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Is There Anything in the Gospel of John That a Mormon Might Object To?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about whether there's anything in the Gospel of John that a Bible study leader should be prepared to discuss with a Mormon who is interested in attending the study.

* Is there anything in the Gospel of John that I should be prepared to discuss with a Mormon who is interested in attending my Bible study?

Transcript

You're listening to the hashtag, STR Ask Podcast. I'm Amy Hall and I have with me, Greg Koukl. Hello, Greg.

And today, Greg, we are starting with a question from Sarah. I am leading a Bible study this fall on the Gospel of John. One lady who is interested and I'm praying will come as a Mormon.

I'm wondering if there is anything specifically in the Gospel of John that I should be prepared for a pushback on or that might be a stumbleback. I'm just wondering if you're struggling a lot for her. That's a good question.

There certainly are things in the Gospel of John that would be directly and specifically contrary to Mormon doctrine. And that is who is Jesus. Now, according to Mormon doctrine, Jesus is the Spirit brother of Lucifer, which probably should be qualified.

I guess you could correct me if I'm wrong. We're all Spirit brothers of Lucifer. You know, because we all existed in the pre-existence and in the pre-existence, God, for some reason, asked Satan and Lucifer for a plan for salvation for the world.

And God chose Jesus' plan rather than Lucifer's plan. And that's what made him mad. If I got that right as far as I've said it, did you understand it? That Lucifer led a rebellion.

He led a rebellion because he disagreed with Jesus' plan for salvation. Yeah. But that

means... Okay, I'm not going to go in there because that raises other questions, but I don't want to get off the topic here.

The key thing that I would focus in on in your presentation, a study of John is in the prologue of John where it talks about Jesus' pre-existence. In the beginning was the Word. Now, remember, the one identified the Word in verse 14 is the one who became the man that we call Jesus.

And so the Word added to himself a divine nature. Okay? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, so he's distinct from the Father, and the Word was God. In other words, he had the central quality of divinity.

But it's not that verse that matters so much because she would probably agree with that. It's verse 3. All things came into being through the Word, and apart from the Word, nothing came into being that has come into being. Okay, so there's a line of argument that I call, the Edie of Christ case closed, and they can find that on our website.

It's also in the new book coming out September 12th, available for pre-order at Amazon called Street Smarts. And what becomes clear from a careful look at verse 3 is that the one who became Jesus who is called the Word is the uncreated creator. Creator.

There is only one being who is not created, but is infinite or should say eternal by nature, no beginning, no end, and that's God. And so a careful look at verse 3, if Jesus is the uncreated Creator, all things came into being through Him and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being. That means apart from His agency.

That's what that means. And therefore, Jesus must be the uncreated Creator and therefore God, or else He would have had to create Himself since everything that was created was created by the Word. Now, that of course flies in the face of a core foundational tenet of Mormonism, and that is that Jesus is just like anybody else, just a better example of it.

Ontologically, in terms of His being, He's just like you and I. He's just worked at it longer to attain a virtue that puts Him closer to Godhood, or actually in Godhood, attaining Godhood, and we can do the same. He's a model to become like God. He is not the God, the only God of all creation.

And so that's where if this point is made clear at the very outset, and by the way, remember, this is the prologue by John. John is giving the back story of Jesus of Nazareth that He had pre-existence, and His pre-existence was at the Word, and as the Word, He was divine. Okay? But that by itself, verse one is not going to do it for you because she would likely agree with that.

It's verse three that makes it clear that He was divine because He was the only God, the one who created everything that was ever created. And the details in that article, the

deity of Christ's case closed, will help you to see that. It's unequivocal.

There's no way out of this in the passage. I even suggest a couple of ways that Jehovah's Witnesses have used to try to get around the logic of that, but there's no escaping the point that John is making because it's central to the rest of his presentation. The claims to divinity in the book of John are much more thoroughgoing and clear than in the Synoptic Gospels, and he's just learning a foundation there.

And so this being the unique divine one, even in places, especially John 8, for example, where he uses the divine name of God from the book of Exodus. I am that I am Yahweh. Jesus says, AGO IMI before Abraham was, AGO IMI.

I AM. And so in the Greek, he's just parroting, in a sense, the name of God that God gave to Moses. What's your name? I AM that I AM.

So there's no, the deity of Christ, the unique deity of Christ, not in any sense similar to what the LDS teach about the so-called deity of Christ is clarified in the book of John. And I think out of the gates, that's a good point to make because that's the point that John makes that we need to understand before we understand anything else about the life of Jesus. And the thing to keep in mind here is that you have to keep engaging her and asking questions because a lot of times she will agree with what you're saying and you won't realize that she has a completely different understanding.

So some Mormons believe there are things called intelligences that always existed, that God formed other, you know, or the gods have formed other beings out of. And so they will say, oh, they've always existed. And then they're, you know, they believe Jesus became a God.

Although this is where one of it gets a little tricky because it doesn't really make sense because in order to become a God, people had to follow a certain plan. They had to do certain things. They had to come to earth.

They had to do certain things on earth. So how is it that Jesus became divine before coming to earth? This is, you know, in John, he talks about the glory he had before the world he can. How did that? How is that the case? How is it the case that there are two gods when God knows of no other God? I mean, there are a lot of questions you can ask about this.

And sometimes I think a lot of Mormons haven't really thought carefully enough about this. So you can kind of, as you're talking about these things, you can ask her what she thinks about it. Now, you might want to do it after the Bible study.

So she doesn't feel like she's on the spot with all these other people or distract other other people and cause confusion for them. Yeah, but I think there are a lot of opportunities here. I think one thing that will come up especially is the Trinity.

So what you'll see in John and all the Gospels is the persons of the Trinity interacting, but especially in John because you have the high priestly prayer in John 17 and you have Jesus praying to the Father. And so that's going to be an example where she might not understand, well, can't you see that they are, you know, Jesus is praying to the Father. So there are two here.

Exactly. Yeah. That's part of our view.

Right. They are distinct. That is a great opportunity to explain the Trinity, you know, one being of God, three persons.

So we, a lot of Mormons don't understand this. They have, they think that we have a modalistic view where we where there's one person in one God who appears in different ways and modes. Yeah.

And so they look at something in John 17 and they'll say, well, clearly that's proving that your, the Trinity is false. So that's an example for that, that's an opportunity for you to explain what we know by that. By the way, if they're modalistic though, you're not going to get Jesus as one mode praying to the Father as a different mode.

There's a unity there and that's a contradiction of modalism actually. Right. And I think that's why she'll bring it up because she'll think it's contradicting the Christian view.

So it's an opportunity for you to say, no, this doesn't contradict the Christian view. Now, let me suggest this when I wrote a book, I rather a a solid ground a number of years ago about Mormonism. And the question there is, is it a subset of Christian classical Christianity? Is it denomination of Christianity? And the answer is no, it's a separate religion for the reasons I give there.

But I use this as a sort source book in order to get my, my doctor and accurate was the most up to date characterization of their beliefs. And it's simply called, I think it's LDS beliefs was the book. And it's published by Deseret Press, which is the press of the Mormon Church.

So what what it is, it is not a systematic theology because they don't have a systematic theology. That's why they don't publish one. But it is, it does talk about different topics in in a alphabetical characterization, like like an encyclopedia.

So there's one entry called God. And there's a page in half or something describing their understanding of God. And then they will have the next entry is the God head.

And this is their characterization of what they would think the Trinity is. We're mistaken. They reject the Trinity that we have, they have a kind of a Trinity.

And they explain it. The irony is that that what they say under God is contradicted on the

next page and what they say about the God head. And all you have to do is read it carefully, and you'll see the contradictions.

But what's important, especially under God head, is for Sarah to have a clear understanding of what the LDS Church means by the God head. And there it says, we believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe each are God.

Okay. But we believe each is as distinct from each other as you and I are distinct human beings. But we're not polytheistic, which excuse me, what you just described was polytheism.

So you have a right to your own beliefs, but you don't have a right to distort the language, you know, and this is what they've done. But it's important just to see their understanding of Trinity versus the Christian understanding of Trinity. And by the way, this isn't even to show who's right at this point.

It's just to be clear in the terms, it's clarity that we're looking for here. But I do want you to see the contradiction between the way God is characterized under the heading God and the way that the so-called Trinity, the Mormon Trinity is characterized under the God head. Yeah.

The idea of going for clarity, I think, is really important here. And you might even say to her before you start, hey, we're going to disagree on some things. So let's make the goal clarity.

Let's say we were clear about where our differences are. And that way, that takes kind of the pressure out of it. But one thing that you can do, Sarah, is be aware, and I think this is this is a great that's why this is a great question, be aware of where the differences are so that you can even anticipate that when you come to certain passages that indicate the Trinity, you don't have to bring her up and say, well, she believes this.

You have to do that. But what you might want to do is say, you might want to do is say, look, a lot of people misunderstand what's going on here. Let me explain.

And then you can get kind of ahead of the game here and explain what's going on in terms of the Trinity before she even has a time to object or before she feels singled out or whatever, you can spend some extra time explaining the differences as you come to them. And what the text means there in John 1 3. And by the way, when you get this piece of our website called the Trinity, no, I'm sorry, theity of Christ case closed. There's an exercise that I suggest people do with a piece of paper and a pen and a dime or a quarter or penny or something like that, some object.

And I suggest Sarah that you actually do this exercise with your whole class. Okay, now let's read here this passage. Okay, now we got verses one through three, especially verse three there.

All things came to being through him. And apart from him, nothing came into being that is coming to be. We're going to draw a piece of paper, a big square, and we'll just call it all things, everything that exists is in the square.

Okay, we divide the square in half. And on the one side, it says all things that never came into being and all things that came into being. Okay, so you have the two categories that are mutually exclusive, but all encompassing.

And then you say, what's on the left? Well, what's what's what is the one thing that that exists, but never came into being? Well, that would be God. Okay, so put God on the left, write that into your box there. And then on the right, everything else, because all the other things came into being.

Now you got a quarter or whatever, and you say, which box does Jesus fall into according to the the Apostle John? All things came into being through him and apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into being. Jesus was never the word who became Christ was never created. He's got to go on the left.

He's got to go on the left out of the right, because he can't create himself. Therefore Jesus, this passage teaches Jesus is God. And the God.

Not just a God, not just a God, the God who created every single thing and was never created. And that's the part that's going to fly right in the face of her theology, if she understands her theology. And there is no resolution outside of the resolution that we offer that Jesus is the uncreated creator.

Therefore he is the God of all creation. Another thing you might point out, and this is something I've discovered over time, is that Mormons, their goal, their ultimate goal is to be with their family. That's their ultimate goal.

So they want to follow these rules and things, and Jesus has provided a way to get there, but Jesus is a means to the to win it. He is the means. Their ultimate goal is to you know, be in the highest level of heaven.

Yes, they'll be with the Father. But if you, I found that asking a Mormon on the street, I mean, literally, they would say that their their highest goal is to be with their family. What you see on the other hand in John, especially, is Jesus as the focal point.

So the disciples love Jesus. They want to be with Jesus. That is their goal.

So one other thing you might want to do as you're going through John is make sure you're focusing on the beauty of Jesus and love for Jesus and your, and your, your emphasis is on him and knowing him rather than on following rules to become a better person or whatever. That is something not only is it a, is it a distinction that they, they might not have ever thought of, but they will, they will, and they might not even be able

to put into words, but it will make an impact on them. There was a book called Passport to Heaven, I think, about a missionary who, and a Mormon missionary who became a Christian.

And that was one of the things that really made an impression on him was the Christian's view of Jesus versus the Mormon view of Jesus, not even in terms of who he is, but how you even look at him or his place in your, in your worship. And so that is another thing that you can do with John. There was in John 14, Jesus says, I go and I prepare a place for you.

And if I do, I will come back for you and bring you to be where I am. So there's the focus on again that you're making. And then in John 17, he says, and this is, in his prayer to the Father, and this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and his son whom you have sent.

And so there's that emphasis again. Mm hmm. And I have a post on SDR.org called Who is the God of Mormonism.

If you want to look at that, there are also, I think there's a link there to another post I have called, Versus for your Conversations with Mormons. And that one has a bunch of different verses about who God is. And, you know, he says, I know of no other God.

How can he know of no other God, even if you're, if you're going to say, for this world, he, he knows there's, there are other God, even if you say for this world, there's Jesus. So if Jesus is a God, then he knows of another God for this world. So there, there are a lot of things that don't quite add up.

And so maybe those verses can help you with that. But again, you always need to be very clear. If you're using any sort of terminology, you have to be sure that you are just, it's better not to use the terms at all, just use other words to describe it.

If you say grace, if you say gospel, if you say, any of those words, they're going to hear what they know. And a lot of times they don't even know the differences. They have no idea that we don't believe in the pre-existence.

They, they, a lot of them don't know. That's right. Because they've been hearing it their whole lives and they just assume that we think the same things on some of these things.

I've encountered that myself. Yeah. They're totally mystified that we don't agree with them.

You, of course, believe this, right? I said, no, we don't. What? You know, it's amazing to them. There, there are some major differences and they don't know.

There's one, one more thing that, that you'll encounter. Mormons think that Jesus atoned

for our sins in the Garden of Gethsemane. And I think they might think he finished it on the cross or whatever, but they think that that's where he was atoning for sins.

So that's another thing you can explain when you come to the cross, look for other places where the cross is discussed and throughout Paul's letters, you'll find plenty of things there. So when you get to that part, you can talk about how he's atoning on the cross and just emphasize that. So that would be another thing that I would emphasize.

Okay. And I think that's it, Greg. Do you have any other ideas for what you use the whole show on that? Oh, there's a lot there.

And by the way, there's a lot in the book, LDS beliefs, that about the family. And it's really clear there that this is a key to the whole plan of salvation, the family, which as ironic to me, and I write about this in the piece, is Mormonism, a denomination of Christianity. The title is something like that.

And it's just amazing to me because Jesus makes it very clear that there's no marriage in heaven. I don't know how that got overlooked, but in any event. Well, thank you, Sarah.

And I hope it goes well for you. And this is helpful. If you'd like to send us your question, you can see that on Twitter with the hashtag STRask or you can go through our website at str.org. Just look for our hashtag STRaskPodcast page.

And that is where you will find the link. We'd love to hear from you. We're always looking for more questions.

I go through every single one that comes in. I look at every single one. I will not miss yours.

So we look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.