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What Questions Could I Ask Someone Who Doesn't Seem to Have True, Saving Faith?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what questions to ask someone who claims to be a Christian but doesn't seem to have true, saving faith and when to stop trying to convince someone who denies some essentials of the faith that he needs to be saved.

* What questions could I ask someone who seemingly has a said faith rather than a true, saving faith?

* At what point do I stop trying to convince my grandfather, who denies some essentials of the faith, that he needs to be saved?

Transcript

[Music] Welcome to Stancher Reasons #STRAsk Podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koko. Hello, Greg. Hey, Ms. Hi.

All right, we're going to start today with a question from Kim. What questions could I ask someone who seemingly has a said faith, not a true saving faith? Well, my question would be when you say you're a Christian, what do you mean by that? I know I sound like a broken record. And incidentally, when I was at reality recently, I used that phrase with a group.

And then I had to ask them, is anybody here in this group know what that phrase means? It turned out nobody knew what it meant because there were a lot of young people that don't know what a record is. So a broken record makes no sense. But I just keep repeating myself in this case, the first columnal question, which is so practical.

So people, all kinds of people say they believe in Jesus and that, well, let me back up, a lot of people say they're Christian. And what they mean by that is they believe in Jesus. But as I pointed out to some who I know, there's a real problem here, like LDS, well, we're Christian because we believe in Jesus.

I asked them, do you think Muslims are Christian? Well, no, of course not. Well, they believe in Jesus too. In fact, there's more written about Jesus in the Quran than there is about Muhammad.

And it's just to make the point that there are lots of different Jesus is, so to speak. It's just last week I read 2 Corinthians, I think it's maybe 11, somewhere in there. And Paul talks about the Corinthians accepting a different Jesus.

And he's being sarcastic. He said, and you accepted so well. So in another apostles, you know, and stuff, they're not accepting him and his Jesus, but they're accepting some counterfeit.

But it makes the point that there are different characterizations of Jesus. And in fact, every single group that is kind of off the reservation, theologically, and I think with regards to classical Christianity, and certainly LDS as an example of that, and so are Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian scientists and new ages and a whole bunch of other people that claim Jesus. They have an entirely different understanding of who Jesus is than the scriptures identify.

And so that would be the question. Now, probably in when when you're talking and having conversation with someone who is in more conventional Christian environments, and they say they're Christian and you're thinking, I can see how they live their life and the way they make their decisions, everything that Jesus isn't a priority for them. Then you're just looking to find out about that.

When you say you're Christian, what is it that you mean? Do you follow Jesus? Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you love the Lord? I mean, I've asked questions like this too. Now you have to be careful when you ask it because you want to maintain a congenial atmosphere, so it doesn't sound like you're interrogating them to see if they've crossed every T and dotted every I. Of course, that's the issue there, but if they feel that you're doing that, then they're going to get offended and maybe defensive. So you want to be gentle when you start asking, I'm curious.

When you say you're Christian, there's lots of people who say they're Christian and they seem to mean a lot of different things. So I'm just curious, what is it when you mean when you say you're a Christian? And then see what they say. Sometimes when people identify themselves to me as a Christian, like, let's see, I'm in an airplane and somehow we've gotten on this topic and I they asked me where I'm going or what I'm doing and I bring that up and we talk about what I do or whatever and then I ask, are you if they don't volunteer the information, but they seem to be part have, you know, affirming in some way or head nodding towards what I'm doing, I might ask, well, what are your convictions? Or I might ask, are you a Christian or they might say that? If they say they're a Christian, then I say, oh, then you love the Lord.

And then I watch for the expression on their face. A Christian, a regenerate Christian loves the Lord and they love them, love the Lord with their mind and their heart. And what I mean by that, in this case is I'm using the mind to be the person other than the affections.

That isn't the the New Testament or the scripture uses the concept of heart as the whole person, but when people talk about heart nowadays, they mean affections. So what I mean is in their, in their mind and their soul, they are committed to Christ and they have some kind of emotional commitment to Christ that varies from people. Some people respond emotionally a lot, some less, I less probably than most.

But I'm just saying there's something inside that's connected with Jesus. And when I say, oh, feel of the Lord, then I watch their face. And if they, if their response is quizzical or they act like they're uncomfortable with that way of characterizing it, now I have a clue about what's really going on.

I'm not going to say, well, you're not really a Christian because that's an accusation contrary to what they believe about themselves. I'm just gathering information, which is the first step of the game plan. And, uh, and that's how I do it with those questions.

How I proceed just depends on the nature of the response. Well, I think it depends on what you're asking the questions for. Are you trying to find out if they're truly a Christian or are you trying to? Are you do you want questions to ask in order to draw them into a spiritual conversation? Yes, a spiritual conversation and to draw them towards Jesus.

So those are two different things. If your goal is just to fair it out, the truth about them. I'm actually not sure how much good that's ever going to do.

Cause like you said, I think they'll get defensive. But if your goal is to ask questions to draw them into a saving faith, in that case, um, well, the first thing you could do, obviously there was something that, um, caused Kim to ask this question. There's something about their life that looks like it's not true.

It's not right. Yeah. Yeah.

So maybe you could just simply ask, Hey, I, I've noticed that you are doing this. Like how do you square that with following Jesus? What is, how do you, how do you look at that? What, how do you make sense of that? Like living with your girlfriend. Yeah, it could be something like that.

Oftentimes that's what it amounts to. There's some kind of sexual behavior that's standard in that person's life. That's completely inconsistent because it's possible that this person really does want to follow Jesus and maybe doesn't even know what they're doing or that's always possible.

You know, uh, Paul talks about, or I don't know if it's Paul, but in, in the new Testament, there are places where it talks about snatching or Jude talks about snatching people out of the fire. Right. And those are true Christians.

So they're obviously living in the way they're not supposed to be living. I think there's a reference in, in first John chapter five, two, or something to that effect. Maybe something about admonishing them as a brother and that sort of thing.

So it's very possible that they are, they're engaging in some sort of sin that makes it look like they're not really following Jesus, but it's not necessarily the case that they're not saved. So I would definitely maybe challenge them a little bit. But the other thing is I would, in order to draw them in, I would let them see you live your life as a Christian because that made a huge impact on me when I became serious about my Christianity and I actually saw people for the first time who were living it out really seriously and it was central to their lives.

And so what I would do is let them see you live your life, open up your homes to them, draw them into fellowship when you're doing things with other Christians, bring them in, let them see how you live. Give them a glimpse of what it means to love the Lord. And so I think that's what I would probably try to do in order to draw somebody in.

Yeah, I just had another thought that came up and a lot of times with these questions, you have to be very careful, cagey. So it doesn't appear like you're shaming or dissing the person. I mean, I'd even be appropriate, but we're thinking tactically.

In light of the circumstances, they should be ashamed of what they're doing is what I'm saying. However, that may not be the most effective means to reach them. But one question is if they say, well, I'm a Christian and you're, you know, I'm a Christian too, and I'm really trying to live a, you know, a consistent life.

Help tell me, I'm curious, how, how does Jesus being a Christian and, uh, and believing in Jesus informed the decisions of your life? Okay, there's another one that might reveal something, but it's kind of like, gee, I'm living this way. I'm what, how, what are you, how do you do this? You know, again, shrewd as a serpents, but gentlest dubs and, and see what happened. I remember before I became a Christian, this is a half a century ago, but this memory sticks out.

So it's during the Jesus movement and the whole hippie thing and all that going on, this was probably 1971 or somewhere thereabouts. And I was talking to a couple and I think they picked me up hitchhiking somewhere and they were Christian or so they claimed, but it was, it was so obvious something about their behavior, their comment, their description of their life that they were sexually active. They were living together or something like that.

And I remember asking them as a non Christian, well, how does this, how does this square with your Christianity and what you say about Jesus? Cause I was raised Roman Catholic and then left all of that and all our family did too, but my younger brother, Mark had become a Christian a couple of years before I did. And he was, he was talking to me about Christ. So I knew there, Hey, there are rules to belonging to this enterprise, you know.

And so I asked them and they said, here's the way we decide. We decide whatever we do that makes us feel closer to Jesus. Um, that's, that's what, um, that's what we follow.

Okay. No, you can't see Amy, but Amy's eyes just went really big and round her eyebrows flew up in the air. And, and, um, so now this is very important.

If you're living in sin and it makes you feel closer to Jesus, you are not regenerate because the Holy spirit wouldn't allow that. I have a thing called the Christian curse. And the Christian curse is when you become regenerate, really, you can't enjoy sin anymore.

If you're not regenerate, you can enjoy it all day long. It's not a problem. You know, like I had one friend who said, I never struggled with sin before I became a Christian.

I never struggled. I just did it. Did whatever I want.

No big deal. Once you became a believer, there's a battle that goes on. Paul talks about it in, uh, in Galatians chapter five, but, but the Holy spirit is not going to allow you to continue in this behavior without convicting you of your rebellion.

And that is no fun. So if this couple is just following their feelings, which is a terrible criterion for trying to understand what the right thing is, what, why are they saying, whatever makes me feel closer to Jesus? They ever read the book. What Jesus himself requires.

So, and, uh, if, if they are regenerate living with each other is not going to make them feel closer to Jesus. They're going to be under conviction. And so that's, that's, uh, on balance or as a rule of thumb, not saying there can't be exceptions.

And when people first become Christian, they, you know, they're carnal. That's the nature of that. Paul talks about Galatians chapter two or three.

That's car, carnal, you're, you're babes in Christ. So it takes a while for even for me, my first year of Christianity for a whole lot of things to get cleared up. But I realized what I was living the way I was living wasn't right.

And, uh, so I got the way I put it as God catches this fish that he cleans them, you know, kind of thing. Well, I just want to clarify one thing I said before we go on to the next question. And when I'm talking about drawing them towards Jesus, I'm not talking about

the kind of drawing that God does.

Yeah, I'm talking about just bringing them into a situation where they can see people who are living for God because they may not have seen that before. And it's, it's something that's beautiful. And it's something that God uses to open people's eyes.

Clearly that's a good point. God uses that. So even the drawing that God does, he doesn't do that in a vacuum.

He uses all kinds of different means. This was one of them. I remember, is it Rosario Rosaria or sorry, a Butterfield and the impact that this pastor had on her life as he welcomed her and her, uh, her lesbian, uh, consort or whatever partner, uh, into their home on a regular basis.

And that really transformed her life. So these are things God uses. He uses the simple gospel.

He uses hospitality in her case. For example, uh, he uses the, the good example of other Christians. He uses apologetics.

He uses a good argument. So there are lots of things that God uses to, uh, to accomplish his end of bringing someone into the kingdom. Let's go on to a question from Eric.

My grandfather is a retired, episcopal deacon and very progressive in his beliefs, even denying essentials of the faith. He's 86 years old and does not have many years left. I've tried talking to him, send him both Elisa Childers and Christopher Yuan's books.

And he says he knows that he's saved and doesn't want to argue. At what point do I just let him go as sad as it is? Well, this is, uh, this is hard to answer. Um, I remember my dad's case.

Uh, he was a pretty crusty guy. Uh, he was a labor union leader from Chicago. Okay.

And he went from bankruptcy with four kids, uh, to being the vice president of a significant labor union in Chicago. So he's a tough cookie and he was not responsive. Uh, in fact, he was resistant to everything that his sons, history sons now, as Christians were saying to him for many, many, many years, he became a Christian, uh, about a year before he died.

And it had nothing to do with us. And frankly, in my mind, at least, uh, I had done what I could do and I just let it go. And I'd pray for him, but I just let it go.

And I didn't have a whole lot of opportunities to connect with him and talk to him about Christ, but God used some other means, the influence of his older sister in part and then, uh, open heart surgery to really get his attention. The challenge of an open heart surgery, which he survived, but they found a spot on his lung, which was metastasized into his

brain. Uh, and he died of brain cancer.

Um, you know, a little bit more than a year later, but when he got, he got converted, it was powerful and he was really transformed. So this was sometimes it's someone on the outside that you just, you know, that, that God uses you do what you can. And, um, you know, it, uh, there are certain things that I pursue.

There are godly goals on behalf of other people. And this happens in prayer. I just get fatigued.

I get so tired of praying that I lapse on that for a while. Now, you know, I think people have to make their own choices about this. Um, you pray, pray, pray, pray, pray.

You say, Oh man, okay, there it is, Lord, you know, and you, you do what you're going to do, but there it is. And then it might come back to it, whatever, but sometimes we just on our side, we just run out of gas and we run out of steam and maybe there's nothing else we can do in certain circumstances. Um, I'm not sure if that's good advice or not.

I'm just making an observation that that's human nature. That's the way it is. And, um, and then if you continue praying, you're not really praying with much faith because you're so worn out and you say, well, what good is this? All right.

But then oftentimes God will use someone on the outside to make a difference. Okay. It's ultimately in God's control.

Now sometimes though you have deathbed conversions and we just came back from series, we just finished our series in reality for this year. And in that series, Tim Barnett in this final presentation on doubt talked about his grandfather on his deathbed and how he got an opportunity, one last opportunity to share the gospel clearly with his grandfather who was in his 80s and or maybe a little older and without any resistance, without any pause, his grandfather said, yes, I want to receive Christ. I want to be a Christian.

And they prayed with him. I mean, Tim was when he talks about it. He said, wait a minute.

I, uh, you're sure you don't have any questions or challenges or pushback. I can answer his and apologize kind of thing. It was just right there.

It was the time was right. Today, that day was the day of salvation for his grandfather and, and, and within it, what a couple of days he was gone. So it was a deathbed conversion.

And, uh, that's the way it works sometimes. So I can't say what the circumstance will be for Eric. Um, I think if you really log your time and, uh, and you said what you can say,

and especially if the other person is not interested in talking, then you don't have to keep beating the drum, keep praying, trust God, put it in his hands and then see what God's going to do.

I don't know what else you could do. Yeah. I think I agree with that, Greg, you can keep praying for opportunities, pray for specific opportunities for things you can say that maybe aren't debates.

I don't know how you're interacting with him, but, um, he says he doesn't want to argue. Maybe there's a way to talk about it without arguing just by, by saying, by being open about your life, about your sin, about your forgiveness. Um, it's interesting to me that he says he's saved.

I, I would be interested to know what he means by that was, what does he save from? How was he saved? Especially in a Episcopal deacon who's progressive. We're right. He says he denies essentials of the faith and he didn't, he wasn't specific about which essentials he's talking about, but, um, maybe there's, if there's a way to talk to him about it without arguing, it might be too late for that because he might get defensive immediately.

But if there's a way to find out, what do you, what do you mean by being saved? And what does that mean to you? What, um, then maybe what you can go in there with the goal, the goal of clarity. Rather than taking that pressure off of you, of trying to convince him and just say, my goal is just to make sure he understands my position and what the Bible says about this and, um, not necessarily that I feel the pressure to convince him because God needs to work in his heart. So as you're asking him questions about what he, what he means by being saved and what he's being saved from, who's saving him, why, how, all those different things, you know, just say, well, that's really interesting.

And here's, here's, because I, what I think the Bible says, or here's what I think is, you know, and then Jesus said, Jesus said, or Paul said, you know, so I don't know how he interprets arguments or debates and, and it might be too late for this kind of conversation. If it's been a debate because he might interpret anything you say as a debate, it's hostility. Yeah.

Yeah. Uh, we've mentioned something about progressive Christians here, somewhat pejoratively, uh, just for clarification sake, we're not talking about politics here. We're not talking about progressive leftist politics.

We're talking about Christians who are called progressive because as Eric has described, they have, they have abandoned certain central elements of Christianity and they have abandoned them for a more, um, liberal kind of leftist understanding of, uh, cultural things and whatever, but we're not, we're not even talking about the politics. If they say you can't rely on the Bible and that's what the secular culture saying and Jesus didn't die

for your sins, which is what the secular culture says. That's child sacrifice and, or, or the cosmic child of use, that some will characterize it or, or whatever it is, this is a, this is a movement away from the foundations and the essentials.

These are characteristic of progressive Christianity theologically, regardless of their politics. So I just wanted to make that clear. Well, thank you, Eric and Kim.

Um, we, we hope you have learned something that's helpful here and will help you with your, your grandfather, your friend, whoever it is you're, you're talking about here. And we appreciate your question. So if you have a question, send it in on Twitter with the hashtag STR ask, or you can go through our website, just go to our podcast page for hashtag STR ask and you'll find a link there where you can send us your question.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason. [inaudible]