

# OpenTheo

## How Can I Keep from Looking Legalistic on Social Media?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to someone who doesn't see how Jesus could be God, who wants every question answered before believing Christianity is true, and how to keep from looking legalistic when sharing one's faith on social media.

\* How would you respond to someone who doesn't see how Jesus could be God and wants every question answered before he can fully commit to believing Christianity is true?

\* As I share my faith on Instagram, how can I respond to claims that standing on biblical truth amounts to legalism and also guard myself from real legalism?

### Transcript

[Music] [Bell] I'm Amy Hall, and you're listening to the #STRask podcast with Greg Koukl. Hello, Greg. Hello, Amy.

Alright, Greg, let's start with a question from Jackson in Australia. Okay. My friend wants to know whether Christianity is true.

He doesn't see how Jesus can be God, and appears to want every question he has to make sense before he can fully commit to believing it. Suggestions? Yeah, okay. So there's two things going on here.

One is, how could Jesus be God? And let me deal with that first because this is important. What's not clear to me is Jackson's friend's real complaint. That Jesus is God incarnate, is weird.

I admit entirely. The whole Trinity thing is odd. It's unusual.

We don't have any analogs in our experience to just that thing. There are similar 3s and 1s that people point to to kind of get us going, but God is unique in this regard. Okay? However, being unique and even weird doesn't mean it's false.

To say that Jesus can't be God suggests there's some kind of contradiction in the notion. Now, this might be because there's a misunderstanding. And this is where it's important for us to dial down really tightly on the notion of incarnation, because oftentimes what we'll say is, well, God became man.

Now, that is materially accurate as far as it goes, but formally, it's not. In other words, when you get right down to the details of focus on God didn't become a man. Just, I can't become a rabbit because if I became a rabbit, the question would have to be, what part of that? That rabbit is still me.

That that rabbit could be identified as having been me. And now it's more rabbit than me. There's got to be some particular that is shared between the two of them.

Okay? And this is the problem, of course, of God became man in what sense is this man God. This is why what the characteristic way of putting it precisely is that God didn't become a man. God added humanity to his divine nature.

So we have in Jesus of Nazareth, one person, two natures. The one person is the second person of the Trinity who is divine. So one of those natures is going to be divine, but added to attach to in some mysterious way.

This is another weird deal. I get it. Added to attach to incorporated with a human nature, a true human nature, everything that is true about our common humanity and native to humanity.

And the fall is not native to humanity. That's an accident. But everything that is native to humanity, Jesus shared.

He was a true human, but he also had, he was true God. He was the God man. He was a manual God with us.

Now, once that's understood that that's the distinction and that's the theologically, philosophically precise way to characterize it, then the question is, why is that not possible? And I'm asking the question, why is it not metaphysically possible? Why is it that this can't happen, which seems to be the objection of Jackson's friend? Okay. And I don't know what he'd answer. By the way, there's our first tactical question, our game plan.

What do you mean by that? When people raise concerns or objections like this one, oh, Jesus couldn't be God. Okay. Why couldn't he be God? What do you mean? He can't be God in what sense? And the only way I can think of that could go through is if there is an inherent, intimate contradiction in the idea that a divine being cannot add a human nature to himself.

I don't see why that's why that's a problem. And so I just have to hear from Jackson's

friend and that's the question that he can ask. Okay.

So that's the first issue. I'm not sure. But there's nothing inherently contradictory about the Trinity or God becoming a man.

It's just weird, admittedly. And we can admit that. I think without embarrassment.

God's weird. In a lot of ways. There's lots of weird things in the universe.

Quantum mechanics is weird. Okay. There's lots of bubble bees are weird.

They're not supposed to even be able to fly aerodynamically. It's not possible. Too big a butt, too small a wings, but they still fly.

There they go. And they sting. So anyway, lots of weird things in the universe that are actual.

And there's no reason for them to be impossible. Okay. Okay.

Second issue, though, has to do with having every question answered before he can move forward. And I think that in this situation, for the most part, this is a generalization. There may be an exception.

I'll mention in a moment. We just, we just walk people through with this. We just are patient with them.

Some people have more questions than others and everybody's got a different, you know, psychological profile issues that they deal with. It's probably not the case that Jackson's friend is going to have to have every single question answered before he can convert, be regenerated, become a Christian. I'm just thinking of myself.

So 49 years ago, when I became a follower of Christ, I didn't have the evolution thing squared away. I didn't have the premarital sex thing squared away. I didn't have the abortion thing squared away.

Big question marks in my mind. I knew that these things were not part of the package I just bought into, but, you know, I didn't know why. And so I had questions about all that.

But I still became a Christian because the issue for me was whether Christianity was true or not. And even though there's these outliers, the main issue was resolved in my own mind. So I became a Christian.

And this is something that happens with lots of people. I've mentioned before, and it's not my saying I got it from somewhere else, that God catches this fish first and then he cleans them. I think it's a great metaphor.

God catches this fish first and then he cleans them because getting clean is not going to

be possible apart from the Holy Spirit. What we do is we surrender ourselves to Christ. We repent.

We turn to him from where we've been going and then we go in a new direction and then God starts cleaning up a whole bunch of stuff. 49 years later, he's still cleaning up stuff in my own life. So that's a lifelong process.

But some of these things get resolved as a result of regeneration. Most people who are Christians cannot really, I think most, can't defend biblically the Trinity, but they believe in it. It is defensible scripturally, but they didn't get persuaded that the Trinity is true like that.

They accepted it as part of the package and they think it's true, but for a different reason than textually. Same thing with the Bible being the Word of God. We have reasons that we can point to that the Bible is a book not simply by men about God, but a book that has a supernatural origin by God through men and to men.

It's that kind of book, not the first kind of book. We have reasons to believe that, but most people haven't been exposed to all these reasons that Stanza reason talks about. Rather, they believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God because they've been persuaded by some other means and it's part of the package of regeneration.

Now, that isn't to give the short trip to any of those concerns, it's just to show that something else is going on. If a person has lots of questions, we'll do our best to answer the questions. If they're coming to Christ, they're going to come to Christ probably before all of these questions are answered.

But if there's something in the way for them taking seriously the gospel message, let's move it. If they ask us to, let's just remove it. So be patient with the questions.

It's not going to be everything, but the things that he's asking of Jackson are things that matter to him, at least at the moment and are kind of in the way. Sometimes they're last gasps. It's like they're on the way and they're still fighting and it's the final shot over the bow.

When in fact what's going on inside of them is they're being changed by the Holy Spirit and drawn into the Kingdom and into faith in Christ. So hang in there Jackson with your friend and do your best to answer his questions and be kind to him and let God do the work. If someone has questions about the truth of something, if they don't believe something is true, then that question has to be answered.

Obviously, I mean, I don't think it's a bad thing if he wants his questions answered. But I think I agree with you Greg that he may not need to have all of them answered, but there will come a point when he is convinced it's true. I don't think we can decide to believe something is true.

I don't think that's something we decide. That's called Dux-A-S-C-E-C-Voliterism and we don't choose our beliefs is the point. We just observe, I don't choose to believe there's an elephant in the room.

And if there's none, and if there is, I'm not choosing that belief either. I do believe it, but it isn't my choice. It's because I'm compelled by other things to hold the belief.

So if he doesn't think it's true because he has certain objections, of course he's not going to commit to following Jesus. And the way Jackson, the way you've put it here is before he can fully commit to believing it, but I don't think that's what's happening. I don't think people commit to believing something.

I think they commit to following Jesus. And where you come to believe it's true will be different depending on a person's objections and also of course on the work of God. So there are actually two things going on here.

There's whether or not you think it's true and then it's whether or not you want to submit to God. And he could be anywhere in these two things. Maybe he's just asking questions because he's trying to find a reason to think it's false.

He actually suspects it's true, but he doesn't want to submit. So that's a possibility too. But just remember there are two categories here.

Even the demons believe and shudder. They think it's true, but they don't want to submit. And the only way we're going to submit is if God works in our hearts.

But the truth issue has to come first. It's necessary, but not sufficient. So right.

So basically all this to say, listen to his questions and answer his questions. It's all we can do. We can't see into his heart, mind or know exactly why he's asking something.

Now over time if you think that he's just asking questions because he's not even really interested in the truth. But he wouldn't be asking the questions. It seems to me, would he? Probably not.

He's just a hostile. Yeah. It's hard.

It's hard to know. But I would just take him seriously. As you said, Greg, and just keep answering.

Yeah. There's a lot of hostile voices that God has won over, you know, and we know some of them. You know, by the way, I'm really happy that I got to use that phrase, Doc's Aztec volunteerism because I spent a lot of money to learn words like that.

And once in a while, I can... Well, I'm glad to give you that opportunity, Greg. All right. Let's take a question from Chimsie.

Hey, I've been sharing my faith on Instagram since 2021. But I've been doing self-examination and don't want to appear legalistic. I know legalism is putting man's law above God's law, but many connect it with simply standing on biblical truth.

How can we respond to such claims and also guard ourselves from legalism? Well, this is... I'm really glad. Is it Chimsie? It's C-H-I-M-Z-I. I'm not sure if you... Oh, Chimsie.

Okay. I'm really glad for the question, and it touches on a basic confusion. And the confusion is, if you insist on biblical clarity and biblical virtue as such, you know, this is what the Bible teaches, and this is what's virtuous that's required of us, that you're then accused of legalism.

Okay? She is right that legalism, actually, in my view, it has two different connotations. One of them is the Galatians 5. It talks about you have fallen from grace because you are seeking to be justified by law. So legalism is law justifies.

That's the first one. But legalism, there's another category which she mentioned, and you see this obviously in the New Testament where human beings make their own rules and they elevate them to the level of God's rules, and then invariably that human rule ends up canceling out God's rule. And so Jesus had to confront this a lot of time of Pharisees.

Now, if what we're saying is, well, premarital sex is wrong, the Bible makes it really clear. Or extra... Let's just call it extramarital sex because that includes adultery, fornication, and homosexuality. Okay? And the, you know, the technicality that gays give married now is irrelevant to this moral question biblically.

Okay? And then somebody says, "Oh, that's being legalistic." Wait a minute. I'm talking about virtue and morality here. I'm not talking about how somebody is justified before God.

We're just talking about what God requires. That's phariseical. That's judgmental.

Well, at some point there are judgments that are made. Jesus said, "Judge, buy an appropriate standard, not an inappropriate standard." So judgments aren't excluded from the Bible. I have a little section in tactics about this, by the way.

That some judgments are commanded. But this is the way people go to dismiss biblical imperatives. You can't just dismiss a biblical imperative if it properly applies to the Christian.

You can't just say, "Well, that's legalistic." Unless what you're doing is making justification dependent on that kind of thing instead of on Christ. But that's not what's going on when people say, Christians say the Bible invades against sexual immorality. That means if we're going to be Christians and followers of Christ, we shouldn't be

sexually immoral.

All right? That's not legalism. That's obedience. By the way, it's interesting because I crossed this bridge many, many years ago as a Christian.

Back in the light and powerhouse days, back in the mid-70s. Okay? And one of the things that instructed me was Titus chapter 3, I think it's Titus chapter 3. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness. The grace of God has appeared teaching us to deny ungodliness.

So denying ungodliness or saying that godliness is appropriate for Christians is not law. It's what the grace of God teaches us according to Paul's letter to Titus. Okay? So they're not at odds.

Grace and obedience are not at odds. That's not. And so obedience entails some kind of law.

But that's not the legalism that is prohibited, spoken against in the New Testament. Now, obviously, people who are really sticklers about right behavior can get into legalism and defact will make it an issue of salvation. To me, the only time it's an issue of salvation is when it's an indicative.

In other words, if you're living like hell, you're probably going there, even though you're claimed to be a Christian. All right? Paul talks about trajectories according to the flesh and according to the spirit. This is Romans 8. So there is a role of behavior in determining whether a person actually is born again, regenerate, and a follower of Jesus.

James make this point in James chapter 2. And other places the scripture mentions this. There's a propriety of assessing based on behavior. Why do you call me Lord, Lord? And you don't do the things that I say.

But that is not legalistic justification. That's a question of whether you've been justified by grace or not and having the evidence of it in your life. That's the issue there.

So it's unclear here why this Instagram is being accused of legalism. I just want to echo one thing you said, Greg. We're not one thing.

Everything you said. I was thinking, "Oh, the rest is plumber, man." It's not. I think people do confuse legalism with discipline, with virtue, with caring about true... With obedience.

And you really have to guard against that. So what can you do to avoid looking like you're a legalist on your Instagram account? And it might just be a matter of emphasis. So when you look at the epistles, what you see is that, especially with Paul, the first half will be concentrated on what Christ has done, on who God is, on the grace He gave us,

on our forgiveness, on our need for forgiveness.

All of these things He starts with. And then He moves to behavior because He's setting up first the idea of God's grace. And then He moves to, now that we are new creatures in Christ, He moves to how we should behave as new creatures.

And in a way that's worthy of the gospel in terms of our forgiveness and God's grace towards us who didn't deserve it. So keeping that in mind, if you look at your Instagram, are you being open about your need for forgiveness, about your need for grace, about the glory of God and what He's done? Are you focusing on that? And also, if there's something about virtue or doing good things, it's fine to have those things on your Instagram account, but it should be within the context of God's grace so that people don't get the impression that your righteousness comes by following the law. So that's something that you can do to avoid appearing that way and also to remind your own heart because the temptation in social media is to make ourselves look great.

That's the temptation. But the way you make God look great is by showing what He's done for you, by forgiving you. And so ironically, you make God look better if people are aware of your sin than if they're not aware of your sin.

So trying to look perfect doesn't make God look better. It actually hides the greatest glory, which is the cross. So the more open you are about your need for that, the greater God will look to others.

And so that's something you can keep in mind as you are posting things. Remember, you're trying to make God look good. Well, you're not trying to make it.

You're trying to reveal His goodness. You're not making Him look good. But you're trying to reveal His goodness in His name and glorify Him.

And that can involve a humbling of yourself and an openness about your need for Him. And so all of those things, I think, will make it less likely that people will misunderstand your Instagram and think that you're a legalist and that you're getting your righteousness by following the law. And that's really important because the world does not hear us saying the gospel.

It's been really interesting. There have been times when I've talked to people who aren't Christians and they've said, "Oh, Christianity is all about fear." And I try to explain the gospel to them. And it's like they don't even hear what I'm saying.

They all they see is you just have to follow these rules. You just have to follow these rules. They're carrots and sticks as our atheist friend Pine Creek.

So it's something we have to hit people over the head with. They're not hearing the gospel. So the more that you share that, the better, especially if you're also sharing good



things like virtues and how we should behave and honesty and all these different things you're trying to promote, you have to make sure you're sharing the gospel so people don't get the sense that we get our righteousness from the law.

To me, medicine is a perfect analogy regarding this claim that it's all about fear. A medicine has a component to it where it is letting you know your actual physical condition and the threat of your actual physical condition and the antidote to it. But it isn't just repairing what's wrong.

I mean, good medicine goes a step further and helps you to be healthy beyond healing the disease. But no one would characterize it. "My doctor, doctors, hospitals, surgeons, it's all about fear." Well, wait a minute.

If you've got a deadly disease, then you ought to be afraid of the consequences. They're there helping you deal with the disease and then practice habits that will keep you healthy. We see the exact same thing in Scripture.

It is an analysis and an assessment of a human condition. And it's a desperate condition that needs immediate help or else it's fatal spiritually. But we have more than fire insurance.

We have a way of living and flourishing given the dictates of God. And so both are in view here in Christianity. If people hit you with a "that's all about fear," I think it's fair to in a certain sense own the fear aspect because that's certainly true.

Don't fear him who can kill the body. Not that's all fear. Him who can kill the body and soul in hell.

That's Jesus Matthew 10. But it's not just that. It's not just a stick.

It's an invitation to be restored to God and be in His kingdom and be part of His family and enjoy the benefits of being in a friendship with God. But there's a barrier. There's a problem.

There's a deadly element. I hesitate to say sickness here. I don't want to carry the metaphor too far because the sickness is a willful disobedience.

And that's in the way and it has to be dealt with. And then there's an open arms. And so I think the medicine metaphor is very useful when people raise this issue of, well, it's all about fear or it's carrots and sticks or something like that.

And I like what you say, Greg, about restoring us to relationship with God. That is the goal. So the goal for your Instagram should be to bring glory to God.

Because God is the selling point here. We want to be with Him. That's the ultimate good.

Not even our flourishing, which is something that is wonderful. That's not even our ultimate good. Our ultimate good is God Himself.

So reveal Him to others. Make that your main goal on your Instagram page and then see what happens. All right.

Thank you, Jackson and Chimsie. We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your questions on Twitter with the hashtag #SDRAsk.

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

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