

# OpenTheo

## How Should I Interact with Someone Who Wants Sound-Bite Answers?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why God expects us to be perfectly moral if he doesn't expect us to be omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent and tips for interacting with someone who asks a lot of questions but then wants a sound-bite answer.

\* If God doesn't expect us to be omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent to gain eternal life, why does he expect us to be perfectly moral?

\* What are your tips for interacting with someone who asks a lot of questions but then wants a sound-bite answer?

### Transcript

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

All right we're going to start today with a question from Robert Zienstra Jr. God doesn't expect us to be omnipresent or omniscient, or omnipotent, to gain eternal life. But he does expect us to be perfectly moral. Why does he make this distinction, this distinction among his many infinite characteristics? I'm trying to understand the question.

It sounds like what he's saying God doesn't require us to have some characteristics of his nature, but he does require us to have other characteristics of his nature. And so I think there is a confusion here. There are some characteristics of God that are not communicable, that are inherent to the divine nature, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience are examples of that.

However, there are other things that are at least in principle within human capability. And that is, when I say human here, I'm talking about human as God created humans, not humans necessarily in the fallen state there and right now. When God created humans, he did not create them with moral perfection, meaning here that they were

intrinsically good in a way that they were not capable of doing evil.

Now God's moral perfection means that he can do whatever he wants and whatever he desires to do will be good. He created human beings in moral innocence. That means he didn't create them bad, he created them good.

There was nothing bad about them. There was no inclination to do evil about them. And so in that state, they could have followed God's law.

And that's the requirement, do what God says. Why? Because he's God. I know a lot of people don't like that, but that's the right answer.

It's God's world. And he's made us, and we live in his world, and his world is a good world, and he is a good God, and he wants us to be like him. And by the way, if we are good, like he is good, we will be happy like he is happy.

This is a connection a lot of people do not make it all. We talked about it, or I talked about it a little bit in the story of reality. I always say, "We because Amy has such a strong hand in the final product of anything I write." And thankfully so.

But that part of my own reflection on this whole process, and it is a reflection, but I think since God is supremely happy, and that's classical Christian doctrine, because he's supremely good, he created us to share in his happiness, but we can't experience his happiness without his goodness. So we were created innocent, and we could maintain the innocence and develop virtue by obeying God. And as we develop virtue, we would grow in our happiness, but it turns out that our forebearers chose otherwise, they chose to rebel, which then created a problem for the entire human race, and now we are fallen.

It doesn't mean that we have no obligation to be good. We still do, but this is a problem. So God is not requiring us to have any of his attributes, even moral perfection.

We didn't have that. What he requires is obedience, so that we live virtuously, even though our characters are capable of sitting, speaking of Adam here. And so I think there's just a little bit of mistaken category comparison here.

And I do think there's a time at the resurrection where we will be made immutably good. And so the goodness of God in that sense is a communicable attribute. That's something he can communicate to us.

It does leave the question open as to why he didn't do that in the beginning. And my reflection is that he wanted us to grow in virtue, and there was some benefit to that, rather than just being given moral perfection. But that's another question.

Because we can't answer for sure why he didn't do that doesn't mean that we can't answer the question of how man was created originally. Man wasn't created with any

divine attributes, because he's human. He's a creature.

But he was created in innocence without sin, though capable of city. I think, Greg, you hit the nail in the head when you said that these are different categories of characteristics. When we think about the difference, we have God who's morally perfect.

You have human beings who are limited and not morally perfect, and you have animals who are limited and not in a moral category at all. So we share the category of being moral creatures who can do right and wrong and intend to do right and wrong. We share that with God.

Whereas we don't share his unlimited attributes like omniscience or omnipresence, just by the nature of what we are. But that's not something that we're condemned for. It's just a different category.

Being limited doesn't separate us from God. The fact that we are not everywhere doesn't separate us from God. It's just not the same kind of category.

That's just the kind of being we are. A moral category is something that separates us from God because of his righteousness. So because he's just, he has to punish evil.

I mean, that's just the bottom line. Otherwise, he would not be a good judge. So that is why there are moral limitations and are failings.

It's not even a limitation. It's a failing. A limitation is the fact that I'm in one place at one time.

Or not a omnipresent or not a natural limitation. This is a failure. This is a failure because it's just a different kind of thing.

So God does require that we're perfect in Christ, not that we are perfect in ourselves. Obviously, he's going to show us grace and forgive us. But yes, he did require that everything be paid for and forgiven in order for us to be reconciled to him.

And that's because morality is the kind of thing that separates us from God. And so God can make limited creatures and that doesn't make them worse in terms of morally worse. It just makes them a lesser being in terms of capabilities.

With their contingent, God is non-contingent. All creatures are contingent in a variety of ways. Dependent.

So we see this all the time. The fact that a child can't do the same things an adult can do is not a moral category. So maybe this is tautological.

I'm not sure, but it's just a different category. I think this is something we could just see if we think about it. Did you have anything more to add to that? Some things are

blameworthy.

If not done, others are not blameworthy. If not done. It's not blameworthy not to know everything.

It is blameworthy not to obey. Right. Okay.

So hopefully that will clear things up. All right. Here's a question from Ashton Webb.

I have been able to begin having religious conversations with one of my co-workers. He asked me a lot of questions, but then wants a "sound bite" answer. What are your tips on how to deal with this? I would love to hear your answer because this is a tough one.

Well, does your sound bite? Come on, Greg. The sound bite sound bite. Yeah.

The sound bite isn't that easy. All right. A lot of what we do at Santa Reason, we call translation.

That is, we take a lot of these complex issues and we try to winnow them down to their core elements and throw the ball so people can catch it. And I think we do a good job at that. And oftentimes can, after thinking through an issue and explaining an issue, can offer a sound bite that might capture the sense of it.

Okay. But not everything can be captured in a sound bite. And that's like saying, explain like quantum physics in one sentence.

Explain anything in one sentence. It can't be done because most things are complex. I'll give you a sound bite.

A stitch in time saves nine. Some things can be captured in a sentence and you get the sense of it. And I think careful, let me back up and put it.

There is a there is a skill to being able to do that and to turn a phrase, so to speak, Frank Beckwith, many of you know, longtime friend of ours, Frank is really good at turning a phrase. I used to believe in reincarnation, but that wasn't a prior life. You know, this, so he's got a clever way of putting things.

When people say, what is the meaning of truth? He said, you want the true definition or the false definition. So notice how in a sound bite, he's able to communicate something powerful. Okay.

And really get to the heart of it. That's a skill that most people don't have. Frank's really good at it.

I think characteristically, it's the end of reason we do a pretty good job at it. But some issues cannot be reduced to a sound bite. That's all I could offer.

So in response to the friend, if I understood the question right, the question asked him. Yeah, Ashton said, I've explained some things to my friend, but then he says, give it to me in a sound bite. Well, if you've explained it, then hopefully he understands it.

Now, maybe he said, give it to me in a sound bite because he didn't understand the explanation. I guess as a general response, some things can be summed up in a fairly tight way and some things can't be summed up in a tight way. And to be able to do that, by the way, even when they can be, is a skill that's developed over time.

This is why I always keep my ears open for good sound bites that are sound. In other words, they capture the issue accurately and precisely. A lot of sound bites are too general.

They're clever. These are memes. We deal with some of them here on the show.

But the memes are clever, rhetorically clever, but they're misleading or they're ill-informed. So sound bites don't always serve our purpose as well. If we have a clear understanding of what's going on, an issue, and then can capture that in a phrase, good for us.

Great, but it can't always be done. If you listen to different speakers or teachers or read different things and you stumble on a sound bite that captures it accurately, great, grab it, use it. A big bang needs a big banger.

There you go. There's some sound bite for the column cosmological argument. You can buy Bill Craig's book on that or you could just have this sound bite.

And it really covers the bases. Now it doesn't cover objections or challenges or everything, but it conceptually helps you to understand what's going on. So I don't know if you have something to add to that Amos.

So he says here that he wants a sound bite answer and it's not clear what that means. Does that mean he won't let you finish? Does that mean he keeps asking questions? Does that mean he won't listen? Does that mean he's specifically asking no just yes or no? So it's kind of hard to know how to respond to him without knowing that. But my guess is he's probably just keeps talking or goes on to the next thing and doesn't want to hear a long answer.

So if you're facing that, I do have a couple tips for that. The first one would be to ask questions. I mean, this is just basic Colombo.

If he's the one talking, not you, he's going to be a lot more patient. So if you're asking him questions and you're trying to guide him into the actual response or the answer, if you're asking him questions, trying to guide him through that process, he might be a lot more patient because he's not sitting there having to concentrate on what you're saying.

He's actually having to think and respond.

And so that would be my first suggestion. Now, if that doesn't work, these are all tips from you, Greg. So I'm not going to take credit for these.

I'm listening. Ask permission to give your answer. So if he's interrupting you, just say, it's explained.

Yeah, this is going to take a little bit of time. Do you want an answer? I'd love to give you an answer. Can you give me five minutes to explain my answer? And once he's bought into that, if he says, yes, well, he's much more likely to listen to the actual answer.

So ask him permission. Next, stay on track because a lot of times people just want to move from topic to topic to topic. And it's so tempting, especially if he brings up a topic you really like and you have a quick answer to, but don't take the bait.

Follow the same question all the way to the end. Just keep bringing it back. Just keep saying, well, we were just talking about this.

Let's hold off on that. Why don't you write that down and we'll come back to that. But I want to finish this one.

So you just have to keep it on track and not give into the bait. And it's really hard to do that. So, and then if he's a steam roller, Greg, you have advice about steam rollers who just roll over the top with interruption.

Right. Yeah. So you want to give those the three? Oh, okay.

Well, yeah, if somebody keeps it basically what it amounts to, there's three steps. But basically, it is if somebody keeps interrupting you, you address the challenge. You say, you know, I'd like to give the answer here, but I need to finish this.

Is that okay with you? So you negotiate. And then if they say, okay, then, okay, then then you, and if they keep interrupting, then you pause and you wait for them to give you an opportunity. And then you address the interruption.

And there's very degrees of this that I talk about in the tactics book. And then, eventually, if you can't stop them from interrupting from steam rolling, you just abandon the conversation. The problem is because you're not going to get anywhere.

It's just, it's just, and this is a big problem. I had another thought though about this. Sometimes, when people want a simple answer, okay, like, for example, this, if I don't believe in Jesus, am I going to hell? Yes or no? Well, a reflection on sound Christian theology will allow you to give a yes or no answer.

But it doesn't explain why you're giving the answer you're giving. And it's possible for

the then the whole issue to be completely misunderstood. I was with Dennis Prager once before a Jewish audience, all Jewish audiences, except for our staff, and you were in the back of that room at that time, and was asked by Dennis on the stage, is Jesus the only way of salvation, believing in Jesus.

Now, of course, nobody in that room, except for standard reason staff, believed in Jesus. And if I simply said yes and left it at that, then it would be easy to assume that Christian views were anti-Semitic, that people are going to hell because they're Jewish. And so, I had to explain this.

I could give a yes or no, but that would, that would be misleading. And so, I went and gave a characterization. The problem isn't whether somebody's Jewish or Hindu or Buddha, whatever.

It's whether they're human in broken God's law, and if they're human, then they and broken God's law, they need forgiveness. And so, I was able to cash that out a little bit. Sometimes when people want a sound bite, they just want to simply yes or no.

And the simple yes or no, though accurate as far as it goes, will be misleading with regards to the deeper issue. And you don't want to do that if you can avoid it. Sometimes people will not give you the alternative.

I don't want to hear a bunch of mumbo jumbo. I just want to know yes or no. Does God hate gays? That's the ambiguous question actually.

No, God doesn't hate gays. He doesn't hate heterosexuals either. Though both may be in sin in their sexual life.

It just, the question is misconstrued as the issue. But sometimes you're stuck with these kinds of challenges and people are not willing to understand they are just trying to pigeonhole you. And that's sometimes the problem.

And then one last thing on this, Greg, sometimes I can remember a time many, many years ago. I mean, this was probably 30 years ago. And in one of my classes in college, there was somebody there who was very antagonistic towards Christianity.

And I hadn't opened my mouth yet about being a Christian. And I just remember, I finally was willing, I think I just wore a cross necklace. I was so scared to do this because of the sky.

And he, when he realized I was a Christian, the next thing I knew, he wanted to talk about it, legitimately talk about it and just asked me tons and tons of questions. So sometimes people who are asking a lot of questions, even if it seems like they're trying to mislead or they're trying to keep from getting an answer, sometimes there's a real interest there at the heart of it all that's pushing them to be talking to you at all. I would

rather be talking to somebody like this than somebody who just doesn't care at all.

A long time ago, I heard Greg Laurie say something like, if you throw a stone into a pack of dogs, the one that barks is the one that got hit. That's great. That's a great sound bite.

So if somebody is really stirred up by the ideas of Christianity and they're upset by it, there's something going on there. There's something that's catching their attention. So do what you can to keep this conversation going as long as you can.

There may come a time when you do have to just end it and it's clear it's not going anywhere. But give it as much time as you can and try using the questions, try asking permission, try staying on track and do whatever you can to hopefully see this person open up. That's all I got to say, Greg.

Great advice, Amy. As usual. Well, thank you, Robert and Ashton.

We appreciate hearing from you. We'd love to hear from you if you have a question on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk or go through our website. Just find our hashtag #STRAsk page and you'll find a link there to leave us your question.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.

(upbeat music)

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