

OpenTheo

Is It Okay to Disobey Authority in Order to Protect Yourself?

April 18, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's okay for a Christian in prison to disobey the rules against fighting in order to protect himself, whether Jesus raised himself from the dead or was raised, if manna was really sap from the tamarisk tree, and the possibility of becoming a different kind of "soil" in terms of the parable of the soils.

- * Would it be wrong to tell an incarcerated Christian convert that it's okay to disobey the prison rules against fighting in order to protect himself?
- * Did Jesus raise himself from the dead, or was he raised from the dead?
- * Was the manna from Heaven a miraculous event, or was it sap from the tamarisk tree?
- * Regarding the parable of the soils, can someone start as one type of soil but become another type later in their life?

Transcript

[Music] This is Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl is with me. We're here to answer your questions.

Hello, Greg. Hey, Amy. All right, here is a question from Eric.

What advice should I give to a Christian convert? Who is currently incarcerated in regards to self-defense in prison? Prisons are full of gangs that rob and extort other inmates, but prison rules prohibit fighting. Would it be wrong to tell him to disobey authority in order to protect himself? The answer to that me is obviously, no, it would not be wrong to protect yourself, okay? And by the way, the violence between people is illegal outside of prison, not just inside of prison. But that doesn't mean a person who's under attack can't defend himself.

All right? Now, maybe this distinction isn't made in prison, but it is certainly made

outside of prison. Did that person act in self-defense? Did he have reason to respond with violence, even lethal violence under the circumstances he was facing? Those are legitimate factors. Now, if in the prison system, there are rules against fighting, but you are not the perpetrator, but you are the one who is being attacked and you're trying to defend yourself and you have to do something to defend yourself.

Well, it might be that the prison officials consider that a violation of their rules. To me, it's a little bit silly, but I think it's harder for them to figure out when you got a bunch of criminals, who's at fault? All right? And however, the question was, essentially before God is a legitimate because you're disobeying the ruling authority and the answer is absolutely, absolutely. Sometimes two moral goods are intention with each other and you have to pick the more important one.

I mean, I think the one thing you have to keep in mind because I don't know exactly what goes on in prisons or what Eric is referring to here. You see, talking about somebody initiating fights in order to protect himself. I mean, I think there are a lot of factors here I'm not really sure about, but one thing to keep in mind is in first Peter, it talks about how it is better for us to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong.

In other words, it's better to suffer at the hands of human beings than to do what's wrong and suffer at God's hands. So what has to be determined here is which is right when they conflict, protecting oneself or obeying authority. Now, of course, those are both good things and important things.

And I think they could be different in different situations. So I think each situation has to be kind of evaluated for that. We're keeping in mind that we are always to do what God would have us do and whether that is protecting yourself or obeying authority, that needs to be determined in the specific situation according to the situation.

Does that make sense, Greg? Yes, it does. And it's a very important qualification. Sometimes these things are not always easy.

Now, Jesus said, if somebody slaps you on the right cheek, then turn the left. Think about that. How do you... Most people are right-handed.

How does a right-handed person slap somebody else on their right cheek if you slap away like a right hook with your right hand, but with an open hand, you hit that person on the left side. The only way you could hit a person on the right side with your right hand is a backhand. Well, what's a backhanded slap? Well, that's an insult.

And so it appears what Jesus is saying is someone is insulting you or doing you some minor wrong, and do you retaliate and return evil for evil? And the answer is no. That is retaliation in this case for your own ego's sake is an evil. That's not the same as

defending oneself.

And by the way, for those who invoke this verse to promote pacifism, when Jesus himself was struck on the face, he did not turn the other cheek in that circumstance. What he did is he asked for an accounting, which was appropriate there. If I did something wrong, bear witness to the wrong, if not, then why did you strike me? And that was at his trial.

So one cannot use... Jesus comments in the sermon of the model while turning it on the other cheek as it is a blanket justification of pacifism. Past strict pacifism is immoral, because what it does is it abrogates ourselves of any responsibility to protect the weak who are suffering unjustly. We just let it all go because we're never going to raise a hand to anyone.

Okay? And this is clearly not right. And I would point out we have done a couple of episodes on self-defense over the years. So go back and look, because we went into this way more deeply in those other ones.

So go back and find out what Greg had to say about that. And Amy described some really good moves that you could use if you have... We did a couple of... No, I'm joking. The difficulty of living in a fallen world is that sometimes it is hard to figure out what the right thing to do is because we know all of the good things, but sometimes the good things are in conflict with each other and we have to determine which one.

So above all, just remember we are under God's grace. You're not always going to get it right. Just do your best.

Use wisdom. Shape your mind to be like Jesus. Make your decisions and then trust in God's grace.

Yeah, in other words, if you don't make the wrong decision, you're still covered even though you're doing your best to make the right decision. I want to say one other thing about don't return evil for evil because we have to be careful about using that indiscriminately in a circumstance. People have said this, "Okay, well, don't return evil for evil." But this presumes that the Christian's response is an evil thing.

And that's the very thing in question. We're trying to decide whether self-defense is an evil. If you say, "Well, it's wrong to turn evil for evil," you've presumed what you need to establish until you're begging the question at that point.

We're trying to figure out what is the right response. Much of the time reacting and retaliating is not right because it's merely returning evil for evil and it is not in the genuine and appropriate act of self-defense or defense of someone else who's being harmed. That's a great point, Greg.

I'm really glad you said that. That's great. Evil is not the same thing as violence.

Sometimes violence is appropriate. Here's a question from Andrew. "Did Jesus raise himself from the dead or was he raised from the dead? Don't know if this is a distinction without a difference since God is triune.

Appreciate any thoughts." Well, yes, yes, and yes. I was just talking with somebody about this yesterday, actually Tim Barnett because, no, it was actually Bobby Lassua, Robbie Lassua, rather a new team member, which is why he got his name wrong. Of course, I get lots of our team members that may be laughing because she knows I don't always get people I've known for 15 years.

Is it Derek or Eric? Anyway, in the early part of Jesus' ministry, I think you might find this a gospel of John, but he said, "Raise... Let's see. Destroy this temple, and I will raise it in three days." The text says, "But this," Jesus said, "referring to the temple of his body, Soma." So that is a reference to his resurrection, because they asked for the sign. He said, "Okay, destroy the temple.

I'll raise it in three days." And so Jesus is claiming that he will raise himself from the dead. Now, there are a number of other passages that say God raised Jesus. No God, when it's isolated from Jesus there, is the Father.

The Father is in view there. I'm not sure if there's a verse that says the Holy Spirit was involved in Jesus' resurrection, but there might be. But in any event, if you have God raising Jesus from the dead and Jesus raising Jesus from the dead, there is an argument there, an intimation that Jesus and God are the same.

All right? So if the Father raises, but Jesus raises, the thing that they share together is a divine nature. Okay? So this becomes an evidence of the Trinity. So just like God's the Creator, but Jesus is the Creator.

God is the Rock, but Jesus is the Rock. God is the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega.

So there's actually a whole list of these things where the Scripture states one thing true about the Father, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. That's an Isaiah somewhere, but then you see that repeated in Philippians chapter two, applying to Jesus. So these are all internal evidences that Jesus is the God.

In the beginning was the Word. In the beginning was God and God created in the heavens of the earth. Okay? No, in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth.

And then for Jesus in the beginning was the Word. The Word was God. All things came into being through him and apart from him, nothing came into being that is coming to being.

Okay? Well, both passages are saying the same thing. The Creator was God and Jesus

the Word. Meaning Jesus the Word was God, just like it says in John chapter one.

So good observation. That's great. Yeah.

One other verse that talks about Jesus is John 10, 18. "No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again." Those are the only two parts I can think of because I think most of them do talk about the Father doing it, but I think that's a great point about the other places where they talk about Jesus doing the same thing as the Father.

Okay. Here's a question from Abby. "Was manna from heaven a miraculous event or was it sap from the tamarisk tree? I read this lately in a devotional." Well, if you recall the event, okay, in the event what you have is you have the manna falling all over the plane to feed 700,000 or 600,000 to 1.2 million.

I mean, the numbers are not entirely clear, but there are a lot of people. All right. I was responsible for a feeding program for an entire refugee camp in 1982, Cambodian refugees who took shelter in Thailand, and there were 18,250 refugees.

Okay. This is just a smidgen. This is maybe maybe 1%, 18,000, 180,000 would be 10%.

This is just 10% to 5% or less of what the Jews were, but I couldn't. There's no way we're going to get stuff out of tamarisk trees to feed everybody on a regular basis, right? In that refugee camp, the numbers don't work. If it was one person or a family, yeah, manna from heaven, by the way, they didn't even know what it was.

Remember they said, manna means what is it? Okay. What is it? They didn't know. Do you think they know about tamarisk trees? And by the way, they were in the wilderness.

How many thousands of tamarisk trees are required to feed them? How many tens of thousands? And notice that if they kept it for, they were supposed to collect every day and then on the day before Sabbath, collect twice as much. All of it would go bad and spoil and they'd need one day at the end of the day and they'd need to get more, except for the stuff they got before the Sabbath and it would stay for two days. I mean, there's so many elements in this that are clearly unusual.

The amount of people that need to be fed, they need to be fed every single day. It goes bad in one day, except from one occasion, it stays until two days. They don't know what it is.

They can't figure it out. They'd never seen it before. Okay, this isn't a natural thing.

And then by the way, it stopped happening. That's what I was going to point out. Certain date.

Them blasted tamarisk, they got all worn out. I'm given and given and given 40 years

enough enough already. And by the way, they were traveling the whole time.

They were traveling from one place to another to another. They'd stay in camp for a while, but they were getting fed on a regular basis. And whatever this was that they were eating kept them healthy.

That's all they had to eat. The only time they got sick was when they complained about the manna. And so God sent them quail, gazillions of them, and they ate the quail and got sick because it was a judgment.

So, I mean, this is an attempt. This is like, okay, Jesus didn't really feed 5,000. You see this little boy offers his loaves and fishes.

And everybody else who had already brought their lunch and was hiding it. They got embarrassed because a little boy offered it. So they all pulled out their own lunches and had lunch.

And everybody thought it was a miracle. It's just a lame attempt to try to explain away the supernatural element. And the Bible is not against explaining when God gives something natural.

I mean, the Bible will talk about God giving an abundance of crops or whatever it is. A natural thing. If that's what manna was, then why not just say it? Why say it? It's a really good point.

There is a distinction Scripture makes between God's natural provision and his supernatural provision. Yeah, it seems very unlikely that the day they go into the promised land, it stops and the never starts again. And it's just some sort of natural process.

Well, we're all these tamarisk trees marching like little ants, you know, along with them while they travel. It's just goofy. I'm just glad we got ants into this podcast.

Okay, here's a question from Maria. Lord, Amy and Greg. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the soil and the seeds.

Can someone start as one type of soil but become another type later in their life? Can one of a false conversion initially, but later on become truly reborn? Well, I think just backing off in the parable for a moment, I think this is obviously so. And it's obviously so because it happens. There are lots of people who say that they were one way and then another way, okay? However, keep in mind with the parable is meant to do parables are meant to tell general truths.

They're generalizations about things. They are meant as an illustration to explain something else. They are not meant to be strained at as categories that are, you know,

hermetically sealed in this case one from the other.

It is meant to explain some details. Jesus is helping understand about the gospel, the message, the word going out to the kingdom. It's interesting though.

He says with the first group who has the devil pulled the seed away because it's a hard ground. He also says they did not understand it. When you do not understand it, it's not going to have an impact.

Okay. The last one who produced 160, 30 fold, the most successful there, it said they hear the word and they understood it. And so this is this whole parable is bookended by these comments.

And I'm actually including that point in the new book. I'm writing street smarts and because this focuses on the importance of us to communicate in a way that people understand. If people are confused, they are easy prey for the devil.

And the message gets taken away from them. So the simple answer is no, these are not hermetically sealed categories. People oftentimes are hard ground for a season and then could receive the word with joy and then not persevere.

I mean, I was hard ground for a long time. I was like the first ground for a long time, I would say. And I think I've become the fourth ground.

You know, I'm still hanging in there after 48 years and people could judge whether I've produced any fruit or not. But so if those categories were hermetically sealed, so to speak, then there's no way to explain my own experience with Christ. But this is true with a lot.

Now, someone might say, "Well, you're going on your own experience." I said, "Well, yes, I am going on my own experience." The reality is that some people are hard and then they become soft. And I'm not the only one. I'm sure there are thousands of people that are listening to my voice for whom this was the case.

All right. And, or others who walked with the Lord in some sense, and then they became teenagers and then it cost them something to be Christian. So they faded out.

They didn't want to pay the price. And then later on, they got their head on straight and they started following Christ no matter what and bearing fruit. So there seemed to be lots of examples to the contrary.

And then given the nature of parables, they seemed to also have that kind of flexibility to them. Well, all we have to do is look at Paul. Paul was persecuting Christians and putting them to death and hunting them down.

So what does he say? He says in 1 Timothy 1, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving

full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all, yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in him for eternal life." There you go. So Paul can become a Christian. He said you can't hold any one.

That's right. That's exactly right. That's a great closing illustration there.

Well, thanks Greg. And thank you for your questions for today. We really appreciate hearing from you.

Send those questions in on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[Music]