavior, their sorrow for it, their embracing the grace of God that's being offered there. And then the flourishing that Israel as a nation will have as a result of that massive turn to their Messiah.

And then the second one, I think, you know, talking about they're going to forget their disgrace. I think what he's saying here is it's just going to be in the past. You're going to move on and that will all be in your past.

You'll be permanently changed. I think, so I think that you're right. This is just different points in time repentance in the first case after God changes their hearts, changing the way they see sin, going from loving it to hating it, and then flourishing and then having all of that judgment and sin behind them in the past.

Yeah. I don't think it's going to mean that our memories are wiped clean. You know, now when we get to heaven, I think that may be a different set of circumstances that were just the former things will be forgotten and the new things, whatever.

But in this particular case, this is still an earthly scenario. And yeah, the past is past. We're moving forward.

I think that's the point. And I just want to say here too, there's something about being aware of your sin with no hope. That's one thing.

Versus being aware of your sin, knowing how God has saved you from it. So even being disgusted by your sin, you're not in despair. You're not beating your breasts and you know.

Whoa, it was me. You're aware of your sin and you hate it, but at the same time, you know your cleanse from that. So you know what God has done for you.

And so it's a completely, if you look at this apart from the gospel, it doesn't really make sense. But it's possible, you know, Christus says, when we have this God spirit in us, we're supposed to have hope and joy in Christ as children of God. That is absolutely true, but that doesn't mean you don't know what he's saved you from.

That actually increases your hope and joy in Christ. So I don't think even those things are contradictory. So this brings us to the next question, Greg.

This one comes from Jeremy. Is it biblical that the closer you are to God, the more sinful you feel? Well, I can't think of a specific verse that makes that point explicit. I can think of a couple of things that seem to be implicit.

And I do think that this is a fairly common reflection that people have as they get older in Christ. I just made it a few moments ago. I said here after half a century of being a Christian, now 51 years and a month actually, I look back at those things and I'm appalled by not only things I did before I was a Christian.

In a certain sense, I'm more appalled by things I did after I became a Christian, and it seems only consistent with being a Christian. And I just needed to mature more to see those things for what they were. So it's kind of interesting too, and this is implicit.

And that is, if you look at Paul's life in Galatians 1, which is his first book, Writing Epistle, he says, you know, I am an apostle who received my revelation not from men, but from Jesus himself. Now I had to check it out with the pillars and they said, yeah, okay, I'm not running in vain, but he says that, you know, but it's interesting then towards the end of his life. I think it's in 1 Timothy, but it might be 2 Timothy.

The 2 Timothy is his last letter, but it's one of the Timothy letters. He identifies himself as the greatest of sinners. That's 1 Timothy.

That's 1 Timothy. Okay, so that, you know, Tia, I wonder, I wonder, you know, if Paul's own kind of existential awareness of his fallenness became more obvious to him as he went on. Now, if there was another other places where he says, I'm not aware of anything against myself, but I

am not by this acquit, the one who quits me as the Lord.

But I just see that, and it raises to certainly the possibility. Maybe that's what's going on there in Paul's life. But I had another verse run through my mind a few moments ago.

Now it escapes me, but I think this is mostly an anecdotal reflection based on people's lives. Oh, I remember what it was. James says that when we look at the law, it's like looking in a mirror.

You know, when, I think when we're new Christians, we still, we can look at the law, but the mere images fuzzier than when we grow older, we understand the word more accurately, hopefully as we grow older. And then when we understand it more accurately, we realize more accurately how bad we are. Okay.

And so that would be another implicit maybe suggestion when I look at scripture, James, and the law being a mirror. And then, you know, time goes as he actually heard somebody put it this way. They said, as you get older, so this is somebody else bearing testimony to the same idea as you get older to the Lord.

You, you end older in the Lord. You end up standing closer to the mirror. And when you're closer to the mirror, you see your own imperfections more clearly.

So that would be, I mean, the scriptural support, if that's needed, anecdotal support is adequate, I think. And it certainly makes sense that the more holy you get, the more, the more you're aware of your fallenness. So.

Yeah, I think, I think also the more sin you kill, the more you notice the ones that are left and the more they bother you. I, the problem is, I think, and I think this does make sense because when we're just around people, we tend to fill this kind of safety and the averages. So I'm better at him.

Either I'm better than him or we're all the same. We all do this. So we're not that bad.

So we're all comparing ourselves by the people around us and we think we're pretty good. But then you see someone like Isaiah, who comes face to face with God and just falls down and says, whoa is me. So there's definitely something about when you're around holiness, it's like a light shining on all the dark places in your own heart.

And this is why this is why the Pharisees hated Jesus so much because they were counting on developing their own righteousness by their own works. But here comes someone who's actually perfect and being around him reveals their own sin to themselves. So they can't even stand to be around him.

And here is where I think it's important to know that our response to seeing holiness all depends on our relationship to the gospel. Because you have the Pharisees who hate holiness when they're actually confronted with it because it shows that their holiness is bad. Their deeds

were evil.

Jesus says in John 3. And then you have, think about the woman in Luke 7 who is forgiven and she comes and she is just, she's wiping Jesus' feet with her tears. And Jesus says she loves much, she's been forgiven much. So she loves much.

So when you have the gospel and you see holiness and you're not depending on your own righteousness, but you're accepting the fact that yes, I need someone else's righteousness, that causes you to love. So whether or not an awareness of your sin causes you to love God more or to hate him more depends on your relationship to your own righteousness and where your righteousness is coming from. So I just want to emphasize that because both of these questions have been about an awareness of your sin.

And we always have to look at that awareness of our sin in the proper place of causing us to love Jesus more for what he's done. And then you look at someone like John Newton, man, that guy loves Jesus because he was aware of his own past sin. He's a slave trader.

Yeah. And he's the one who wrote Amazing Grace. So it's not a bad thing to be aware of your sin.

As long as it's driving you to love Jesus more and not to protect yourself by protecting your own righteousness and denying your sin or hating God for being a judge. All right, Greg. I think we're out of time.

I just realized. All right. Well, those are both good questions.

This is something back to our commenting on the question from the atheist we had in the last call. I mean, the last show. This is something atheists don't understand.

So when they look at Christians and they see, oh, Christians say all these things are wrong and I've sinned. They think that we as Christians are living in fear because the law makes them hate God. They're because they know they're guilty.

So all they see is that. And so they think, oh, Christians, you're just living in fear to which Christians are always kind of mystified. No, but I don't even understand the question.

I've been reconciled to God. The fact that these rules condemn me. Say nothing about how I am with God now.

I would rather be reconciled to a perfectly good and righteous God. Then to not have a God at all and be lost in all of this evil and suffering. So again, this comes down to the way you view the fact that we see our sin comes down to the gospel.

So every time this comes up, whether it's in your own life or it's coming from an atheist, just know that's the root of the problem. You can go straight to that and try and explain why knowing our sin and seeing the law doesn't cause us to despair and fear. Okay, enough

preaching.

That's the end of the show. Nice. Nicely done, Amy.

Thank you, Krista and Jeremy. You can send us your question on X with the hashtag STR, ask or go to our website and just look for the hashtag STR, ask podcast page at STR.org and you'll find a link there. And you can send us your question and just make sure it's fairly short, one to two sentences, and we will consider it for the show.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.