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How Should I Respond to a Formerly Muslim Friend Who Is Unwilling to Pay the Price for Becoming a Christian?

December 21, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to a formerly Muslim friend who is unwilling to pay the price for becoming a Christian and doesn't want to respond to challenges or discuss differences and whether Acts 17:23 implies that people who never hear the gospel will be judged differently.

* How should I respond to a formerly Muslim friend who is unwilling to pay the price for becoming a Christian and doesn't want to respond to challenges because his philosophy in life is to love and help, not discuss differences?

* Does Acts 17:23 imply that people who never hear the gospel will be judged differently?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Kockel and you're listening to the hashtag S-T-R-Ask podcast. Hello, Greg. Hi.

Let's start with a question from Kevin. Down to business. Yes, always, always.

Kevin. I know what I like to listen to in podcast and I like it when people get down to business. Yeah, me too.

So, we're going to talk a little bit about it. Which we just now have a way to do. They're blathering.

Sorry, everyone. Okay. All right, here's a question from Kevin.

My former Muslim friend has heard the gospel but is unwilling to pay the price. He says, if Christianity is true, I could only follow secretly. How would you answer his statement? I'd rather not answer what you said on prophecy as my philosophy in life is to love, help, and not discuss differences.

There's a lot there. Yeah, there's a lot there. Well, he's already violated his philosophy in life if he's not going to discuss differences because he's now expressing his difference with the Christian and the Christian viewpoint.

All right. So, I'm going to talk a little bit more about this. I'm going to talk a little bit more about this.

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I'm going to talk a little bit more about this. What he does here is not what his philosophy of life happens to be, which he's actually just violated with the Christian by talking about differences, is that what really matters is what is true and writing good and finding that out. Now, apparently he's come to the conclusion that Islam is not true.

All right, so he's abandoned that. A former Muslim friend. And then he's raising objections about Jesus following Jesus and what he's saying is I can't follow Jesus because it's inconvenient.

That's another way of talking about sacrifice, too much sacrifice, which I happen to agree with him. It doesn't tell sacrifice, some more than others, especially someone coming from a Muslim culture is going to probably embrace, have to embrace, more sacrifice, because there's such a radical difference between his culture, which is based in something false and Christianity, which is grounded in something true, and for which there are long-term consequences. We're not just asking people to adopt a different frame of a frame of reference, or maybe that's not the best way to put it, a different philosophy of life.

Well, here's your philosophy, here's my philosophy. You should have not mine rather than yours. I mean, in a certain sense, philosophies of life are persons specific.

Now, they ought to be governed, as I said, by those earlier things, by wisdom and morality, et cetera. But we're not asking for people to just change their flavor, to change their club, to join our group. We're asking people to embrace reality.

And if reality is the way that Christians claim, that is Jesus' understanding of the world, is sound, well, then that's a reality that he's going to have to face sooner or later. I remember my brother Mark telling me during the time, the period of time, about a year, where he was talking to me about Christ before I became a Christian back in the early 70s. And at one point, Mark said to me, you know, Greg, the things that I'm telling you are true.

Sooner or later, you're going to find this out. I just hope that when you do it isn't too late. Now, I think he's right about that.

And also, I was impressed because of the confidence that he expressed by talking to me in that way, graciously, directly, but confidently. And the truth isn't going to change, Greg, just because you want something different. Well, the same concept applies here.

If Jesus is who he claimed to be, then this former Muslim is going to have to stand before Jesus and give an account for his life. That's when the books are going to be opened and everything that he's ever done wrong is going to be written out there and he's going to have to give an account for that. That will not be a pretty picture.

And he will be judged according to his deeds and found wanting and then cast in the lake of fire. I mean, that's Revelation 20. It's pretty straightforward.

That's the reality. Okay. And that's the question he ought to be asking himself.

What's actually true? Not what's going to be difficult for me in this life? Because if you take the easy way in this life that's not the true way, then you're going to have a difficult way for the rest of eternity. And that's just the simple calculus that people I think have to face. Now, of course, this all depends on whether or not Christianity is true, which is why that kind of question ought to be the one that's asked.

And so I'm not sure what is dismissal of the prophecy issue happens to be. Maybe Kevin was sharing some fulfilled prophecy or some prophetic element that ought to have been at least considered to persuade his former Muslim friend. And now his friend is brushing that off.

Well, if you brush it off because it's not persuasive, okay, that's one thing. If you're brushing it off because you don't like where it leads because it's going to make things harder for you, okay, well, that's an entirely different matter. Because if we're talking about well, look, if somebody, if somebody parallel here and analogy, if somebody is diagnosed with cancer, and the doctor says, you got to get chemo.

And the person says, chemo, are you kidding me? I'll lose my hair. I'll be barfing all the time. I'll lose weight.

I can't do that. Okay, what's the alternative? You're going to die. That's the alternative.

If the cancer diagnosis is a sound one, all right. And to me, that's analogous to what this individual, the former Muslim, seems to be doing, and it's analogous to what a lot of people seem to be doing. Oh, that's too hard.

I'm not going to go there. I want an easier way. Okay, great.

You're going to get an easier way for a short period of time. And of course, if you have

two different doctors offering two different courses of action to combat the cancer, you're going to want to discuss the differences. That's right.

Because you want to know which one is actually going to work, which one is true, which one is effective. That's right. That's right.

So the analogy is even more appropriate than I thought. So I think that's what you're facing here. And what the Kevin, your Muslim friend, I think needs to be challenged by is the question of truth here.

We're not talking about flavors. We're not talking about preferences. We're not talking about clubs that you join and you're like one club, rather than the other.

We're not even talking really about a relativistic philosophy of life. What we're talking about is the way reality is structured. That's what we're talking about.

And reality has a way of bruising people when they don't take it seriously. That's the cancer illustration, which is a probe to the salvation illustration. Find out what's true, and then live according to that.

Because if you don't, it's going to hurt you in the end. And of course, we don't need to downplay the reality that there will be a cost. Jesus said to count the cost.

Jesus wanted people to be aware that there is a cost. So you don't need to deny that this will cost him, obviously. But even here, the only cost here is that he would be following secretly.

I'm not sure exactly. He's not even worried about persecution. He's just, like you said, it seems like he's worried about the inconvenience.

Or maybe there's something in there about persecution too. But so I think you're right, Greg, the problem here is that he doesn't seem to care about truth, or he doesn't know that the claims about spiritual reality are claims about truth. So maybe just a simple question you could ask is, is there any place in your philosophy for truth? You mentioned these other things, love, help, is there a place for truth? Do you, does that truth matter to you? And if nothing else, you'll at least get them to start thinking about religion in a different way.

And your analogy is about cancer and not doing what you need to do because it's inconvenient. I think that's a great analogy. And that also might help him to understand.

Does he care about reality? That is, that's the question you want to get across. My suspicion is he's relativizing this issue. It's almost as if, okay, if you want me to join your club, there might be some benefits to it, but I'll have to do it secretly.

And that's just really inconvenient. So I'm not going to join your club. Instead of asking

the other question, is, is what you're offering the truth or not.

And by the way, I'm glad you mentioned about not being afraid of the cost. This is something I think that Christians who focus, I think, inordinately on the love of God as a technique of communicating the gospel. It's not wrong because the scripture speaks of that for God so loved the world that he gave, etc.

But it might be surprising for people to realize that the word love doesn't appear anywhere in the book of Acts, which means the disciples, when they evangelize these disciples who are trained by Jesus, when they were evangelized, they didn't focus in on that. And I did a whole study of that book of Acts. You just go through every time the gospels preach 13 times to individuals or groups and see what they said.

And that's what I did. And so... Are you saying the word love isn't in the book at all or isn't in the sermons? It's not in the book. Look, you look up love in your concordance.

You won't find any reference in the book of Acts. Okay, it's just not there. Now it's manifest there, of course, in different ways, the love of God.

But instead, there's an emphasis on the cost, okay, the cost of denying, you know, and the danger of being in the wrong place before God and not covered by the forgiveness that Jesus provides. So there's certainly nothing wrong with us making that clear to other people. And here I was 50 years ago, Mark saying this thing to me, and I remember it to this day because it was so impactful.

And now when I, you know, I give the clothes at our realities, I always make this point. In fact, I made that particular point to 3,000 or almost 4,000 young people in Minneapolis just a few weeks ago. I said, there's going to be a reckoning.

Okay, the things I'm saying are true sooner or later, you're going to know that. I hope they will and you too. It won't be too late.

We let them know what the cost is. Peter talks about this idea so much. And first Peter, when he talks about how we will suffer with Christ now, I mean, that's just a given.

That's what we're supposed to expect. But we will also be glorified with him later. And if you reject that suffering now for glory now, then you will have suffering later.

You're not going to avoid the suffering. There will be suffering either way. You either have it now or you have it later.

And believe me, you want it now. All right, well, let me just say also, the glory you would have now cannot compare to the glory you will have later. But the same is true for the suffering.

Okay, let's go on to a question from James Caruga. Does Acts 17:23 imply that people

who haven't heard the gospel by Christ return or after their death will be judged differently? Let's say someone in remote jungles or Islamic countries, but have a sense and reverence of God existing, but not knowing Christ in the gospel. Well, let me read the passage.

And since the question, there's actually two questions here. One, does this verse intimate that? And the second one has to do with the larger question of those who haven't heard the gospel. So here's what the verse says at 1723.

And many people familiar with the book of Acts will recognize what this, this famous occasion, this verse introduces. It's Paul who's speaking here. And let me start in verse 22, just to set the stage because that's the beginning of that pericope.

So Paul stood in the midst of the areaapagos and said, men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all aspects. For, and here's the verse in question, while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription to an unknown God. Therefore, what you worship in ignorance this, I proclaim to you.

All right. So the question here is, is there a suggestion in this passage that those who haven't heard the gospel will be judged in a different fashion than those who have heard the gospel? Can they be saved by a different method if they're not within the reach of the gospel? Now this question, well, there's two questions like I mentioned and the larger question involves other theological elements. But let me just point out with regards to this verse, this is an introduction of a talk that Paul gives to the philosophers there in Athens to correct their false thinking.

If this was adequate, in other words, worshiping an unknown God who Paul is kind of using the phrase to leverage a proclamation of Christ characteristic of the true God, if that was all this adequate, Paul would have ended his discussion at verse 24, you know, but he says what you worship in ignorance. This is not a good thing. Worshiping in ignorance.

And by the way, I think he's giving them the benefit of the doubt because when you worshiping an unknown God, you're not directing it at anyone. In particular, they're just trying to cover their basis. They got God's to everything, but they figure maybe there's another God that I haven't covered yet.

So we're just going to do the unknown God. So Paul leverages that and say, let me tell you about that unknown God. He's the real God and he's going to judge everybody through a man named Jesus who through whom he's given proof by raising him from the dead.

So he gives this great evangelistic sermon there because these people are not saved.

They are, they are worshiping in ignorance. Remember Jesus said John chapter four, you must worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

So people who are worshiping in ignorance are lost. Okay. And even if they don't have the message of Jesus, they are still culpable, blame worthy, responsible before God for their sins.

And I'm going to say something that's true and sound, but is hard for many people's ears nowadays, even Christians, but you need to hear this. God does not owe anyone forgiveness. If people break God's law wherever they happen to be and they don't hear a message of forgiveness, they are still guilty before God.

Now, whether they get the message of forgiveness, that's going to be God's business. And here in this particular case, he's arranged for Paul to come to this group and to speak the message of forgiveness, which some responded to. You also have something similar, just a couple of chapters before in Acts chapter 15, where you have Cornelius, who is a Gentile, a God-fearer.

In other words, he is, he acknowledges the God of Israel. He's doing better than these Athenians are doing. And he's giving alms and prayers.

He's maintaining all kinds of this religious activity towards the true God as an outsider, as a Gentile. And the text says, because he gets a visitation from an angel, your prayers have been heard before God. So this guy's got it better than everybody, the way it's described here.

But it turns out it's not good enough, because part of the vision was that Peter would come to talk to them and give them the gospel, which they needed, because even with this great pedigree that's described in Acts chapter 10, I'm sorry, Acts 15, Cornelius and his kin are not saved. They need the gospel. So both of these passages ought to teach us just the opposite, that it isn't that there's a separate way, or God will judge them in a different fashion, but that they need the gospel to be reconciled, to put their faith in.

What must I do to be saved? Acts chapter 16, the Philippian jailer, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. So this raises other issues. I realize for people, and we have some teaching, I think it's called the Heathen.

I'm the unknown God. I gave that title before the word heathen was politically incorrect, but nevertheless, there it is. And I talk about some of the issues that are involved here that we have to keep in balance.

And one of them is God owes no one forgiveness. He only owes them justice. In chapter 17, verse 30, it says, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.

So he's calling all men to this. And one thing that James says here, James, I'm sorry, the person who asked the question. Sorry.

Yeah, because you were just citing from the biblical writer, you're just citing from the sermon itself that was preceded by this verse. Okay. So the question is, will they be judged differently? And the answer is no, everyone will be judged the same.

And here's how they'll be judged. All you have to do is go to Revelation 20 to see that everyone's going to stand before the throne. The books will be opened.

And another book is open, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. Everyone will be judged the same according to their deeds.

And unless they're in the book of life, unless they've trusted in Jesus, they will pay the price of their sins. So this goes to what you were saying, Greg, about people about God not owing people grace. That's what makes it grace.

Everyone will be judged by their deeds. If they have not been rescued by Christ, then they will pay for the justice themselves. Okay.

And incidentally, I may have just a postscript to this. In that talk that I give, I give some examples from Don Richardson who wrote a book called Eternity in their hearts. He's a missionary and he talks about all of these circumstances where you have people in these remote areas that genuinely seek the Lord in God, like moves mountains to get the message to them in extraordinary ways.

And so what this shows is that those who are genuinely seeking the God in truth, God is going to get the message of salvation to them. And we have lots of examples. By the way, this is one of them in Athens.

You know, they're going to this remote area. He's not in Judea anymore. He's in Athens and he's talking to all these philosophers.

And some of them followed all after this message is given. Many rebuffed him. Of course, they laughed.

They said it's cornfully, but even so, some believed in God's faithfulness there. Well, thank you, Kevin and James. We appreciate you sending in your question.

And if you have a question, you can send that on Twitter with the hashtag STRask or you can go to our website at STR.org. Just keep your question short and we will consider it for the show. We can't guarantee your answers. We can be short though, right? That's that's true.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

