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If I'm Scared of Death, Does That Mean I'm Not a True Christian?

July 6, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about the difference between trusting your heart and trusting your human faculties to evaluate evidence, whether having a fear of death means you're not a true Christian, and whether believers will spend eternity with the Lord on the new earth rather than in Heaven.

* What's the difference between trusting in your heart, which Scripture says not to do, and trusting your human faculties to evaluate evidence and determine what is true?

* If the idea of death scares me, does that mean I'm not a true Christian?

* Is it true that believers will spend eternity with the Lord on the new earth rather than in Heaven?

Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason's hashtag, S-T-R-Ask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Kockel. Hey, Amy. Hey, Greg.

Are you ready to answer some questions? We'll see. Okay. I'm ready to listen to some questions we'll see about the answer.

Alright. Alright, let's go to a question from Jordan Dander. What's the difference between the two of you and the other? What's the difference between trusting in your heart, which scripture says not to do, versus trusting in your own human faculties and intuitions for things you have strong evidence to believe are true in your heart? Is trusting in your heart more akin to trusting in your feelings which fluctuate and change? Well, there's a little ambiguity here for me because he may be referring to Proverbs 3, which I'll get to in a moment, where it says trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

That might be the reference. It might be a reference to our concern where we hear so

much in our culture. Follow your heart, trust in your heart, do what your heart tells you to do and live your truth and all that.

And that's a concern for us because in that context, we're talking about people just being slaves to their feelings in the moment, instead of trusting what is good and right and true, regardless how they feel about it. So there is a concern with the cultural ethic of following your heart. When it comes to scripture though, the scripture doesn't say we shouldn't, well, let's go to Proverbs 3 because this is where some of the ambiguity scripturally might be coming from.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and keep in mind that the concept of heart now, biblically Old Testament concept, is that it's the center of your being. Guard your heart. It says in scripture, not guard your emotions.

No, there's a reason though we should be careful with our emotions if we're given to following our emotions rather than following what is true. But what Paul is talking, I'm sorry, what the writer of Proverbs is talking about here is that our whole self should be trusting in God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

This is the center of your being. We'll intellect emotions and do not lean on your own understanding. That is, there's a contrast between God's way and man's way and that the writer of Proverbs is saying it's not wise to lean on our own understanding.

Rather than on God. Okay. And I say rather than on God because of what follows in the next verse.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding in all your ways. All your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes.

That would be leaning on your own understanding. Rather fear the Lord and turn away from evil. We lean on our own understanding and we follow our heart in the sense that the modern culture says it.

We are often turning towards evil, not away from evil. And the writer of Proverbs is saying here is that just trusting in human understanding that is human assessment of things. And I don't think it's referring to using evidence as in logic to come to reasonable conclusions.

It has to do with a totally different value system. I say that because all through scripture, even in Proverbs, we see an emphasis on knowledge on observing the world, seeing how things function and work in God's world, drawing conclusions from evidences that are given us, etc. And we see this in the Gospels and in the book of Acts.

So it can't be excluding that kind of thing. I think what we have here in the Proverbs

passage is that we are not moving ahead as if our wisdom and our take on the reality is the only thing that matters. James has something similar in I think James 4 or 5 when he says, don't say, I'm going to go to this city or that city and make this money and do that.

That kind of boasting is evil. Really? Boasting. Then we keep reading.

Say rather if God wills, I will do this or that. So again, there's a kind of focus or addressing an issue where you are doing something totally on your own, based on your own thinking, wisdom, understanding as an autonomous self. Without taking God into consideration.

And the writer of Proverbs is saying, if you're leaning on your own understanding, that's why you're leaning on. Well, that's a bent read. Okay, it could.

Maybe it's not going to hold you. If you're in all your ways by contrast, acknowledging him, then God will make your path straight. There's a similar if you're just making your plans willy nilly here and there.

Hey, you don't even know if you're going to be alive tomorrow. Rather understand that God is sovereign. He could intervene in any plan that you have.

Now, keep that in mind. Go ahead and make your plans. But remember, they'll only happen if God wills that if God allows it.

Okay. So I think that's the best way to understand this. Certainly in the cultural sense, we don't want to follow our feelings.

We don't want to live our own truth. That's a lie. And our feelings often betray us.

You know, so there's a warning there. And in Proverbs, I think we had a clear picture of exactly how in a certain balance, we take our understanding, our perception, our reasoning, whatever. We integrate it by leaning on God and the things that he has to say about things.

And that's all part of the package. We're supposed to be conforming our minds to who God is and his word. And that's in that way, we're supposed to learn wisdom and learn how to apply that wisdom.

So all those things, as we're taking in God's wisdom, we're learning to use that in life. And so we're using our mental faculties. But I agree, Greg, I think what Proverbs is talking about a moral issue, not as much an intellectual issue, although of course our intellect is shaped by the state of our hearts.

I thought of another verse that he might be referring to, and that's in Jeremiah 17. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick who can understand it. So the idea is that we are bent towards believing wrong things or having a moral compass is

broken.

And so we need to have that shaped by trusting in what God has told us about those things. But of course, like you said, Greg, there are all sorts of places in the Bible where we're supposed to use our intellect. I mean, even Jesus doing certain things as evidence for who he is, that's an example of asking people to evaluate what they're seeing in order to come to the conclusion that he really is the Messiah.

And so there are all sorts of examples like that. And so we just have to put all those things together. Okay, here's a question from anonymous.

The idea of death scares me so much. Does that mean I'm not a true Christian? I've been a Christian for a long time. And sometimes it feels like all I have is knowledge and not faith.

Well, I actually don't know how to answer that for this individual because I can't see the quality of their trust. I will say that I think that the prospect of one's death is unsettling for just about everyone. I've said in the past, if I were asked to give my life for Christ or the decision was either you renounce Christ or you lose your life, then I would not renounce Christ.

I would suffer my life, but that would be an act of my confidence on the nature of the truth. Nevertheless, my palms would be sweating. I would be pounding because what's at stake? And for many people, there still isn't ambiguity about the the or as one Doug David from one of my mentors over at Talbot, the philosopher there, he calls these pockets of agnosticism.

We may have a very high degree of confidence that what we believe to be so actually is so, but there still could be a nagging doubt. But what if I'm wrong? And that's when we revisit or at least when I revisit my reasons for thinking I'm correct about something particularly on spiritual things. That's comforting, but there's always going to be, for many people, there's going to be this margin of uncertainty that's there.

And so most of the things we do in life, the decisions we make, even important ones, are not based on absolute certainty. Okay. So then this is no different.

The more that we know, I think the more confidence that we have to face death with a peaceful attitude. We just lost, let me struggle with this Tim Keller. And Tim Keller on his deathbed was was ready to go.

I'm ready to be with Jesus. And so there was probably no equanimity in his emotions at his passing, but we're not all Tim Keller's, right? And so everybody's emotional reaction to the idea of death is going to be different. So I've been a Christian for almost 50 years and have a very high degree of confidence that Christianity is true.

Yet at the same time, there is a sense that, well, I'll see in what final sense in a few years and those years are, you know, getting fewer and fewer. It's the older I get and the more I think about this. So it's normal, I guess is what I'm saying, to have some uncertainty.

The faith though is your act of trust of putting yourself in someone else's hands. You can have somebody that is afraid of flying and really uncertain that if they get into an airplane, whether they're going to get in a crash. And this could be really upsetting to them, but they still get on the airplane.

Now if they get on the airplane, they're 100% in. They're all in, which means they have given their full faith trust for this trip and in the pilot and the plane. The fact that there's not complete equity about it doesn't mean you haven't given your full trust.

So again, I can't say for certain or clearly about the individual in mind. I don't know what anonymous his interior state is, but what he's described is not unusual of people who are really Christian. I think my question would be, what is it about death that is scaring you so much? Because I think that also matters.

I think about what is it? Is it the idea that I'm not sure this is true? Is it just the idea that I don't know what to expect? What it's going to be like? I mean, there are different things that could be causing you anxiety. If you are not convinced that if this is an intellectual thing, which I'm so glad you came to know that you're not going to be able to do it. I think that is a great example because every person on the airplane gets to the destination regardless of how anxious he is about getting there.

But even in the case of an airplane, a lot of times people intellectually know this airplane is not really going to go down, but that doesn't stop the anxiety. So there's something else you have to do to deal with that anxiety. And what comes to mind for me is that you're not going to be able to do it.

And what comes to mind for me is Gary Habermas' book, *The Thomas Factor*, where he talks about emotional doubts, which are different from intellectual doubts, which can just be resolved by an intellectual understanding. So if you're convinced already intellectually, you may just have to deal with an emotional doubt. And so I would recommend going to Gary Habermas' website and looking for a book called *The Thomas Factor*.

And it's free there. I'm not going to download, right? Yeah, you can read it right there online. And he has very good advice for dealing with emotional doubts.

And in that show, I'm not going to give you his whole thing. But the idea is you have to be intentional about shaping your response to this anxiety and conforming it to the truth. You have to be aware of this anxiety because if you're convinced it's true that you're going to be with God and everything's going to be fine or better than fine, the best it's

ever been for you.

But your emotions aren't following that. You have to intentionally think about what the truth is and reject that anxiety in favor of the truth. So kind of instruct your own emotional response.

So you shape your understanding first. You can read things about *The After Life*. Randy Alcorn wrote a book called *Heaven* that's very popular.

And then you just, when you notice that you're having false ideas about it, you practice replacing those false ideas with true ideas. And over time, that instinctive reaction and this habit you've gotten into being anxious will be affected. So I recommend he ties us all into Philippians 4. And I think it can be really helpful.

So that's what I would recommend if you're having that sort of anxiety. Okay, along the same lines of *The After Life*, here's a question from Doug Smith. Regarding 1 Thessalonians 4, 16 through 18, and Revelation 21, 1 through 4, it would appear that believers will not spend eternity in heaven, but with the Lord on the New Earth.

Is this right? Yeah, I think that's right. And I think they're confused understandings about eternity. People say things like we go out of time and into eternity.

Well, we kind of know what they mean in a poetic sense. But the fact is there is time in eternity. In fact, we're in eternity now.

In the sense that this, these are where the words are sometimes imprecise, we are in a never-ending existence. Now, it turns out we will never live for any eternity because you can't accomplish an infinite amount by simply adding more years in this particular case. We'll always have an age, but we will, our lives, our conscious selves will never end.

Okay, so, but we'll be doing things. We won't be just locked into this, you know, what's the word I think Aquinas referred to this. It is basically this moment of ecstasy, this ecstatic, ecstatic, unending moment.

I actually heard John MacArthur talk about this recently. When you go to heaven, you're just going to be locked in this perfect gaze on God and be nothing happens. Well, that doesn't sound to me very interesting.

And it doesn't sound to me like what is going to take place. I was really surprised to hear John MacArthur say this because revelation and in the Thessalonians' passage do indicate that we are going to be engaged in activity and in relationships. We're going to be doing things and we're going to be doing those things on a new earth.

And you mentioned Randy Elkhorn's book. That's a great resource. It's almost like an encyclopedia.

It's a large book deals with all kinds of different aspects of what scripture teaches about heaven and the afterlife. And so you can jump around and read what interests you, but he does a good job of making the biblical record really clear. And that's part of the biblical record.

Even Paul says in 1 Corinthians that we will rule angels. So we're going to have an authority, some role exercising authority in the new heavens and the new earth. I don't know what that looks like, but sometimes you read these stories about people who had near death experiences and allegedly went to heaven and everybody sitting around having a picnic.

Well, I'm not wild about picnics. This does not look appealing to me. I want to do stuff.

Even when I'm on vacation, I'm doing things that I count as productive, moving towards a goal, completing some task. Why? Because that's satisfying to me. And so I think that we are going to have satisfying work to do in the kingdom.

Remember, work is part of the creation order. It is not work, but labor or, or toil that is part of the fall. Okay.

Work is a good thing. But the toil is the downside of work that is a result of the fall. We're going to have work to do.

And so I'm still trying to think of that word, that ecstatic moment or whatever. Like I said, we're just locked in this. There is a beautiful vision.

Thank you. Yeah, it's called the beautiful vision. And I just don't think that's the way it's going to be.

We're not going to be sitting in clouds, strumming harps, singing songs to God forever. It's just that's not the account that the scripture gives of our eternal existence. I think people often use the word heaven as kind of a shorthand for the afterlife, but it's always been part of Christianity, the idea of resurrection.

I mean, that's the whole thing. Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection. And that's our hope is that our bodies will be resurrected.

They'll be fully redeemed. You know, Paul talks about this in Romans eight. We will have new bodies that no longer will sin.

And that is, that is our hope. In fact, I was also thinking about second Peter, the end of second Peter talks about this. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will pass away with the roar and the elements will be destroyed with an intense heat and the earth and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to

be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt within tense heat. But according to his promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. So yes, there will be a new earth and we will be living on this new earth with God in perfect harmony with each other and with God and doing things with our talents and our gifts and creating things.

Being in relationship with each other. That's why Paul says they're in First Nestle on his fore, comfort one another with these words. The comfort has to do with the rejoined relationships.

Mm hmm. All right. Well, thank you, Doug and anonymous and Jordan.

We appreciate hearing from you. We look forward to hearing your question on Twitter with the hashtag SDR. Ask or through our website.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason. You