

OpenTheo

“If Jesus Didn’t Come to Condemn the World, I Doubt He Sent You To”

January 30, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to a meme that says, “If Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world, I doubt he sent you to,” and whether it’s common for God to prepare us for a specific purpose that never actually happens.

* How would you respond to the meme stating, “If Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world, I doubt he sent you to”?

* Is it common for God to prepare us for a specific purpose that never actually happens?

Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason’ #STRask “ If you're not doing anything together here, you're breaking the fourth wall a little bit here because nobody knows. All that's right. Thank you.

We've been able to keep up for you, dear listener, and so for you, it's not been three weeks, but yes, we've been out for a little bit, but we're back. We are. And Greg, our first question comes from Everlasting.

How would you respond to the meme stating, if Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, I doubt he sent you to? You know, it's interesting because we're both been reading through a work that two of our colleagues are doing, Tim Barnett and Alyssa Childers, on deconstruction and deconversion. And this is one of the memes that kind of fits into that broader category of people challenging foundational Christian doctrines in ways that makes its sound clever, but there's a fundamental mistake that's being made in many of these challenges, and that is they do not understand Christianity. Because Jesus himself said, "I did not come to condemn the world." What did he come to do? He came to save the world.

Okay? Why didn't he come to condemn the world because the world was already

condemned? And we see this throughout Scripture that human beings are held morally responsible for their rebellion against God, and that God legitimately will judge their rebellion. Now, this is the bad news. Gospel is a word that means good news.

And so what Jesus came to bring is good news that was prefigured in Old Testament Scripture about God's enduring or durable patience, long-suffering, loving kindness, extension of grace, etc. And we have a manifestation of it in the person of Jesus, but of course, Jesus, the good news of Jesus coming to rescue people from the judgment that people deserve is, first of all, good news set against the bad news. And it is the core of the message of Scripture.

If there is no condemnation of people, and of course, I think this is the subtext here, Amy, this revulsion that many people have regarding Christianity, and this is true of many former Christians, to the idea that God judges. All right, there is no purpose to Scripture. That is, the Bible is given to display the origins of a problem, Genesis, origins, Genesis one and two, the origins of everything in simplified form, so to speak, in summary form, and then the origin of the problem, Genesis three, and all of the rest of Scripture is meant to explain how this problem gets solved.

What's the problem? Man's rebellion against God, and God's subsequent judgment against humankind with a rescue plan. This is nothing controversial about this biblically. That's Genesis three.

And following, and then Genesis is a 12 Abraham, a covenant Abraham, that initiates the big plan that gets played out in the rest of the 65 books of Scripture. The point I'm making is, if the world is not condemned, requiring a Savior to save them, nothing in the Bible makes sense. Why is the Scripture even given? Why does this exist? Now, I guess critics would say, well, that's just a man-made document, and maybe the person who offered the meme.

That's just a man-made document that expresses ancient tribal religious views of sacrifice and everything, and has nothing to do with reality. Okay, we'll find a reject the whole thing. I get that, and that's certainly a position.

What you can't do, though, if that's your position, is you can't then go back to that book and start picking and choosing things you like, especially in the life of Jesus, and build a theology around that as if this were the theology of Jesus. When what you're doing is cherry-picking things that support your own subjectivist, personal, invented theology that you like, and trying to get Jesus somehow to sign off on it with certain sayings that you are cherry-picking out of context to make it sound like he's on your side. You can't do that.

Not if you're going to be intellectually honest. As a theme in the book that's coming out later this year, we don't have a final title on it yet. I mean, they don't.

Tim and Alisa don't yet, but certainly we'll feature it here on our show and whatever when it comes out. But that is that people are... The idea is we make up our own religion. It's all about our subjective feelings and whatever it's not about objective truth.

The irony though is, is the meme is making a challenge to an object regarding an objective claim. If Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, then why are Christians condemning the world? The answer is Jesus didn't come then to condemn the world, not as the Lamb of God, but he will come to finish the job of judgment as the line of the tribe of Judah. That's part of the picture.

And as Peter puts it in 2 Peter, why isn't that second part coming? Because God is long-suffering, not willing, that ain't even should perish, but all cometary pendants. Right. So God's waiting instead of delivering the wrath that is due people for their rebellion.

He's offering them the grace that is available through Christ. So what do Christians say? We give the good news in light of the bad news. By the way, Jesus said I didn't come to condemn.

That wasn't the reason he came at that particular point in time. But he also said in John 3, he who believes is not judged, but he who does not believe, that is does not trust in Jesus as Savior, has been judged already. In other words, it's the fate of complete.

That's John 3. That's Jesus. And then he said a little later verse 36, "And the wrath of God abides on him." So this is a package, bad news and good news. And Christians, ideally, we haven't always done this well, but ideally Christians are delivering the bad news, like a doctor delivers bad news of disease, or infirmity, so that a solution, a remedy, a prescription can be made to fix the problem.

I've been off three weeks because I had hip replacement, okay? I had a problem. The doctor diagnosed the problem. So what was the doctor appointed to? He was appointed to health, my health.

But he had to diagnose the problem before he could give an appropriate solution to the problem I had. And that fits precisely here. So when people kind of get their, what's the right word, you know, their bile up a little bit about judgment, judgment.

You know, Jesus didn't come to condemn. Well, that's actually not entirely what he said, but there is a sense in which he meant that. But when you consider the whole thing, you realize there's bad news and there's good news.

And the good news is really good because the bad news is really bad. I think the key thing you've said here, Greg, is the idea that he did not come to condemn as the Lamb of God. When Jesus came, I mean, he certainly talked about the coming judgment many times.

No, the separation. Yes, of the sheep and the goats and the verse you just mentioned, which I had pulled up, but now you've saved me that time. So what I think is happening because the people here are the verses.

I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. That's in John 12. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

There are all these verses like this. So why as the Lamb of God did he not come to condemn the world as the Lamb of God? And the answer is because God wanted him to be associated with the grace that he was offering. There's certainly going to come a time when he comes at the end of time and he will judge.

He says this very clearly. But what God wanted to do was to reveal him as the Lamb of God, the one who would offer grace or if the Father would offer grace through Jesus. And that's what he wanted him to be associated with.

And what this reminds me of is when David wanted to build the temple and God said in 1 Chronicles 28 he says, "You shall not build a house for my name because you are a man of war and have shed blood." Now David hadn't gone against God's commands in those wars. He had actually done what he was supposed to do in fighting back the Philistines and all of that. But God didn't want him to build the house because he didn't want his house, his temple to be associated with war.

Because as God, even though he does condemn, even though he does fight against evil, even though he does those things, he wanted mainly to be associated with something else. What? The temple is a place of the grace and the forgiveness and the glory of God and he wanted all those things to be thought of first, not the God of War. So God wants to be known ultimately, his greatest glory is his grace and that's how ultimately he wants to be known.

And that's how he wanted Jesus to come the first time. But notice as you said Greg, a revelation of his grace requires a knowledge of sin. Grace makes no sense if you don't understand sin.

So why do you think Jesus spent so much time, I mean just look at the Sermon on the Mount. He increased the strength of the law by helping people realize they couldn't follow it. He said you are following the letter here but you're not following the spirit, your heart is not good.

He actually increased their understanding of their condemnation because that's the only way they would understand his grace. So even though he wasn't executing judgment at that time, he was certainly making clear a knowledge of people's sin. And in fact, I also, what came to mind for me was he talks about when he's going to send the spirit.

And what are the things he's sending the spirit to do? He says when he comes he will

convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. So after Jesus left he brings about God's grace on the cross. He enacts both justice and grace.

And then he says he's going to send the spirit and was the spirit going to do? He's going to convict people of sin. Even the verses that are used here as part of the objection implicitly as part of the objection. You know, Jesus didn't come to condemn.

Okay, that's a reference to a verse. Or what did he come to do then? So this is a tactical response. What did he come to do? He came to save.

Save from what? Obviously condemnation. If we listen to Jesus describe his own reason for coming a year and a half ago or so, we published a piece on Solid Ground. It's on our website called, I think title was the something about social justice.

Jesus, Jesus, the myth of Jesus. The legend of social justice. Do you think that's something like that? The myth of the social justice Jesus.

Yeah, something like that. See what's so clever. It was much better than any of it.

It was a good title, but we can't remember it. But it was like towards the end of 21. And there I went through all of the statements that Jesus made about himself and others who are authoritative, and who spoke for Jesus about why he came and what he came to do.

And it turns out that Jesus came to rescue. I mean, to put it in a simple word, rescue from what? Rescue from judgment. Which is why he took the judgment on himself on the cross.

Okay. Now a lot of people don't like the idea of substitution or atonement. But again, none of the story makes sense without that.

Therefore, the story doesn't make sense. Then reject the whole thing. But this meme is trying to hitchhike on Jesus in some way.

Jesus didn't come to condemn. Therefore, why do Christians think it's okay for them to condemn? All right. The fact is Jesus spoke a lot of words that were condemning of people and individuals.

And even in John 3, the most, the chapter with the most famous verse in the Bible for God's love the world that he gave his only begotten son, etc. Has multiple references to God's judgment on those who reject this gracious offer of forgiveness that God has made. And so these memes jump up a lot.

And a lot of times they are, you know, I don't want to say disingenuously because I don't know how thoroughly people have thought about these things. I think they read things online or they hear something and then they throw this out of Christian. But they try to pit Jesus against Christians who are accurately representing the biblical gospel of Jesus

himself.

And if they understood Jesus more, if they just read more of Jesus, even just read more in the same paragraph that they are citing against Christians, they would get a clearer picture of what Jesus himself had in mind. Now, once you do that and you want to reject it, fine. But don't mischaracterize Christ.

I don't know what else to say at this point. I'm kind of like a wordless, but don't do that. I'm just going to sum up what you said, Greg, because I think the questions that you asked- That's not that was my summary.

Okay. You can sum up my summary. I'm just going to remind people because I think the question that you asked is key and it's very easy to remember.

And that is, why did Jesus come? Why do you think Jesus came? Because the answer will lead to conversation no matter what- if they say Jesus came to save, if they say Jesus came to help people love, whatever they say, then you know where to take this in a productive direction. Right. That's just the perfect question.

All right. Let's go on to the next one. Okay.

This one comes from Brian. Is it characteristic for God to prepare us for a specific purpose that never actually happens? I responded to a calling with prayer, obedience, and preparation. When it came time to take action, suddenly the door closed.

Is this common with God? What are we to learn from such experiences? Well, this is a great question. And I think that what is common- and I don't want to say common with God because that presumes an answer here. In other words, if we say this is common with God to make a whole bunch of plans he doesn't fulfill.

That's basically what the common with God phrase entails. Is this common with God? It is common in life for us to be surprised by changes of directions of things we thought were going one way, and maybe for a lot of good reasons in our own mind that ended up going in an entirely different way. This is very common.

I remember seeing a little clip from a movie many, many years ago, and it's stuck with me because I think it's really profound. And the line was, our lives are like a diary in which we mean to write one story, but we write another. Our lives are like a diary in which we mean to write one story, but we write another.

Simple point is our lives never turn out the way we expect them to be. Sometimes for better, sometimes for worse, but never the way we expect them to be. As I guess I can quote John Lennon here, life is what happens when you're making other plans.

But the point is, Christians are not immune from this. And the fact that we think God is in

something doesn't necessarily mean that the thing that we think God is in will work out the way that we think it will work out. I'm trying to remember, it seemed to me recently we had a call, or maybe it's one of the questions from our... We had an open mic call from... This may be the same person for all.

I don't remember what his name was, but it was a missionary who had prepared to go on the mission field and then had to come back because of health reasons immediately. Right, and it was discouraging. Yeah, that's right.

And everybody moved out of the country, and then a few months later, everybody moved back, the whole family. And this is... I understand the frustration. I'm just going to have to take my word on this.

As I look back at almost 50 years with the Lord, and the kinds of things that I expected to take place in multiple circumstances that never eventuated. And I was as best as I knew how, was doing everything that was appropriate to the task before the Lord. Now, I wasn't hearing from God kind of thing, and that's not part of my theology, but because I don't think that's a New Testament motif.

That this is how we figure out what we're supposed to do. God kind of gives us instructions like that on an individual basis. But I was taking the teaching of Scripture and the gifts that I had and looked at the opportunities that presented to me where I was able to generate and being faithful.

And all of a sudden, I'm going in a whole different direction, something just the door slams in my face. That is common. Now, I don't think that what this means is God is making plans, and then he changes his mind, and then he drags us somewhere else.

That's what it sounds like when you listen to people who describe how they think God has told them to do ABC, and they end up doing D, E, and F because God does it. Because God now is telling them to do something different. That's the liability of that whole approach.

Fundamentally, it's not biblical, but this is the liability of this non-biblical approach. It makes God seem capricious. Now, God isn't capricious, but this is where, and I benefit a lot from you, in your counsel on this, Amy, personally, and as we do this show, on a rich sense of the sovereignty of God in everything that we face.

To presume that because we're doing ABC, that our elders, and our prayer leaders, and our friends, encourage us a certain way, and everything is falling in place, to presume that that's what God, it, eventually, intends to eventually fulfill. That's a presumption. It's nothing wrong with, well, let me be back up.

That's a dangerous presumption. It's nothing wrong with making those plans, obviously, but what James said, is that it's a dangerous presumption. It's nothing wrong with

making those plans, obviously, but what James says is, don't say, "I'm going to go do this, that, and the other thing." Say, "If God wills, I will do this, and that." So we make our plans with an understanding that if God wants to intervene sovereignly, like from out of nowhere with what the heck was that, it's okay for him to do that.

And it leaves us stymied, and frustrated, and disappointed, and discouraged, and all of those things, and then with a, "Now what? Now what do I do?" And now you have a new set of circumstances to do decision-making regarding. So two takeaways here. One, God is not capricious.

God doesn't move in one direction, changes mine and move in another direction. Why would he change his mind, in that sense? Because he got information? No, because he was too weak to do what he originally planned? No, that's not going to work. No, God doesn't do that.

So this isn't about God. This is a reflection on our circumstances, and so this second takeaway is there are lots of disruptions in our life, who are going in one direction, and then we are forced to pursue a different direction. And God is still in control.

He's not caught by surprise. He's still the Lord of the universe and of the circumstance. And now it's our job to figure out what to do next.

I think part of the issue here, he says, "I responded to a calling with prayer, obedience, and preparation." A lot of this depends on what he means by a calling. So I don't know if he thought he had specific direction from God, or he's just saying, "I had this desire to do this. I had this opportunity." It's something that God obviously wants us to do.

It's not immoral. You mean in principle. In principle.

Yeah. So it's hard to know if that's playing a part in this. Maybe if that's the case, part of what you can learn from this is that maybe your misunderstanding how God is directing you.

Because God is always going to be leading you without you knowing what he's doing. He's sovereign over your life, and you will go in directions that he wants you to go. You make your decisions based on wisdom and as much as you can you try and follow what he's doing.

But even Paul had a door slammed in his face more than once. It says the Holy Spirit wouldn't allow them to go into Asia. So that's part of God's leading.

Now that doesn't mean that everything you went through is worthless. And this is the most important thing I think you can take from this is that God is always working in your life. It's not always about where you're going and the specific things you're doing.

Part of it is about who you are. And your knowledge of him and your closeness to him and your submission to him. And those are really important things that you have learned in this situation.

You've also learned many skills. God will use them in the future. And right now you might not be able to see.

But in 10 years, give us a call back and tell us how he's using those things. Because everything that you're learning now, I'm not where I thought I would be 20, 30 years ago at all. But I can look back now and see the things that God taught me over time and how those things, even bad things that happened to me, how they've played into me being able to do what I'm doing now.

So I think what you can learn from this is that nothing is wasted. God is always working in everything that you're doing. He's working in you.

He's working through you. And you should not feel as if you didn't make it to a certain point that what you did was worthless. God is always working in you and through you.

So if you can hang on to that truth, I think it will help you get through a lot of strange things that will happen in your life that you didn't expect. Right. You may want to check out our material and decision-making in the will of God.

I am this use of the phrase calling in the question. It may indicate part of the concern here. God does not, as a generalization here, biblical generalization, God does not distribute ministry by calling.

It's a huge misconception in Christianity, characteristically now. He distributes ministry by gifting. There is no, I mean, you have Paul called as an apostle, but you can even characterize that as the gift.

It's a gifted man, apostolic. He distributes ministry by gifting. And that's going to get a whole chapters 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, etc.

1 Peter 3, whatever. Anyway, so hopefully that's helpful. All right.

Thank you, Brian. We appreciate hearing from you and thank you everlastingly. Great questions today.

We'd love to hear from you. Send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag STRask or you can send it through our website. Just go to our hashtag STRask podcast page on our website and you'll see a link there to send us your question.

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

[Music]