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Is It Circular Reasoning to Say the Bible Is True Because God Says It's True?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's circular reasoning to say the Bible is true because God says it's true, how we can know when sarcasm or some other relevant tone is being used in the Bible, and whether tithing results in God's faithful provision and financial blessings.

- * Is it circular reasoning to say the Bible is true because God says it's true (in the Bible)?
- * How can we accurately read stories like 2 Chronicles 18:12-16, where it seems as if Micaiah was using sarcasm? How do we know when there is an important tone in play?
- * Is it biblical for someone to say, "I'm so thankful for tithing and knowing God faithfully meets our needs because of our faithfulness"?
- * Does the pouring out of blessings from Heaven when we test God with the tithe, spoken of in Malachi 3:10, refer to financial blessings?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel back again with hashtag SDRask. Here we are. Welcome.

So Greg, I have questions about the Bible today, or interpretation, and different aspects of the Bible. So we're going to start with a question from Josh Forrester. I'm studying fallacies, and I came across the circular reasoning fallacy.

Is this something that we're going to be able to do? In this statement, the Bible is true because God says it's true in the Bible, not circular reasoning. How do we navigate this in conversation? Well, I just want to consider that there is a circular way of trying to defend the Bible. There's a non-circular way.

A circular reasoning is when you presume what you're trying to prove. So if we're thinking about it formally, how the structure of the argument goes, and you're

supporting sentences, your premises, you have the assumption of the thing you're trying to conclude in the conclusion. For example, we've said God can't lie.

Well, how do you know that? Well, because God said he would lie, and if he can't lie, then he's telling the truth there. Now, of course, you see that, well, that doesn't work because you're presuming his truthfulness to trust the statement that he can't lie. And that would be an example of circular reasoning.

But I want to hear the syllogism or the line of thinking or the argument that was offered as a possible way of being circular regarding God's word. The Bible is true because God says it's true, and then he has parentheses in the Bible. Well, it would depend on how you're using that, okay? That could be circular and possibly not.

When I talk about the authority of the Bible as being God's word, I first look at the claim, okay? The Bible makes a claim for itself. The claim is in the text, the claim is that this is God's word, just for simplification, simplicity's sake, I'm just going to reduce that. This is God's word.

Now, I don't believe it is true that the Bible is God's word simply because the Bible claims to be God's word. There's no justification for that. And that borders on circularity, okay? Or just presumption.

A circular argument is actually an argument in which your case for the conclusion presumes the conclusion. If you're just saying the Bible is God's word because God says it's his word, that's not even, it needs to be a little bit more worked out than that to be actually example of circularity. But I would start there.

That person is saying their testimony is true, okay? Why should I believe their testimony is true? Well, I have to see other reasons why. Maybe they have a history of telling the truth and that gives me a reason to trust them in this particular case. Maybe there's other evidence that supports the testimony they given that shows through external evidence or additional evidence that their statement is true.

And so then therefore they're telling the truth about their own statements. And that's kind of the way I go about with the scripture. The scripture makes a claim for itself about having a divine origin that needs to be clarified, but nevertheless, for simplicity's sake, that's the claim.

Then the question is for me, do I have any reasons to believe that it's simply that it is accurate and is claimed to be divine? Are there supernatural elements of it that comport with it, it's claimed to have a divine origin as opposed to merely a human origin, which are the only two options. See, there's a book by men about God, or it's by God, two men about himself. So what's the ultimate origin, God or man? And then I'm looking at reasons.

But I'm concluding that the Bible's claim about itself is sound for a series of reasons, and one of those reasons is not because it says so. That it says so puts it in the running, but it's not one of my reasons for believing it's accurate. It's the claim, not the justification.

That's right. Nicely put. Perfect.

Let's close the prairie. That was fabulous. It's the claim, not the justification.

When your justification and your claim are the same, like in the illustration I gave, that would be circular. Sometimes that's done in fairly sophisticated ways. Circularity can slip by people.

But sometimes people, if you go to demonstrate that the Bible, using the Bible to prove the Bible, the claims of the Bible of divine origin, people say that's circular, and it's not necessarily circular. Any witness on a stand makes a claim about something, then they cross-examine. But when they cross-examine, they're asking the witness.

So you're trying to prove or demonstrate whether the witness is telling a true truth or false to it based on what the witness says. That's not circular. It just isn't.

But a lot of time, you're proving the Bible by the Bible, so that's circular. Well, it depends on how I'm going about the process as to whether a circular or not. In order to evaluate the claim, you have to look at what it is.

I mean, that's just obvious. Let's say you wanted to authenticate any sort of document, and the document says this was written in 1750 or whatever. Well, in order to determine whether it was written in 1750, you have to look at the document.

That's right. And you wouldn't necessarily use the, well, maybe that would be some sort of evidence because it is there. That is a reason to think it is.

But you would have to look at the document and evaluate certain aspects of the document to see if they match that claim. Right. So you would do it with any sort of a document.

So if you have a document that signed Thomas Jefferson and a date at the top, you have to look at all these. Now, is this authentic from Thomas Jefferson? What if the date is 1972? You know, well, that could be, and he's talking to our baby in this thing that signed his name. It's talking about John Kennedy assassination, which happened hundreds of years later.

So what you're doing is you're looking at the internal evidence of the document itself to determine whether the document is authentic regarding its central claim that it's authored by Thomas Jefferson. So that, well, you're proving the document by the document, that circular. Well, obviously when you look at the details, that's not circular.

That's the kind of thing we do all the time. And you've written about this. Now, do you have the marks of the supernatural nature of the Bible? Is that in ancient words ever true? Do you remember if it's in there? Because you did a solid ground on this.

I think that may be the title of it. So if you go back, it's not too long ago, ancient words ever true. And I think that's where you give the, what we see in the Bible that points towards a supernatural origin.

Okay, let's go to a question from Stuart. How can we accurately read stories like 2 Chronicles 18, 12 through 16? It seems by the flow that Miciah was using sarcasm, or something like that in verse 14, because otherwise he was lying. In contrast to his claim in verse 13, how do we know when there is an important tone in play? What's the text, 2 Chronicles 18, 12 through 16.

Let me just read them, see if we can get up to speed, 12 through 16. And when he finished, and when he humbled himself, the anger of the Lord turned away from him. So as not to destroy him completely, and also conditions were good in Judah.

So King Rebaum strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Now Rebaum was 41 years old, when he began to reign, and he reigned 17 years of Jerusalem in the city of Florida. Wait, is this the right? Is that the right? This doesn't sound like 18, 2 Chronicles 18, 12 through 16, 18.

No, I thought this is really boring. Is this 2 Chronicles 18, 12? 12 through 16. Okay.

Then the messenger, okay, 12, okay, good. The messenger went to summon, this is Mikea Brings word from God. It's the heading here.

The messenger went, who went to summon Mikea, spoke to him saying, behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. So please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably. Okay, I know where this is going, but Mikea says, as the Lord lives, oh my God says that I will speak.

When he came to the king, the king said to him, Mikea, shall we go to Ramath Gilead to battle, or shall we refrain? He said, go up and succeed for they will be given into your hand. Then the king said to him, how many times must I assure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? So he said, I saw Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep with no shepherd and the Lord said these have no master let each of them return to his house in peace. Now, I think there is obviously sarcasm going on there.

And it's just the nature of the relationship. And even the king knows that, come on, this isn't the way you do business. I don't believe you.

Okay. And then he gives the true thing. So I'm not sure the interpretive difficulty here, it

just strikes me that the sarcasm is obvious.

Yeah, so the question here is how do we know when there is an important tone in play? And I would say, you knew, you know from the context. Yeah, read the passage. Yeah, you know from the situation and the king saying, I told you to tell me what, and you can read the rest of his whole situation.

You can see what his, you know, we can see from the context is my point. So I don't think there's going to be some place where Jesus was actually saying, oh, blessed are the meek. Yeah.

And we, and we missed his sarcasm. I don't think that's going to happen. No, it's not his hint.

Yeah, that's right. There is sarcasm in scripture, you know, and even Jesus used to sarcasm, Paul does as well. But.

And Elijah was it can never have a witch's witch. I think it was Elijah saying, well, maybe you're God's asleep. Yeah.

Oh, that's right. The first king's 18. And where is he? You know, maybe he's going to the bathroom or something.

Yeah. So we do find sarcasm, but it usually, just like in normal conversations, sarcasm is pretty obvious. Yeah.

Okay. So here's a question from Damon Hawkins. Here's a comment from a participant in a group Bible plan.

I am so thankful for tithing and knowing God has met our needs because of that faithfulness. Our faithfulness results in his back to us. Is this biblical? And how would you respond? Well, I presume the person, and this needs a clarification.

When the person says tithing, Christians use the word tithe in different ways. Sometimes they are using it just to describe their giving, whatever their giving happens to be. The word tithe means 10th.

And so, tithing was a requirement of the law. Actually, it was more than 10% when you look at other provisions for taxation, which is what we find in the Hebrew covenant there, Mosaic covenant, that you have a unique situation in the nation of Israel, and that is that it is a religious community, but it's also political community. Okay.

And all political communities require funds to do what they need to do for the rest of the people. And so, the tithing was given as a means of taxation to provide for the leadership of the people. And as such, it is a feature of the Mosaic covenant.

This is a feature that no longer applies in the New Testament. We are not under the Mosaic covenant. That's a feature there.

Now, this doesn't mean we have no obligation to be generous. And that's what Paul approaches or deals with when he talks about this, particularly in Second Corinthians. And we are not giving under obligation, but as our hearts have decided, you know, before the Lord has got us prospered us.

So people can still give 10% if that's what they decide. Now, there are a number, but there's not an obligation to give 10%. And sometimes people strain over this.

Well, first fruits is that 10% off the before taxes or after taxes or rob them. You don't have to worry about that. The tithing obligation does not apply to us.

And when at the end of the Hebrew scriptures, you know, Malachi says, you're stealing from the Lord. He's talking to Jews under a covenant that we're not under. And so we can set that entirely aside, that 10th thing is not a requirement.

But giving and generosity is partly for the same reason, not because we are under the government of the church, the way the Jews were under the government of the Levites, etc. But because there are needs in the body of Christ for financial help and providing for those who teach us, I mean, that's in Galatians chapter six, you know, let him who is taught share all good things with him who teaches and the one who labor is hard to teaching the word should be worthy of double honor. It says in I think second first Timothy and that speaking, probably a financial thing.

So there is this obligation that we have to share with the church, but it's not a 10%. Now along with the obligations of giving, there are promises that are associated with it. So actually in the first Thessalonians passage, no, the Philippians passage at the end where he says, and my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

Now that actually comes in the context of a gift that the Philippians are providing for other Christians. He said, you are gifting and God is going to help take care of you. Proverbs says, cast your bread upon the water, it'll come back to you and do time and things like that.

You know, he is generous, God will be generous to him, press down, shaking together, overflowing in his lap. So there is certainly a promise of God responding to generosity with generosity. And so as a broader principle, I think that's in place.

If we say if we are not giving tithe, if we give 9% instead of 10%, then God's going to bring God's angry, He's bringing judgment on us. There's no justification for that in the New Testament economy. It's just flat out false.

And some people will go to the passage in Matthew 25 and they'll say, wait, Jesus said,

you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, but you ignore the weight of your provisions of the law. These things you should have done without neglecting the others. So therefore we should tithe.

Jesus said we should tithe. Well, just backpedal to the beginning of that chapter. And at the beginning of the chapter is he's addressing the people, he says, to those people, he says, do everything that the love Moses and the Pharisees tell you to do.

Just don't do as they do, because they're hypocrites, basically. So Jesus is now, it's clearly he's speaking in that chapter under an Old Testament mosaic law economy. In that economy, tithing is appropriate.

If somebody wants to go to the later part of that chapter and say you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, we should have done that, then we ought to be doing it too. Then you've got to also include what he says in the beginning of the chapter, saying we got to keep the whole mosaic law. But of course, this isn't the new covenant plan.

And in the new covenant plan, giving is still an important part, but it is not dictated in the same way that the tithe is dictated for Israel under the Mosaic covenant. So just as part of the answer to this, I'm going to read another question because it is related. You actually brought it up.

This is from Cyrus. Does pouring out the floodgates of heaven spoken of in Malachi when we test God with the tithe mean prosperity and financial or otherwise blessings? Well, I think that this probably in that context meant financial prosperity. And the reason I could say that is that this was the provision of the Mosaic covenant.

You can see the blessings and curseings due to our enemy 28 to 30. If they obey what God tells them to do, which includes the tithing and that the year of Jubilee and all of those other things, giving the land, the rest, and all you do, all of these things, then God is going to physically prosper Israel. That is part of the promise.

Now, the fact is they didn't do that and judgment came upon them. Okay. But to apply those kinds of verses without qualification to new covenant Christians is a mistake and a whole bunch of word faith ministries do this.

And some pastors do it too. Lots of pastors actually, but they do it. I don't think with the same motivation as the word faith crowd does or the same misunderstanding of God's economy.

They just think this is what's required. So you have tithes, you bring into the church and offerings, you can give to stand the reason if you want, but the tithes go to the church. Well, there is no tithing pattern or directive in the New Testament.

It's gone. The reason is this tithing is part of the has been superseded by the new.

Jeremiah 31, 31 and following makes that really clear.

So I think that'll help maybe avoid the confusion. And I actually think even in the case where Jesus is saying, given will be given to you, like I'm looking at Luke 638, given it will be given to you, they will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over for by your standard of measure will be measured to you in return. I think that's talking about other people.

I don't think that's even that's not talking about like, I, I give to God and he gives back to me. He's actually talking about the fact that when we're generous to others, they're generous back to us. Whatever to me, it might be a mixture of things, but whatever the, you know, the kind of phenomenology, whatever the cause of all that coming in, God is still over that and prospering an individual one way or another, maybe through other people being good to them.

So the promise that we do have is one we, we talked about in the last episode and that is that we can do all things to Christ who strengthens us that no matter what situation we're in, in plenty or in want, now get there, Paul was saying, I can be in want. Well, how could Paul be in want if he's being faithful to God? Well, now we know the promise is not that he will be given financial blessings. The promise is that Christ will enable him to endure any situation he's in.

So that's the promise we should be hanging onto. And the issue I have also with saying something like this and connecting their financial situation to faithfulness. Well, there are people who have something, some sort of financial thing happen.

Let's say their house burns down. Is God unfaithful? God has not, and this is where it really is important to know what God has promised us and the fact that we're not in the Old Testament covenant with the blessings and curseings that he gave to them. Because then you start to think, I have what I have because God is faithful to me, because I was faithful to him.

So I earned with my faithfulness, God's faithfulness. And if you don't have what I have, what should we conclude that you're not being faithful and God's not being faithful to you. Well, this is exactly the kind of dialogue that line of reasoning at word faith enterprises are involved in.

And I just think that's, that's obviously wrong. We need to be really careful about the promises that we're hanging onto. God has promised to make us like Jesus.

Number one, all things are working together to conform us to the image of Christ. So that is the biggest thing he has promised. He might do that through plenty.

He might do that through want. But God is always faithful, and he's always faithfully doing that in our lives. So I hope nobody out there has ever had the experience where

they felt like maybe God's not faithful to me because I don't have these blessings.

So hopefully that gives you some ideas, Damon, and we're out of time, Greg. That one went really fast. All right.

Thank you so much for your questions. If you have a question, just go to Twitter with the hashtag strask or you can go to our website at str.org. All you have to do is look for our hashtag strask podcast page. And when you find that, you'll see a link.

You click on that link and you can submit your question. And the only thing we ask is that you keep it very short. So two sentences at the most, it's a size of a tweet.

If you're not aware of how big those are, it's like 280 characters. But just close to that. I mean, I'm a little bit, I'll let it go a little bit.

But if I have to cut things out, I will. But we just try and keep them from getting too long. So thank you.

And we hope to hear from you soon. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for a stand to reason.