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What Tactical Approach Should I Take with Someone Who Says the Trinity Isn't Biblical?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about a good approach to take with someone who says the Trinity isn't biblical, how to respond to Jehovah's Witnesses who say Jesus received authority to forgive sins in Luke 4:18-19, and whether God "was looking for friends to collaborate with on running the world."

- * What's a good tactical approach to take when in conversation with someone who says the Trinity isn't biblical but was adopted much later in church history?
- * How would you respond to Jehovah's Witnesses who say Jesus didn't have authority to forgive sins because he was God, but rather he was given that authority as part of his anointing in Luke 4:18-19?
- * How would you respond to the claim that "from the beginning of time, God was looking for friends to collaborate with on running the world"?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-T-R-A-S-C-Podcast with Greg Kockel, starring Greg Kockel. I don't say that. I am here, that's it.

Okay, Greg, we have some kind of tactical-type questions here. The first one comes from Robert. What is a tactical approach? When in conversation with someone who says the Trinity isn't Biblical, that the Trinitarian view was adopted much later in church history? Well, I guess if you're taking a tactical approach, you'd ask for more clarification.

So when you say it isn't Biblical, do you mean the concepts are not taught in scripture? And if you say it is adopted later in church history, when later did the doctrine of the Trinity as such get invented? So those are clarification questions. Another question that's important is what is your understanding of the meaning of the Trinity? Okay, and simply put, there is one God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate persons or centers of consciousness, if you will, but they are not separate beings. They all equally share the nature of the one God.

Okay, now all we're doing is clarifying at this point. We are not advancing our case, and what I just offered is probably the most crisp way of putting it. One what and three who's others have put it, but I think you need a little bit more detail.

And the reason I put it that way is those are the three elements of the Trinity. First, there's one God. Second, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit are separate persons.

Third, they each share the divine nature of the one God. Okay, so there's not one being. I'm sorry, there's not three beings, but one.

All right. Now, once we get that clear, and that's part of the question, so what do you understand to get to be? If they don't get that quite right, you might correct them. This is what the view is.

Okay, so which part of this definition, next question, which part of this definition do you think is not substantiated by scripture? Now, of course, the oneness of God is very clear. There is one God, and you have the famous shimah of the Old Testament, which was held by Old New Testament believers, that there is one God. Behold, our God is one, Isaiah six or whatever.

So they are not going to take exception with that. Well, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separate persons. Well, they're all interacting in personal ways, so they're not going to take exception with that.

They might say, well, they're not all the one God. Okay, well, now all you have to do is go to texts that identify each the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as God, in the context, broader context, of the text affirming there's only one God. That's really key right there.

If the text affirms there's only one God and says that the person of the Father, the person of the Son, and the person of the Spirit are each God. Now you have three persons in the one God. That's the Trinity.

And the way to demonstrate this is that, and I talk about this in some material we have called the Trinity, a solution, not a problem, and I do outline this in the street smarts book. Okay, the one book that I've written that I can't remember the name of. It's the one most recent, this is not a good sign.

The street smarts book, and there's two chapters on Jesus, and they deal with this particular issue, the Trinity, because there's challenge on that issue. So I really parse it out there. But if we can demonstrate that, that each of the persons is called God, has divine attributes, and exercises divine prerogatives.

For example, only God should be worshiped, but Jesus received worship. Okay, so then we have all the pieces of the definition in the text of the New Testament. That it was all kind of brought together sometime later into a kind of coherent statement and a doctrine.

That's irrelevant. What's relevant is that the pieces of it are all there in the text. And it didn't happen that much later.

By the way, the most common characterization of Jesus by the early church was Jesus is Lord. And they didn't mean he's an exalted individual. He's Lordly.

No, Jesus is Lord. If you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart, God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. So the early church, very early on, that's in Romans, which is what? Mid-50s or something like that.

Very early on the church is confessing Jesus as Lord. At the same time that they acknowledged that Jesus wasn't the Father, and there's only one God. So this didn't come about in the third or fourth century.

In the end of the second century, Tertollian was the first one to use the word Trinity. But who is the first person to use the word gravity? I don't know. What's his name? Newton.

Newton. But he didn't invent it. It was still there.

He just gave it a name. So when the name is given is not relevant to the existence of the thing. And we can see the details of the existence of the thing right there in the earliest documents of the early church.

So the Trinity, as a matter of fact, was not invented later. It's resident in the text, but you have to characterize the Trinity accurately. And there are three elements, and I gave them already.

And if you find each, the question then tactically is, which one of these elements do you think is not biblical? And then when they raise one of the elements, you can go back to the text and show that. So how do we make all of this fit together, the Trinity? That's why the title of the material that I've produced on this, the talk, et cetera, is the Trinity is a solution, not a problem. If we take the texts seriously, it's a way of harmonizing the texts.

I really like asking them that question, which one of these is not biblical. Because then they have to be specific. I think that's a great way to go about it.

I think it's important to, and you made this point, Greg, but it's so important to say, we don't believe in the Trinity because later people thought it up. We believe it because of what the Bible says. That's really important.

If it's not that we're looking at their writings later on and saying, oh, these are good ideas, we're saying, oh, look at the arguments they made from scripture, their arguments are correct. And this can happen with any topic in the Bible. Maybe there's something, in the first 100 years, maybe they didn't think about every single topic in the Bible as much as they have over the years.

But as the years have gone by, people have thought very carefully about different aspects of

scripture. They've made a case from the Bible. And then we believe those things not because of that person sent it, but because of the case they made from the Bible.

And I think that your idea of bringing Newton into this is really helpful because you can ask, do you believe that gravity, I don't even remember what the equation is? Do you believe that that's the case? Oh, sad. I don't even know what it is. But do you believe that that's true because Newton said it? Or do you believe it because the evidence that he pointed to in nature supports his brilliant characterization of how nature is.

And I think that helps us to understand he didn't make up gravity. He just looked at the evidence and brought it all together in a way that we can all understand. But it's we believe it because he's right about nature, not because we just want to believe him.

All right, let's go into a question from link. Howdy, I was evangelizing to Jehovah's Witnesses a few days ago using Mark 2, 1 through 12, where Jesus has the authority for forgiveness sins. And I asked, but how? I said Jesus being God had his own authority.

The JWs said Jehovah gave him authority in his anointing in Luke 4, 18, and 19. How would you respond to this claim? What's interesting is the way that the Jews responded to Jesus in Mark 2. All right? Because Jesus is forgiving sins. And the Jews say, who can forgive sins but God alone.

Now to me this, I understand the point that they're making and I guess you could. There is a point, I think it's fair to say this, a point where the ability to announce forgiveness can be designated or delegated. Let's put it that way.

That's what Roman Catholics believe, for example. And they do that because their verses that seem to indicate that since you've retained, they are retained or have been retained as the past tense and those that you forgive, have been forgiven. But so I get their point.

But what's interesting is, first of all, so you've got to ask the question, is that the case? Is that what happened? Okay. Well, the Jews did think of that. That was the case in the passage in Mark 2. They said, who can forgive sins but God alone? Now Jesus does say, in order that you may know that I have the authority to forgive sins, I say to you, rise, take up your pellet and go home.

He doesn't say, yes, God's the one who's got authority but he can delegate it and it's been delegated to me. And to prove that, I'm going to do this. He doesn't take exception with their thinking.

He simply shows that he has the authority. So that strengthens the case. It seems to me that Jesus is exercising the authority to forgive sins in virtue of his divine nature.

All right. Now when we go to Luke chapter 4, let's just look at the passage. This is where Jesus is in Capernaum and he's reading from a text that has to do with, well, it's actually, he's in the synagogue, he's doing the reading.

He doesn't complete the reading for the day. He takes the prophet Isaiah, which was handed to him because that was the reading for the day, opens the book and finds the place where it's written and then he cites that the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he had noided me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.

I'm convinced that he's referring to spiritual oppression there and spiritual poverty. And then to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. That's it.

He's reading from Isaiah and he closes the book. Now all the eyes are on him because he stops short of the full reading because the next verse has to do with arguably the second coming, not the first, and then he explains today this passage has been fulfilled in your hearing. Where in those verses verse 18 and 19 do we have any intimation that Jesus has received the authority to forgive sins? It's not mentioned there.

So I don't know why they would say this is when he got the authority when he read that. Well, certainly all these things that Jesus, this text says that Jesus would do. Well, he didn't start doing them right then and look for he'd already been doing them.

He's just pointing out that this has been fulfilled. It's happening now. So it isn't as if in that moment he's invested with all of this.

He's just saying this verse applies to me. But this verse has nothing to do with forgiveness, authority to forgive sin that has been delegated to him. So I don't even see that in this passage.

So the mark reference still stands, I think, as a strong testimony to Jesus' authority to forgive sins. In virtue of the fact that he is God, he's got divine, a divine nature that gives him that authority. And incidentally, this is not an outlier mark too.

There are many, many examples in the New Testament where Jesus' divinity is affirmed. And John 8, for example, unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins. The Greek, your translations say, I am he, but the he is an italics.

You look at your translation, which means it's not in the original. He just says, Ego, Amy, I am, which is the name of God. And of course, the Jews reacted to that.

He says a number of times they get bugged. You're making yourself ought to be equal with God. That's in John 8. There's also John 5 where Jesus is given all authority to the Father so that everyone would honor me.

He says, even as they honor the Father, whoa, I give life myself, I have the authority to give life myself. He says in the same passage, just magnificent. But they would honor me even as the God doesn't share his glory, yet Jesus is saying they would honor me even as the honor of the Father.

So there are many, many other verses that dovetail in with the Mark passage. And nothing in the Luke passage that intimates what the Jehovah's Witnesses say it intimates. I do think the response of the other people is key.

They were responding to him as if he were saying he is God. That's really important in understanding what he meant because there's no, there's no attempt by Jesus to change their minds. He knew what they were thinking that says that in the text.

He doesn't say, you know, as everyone else in the Bible says when people accuse them of being God or say that they're God, they always say, no, don't worship me, I am not God. There is no angel who was equal to God, who could fit into the way that Jesus is described throughout the New Testament and what he claims for himself. If you have seen me, you've seen the Father.

Well, no angel is going to say that. So I'm Michael the Archangel, which is part of the Jehovah's Witness theology regarding Jesus. And I love your point too that that doesn't say anything about forgiveness.

If their argument is simply that he is anointed, well, there are plenty of anointed people in the Bible who didn't have the authority to forgive sins. So I think with all of those things, I would first go to that passage and say, where in this passage does it say God gave him that ability? So hopefully that is helpful to you delegated it, right? Okay, Greg, we're going to do one more here. This question comes from Vanessa.

My daughter was assigned a book in her Bible class at school where the author makes this claim. From the beginning of time, God was looking for friends to collaborate with on running the world. We explained to her why we thought this was an error, but we'd like to hear how you would respond to it.

Well, I guess I'd want to read more of that context to figure out what that person was trying to say and what that person was referring to. We do have passages in the Old Testament that say God is searching to and fro to find a person as hard as right towards him. He finds David a man after his own heart and then he anoints David to be the king, an overseer of his people.

And so there certainly is this notion, anthropomorphically, in other words, they're using the language that describes God as a mere human, looking around for someone. Now, of course, God doesn't have to look around and say, oh, there he is over there. I have just discovered the righteous man.

I have just found the one that I didn't know of before until I looked for him. Obviously, this is a, um, when, when characterized that way and seriously, that's a libel on God's character. He's omniscient.

He doesn't discover things like that. But we, we understand we sometimes in scripture does talk analogically about God's activity in using human traits as an analog. And so that's what I mean

by anthropomorphically, like a human being would look around.

Um, then, uh, well, we certainly have words to that effect in the Old, Old Testament and there, it is the case that God is, is partnering with people, um, Solomon, he prayed a prayer. God give me wisdom so I would be able to lead this people. Okay.

And, um, and we see other examples of that. It's clear that God is partnering with people to accomplish his purposes. He, he virtually always works, uh, immediately through something or someone else, not immediately bam, like that directly, um, especially the work of evangelism, et cetera, et cetera.

That's our job to do with God's help. So there is a sense in which I could be comfortable with that statement. I'd have to see more, I'd have to see more to see how they're characterizing it.

Well, I would say just as is, if you're going to say from the beginning of time, God was looking for friends to collaborate with what that suggests to me, that's kind of, uh, reminiscent of the idea of God, of Adam looking around and saying, Oh, none of these, these animals can be my helper. And so then God says it wasn't good. So then he creates the, the woman to me, this sounds very similar to that idea that God is looking around and it's not good because God wants friends to collaborate with.

So if that's what this is indicating, that's, that's, that's very, that's not good because you want, you want your, uh, you want your daughter to understand that God was not needing something. God wasn't looking around for something he lacked. God was complete in himself, the Trinitarian God, the three persons God interacting with each other in relationship with each other, enjoying each other, loving each other.

All these things were going around. It wasn't that God was, was looking for someone who could do this work and, Oh, I'm going to have to create them. I don't think that's how it was.

God was creating out of his fullness and his completeness, not out of his lack. So if that is indicated at all in what was being said, then that is a problem. You know, I did think of Michael Heiser when that question was characterized and on Mike Heiser's written a book called The Unseen Realm, Went to Be at the Lord, what four or five, maybe six months ago now.

But this book was an interesting book, The Unseen Realm, because part of what he was talking about, the case he makes is that God actually has employed angelic creatures to, to govern elements of the parts, you know, parts of the world. And this seems to be at least substantiated in some sense in that book. And it might be that this language, what occurred to me is that maybe that's language they read from Mike Heiser, but he's very careful to qualify it biblicated, a very particular sense.

And it is not the case that Amy is concerned about that. You mentioned just a moment ago, Amy, that God is missing something. He's trying to find some buddies to hang out with.

He's kind of lonely and he made people for that effect, for that purpose and then the partner with him. God is certainly partnering with us in many things. And it says, Paul says that in first Corinthians, what, three, that in the resurrection, we will, we will rule angels.

So we will have activity even after the resurrection, doing something meaningful. It's not that God couldn't do it, but he's, he is delegating those efforts to us. I think the kickoff or the tip off here is this God is from the beginning of time, God has been kind of lonely, you know, and looking around, gee, I'm so I need some buddies here.

And that's the tip off that maybe this is not really a sound. Now, I do think that we would have to see more more context because maybe all the this is saying, like you said, is when God created the world, he was, as you said, the verse, you know, his eyes going to and fro throughout the world, looking for people who love him and, and there is nothing wrong with that. So I think just those are the things to look out for it.

If that's what it's communicating, if it's just communicating God gathering his people and giving them work and doing things in the world through them, there's nothing wrong with that. So it, I guess, just evaluate it and look for those ideas. Well, when people talk about relationship with God, they're, they're intimating something like that in the story of reality.

I talk about us being in friendship with God, but I'm very careful to make the point that God wants us to be in friendship with him for our sake, not for his sake. It's so we can share in his happiness, not to increase his happiness. And that's the concern that we're talking about here.

Well, that's it for this show. Thank you, Robert and Link and Vanessa. Thank you for your question.

Send us your question on X with the hashtag SDRAsk or go to our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason. Thanks for listening.