

# OpenTheo

## I Can't Accept the Gospel Because It Would Mean My Loved One Is in Hell

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to someone who refuses to accept the gospel because it would mean a loved one has likely gone to Hell, why we should think animals have souls, and how to differentiate between true Christian love and an indifference to social and political issues that are harming our communities.

- \* How do you respond to someone who refuses to accept the gospel because it would mean their deceased loved one has likely gone to Hell?
- \* Can you explain how you reached the conclusion that animals have souls?
- \* How can we differentiate between true Christian love and an indifference to social and political issues that are harming our communities?

### Transcript

I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Kolkel and you're listening to the #STRaskpodcast. Welcome.

And thank you for sending your questions. We take questions from Twitter with the #STRask. Or you can go to our website, just go to the podcast page, choose #STRask.

And you'll find a link there and you can send us your question that way. We want it to make a way for people to be able to send questions, even if they don't have Twitter. Because I realize a lot of people don't have Twitter.

Give me more, especially conservatives. All right. Let's start with a question from Josh.

Hey, Josh. How do you respond to someone who refuses to accept the gospel because it would mean that their deceased loved one has likely gone to hell? Well, this is a tough nut to crack. And when I talk about the kinds of reasons, the categories of reasons that people reject the gospel, one of them is something we address all the time, rational

objections.

But another one is emotional. People have emotional reasons to reject the gospel. And this is number one on the list.

If they acknowledge that the gospel is true, then they would also be acknowledging that loved ones died without Christ and have perished forever. And they cannot emotionally countenance that. Now, to me, this is like a person saying, "You know what? I have had this persistent pain in my abdomen, but I'm not going to the doctor because I might find out it's cancer and I don't want to know I have cancer." Now of course, that would be silly for a person to do that because whether or not they have cancer is the issue, not how they feel about knowing that they have cancer.

And at least if you know that you have cancer, you're in a position to potentially do something about it. And this objection falls into the same category. But of course, I'm just giving you kind of a rational/reasonable way of approaching it when that's not the problem.

The problem is emotional. Now I'm not saying the rational/reasonable element doesn't play a role here and I think it's fair to bring this up. The real question is whether the gospel is true or not.

If it is true, then it does have ramifications for those who died without Christ. But it also has ramifications for the individual with whom you're talking who is distressed about the idea that their family members might have died without Christ. I mentioned a moment ago this is a tough nut to crack because the emotional element is so powerful that it keeps people from counting and saying the real issue is the gospel true or not.

But that would be the issue I would press. I don't know that you're at least initially your success ratio is going to be very high in addressing people with this particular concern because the emotions are so big here. But I think it can be addressed.

And sometimes what we're left with when we face difficult challenges is just to graciously tell people the truth. God is going to be the one who changes their mind anyway. But at least if we tell them the truth, they have the resources to work with, so to speak, the Holy Spirit does of truth to bring conviction to their souls.

Either the gospel is true or it's not. If it's not true, nothing to worry about for anybody. If it is true, then there are ramifications for those who died without Christ.

But it also means those who are still living are in a position to avoid that fate. And so that's the question they should be asking is the gospel true. And that would be the point that I would emphasize most.

I think you could also ask them if it were the case that your loved one were in hell, would

they want you to follow them? Would they be urging you right now to hear what I have to say? Or would they say, "Oh, ignore them. I want you to be with me in hell." That's great. Because they might feel some sort of disloyalty.

I want to be with them above all else. And if I don't, I'm going to be disloyal. But if someone loves you, they don't want you to be there.

Think about the parable that Jesus tells about the man, the rich man, who's in hell. And he says, "Go warn my brothers." Yeah. Oh, excellent.

And so if you can help them to think about what the loved one would want for them, then maybe that's it's a way that they can face it without feeling disloyal. I'd never ever heard that response before in its fabulous. And the reason that I think it's so helpful is because it's more left brain, which is what the difficulty is.

The difficulty is emotional. And so what I offered, I thought, was helpful, useful, but it's all right brain. I'm sorry.

What you offered is more right brain. And what I offered is more left brain, which is helpful. But the emotional problem is right brain kind of activity.

And you're appealing more to the right brain, so to speak, the more affective. What would your parents, if they were in hell, want of you, or your loved ones? What would they want of you right now if this was, in fact, the outcome of their sin and unbelief regarding Christ and the reference to the, I don't know what to call a parable or an account of the rich man in Lazarus, because it's hard to tell in that one. But in any event, the point is clear.

Please warn my brothers. And I think that's really powerful. Well done.

Let's go on to a question from Brad from Australia. Greg, you've mentioned in the past that animals have souls. Can you explain how you reached that conclusion? Well, I don't have the proof-text for you, Brad, right in front of me.

But the language that is used of the invisible self for humans in scripture is also used of animals. Okay. And so there's a, there is a, you know, a textual point, but there's also a philosophic point too.

And that is there are certain activities that we as soulful creatures, human beings participate in that are uniquely activities of the soul and are not activities of physical things. Okay. Thinking, for example, having thoughts, having beliefs about things, no physical thing is about anything else.

But our beliefs are about particular things. A philosopher's called it intentionality. So I have a thought about pizza tonight when I get home after all the shows are done.

So that's not the kind of thing that any physical thing has that is, and indeed that thought is not extended in space. It's not affected by physics or chemistry. It's in a unique category.

Okay, acts of will, intentions, sensations, the feeling of something, the feel, the felt quality of something is not a physical thing. It is, it is in a different dimension. And so the, the, the, all these categories that are, are functions of soulful activity and human beings.

And we know it is that because it cannot be reduced. Consciousness cannot be reduced to something physical. These are the same kinds of activities that animals seem to go into.

You know, we got three cats. So one of them is famous for sitting there at the sliding window, like last door behind the screen, looking in like I'm waiting for you to open the door. Okay.

Oh, great. You want to come in fine. I open this lighter and there she sits and she sits and she sits and she looks left and she looks right, she looks, looks around.

Boop. And then she jumps in 30 seconds later, you know, come on, come on. What's she doing? She's, she's thinking she's not a robot.

Something's going on. There's mental activity that, that is going on that allows her to reach a conclusion where she makes a decision to come into the house. These are all soulful activities.

So, um, and the higher on the, in a certain sense, the animal kingdom ladder, so to speak, the more it appears that they have the same kinds of activities, mental activities that we do. So, an earthworm, I don't know what they react to stimulus. So they must be feeling something, but I don't know how much what their thought life is actually like.

They're very different than us. But I think those are some of the philosophical reasons we can conclude that they have an interior life of some sort and interior life is not characteristic of any physical object. It's, it's, it's these interior activities are not brain activities.

They may be accompanied by brain activities, but they aren't brain activities themselves. And once again, because they have different characteristics and physical things. So it's a very principle, basic principle.

Okay. And, uh, so those are, I mean, very briefly, some of the reasons JP Morlin has done a lot of writing on this. I just read a little booklet that he put out for Rachio Christie on the soul.

And as a quick read, I, you know, just refreshing my memory, but I've, I've done a lot of work on this, read a lot of books on this and it's fairly straightforward when you, you see how the basics work together. So basically what you're saying is, if something is alive, then that thing has a soul because the soul is the life. Is that kind of what you're saying? I'm not saying that what I'm saying is because I'm not sure that everything that alive has, has a consciousness.

Okay. There may be a, a vital force of some sort. They called it, I used to call it *Elon* by tell.

But it's, it's, I don't know. And so there may be other elements of living things that are immaterial, but this is a conscious life. So a soul, the way I'm understanding or characterizing it is the, is the residents of the conscious self, so where the self resides, as it were.

And that's why when we die, our souls, ourselves can go be with the Lord until our bodies are resurrected and rejoined with it. Okay. There's no evidence that animal souls survive the death of their bodies.

But it is clear that animals have the kinds of interior experiences that we have. All right. Maybe in different degrees, whatever.

I mean, I'm smarter than my cats. I guarantee you that. But it's kind of a joke.

But nevertheless, there seems to be an interior life and the interior life, the way I described it, the way animals seem to experience it requires an invisible self as the locus of those activities. So you're making a distinction between human souls and animal souls. So qualitative distinction.

Okay. Not a metaphysical distinction. So, so in terms of being made in the image of God, how would you make that distinction between an animal soul and a human soul? Well, just that, that human humans are valuable, not because they have souls, because other non intrinsically valuable creatures, or not as intrinsically valuable, depending on how you want to put it, also have souls.

It is the kind of soul that a human has that bears the imprint of God that gives us our ultimate value and informs our moral obligations towards each other. We have obligations towards humans that we don't have towards animals, etc. And so that would be a there are more things could be said about that.

But that is the difference. Okay, Brad. Hopefully that clears that up for you.

Let's go into a question from Kirk. How can we best differentiate between true Christian love, such as love your enemies, and an indifference to social and political issues that are harming our communities? Well, that's that's a good question. And I've not been

asked quite like that before.

This is why I'm pausing and cogitating a little bit. It simply is not here. Here's just I'm just going to give you a piece right now and maybe some other pieces.

It simply is not possible for any Christian individual, any individual who cares about other human beings to care equally about every issue that confronts other human beings. I mean, we're coming into Thanksgiving season. I'm already getting letters from various soup kitchens in our community asking for money.

I don't even open them up. I toss them. Okay.

My wife and I monthly support Orange County Rescue Mission, which we know does a fabulous job with that kind of thing. So that's where that portion of our money goes. But what about all these others? They're maybe they're doing a good job and they're helping people.

I cannot carry the emotional burden of all of that. I have other burdens to carry. So I have to I have to triage, so to speak.

So you I guess this is simply to say you could have a person, a Christian, or anybody who is deeply concerned about the welfare of others in principle, but only be able to live that concern out in a very limited way, given the limitations of time and energy and money and all that other stuff. So now if there are people who are claimed to be Christians and show no interest of any kind to the human predicament, well, that then makes me wonder whether they are genuinely Christians. And the because because in Christianity, the concept of love is action for God so loved in this way God loved that he gave his only begotten son.

And when we are to love others like ourselves, the point is that not that we have emotions towards other people, but we are naturally looking out after our own well-being. And we are to also look out for the well-being of others and not simply be self centered and narcissistic in our lives. But we can't look out for the well-being of everybody.

It's just not possible. And keep in mind, I might one of my first verse I ever recall, meant remembering an important one by grace you're saved through faith it's not of yourselves, it's a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone boast. But what follows that is Paul's statement in Ephesians chapter 2 that we were created for good works that we should walk in them.

Good works almost universally are understood in light of our actions towards other people. I'm trying to think of a good work other than like worshiping God that doesn't have another human being in its view. What makes it good if it's not to help other human being.

Unless it's something directly in terms of our virtue with God, a good work has to do with helping other human beings. James chapter 2 of the second half the same thing. You show me your faith without your works.

I will show you my genuine faith by the things that I do on behalf of others. So both faith and love are characterized in actions of benevolence towards others. If there's none of that in a so-called Christian's life, why should I think that person cares about the things that Jesus cares about? But even so, you can't do everything.

And part of the objection that people have against pro-lifers is, well, you're not doing this, this, that, the other thing for other people. So I don't trust your, it's disingenuous in that you would be part of pro-life movement. Well, you can't do everything.

You just can't do everything. So taking everything you've said, I'm going to rephrase this a little bit because I suspect what he's asking here. I want to apply everything you said to what I suspect he's asking here.

I think what he's asking is, what about people who seem to be indifferent to these social issues that are harming our communities, but they're calling that Christian love. So what he sees them, they see themselves as being loving to their enemies by maybe not talking about it or whatever. And he sees it as indifference.

I suspect that's what's going on here with this question. Well, that's interesting because I hadn't seen that angle, but you might be right. But I'm not quite sure I understand it.

Are you suggesting that we're not going to, because we love our neighbors, we're not going to speak out against transgenderism and gender dysphoria, which is very destructive to human beings if that's encouraged because the suicide rates and a whole bunch of other things. But out of love, we're just going to be silent to them without taking the appropriate actions that might actually help them. Is that what you're referring to? I think that might be what he's asking.

So maybe answer that question in addition, because everything you said before about what love means, I think applies to this. Right. Well, if that's the concern, then the Christian is confused because Christian love isn't characterized by a benign acceptance of others.

Okay, that's what you do. I'm so loving, I'm going to accept that I'm so loving. I'm not going to see anything about it.

I'm so loving, I'm going to let it go. I'm going to, I'm just going to let you do what you want to do because I am so loving. I am going to give you positive regard, no matter what it is that you do.

Well, there's a kind of a sense in which positive regard is valuable regardless if it's

limited to the sense that treating people with respect is image bearers. But if positive regard has to do with all of their behaviors, so you don't ever ruffle them for others and you make them feel comfortable in whatever they're doing, then that is not a Christian, a perspective. Paul says, do not participate in the evil deeds of darkness, but even expose them.

All right. And so, Proverbs says faithful are the wounds of a friend. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

So that means that true friendship entails addressing harms that a person is pursuing. And it is perceived by them as a wound, but it's actually an act of love. It's kind of the point there.

And I give a talk many, many, many years ago at Hope Chapel titled love, when love is a lie. And I was talking about all these circumstances when people would use love as a cloak or as a justification for encouraging behaviors that were just wrong or just just passively affirming behaviors that were wrong, because if they're wrong, they're destructive for the people who are doing them. And they ought to be confronted.

That's a way to do that. And Scripture talks about that as well. But if what Kirk is asking about is, you know, what about so-called benign acceptance or passive approval as a little edge expression of Christian love? If that's what he's after, I think that the Christian is very confused about what love requires.

What this comes down to, how do you tell the difference it's by the definition of love that's being used? So our, and we've talked about this before, the culture's definition of love is acceptance is affirmation, but that's not the Bible's definition of love. The definition of love is giving to others, seeking their good to your own, you know, using your own, what's word, some kind of self sacrificial love where you're giving of yourself for the other's good, even to your own hurt. And when you look at it that way, you can look at how people are, how they're living their lives.

And that doesn't mean that you fight every political battle or you definitely doesn't mean that. But are they grounded in the truth? And are they seeking the good of people by seeking that truth? Are they speaking the truth in love? Are they doing it in kindness? Are they doing it with wisdom? But they're not denying truth. And they're seeking to make things better for people.

Even if that means people hate them, even if that means they're, they suffer because of that, they're putting their love for the other people above their own comfort. It is ironic that when you don't do what the rest of the culture says is loving, they don't characterize it as being unloving. They characterize it as being hateful.

This is a rhetorical flourish that is manipulative. It's just bullying is all it is. It's beyond



confusion.

This is an attempt to bully people into accepting the bully's way, doing what they want. Keep in mind, the famous chapter of love in the Bible tells us all what love entails. 1 Corinthians 13 says love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth, which is just what Amy has been saying.

And just as a final note here, again, because he's talking here about indifference to these issues, not everyone is called to engage politics. That's just not everybody's gift. It's not everybody's calling.

It's just, it's just not. So I, I would not judge people who are engaged in other acts of love, who are not engaged in the political sphere and charge them with not being loving. I see people doing this a lot when in reality, most of the time for most people getting upset about political things is not actually doing anything.

It's not actually changing anything. Whereas there are people out there who maybe they're not interested in politics, but they are serving others in tangible ways one at a time and making a difference. So don't judge someone's love by whether or not they're getting worked up by politics.

There are other ways to love people. There are other colleagues or other, there are other things you can do. And a lot of people who are getting worked up about politics aren't actually doing anything to make it better.

So you have to keep all of these things in mind as you're kind of evaluating what you're seeing around you. Well, thank you everyone for listening. We love hearing from you.

Send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag #SDRask or through our website. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kolkle for Stand to Reason.