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How Do You Know if Something You're Doing Is a Sin?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how you can know if something you're doing is a sin, what the author of Ecclesiastes meant when he said, "There is nothing new under the sun," and whether the possibility that Moses was a lunatic or liar brings the whole Tanakh and New Testament into doubt.

- * How do you know if something you're doing is a sin?
- * Since there are new things every day, what did the author of Ecclesiastes mean when he said, "There is nothing new under the sun"?
- * If Moses could have been a lunatic/liar, does that start a chain reaction that brings the Tanakh and the New Testament into doubt?

Transcript

#STRask How Do You Know If Something You're Doing Is a Sin? #STRask how do you know if something you're doing is a sin, what you're doing is a sin, what you're doing is a sin. #STRask How Do You Know if Something You're Doing Is a Sin? I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to the #STRask podcast. As Greg is trying to make me laugh, I'm starting this episode.

I succeeded, apparently. Let's get going with a question from Christina Zatole. Mm-hmm.

How do you know when something you're doing is a sin? For instance, is smoking CBD a sin even though it's legal? Well, let's just go with the example the instance she offered first. And CBD is a marijuana derivative that is used characteristically as I understand it for medicinal purposes. All right? I actually am broadly suspicious of marijuana as medicine.

That whole movement because if marijuana was a good medicine, even though it's a drug of sorts, then it should be a prescription item and not sold on the open market. I, you know, that's why I, you know, I'm suspicious of all these attempts to legalize

marijuana for that reason. But I think, however, apparently CBD has some medicinal qualities to it and it's a derivative of marijuana and it's not intoxicating.

So the problem with marijuana is the production of the altered state of reality and there's some other concerns too, health-wise, whatever. There was an excellent book that was written on this that pointed out the massive amount of evidence that smoking marijuana leads to schizophrenia and other mental health issues. But that aside, I mean, those are all reasons to stay away from it.

But this, in this case, the CBD is non-intoxicating and apparently smoking it allows faster ingestion into the system to accomplish its medical purposes. That's my understanding. So I don't see there's, if there's anything wrong with that, with that.

And this apply now to the broader question. I was able to answer or give the answer I did regarding smoking CBD because I was applying broader moral principles that are biblical and one of those has to do with intoxication and, and arguably harmful substances that could significantly impair your ability to function. And so that I brought to bear on this other question and apart from the smoking CBD for the purposes that were mentioned, marijuana use in general has other problems that have moral ramifications.

And so even though it's been made legal, that simply avoids one of the problems of it being an illegal drug, but it was made illegal for a reason. And that's because of the liabilities that it provides. And so, so what I've done is take my knowledge of moral teaching in the scripture and applied it in a particular circumstance.

And this is one way that you can determine whether a particular action is good or bad, or at least bad or not bad. Some things are morally neutral. Okay.

Like eating, what you eat is morally neutral. Unless under certain circumstances, and Romans talks about this, it creates a problem with another brother. It gives inappropriate offense.

It causes a brother to stumble, etc. So there the principle there is that that eating food is morally neutral except for under certain circumstances, it can be bad. Your choice of food.

All right. So, and then maybe some arguments can be made regarding public physical health as well. Incidentally, I would not use the verse out of 1 Corinthians that says that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in order to argue against habits that are unhealthy because Paul is not talking about the physical state of the temple, but the moral state of the temple.

He said, this is why you don't fornicate because the Holy Spirit lives in you. And when you sin in that way, then you are involving the Holy Spirit, so to speak, in that sin. Now, as for the physical qualities of the temple, well, this isn't what Paul has in mind.

And think about it. Paul himself was sick a number of times. And he mentions this in some of his letters.

He had eye problems. He had some other issues that we don't know about. I think Titus was sick or maybe my lead us or something.

So there is, well, if a person sick does that make their temple unfit for the Holy Spirit? What about an amputated person? Somebody is a paraplegic. Somebody who's got other kinds of physical problems. Well, the consequence of this way of thinking turns, just takes us to absurdity.

Paul wasn't talking about that. I think that there is an argument on stewardship grounds that has to do with physical health, but not on the temple of the Holy Spirit grounds. So broadly, if you understand the specific directives in Scripture regarding moral behavior and you're aware of some of the reasons why these directives are giving you could generalize to other circumstances.

And that's how moral thinking is done. In the book of Hebrews, it talks about Hebrews the end of chapter 5. It talks about how we have our senses, in a sense, developed, matured to discern good and evil. I'll find that verse for you.

So this process of discernment and growth, et cetera, is all a process. It's based on our understanding of Scripture and living things out and working out the details in our lives. And then we become more and more, in a certain sense, educated to what is right and what is wrong.

I'm looking for this here. Chapter 5 of Hebrews. I don't know which one you're referring to, right? He says, okay, let me find a way to read one while you're looking for that.

Yes, if you sure, go ahead. So I'm not. Because when I was thinking about was Romans 12, too, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the world.

So how do we become transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect? So how do we become transformed by the renewing of our mind? And the way we do that is we read Scripture. And as we read Scripture, that shapes our conscience. It shapes how we view the world.

It shapes how we understand everything that we see. And when we do that, and I don't just mean reading laws in the Old Testament. I mean the entire story, because you see who God is.

You see what he loves. You see what he hates. Your mind starts to love what he loves and hate what he hates.

So as you're trying to figure things out, sometimes you may not have a specific reason to give. Maybe you don't know how to think through the issue, but you might feel like there's something wrong here, but I'm not sure exactly what it is. And we should listen to that, because as we're shaping our conscience, I think it does react to things even subconsciously to things that we shouldn't do.

But go ahead, Greg, did you find it? I did find my verse. It was right in front of me here. It's the last verse of chapter 5. And here in the book of Hebrews, and here Paul is abrading his readers that they ought to be mature, but they're not.

And this is a context that leads into some of these troublesome verses in Hebrew 6. It's just something to keep in mind. But the operative verse for me right now is verse 13 and 14. "For everyone who protects only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant." And that's what he's charging.

They are. They should be eating solid food. They still have to go back to milk.

Verse 14, "But solid food is for the mature. Who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil?" So that's precisely, I think, what you're talking about there, Emma. Mm-hmm.

Let's go on to a question from C. Cooper. "Regarding Ecclesiastes 1-9, since there are new things every day, what did the author mean by there is nothing new under the sun?" Well, yeah, I'm chuckling. I'm glad this question was raised.

Since, you know, I hear this verse used a lot. And sometimes it's used frivolously. Well, there's nothing new under the sun.

Blah, blah, blah. But if we're going to exegete the passage, there are all kinds of things that are new as time has gone on and changed. I think what he is talking about is the basic, I don't even have it in front of me.

But I think it's probably safe to say, since certainly many things are new, he's not referring to those things. He's referring to the weighty, substantive things that are a part of human nature and the human condition. Okay, so we see in Proverbs it says, for example, "The eyes of a man are never satisfied." Well, that's true.

You know, no matter how much you get, you want more. That wasn't the case just when you have Hollywood moguls making millions and millions of dollars or Internet billionaires making billions and billions. And it's still not enough.

Instead, the eyes of a man are never satisfied. This isn't new. It goes all the way back.

And so we read these essential foundational things that are part of the human condition and part of human nature and part of the world that God has made or the world that

we've inherited that has been broken from what God has made. And those are the weighty foundational things that don't change. I know that some people think, well, they've said it, Christianity is out of step with the modern times.

And when I answered that on an interview recently, my answer was Christianity has always been out of step with any time. Even from the beginning, so Christianity formally is just 2000 years old. But from the beginning, it was never in step with the culture.

The world has its ways and God has his ways. And there's none of that is new. There's nothing like that that's new under the sun.

I think that's the point. You probably have looked up the passage, so maybe you can go directly from the text. I definitely think that's part of it.

The whole point of the book is that if you are seeking your fulfillment and all these other things, he tries everything. So he's just letting you know, look, I've tried this, I've tried that, I've tried more of this and more of that. And nothing satisfies.

Vanity of vanities. It's all vanity, he says. It's never enough.

So as he's going through here, I think that's the point of what he's making here, that you're not going to find something. As human beings, we think, if I find this, I'll be happy. If I get this, I'll be happy.

But what he's saying is, there's nothing new that will make you happy. There's nothing new that's going to satisfy you. That's not where our satisfaction is.

One thing he says here is in chapter 6, what the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. In other words, enjoy what God has given you. That is better than these things that you're imagining that will be better, that you don't have.

And that aren't going to be better, by the way. We enjoy the things that God has given us and we don't put our fulfillment in those things. Our fulfillment comes from enjoying things in God and enjoying the things he's given us.

Lewis has said that if we were really honest with ourselves, we would have to acknowledge that what we want deeply is not to be had in this world. We were made for a different world. In fact, I just read it the other night.

I was reading through the story of reality. I like that book when I was in Dallas over the weekend. And I was reading towards the end, especially the perfect mercy, which is drawing to a close the entire story and the resolution of all things.

And the deep longing that we have in our hearts that is never satisfied in this world. It was a significant factor in Lewis becoming a Christian. It's called the argument by desire or from desire.

I don't know if he called it that or not, but the fact is that we have desires that have satisfactions to them. And if our desires can never be satisfied in this world, that means we were not made for this world. We were made for a different world where they would be satisfied.

And I think this goes to the point of vanity of vanities. There are desires we have that have some fulfillment in this life, but not ultimate fulfillment. There is always a nagging inadequacy of any of these things, the best relationships, the best food, the best sexual experience, all of these things.

And Solomon talks about these things quite frankly in that book, Ecclesiastes, he said that there is a measure of fulfillment in them. But if you're looking for ultimate fulfillment, forget about it. Then it's nothing.

Then it's vanity. And the point being we were made for another world. And no matter what is ahead of us, that's not going to change.

There's not going to be anything new that will suddenly be the answer to all of our desires. Wait, if I put these goggles on, these ultimate reality and I just get lost in this new thing. Oh my gosh.

I don't think I will, I never will be a fan of them. I might put one on just for curiosity's sake, but I do not like the whole idea of that. I mean, it's bad enough when people got headsets on and they're walking around the airport or wherever lost in their own little world.

Well, this is their own little world to the nth degree. You know, they got these things on these alternate reality, whatever those things are called. I don't know, you know, but, but even so, that's not going to do it.

You could, you could have a world where you can have everything exactly your way. That's what Solomon had. He had all the money.

He had all the women. He had like a thousand women. That's a lot.

You know, it's a different woman every night. If you can sustain that activity for three years without repeating any gal. Not enough.

The eyes of a man are never satisfied. And when you try to enhance human experience in a way you think will make human experience a whole new thing, often what you end up is, what you end up with is something that is inhuman. So in the case of the goggles and this different world, now you're not having any human interactions, embodied interactions with people around you.

Now you're in some other completely different world that is supposed to enhance your

experience, but it's actually not a human experience at all. It's, it's, it's a lesser thing. Anyway.

All right. Don't get me started on that. My response to that is for those folks, get a life, please.

A real embodied life, not a life behind a screen. Okay. Enough of that.

Let's go on to a question from Jeremy Melberg. Oh my goodness. He's my, he's my nephew.

I thought he might be related that that's because I recognize Melberg. Oh, yeah. All right.

He asks, if Moses could have been a lunatic slash liar, does that start a chain reaction that brings the Tanakh and the New Testament into doubt? Huh. Read that again because I'm not sure I quite get the point. Okay.

If Moses could have been a lunatic slash liar, so if you're imagining, maybe, maybe Moses was a liar or lunatic, and he says, does that start a chain reaction that brings the Tanakh and the New Testament into doubt? Okay. I'm not sure how the New Testament would be influenced by that, but certainly the Tanakh, the first five books of the Bible, the law, are classically understood to be authored by Moses. That's my view too.

Then one wonders, gee, how could a mad man do this? But remember that this question is a conditional. If then, if then, if Moses was a woman, then what about this? If Moses was an alien, what about this? Those conditionals all depend on the if being not counterfactual, but real. First step.

I don't have any reason to believe that Moses was a mad man. There's nothing in the text that I could tell. I read that in the account of Moses own life, which all through the first five books, we see a profile of Moses.

I don't see anything that would give me the indication that he is, how did Jeremy put it, a mad man or lunatic/lire? Or liar, lunatic/bad man, or liar. I don't see anything that would give me that indication. Now, he might have encountered an objection, and this is the, there's a kind of a broader issue here.

When people bring up these conditionals, if this, then what? Well, the question always has to do with the if portion. Why would we even entertain such a thing? Do we have a reason to do that? If my mother law was a trolley car, would she have wheels? I mean, that's a kind of a famous Yiddish, something or other, I think. These kind of questions don't take us anywhere unless you have some reason to think that the conditional is not counterfactual.

It's real, that he was a lunatic or that he was a liar. And then that raises a question. But it

doesn't resolve the issue because if he was a lunatic and he was a liar, does that mean that God could not have used him, even so, to write accurately in the Tanakh? And the second doesn't follow from the first.

There are all kinds of people who made contributions and were used by God in the Old Testament that were very ignominious of CVs, right? Curriculum, Vite. And that's like David. Like Jesus? Well, when you look at his whole background, not Jesus, though, I mean, he wouldn't be a person with personal faults, but I was thinking about... Oh, no, I was just thinking, oh, I see what you're saying.

Rahab? Look at Rahab. I mean, look at all of the people. Look at Peter, who denied Christ.

Look, the scripture is filled with broken people who fail miserably. Look at Abraham for goodness' sake. And yet God still used them in magnificent ways.

So it wouldn't necessarily follow. Look, Abraham told what the king can't remember his name now that Sarah was his sister, right? And then I think his son did the same thing in a similar circumstance. Well, he lied.

So he was definitely a liar there. Isaac was a liar, too, or was a Jacob. You know, so you've got to... I mean, you've got to mess there morally, even with the famous patriarchs.

Look at the brothers. They sold their own brother into slavery. So you've got all kinds of immoral people that are involved in the process, and some of them providing scripture, who for whom God was not limited in using simply because of their immorality.

So my answer is in two parts. Given a conditional, it doesn't make any difference the conditional unless you have good reason to believe the first part of the conditional is something you could actually countenance if he was crazy and if he was a liar, why would anybody think that? But even if we grant the conditional, it doesn't follow that we can't trust the tenor in the case of Moses right now. So I guess the only way you would, if you were to say, okay, Moses imagined everything, right? It was all his imagination.

He just thought, well, obviously that has a bearing on the rest of the story. However, why think about it in that direction? The tenor in the New Testament cast doubt. It's not just that that would cast doubt on the other parts.

The other parts cast doubt on that theory because what you have is a unified story that makes sense in light of what Moses said and the law he laid down. That's right. It all led through multiple people.

There wasn't just Moses involved here speaking for God. Multiple people. And you mentioned this, Greg.

Spoke for God, acted for God, all in a unified way, all the way to Jesus. And now we have the resurrection. We have the New Testament.

We have the creation of the church. All those things make you look back on this theory and say, how could Moses have been making all this up in light of the whole story that we now see? That doesn't make sense. In fact, Jesus himself, the resurrected one, and let's just start from that because this is a way of arguing for the, it's called the retro-adductive, I think as John Montgomery calls it.

As you look at Jesus and what Jesus did in "Rosa and the Dead," if he rose from the dead and we have reason to believe that, and there's an argument right there, the minimal Hacks argument, I use it in the story of reality, then if Jesus, then he is who he claimed to be, who is God in the flesh. And this one who demonstrated his credentials through the resurrection also said that Moses quoted Moses multiple times from the Tanakh. So Moses was the guy who wrote this and this stuff was good and it's true and it's right.

That's Jesus' view of it. There's no aspersions of any kind that he cast. In fact, if he simply just identified Moses doing it, this was authoritative to the Jews and it was to Jesus as well.

So now you have this *expos facto* assessment by Jesus of Nazareth who rose from the dead that this book written by Moses is reliable of these books. Now, he doesn't say that Moses isn't crazy and he doesn't say that Moses isn't a liar. He didn't address that.

He says that what Moses delivered to us is trustworthy as from God. That's the key point here. Thanks, Greg, and thank you everyone for sending in your questions to us on Twitter with the hashtag #strask.

Or you can send them through our website. Just choose "I have another question" on our contact page and make sure you put #strask somewhere in your question. That way we know it's for this show and we will consider your question.

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

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