

OpenTheo

Are Homosexuals Harder to Reach with the Gospel?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to a friend who says she doesn't like the God of the Old Testament and is glad she has Jesus who forgives and whether Romans 1:26-28 indicates homosexuals are harder to reach with the gospel.

* How would you respond to a friend who says she doesn't like the God of the Old Testament (referring to the Levitical laws and God's immediate discipline of those who break those laws) and is glad she has Jesus who forgives?

* Does the "reprobate mind" referred to in Romans 1:26-28 refer specifically to homosexual acts or to sins in general? Does this passage mean homosexuals are harder to reach with the gospel?

Transcript

(upbeat music) (bell dings) - Welcome to Stan Jorisans #STRaskpodcast with Amy Hall and Greg Cocal. - Here we are. - Here we are, Greg.

Let's start with a question from Tui. - What is it? - Tui, T-H-U-Y. - T-H-U.

- Oh, that's Vietnamese, it looks like. - How would you respond to a friend who says, "I don't like the God of the Old Testament, "and I'm so glad I have Jesus who forgives me," referring to the strict Levitical laws and God's immediate discipline of those who break the law? - Okay. It's interesting the way the question is put or the common is put.

I don't like the God of the Old Testament. Now what they didn't say is, I don't like what God did in the Old Testament because if you say it the second way, you're acknowledging that it's the same God in both testaments, God is still God. But the way things happen in the Old Testament, yuck.

I get that. But they said, I don't like the God of the Old Testament. Now it might be helpful to ask for clarification.

And that is, it's interesting the way you put that and I'm curious what you meant. Are you suggesting that the God of the Old Testament is not the same God as the God of the New Testament? Or he's not the God who became a man in Jesus? I don't know if that's what they mean, but sometimes that is what people mean. In fact, one of the earliest heresies was at Marcian, one of the very earliest heresies was this view that the God of the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament are two different characters.

And whatever's Jewish is out of the canon. Whole Old Testament is gone and all the Jewish stuff, anything that looked Jewish is taken out of the New Testament canon. Okay.

That was a very early heresy and one the church had to deal with because God is God. He gives one covenant and then he replaces it with a different covenant. The first one's called the Mosaic Covenant or the Old Covenant.

And the next one's called the New Covenant. And it's new because it's new. It replaces the Old and it does what the Old is not capable of doing.

And that gives us the Holy Spirit that empowers us to keep what's right and wrong. And yes, God did act severely in the Hebrew Scriptures because he's communicating something about his character and about the importance of obedience. All right.

And incidentally, those people got judged in the Old Testament under that economy in a very severe way in this life. But it's clear in the New Testament that the judgment is also going to happen in the next life. And that judgment is the judgment of fire in brimstone, the lake of fire, Revelation 20, that lasts forever.

So in a certain sense, the judgment of the God of the New Testament is much more severe than the judgment of the so-called God of the Old Testament. It's the same God. There are just different things that are going on.

So I would ask the question, why would you think they're too different? Or do you think they're two different gods? Or are you just saying, "Gee, I'm glad I don't live under that law." Of course, in a certain sense, we don't live under the Old Covenant, but we still live under moral obligation, which we violate and were vulnerable to God's judgment forever, Revelation 20, even in this time. So in some ways, things haven't changed. If you were a righteous person in the Old Testament, righteous in human terms, following the dictates of the law as best you could, as opposed to totally rebelling against God, you didn't get fried or blown up or buried by rocks or anything like that.

There were godly people in the Old Testament and the believing remnant. So there was no threat to them as long as they followed the kinds of things that God told them to do. And many dead.

And actually, I'm reading through second chronicles right now. And there is a lot of screwy kings. The northern kingdom, there were no good ones.

The ones that get me of the southern kingdom, where you had good ones and bad ones and good ones and bad ones. And you had good kings, they had lousy sons, and you had lousy kings that had good sons. And even the ones that had, what, Hezekiah, I'm thinking.

I mean, some of these guys, they did pretty well, then they ended poorly. And then their son doubles down. And when they end poorly, it's not just they end poorly, they get their butt kicked by God for ending poorly.

And then their son doubles down and does even worse. And they think, "I keep writing in pencil in my margin. What an idiot.

What an idiot." Here's another idiot. How could they keep doing the same stupid stuff that got them beaten up in the past? So in one case, you've got a king that does wrong. So God says, "I'm gonna bring this Assyrians against you." And then the Syrians come and defeat them.

Instead of saying, "Oh, God was right. I better not do this anymore." He starts sacrificing to the gods of the Assyrians. And he said, "Well, they beat me, so they must be the real God, even though God told them the Assyrians are gonna beat you, 'cause I'm the real God." Okay, they're getting, like I said, idiots, all right.

(laughs) So, but what I keep seeing over and over again, even with these stupid, ridiculous, idiotic gods, not just the high places there, but other things they're doing. And God still is gracious to them and kind to them. For the sake of David, many times, not for their sake, but you see a massive amount of grace that's manifest in the Hebrew Scriptures there.

And it's there all the time. It's the same God of grace. And in the New Testament, you've got all kinds of, look at Ananias and Sapphira, bang, just like that.

You know, when Acts 3 or 4, you know, and down they went and out they went, you know. And so you've got, you look at the book of Revelation, all kinds of things that are going to happen. This is not a pretty picture.

It's a lot more dramatic than anything that we saw from the Old Testament, except for maybe the flood. So you have God's grace manifest in both testaments and his anger and hostility manifest in both testaments. They are not two gods, it's the same God.

If what a person wants to say is, I'm glad I'm living now rather than then, okay, I get it. All right, nothing wrong with that. But if they're implying that somehow God has changed, that is not the case.

It is not the testimony of the text. I think it would help to help them understand how all these pieces fit together. Because one thing that might throw a lot of people off is just

the fact that they had this law in the Old Testament and that's because God was creating a nation.

This was their constitution. That's what he was doing at that particular time, but that doesn't encapsulate all that God was doing in relationship with them. I mean, just start back with Adam and Eve.

Already God is talking about overcoming the evil one right away. He's already starting to work his whole plan of redemption. And then you come to, obviously, you come to like the judges and you come to all those things and you see God graciously forgiving and continuing to guide them and lead them and all those sorts of things.

But the law can be very confusing to people because they don't really understand that it was, God was creating a nation. And we have laws now too. And guess what? If you break those laws, you go to jail.

So that wasn't what was governing God's relationships with people because when you look at the people who were gods like Abraham and David, they both sinned, but they were considered righteous and their sins weren't counted against them because of their faith in God. And all this time God was in relationship with people because of their faith by his grace because he was looking ahead to when Jesus would pay the penalty. And in fact, this is part of what the law did.

The law was pointing people towards forgiveness on the basis of sacrifice. He set up the whole sacrificial system which was meant to point to Jesus who would fulfill all of that. So even in the law, you're seeing God's grace because he made a way for them to be forgiven to be made holy.

And that's all that all was going on in the law. And the promised Abraham was always by grace. And David was by God's grace.

You know, he promised the covenant, he promised that he would bring about this king who would be there forever, which was Jesus. God fulfilled that. David wasn't perfect, David sinned.

So you see God's grace all the way through here. You see the one plan of Jesus dying, affecting even people back then, affecting even Abraham, affecting even Adam and Eve. All, you know, God overlooked the sin because he was waiting for the time when his whole plan would come together and Jesus would die on the cross and cover the sins of all the people who would have faith.

So this is one story. This is not two separate stories. God was doing the same thing throughout.

If you read Galatians, you'll see everything God says about the law through Paul there.

And he says that God made a promise to Abraham. The law didn't come until 430 years later.

And it didn't nullify the promise 'cause the promise was always by grace. And he talks about how the law leads us to Christ so that we can be joined to Christ by faith, by God's grace. So if you're interested in seeing how the law all works together, I think Galatians covers a lot of this.

- Yeah, it does. Also, we have a teaching series called The Bible Fast Forward that will, it doesn't get a lot of press with us. It's been around for a while.

It's eight, 50 minute sessions with a huge syllabus that comes with it, you print it out, but it's 150 pages long. So my entire teaching outline is available there. But this is the tool I think that will help you see how these fit together.

It takes eight sessions to kind of work through the material. And the history of the nation of Israel as it unfolds, and there's the 12, the 10 major historical events of Israel that help you have a backbone of the history, starting with the call of Abraham and ending with the advent of Messiah. And then you kind of see these details in the history and then how these different covenants are working themselves out, the Mosaic Covenant.

And then ultimately the new covenant, those are the key ones, there are others, but those are the key ones. And you're right, the Mosaic Covenant was meant in part to provide a constitution of sorts for the nation of Israel as not just spiritual, it's not just religious, it was political as well. They were all combined in the theocracy.

So this is a piece that will help, I think, put that into perspective for people that are trying to understand how they overlay. - And one last thing about God striking people down, 'cause there are places like when they're moving the ark and they accidentally, they touch the ark against God's rule. And you mentioned Ananias, Zephyra, God struck them down because they lied to the Holy Spirit.

These are all examples of God's holiness. I think today we've lost a lot of sense of God's holiness. We think of him as our friend and our buddy.

And we don't really think about-- - Sweetheart. - Think about all of the cathedrals and the sense of awe and reverence and holiness that you get in those. God had to help them to see that that was the case.

So when he struck people down for either rebelling against him or ignoring the fact that they were unholy and he was holy, he did that to reveal that. Now, what this should do to us is not think, well, now he's relaxed those things. Now he's not so hard on people who do those things.

No, the fact is that should make us even more amazed at the fact that we are holy in

Jesus, that all those rules and laws about holiness and all those things they had to do, Jesus has made us holy, he has cleansed us, he has done those things. It's not that God no longer cares about his holiness, it's not that we no longer are unworthy to be in his presence, it's that Jesus has done this great thing of bringing us together with God. And so that has not changed.

So rather, anyway, I think we just need to remember that we learn many important things about God in the Old Testament that helps us to appreciate the grace that we see in the New Testament. All right, Greg, here's a question from trying to abide. Please explain Romans 1, 26 through 28, when it says reprobate mind.

Is it directed specifically to homosexual acts or to sins in general? A relative feels homosexuals are somehow harder to reach with the gospel due to having a reprobate mind. I don't think that. - Well, homosexuality is just one sin that's mentioned in Romans 1. If you go to the end of the chapter, so we're talking about 26, what was it? - 26 through 28.

- Let me just read that so we all know we're talking about. And I'm gonna start in verse 24, just to get up ramp up to speed because this particular section of Romans, Romans the second half of Romans 1, is talking about the response to human beings to the revelation that is available to everyone that God is real, that he exists, and that his attributes, he has certain attributes. And what they do is they suppress the obvious truth about God because they have unrighteous motives.

Jesus said in John three, "The light has come into the world, "and men love darkness rather than light "for their deeds are evil." Now he's referring to himself as the light of the world, but this apparel concept is expressed here. Here's God, the Father revealed to the world through natural, through nature, if you will, through the world. And people see God and they suppress that truth because they have unrighteous motives.

So in verse 24, therefore, because they've done this, they've exchanged the glory of God who's incorruptive with the idols and stuff like that, creatures, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity so that their bodies would be dishonored among them, for they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator who has blessed forever, amen. And what he's describing there is God is letting people rebel and the nature of the rebellion is they exchanged the truth for a lie. And this is why they are idolatrous, worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

And there may be a reference here to homosexuality, the creature being other men or other women because lesbianism is mentioned here. So I continue. For this reason, God, this is verse 26 and following now, God gave them over to degrading passions.

For their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural. Women

were't meant to function with women. And in the same way also that sexually that is men abandon the natural function of the woman for men sexually and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error, which I take to be judgment here, not some sickness because this is the nature there without excuse.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind. The depraved mind was already there, but God is just releasing them to experience the full effects of their degradation. And then right after that, he says they did not do the things that were proper.

Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, taters of God, so you got a whole list of a Rugg's list of vice here and caps it off at the end. They don't only do these things, but they give party approval to those who do that. So it is the fallen human being that suppresses the truth and unrighteousness that has the depraved mind and he uses homosexuality and lesbianism as one characteristic sin of a depraved mind and then he adds all the other sins at the end.

So I don't think the problem is just homosexuality that have a especially difficult time coming to Christ. They're like anybody else. They've got a lot at stake in their own, celebrating their own autonomy, their own sexual desires and doing what they want.

And so they're gonna suppress the truth at unrighteousness just like all the rest that are characterized couple of verses later. So I think this is not in a sense picking out homosexuals for specific condemnation, but using them as an example of a rebellion against God's provision. Notice the word function in there, it's a Greek word creases, that men were made to function with women sexually, and we're talking about plumbing here now, and women were made to function sexually with men.

And what mankind did in suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, they're saying no to God, I'm going to choose my sexual partners the way I want and not according to your provision. Notice the wording here in verse 27. And the same way also it meant abandoned the natural function of the woman.

The woman had a function for them. They abandoned the woman that God made to function with them. Okay.

And so it's just an example of saying no to God in the area of sexuality. And by the way, the same kind of thing happens when in fornication, that is men or adultery. Men abandoned the woman that God ordained for them, which is a wife.

And so they have fornication before they're married or husbands abandoned the wife that God has given them in marriage and burned under lust to someone else. So it's the

same pattern in all the sexual sin of saying no to God's provision for human beings sexually and saying yes to something they want contrary to God. And that's just really archetypical of the rebellion that you see characterized in the other sins at the end of the chapter.

- Yeah, you mentioned verse 18, which starts all of this off about men suppressing the truth and unrighteousness. This all goes back to suppressing the knowledge of God. And as you said, Greg, these are different ways this plays out, including disobedience to parents, being unmerciful.

There's a ton of things here as you pointed out. And I just wanna say that every person's salvation is a miracle. It's not that, oh, well, this one's impossible and this one's better.

No, actually every person is by nature a child of God's wrath, by nature, every single person. And that means every salvation is a miracle. - Mm-hmm.

- And if every salvation is a miracle, God can save somebody who's in sexual sin as easily as he can save someone in any sin. It's as impossible for every person as it is possible for God for every person. So we should never, we should never, and I'm afraid people write people off just because they're in sexual sin.

And those, now we experience things like that as maybe more enslaving, maybe harder to break out of, but for God, all things are possible. - And think about Christopher Ewan, who's worked with us in the past. And-- - Beckett Cook.

- Beckett Cook, who both have worked with us last year Beckett and years before that, I think next year, Christopher Ewan with realities. And these are people that are completely consumed with a lifestyle of homosexuality. And Christopher's case, drug dealing and drug addiction, too apparently, he would certainly drug dealing because he went to prison for that and that he became a Christian in prison against all odds, too, when you think about it.

Who would think that God would change his man's heart, but it's a tremendous story from, I wanna say out of a silent planet, but that's the S. Lewis from-- - Out of a far country. - Out of a far country. The book that Christopher Ewan has written, which is very readable, and if you want encouragement for prayer, just in general, about his mother prayed him out of prison and into salvation, I mean, that's kind of one way of putting it, obviously God did it in response to the prayer, but it's an amazing story.

So you can follow that and be encouraged by that, but as you put it, it's just as impossible for everyone in the same way that it's to be saved as just as it's possible for God to save them. I don't know how you put that, but it was good. I'm gonna give you a raise, that was a good one.

- Yeah, since God's the one who changes our hearts, nobody is outside the realm of

possibility, nobody. - Look at Saul of Tarsus. - So hopefully that helps you, and you can explain that to your relative who was trying to understand.

A lot of this comes down to just understanding the nature of human beings as fallen human beings, the nature of us as being by nature, the children of God's wrath, and understanding the nature of grace and God's work in our hearts. - Well, this is why biblical anthropology, what the Bible teaches about man, in the image of God, beautiful, but also fallen broken, beautiful broken, it's in story of reality, but it's not, I didn't make it up, understanding that, and understanding soteriology, that is the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of salvation. These are so foundational.

When people get off on these crazy tangents that they pursue, and they're not grounded in biblical anthropology and biblical soteriology, you just wonder, yeah, well, let's major in the majors, and don't worry about these secondary issues. Let's lay this foundation because it's gonna solve a whole bunch of problems for people who do. - All right, thank you, trying to abide.

Thank you, Tui. We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your questions on Twitter with the hashtag #strask or go through our website.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason. (bell dings)

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(upbeat music)

(upbeat music)