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Are Christians Who Continue to Sin Hypocrites?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about sins of action vs. sinful character flaws and whether continued sin makes Christians hypocrites, whether Ananias and Sapphira were saved, and whether Christians aren't practicing what they believe if they're spending time and money doing anything but evangelize.

- * What's the difference between sins of action and sinful character flaws, and does continued sin of either form make Christians hypocrites?
- * Do you think Ananias and Sapphira were saved if they had accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, despite their massive blunder/punishment?
- * Given the stakes of temporary time to choose an eternal destination, why do any Christians do anything but evangelize? Why do churches have state-of-the-art equipment and buildings for a temporary time when they preach an eternal reality? It seems like they're not practicing what they believe.

Transcript

You're listening to the hashtag S-T-R-Ask podcast. I'm Amy Hall, and with me right now, is Greg Kunkle. I am here.

All right, Greg, let's start with a question from Andrew Wilson. Greg made a comment once about sinful character flaws. Can you explain the difference between sins of action and sinful character flaws? And does continued sin of either form, make Christians hypocrites? Well, let me take that in reverse.

A hypocrite, just for clarification. The word hypocrite comes out of the acting community, back Shakespearean actually. And the idea there was, you know, when people would take on different roles, they would use different masks.

All right, so a hypocrite was somebody who would wear a mask. The real person is underneath the mask would hide the real person, all right? And this is a, I think, captured

in this passage in Proverbs that a lot of people misunderstand and misquote. The misquotation is, as a man thinks in his heart, so he is.

And that's kind of like, if you think so much in a certain way, then that will change your character and whatever. And well, that may be true, but that's not what the writer is talking about. He's the citation is as the man thinks in his heart.

So he is. Well, who is that? It's the selfish man in the context read the whole pericopy. He says to you eat and drink, but his heart is not with you, you will vomit up the morsel.

So this is a warning against a duplicitous person who appears one way on the outside, but it's someone else truly on the inside. Okay. And that's kind of the one a hypocrite is a hypocrite is a faker.

That's different from being inconsistent. If you, all of us are inconsistent in some measure as Christians, because we hold to a certain ethic and we promote it, but we don't live up to it. That doesn't mean we're being hypocritical, that just means we're being human.

All right. Now, if certainly there are hypocrites in the church that are people that are faking it, all right, they are pretending to be one thing, but underneath their entirely, they are something entirely different. All right, that's a problem.

But I don't think that particular thing is a bigger problem as many people make it, because there are a lot of Christians that are just inconsistent. They're working at trying to uphold a set of values they believe in, but they falter. Okay.

So that's the distinction there. So would you read to me the first part of that question? You made a comment once about sinful character flaws. Can you explain the difference between sins of action and sinful character flaws? And then how that relates to hypocrisy.

Okay. So the hypocrisy thing is, is a, is hopefully cleared up. Character flaws are dispositions that are built into one's character as a result of practice.

So if you start, if you, if you tell lies and you get used to it, and you do it a lot, you become a liar. Now, the way we use the word liar, well, we use it in different ways. If somebody makes claim this false and we know it to be false, and somebody else thinks that's the case, we say, you're a liar.

And they're referring to that instance. You are lying in that moment. But if we know people who lie habitually, they are liars in that sense, that they are, that this is part of the character that they formed over time.

So honesty is not characteristic of their behavior. They have a character flaw of

dishonesty. And therefore their behavior reflects that because they've kind of formed a groove of behavior that, that is a vice.

So that's what I mean by character flaws. Now, part of our role as parents, and it's not easy, but is to work with our children to develop character virtues. And character virtues are practices that you pursue so that they become habits.

Aristotle actually talks about this in the Nicomachean Ethics, how you get habituated to certain behaviors. And this is how you become a virtuous person, certainly consistent with biblical teaching, that when we practice virtues as an obligation, pretty soon we do these virtues habitually, they become part of our character. And we begin doing them for their own sake.

They are satisfying in themselves because we've nurtured that and cultivated that character virtue. The same thing happens in reverse character flaw. We have become in use to doing the same vice so many times that it becomes natural, so to speak for us.

It's automatic. Habitual liars just lie without even thinking about it. If they think that seems to benefit them, they're just going to tell lies.

Okay, you can't count on them. You have a whole generation of people that are being habituated to narcissism, self love, self interest, self-ishness. And so their assessments of things are going to reflect that character flaw, selfishness.

And you can see it very quickly. By the way, they assess things. They are speaking from this other perspective.

So when I speak of character flaws, I'm talking about that kind of thing. Problems people have cultivated over time that are part of their character now because they're habituated to it and happen almost subconsciously or automatically and in our problematic virtues work the same way. This is why we are supposed to practice virtue.

And in the practicing of virtue, that's the biblical command. We develop virtuous desires and virtuous habits. Habits and these become more natural to us.

By the way, none of this should be controversial because all of us are aware of people that we know that either of these two categories, the virtuous people just seem to be habituated to goodness and virtue and they do it kind of automatically and they seem to enjoy it. Where people who are habituated to vice are somewhat, it's obvious too. And they are irascible and unpleasant.

And then you wonder, will they change? And of course, both could change depending on environmental circumstances. I've been speaking from a human perspective. You have very virtuous people of a very, very bad experience and they don't handle it well.

And it just changes them. They could become curmudgeons. But if you are deeply habituated to goodness, particularly if you're a Christian with the help of the Holy Spirit, obviously, then it's going to be much less likely that you will give in to vice in general and even when something bad happens.

And by the same token, you have a person filled with vice and become a Christian. And this transformation because of the miracle of regeneration is sometimes quite dramatic. And they begin doing what's good and right out of obedience and eventually for its own sake.

So I think that's what I was referring to. I just want to say something about whether sin makes Christians hypocrites. Sin does not make Christians hypocrites.

Sin actually confirms our need for Christ. It's actually part of what we, it's the reason why we're Christians. It's part of our story.

It's part of why we are there, why we need him. It's not hypocritical to say we need Christ. That's what everything is about.

I think, I think what happens. It's not phony. It's not, it's not phony.

Now, if you are pretending to be perfect, now you are robbing Christ of his glory. And I would say that would be hypocritical because you are faking your perfection. You're robbing Christ of his glory.

You're saying you don't need him. And you're saying you have overcome all your sin on your own. So I think Christians get confused because they think that the way to be a good Christian and the way to be, what's word, when some other people to show that Christianity is true is to hide their sin.

Put on errors. Or just to hide their sin, to pretend they are perfect. And that is not that, I think it's much more attractive to acknowledge the truth about your sin.

And when people see that, and they see that you don't have to hide it, because think about it, the world has to hide their sin. They have no way to get rid of their guilt. They have to hide it if they're going to be acceptable.

But we don't have to hide it. We can be open about it because we are trusting in Christ. And that is how we honor him being open.

And I know I've said this before, but I just want people to understand the fact that we sin is part of our worldview and our need for Christ. And it's what displays the grace of Christ. Now, does, you know, as Paul says, does that mean, does that mean we should sin all the more so that grace may abound? No, of course not, because God's goal for us is to make us like Christ, and that will happen over time, but it will never happen

completely in this life.

And so I think all of this, none of this is hypocritical. But one thing I also want to say about character flaws, even if you don't act on them, it's still worthy of condemnation. If you are, if your soul is bent in a certain way, that is wrong.

And the same is true of God. We praise God because of who he is. Goodness, right? Yes.

And we are condemned because of who we are, which is not good. So both, I think both of those things are wrong. But again, we accept this.

We, this is the truth of human beings. And we know this is true. And this is how we move forward.

Enjoy in God's grace. Okay, so let's go to a question from this new heart beats. Do you think Ananias and Sophia were saved if they had accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, despite their massive blunder slash punishment? That was a kind of rough judgment call.

If I had to make an assessment, I'd say no. And partly because one's behavior is indicative of their genuine conviction. Remember Jesus talked about four different types of soil.

And in two soils, there was a response. But didn't lead to fruitfulness. One, no root.

That would be the second soil. The third soil was, was the plant survived, but didn't thrive. It was choked out by worries and cares of the world.

Remember, Demis left Paul as in 2 Timothy, having loved this present world. That's a pretty strong condemnation of Demis coming from Paul. I think the implication there is he, he, he apostasized, he's gone, having loved the world.

And so this third soil where you have a plant, but it does not bear appropriate fruit. Arguably is an example, again, of a non-Christian. It's only the final one where you have a real Christian, you have someone bearing fruit.

Okay. And that's going to be the measure. So what is the fruit that was born by Ananias and Sapphira, lying to the Holy Spirit, putting on errors, errors.

They were a good example of hypocrisy. They were pretending to be more generous than they actually were. Okay.

And that was the problem. They had to glorify themselves. Yes, that's right.

They could have kept all the money for themselves, give them portion, whatever that was up to them. But because they represented it as the full amount, they're glorifying themselves and lying to the Holy Spirit. And these are not doesn't strike me as

characteristic of a born-again person, a regenerated person.

So the only thing that we know about Ananas and Sapphira, we know two things. First of all, they did this thing that was bad and God killed them secondly for it. So I would say based on the evidence we have, it's probably safe to say they were not regenerated.

Now, I think the way the question is worded is a little bit trick question because what it says is if they had accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, would they be saved? So of course, if they were saved, then they were saved. Yeah, that's right. But the question is, do you think they were saved based on what you see that they have done? And so I think even you would agree, Greg, if they had been saved, then they were saved despite the punishment.

That's correct. But the indication, what's the indication in this specification is interesting because the language is 20th century, except Jesus is Lord and Savior. You don't see anything like that in the New Testament.

The proclamation of the gospel doesn't include the kind of language. Of course, the notion of trusting and believing in Jesus is certainly throughout the text, but that wasn't the way they put it, obviously. And so there wasn't these, you have these altar calls, you go through these motions, and then you see if it sticks.

There was a response and they were part of the Christian community, but the only thing we know about them were these two things that I mentioned, and this does not commend them well to being regenerated people. So it reminds me right at the beginning of the Old Covenant, what happened is God gives the Old Covenant the laws and the symbol of those laws, the Sabbath is a sign of their covenant with God. And what happens right at the beginning, somebody goes out and they gather up sticks.

And then they're put to death. Now people object to that all the time, but the truth is, if you are going to, right at the beginning of the creation of this whole covenant, if you're going to thumb your nose at the sign of this covenant, that is so egregious and so dangerous to the entire enterprise of creating this covenant people that it deserved death. And I think this is parallel to that, because what's the sign of our covenant? We received the Holy Spirit as the seal and the guarantee of what's to come.

And here they are right at the beginning of this covenant, and they are thumbing their nose at the Holy Spirit. They're lying to the Holy Spirit, right? And what happens right after that is it says everybody was really scared as a result. I'm looking for, here's the fate of Ananias and Sapphira Acts chapter 5. It says, immediately she fell at his feet, breathed her last young man carried her away.

And verse 11, great fear came over the whole church and over all who heard these things. At the hands of the apostles, many signs of wonders were taking place among

the people. They were with one accord in Solomon's portico and none of the rest dare to associate with them.

However, the people held them in high esteem. So there was this multiple impact, multifaceted impact as a result of this action by God, this judgment on Ananias and Sapphira. He shows the seriousness of it.

And right at the beginning, he establishes his authority and the need for people to be part of this covenant and not denigrate it, not despise it, not treat it lightly. Yes, thank you. I couldn't think of the right words there.

Okay, let's squeeze one more question in here. This one comes from Jason. Given the stakes of temporary time to choose an eternal destination, why do any Christians do anything but evangelize? Why does a church have state-of-the-art equipment and buildings for temporary time when they preach an eternal reality? Seems like Christians are not practicing what they believe.

Well, there's probably some merit in this observation as regarding priorities. Okay. However, I think there's a mistake and it's an understandable one and it reflects, I think, a mistake that everyone, I mean, pastors often make.

And the mistake is thinking that the only reason that we're here is to help get other people saved. That's why we're here. After all, I've heard people say this and that isn't the New Testament perspective.

Paul says, and I'm not sure, see the Philippians are thessalonians or maybe Colossians somewhere it says, that his goal is to present every man complete in Christ. It isn't just, okay, now you saved, wraps her out. It is to develop and grow in governess.

And by the way, that's the point of discipleship. The Great Commission is not a commission to evangelize. It entails evangelism as a necessary, but not sufficient element.

The sufficient element is discipleship, make disciples. That is the command of the Great Commission. And what Paul does with all of his converts is he works with them, especially Ephesus.

He spent two years at Ephesus and building and strengthening them. And then when he leaves their ex-19 or thereabout, he's saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders in this big deal because they're all close to each other. And he said, I'll never see you again.

And he knows this. He's on his way to Jerusalem and other places afterwards under persecution. But he has spent time training them to do things.

He wasn't just training them to preach the gospel. He was training them about the things

of God, the kinds of things that we see all throughout his epistles. So this was, this is the goal.

It's broadly put, presenting every man complete in Christ. Now this requires facilities, organization. It requires a proper use of resources at our disposal.

It's not just a matter of all we need is to get people to pray the prayer and let's just keep moving on to get people to pray the prayer and get all these people into heaven. That isn't what the kingdom is. It's interesting when Jesus came to preach the operative language was not that he came to preach the gospel, but he preached the kingdom of God.

Now the kingdom of God is the world being brought back under the authority of their rightful sovereign. And that entails a whole lot more than regeneration. That entails a whole way of life and living a certain way before God to bring honor to him in the life that we already have.

And entails developing in godliness because godliness is not just a value for this age, but also for the life to come. So there was a lot going on there and it just strikes me the question reflects this fairly one-dimensional idea about the role of Christians in the world is just to evangelize and get other people saved. As first Peter says, we're called so that we can proclaim the excellencies of God.

And we do that in large part by who we are, by our behavior. In Romans 8 talks about how God is conforming us to the image of Christ. That's his goal for us.

That's what he's working. He's working all things together for good to conform us to the image of Christ. And here's, I don't know if this is the verse you were thinking of, but this is from Ephesians 4. And he gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

No. That wasn't it. So there's another one, but that does the job.

Yes. So that's what God is doing. He is maturing us.

He's turning us into people who reflect him. This is what he was doing in the Old Testament with the law. But of course, I'll just follow with you.

Of course. Of course, the law couldn't make people better. So he was trying to conform or not trying.

That was the purpose of the law was to conform people. But of course, we know the law,

the law was only there to show us our need for Christ and the Holy Spirit to change us. But that's what he's doing.

He's creating a people to proclaim his excellencies. And he's maturing us and all that involves teaching, gathering, being together, fellowship, all these things are involved. And so we do those things.

That's right. And I just love the way you put it, Greg, that this is a kind of a one dimensional look. So of course, God is bringing more people into his people.

And of course, we should care about that. And if the church doesn't care about that, there's a problem. But there's a lot more going on.

Yeah, presenting every man complete in Christ. Did you ever figure out where that is? No, we'll look it up. Put it in the show notes.

Colossians, maybe? I don't know. Well, thank you. Thank you, Andrew.

And this heartbeats and Jason. We appreciate getting your questions. Send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag STRAsk or through our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.