



James Prosoco

Why Would a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell? Exploring Judgment, Love, and Freedom

Have you ever wondered how a loving God could allow for judgment and hell? This course invites you to wrestle with one of Christianity's most challenging questions. Through honest exploration of Scripture and thoughtful reflection, you'll uncover the biblical context of judgment, examine the tension between love, justice, and human freedom, and consider the significance of your personal response to Christ's invitation. Whether you're a believer seeking deeper understanding or a seeker with tough questions, this course will help you see God's justice and mercy in a new light.

- ≡ Framing the Question: Judgment, Love, and Biblical Context
- ≡ The Tension of Love, Justice, and Human Freedom
- ≡ Scriptural Analysis: Jesus, Judgment, and the Human Response
- ≡ Rethinking Labels: Faith, Identity, and the Limits of Human Judgment
- ≡ The Invitation and the Response: Embracing Christ's Call

Lesson 1 of 5

Framing the Question: Judgment, Love, and Biblical Context

JP James Prosoco



Why Would a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?

Framing the Question: Why Would a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?

Few questions stir as much emotion and contemplation as this: Why would a loving God send anyone to hell? This is not just a theological riddle for scholars—it's a question that reaches

into our hearts, shaping how we see God, ourselves, and the world around us. Wrestling with this question means confronting our deepest hopes and fears about justice, mercy, and the meaning of our lives. As we begin, let's acknowledge the weight of this inquiry and prepare to explore it honestly and thoughtfully.

As you engage with this lesson, keep these objectives in mind. By the end, you will be able to:

1

Understand Scriptural Definitions

2

Recognize Common Misconceptions

3

Explore the Biblical Narrative of Love and Justice

4

Build a Foundation for Theological Reflection

Defining Judgment and Hell in Scripture

Before we can explore why God judges, we need to understand what Scripture means by "judgment" and "hell." In the Bible, judgment refers to God's assessment of every person's life, motives, and choices—an act rooted in both justice and truth. Hell, as described in Scripture, is not merely a place of punishment but a reality of separation from God, the source of all life and goodness. Jesus speaks plainly about judgment, separation, eternal life, and eternal punishment, making it clear that these are not abstract ideas but central to the biblical story.

These concepts are not about God catching us out or weighing our good deeds against our bad. Instead, they reveal the seriousness with which God regards our freedom, our choices, and our relationship with Him. Understanding these definitions is essential as we move forward.

Key Terms and Scriptural References

Review each flashcard to reinforce your understanding of the core terms and passages that shape this conversation.

Judgment

God's assessment of each person's life, motives, and choices, rooted in justice and truth.

Hell

The reality of final separation from God, described as eternal loss or punishment in Scripture.

Condemnation

The state of being found guilty or unworthy before God, resulting in separation from Him.

Matthew 25

Jesus' teaching on final judgment, where people are separated based on their response to Him.

John 3:16

The verse declaring God's love for the world and His desire to save, not condemn, through Jesus.

Common Misconceptions About Divine Judgment

Many people carry misconceptions about what divine judgment means. Some imagine God as a harsh judge, eager to punish. Others see salvation as a simple checklist—good people go to heaven, bad people go to hell. Still others believe that labels like "Christian" or "atheist" determine our destiny, or that judgment is about catching us in our worst moments. These misunderstandings can cloud our view of God and distort the biblical message.

To move forward, we need to clear away these false ideas and seek a more authentic understanding of what Scripture actually teaches about judgment, love, and human freedom.

Misconceptions and Biblical Corrections

Expand each item to see how common misconceptions about judgment are addressed and corrected by Scripture and theology.

God Sends People Arbitrarily —

Some believe God sends people to hell on a whim, without reason or fairness. Scripture, however, shows that God's judgment is never arbitrary. He knows each person fully, understands every circumstance, and judges with perfect justice and mercy.

God's actions are always rooted in His character—He is both just and loving, and His decisions reflect both attributes in perfect harmony.

Only Actions Matter —

It's easy to think that judgment is simply about tallying up good and bad deeds. But Jesus teaches that belief, motives, and the heart's response to God matter deeply. Even those who do good can miss the deeper invitation to relationship with Christ.

Scripture reveals that God looks beyond outward actions to the intentions and openness of each person's heart.

Labels Determine Destiny —

Many assume that being labeled a "Christian" or "atheist" automatically decides one's eternal fate. Yet Jesus makes clear that He alone sees the whole person—every thought, struggle, and moment of grace. Labels can't capture the fullness of a life or the mystery of God's work.

Ultimately, it is Christ who judges, not human categories or assumptions.

Judgment Is About Catching Us Out —

Some fear that judgment is like a test designed to trip us up. In reality, Scripture shows that God's judgment reveals the truth of our lives—what we have done with the light and grace we've received. It is not about surprise punishment, but about truth coming to light.

God's desire is always to save, not to condemn, and His judgment is the culmination of a lifetime of invitations to respond to His love.



Light Breaking into Darkness

Light Breaking into Darkness

Imagine a beam of light piercing a dark room, revealing what was hidden and offering a path forward. This is how Scripture portrays God's love and justice. God's first movement is always toward us—He loves, He gives, He comes to save. The biblical story is not about God waiting to judge, but about God seeking, inviting, and shining His light into our darkness so we might respond and be restored.

The Bible presents God as both perfectly loving and perfectly just. These qualities are not in conflict; rather, they are woven together throughout the biblical narrative. God's justice ensures that evil and wrongdoing are taken seriously, while His love means He continually seeks to restore and redeem. The story of Scripture is one of God reaching out to humanity, offering grace and truth, and calling us to respond freely.

When we see judgment and love together, we begin to understand that God's justice is an expression of His love—He desires what is truly good for us and for the world. This tension is

not a problem to solve, but a mystery to enter, inviting us to trust in God's wisdom and goodness.

The Biblical Narrative: Judgment, Love, and Response

This lesson explores the overarching story of the Bible, focusing on the themes of judgment, love, and human response. Each step reveals how God interacts with humanity and how our choices shape our relationship with Him.

Step 1

Creation and Relationship

God creates humanity for relationship with Himself, giving us freedom and dignity as His image-bearers.

Step 2

Fall and Brokenness

Humanity chooses independence from God, resulting in brokenness, sin, and separation from the source of life.

Step 3

God's Pursuit

Throughout history, God pursues His people—through covenants, prophets, and ultimately in Jesus Christ—offering grace, truth, and the invitation to return.

Step 4

Invitation and Response

Each person is invited to respond to God's love and grace. Our response—whether acceptance or rejection—shapes our relationship with Him.

Step 5

Final Judgment

At the end, God judges each life with perfect knowledge and justice, revealing the truth of our response to His invitation and the reality of our relationship with Him.

Summary

The biblical story is a journey from creation to final judgment, marked by God's relentless love and our freedom to respond. Judgment is not the beginning, but the culmination of a lifelong conversation between God and each person.

Approaching the Question with Humility

As we continue, remember that questions about judgment, love, and eternity are profound and complex. No single answer can capture the full mystery of God's ways. The most important attitude we can bring is humility—recognizing our own limits and being open to what God reveals through Scripture and reflection. Avoid simplistic answers and be willing to listen, learn, and wrestle honestly with these truths.

If we're going to ask the question honestly, we have to be willing to follow the answer wherever it leads.

Continue

In the next lesson, we'll dive deeper into the interplay of love, justice, and human freedom. We'll explore how these themes shape our understanding of God's judgment and what it means for our own journey of faith.

The Tension of Love, Justice, and Human Freedom

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Darkness verse the light

Holding Love, Justice, and Freedom in Tension

How can God be both perfectly loving and perfectly just—and what does that mean for our freedom? This question sits at the heart of Christian faith and challenges us to wrestle honestly with the nature of God, the reality of judgment, and the significance of our choices. The tension between love, justice, and human freedom is not just a theological puzzle; it shapes

how we understand God’s character and our own lives. As we explore this lesson, let’s be willing to follow the answer wherever it leads, even if it stretches our understanding or unsettles our assumptions.

In this lesson, you will explore the complex relationship between God’s love, justice, and human freedom. Here’s what you can expect to learn:

- 1 Explore how Scripture presents God’s love and justice.
- 2 Examine the concept of human freedom and responsibility.
- 3 Analyze how divine judgment relates to both love and justice.
- 4 Reflect on what it means to reconcile these attributes in understanding hell.

The Scriptural Tension: Love and Justice

Scripture reveals that both love and justice are central to God’s character. These are not opposing forces, but deeply intertwined aspects of who God is. The Bible consistently presents God as both the source of boundless mercy and the righteous judge who cares about truth and goodness. Understanding this tension is essential for making sense of divine judgment and the reality of hell.

Scripture on Love, Justice, and Both

Expand each tab to explore how Scripture presents God’s love, God’s justice, and moments where both attributes are powerfully revealed together. Each passage offers a unique perspective on the character of God and the meaning of judgment.

LOVE: JOHN 3:16, LUKE 15	JUSTICE: MATTHEW 25:31-46, EZEKIEL 33:7-11	LOVE AND JUSTICE TOGETHER: THE CROSS, THE PRODIGAL SON
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John 3:16 declares, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” This verse is foundational, showing that God’s initiative toward humanity is rooted in love, not condemnation. God’s love is not limited to the righteous or deserving but extends to the entire world, inviting all to receive life.

Luke 15 contains parables like the lost sheep and the prodigal son, where God is portrayed as a shepherd or a father who actively seeks out the lost. These stories emphasize God’s relentless pursuit of those who have wandered away, highlighting mercy, forgiveness, and the joy of reconciliation.

LOVE: JOHN 3:16, LUKE 15

**JUSTICE: MATTHEW 25:31-46,
EZEKIEL 33:7-11**

**LOVE AND JUSTICE TOGETHER:
THE CROSS, THE PRODIGAL SON**

Matthew 25:31-46 describes the final judgment, where the Son of Man separates people based on their response to the needs of others. Justice here is not arbitrary but is rooted in truth and the reality of how we have responded to God’s presence in the world. Jesus makes it clear that our actions and choices matter.

In Ezekiel 33:7-11, God declares that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that they turn and live. Justice is not about catching people out but about calling them back to life. God’s justice is always paired with a longing for repentance and restoration.

LOVE: JOHN 3:16, LUKE 15

**JUSTICE: MATTHEW 25:31-46,
EZEKIEL 33:7-11**

**LOVE AND JUSTICE TOGETHER:
THE CROSS, THE PRODIGAL SON**

The Cross is the ultimate intersection of love and justice. In Christ’s sacrifice, God does not ignore sin or pretend it doesn’t matter. Instead, He bears the cost Himself, offering forgiveness while upholding the seriousness of justice. The Cross shows that God’s love is willing to go to the furthest lengths to save, even as it affirms the reality of judgment.

The story of the prodigal son also brings love and justice together. The father’s embrace is not a denial of the son’s wrongdoing, but a response to his return and repentance. Justice is not set aside; it is fulfilled in the restoration of relationship, showing that true justice is always shaped by love.

When we look at these passages together, we see that God’s justice does not cancel out His love, and His love does not erase His justice. Both are necessary for a full understanding of who God is. If God were only loving without justice, there would be no accountability or truth. If He

were only just without love, there would be no hope or mercy. Christian theology insists that God's love and justice meet perfectly in His dealings with humanity, especially in the person and work of Christ. This balance is foundational for understanding why judgment exists and how it relates to the reality of hell.



A Judge's Bench Bathed in Light

A Judge's Bench Bathed in Light

Divine judgment is never separated from divine love. Imagine a judge's bench illuminated by warm, radiant light—justice and mercy coexisting in the same space. In Scripture, God's role as judge is always shaped by His desire to restore, heal, and invite us home. Even when judgment is real and consequences are serious, God's heart is for redemption, not destruction.

Human Freedom and Responsibility

Now we turn to the other side of the equation: our freedom and responsibility. God's love and justice are not abstract concepts—they invite a real response from us. Scripture teaches that

God honors our freedom, allowing us to accept or refuse His invitation. Our choices matter, and the story of salvation is not just about what God does, but also about how we respond to His grace.

Facets of Human Freedom and Responsibility

Unpack different aspects of human freedom and responsibility in relation to God's justice and love. Expand each section to explore how our choices, responses, and limitations shape the story of judgment and salvation.

Freedom to Respond or Refuse —

Throughout the Bible, people are given the freedom to respond to God's invitation or to turn away. The thief on the cross, for example, turns toward Jesus in his final moments and receives mercy. The prodigal son chooses to return home and is welcomed. These stories show that God's love is always reaching out, but our response is real and meaningful.

God does not force anyone into relationship. The ability to say "yes" or "no" to God is part of what makes our response genuine. This freedom is a gift, but it also carries weight, as it shapes our destiny.

Consequences of Choice —

God respects the choices we make, even when they lead to painful outcomes. Scripture is clear that judgment is not arbitrary; it is the result of our response to God's grace. The reality of hell is not about God seeking to punish, but about the consequences of refusing His invitation.

God's desire is always for us to turn back and live, but He does not override our will. The consequences of our choices are real, and they reveal the seriousness with which God treats our freedom.

What Real Love Requires —

True love cannot be forced. If God compelled us to love Him, our relationship would not be genuine. Real love requires the freedom to choose, even if that means some will refuse. This is why God's love and justice are inseparable—He loves us enough to let our choices matter.

God's respect for our freedom is not a sign of weakness, but of the depth of His love. He invites, calls, and pursues, but never coerces.

Limits of Human Judgment —

Only God knows the full story of each person's life. While we may be quick to judge based on labels or outward appearances, Scripture reminds us that God sees the heart. The story of the atheist, the criminal on the cross, and countless others show that our judgments are limited.

At the final judgment, it is God—not us—who knows every invitation, every response, and every hidden moment. This calls us to humility and caution in how we view others' destinies.

Introduction to the Flow of Love, Justice, and Freedom

This lesson explores the dynamic relationship between God's love, human freedom, and the consequences of our choices. Each step reveals how God initiates, invites, and responds to humanity, offering us opportunities to experience grace and make meaningful decisions.

Step 1

God's Loving Initiative

The story begins with God's invitation: "Come to Me." God's first movement is always toward us, reaching out in love and grace.

Step 2

Human Encounter with Grace

Each person encounters God's truth and grace in unique ways throughout life. These moments may be obvious or subtle, but they are real opportunities to experience God's presence.

Step 3

Opportunity for Response

We are given the freedom to accept or refuse God's invitation. Our response is not just intellectual agreement, but a movement of the heart and will.

Step 4

Consequences and Judgment

Our choices have real consequences. Judgment is the moment when our response to God's love is revealed—either leading to communion with Him or separation.

Ongoing Invitation and Summary

Until the final judgment, God continues to invite, call, and pursue us. The process is marked by God's persistent love and our ongoing opportunity to respond. The story is not over until it is truly over.



A Figure at the Crossroads

A Figure at the Crossroads

The moment of judgment is like standing at a crossroads, with two paths stretching out before us. This image captures the gravity of real choice—our response to God's invitation shapes our destiny. The stakes are high, not because God is eager to condemn, but because He honors the freedom He has given us. Our decisions matter, and the invitation remains open until the very end.

God's love does not erase His justice, nor does His justice erase our freedom. The invitation is real—and so is our response.

Continue

Next, we'll closely examine Jesus' teachings on judgment and salvation—especially what He says in John 3 and Matthew 25—exploring how personal encounter with Christ shapes our understanding of who is judged and why.

Scriptural Analysis: Jesus, Judgment, and the Human Response

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A Closer Look at Jesus' Words

A Closer Look at Jesus' Words

When it comes to questions of salvation and judgment, it's easy to fall back on simple formulas or labels. But Jesus' teachings invite us to something deeper. In this lesson, you'll be challenged to read His words with fresh eyes—setting aside assumptions and listening closely

to what He actually says about who is saved, who is judged, and why. True understanding requires us to move beyond surface-level answers and consider the profound significance of encountering Christ Himself.

In this lesson, you will engage with key passages from the Gospels to deepen your understanding of Jesus’ teachings on judgment, salvation, and authentic faith.

- 1 Examine Jesus’ words in John 3:16–21 and Matthew 25:31–46.
- 2 Analyze the nuances in Jesus’ teachings on judgment and salvation.
- 3 Explore the significance of personal encounter with Christ.
- 4 Distinguish between outward labels and genuine faith.

Two Central Passages: John 3 and Matthew 25

To truly grasp Jesus’ perspective on judgment and salvation, we need to focus on two of His most important teachings: John 3:16–21 and Matthew 25:31–46. These passages don’t just lay out rules—they reveal the heart of Jesus’ message about God’s love, justice, and the human response. By exploring these texts, we’ll uncover both the clarity and the mystery in what Jesus says about our ultimate destiny.

Key Gospel Passages: Judgment and Salvation

Expand each tab to explore the main passages and see how Jesus’ words challenge our assumptions about judgment, salvation, and what it means to encounter Him.

JOHN 3:16-21	MATTHEW 25:31-46	COMPARING THE PASSAGES
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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus continues, explaining that God did not send His Son to condemn the world, but to save it. Those who believe in Him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of God’s only Son.

Jesus describes the coming of the Light into the world, and how people respond to it. Some love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, while others come into the light so their deeds may be seen as done in God. The focus is not just on belief as a mental agreement, but on a willingness to step into the truth and be transformed by it.

JOHN 3:16-21

MATTHEW 25:31-46

COMPARING THE PASSAGES

Jesus paints a vivid scene of final judgment: the Son of Man comes in glory, all nations are gathered, and He separates people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The criteria? How they treated “the least of these”—the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. Those who cared for the least are welcomed; those who did not are sent away.

Both groups are surprised. They ask, “Lord, when did we see you?” Jesus reveals that whatever was done (or not done) for the least of these was done to Him. Judgment is not just about knowledge or labels, but about recognizing and responding to Christ, sometimes without realizing it.

JOHN 3:16-21

MATTHEW 25:31-46

COMPARING THE PASSAGES

Both passages emphasize that salvation and judgment are not about checking boxes or wearing the right label. In John 3, the focus is on belief that leads to coming into the light; in Matthew 25, it’s about acts of mercy that reveal a heart attuned to Christ—even when He is unrecognized.

These teachings challenge us to see that encountering Christ can happen in unexpected ways. They warn against reducing faith to formulas and invite us to a living, authentic response to God’s love and truth.

When we read these passages together, it becomes clear that Jesus is not offering a simple equation for salvation or judgment. Instead, He calls us to a relationship—a living encounter that shapes our actions, our beliefs, and our hearts. Both John 3 and Matthew 25 reveal that it

is possible to know about Jesus, or even do things in His name, without truly knowing Him or responding to Him.

Jesus' words invite us to move beyond outward appearances and easy answers. The real question is not just what we believe or do, but how we respond to the presence of Christ—sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious—in our lives and in the lives of others. This is the heart of His teaching on judgment and salvation.

Key Terms from Jesus' Teachings

Review each flashcard to reinforce your understanding of the central terms and phrases Jesus uses when discussing salvation and judgment. These words carry deep meaning in the passages we've explored.

Condemnation

The state of being judged or found guilty; in John 3, it refers to the result of rejecting the Light and refusing belief in Christ.

Eternal Life

The gift promised to those who believe in Jesus—a life that begins now and continues forever in relationship with God.

The Light

A metaphor Jesus uses in John 3 for Himself and the truth He brings, exposing both good and evil and inviting people to step into truth.

Depart from me

The words Jesus speaks in Matthew 25 to those who failed to care for the least of these, signaling separation from His presence.

With me

Jesus' promise to the repentant thief on the cross, emphasizing relationship and acceptance rather than mere reward.

Encountering Christ—Seen and Unseen

One of the most striking themes in Jesus' teaching is how people encounter Him—sometimes without even realizing it. In both John 3 and Matthew 25, Jesus shows that our response to Him is not always about explicit knowledge or religious identity. Instead, it's about whether we

move toward the Light, recognize Christ in others, and allow ourselves to be changed by the encounter.



Recognizing Christ in Unexpected Places

Recognizing Christ in Unexpected Places

Jesus teaches that He is often present where we least expect Him—in the hungry, the stranger, the overlooked. The moment we recognize Christ in these places, our understanding of judgment and salvation deepens. It's not just about seeing Him with our eyes, but about responding to His presence with our hearts and actions.

How Do We Encounter Christ?

Explore each section to see the different ways people encounter Jesus—sometimes knowingly, sometimes not. Reflect on how these modes of encounter shape our understanding of judgment and salvation.

Through explicit faith and confession —

Some encounter Christ through a clear, conscious faith—professing belief, seeking Him in prayer, and openly following Him. This is the path of those who recognize Jesus as Lord and respond with trust and commitment.

Yet, as Jesus warns, even those who call Him “Lord” must move beyond words to a genuine relationship. Faith is more than a label; it is a living response.

Through acts of mercy and love —

Jesus reveals in Matthew 25 that caring for the hungry, the sick, and the stranger is a way of encountering Him—even if we don’t realize it at the time. Acts of compassion become encounters with Christ Himself.

This means that our response to others, especially the vulnerable, is deeply connected to our response to Jesus. Mercy is a form of recognition.

Through the call to repentance —

Some meet Christ in moments of conviction—when the Light exposes what is hidden and calls us to change. The thief on the cross, for example, turns to Jesus in his final moments and is received with mercy.

Repentance is not just regret, but a turning toward Christ, trusting in His grace and accepting His invitation to new life.

Through moments of self-truth and humility —

Jesus’ teaching shows that judgment is not about impressing God with our achievements or religious resumes. Instead, it is about honesty—seeing ourselves as we truly are before God.

Humility opens the door to encounter. When we let go of excuses and self-justification, we are able to receive Christ’s mercy and step into the truth.

It's tempting to rely on outward labels—like “Christian,” “atheist,” or “religious”—to define who is saved or judged. But Jesus warns that labels can be misleading. Some who call Him “Lord” are turned away, while others who never recognized Him are welcomed because of their authentic response to His presence.

True relationship with Christ is not about what we call ourselves or the boxes we check. It's about whether we have genuinely encountered Him and allowed that encounter to shape our lives. Only God sees the whole story; our task is to respond honestly and humbly to His invitation.

Label or Relationship?

Sort each statement into the correct category. Consider whether it describes an outward identity (Label) or a genuine encounter and response to Christ (Relationship). Reflect on how easy it is to confuse the two.

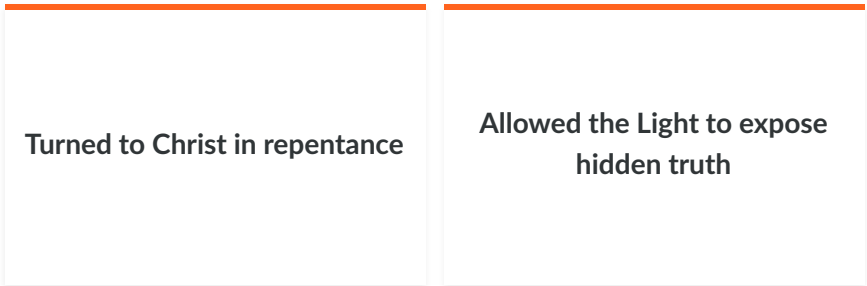
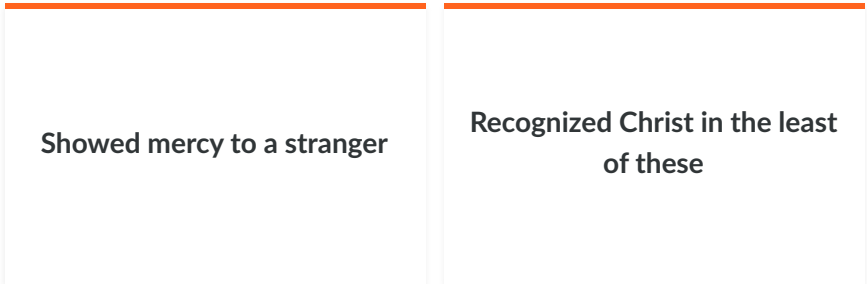
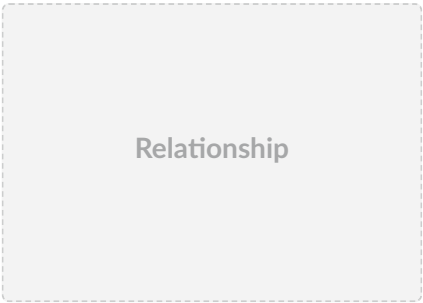
Label

Grew up in church

Knows Bible verses by heart

Calls Jesus 'Lord'

Volunteered for church events





Self-Examination: Label or Response?

Self-Examination: Label or Response?

Jesus' words challenge us to look honestly at ourselves. Are we simply wearing a label, or are we truly responding to His call? The difference is not always visible to others, but it is clear to God. Self-examination is an essential part of authentic faith and prepares us to encounter Christ in deeper ways.

In the end, Christ sees the person—not the label. Judgment is not about what we call ourselves, but how we have responded to His invitation.

Continue

In the next lesson, you'll be invited to reflect on how labels and assumptions can obscure the deeper reality of faith. Prepare to explore the importance of humility, self-assessment, and learning to see others as God sees them—beyond outward appearances.

Rethinking Labels: Faith, Identity, and the Limits of Human Judgment

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Rethinking Labels: The Hidden Reality of Faith

Rethinking Labels: The Hidden Reality of Faith

We often use labels like "Christian," "atheist," or "believer" to describe ourselves and others. But do these labels truly capture the reality of a person's faith or relationship with God? This lesson invites you to look beyond surface identities and consider the deeper, often hidden,

reality of faith. As we explore the limits of human judgment and the importance of humility, prepare to challenge assumptions and reflect honestly on your own journey.

In this lesson, you'll explore how labels shape our understanding of faith and identity. You'll also reflect on your own beliefs and learn why humility is essential when considering the salvation of others. By the end, you'll be better equipped to see yourself and others through a more honest and compassionate lens.

1

How Labels Influence Faith

2

Personal Reflection and Self-Assessment

3

God's Perspective vs. Human Judgment

4

Practicing Humility Toward Others

Understanding Labels in Faith

Labels are words or categories we use to identify ourselves and others—like "Christian," "atheist," or "spiritual." They can help us find community, express beliefs, or make sense of the world. But labels can also become shortcuts, offering a false sense of security or leading us to judge others too quickly. While labels may describe outward identity, God sees far deeper—into the heart, the motives, and the reality of our relationship with Him.

Key Terms: Faith, Identity, and Judgment

Review each flashcard to deepen your understanding of key terms that shape our thinking about faith, identity, and judgment.

Label

A word or category used to identify or describe someone's beliefs or group, such as "Christian" or "atheist."

Identity

The deeper reality of who a person is, shaped by beliefs, actions, and relationship with God—not just outward labels.

Judgment

The act of forming an opinion or decision about someone; in faith, it often refers to God's ultimate assessment of a person's life.

Relationship

The ongoing, personal connection between a person and God, which goes beyond labels or actions.

Salvation

The gift of eternal life and restored relationship with God, offered through Christ and received by genuine response.



Hearts Beyond Labels

Hearts Beyond Labels

Imagine a crowd where every person wears a different label, but only their hearts are illuminated. This image reminds us that while we may see and judge by outward categories, God looks beyond appearances. The true reality of faith is often hidden from human eyes, known fully only to God.

Labels: Clarifying or Confusing Faith and Identity

Explore how labels can both help and hinder our understanding of faith, identity, and salvation. Expand each section to discover how labels shape our perceptions—and what God sees beyond them.

Labels as Comfort or Shortcut —

Labels can make us feel secure by giving us a sense of belonging or certainty. It's easy to think, "I have the right label, so I must be okay." But relying on labels alone can keep us from examining the true state of our hearts and relationship with God.

Sometimes, labels become a shortcut for real faith, replacing genuine trust and obedience with outward identity.

Labels as Barriers —

Labels can divide us, creating "insiders" and "outsiders." When we focus on categories, we may exclude or judge others without understanding their true story or faith journey.

Labels can also obscure the deeper reality of a person's life, making it harder to see them as God does.

When Labels Fail —

Scripture shows that labels do not always match a person's true relationship with God. Jesus warns that some who call Him "Lord" will be surprised at judgment, discovering that their label did not guarantee a genuine connection.

Outward profession or religious activity is not the same as being truly known by Christ.

God's Perspective on Identity —

God looks beyond every label to see the whole person—their heart, choices, and response to His grace. While we see categories, God sees the reality of faith and love in a person's life.

Scripture reminds us that only God knows the full truth about anyone's identity and destiny.

Looking Inward: Honest Self-Examination

Now, turn the focus inward. How do you use labels in your own faith journey? Are you relying on a label for assurance, or are you seeking a genuine, living relationship with God? This is a moment to reflect honestly: Am I hiding behind a category, or am I truly responding to Christ's invitation?

Label vs. Reality: Sorting Faith Statements

Sort each statement into either "Label" (an outward category) or "Reality" (genuine faith/relationship). Reflect on what each item reveals about the difference between appearance and truth.



Attends church every Sunday

Calls Jesus 'Lord'

Knows all the right answers

Reality

**Lives with compassion and
humility**

**Recognizes Christ in the least
of these**

**Responds to God's grace in
repentance**



Seeing Ourselves Honestly

Seeing Ourselves Honestly

Picture a mirror reflecting both a name tag and a heart. This image challenges us to look beyond what we call ourselves and examine who we truly are before God. Honest self-examination requires humility and the courage to let go of appearances in favor of real transformation.

The Limits of Human Judgment

It's tempting to judge others' salvation based on what we see—labels, actions, or reputations. But Scripture is clear: only God knows the whole story. Our perspective is limited, and we cannot see every invitation, struggle, or act of grace in another person's life. Humility calls us to leave ultimate judgment to God and focus on our own response to His love.

How We Judge, How God Sees

This lesson explores the difference between human judgment and God's perfect understanding. We will reflect on our tendency to judge, recognize our limitations, and consider how God calls us to humility and trust.

Step 1

Human Tendency to Judge

We often make quick judgments about others based on labels or appearances. It's easy to assume we know someone's spiritual state just by what we see or hear.

Step 2

Recognizing Our Limits

Our knowledge is incomplete. We don't know every struggle, every moment of grace, or every hidden act of faith in another person's life.

Step 3

God's Perfect Vision

God alone sees the whole person—their heart, motives, and every response to His invitation. His judgment is perfect because He knows what we cannot.

Step 4

The Call to Humility

Recognizing our limits should lead us to humility. Instead of judging others, we are called to show compassion and leave ultimate judgment to God.

Step 5

Trust and Respond

Our focus should be on trusting God's justice and mercy, and on responding honestly to His call in our own lives. We are invited to humility, not presumption.

Summary

While we may see labels, God sees the heart. Our role is not to judge, but to respond to God's love with humility and honesty.

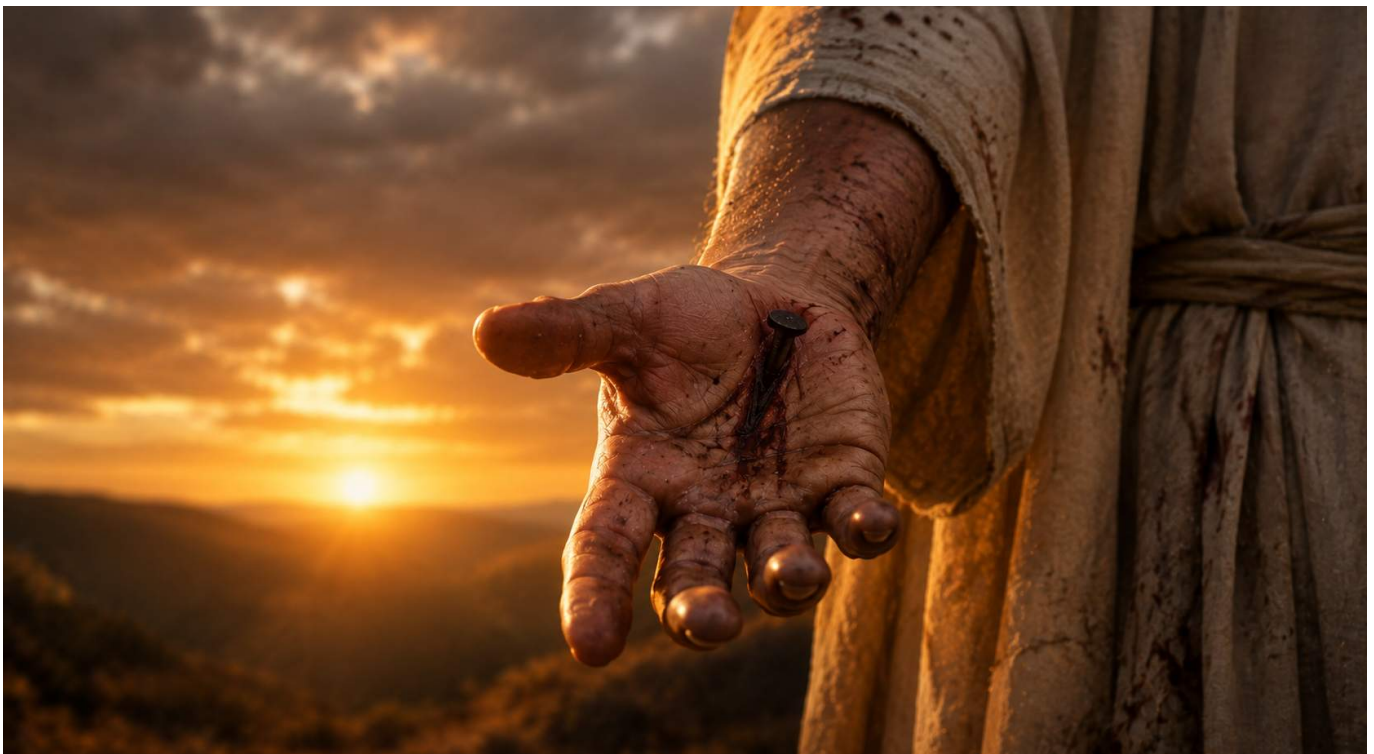
Christ sees beyond every label. Our call is not to judge, but to respond to His invitation with humility and honesty.

Continue

In the next lesson, you'll explore the hope and challenge of Christ's ongoing invitation — "Come to me." Prepare to consider the personal and eternal significance of your response to God's grace, and what it means to embrace His call with your whole heart.

The Invitation and the Response: Embracing Christ's Call

JP James Prosoco



Christ's Invitation: A Call Still Echoing

Christ's Invitation: A Call Still Echoing

Before any final judgment, before any doors are closed, Christ's voice still calls out: "Come to me." This lesson invites you to pause and consider the weight and wonder of being personally called by Christ. What does it mean to be sought after by God Himself? As you begin, let your

heart and mind be open to the possibility that, right now, the invitation is still being offered—to you, and to all.

In this lesson, you'll explore the heart of Christ's invitation and what it means to respond.

Here's what you'll gain as you journey through these ideas:

1

Ongoing Nature of Christ's Call

2

Biblical Examples of Response

3

Role of Grace and Mercy

4

Eternal Significance of Response

God's Persistent Call in Scripture

Throughout the Bible, God is not distant or indifferent. Again and again, He calls out to His people, inviting them to turn back, to live, to come home. This is not a one-time offer, but a persistent, loving pursuit. God's desire is not condemnation, but restoration—He longs for relationship, offering grace and mercy at every turn.



Shepherd Seeking the Lost

Shepherd Seeking the Lost

Picture a shepherd searching tirelessly for a single lost sheep, or a door left open with light streaming out into the night. These images capture the heart of God’s pursuit—He seeks the lost, calls them by name, and never stops inviting them home. No matter how far someone has wandered, the invitation remains open, and the way back is always illuminated by His love.

Models of Response to God’s Call

Expand each tab to explore three powerful biblical examples of how people respond to God’s invitation. Each story reveals something unique about grace, repentance, and the open door Christ offers.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

THE LOST SHEEP

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke tells us there are two criminals crucified with Christ. One joins the voices mocking Him. The other responds differently. He acknowledges that they are being punished for what they have done, while Jesus has done nothing wrong.

And then this dying criminal looks at the man hanging beside him and says: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answers: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Even at the very end, the invitation is open, and a sincere response is met with grace.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

THE LOST SHEEP

THE PRODIGAL SON

Jesus tells of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to search for the one that is lost. When he finds it, he rejoices more over that one than over the others who never strayed.

This story shows God’s relentless pursuit and the joy that comes when even one person turns back. The invitation is not just for the worthy or the found, but especially for the lost.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

THE LOST SHEEP

THE PRODIGAL SON

A son demands his inheritance, leaves home, and wastes everything. When he finally returns, expecting rejection, his father runs to meet him, embraces him, and restores him fully.

This parable reveals the heart of God—a Father who watches, waits, and welcomes home anyone who turns back, no matter how far they have gone. The invitation is always to return, and the response is always met with mercy.

These stories remind us that God’s grace can reach us in the most unexpected places—on a cross, in a distant land, or lost and alone. No matter how late the hour or how far we have wandered, the invitation to come home is never withdrawn. God’s mercy is not limited by our failures, and His call is not silenced by our distance. Until the very end, the door remains open for anyone willing to turn toward Him.

Key Concepts: Grace, Mercy, and Response

Review each flashcard to deepen your understanding of the essential terms that shape our response to Christ's invitation. Each concept is rooted in Scripture and central to the journey of faith.

Grace

God's unearned favor, freely given to those who turn to Him, as seen in the thief on the cross.

Mercy

God's compassion in withholding deserved judgment, welcoming the prodigal son home with open arms.

Invitation

Christ's ongoing call to relationship
—"Come to me"—offered to all,
regardless of past or present.

Response

The personal decision to accept,
ignore, or reject Christ's call, shaping
one's relationship with God.

Repentance

Turning away from sin and toward God, demonstrated by the prodigal son and the thief's plea for remembrance.

Answering the Call: Your Response Matters

What does it mean to answer Christ's invitation? The stories of Scripture show us that response is not about perfection or performance, but about turning—sometimes in desperation, sometimes after wandering, sometimes in small daily choices. The thief on the cross had nothing left to offer but his heart, and that was enough. As you reflect, consider: How are you responding to Christ's call today?

Ways People Respond to Christ

Explore the different ways people can respond to Christ's invitation. Each path reveals something about the heart and the hope found in God's call.

Turning Toward Christ in Desperation —

Like the thief on the cross, some turn to Christ in their darkest hour, with nothing left but a plea for mercy. Even then, Christ's invitation is real, and His response is full of grace.

These moments remind us that it is never too late to turn toward God, and that sincerity matters more than a lifetime of achievements.

Coming Home After Wandering —

The prodigal son's journey shows that after seasons of rebellion or distance, the way back is always open. God runs to meet those who return, no matter how far they have gone.

This response is marked by humility and hope, trusting that God's love is greater than our failures.

Responding in Small, Daily Choices —

Not all responses are dramatic. Many answer Christ's call through daily acts of repentance, kindness, and faithfulness. Each small "yes" builds a life shaped by God's grace.

These choices matter, showing that response is an ongoing journey, not a single moment.

Refusing or Delaying the Invitation —

Some hear Christ's call but choose to ignore, delay, or reject it. Scripture warns that this refusal has real consequences—not because God's love fails, but because He honors our freedom.

Ultimately, the invitation cannot be forced. Our response, whatever it is, truly matters.



Hope in the Open Invitation

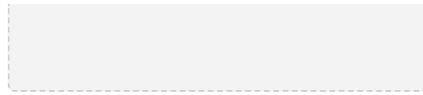
Hope in the Open Invitation

Imagine a hand reaching out to another, or a path leading toward a radiant horizon. These images capture the hope and promise of Christ's invitation—no matter where you are, the way is open as long as you turn toward Him. The journey home is always possible, and the invitation is never withdrawn while life remains.

Invitation or Response?

Sort each statement into the correct category. Decide whether it represents Christ's invitation or a human response. Reflect on how these dynamics shape your understanding of faith.

Invitation

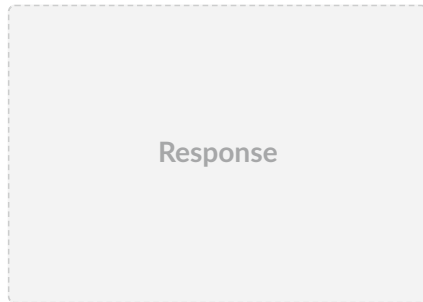


Come to me

Repent and believe

**Today you will be with me in
Paradise**

Depart from me



Response

Turning away in fear

**Returning home after
wandering**



Before anyone ever hears 'Depart from me,' we are looking at a God who has spent the entire story saying: 'Come to me.' The invitation is still open.

Continue

As you finish this course, remember the journey you've taken: exploring God's love and justice, wrestling with the reality of judgment, questioning the limits of labels, and discovering the hope of Christ's ongoing invitation. The story of Scripture is not about a God eager to condemn, but about a God who pursues, calls, and welcomes. Your response matters—not just once, but every day. May you continue to listen for Christ's call, respond with honesty and humility, and walk in the light of His grace. The invitation is still open. Keep following Him.