

# OpenTheo

## Is Deconversion Grounds for Divorce?

February 27, 2023



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether deconversion is grounds for divorce, why non-Christians misuse the Lord's name, whether the sower in the parable deliberately sowed seed upon the hard ground and into thorns and weeds, and the meaning of the parable of the foolish virgins.

- \* If a spouse deconverts, is that grounds for separation or divorce?
- \* Why do non-Christians say the Lord's name in vain?
- \* Do you believe the sower in the parable deliberately sowed seed upon the hard ground and into thorns and weeds, or was he just trying to fully cover the good soil?
- \* Are the foolish virgins in the Matthew 25:1-13 parable faux believers or non-believers, and what does it mean to "be ready"?

### Transcript

[music] [ding] Welcome. This is the #STRAskpodcast with Greg Kockel, and I'm Amy Hall. Hi, Amy.

[laughs] Hi, Greg. All right. I have some questions.

I have a few questions. They might not take as long as the other ones. I thought it might be fun to get through a few here.

So what people say after an event, they say, "Oh, I just have a short question." So the questions are always short as the answer is there long. True. That's true.

All right. This first one comes from Matchless M. If a spouse deconverts and becomes a progressive, quote, Christian, is that grounds for separation or divorce? Well, on my reading of 1 Corinthians 7, no. And because it appears that Paul addresses that specifically, and that is, if you have a non-Christian spouse, and I think the circumstance he was facing is when you have one spouse that becomes a Christian, because this is

early on, remember, and the spouse is not a Christian.

Now you've got, obviously, a mixed bag there. You've got an unequally-oaked circumstance of people who are already married. Paul says, "No, you don't need to get divorced unless if the non-believer chooses to leave." And if the non-believer chooses to leave, then the Christian is not under compulsion.

Something like that. His wording. And I take that to mean that they are no longer bound.

The non-believer goes, "God's called us to peace." The non-believer leaves for the reasons, for spiritual reasons, presumably, and therefore then, okay, then they're gone. And I think that a person in that circumstance has the freedom before God to remarry without any difficulty. I think that parallel would be what is just suggested, that if the one spouse becomes a non-Christian, or loses their testimony, however you want to characterize it, you know, and I think progressive Christianity would be an example of that, because they disavow virtually everything that is central to the gospel.

Then you're dealing with a non-Christian Christian matchup. And in that case, there's no... I don't think there's no... It's the right word. Requirement or there's no... There's no grounds? I don't know if grounds is the right word, but it isn't like... He's just saying you don't have to divorce them, and we can read the exact wording.

Maybe I should go there just for clarification. But if the non-believer leaves, well, then the believer is not under compulsion. So maybe some would interpret that as grounds for divorce, but here it is.

I'm sorry. I said, "Learn the minute." Okay, okay, verse 12. And then here Paul gives his opinion.

His first opinion was something that Jesus taught on, and the second opinion is not what something Jesus taught on. People misunderstand that. To the rest, I say, not the Lord, I say... Now he's not saying he's not inspired.

He's just saying Jesus didn't speak on this, because he had referred to Jesus command just before that. If any brother has a wife who is an non-believer, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. Oh, there it is.

This is pretty strong. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified, not entirely sure what he means by that, but I'll just read these words.

"Through his wife..." In other words, there is a salutary spiritual impact because one is believing. Minimally, that's what he means. "And the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband.

For otherwise her children are unclean, but now they are holy." Okay, and that's another kind of cryptic thing. But the point is, I mean, minimally what he's saying there is, if you have one believer in the family, you have a salutary spiritual effect on the children. Okay, but there's the answer to the question.

If one is an unbeliever and consents to stay, do not divorce that person. Yeah, I think it's pretty explicit there. All right, here's a question from Molly S.E. Why do non-Christians say the Lord's name in vain? Well, I know what she's referring to.

I'm not sure if using Jesus' name or God's name in an irreverent manner is precisely what the scripture, the law, refers to, but in any event, that's not the question. I think it's wrong in any event for a number of reasons, but why do they do that? I actually think they're socialized to do that for the most part. I'm not sure how this whole thing started, but why do people say, gosh, dang, who invented those words, or darn it, or ding dang, or crud, or, you know, any kind, any words that people use as an expression of frustration, anger, hostility, surprise, or whatever.

These are just things that come up, you know, in culture. Now, it does seem that some of these words, like dang it, is a variation of dammit, and people don't want to say dammit because that refers to spiritual things, and so out of respect that they say dang it, you know, and so some, these are variations. And so, but how did those original spiritual terms get into the vocabulary in the first place? That's a good question, and I don't know.

It might be because when you think about just, this isn't the Lord's name, but it is part of, it is a kind of spiritual reference. When people say dammit, and they are thinking about, they originally are thinking about, here's what damning involves, and I want that to happen in them. So it's a very unkind, uncharitable thing to say.

But then it starts taking on this, its own life as just an expletive, and people don't mean that when they're using it. They're just, you know, getting off steam in an inappropriate kind of fashion. It's hard to know about the etymology.

I don't know if you have any understanding of that. I think there's something transgressive about using a holy word in an unholy way. Right.

So I think that's how it starts. I think if somebody wants to be rude or they want to even create a bad word, they want to shock people, then you would take something that's beautiful or sacred, and you would spit on it basically. You know, you would use it in an angry way.

I think that's how this happens. I think people are simply transgressing against the sacred. I think that's how it starts.

How much people are doing that when they do it now? Probably a lot of it's habit now, but maybe not all of it. You know, there is something about our rebellion and people's

desire to shock by transgressing the boundaries of what's good and sacred. Yeah.

I think is maybe playing a part of this. Yeah. I mean, you also have people who will say Jesus Christ in an inappropriate way, but they don't say, "Ah, katama Buddha." You know, it doesn't even make sense to say why choose that rather than the other.

And there may be there's another spiritual dimension that's involved in this. That could be, or it could be in those cultures where those things are sacred. There might be words that are related to that there that I don't even know about.

Oh, well, I was in Thailand. I never heard anybody say that. But yeah, it could definitely be something deeper spiritually, but they may have sacred things that they mock or denigrate when they use bad language.

I don't know. I mean, I guess you would probably know if you were there, but maybe not. Well, yeah, it's like if I had been there for 20 years and was really tight in, I'd be able to notice that was there seven months.

But it strikes me though that, just say Thailand, for example, that the people's, their religious sensibilities and all these things, they were very committed to it. People would not. There were all kinds of little patterns in everyday life that were meant to reflect the sanctity of what they viewed as holy, how you use your feet or your place, your hands.

If there was an image of the king or a Buddha, it was always up and up really high right by the ceiling because high was holy and low was not. And so you don't mess with that stuff. Even if a tourist messed with anything like that, they had a tourist once that had his picture taken.

This was before digital. So you had to get your pictures developed. And he sat on a Buddha idol and he was sitting on the head of Buddha.

The head is the most sacred place. And his bottom is on the head and his feet are the filthiest thing dangling in the Buddha's face and they're smiling for a tourist picture. When they produce those pictures, they called the authorities and they ran them right out of the country.

So I'm not sure. And certainly in that case, there's a lot more sensibility. You know, in Muslim countries, you're not going to mess with anything holy because that could get you killed.

It might be because of the latitude we have in the West, but that makes it easy to make fun of sacred things or not. I'm not sure. It might be because of the focus on Christianity.

It could be too. Right. This has probably increased over time.

Maybe there were fewer people doing this back when the culture held these things in

more honor, but as we rebel, you see more and more of it. I mean, that's possible. Maybe.

All right. Here's an interesting one, Greg. This one comes from David.

All the rest are kind of really boring. Yeah, I'm going to be finally got an interesting one. He's anxious him.

Do you believe the sower deliberately and intentionally sowed seed upon the hard ground or into thorns and weeds or were those seeds an effort to fully cover the good soil? I think that that's a misread of the parable. Parables characteristically is a there. They're a genre.

They're a style of writing and they're meant to do something particular. It's a mistake to try to strain at all the details since parables as a genre are meant to make general points. And like any illustration, you choose any illustration that you give for any particular thing.

And it turns out if you press the illustration too far, it's going to break down. So I don't think that's what that Jesus didn't tell the parable with those details for that purpose. The purpose that Jesus told the parable for was what he explained to the disciples privately after the parable.

Okay. He gave some very particular things in there to kind of try to divine what was in the mind of the sower as he scattered on hard ground versus whatever. I mean, my take is that the sower, and I wrote a small piece about this once, the sower just scattered the seed recklessly.

The sower was just throwing the seed. This is just what they do. And the seed falls here, there, and wherever.

And there's a sense in which you might want to say we are prejudging where the seed we sow is going to go. Oh, that guy's too close. He won't listen or whatever.

I'll give you a little bit of illustration. So three nights ago, I was at a lazy dog restaurant because I was in Denver. And my host, Pastor, and I were having dinner and he teaches tactics and I was teaching the next day of tactics at their church.

And we're talking together, we're making small talk with the waiter and we know the neighbor's waiter's name is Colby and we're carrying on and just creating a warm, friendly atmosphere. And then the pastor says, by the way, Colby, I don't know anything about your own spiritual life, but do you have a church that you go to? That was a question. All right? Simple kind of question.

Now, some people might be thinking, oh, you know, what are the this is some restaurant.

This guy's such a so my pre judge or whatever it's, you know, and I'm not going to say anything because he's probably hard ground. I'll tell you what happened.

Colby paused and he said, I'm going to take that as a sign. Why? Because the last four Saturday nights I had Christians at my table that invited me to church. Now, of course, the pastor guy didn't know David.

He didn't know. I didn't know. And we could have prejudged the circumstances.

Oh, these guys aren't interested. You know, they're not at church. People come to church.

At least now we know they're interested. Okay. What was he doing? He was scattering the seed recklessly, so to speak.

He just tossed in and out there with a question, great, tactical approach. And then he said, well, no pressure. No big deal.

It was a friendly atmosphere. And but unwittingly, he discovered that by taking this simple step, he was stepping into a design of God in the life of Colby the waiter. Now, we don't know where it's going to go, but we got a dress and email asked for all of this stuff.

Well, tell me where it's at, what the times are. And then he left his email address, the pastor didn't. And he said, Hey, yeah, you want to sit down for coffee sometime? No worries.

We could just get together. Yes, no pressure. That's what he said.

No pressure. That's great. So, so I think the point, if you want to make a broad application of the sewer, the sewer is just thrown at a seat out.

He's not prejudging what Jesus is talking about is the kind of person that responds. And it's interesting in the Matthew's version of that, Jesus mentions that the first, the hard ground, it isn't like their hearts are, their hearts are hard. He says that which has been sewn in their heart gets snatched away because they don't understand it.

They do not understand it. And therefore it's easy for the devil to take it out that which has been sewn in their hearts. That's the way Jesus put it, take it out or sewn inside them.

And then the fourth, the one that bears fruit 30, 60, 100 fold, they hear the word and they understand it, which means this is a great case for us slowing down and the whole tactical approach asking questions and making sure that we're not just making Christian noise at them, but we are actually engaging them in a way that they can understand it. All right, let's take another question about a parable here. This one comes from E. Fudd.

In Matthew 25, one through 13 are the foolish virgins, foe believers or non-believers in the parable? What does it mean to be ready? Is it a work? Yeah, that's another one of these parables that are sometimes somewhat mystical or mystifying and sometimes you can, okay, I got to get this, but I'm not sure about that. And frankly, that's true for me too. Parables are a means of communicating a main thing.

So there's a main thing there. We don't want to go too far with it and maybe draw the wrong conclusions, but even so some of them are a little mystifying. Jesus clarified in many cases with his disciples in private what he meant by these things because the disciples are mystified too.

But some he didn't. And as far as I can tell with this one, there's no clarification here. Oil is a common metaphor in Scripture for the Holy Spirit.

So it, and keep in mind the cultural context, you have Jews, all these Jewish people following Judaism, but you have those who are the genuinely and appropriately, the and appropriately, the of Israel. And we have examples of that. We have Joseph of Aramathia.

We have Nicodemus. We have in the birth narratives, we have when Jesus goes to the temple and we have those two encounters there. So is that Corrias and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph.

So you have those people that are part of the commonwealth that have a genuine heart towards Christ, towards God, true believers, so to speak, in the Old Testament manner. And then you have a lot of people that are going through a lot of the motions and they're whitewashed tombs. They look great, but they have dead men's bones and sides.

See, both categories. And I think, remember, that's the broader context here. So when you talk about the virgins and the virgins are there and some have oil and some do not, to me, that's pretty straightforward.

Some have the Holy Spirit and some do not. And so when it's ready, when it's time for the moment, when the wedding happens and there's eschatological elements in view here, that is the return of Christ and the wedding supper, the lamb and the church, et cetera, and some don't have the Spirit because they don't have the oil. Then they go out and get their oil, they're gone, and then the doors are closed and left behind.

And I think this, and again, just speaking broadly here, it's the metaphor or the analog of the oil to the Holy Spirit. I think it's very obvious here. And so therefore, we have non-believers who are still part of the group who are not going to be included because they don't have what is necessary and that is the Spirit.

And I think it... That makes sense. Yeah. So if you go back just a little bit before this, you see... The Neo versus here, Matthew.

So in Matthew 24, he's talking about how he's going to come back. And his big point here is just you need to be ready. So here's what he says, starting in verse 36, "But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father alone, for the coming of the Son of man will be just like the days of Noah.

For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving and marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark. And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So will the coming of the Son of man be." In other words, he's making the point here that people were not listening to the message.

They were not listening to the warning. They were not turning to God. They were continuing along their own way like they always did.

And they just ignored what they should have been doing, which is listening to God's message and turning to God. So I think that's the overall thing he's trying to get across here. So he goes on to say, "Therefore, be on the alert for you do not know which day the Lord is coming." And he gives the example of the faithful and sensible slave.

Don't just keep going along and you're continuing to beat your slaves or whatever it is you're doing wrong just because you don't know when he's coming. Because your master's not there. Because he's not there, right? Yeah, right.

And so because he could walk in any moment kind of thing. So, yes. And so that's the first illustration he gives.

And then he gives another illustration and this is the one of the 10 virgins. And again, the idea is simply they were not ready for the coming of the bridegroom. I think that's the simple message he's giving.

And if you go back, like I said, the way you get ready is you heed the message and you turn to God. Right. The next parable, verse 14 of starting in verse 14 of chapter 25 is the parable of the talents and then verse 31 of that chapter, then the judgment section.

I mean, in my Bible, it's nicely headed. So you can see these things. You know, perilous times coming, Matthew 24.

Be ready for his coming, Matthew 24, 42. And following parable of the virgins, 25, 1. And following parable of the talents, 14. And following.

And then judgment 31. And following in chapter 25. So you look at the big picture and you see this flow of things.

And it's the conjoining of these different parables that kind of say the same thing in lots of different ways. So I don't think there's an exact one to one reference for everything in the parables. The simple idea is be ready for the return.



Don't just keep going on your way, ignoring what's about to happen because you don't know when it will happen. But readiness is faithfulness to the king who is going to return. That's what readiness is.

And so it might be characterized. I mean, faithfulness because you are trusting in him, you are regenerate and you're living an honorable life in service to him until he comes. And all of that is captured in these parables.

All right. Well, thank you for your questions. We got through for today, Greg.

It might be a record. If you'd like to give us your question, go on Twitter and send us your question with the hashtag #STRSQ or you can go to our website at [str.org](http://str.org). Let's look for the hashtag #STRSQ podcast and there'll be a link at the top of the page for that podcast that will take you directly to where you can give us a question. We look forward to hearing from you.

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

[MUSIC]