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What Should I Say to Active Churchgoers Who Reject the Trinity and the Deity of Christ?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to say to longtime, active churchgoers who don't believe in the Trinity or the deity of Christ, and a challenge to the idea that it's possible for someone to have a relationship with Jesus today.

- * What should I say to family members who have been active churchgoers for 40 years, but who don't believe in the Trinity or the deity of Christ?
- * Do you claim to have a relationship with Jesus—someone you never met—who died 2,000 years ago and hasn't been seen since? That seems like the definition of a delusion, an imaginary friend in the sky.

Transcript

You're listening to Amy Hall and Greg Koukl on Stand to Reason's hashtag, S-T-R-S-C-Podcast. Welcome, Greg. You got top billing there, Evie.

I've got to slip that in every once in a while. You must increase. I must decrease.

Nice to see you this one. So we're going to continue on a little bit on questions about Jesus and salvation from another angle. This one comes from Matt for Western Australia.

I have just recently found out that two family members who've been active churchgoers for 40 years don't believe in the Trinity or the Divine Son. They believe Jesus as Savior as the perfect man created. I've challenged them, but they say they're saved.

Your thoughts? Well, the question is a biblical one, a textual one. It has to do with what scripture says is necessary for salvation. Jesus, when he is talking to a woman at the well in John chapter, what's that for? He says that the father should be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

Certain details are really important. You go to Romans 10. I'm just going off the top of my head

now.

There's a lot of verses that would pertain here, but this would just be helpful quickly. It says, if you confess with your mouth, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Not a citation from the Old Testament.

But then it says, if you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. Notice the criteria involves not just a belief in the resurrection, but a belief in the nature of the identity of Jesus himself. When John closes out his gospel in John chapter 20, I believe it is, and he tells the reason that he's writing the gospel.

He says, many other signs and wonders, miracles, Jesus performed, that are not included in this book, but these, I have included the seven miracles in John so that you would believe, believe what? That Jesus is the Christ Messiah, the Son of God. Now that's a divine title, and you can't get away from the Son of God as a divine title. Given the internal evidence of the text, this is the way the Jews understood this to be.

And in believing those things have life in his name. So there John connects eternal life to belief in Jesus with certain content that he's the Messiah and the Son of God. And at Jesus trial, he was asked the question, are you the Messiah, the Son of God? There's the two categories right there that John was talking about.

And Jesus said, yes. And the priest, Torres Roman, said you've heard the blasphemy. No, it is not a blasphemy to claim to be a Messiah.

It is a blasphemy to claim to be God in human flesh. And in John chapter, what, eight? Jesus says, unless you believe I am, now in your translation, it'll have the word he after that in italics, because that's not in the original. What Jesus said, unless you believe that ego, a me, I am.

And that's the Greek rendering of the name of God from Exodus. Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins. So here we have a series that I just offered off the top of my head for the study could provide lots more.

That make it very clear that our understanding of who Jesus actually is, our belief that and in this particular individual, the Messiah, who is also the incarnate Son of God, that our salvation hinges on that. Now, I think it's possible not to know all those details and be saved. Look at the thief on the cross.

Today, you will be with me in paradise. He didn't have a lot of theology, but clearly he is, he is putting his trust in that man next to him on the cross. And that was efficacious.

That was enough to rescue him. And sometimes we are rescued without a lot of theology. But what comes with the package is a belief that Jesus then is the same one who is claimed, he claims he is, and the scripture claims he is too, and that is God.

So you don't have to believe in the Trinity if you're kind of in ignorance. But what you can't do is you can't reject it once you know what it is. All right.

And so that's an important distinction there. Some people are just untutored, and they don't know all these other details. But once they learn about Jesus, this is part of the package that I think actually the Holy Spirit provides.

So there is a faith that the Holy Spirit helps us to have in Christ and helps us to understand also that this Christ that we just put our faith in, is our faith in Christ. There is also God, Emmanuel, God with us. And so it's packaged together.

And that's what we see later on in the development of the theology, these things going together. A person who believes in Jesus as a perfect human being, but not God is not one that's participating in the salvation that Jesus offered based on what the text says. I should back it up and put it this way more precisely.

A person who says they believe in Jesus, but rejects that Jesus is God incarnate. They are not believing in the Jesus that is declared in scripture. By the way, what I just described is what Mormons believe.

It's also what in a certain fashion Muslims believe were Jehovah's Witnesses. They each have a Jesus in their theology based to some degree on what scripture says. But this is not the same Jesus as the Gospels portray, and we see written about in the rest of New Testament.

And so consequently, they are outside of God's salvation plan because they are believing in a false Jesus. Now, can you have a great way of making the case that Jesus is God in your article, the deity of Jesus case closed? Do you want to talk about that? Because I think that's a helpful way to describe it. Now, I happen to know, because I asked some questions, I'm mad about this, and he said that they had a book they read and the pastors talked to them and all of this.

And apparently, I don't know if they must not be members of the church. I would assume if the pastor knows about it, but maybe they are. I don't know.

But they have a book that they have that has convinced them that Jesus is not God. So how would you go about trying to convince them of that? Well, what I offer just a moment ago are a series of citations that show how belief in Jesus as God are necessary to salvation. That was the key point there.

But there are other passages, other ways we can demonstrate that the scripture actually teaches this. And the way I characterize it in general is that the Trinity is a solution, not a problem. And if you don't affirm the Trinity, then you have problems with the text.

You're going to see passages where clearly the humanity of Jesus is focused in on, you know, and you say, well, there it is. Jesus is not the Father. He's talking to the Father, which we agree.

He's not the Father. He's the Son. They are distinct persons, centers of consciousness, if you will, but they all share the same divine nature.

Well, why would you say that? Because other texts make this very clear. And in this piece called, I think you can get it on the Internet, that deity of Christ case closed. That's the one I just mentioned.

Yeah, that's right. And which I, by the way, I included in Streetsmart. So if you have the Streetsmart book, I have a whole chapter dealing with these issues.

I talk about it there as well. And if you look at John chapter one, the Gospel of John begins with a prologue talking about Jesus and who he fundamentally is. And John starts out in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now, this is where people disagree and they fuss with the Greek, which I don't understand, and most people you talk to don't know what Greek. So I'm not going to fuss about that in that verse. I'm going to go to verse three, because in verse three says this, All things came into being through him, now referring to the Word.

And keep in mind in verse 14, it says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So the Word is the pre incarnate individual who took on humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So all things came into being through him, the Word, and apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

Now, this is a very simple, straightforward way of saying from two different angles that the Word is the uncreated Creator. Everything that was created was created by the Word, so the Word couldn't be created. And I have a little diagram that I show in the article, I won't go into details now, but you could do this on a napkin, and it's in the book also, Street Smart.

Very simple to show this. There's no way out of the force of that particular verse. And what's interesting is that John chapter 1 parallels Genesis chapter 1, which says, In the beginning God created the heavens of the earth, and John says, In the beginning, an RK, in the absolute beginning, the Word created the heavens of the earth.

In other words, the Word is God, which is what he says in verse 1. So that's just one little section that is unequivocal. It's univocal, and it's declaration that the Word is the only uncreated being, and therefore the only God, which is a theme that's played out the rest of the Gospel of John. So that's just one example.

We also have a number of examples where certain things are said to be true of Yahweh in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah 45 in that area. Lots of statements, the beginning and the end, the only Savior, the only rock, etc. And then you see all of these same terms being used in the same way of Jesus of Nazareth.

Okay, and in fact in Philippians chapter 2, there's a statement there where every knee shall bow

and every tongue shall confess Jesus as Lord. That's actually taken also out of that section of Isaiah. But in Isaiah it says every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess Yahweh as Lord.

And so the verses apply to Yahweh in the Old Testament to Jesus, the New Testament, which means Jesus as Yahweh. So why don't you describe, I want you to describe what you drew on the napkin. Okay, all right.

Because this is such a simple way to illustrate to people what you're talking about. So you make a square on a napkin, a rectangle, all right. And you describe, you explain this rectangle, it tells everything that exists.

There's nothing on the outside of it, okay. Okay, and then you split it right down the middle, top to bottom. And on the left side you say did not come into being.

And on the right side you say did come into being, all right. So what does everything in all that exists, what is the one thing that did not come into being? Come into being, but does exist. That would be God.

Okay, so there's God is on the left and everything else is on the right, all right. Then you take a quarter or a penny or whatever and you decline and you say, this represents Jesus, the word. Okay, now you tell me which side of those two did not come into being and did come into being, Jesus should go into.

Now, of course they want to say, well, on the right side there, he did come into being. You say, wait a minute, according to verse three here, which we just read. John 1-3.

John 1-3, the word is responsible for creating everything that ever came into being. So if you put Jesus in that square, that means he created himself. Well, he didn't create himself, did he? No.

Well, then he can't go there. What's the only other place he can go? The other side that did not come into being, which means he is divine. So, and that might have been a little quick for some of you, but it actually is a very simple thing.

And that's an ancient argument. I got it from the late Bob Passantino and he got it from some church father, I think, but I think it's a great argument. And it really makes it clear from John 1-3, all things came into being through him and apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

I mean, there's no way out of that. No. And for even more, there's a book by Rob Bowman and Ed Komachevsky called Putting Jesus in this Place.

And they go through the acronym hands to help you see that Jesus is God. And you think he has the honors of God, the attributes of God, maybe it's the names. Could be.

And then what is D? I can't remember now. Descriptions, I don't know. See, it's a problem with

the acronyms.

They better be memorable. Oh, gosh. This is my fault.

This is not their fault. No, they do a good job. And then S is the seat of God.

He shares the throne of God. Right. So Jesus has the attributes of God.

We just talked about one. He has this is my summary of it, the three things. He has called God and he has the distinctions that belong to God like he receives worship, for example.

So that's another way of thinking about it. Yes. It's the deeds that only God can do.

Oh, there you go. I looked it up very quickly. So that might be a book you could read also, Matt.

All right. Let's go to a question from Dan Edwards. Do you claim to have a relationship with Jesus? Please explain.

Have you ever met Jesus? Didn't he die 2000 years ago and hasn't he been and hasn't been seen since? Seems very much like the definition of a delusion, an imaginary friend in the sky. Well, the question here is whether or not it is the delusion and whether it's imaginary or real. Simply looking at the characteristics of delusion and so-called relationship with Jesus itself is not going to help.

In order to know that something is delusion, you have to know that it's a delusion. You have to know that the characterization is simply false. So if somebody thinks they're Teddy Roosevelt or something like that, they're deluded because they're not.

Now, if somebody thinks they're God, that would be a delusion if they're not. But if it's Jesus, then we have good reason to believe he was, then it's not a delusion. So what matters here are the facts.

Okay, not whether or not I can see Jesus or somebody else has seen him for 2000 years. That's not relevant. And incidentally, that is even contested because in the New Testament, Jesus appeared after he died and rose and ascended to Saul of Tarsus.

And a number of times, and to others, he appeared. So after the resurrection, he appeared. And I have no reason to believe that some of the testimonies of people that they have seen Jesus now, I have no reason to believe they couldn't be very critical.

They couldn't actually be. So just to assert that nobody's ever seen him is, I think, self-serving. That's a matter of discussion based on the evidence.

But to dismiss a relationship with Jesus as being delusional on the order of somebody as an imaginary friend, rather, depends entirely on whether Jesus is imaginary, like the imaginary friend or not. And so any evidence that he's not, that there is a God, that Jesus lived a certain

life here and then died and rose from the grave, and is manifest in the lives of Christians who trust him and have a relationship with any evidence in favor of that, it's going to be evidence that it's not a delusion. But it's not enough to simply dismiss as a delusion simply because you can cite another circumstance that is similar, that is a delusion.

Does that make sense? Yes, and I would also contest the idea that he hasn't been seen since, and not even in the sense that you see a vision or you see him bodily. The fact is Christianity has continued for 2,000 years because people have interacted with Jesus and been changed by him and prayed and received comfort and had a sense of his presence and gotten to know him. And had those prayers answered? Yes, yes.

But you're imagining friends are not capable of doing. Exactly. So you've got 2,000 years of a particular man who lived in history that I can read, and this, I was just thinking about this.

I can read the words of Christians who lived 1,500 years ago talking about their relationship with Jesus, and I recognize it. I understand it. It's something that I experience.

I know what they're talking about. So you have everybody, all the Christians over 2,000 years, who have been interacting with Jesus in the same way, the same person, that's not what an imaginary friend does. You can't cite any example that's even close to anything like that.

Children have imaginary friends for emotional reasons. However, adults, this is not characteristic of adults. You have multitudes and multitudes and multitudes of adults that can characterize a relationship with Christ in a way that's consistent with so many others as you're pointing out.

It's unfair to simply dismiss it as if it's just the same thing that a child does. Now, of course, there are other gods. People worship other gods, and I would say that either those gods don't exist or they are demons of some sort, that they're worshiping.

So I do think that's the case, but I wouldn't call that an imaginary friend either. False belief. So again, it comes down to the question of does that God exist? Does Jesus exist? Did he rise from the dead? If he did, then he's not an imaginary friend.

So you can't start from the fact that we can't see him to say that he's an imaginary friend. All right, Greg, that's it for the show today. Thank you, Matt and Dan for your questions.

We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your question on X with the hashtag STRS or you can just go to our website at str.org and all you need to do is look for our podcast page on the top of the page there. Just look for hashtag STRS and then you'll find a link there to send us your question.

Just make sure it's fairly short. Like maybe two sentences. It should be about the size of a tweet or whatever X is calling it.

I actually prefer easy questions too. So that would be nice. So we'd love to hear from you.

If you've been putting that off, go ahead and do that now. We're getting all of our episodes together now for when Greg is on vacation in the summer. So we need your question and we'd love to hear from you.

Well, thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.