

OpenTheo

Can I Be Acting on Godly Wisdom if My Choice Is Giving Me Deep Pain?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether you can be acting on godly wisdom if your choice is giving you deep pain, how a combat vet who has difficulty going to church due to PTSD can find peace with who he is, and whether a Christian can be a public defender and represent criminals.

- * Can I be acting on godly wisdom if my choice is giving me deep pain?
- * I am a combat vet with PTSD who has difficulty connecting with people and doesn't do well in crowds, which makes it difficult to go to church and have friends and fellowship and leads me to question my faith. How can I find peace with who I am?
- * Can a Christian be a public defender and represent people charged with a crime?

Transcript

Welcome, everyone. I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Colkel, and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag STR Ask Podcast.

And this is the podcast where we take your questions and we try to respond to them as best we can. And you can send them through our website at str.org. Just look for our hashtag STR Ask Podcast page. Or you can go through X and you can send us a tweet.

I mean, I don't think they're called tweets anymore, but I refuse to change that word. Collexus. I don't know what they're even called now.

But you can always do that with the hashtag STR Ask, hence the name. That's where the name came from. Okay, Greg, today we have some practical questions.

And this first one comes from Noel. I'm going through a divorce. I passed my decision through what James teaches in chapter three.

My hangup is having peace with the decision. Can I be acting on godly wisdom if I am in deep pain? My husband cheated on me, amongst other things. Well, the simple answer to that is yes.

You can, doing the right thing does not guarantee that we will have emotional equanimity, especially in the circumstance, Noel, where there is a betrayal in the most personal and important relationship, humanly speaking in your life. It's, you know, inside I cringed when I heard the detail of how difficult and painful that must be. And divorces never, probably never easy.

I'm thinking, let's just think Christians now because maybe for some non-Christians it is. But it's so disruptive. It's it's characteristically, it's a tearing away.

It's a destroying of relationships, a dismembering of family. And so it's hard. And even if the action is justified and morally appropriate, they're, they're, in definitely in this situation, there's going to be a lot of pain associated with it.

I would not doubt a, an appropriate, or I would not doubt a decision based on the fact that I didn't feel peaceful. I didn't feel now a loss of the anguish that was associated with the circumstance that necessitated the decision. And, but this, by the way, is a mistake that people often make when they think about decision making, and they have been taught one way to determine what God wants you to do is by having a piece about it.

And they cite inappropriately, as it turns out, this passage from Colossians 3, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. And rule means act as arbiter. And they, they mean, they think, okay, well, then here's, here's how I arbitrate whether this is a decision.

This is the right or wrong decision to add peace in my heart. This is not what Paul is talking about at all in Colossians. He's not talking about the internal sense of peace there.

He's talking about peace among Christians. And let that be the guideline of your relationships if you read the broader context. But when people read it in this way, because they've been taught to do that by books on decision making, that this is a hint that you are in the will of God.

Well, then you, people will run into the difficulty that Noel is running into now. And that is, well, what if I don't feel peace, lack of conflict in my heart, lack of joy and instead presence of anguish in this decision I'm making. And I think it's a very extraordinary and normal to feel some consternation when making a very difficult choice, even if you're making the right choice.

And it's certainly normal to feel pain and anguish when the choice has to do with the destruction of a marital relationship for the reasons that she gave especially. I think wisdom can always involve deep pain. It's doing the right thing sometime.

You know, assuming that she's doing the right thing and I'm not going to make any sort of comment on that because, of course, I don't know the situation, but often doing the right thing causes pain. Sometimes it causes other people to hate us. Sometimes it causes misunderstandings.

There are all sorts of situations where even being wise can end up making you feel worse than you did before you made the wise decision. Doing what other people want you to do is much easier. Of course, in the long run, it will be worse.

But you can't, I don't think you can judge wisdom by not having pain. And like you said, Greg, I think, I think no matter what, if a marriage is ending, there will be deep pain. Well, she did mention James 3, so let's look at that passage.

He's talking about here, beginning in verse 13, who among you is wise in understanding that he'll show by his good behaviorist deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. Okay? But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant, so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not which comes down from above, but earthly, natural, demonic, for where jealousy and selfish ambition exist.

There is disorder in every evil thing, and then he's going to make a contrast with godly wisdom. All right? And notice that he's making a contrast. I don't think he's making a statement as an absolute that in the case I'll just read to verse 17 that the exercise of wisdom and appropriate moral judgment is going to alleviate all sense of anguish.

Here's what he says in verse 17, but now by contrast to worldly wisdom that is based on selfish ambition and jealousy, he says, but the wisdom from above is first pure, in other words, undefiled by sin. All right? Then peaceable, not peace-producing, I think, but is acting in a peaceable way, as opposed to the jealousy and strife that was just described, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy, and the seed which whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. It's interesting here that this passage is talking about by contrast two different ways of behaving, and wisdom dictates one kind of behavior, not a different type of behavior.

And it's not saying that those who are doing the right and wise thing will always feel good about it and even feel peaceable about it. So I think that's the key there. Okay.

All right. Let's go to a question from Kevin. Hi.

I am a combat vet with combat PTSD. As a result, I have difficulty connecting with people and do not do well in crowds. This makes it difficult to go to church at times and fellowship with people.

I have no friends. This often leads me to question my faith. How can I find peace with who I am? Well, Kevin, you've made a sacrifice for something good.

And the irony of living in a fallen world is that you can do a good thing and suffer for it. And you can emotionally suffer for it. And that's what PTSD is in this circumstance.

And men who fight in battle, in wars, may have to do all kinds of things that are gruesome that are the right things to do in the circumstance. It doesn't mean that it won't injure their soul. And this seems to be what you're facing, Kevin, in PTSD.

And it has these consequences in your life. I'm not sure why it would cause you to doubt whether you're Christian or I'm not sure that factor there. I'd ask you more about that if we were having a conversation.

But maybe you have in your mind a real Christian has certain types of interests in other people and emotional responses to different things as more sociable, et cetera, et cetera. And maybe as a generalization, that might be true. But I'll just tell you for myself, I'm not a combat veteran, but this will come as a surprise to a lot of people, but I'm just not the most sociable person.

I like hanging tight with friends of mine where I feel comfortable, but I'm not the life of the party. I rise to the occasion publicly as my job requires, but I enjoy being in more solitude out of the limelight and on my own. Of course, I like being with my wife, et cetera.

And I have friends too, but I wouldn't say, you know, it's just, it's not like other people have gazillions of them. There are differences in personality. And especially when you have trauma in your life, that's going to affect this particular element.

I don't think, Kevin, that there's any reason at all to question the legitimacy of your spiritual life because of the impact of your combat experience. Now PTSD is a disorder. It's a problem, and you know that.

And there are ways to deal with it. There are counselors that can help with that. There's a process or a modality called EMDR that people have used with traumatic circumstances.

Principally, I'm saying there are ways of helping this, and you may want to seek out counsel that will help with that. Okay. I don't want you to question your salvation in virtue of your reaction to trauma.

I don't think they're related, but some people react better than others to this kind of thing. I think it is a concern that you don't have any friends. And I don't think that you have a hard time going to church.

I think that's not a function of your lack of spirituality, but it's a function of your disorder, your PTSD. So first thing, please don't question your salvation in virtue of your experience as a combat vet. And by the way, thank you for your sacrifice.

I'm just saying. And secondly, it's not a good situation that you do cannot connect hardly at all. It seems to be with people even even to the body of Christ that you don't connect.

Like other people. Well, I don't either. Some people are a lot more social than I am.

But Alan sleeping is really social. You know, for example, but I'm not so social. It's just I like doing stuff on my own.

And so that may be a personality thing. However, at the same time, you don't want to be a hermit because of a disability. And I think you will find fullness and satisfaction and fulfillment in relationships with the body of Christ if you can kind of overcome this liability.

And this is where some counseling could be helpful to you. And it might be a good idea to start watching a particular church every Sunday. If you can't be there, start getting involved from that distance and then maybe you can contact the pastor and see if he has any ideas.

Because you never know what the options are until you ask. And one thing I do want to say, you know, your question, how can I find peace with who I am? No Christian is at peace with who they are. We shouldn't be at peace with who we are.

So you are not alone in feeling like you are failing in some way, that you're not living up to God's standards, that you're not doing what you should be doing. I've been reading Romans 8 a lot. And one of the things there that Paul talks about is how even having the first fruits of the spirit, and with the spirit, we are putting to death the deeds of the body.

We're putting to death our sin. But even though we have those, we are still groaning within ourselves. Longing for the day, when we will be redeemed, we will be adopted as sons, our bodies will be redeemed, and we will no longer have any sin.

We are all groaning within ourselves. So don't feel alone in this. This is the state of a Christian.

We want what's good and we don't yet have the ability to act in the ways that we want to glorify God. And the Holy Spirit is there to help us kill our sin, but we are not there. And Paul says, we were saved in hope, but hope, we don't hope for what we already see.

We hope for what we don't yet see. So we are all in that place of hoping and waiting. And in the meantime, I would just focus on God because if you can't handle crowds, well, right now, what you can do is read your Bible.

You can watch church online. You can memorize. You can meditate on the Bible.

You can read good books. There are a bunch of things you can do, but turn your attention away from anxiety over who you are and turn it towards God. And look at what

Christ did for you on the cross and see his love there.

See the objective truth of his love for you. He proved that on the cross and start there. And there are certainly things that we can all do as Christians alone, but I do encourage you to contact a pastor and maybe he can talk to you on the phone if you don't even want to be around him.

But there's something about interacting with others that helps us get outside of ourselves a little bit and get a better grasp of who we are. If we're alone too much, we start to lose a sense of who we are. And I think that can even make things worse.

But maybe there are ways and maybe a good pastor can help you figure out ways to maybe meet with one person or whatever it is. But those are my only thoughts. And obviously I'm not an expert on PTSD.

I really don't know that much about it. But maybe there are Christian counselors who can help you with this and they have ideas because I'm sure you're not the only one in this situation. Right.

And I have one thing to add to that. And that is you are a combat vet, which means you had to express courage under fire. And by the way, I was just reading this yesterday in an odd place, an autobiography of a sports figure actually.

But he says the courage is not what you feel. That's what you do. It's based on what you do.

And here you are standing in the line of fire for, I don't know, the details of the combat that you're in. But nevertheless, you are fighting. And that takes a certain kind of grit to do that.

And now you are out of the combat situation, but you're in a different conflict situation that that is going to call upon the same grit that made you capable of being a combat soldier. And I don't know if your infantry won one Bravo in the army, but they have a badge that you earn CIB, a combat infantry badge. It's the blue badge with a rifle on it for those who are not familiar with this.

You see that somebody's uniform. You know, this person has been under fire. And I have tremendous amount of respect for people like that because it takes an amazing amount of grit to be able to do your job in the midst of being under fire.

And this is what creates the PTSD. But what I'm getting at right here, Kevin, is that I want you to draw upon that courage and grit that you have already had and direct it now to the PTSD. And that means not letting this beat you, but fighting against it, maybe in little steps.

Okay. So, you know, when I had basic trading in 1969, you know, we had a crawl under the wire with live machine gun fire going overhead. So we are in a relatively safe situation, but it still was challenging.

And so going to a church and maybe sitting in the back after you've maybe watched something online. So you're getting fed spiritually, but then sitting in the back and maybe going, leaving early because that's all you could take. But this will ignore you, that experience too, that will strengthen you little by little and keep taking another step forward.

I think you can get out of this. But it would be good if you do, especially in the body of Christ, but I'm just encouraging you, observing that I think you have what it takes if you were able to endure under combat. circumstances to aggressively take on this new foe, this new challenge, and move ahead and be successful against it over time.

All right. Thanks, Greg. Let's squeeze one more in here.

This one comes from Eric. Can a Christian be a public defender and represent people charged with crimes? I don't see why not. Why not? I think what maybe the impulses behind this is that, well, you're trying to get someone off who is guilty of their crime.

Well, I don't know if that's what's going on here. Sometimes you're trying to get somebody off who's not guilty if you're a public defender. Certainly somebody doesn't have the resources to pay for an attorney themselves, and that's what the public defender is brought in to do.

So it strikes me as a great kindness and mercy that anyone would be a public defender. They don't make much money, especially considering all the education that they've had to pay for. And so it's an act of kindness for them to do it.

And this would be totally, totally consistent with a Christian character. Now, if the public defender is defending somebody that they have reasonably committed the crime, they still can in a noble way defend them because even people who commit crimes have rights under the law that are good to uphold and make sure are expressed properly in the criminal justice system. Now, of course, if a person has a, you know, I can see where a public defender, any public defender could get to a point say, I can't a good conscience defend this person.

And it strikes me that, of course, I don't know how the system works, but there should be an opportunity in certain cases to recuse yourself so that you don't have to defend somebody that you in good conscience can't defend for whatever reason. But that you are working to help them get a fair and appropriate defense given the parameters of the system is, I think, a noble thing. Yeah, I agree.

I think you are upholding our justice system by ensuring that they get a fair trial. And

there's nothing wrong with that. That's how our system works.

And if nobody defended people charged with crimes, there would be all sorts of abuses in that. I mean, you are, you're part of the whole system of justice that's necessary part. Now, I wouldn't lie about something.

I wouldn't cheat. But as long as you're following the rules and you're doing what's right and you're making sure that they get justice, then I don't see a problem with it. All right.

Now we're out of time. Greg, thank you, Noel and Kevin and Eric. We appreciate hearing from you.

And if you have a question, we hope you'll send us your question also. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.