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Does “Repent from Your Sin and Believe” Describe a Works Salvation?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether “repent from your sin and believe” describes a works salvation and Greg’s stance on the idea of “easy beliefism”—i.e., the idea that all one must do to be saved is believe in God.

* I do not agree with the “repent from your sin and believe” salvation, which seems to be a works salvation. How can someone repent without faith?

* What is Greg’s stance on the idea of “easy beliefism”—i.e., the idea that all one must do to be saved is believe in God?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-T-R-Ask podcast. So, Greg, today we have questions about repenting and believing and easy beliefism and all these kinds of questions. So, we're going to start with one from PR.

I came to faith in Christ when I heard and believed that Jesus died for my sins. I do not agree with the repent from your sin and believe salvation, which seems to be a works salvation. How can someone repent without faith? Well, I agree with that the way it's put.

The difficulty is in the way we have come to use certain words. And in this case, the difficulty is with the word repent. Now, the word repent does not mean turn from your sins.

It means change your mind or have a change or turn, if you will, but it needs an object. Now, when the text says repent from your sins, now we have the object. We know what the turning or the mind-changing is about.

Sometimes, by the way, the text says repentance towards God and faith in Jesus. That's another characterization of it. Not sure where it is, but the point there is you have wrong beliefs about God.

You need to change those beliefs and that entails putting your faith in Jesus. Nothing about sin is manifest in the word repent. But this is the way the word, the connotation of the word, has come to be for us.

You see placards and signs. Repent, you see in movies. Repent, there's the crazy man on the street.

Repent, repent, as if this word all by itself is all that's necessary to be able to understand what God requires from us. Well, if you have more background information, then the answer is one word is enough if you have the proper background information. And I agree with the point that PR is making that you can't, if you're saying, okay, I'm promising to leave all my sins behind and I'm not going to sin anymore, now I'm okay to receive Jesus.

That is works based salvation. And what I wrote in the story of reality is that in my view, and this is a kind of a little aphorism here that helped me, God catches his fish first and then he cleans them. He catches his fish first and then he cleans them.

Of course, it's an illustration. It doesn't prove anything. I think the proof is in the text.

It's when we come to Christ, our lives are transformed. Behold, if any man is in Christ, he's a new creature, old things passed away, new things have come. First Corinthians somewhere.

And then we see the, John the Baptist, when he's talking about repenting, people are coming and confessing their sins. I'll say something about that in a moment. But then he sees the Pharisees coming up and he says, you brood of vipers, who warns you of the wrath that is to come? And he doesn't trust them with good reason.

And so he says, bring forth deeds in keeping with your repentance or professed repentance, okay? If you are really having a change of mind here, then you better show me that's the case and you're not just showing up because right now it's the religious thing to do. And you're joining in with the crowd. So I think the passages like this help us to see that repentance is a transformation of mind, but it does entail a change of life.

And Paul writes to Titus chapter three, the grace of God has appeared teaching us to deny on godliness. So the package is a robust package. We come to Christ like the song says, just as we are.

We have changed our mind about the way we viewed him and God and even ourselves before. Now we're coming as sinners to receive the rescue that he provides and to enter into a new life. So it isn't like I'm getting my fire insurance.

Okay, I'm done with you now. Leave me alone. I have a life to live.

That's not the new life God is talking about. The changed life, the transformed life, the born again life results in a transformation that has ramifications for our behavior. And if it doesn't,

then it isn't a real transformation.

It's not a requirement of salvation. It is a consequence of salvation. But built into this, and this is why I want to be careful, is the idea that when you have a change, you're turning from one thing to another.

You're turning from an old life to a new life, an old life where to use the for spiritual laws characterization with crusade or what they call crew now. I guess they still use this. I don't know.

But we had been on the throne of our life. And now we're putting Christ on the throne of our lives. I think it's a helpful way of viewing it.

And so the turning, the repenting, the metanoia, I think maybe is the Greek word, the transformation is a result of viewing Jesus and ourselves and the world entirely different way. Now we're shifting. We're shifting to him.

We're putting him on the throne of our lives. We are no longer on the throne. Now we belong to him and we're moving in that direction.

So our trajectory has changed from a trajectory that is according to the flesh, the way Paul describes it in Romans eight in the beginning. To according to the spirit. Once we have the spirit, we are his and we are walking according to that spirit.

But that is the process. In Galatians five, we see a description. Those who are walking according to the spirit cannot.

Well, he says the flesh and the spirit are at war with each other. This is for the believer and you can't do the things that you want. It's kind of a double entendre.

You can't do the fleshly things you want when the spirit is in charge, if you will, and you can't do the spiritual things you want if the flesh is in charge. And then he has the description of the deeds of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit. All of this to say is that it's not just a simple repent or a simple believe.

It is a turning a metanoia, which is the word I think that's used to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. But then he has a suitable analog here. It's a turning that has ramifications and it's a turning from old life to a new life.

And it isn't saying you won't sin anymore. But for many people, it's a radical shift because now they're focused on Christ and they're leaving that light behind. They stop, you know, drinking and smoking and excess or whatever it is that they think is breathing and holding them down, gambling, all kinds of things that were awful.

You hear people say, yes, when I turned to Christ, bang, that was gone. I didn't do any of that. I was transformed.

Now, that's not true with everybody because of some things they struggle with. But nevertheless, I want people just to get the general picture of the shift and the change that's involved. Salvation is the free gift of grace.

Okay. That's what we receive from Christ that then initiates this radical transformation inside that has consequences for the rest of our lives. And one important point you're making here, Greg, is because one of one of PR's concerns is that, you know, how can someone repent without faith? So I think he's seeing it as repent and then believe.

But the point you're making is it's one action. You're turning towards Christ. It's the belief in Christ is making you turn.

It's not that you're repenting first. Because obviously Jesus said repent and believe. So he couldn't be wrong about this.

It's just a matter of understanding the words correctly as they're being used. And what happens is, unfortunately, there's these cultural understandings that repent means turn from sin and we import that into the text. When the text isn't saying it quite like that, that word doesn't mean turn from sin.

It means something different that may entail turning from sin. But we have to get in proper realms. Here's a question from Jordan.

When is Greg's stance on the idea of easy beliefism? That is the idea that all one must do to be saved is believe in God. Many people say that the belief in versus belief that theology isn't found in scripture. But I've been raised and surrounded by it as the correct view for my entire walk with God.

The ones that bring up easy beliefism say that the verse in James about how demons believe that they tremble isn't relevant because salvation isn't offered to demons in the first place. Well, I'm a little stunned at that response because what's the point of James writing it? If he's not making an application to believers, you say that you have faith, but you have no works. The demons say they believe in God, doesn't do them any good, and it's not going to do you any good if all you have is what you say.

If you're so-called faith and what he says there in James 2 is, can that faith save you? Can that sort of quote unquote faith save you? And his answer is no. That's not real faith. Then he explains what it actually is.

I mean, the phrase easy beliefism is a kind of pejorative characterization. And I think it oversimplifies the circumstances. I mentioned, I think a few moments ago about Romans 8 and a trajectory called characterizes or contrasts those who are according to the flesh and those who are according to the spirit.

Okay, it's my word trajectory, but I think that's what's being captured there. If your life is on a

trajectory according to the flesh, that means you're living like everybody else. It doesn't mean you're the worst person in the world.

It means that you're no different from a non-Christian. Then you probably are non-Christian. If you rather, according to the spirit, and Paul characterizes being according to the spirit is actually possessing the spirit.

If the spirit is in you, because if he's not, you're none of his is what Paul says there. If he's in you, then you are according to the spirit. Even if your life is kind of messed up and you're struggling with things, Paul uses the same phrase according to the spirit or in the spirit.

Not the way we often use it, like in a state of sinning, but he uses as a synonym for new birth. So that's the best way, I think, to think of it. When we become Christians, we are putting our trust in Christ and we are getting on a new trajectory.

It isn't like just say I believe, because if the I believe does not entail being on a new trajectory, it isn't the kind of belief that saves. That's James' point. So I know there's this kind of fight between lordship salvation, and if Jesus isn't Lord of all, then he's not Lord at all.

Well, that's the equivocation. I'll tell you right now, Christian 51 years plus, and Jesus isn't Lord of every, he is not the practical Lord of every aspect of my life. He is the Lord of everything because he's God, but there is not the Lordship of Christ in every avenue of my life, but he's still my Lord, and I'm still a Christian, and that's part of sanctification.

So I think that aphorism isn't helpful. That isn't what I'm shooting for. But at the same time, I'm very clear when I have an opportunity to talk about these things that we're not asking people to believe that Jesus did this, that the other thing.

That's important. That's the first step, but it isn't the step that works, that takes you where you need to go. I can believe that the plane is going to take me to Dallas.

A bunch of you guys are getting on that plane next week, I think, for the, or the week after for reality, I won't be there because I'm having surgery, but I can say that because it's already sold out, right? Okay. No worries. It's already passed.

Oh, it's already passed. Oh, there we go. So, um, but it doesn't do it.

I can believe that and believe accurately that the plane, but I don't exercise useful faith or trust in that belief. Until I get out of the plane, then the plane can do for me what I can't do for myself. And that analogy, I think is really helpful in understanding this.

I don't want if easy believism is just believing that that doesn't help you at all. The demons also believe all those things and they tremble. It has obviously there's no salvation plan for them, but that misses the point.

The point is, well, if that were the case, then James would never have made this remark. He

makes it because he's making a point. Look at that is not enough.

Believe that. It's trust in that matters and makes the difference. And the trust in has ramifications in behavior.

The internal manifests itself externally. That's James's point chapter. And some people will use the word belief to mean trust.

So I think trust is the key word here. And I just want to add something about James because even James is talking about the trust specifically. I don't think he's actually talking about good works here because what he says is if you have faith, then you will have actions that reflect that faith.

And then he gives the example. If you say be warmed and filled and you don't give anything to help them, you don't really mean that you want them to be warmed and filled. So he gives an example of charity there, but when he's talking about his point, that's just an analogy for him.

When he's talking about his point, he actually gives examples that have to do with faith. So Abraham believing God, believing his promise, believing that he could raise Isaac from the dead. He acted in faith and trust in God.

God told him to do something. He acted in a way that showed that he trusted God would fulfill his promise. So I think James whole point here is all about trust.

Yes, I'm glad you're making this point. James isn't a faith plus works scenario at all. It's all about faith, trust, and the manifestations that genuine trust produces.

Even Ray have the harlot, which is the second illustration where she hides this. I mean, look at the dynamic between those two. It's to be willing to kill your son because God told you to, even though he stayed his hand, versus hiding the slaves.

I mean, the spies, they're dramatically different in gravity and weight, you know, but there's still evidences. And she was not a righteous woman, obviously, for her background. But what she did evidenced her trust in the God of Israel.

Right. It showed that she believed God was real, that he was with him, that he would fulfill his promises to them. So her actions reflected the fact that she truly believed what God had said, that he was, that he is, and that he rewards those who seek him as whoever puts it.

The details are right there in that passage too, in Joshua. So the point here is, yes, when you trust in God, you will be saved. In Romans 10, Paul talks about how with the heart of person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

You're trust in God. If it is true trust, then you will act in ways that reflect your trust in God. And in addition to that, the Holy Spirit will be shaping you to the character of Christ.

But I don't think, but the main point here is, it's all about your trust in God, because God changes you, and he enables you to see him as he is, and then you trust in him, and then you act in ways that reflect that. Well, incidentally, all of these things that we talk about are the appropriate consequences of genuine regeneration, spiritual regeneration, are not in any ways a work that justifies you. And this is where some of the confusion comes in this debate or discussion about lordship salvation, that, and I think there is a justifiable concern depending on how lordship is characterized.

But it isn't an easy beliefism here, and it's just, people are just simply missing. It's not one or the other. It's kind of an amalgam that needs to be carefully understood to have a biblical sense of how it works.

So if you want to understand, go to Romans. Paul lays this out so clearly. He goes through all of chapter 5. It's all about our justification in Christ by faith.

Four and five are all about that. So then what does he say? So does this mean we sin because we're under grace, may it never be? Yeah, that's right. And then he explains, we don't sin because we have died with Christ.

We've been raised again. We now submit to righteousness and we use our body for acts of righteousness because we've been changed and we love God. So he kind of explains how this all works.

Right. So it could truly be said that for Amy Hall, all roads lead to Rome. That's kind of true.

He just does such a great job of explaining just theological basics from start to finish. And then one last thing I want to say that he says in chapter, which chapter is it? I think it's in eight where he's talking about how you mentioned this verse. Well, we have the spirit.

If we're in Christ, we have the spirit. And then Paul says, if you're, if you are not putting your sin to death, you will die. And goes, but if you're putting your sin to death, you will live.

And then instead of saying because you're putting your sin to death and you're getting better, he says, no, no, that's not why. It's because if you're putting your sin to death, that's showing you that you are an adopted child of God. So even there, he's even when he's using the example of us putting our sin to death, it's only an example proving to us that we have the spirit and we're adopted.

Actually, the phrase he uses is led by the spirit. This is universally misunderstood to mean something entirely different. This is what Paul means.

In that case, the only other case where he uses Galatians 5, and it's the same thing, just what you described by the spirit putting to death that he's into flesh. Well, thank you, PR and Jordan. We appreciate hearing from you.

If you have a question, we'd love to hear from you. So just go to X and use the hashtag SCRS or just go to our website at str.org. Just look for our hashtag STRS podcast page at the top of every page. And then you'll find a link to submit your question.

So we'd love to hear from you. Thank you so much for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.