

OpenTheo

They're Only Christians Because They Were Indoctrinated at a Young Age

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether most Christians are only Christians because they were indoctrinated at a young age, whether getting pregnant out of wedlock was “just God’s plan,” underlining text in books, and whether we should always find something new in the Bible when we read it.

- * How would you respond to someone who argues that since 60% of American Christians came to their faith between the ages of four and fourteen, that means most people in the church are only Christians because parents and churches indoctrinated them at a young age?
- * How should one respond when someone who got pregnant out of wedlock says, “I guess it was just God’s plan”?
- * Do you ever underline or highlight text in a book you’re reading, or do you always use pencil to allow for changes?
- * Preachers say the Bible is a living book wherein you always find something new, yet I seem to only keep hearing the same thing.

Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cokel and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag, STRask Podcast. Okay.

Good morning, Greg. Let's go. Alright, this is going to be a kind of a random collection.

Sometimes I have a bunch of questions and they don't seem to fit into a particular category. So we'll just throw these all together today. Ms. Mosh.

This first one comes from Brian. According to several studies, over 60% of American Christians came to their faith between the ages of 4 and 14. How would you respond to

someone who cites this as an argument that most people are only Christians because parents and churches have indoctrinated children at a young age? Well, I'd respond by you might be right.

I object to the term indoctrinate, alright, because it's a pejorative term that what you're doing is kind of grilling them in some way so that they believe falsehoods that are harmful or something like that. So, I'm going to say that's the term indoctrinate which has been used of his Prager U, etc. And he said, what are we doing when we indoctrinate? We're teaching doctrine.

That's what everybody does. Now, it is the left indoctrinate. Yes, of course.

Do people in the middle indoctrinate? Yeah, they teach their kids to stay in the middle. If you are saying, I'm not going to teach you about children, I'm not going to teach you about God, I'm going to let you make your own decision. You're indoctrinating with a different viewpoint.

You are saying that religious questions are questions that are completely subjective and they're up to the individual and they get old enough to decide what they like for themselves. That's an indoctrination too. Okay.

So, I want to make the observation though that this doesn't tell us anything about the truth. The truthfulness of the things that young people are allegedly being indoctrinated by. This is a sidestep.

It's kind of like a person, an atheist who says, well, you're a Christian because you're raised in America. So, now we just brought the group from the home to the culture. Okay, but it's the same issue.

You're a Christian because you're raised in a Christian home or you're a Christian because you're raised in America. If you were in India or in Arabia or something, you wouldn't be a Christian. You would be raised in a Muslim home or a Hindu home and therefore you would be Muslim or Hindu.

Oh, okay. You might be right about that because all that is is an observation about the nature of culture and its influence on people's beliefs. It doesn't tell you anything about either Christianity or Islam or Hinduism about the legitimacy of any of those things.

It just tells you why people may choose the things they choose. Okay. Our question is not what is the anthropological explanation of why groups of people believe particular things.

Our question is whether Christianity properly understood is worth believing and is true over and against. Something like Hinduism or Islam. And by the way, this whole thing can be turned on its head because my comment to the atheist will be, well, if you lived in

India, if you were raised in India or you were raised in Saudi Arabia, you wouldn't be an atheist.

What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Now, of course, my view is it's not sauce for either. It tells you nothing important about anything regarding the validity or legitimacy of any religious claim.

It just tells you about how culture works. This is anthropology and psychology. That's all it is.

It's not relevant to our question is what is the nature of the world we live in and which view of reality is most accurate to real reality. Right. We want to know what matters is what's true, not how people learned it.

And certainly children learn lots of true things. So maybe you could ask, so does that mean everything children are taught is false because they learned it between the ages of four and 14 from their parents is math false. It just doesn't make sense.

And I think in any other area, nobody would make this claim because they put religion in this different category. And I don't understand this objection at all. Here's another illustration that I thought of long ago, and I haven't used it for a while, but it fits this.

Okay. If you're in the Amazon region, for example, Amazon River region, you have tribal peoples that believe that disease is caused by demons. Okay.

Why do they believe that? Because that's what their parents taught them. Okay. Well, if you go to New York City, people there believe that Jesus disease is caused by germs.

Why do they believe that? Because they were taught that by their people and their culture. Okay. What does that tell you about the nature of disease? It doesn't tell you anything.

It tells you something about the cultures. You have to take a step further and say, what is the cause of disease and what reasons do we have to support that notion? And so that's all we're facing here is another one of those kinds of appeals. And it might be that a lot of these 60% of American Christians have never thought about reasons, but again, that doesn't mean anything about whether or not it's true.

That's correct. Okay. Here's a question from Amber.

How do you respond when someone who got pregnant out of wedlock says, I guess it was just God's plan? I don't want to agree that God purposefully planned for them to commit sin, but I also don't want to intentionally disparage the child because a child is a blessing from God. Well, the statement, I guess it was just God's plan is not referring to the sinful action. It's referring to the pregnancy, as I understand it.

And so there, I think there's an appropriate way to approach this and seeing God's sovereign hand in the cons, even as in play in the consequences of our sinful action. Okay. All of my children were born out of wedlock.

My step son, Dane, and both of my daughters who we adopted. Okay. So do I see God's hand in that? Sure.

Does that confirm or does that sanitize the behavior that led to it? No. God's sovereignty can take all kinds of things. We know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him or are called according to his purpose.

Okay. And so there's an example of a promise pertaining to Christians that God is going to take these bad things and work them to a good end. Okay, particularly for us to be like Christ is what the text says.

But that doesn't mean that the things that God is going to use to make us like Christ, God's plan, God's purpose. That doesn't mean that what caused those things to begin with are good and holy and righteous things that God approves of. It just shows God's ability to take even the bad things and do something good with them.

I'm not entirely sure the sense in which this young lady, Amber's friend, meant, well, I guess it was all part of God's plan. But I would make a distinction between the sinful behavior, which was not appropriate and the good thing that God is producing as a result of that behavior, a new life, for example. So a lot depends on what she meant.

Yeah, and I'm not even sure you would have to go into it with her. But yeah, you don't want to intentionally disparage the child. My guess is you're right.

The life of the child is God's plan. I'm guessing that's what she's referring to. But God does work through sin for good.

Like think about the Joseph story. And so even in that case, I would say that the Joseph's brother sent him into slavery and he saved everybody. And then could you say, I guess that was just God's plan? Yes, because it was just God's plan.

So you can say that even when God is using people's sin to do something good and to bring a life into the world or whatever it is that he does. So I don't, I wouldn't worry too much about thinking that is what's word, condoning the sin. I doubt she's thinking that either.

I think there are plenty of ways to look at this in a different way. All right. So let's go to see for the truth.

The article really. See for the truth. I always think of like the explosive C4.

I guess that's what he's referring to. Maybe it is. He has said it a few different questions

over the years.

The article reading less twice as fast. The section on read says to mark the margin, but don't underline the text. Curious, do you ever underline or highlight text in a book you're reading? Or do you always use pencil to allow for changes? No, I do.

I don't highlight. I highlight my Bible sometimes with a with a colored pencil, not with a marker like a because it bleeds through. But if you use a colored pencil like you can buy those for your Bible, then it'll make it yellow, you know, yellow lead.

And then I'll do that. But only for real standout verses like things like I am the way the truth in the life. No matter comes to the Father but through me.

I mean, these iconic passages. If anybody is in Christ, he's a new creature. Old things have passed away.

New things have come. So these are the ones that I would likely underline. I'm sorry, but I'd highlight with a yellow pencil.

But all the rest of the stuff now I do with pencil. And partly because it doesn't bleed through into, you know, onion skin type pages. And also sometimes I do erase things.

I ask questions about something. Well, what about this? It's happened just a couple days ago. And then I realized when I read further, this time I was reading through, I said, well, that question doesn't even apply to this text because now I'm reading with fresh eyes, if you will, I saw something ahead and seen.

So I raised it. Okay. When I'm reading that's Bible.

When I'm reading books, though, it's hard sometimes not to underline stuff. But the problem with underlining a lot of stuff is that it slows you down when you're reading. And the idea of that I mentioned in the article is by putting a little vertical line in the margin on those lines that were significant is that's easily done very quickly.

And it alerts you to passages that when you do your post read, you come back over the passage. You're not going to read everything. You're going to read the things that in your first read through stood out and you thought were important.

And then you could look more closely at that. And then you might underline some things or circle some words or whatever, draw some some lines of reference or something if you if you feel that's helpful. Whatever it is that helps you to retain the ideas and that are important and recall them.

That's the point of of interacting with the text. It's too easy to forget things, especially your first time through. I want to go back and see my marks.

But I do lots of times give into the tendency of just running that pencil horizontally under the lines. And it slows me down. Okay.

So if I want to read fastest read less more as the article states. I'm not going to do that in my first run. The second run, I'm just making marks in the margin.

Horrors vertically on the lines that I want to return to. Then I might when I return to them underline some. But that's the next time through.

Yeah, I used to highlight in books, but now I just use a pen. I do the vertical lines on the side, but I mostly use Kindle now. So I do highlight in there and take notes in there.

So I don't read as much physical books anymore because I like having my notes everywhere. I go on my phone and my computer everywhere. And being able to look things up.

I'm a big proponent of reading on Kindle. But I know people say that you can't necessarily remember as much that way. But I just find it really helpful, especially if I'm writing posts and things.

If I can copy and paste and I can search and later. You can find what you're looking for. I have all my books with me all the time.

Yeah, that's true. And I can't bring my library with me all the time. Sometimes I can't find it.

And I think where was that citation that I just thought of? But you're, you know, I just, I just like having a book in my hand flipping through the pages, looking back and forth. What did I just read? Now, I guess you could do that kind of with Kindle, but to me, the dynamic is different. The field is different.

The sense is different. So I get that. I get that.

Okay. Let's take a question from Sven Janssen's. Creatures and teachers keep saying to keep reading the Bible that it is a living book wherein you always find something new.

Yet it seems that the only thing I keep hearing is basically the same thing except different and sometimes more complicated. Well, if it seems more complicated the second time. Sorry, it said more complicated way.

I guess I'm not exactly sure what the concern is. When we say that the text is living, I mean, we have to qualify what that means. And the writer Hebrews in chapter four verse 12 talks about an aspect of the of God's word that.

That has a powerful impact on us in particular ways. Judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart, you know, we read through things and we get convicted by certain things

we read. Don't return evil for evil.

Okay. And you read that. You think, you know, the way I responded to my spouse last night.

I reacted and I thought, Oh, that was a great one. I got her, you know, or I got him, whatever. But then you think about it.

Well, that was all I was doing was returning evil for perceived evil. Okay. So there's a conviction there.

So I'm not exactly sure what the concern is. I don't think there's any guarantee that every time you read through a text, you're going to see new stuff. I don't see new stuff every time I read through a text.

And I'm trying on a regular basis to read through the text, you know, so I just finished job. I actually got more out of the Bible project characterization of Joe because it gave me a big picture. Look at it.

That you sometimes get lost in with all the 42 chapters of all of this poetic characterization of bad advice given to Joe. And but having watched that beforehand, it was a little bit more meaningful to me when I went through and read it. So if I don't have an expectation that every time I go to this, the text, I'm going to see something new and something wonderful.

It just doesn't work that way for me. I do go to the text with an attitude of prayer. God, this is your word.

I'm here to be instructed. You want to speak to me, then speak to me. A lot of times it's just reinforcing things that I already know.

Sometimes the aha moments come not when I'm reading on my own, but like Sunday, when my pastor taught on to live as Christ and to die as gain. And that section of Ephesians or Philippians rather that dealt with that. And there was a lot that I got out of the sermon because of the way he emphasized these passages that I probably would not have gotten by myself.

But being familiar with the passage because of reading it so often, I think what was a precondition that made the sermon more effective for me. So there might be an expectation from the text that's not a reasonable one. This person is having one he's reading.

And I would say too, what do you mean by living book? I actually, the passage in Hebrews, I'm not convinced that's talking about scripture. I think it's talking about the word of judgment that God just declared in that directly before that and that the idea

that we can't escape that. So the idea that is living, I think people might have a weird idea of what that means like you were saying, Greg, the text, it doesn't change.

The text is the same. The meaning is the same. Now, we might just not have a good enough understanding of that meaning.

So like you said, the more we the better we know the passage, the more we'll see how it fits in with other passages in the Bible. We might see more connections with other parts that we didn't make that connection before. So what's changing is not the text.

What's changing is our ability to see what's in the text. So in that sense, you can find something that's new to you, but it's not new to the text. It's not something that grew there and now is appearing there for you.

Now, what does change is the application. So maybe you are in a completely different situation in your life and you read through it and suddenly you see because of what you're going through, you see an application of the text that you never really understood before or the Holy Spirit could use it to convict you about some sin that you're engaging in. So in those senses, things will stand out to you because of where you are in your life.

But again, this is not, it's not that there's something new in the text. It's that something in you has changed, either you're understanding or you situation so that you can apply the text to your situation. Sometimes I think that when people say the Bible is living, what they mean, and it's clear in the way they're using this, they mean that it has different meanings for different people.

And so what they're doing is subjectivizing the text. They're saying the Holy Spirit spoke to me out of these lines, out of these phrases. Okay.

And that's a message to me personally. It might not be a message to you personally, but it's a message to me. This is what we're fighting when we talk to people about never reading a Bible verse.

Because they're looking for privatized messages just for them and they call that the living word. Okay. That it has different meanings, different messages that are being communicated to different people.

What's interesting there is the meaning then is not in the text and the intention of the author. The meaning is in the subjective experience of the reader. And that's a postmodern relativistic way of understanding texts.

Okay. However, somebody could be meaning that there is something, the Bible is a different kind of book than any other book because this is God's word speaking. It has the power to change us in ways that mere human books do not have.

It is unique in that regard because it's God's word. And that of course is true. There is a transforming effect of the scripture has because it's God breathed and God speaking through the text to make a difference in the lives of people that are reading it.

It isn't a different message for every person. It is a powerful message that is fixed in the text that because it's God's message and the Holy Spirit is using it, it has the ability to bring transformation to our lives as we read it. Now, if you are possibly starting to get bored, my suggestion would be you probably need to go deeper.

And what I mean by that is there was a guy named James Gray who he wanted to teach people how to master the English Bible. And so what he said was you read through it over and over and over and over. And you'll get to some point where it'll start to, you'll just plateau for a while.

But then you actually go deeper and then you're able to see it's because it's a matter of mastering it. And again, seeing the entire book from beginning to end and seeing how the parts fit together and how it fits in with other parts of the Bible. So the better you know it, the more interesting it will be the more you will see.

And if you let yourself just become bored and you give up on that, then you're going to miss out on knowing it better. Well, this is why interacting with the text with a pencil, for example, I think is so helpful for me. I'm reading solely.

We've talked about this before. Sometimes you've suggested just read through and really get the big picture, so to speak, and the whole flow of it. That is a valuable way of approaching the text.

Another way is just to move more slowly and really look closely at the words and the arrangement. If looking at parallelism, looking at repeated concepts, looking at how these things are structured, even I used to do this as a kid, not as a Christian, but just with language, I was taught how to, what do they call it now? And then you get a line and you get a line across and it separates. Then you have all these rest of these phrases and words.

There's ways of demonstrating the relationships between these words. This is how you are able to, to in a certain sense, decipher the meaning of a sentence, because you can see visually how one phrase is associated with or attached to other words that they're modifying. It keeps you from misunderstanding the meaning if you see how these things are done.

Now, if you never even taught to do this, it's not easy to do it, but I was taught to do it, and I do it mentally all the time when I'm going through a text. I'm seeing which phrases modify other phrases, and this helps unlock the meaning of the passage. So maybe interacting like that will take some of the boredom away.

Memorizing, you have to do that in order to memorize. You have to think about it that carefully and that closely. So memorizing a large passage, a chapter or two, or a whole book, I think we'll accomplish that too.

Which you've done. And it is so worth it. It is so worth it.

Let me add too, just what I said a moment ago, I've made reference to the Bible project. And these are little animated feature outs that give you an overview of a book that helps you to see the big picture quickly so that when you're reading through the book, you can see you are aware of how these different parts relate to each other. Well, thank you all for your questions.

Send us your question on our website at str.org or you can go through the platform form on Twitter. I'm never going to get over that. All right, but we love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.