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## How Can I Start Conversations with Postmodernists about the Need for Repentance?

March 25, 2024



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to start conversations with postmodernists about the need for repentance and what question one can use to put a stone in the shoe of a Buddhist friend.

- \* In a postmodern world, what tools can believers use to start a conversation about the need for repentance?
- \* What question can I use to put a stone in the shoe of my Buddhist friend?

### Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-C-R-Ask podcast. And this is a podcast where you send us your questions through X or through our website, and then I read them all and we answer some. That's well put.

Yes. But we always love to have as many as possible because I like to choose ones I think a lot of people are interested in. Sometimes I can see just from maybe I'll get a bunch of the same question what's going on out there and what people are really wanting to learn about.

Okay. Today, Greg, we have tactics questions. So we're going to start with one from Dean.

In a postmodern world, what tools do believers have to start a conversation about the need for repentance? I understand the question. It come up a lot because the culture is so relativistic. Okay.

Even so, human beings, and this has been something that I learned as a brand new Christian from Francis Shaver and has stood me in good stead for half a century. And that is regardless of the frame of mind people have, in this case postmodern radical relativism, especially when it comes to morality, they are still human beings made the

image of God and they have to live in the world that God made. Okay.

Now, this is at the core of the inside out tactic, which is in the 10 year anniversary edition of the book. And the point there is that God has built things on the inside of every human being that eventually comes out when they're not, especially when they're not guarding turf. Sometimes they're even guarding turf.

It still comes out like a person who says, well, morality is relative. There's no absolute right or wrong. Okay.

So therefore, it's wrong for you to push your morality on me. Okay. Notice there's the contradiction built right in.

On the one hand, they're speaking from their philosophy of relativism, but then the next statement, they are making a moral claim. It's wrong for you to do such as so. Actually, if morals are relative, it can't be wrong.

For anyone to push anybody's morality on anybody else. It's just whatever one is capable of doing. That's the only limitation power.

But why do they say things like that? Why does Richard Dawkins say that we live in a world in which there's no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference? Well, that's the way the world is. If piteralism is true, that's consistent with his view, but then he complains about the God of the Bible being an immoral God. Well, wait a minute.

Where did that morality just come from? So on the one hand, he's speaking from the perspective of his philosophy. Next, he's speaking as a human being made in the image of God by making the moral judgment on God. Now, I don't think his moral judgment is accurate, but the act of making the moral judgment is consistent with being human.

So what this amounts to in terms of this question is that you can count on the fact that there is something true that every person is aware of, even if they're not aware of it. And what I mean here is a dispositional belief. They may not be consciously thinking about it, but it's something they believe deep down inside, which informs their talk and their behavior.

This is why people say the things that in both of those illustrations that they offered that they say. And the fact is people know they're broken. They know they're broken.

A good introduction to this concept is in mere Christianity. Just take the first four or five pages of that book because he's talking about the way people talk about morality. On the one hand, they'll claim there is no morality.

Then they say, well, that's not fair. I gave you one of my piece of words. Why don't you give me your piece of words? Or you should be cutting in line in front of me or something

like that.

He said, all of these kinds of comments reflect a basic understanding of morality that's built in. And it betrays or belies the claims we're making about being, say, in this case, opposed modernist. That can always be appealed to.

Okay. There's two ways to do it. It seems to me.

One way is to just ask questions about the contradiction. Wait a minute. I'm confused.

What do you mean you're confused? Well, you just told me there's no objective morality. Yes, of course. Well, then how can it be wrong for me to push my morality on you? That's the question.

Okay. So that's a, that's actually it's a column number one. It's a request for clarification.

What do you mean by that? That your comments are contradictory. You're inconsistent. So tell me which is true.

Is it wrong to push my morality on you? Okay. Or is there no morality at all? Can't be both. So that's one way.

You listen for the truth that comes out against the person from that person against that same person's alleged worldview or point of view with regards to just about anything. And so that and then you ask questions about it. Wait, I'm and I think the bridge and I just told this to somebody else just last week in Ohio, where I was doing presentations and during the Q&A.

And I thought, this is a good bridge. Hey, I'm confused. I'm confused.

What do you mean you're confused? Well, you said this, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then you said this. So how did that work? So that's the nature of your column tactical maneuver there.

Now, here's another. So now you're going for the contradiction. You're asking for them to make sense of it.

Here's another approach though. And that is, is you just go to the existential issue, existential issue being the awareness that people have of their own actual state. People know they're guilty.

How do they know they're guilty because they feel guilty? You know, they feel guilty about all kinds of things and they have to quell it or try to disregard it or say, well, that doesn't apply to me. And Lewis talks about this too in the first few pages of mere Christianity. That's an unjust law.

So I'm exempted. The excuses that we give are ways of saying, well, in my circumstance, I'm exempted from that moral law. That's kind of what's going on there.

But the fact is, we can only do that so long. It's only, it could be commencing for a while, but ultimately, we know that we're broken. And I mentioned this many times.

This, this lecture I gave it to Cal and Berkeley on right on campus, a big full house, large auditorium, completely full overflow rooms. And I ended up as a talk on relativism. But at the end, when I'm making the point that relativism is false, therefore, some form of moral objectivism must be true.

This has explanatory power. What it explains is the feelings that you have about your own, the dark thing inside of you. Is that in the running? Okay.

And then my response is the answer to guilt is not denial. That's relativism, postmodernism, if you will. The answer to guilt is forgiveness.

And this, I said, is where Jesus comes in. Now, I actually really like that stepping stone. And I don't know if I plan that out in advance or not, but this is the way it came out.

And I've remembered it ever since because to me, it's so poignant. It even touches my heart when I think of it now. Why do you feel guilty? Because you are guilty.

The answer to guilt is not denial. It's forgiveness. And this is where Jesus comes in.

So anyway, those are, lines are all meant to touch the heart, to go right past, in a sense, the intellect, and to speak directly to the existential awareness people have. And that is a very, very powerful way of speaking to people because their human beings made the image of God and they have to live in the world that God made. And so this makes your speaking truth to them that they can't deny deep inside themselves.

They can deny it to you, to your face. Oh, no, no, no, no. That would be my recommendation.

Maybe you have something more to say, but I think you keep your ears open for the contradiction because nobody can live a consistent, relativistic life, except for a sociopath. I mean, if you're a sociopath, you can do that. Secondly, sometimes just go for the heart, if you will, the existential concern.

Yeah, I think, you know, especially today, people are likely to bring up moral concerns about the world or whatever. If you just listen for those, say, oh, oh, I thought you were a postmodernist. You think that what that country is doing is wrong? I'm really curious.

Why do you think that? And those things are bound to come up in this culture. So you could just listen for those. And that's not argumentative.

That's just confused. Yeah. Yeah.

You're just trying to help them to think through that maybe their worldview isn't very consistent. And I would also say, if they're going to deny that there's any standard outside of themselves, they still have a standard within themselves. They're still breaking their own standard.

And so you can ask if you can get the conversation into that area, you can just say, oh, how do you deal with that? You feel like you have some sort of obligation to follow this? Who you obliged to follow this? Who is holding you accountable yourself? Well, a lot of people would say, oh, I'm accountable to myself. But all you have to do is change your view. Yes.

Right. Just include that. Why don't you just say that's good now? Yeah.

So, yeah. Yeah. So, and then just say, well, what do you do with your guilt? That seems like it would be so hard to live with that if you have no way to have it forgiven by the person you're accountable to.

What do you, how do you deal with that? And then maybe they'll ask you, how do you deal with that? Well, let me tell you. So, and you, and another thing, just think about what guilt is, and I think what guilt is is an awareness of culpability. That means blame.

You did something wrong for which you are accountable. So, the angst, the anguish is the fear of punishment that is associated with the guilt. And so, it's not just, it's not just that you're wrong, but that you're going to get it.

You're in trouble. And I don't know what else it would be. I think it's fair to ask the question.

If you're feeling it, then what is that thing that we call guilt? Clear when we're talking about jurisprudence, the person committed a crime and they're going to get punished for it. So, it's not just guilty. Okay.

The jury says guilty. Well, it doesn't stop there. He said, okay, now sentencing because the guilty verdict carries with it a consequence.

So, tidying with the notion of guilt is the awareness of wrongdoing and the awareness that it is appropriate for a consequence, a negative consequence, a punishment to follow. All right. Let's go to a question from Kim.

What question should I initiate to put a stone in the shoe of my Buddhist nail tech? I've known her 20 years and we've talked about Christ. However, it has been too surface and I need to do more. My sense about people who are Buddhist.

Well, there's a question here. Is she Asian? I don't know. She could be Thai and Thai are

Buddhists because that's their national religion.

And this is true of other countries as well. Well, Thai is Asian too. Do you mean? No.

Well, so if they're Asian, the point of making is that she may be Buddhist because she's raised in a Buddhist home and this is the, this is associated with her ethnicity. Then you've got American Buddhist. You got gringos that are Buddhist kind of, you know, he got it.

And these people don't know anything about Buddhism. Many of them, they, Buddhism at its core. First of all, it's non-theistic.

God is not, is not a factor in Buddhism. You do have kind of God-like characters like Bodhisattvas who have attained a certain level of enlightenment. But ultimately, Buddhism is about suffering.

That's the core. And how do you escape suffering? And you could take the fivefold path to try to escape suffering, but ultimate escape comes in Nirvana and Nirvana is extinction. You disappear.

There's actually no permanent self, no ego, permanent individual. In that view. So, and for some reason, like Americans, when they do Buddhism, you know, they have these little bits and pieces that they think are so cool, but they, they're not really engaging the religious philosophy itself.

So you might want to start by asking a lot of questions just about, when you say you're Buddhist, what exactly does that look like? What is that view? I think if they're American, you know, people who are kind of doing the Buddhist thing, what they're going to talk about are individual aspects of Buddhist practice that they like. Well, I do meditation and it makes me feel better. They're not in touch with the structure of reality that Buddhism offers.

It's a false characterization of it. But it does offer a structure of reality. And so I would just, I'd want to ask a lot of questions of what it is that you think that you, what do you, what is, what does the, what do you mean by that? What is the Buddhism that you believe in? Okay.

But you mentioned something earlier, and it has to do with guilt. Let me tell you why Jesus is important, because it's the suffering of the world that we know of, even as Buddhists that we see and we're trying to avoid is a result of sin. And the sin isn't just out there somewhere.

Sin is what we commit. We're responsible for that. Now what? Here's, here's a way.

And it's that maybe sometimes it's just a contrasting view. This is what Buddhism

teaches. I'm going to tell you what Jesus thought.

Jesus understood that there isn't God before whom we live and who we have disobeyed and therefore we are guilty and subject to punishment. Well, I don't like that. Well, I don't like it either.

But that's not the issue. The issue isn't whether we like Buddhism or not. The issue is whether Buddhism is true or in this case, Jesus is true.

Jesus wasn't a Buddhist. He was a Torah observant Jew. Some people have tried to remake Jesus into some kind of Eastern mystic.

That's a new age approach, but it's not sound. Because there's nothing new age about Jesus at all. So we tell what the truth is.

And even if it's just by contrast. Now, here's the difference. One thing to avoid if what we're doing is offering a contrast.

It's not a matter of, OK, this is your view and here is my view. And this is you adopt that religion, I adopt religion. We're not just trading religious stories here.

What we're trying to help people to see is, and this is that needs to be built in the way we communicate. It is that this is this is the way the world actually is. OK, now last weekend, for us, we were at reality and I give six, seven minute presentation at the end, which included the gospel.

And I talked about how my brother 50 years ago told me before I was a Christian the things that I'm telling you are true, Greg. Sooner or later, you're going to find that out. I just hope that when you do, it's not too late.

OK, that's stuck with me all these years because it was so powerful. He wasn't making a defense for Christianity. He was communicating the stakes in a clear way and a confident way.

This thing is true. And so I told the kids, you're going to stand before Jesus someday. You will stand before him and then he will open the books and see how you've done.

And that's not going to be a pretty picture and you know that. And one of two things is going to happen. Either Jesus pays or you pay.

That's it. That's the calculus. So notice in this situation, I'm not saying, well, Christians believe this is going to happen, but Buddhists believe this.

Now I'm relativizing everything. I'm telling these students. This is the way it is.

And one day you're going to stand before him. As a matter of fact, you know, sooner or

later it's going to happen. I just hope when it does, it's not too late kind of thing to to repeat what my brother Mark told me.

So that's the way I would try to approach this. I was influenced by my brother's grace towards me, but also his confidence and non compromise. Greg, I love you.

I'm telling you this, but this is the fact of the matter. Even though it may be underneath the surface, it's still there. I think one thing that might be helpful and you touched on this, Greg, is to ask, what is the goal of Buddhism? What are you trying to get? What are you trying to achieve? What's the highest goal? And if the goal, as you say, Greg, is to separate yourself from all desires so that there's no more suffering and then you're kind of absorbed into the oneness of the universe or whatever it is.

I would, I mean, surely, surely that's not the greatest thing we can imagine. I don't know. I don't know.

Maybe you could just ask her is that how do you feel about that being kind of annihilated and becoming one? I mean, sure that that ends the suffering, but then it stops there Christianity ends the suffering. But then we offer the kindness of God lavished on us and the fraternity. And so there's no, there's no sort of reward.

There's just, we lose all the things that have been hurting us, but then that's it. And that seemed to me that seems bleak. I mean, I wouldn't, I don't think I'd put it this way, but I think I would just draw out her vision of what is the best outcome of, of reality or if she desires more.

I, I can't imagine that she doesn't. If she really thinks about it. Well, there's another question too in the standard for the tactical approach is why would she think that that particular way of looking at reality is accurate? How did you come to that conclusion? What are your reasons for this? Why would you think that that's actually the way the world is? So why should we believe Buddhist take? Oh, yeah, there's suffering.

That's the human condition. Okay. But why should we believe that Buddhist take on it and his solution and the ultimate end of all things is accurate? Because we are talking about stories of reality here.

We are not talking about preferred belief systems. So I like this one and you like that one. It's not the goal and good.

Okay, because God is noble and good, but there's aspects of it that are difficult. So the goal isn't to find something we like. The goal is to find out what's true, ultimately.

And I'm convinced Christianity is true, even though I have tons and tons of unanswered questions, especially as to how we live the Christian life and different things like that. They'd have to do a sanctification, not apologetics issues, but I don't think those are the



hard ones. I think it's the theological issues that are more difficult, walking with God.

But in any event, we've talked about this before, but you mentioned how do we know this is true. Well, you have one man having a vision and having an idea about what's true with really no way to test it. Buddha, are you talking about that? Yes.

Whereas with Christianity, you have God interacting with history, and you have a whole, you know, 1,500 years of interacting with the nation and then Jesus and the resurrection. And all of these things are publicly accessible and God interacted with multiple people over the years. And we have a quite thorough, thorough-going historical record of that, not just the kind of the story of Gautama Buddha and what he endured and what he thought.

Yes. So that is one advantage that we have when we're making our case is that we have reasons that aren't just internal reasons or subjective reasons to think that Christianity is true. So when you ask that question, just keep that in mind as something you can offer.

How can I know if it's true? You can tell me how you know it's true, but how can I know it's true? Right. Just remember, Emmanuel, God with us, God came down. That's huge.

God came down. He is there and he is not silent. This is the name of the book of Francis Schaeffer, and that's his point.

God is really there, but he has not hidden himself. He has not only spoken, but he has come down to earth to make himself known and his feet touch the dirt in a way that could be quantified and chronicled for us. So hopefully, Kim, that gives you some ideas about topics you can bring up to draw out what her views are and what she is sensing that she's missing, because we're all created in the image of God, as you said, Greg, and we all know certain things are true about the world.

And everyone is trying to figure out a way to deal with reality as it is. And the Buddhist way is to try and separate yourself from desire so you no longer have suffering. So the question is, is that adequate? Does that really solve the problem? And is it true? So those are all questions you can think about as you're talking to your friend.

And we pray that you are successful and we'd love to hear how that goes. All right. Thank you, Dean and Kim.

We appreciate hearing from you. You can send us your question on X with the hashtag STRAsk or go to our website at STR.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.