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How Can I Stay Balanced in My Belief That God Is Always Good to His Children?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about believing God is always good to his children while rejecting prosperity teaching, how God can be jealous if he is love and love is not jealous, and whether God changing his mind in Exodus 32 indicates he gained knowledge and is not all-knowing.

- * How can I maintain balance in my belief that God is always good to his children and not believe too much in prosperity teaching?
- * If God is love, then how could he be jealous if the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that love is not jealous?
- * How would you respond to someone who said that God changing his mind in Exodus 32 indicates he was gaining knowledge and means he is not all-knowing?

Transcript

Welcome to the hashtag SDRask Podcast with Greg Kockel and Amy Hall. I got top-building that time. Alright, I know all the listeners were waiting to see if I would come through on that one.

That was not an alphabetical or that was in age order. Yes. Alright, Greg.

No, not in the level of importance though. Order of importance. Let's start with a question from Thomas from Sweden.

I believe God is always good to His children, but I realize the importance of balance in this belief. I strive to remain humble, recognizing that my success comes from Him, but sometimes I feel guilty for believing too much in prosperity teaching. Is there a way to maintain balance? Well, I don't have a lot of information there to know precisely what He's struggling with.

God is always good. I mean, there's no imbalance in that. That doesn't mean that the

things that we think are good are the things that God thinks are good.

And what the word faith movement has done is it's not properly defined goodness. On their view, sickness is bad. Poverty is bad.

Not getting what you want is bad, and therefore they're not consistent with God's goodness. No, I'm not entirely sure what to do with the sickness part. I think that's evidence of the fall.

But the presumption is that if God is good, He would not allow anything bad to befall us, and then bad is often understood in terms of human want, in human desires. James says you have not because you asked not, and then he says, well, you've asked, but you've asked what wrong motives in many cases to spend it on your pleasures. And this seems to be characteristic of the word faith movement.

Now, I'm not sure what Thomas is struggling with here. We want prosperity for ourselves, but we want the kind of prosperity that God values. He doesn't value financial prosperity.

Financial prosperity is a earthly good that can be used for good or for ill. It can be good for us, or it can be bad for us. It just depends on us.

So there is nothing a mess, I think, with seeking after the earth's goods, as long as it's in the proper proportion. A lot of what I do, and especially here at the golden years, so to speak, I'm thinking about my future financial well-being and my family's future financial well-being. And I see no problem with that.

The Book of Proverbs has lots to say about that kind of planning and that being diligent and hard-working to that end. But of course, if you get the tail wagging the dog, that creates all kinds of other problems too. So the question I think that Thomas asked is what is the balance, and I can't answer that like in a general sense.

I can only look at individual circumstances and say, yeah, I think that's not in balance what's happening there. I think a person has to look at their obligations that they have towards regarding their families themselves. We all have obligations to take care of ourselves as adults.

We are not to be burdened on other people. In fact, we have an obligation. This is scriptural too in the New Testament.

I can't remember because Galatians are 2 Thessalonians. I think there are passages in both sections that we are to work to take care of ourselves and have enough extra to take care of those who are in genuine need. And also to take care of our own families.

Those are all legitimate concerns and those are moral obligations we have before God. And once those basic things are met, and our productive work provides more for us than

we have a stewardship. But Paul says, don't try to get rich because when you try to get rich, all kinds of problems come from that.

It's not wealth, but the desire for wealth that brings all kinds of difficulties and problems. So there are liabilities there, and I guess we just have to be careful for it. When God is good to us, and I think God has been fabulous to me, I look at all the things that I have that are tremendously beneficial to me, both in terms of material things, and in terms of the material things, the productivity of this ministry, the organization, my friends that I have here, my colleagues, certain aspects of my family, I think, wow, and I live in the United States of America for goodness sake.

I mean, nobody in the U.S. has it bad compared to the rest of the world, generally speaking. So God has been very generous to me, and I'm thankful for that, and I try to maintain that thankful spirit. So, I don't know, having said that, hopefully there's some stuff in there for Thomas that will help him to keep his own life in balance.

Do not go the root of the word faith crowd though. Don't believe a word that they say, the Benny Hinn crowd at all. Forget about it.

Who's the other guy? I thankfully forget his name in a way. Here's the guy. Your best life.

Your best life. Oh, Joel Osteen. Joel Osteen.

Yeah, just forget about it. You don't want your best life now. Joel Osteen gets his best life now.

It's all downhill after this. All right. Your best life.

Our best life. Christian's best life is not here. It's there, and we are being prepared for the next life.

Doesn't mean this life has no significance. We do what we can with what we have, and we enjoy the benefits that God has given. Everything is to be enjoyed.

If you take away Thanksgiving, Jesus said, Paul says, different places. But this is not our landing place. This is just a temporary place.

Thomas, I think your question is so common. I think it's one of the most common struggles that Christians have to go through. If not the most, it's something that every person has to figure out.

And that is, what does it mean? What does God's goodness look like? Because as you ask here, I believe God is always good to his children, but sometimes I believe too much in prosperity teaching. If you put those two things together, what I hear is that your understanding of God's goodness is him giving you certain things that you want or need or whatever it is. And that's just not the case.

And this is something I think we all have to struggle with because a time will come when you'll realize, I'm not getting everything I want. Things aren't going the way I wanted them to. So what does it mean for God to be good to his children? What does that look like? And the way that we discover that is by reading the Bible.

Find out what does God say is good. And we know that his goal for us is to make us like Christ. That is the ultimate goodness that he's working towards.

That's the Holy Spirit's working towards in us. That is the good that he's working towards. He defines this specifically in Romans 8, 28, and 29.

So that is the goodness that he's doing your life. I'm sorry to tell you because that means that you won't always have prosperity. And again, the reason for that is God has something greater for us than prosperity.

We're thinking too low. Our goal is too low if what we want is comfort and prosperity. It's too low.

So whatever he brings into our lives and he blesses us with, and some people do receive more things than others for whatever reason God is glorified in all sorts of different ways. But in every case he's working in that person towards making them like Christ. Here's an example.

Listen to what Jane says. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have its perfect result so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach.

So he's connecting the idea of our trials turning us into someone better than we were, and it all involves wisdom. And wisdom is a good thing, even if it involves suffering. And this is something I think it's very hard for us to make sense of, maybe especially in this country, because we've had it so good for so long.

When we're hit by something, we have to work through this. So I just encourage you, look and see what the Bible says about God's goals for us. Read through the New Testament and look for that specifically, and you have to start retraining your thinking to think about what does it look like for God to be good to us? Agreed.

Okay. Let's go on to a question from Tom Tillerman. How would you respond to the objection, if God is love, then how could he be jealous? The Bible says love is not jealous.

Well, the Old Testament does talk about jealousy, God being jealous for his people, his bride, which is Israel, and his bride has been unfaithful to him. In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 13, which is what Tom just cited, it gives a lot of characteristics of love, and

one of them is the love is not jealous. My sense is that it's actually using the term in a different fashion.

Now, I haven't done the linguistic analysis or anything like this to see how these words are used or what their relationship is, but just my general understanding of it, when you think about human jealousy, this is usually the way the word is used as a vice, because it is an unreasonable possessiveness of someone and an emotional reaction to when that possession is being threatened in a certain way. So you may be married, you have your wife, and then some man compliments her on her dress, and then you take offense because you are jealous because that looks like an intrusion into your property or something like that. And of course, we've all have recognized this kind of quality in people, jealousy, and we realize it as not just a weakness, but as a vice.

It's destructive in relationships. However, if a husband was offended because his wife was actually committing adultery with someone else, and his attitude was, you are mine, you have pledged yourself to me. I guess you could call that a jealousy, but I don't think in common parlance we use that language because we know jealousy is kind of a shallow response, inappropriate response to an innocent action and it's a vice.

But being offended that another man is making moves on your wife or something like that, that's an entirely different category of things. And this is why the word English word jealousy in translating the Old Testament attitude about God towards Israel and the New Testament Paul's understanding of love, that these are not, they can't be synonymous, this is not a good choice of words. If we're just thinking that there's no distinction between these two types of jealousy.

In the Old Testament, we have something very different. God has sacrificed himself. Maybe that's not the right word to use.

God has rescued a people. And this is the basis upon which God makes his demand in Israel. He said, I rescued you from Egypt, from slavery, and I made you a great nation.

I gave you a land and my condition was that you follow me. And you didn't. You were a bride to me and you were unfaithful.

Think about Hosea who talks about the same concept of Hosea. He had Gomer, a wife who was a prostitute, and then betrayed him. And what God arranged in that circumstance is a picture of the betrayal of Israel to their husband, the Lord, and this was parallel.

And so it's in this context that we see reference to God's jealousy. It's not the same kind of thing. It's not the same kind of moral element when jealousy is described of God in the Old Testament regarding Israel and her waywardness and the jealousy that's identified as a vice that's lack of love in first Corinthians 13.

It's an inappropriate possessiveness versus an appropriate. Oh, it's a great way to put it. In fact, I can even... Why didn't you start to save me almost breath? Well, I can even prove there's a difference in Paul's very next letter to the Corinthians because here's what he says.

For I am jealous for you. Remember, it was Paul who said love is not jealous. And he says, for I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

For I be true due to one husband so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. That's a great way. So he clearly thinks there are different kinds of jealousy.

There's a godly jealousy that's the rightful position that God has and this rightful... I don't want to say demand, but his rightful... Demand, I think, is appropriate. Because of the covenant he has, that is actually godly to guard that covenant and to protect it from people who would enter into it and destroy it. That's all for our good.

Now, a bad jealousy would be preventing someone from dragging that person to yourself in an inappropriate way where it's for their detriment. But of course, God is doing... We harm ourselves when we walk away from God. Right.

So when someone walks away from a covenant, that's a terrible thing. And so you want the other party to try and maintain that covenant, protect that covenant. It's good for you.

Of course, you use your computer search to find that verse. So you had a leg up on me and that one. I did.

But it was an excellent search there. Alright, Greg. Here is a question from Patrick.

I had someone tell me that if God changed his mind, for example, in Exodus 32, he was, quote, learning or gaining knowledge, which they contend equals not being all-knowing. How would you respond? Well, you have verses that make this point. In fact, I have it here, Exodus, chapter 32, verse, I think 14, right? So the Lord changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people.

Now this was a judgment on the people and Aaron who made the golden calf in the circumstance in Exodus where Moses had gone up in the mountain. When he came back, this is what they saw and God got mad and Moses contended for the people as a priest, he stood in between them and prayed that God wouldn't destroy them. Now he actually did destroy some, but he didn't destroy the whole people and he was going to, you know, he changed his mind as the text says.

Now, of course, I just read last night Psalm 139, which is an amazing psalm of God's omniscience. God knows everything, okay? Four and a half top to bottom. There's nothing that catches him by surprise.

So how do we make sense of this? And the charitable reading, characteristically you try to make a charitable reading, you find a way to try, look for a way to make sense of both. And here's, I think God, it's pretty clear, not only from scripture, but just a reflection that if God is God, one of his perfections is knowledge. There is something, nothing that he doesn't know, he doesn't discover stuff, he doesn't learn stuff.

So it isn't as if he changes his mind in light of new knowledge. Sometimes God can change his mind in light of new circumstances. So he has a fixed disposition regarding one set of circumstances.

And when the circumstances change, then he has a different disposition regarding that. Now what's the best way to describe that? The best way, humanly speaking, anthropomorphically so to speak, is to say God changed his mind. Instead of God saying to Moses, I knew you were going to do that.

So now I'm going to do something else, okay? No, he did know Moses was going to intercede for the people. And he did make a claim, I'm going to destroy these people and make my promise to you and raise up a nation out of you. And Moses said, you can't do that.

The reason you can't do that is you already made a promise, okay? And so what Moses is doing is holding God to his word. So he's calling on God in his prayer to be God. It's a very powerful prayer because he's appealing to God himself.

And then he says, by the way, and the other nations around are going to say, you just dragged all these people out here just to destroy them, okay? So it's not going to look good for you. But what's important here is the intercession that Moses is making as a priest before the people. And God responds to his prayer, okay? Now had Moses not prayed, of course, this is, you know, hypothetical, then God would have carried through with his thing.

But that God knew that Moses was going to intercede and therefore has a different disposition regarding the different circumstances, okay? Now that's a charitable reading of the text. Some people are going to exist. God changed his mind.

Greg, open the escape. Yeah, Greg Boyd is going to, you know, really camp on verses like this. Say God changed his mind.

And so God doesn't really know the future. Well, what he's doing is he's taking one reading of the text that makes sense of the text, this text, but then it's savages other texts and the character of God removes a divine perfection. And I think a better way of doing it is to maintain the divine perfection and then try to understand the language in a text like this in light of the unchanging divine perfection.

Yeah, you have to look at everything that's involved, not just one single Bible verse.

Never read a Bible verse. But sometimes the context, which is what you're pointing out here, is the larger context of Scripture.

I was talking to my brother yesterday about some particular point, theological point in how he was talking to some friends who had one view and he thought that was a mistaken view, which it was, and I give the reasons why, but what I said to him, even this morning as I was driving in, he was hauling his boat out to go fishing, so nice to be retired. My younger brother in Florida, good for him. But I said, what you want to do when you're solving Bible problems is you're trying to read the text charitably and try to find a way of recognizing, especially if you're a Bible-believing Christian, you can't just say, well, here's my proof first against my view and you have yours against yours, but I got my view.

I said, well, all that person is done at this point is just affirmed a contradiction. The goal is to take all of the verses relevant to an issue and then try to see, come up with a solution that incorporates the most of them and integrates them in a coherent fashion. And we were talking about replacement theology and about how the church has replaced Israel.

And I said, wait a minute, the Old Testament is thick with passages that says God is going to do these things through national Israel and give them the land. We turn them to the land. I was looking at Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 37 and 36 and all these passages.

And he said, well, we have a New Testament understanding of that because here it says, you know, this thing. So they cite these verses. I said, well, look, all they've done then is savage to all the promises of the Old Testament.

If they can't bring these two together in a way that makes hermeneutical sense. I think there is a solution to that, but not the way they were doing it. And so this is the point.

You don't want to leave a contradiction laying on the table if you can solve it. And that's what I've attempted to do. Yeah.

Oftentimes there will be one view that can make sense of all of it, whereas the other view can't make sense of the other side. Or most of it. I mean, sometimes they're going to be outliers.

Right. But in this case, I think the view that you described can make sense of both sides. Whereas if you say, God doesn't know everything or he doesn't know the future.

Now you've got so many problems in the Bible that contradict it, that you can't make sense of both. All right, Greg, we're out of time. Wow.

Thank you so much for your questions. Please send us your question on X with the hashtag STRasker. Go to our website at str.org and send us a question through the

hashtag STRaskpodcast page.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.