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The Concept of God's Omniscience Is Just a Fear Tactic to Control Your Mind

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether the concept of God's omniscience is just a fear tactic to control your mind and what to say to someone who thinks it's possible for God to lie and that Jesus' coming might have been an elaborate scheme to make us think he loves us.

* I would love to hear your thoughts on God's omniscience. God uses fear tactics to control your mind. He loves you so much that he's watching your every move and knows your every thought? Is this good?

* What do I say to someone who thinks it's possible for God to lie, that he treats us like his playthings, and that Jesus' coming might have been some elaborate scheme to make us think he loves us?

Transcript

Welcome to the hashtag S-C-R-Ask Podcast. And Greg, in the last episode, we kind of touched, there was a part where we were touching on God's omniscience when we were talking about God being perfect and God not regretting it and those sorts of things. So here's a question that goes follows from that.

This one comes from Dan Edwards. Greg and Amy, we'd love to hear your thoughts on God's omniscience. God uses fear tactics to control your mind.

God loves you so much that he's watching your every move and knows your every thought. Is this good? This is why I define religion as man-made mythological mind manipulation. Well, there's a lot there as is often the case in a challenge about God.

This is just a more of a strategic concern when people raise challenges. There's oftentimes a bunch of stuff mixed in that you have to separate out and you have to parse out. So in the question, there is the claim that God uses fear tactics.

As if this is somehow morally questionable. Then he uses those tactics to control your mind. Not even sure what that means.

He might say fear tactics to get you to do what he wants. I get that. I get what he's talking about.

I get what he means. I don't want to share what he used fear tactics to control your mind. What that is.

If I were in conversation with Dan, I'd want to get more detail or clarification on that. He also says, I'm looking for it now right here. God loves you so much that he's watching every move and knows your every thought.

Well, watching every move and knowing every thought is not a function of his love gets a function of his omniscience. Nevertheless, when one thinks about love, we have two teenagers. And we are watching their every move.

Why? Because we love them. And sometimes we threaten them to get them to do the right thing because we love them. So fear tactics are not wrong in themselves.

They can be used to get someone to do something illicit improper, immoral. Okay, that would be a itself an act of immoral manipulation. But there are dangers in the world that one ought to be afraid of for their own personal good.

For their self benefit and good people encourage P others to be aware of the dangers to avoid them for their benefit. And God is good. And therefore he warns us.

And sometimes the warning entails the element of fear because the thing he's warning us against is dangerous. And sometimes the warning is a warning of justice that what you're doing is wrong. And doing wrong things requires a just response.

Now, by the way, that's the way law works on a human basis. Don't run the red light. There's a camera right there.

Never mind that you might get killed. We're watching you and we're going to give you a ticket if you run the red light. So now the fear tactic there, the fear is to don't want to get the ticket, but it keeps you doing something that's safer for everyone.

What the heck is wrong with that? Even if I were to just accept the language he uses, which puts it all in the negative or the majority of it's still, I'm not sure what's wrong with using fear tactics to control us. I don't know what control your mind means in this particular case, but to control us. All right.

And yes, and because of God's love, he does watch over us. But also because of his goodness and that informs his love. He also watches over human beings who do bad things so he can perform justice because he's good.

All right. So I'm still trying to figure out the problem here. Is this good? Yeah.

In principle, it is. It certainly isn't on its face bad. Like this, somehow, impunes the character of God.

I'm just looking. There's, I know there's a there's more here is that if that's you want me to go further. This is why I defined religion as man made mythological mind manipulation.

Well, okay, notice it's interesting. He defines it. So that's subjective.

It isn't. He doesn't say it. Maybe this is just poor choice of words.

If I were him, I'd say this is why I think that religion is man made because it's an attempt to control people. Okay. But of course, if you're controlling people for good, what's wrong with that? You know, even if it was man made.

But I think there are a lot of reasons to think it's not man made, at least Christian religion. I believe all the other religions are man made. I have reasons for that.

But not this. And why is it manipulative? By the way, if it's manipulative, I'm presuming that Dan thinks manipulation is bad. But then I have a question by what standard is manipulation bad if there is no God? If it's just molecules in motion and that's the standard atheistic metaphysic.

You're not going to get morality out of that. You're just going to have things you don't like. Dan doesn't like religion.

I get that. So what? On his view, where is the immorality of controlling people's minds when you have no objective standard for morality to begin with? Just a postscript. Evolution will not give you an objective standard.

It will only give you a subjective standard. And that is your impulses that evolution has caused you to have. It's a relativistic system of morality, not an objective system.

And that's what's required for these kinds of judgments. All right. You said most of the things I was going to say, Greg, I think the biggest thing here is if you want a good judge, only a judge who knows absolutely everything can be a perfect judge.

What if God didn't know everything? What if he was judging the universe because justice is a good thing? I mean, unless Dan wants to deny that justice is good, what if God were judging the universe and he didn't know everything? He would no longer be a good judge. There would be injustices done. He would miss things.

He wouldn't know what someone had deserved or not deserved. That's terrible. It's a very good thing for the judge to know the facts of the case.

That seems really obvious to me. I think the problem comes in in two different ways. The first

way is this.

Justice is good, but it's not good for those who are being judged. Good point. Justice in itself is a great thing.

And I think we all understand that when it doesn't have anything to do with us, when it has to do with somebody else. That's a great thing. But fear comes in if you're guilty.

And so I think one thing that happens is people don't want God to know everything about them because they're guilty. And now they feel now they want to lash out and say, you're just trying to control me. It's not making me feel guilty.

Just let me have my little sins and don't punish me. Well, he's a good judge and he will punish. The thing I don't think atheists understand is that Christians aren't living in fear.

And this I've seen this happen over and over and over. They accuse us of living in fear. But the truth is because of God's love for us and Jesus dying for us, we have no fear of God.

We're not going around. Oh, I have to do what God says because I'm afraid of him. That's not how it works.

That's how it works with people on the outside where God is their judge. God is our father. God is the father of his people.

And there's a different thing going on in that situation. From the outside, all you see is the judge. But that's not where it is on the inside.

And so I encourage you, if you are feeling guilt, don't run from the judge. The judge has made it possible for you to be forgiven. So there's no need to be afraid.

There's no fear in love. Right. Perfect love drives out fear.

Yeah. And at such a great point, we can be respectful, fearful in that sense of God, but not for our own well-being. I'm thinking here of this.

I think of it frequently Romans 5, the first couple of verses, therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God. It's not the peace of God. That's subjective.

That's another verses. It's peace with God. Put simply, God is not angry with us anymore.

Now it's interesting what follows that because God is not mad at us anymore. Paul writes, and we exult in the hope of the glory of God. In other words, it does create an emotional response that we know that we are safe with God because of Jesus, which is what he's been describing up until that point, justification by faith.

We're safe with God. We don't have to worry. Now, are there Christians who don't really understand that? Yeah, there are.

And this is because they're, to some degree, biblically untutored, or they're in religious environments that are somewhat toxic. But when you understand what the text says about us, and this is verses that I just mentioned, well, then you realize there's no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear.

God's not mad at us anymore. We are safe. And we don't have to reject the goodness of justice in order to accomplish that because he maintained justice while offering us grace.

So that's the first problem that it's hard to see because maybe you feel guilty and you don't like justice being done against you. But here's the second big problem. I think when, because I do hear atheists complain about this quite a bit, I think what they're doing is they're not looking at God even setting aside the fact that he's real.

Let's just forget that for a second. Let's just look at the character of God. Let's look at who he is in the Bible and let's evaluate him, not some made up way that the atheists see him.

Because what I think they're doing is they're imagining how they would react to a sinful human being knowing everything that we know or that we do. Because, of course, we're against that. We don't want a communist government following every single thing we do and saying, keeping track and punishing us.

But there's a reason why. It's because they're not good. They're not good judges and they're not doing it for good.

They have no good purposes in mind. It's a fallen human being. But that's not who God is.

God is not fallen. If God is perfectly good, if God is seeking good, if God is working out a plan for everyone, for his glory and for the good of his people, and God is a perfect judge, there's no problem with him having all the information. That's how we know he's perfect and that's how we know he can fulfill his role as judge perfectly.

But they don't see him as he is. They're looking at him as if he were a sinful human being. I was in Canada once doing participate in an enterprise.

I'm not sure if it was Andy Seiger or someone like him who made an observation in response to Christopher Hitchens's book that was titled, God is not good religion poisons everything, right? And he said, well, the second part of that title is right. Religion doesn't poison everything. And so does everything else that man touches.

It's better to put it. Man poisons everything was the point he was making. This is what you're getting at here.

Man poisons everything. If it's not God executing justice, if it's not God who knows all and it's perfectly good to just that's making the decisions, it's going to be poisoned because fallen human beings are involved in the process. And we can't judge God as if he were that.

So we can't look at, I think it was Hitchens who would talk about God being a South Korean dictator. You can't look at him and say, oh, that's what God's like. He would be North Korea.

I'm sorry. Thank you. I'm losing my mind.

Thank you. North Korean dictator. The South Korean dictator is just too posed.

He's gone. They didn't like him forever. He wasn't a dictator.

But anyway, let's go on to a similar question from Nora. What do I say when my brother thinks it's possible for God to lie that he treats us like his playthings and that Jesus coming might have been some elaborate scheme to make us think he loves us? Well, I have this reams and reams of notes about all kinds of things. And I was just going through them.

I mean, hundreds of pages of stuff that I just throw in there yet I don't want to lose. I probably will never read again, but I did read them recently because I was isolating all of the things that had to do with God speaking to us and does God whisper for the sake of the book. Then I hope I write this next year.

And I came across the line about possibilities. And the line was something to the effect of something like, yes, lots of things are possible, but possibilities are cheap. In other words, maybe not a very clever aphorism.

I think I wrote it out a little bit better. But the point was possibilities are cheap. In other words, you can just come up with them left and right and toss them out.

But possibilities are not the same as plausibilities or probabilities, certainly not actualities. Notice how there's a whole string of things. You have actual, you have plausible, you have possible possible is lowest one in the letter.

Almost anything you can imagine is going to be possible because the only way to disqualify a possibility is to show that it's somehow incoherent. You know, anything is possible, but that doesn't get you anywhere. So one could say with regards to Nora's brother who challenged her, I guess anything is possible.

But why would you think that's what actually happened? Why would you think that's plausible? And if plausible, probable, that's what we're working with here. And those are the questions that matter, not what's possible. I think J. Warner Wallace is one who says it doesn't matter what's possible.

He's talking to Jerry. Yeah, all these things are possible. It doesn't matter what's possible.

What matters is what's reasonable and what is reasonable is determined by the evidence that you have in hand pertaining to the issue. So in a certain sense, I don't, it isn't like I have a clever comeback on this one. I remember a long time ago, 30 years ago, J.P. Morlin was, I was with a friend who was offering, questioning Christianity, offering a challenge to J.P. Morlin.

And he raised this issue. And isn't it possible, she said, blah, blah, blah. And he said, his response, he said, just because it's possible does not mean it's reasonable to think it happened.

Just because it's possible does not mean it's reasonable to think it happened. We don't live our lives based on what's possible. We live our lives based on what's actual and we determine what's actual by looking at the alternatives and to some degree assess plausibility and ultimately probabilities.

Do we have a good reason to believe this is the way it is? And if we don't, then there's no reason we should think that's what actually took place, even if it is possible. And I'm not even sure I could grant that it's possible because if, if God can lie, then God's not good. So where is the standard of goodness coming from exactly? Now you've got it.

Now you've got a bigger problem because there's no standard. So I'm not even sure it's even possible. If you have a self-existent being who's perfectly good and acting as the standard, he's not going to lie.

And if he lies, then there is no such thing as truth anymore because there's no such thing as a standard. No such thing as moral good. There's no such thing as moral good.

He's the creator who is the standard for moral goodness. But there is such thing as moral good. And the problem of evil is the best proof of that.

And therefore, there must be the standard. Therefore, there must be God. So this is the moral argument for God kind of being employed against the subject.

So I'm not even sure I would concede with him that it's even possible. But secondly, it looks like he's speaking in terms. He's not just saying, oh, there's a there's a God who he seems to be talking in terms of the Christian God.

So I'm just going to keep it there because it doesn't it's not really clear if he's saying some other kind of being created the whole Christian thing. And I don't know. So here's the question.

You know, it says Jesus Jesus is coming might have been some elaborate scheme to make us think he loves us. Then my question is, well, that seems like an awful lot to go through to trick people into experiencing peace and reconciliation with God. What exactly why exactly would he do this? If his goal is only to trick us, why would he do it that way where he comes and he suffers and he dies and he heals and he does all these good things.

And he demonstrates his character. Why exactly what what I don't even understand what the goal would be here. So at the end of time, he can say, Hi, gotcha.

Yeah. It's just so crazy. I don't even look, we have thousands of years of history of what God has done.

There is no reason to think that he is just playing around. And you know, just read through the

Bible. I guess that's my ultimate thing.

You can see the whole history of what he's done. And this is just it's just a foolish. And it's also the history of what followers of Jesus have done for thousands of years since then.

And I'm making the distinction between followers of Jesus who do what Jesus says to do. And those who claim to be Christians who do not live like Christ wanted them to live. Okay, just so distinction there.

But now the blessed hope of the church is the second coming of Christ, characteristically as the way it's described. But I'll tell you what, for me, it's not my blessed hope. I don't know for you, but subjectively for me, what makes me feel great is that I'm going to him, not that he's coming to me, that I am forgiven.

Okay. And I bring you back to that Psalm that says, Lord, if you would mark in equity, old Lord, who could stand. That's not a good sign, right? Oh, who could stand? If you're keeping track in the sense that this is what I'll be assessed by, nobody's going to make it.

But there is forgiveness in you that you will be praised. And there's so much comfort in that fact for me. Not that Jesus is coming back again.

That's great. But I don't plan to be here when he does. I mean, I don't think I will be.

It has nothing to do with my plans. But the point, you know, what matters to me is my going to him and being with him wherever he ends up coming or going or whatever. I'm safe in him, therefore being just by my faith, we have peace with God and we exalt in the hope of the glory of God.

And it just doesn't make any sense that God would trick us into feeling that peace, experiencing that peace and forgiveness and trick us into doing good for others and building up all of these things that have helped humanity. And it's just none of that makes sense. So if you have a very thin view of Christianity and a very small understanding of what it's about, then maybe you could throw this out there.

But it's just the history is too rich and intricate. And God's character is so carefully laid out that this is just ultimately a foolish speculation. Well, Nora, I hope your brother listens to this podcast or our portion of it, but I just have a parting thought and it's it's not dismissive.

It is a sound that way. My thought is, is this the best you can do? This is what what you think is a legitimate kind of complaint against Christianity. This is very thin.

It takes him nowhere. And it's not really a very substantive complaint for the reasons that we've given here. And I hope you reconsider, Nora's brother.

And maybe he would be willing and I don't know why he's made this claim. Maybe he's heard someone else and now it's bothering him. Who knows? But maybe you could start by reading

the story of reality and just get a better understanding of the big picture here.

And maybe that will help you to see God more clearly. I heartily recommend that. All right.

Thank you, Dan and Nora. Send us your question on X with the hashtag STRS. Go to our website at str.org. Just look for our hashtag STRS podcast page.

If you can leave us your question. We really hope to hear from you. And if you've had something that's been on your mind, send us your question.

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