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How Can I Reveal and Defend My Belief in the Trinity and Leave My Oneness Church?

September 19, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how a teen can reveal and defend her belief in the Trinity and leave her Oneness church and whether church memberships that exclude people living a homosexual lifestyle create a two-class system contrary to Jesus' strategy of hanging out with sinners.

* How do I, as a teen, reveal and defend my currently hidden Trinitarian belief to my Oneness parent and church friends and leave their church?

* Do church memberships that exclude people living a homosexual lifestyle create a two-class system contrary to Jesus' strategy of hanging out with sinners?

Transcript

[Music] You're listening to the #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and with me is Greg Koukl. We're here to answer your questions that you send on Twitter with the #STRask or through our website.

And today, Greg, we're going to continue with a couple more questions about church. Because it took us the entire episode to do one question last time. That's right.

And I have a couple more questions though. Alright, so this one comes from Kiara. How do I, Ateen, Reveal and Defend My Currently Hidden Trinitarian Belief to My Oneness Parent and Church Friends and Leave Their Church? Oh my goodness.

Read it again. Just for the sake of information, oneness pentecostals do not believe in the Trinity. That's why they're called oneness pentecostals.

They are... I think they are modalists. In other words, the different... The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different modes of expression of the individual unit. They are not separate persons or they're not separate centers of consciousness.

However you want to characterize it. Hypostases. So, could you read it again then? How do I... How do I, Ateen, Reveal and Defend My Currently Hidden Trinitarian Belief to My Oneness Parent and Church Friends and Leave Their Church? Okay, there are reveal, defend and leave.

Those were the verbs that are relevant here. I think this is a hard situation, Kiara, and so our hearts go out to you on this one. And it's hard because this is the family you grew up in and the community that you're a part of.

And you are going to leave that community, at least leave the spiritual aspect of that community. It doesn't mean you're going to leave your family. But certainly the spiritual community and find another church.

That was the last one, leave. I think there are two ways to do the reveal part. One is face to face and one of them is in a writing.

I don't know, you're 18. I suspect you still live with your parents. And however you do it, and maybe you have a contrary opinion about this, Amy, so I'm happy to hear, but I'm just offering this.

However you do it, whether you write a letter or you speak to them, you want to be respectful to them as your parents and family members. I love you, I honor you, I respect you. However, I'm a grown-up and I need to make my own decisions about my convictions, something along that line.

And after studying and praying and interacting with different people, I came to the conclusion that the Trinitarian position is the biblical position. It's also the classical Christian position. And then offer some conciliatory comments, like I have no intention of hurting your feelings, so I know this is going to be hard for you.

But I have to follow God based on my own conscience. Something like that. And then especially if you're face to face, mom, dad, brother, sister, I want to sit down with you and talk to you about something that is really a big deal of my life.

It's really important and it's going to be hard news for you to hear. Now, I don't know if that's an appropriate phrase for a joke, but maybe they're going to think it's something much more bizarre than what you end up revealing to them. And this will be a sigh of relief if you set them up and let them look at some information that's going to come down that's going to be hard.

But in this particular case, since it's a theological issue, and it seems like your family, Kiara, is very serious about the theological convictions, then this is probably going to be a challenge for them. But this is where it's really important for you to be willing to pay a price to stand for Christ. And Matthew, chapter 10, Jesus talks about this in the second half of the chapter, and he says, "Do not fear them three different times." And so I

encourage you to read that chapter.

Most of us in our lives right now do not have to face the kind of challenge that you're facing to be faithful to Christ. You will be facing people who are Muslims who become Christians or LDS and become Christians to face that. And there may be some kind of similar dynamic in your oneness Pentecostal community.

So I'm sympathetic to that, and the best way to reveal to them is in an adult straightforward fashion showing grace and respect for them. And then even giving them an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions. Now, the important thing is, and this is going to be hard, when you give them the freedom to express their feelings, which is an act of grace, I think, in kindness, you've got to really protect yourself against being defensive.

Let them say what they want. And then the thing that you're going to defend is your theological view, but the temptation is going to be defend yourself. I know they're connected, but there is a difference.

We want not to be defensive. If you are not defensive, it communicates more conviction for one. And it also, you know, harsh words stirs up anger, a gentle answer turns away wrath kind of thing.

All right. As far as defending the view, you have become persuaded of the Trinitarian view for reasons. So I suspect you already have a basic defense in place, that is the reasons that you, against the flow of your theological community and family, have turned a corner theologically.

The simplest way that I can think of to characterize it is in material that we have a standard reason called the Trinity, a solution, not a problem. And what I mean by that title is that the trinity, the characterization of God, according to the Trinity, is the only way of characterizing God that makes sense of all the passages. So the scripture teaches there is one God.

It teaches that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each God. But, and I think this is the key for the, the, the oneness Pentecostals, they are not the same unified individual. And I mean unified in a metaphysical sense.

They are separate persons. How do we know that? They, they talk to each other. Jesus prays to the Father.

He's not praying to Himself. Strictly speaking, He's praying to another person. He submits to the Father.

At Jesus baptism, there is Jesus the man, the Father speaking, and the Holy Spirit hovering over Him in a man of physical manifestation of a dove. And there are lots of

characterizations like that you see in scripture. We know they are different.

They are distinct persons because they interact with each other in personal ways. And in the material that I've given, all of these things are characterized, all the passages are characterized. So I'm sure, Kia or you know many of them yourself.

To me, it's actually easier to demonstrate that the persons are distinct than it is to demonstrate that the persons are each God. Although I think that can be demiscripturally as well. In fact, I was just reading through Titus.

And I'm reading three chapters short, right? Boom, boom, boom, boom. There it is. God our Savior.

Jesus our Savior. Our great God and Savior Jesus. So there it's clear that Jesus is God.

I mean, verses you can show that. But that they are distinct, the Father, Son, and the Spirit, I think is much easier to demonstrate. And in fact, it's something that non-trinitarianists point out readily because it's so clear in scripture.

And that's the issue that they'd have the hardest time. And as far as the leave is concerned, so that's reveal, defend, and leave. The leave, it means just that you are not going to be attending their religious functions anymore because you don't hold to their views.

In fact, I would think they would want you to if you don't hold to those views. But if you're not being active part of the community, maybe as a non-believer, they'd want you there to see maybe you get persuaded. But I think to say I need to start fellow shipping and worshipping at a place that is consistent with my own views.

Now this isn't going to be easy. You already know that. This is why you've asked a question for counsel.

But I'm glad that you're willing to make a statement and to take a stand and to be honest about your conviction. And have the courage to live according to those convictions. I just want to add a couple things to that, Greg.

First, your comments on revealing. I thought were very helpful. And one thing you might do, Kira, is write it all out as a letter, but then deliver it in person.

That way you won't lose your place, but you're doing it in a personal way. One thing that makes this really tricky is the fact that you are a teen, and depending on how you said parent, so I assume there's just one parent in this situation. But depending on how that parent reacts, it's hard to know what direction this is going to take.

Now I would say, and Greg, you might disagree with me on this, I'm not sure, but I would say that if your parent is insisting that you go to church with them, I would actually

submit to that. But what I would do is that qualify if she's a member of their household. If she's 18, apparently if she's living on her own, she's 18.

Sorry about that. Sorry about that. Sorry, I presume she is still.

Yeah, so I think what I would do in that situation, rather than, I would submit to your parent, but I would do it in this way. And I would say, look, I will come with you to the church, and I'm going to talk to, if this happens, you will have to talk to the pastors, youth leaders, or whatever, and just explain, this is not my view now. And I'm coming because my parent has requested that I come, and you can sit there quietly and just don't worship the Unitarian God.

I mean, I've attended services for other religions, and I've just sat there quietly. I haven't joined in in the prayers, I haven't joined in in anything, but I've been respectful. And I think that's possible if your parent is insisting that you go, I would not, obviously I think it's better if you find, if you go, if you're going to a church that is worshipping the true God.

And they allow a lot of you to do that, yeah. But if it comes to this, I think it's possible to be there without worshipping a Unitarian God out of respect for your parent. But I would do what you can to say, I'm not going to be part of youth group or anything.

That's, you know, I'll come with you, that's what you want, but I don't, you know. Yeah, the only pushback I'd have is it sounded like you're saying you're going to have to talk to the pastor and the youth group leader and everything. That might be too much at once.

I don't know why she couldn't just go to the church and not make a public statement to other people and just let it ride. But that's her family she's most responsible for, but, and then if somebody asks her, she can respond, but rather than kind of inviting additional scorn from her community, what do you think? Yeah, I think it depends on the kind of relationship she has with the pastors because if out of respect for them, if I were going to a church where I disagreed with their theology, I would want them to know just because I'm coming to their church. They're not, I'm not going to, I'm not like coming in as some secret person trying to persuade other people in the church.

Right. But in this case, you and becoming, and you're an adult, she's actually a minor already as a part of the church. She's changed her conviction.

She tells her parents, but she doesn't have to make it big. I'm just saying maybe she doesn't have to make a big announcement to the rest of the. That's, I was only thinking in terms of out of respect for them.

So it doesn't seem like you're coming in to try and change people's minds or whatever it is. I mean, this depends on your, the relationship you have with the pastors, how small the church is, all those sorts of things. If you don't know the pastor at all, then there's no

need to do it.

But especially if she requires you to go to youth group, then the youth pastor, I think, would need to know. I just need you to know I'm here because my mother wants me to be here. I'm not, I have different views.

I'm not part of your, the logical convictions here. And I'm not here to necessarily, cause trouble. Cause trouble.

I'm just here because I'm respecting my parents wishes. So that's a possibility. If that happens though, I would try and find another way to fellowship.

You may have friends who have youth groups that you could attend with them. If you can't go to another church, it might be possible to go to two churches. Whatever you can do to find fellowship in another way, but I'm assuming you probably won't have that many years before you will be able to worship freely.

It just makes it really difficult because you have, you still have to do this in the context of respect for your parents, which you mentioned at the very beginning of this, Greg. And then I would, you can also still be friends with your, because she talked about her church friends, you can still be friends with your church friends. Now they may not want to be friends with you.

Again, this depends on the, the situation at the church and how the people are there because they may just reject you and not want anything. To do with you. But if not, there's nothing wrong with remaining friends with your friends there in another context, not necessarily the worshipping context, but in other contexts.

What do you think about that, Greg? Do you think? No, I agree with that. I have a parting thought, but I'll wait until you're done. Okay.

That's it for me on this one. I think. Well, I just want to say that I'm really impressed with Kiara for a teen who lives in a home with a very different set of spiritual beliefs to kind of come to her own conclusions to follow classical Christianity and the biblical view of God.

Even in the, in the face of the rejection of her family and her friends and her spiritual community, I think this is a tremendously brave thing to do. And I think it's virtuous, spiritually virtuous, and the fact that she would ask for counsel shows a lot of wisdom as well. So to me, I'm very impressed with you, Kiara.

Good for you. It's a tough job ahead of you here. Be prayed up.

I'm sure that's pretty straightforward for you, but keep that in mind. And we hope that the things that we've offered would be helpful to you. Maybe get back in touch with us sometime and let us know what things went.

Okay. Let's one more question. This one comes from Jack.

I'm hearing a lot of squeaking from your chair, Greg. I don't know what that is. Okay.

This one comes from Jack. Should churches have memberships? My friend argues that gays and other sinners should all be welcome in the church. But if a church won't allow someone living a homosexual lifestyle to be a member, for example, it's contrary to Jesus strategy of hanging out with sinners.

It creates a two class system. Plus, where would we draw the line with sin? Cussing, porn viewing? Well, Jack. He's responding to his friend is making this argument.

Oh, okay. Good. Thank you.

I guess what I'll say. You don't have to say this, but I'm just saying this for your benefit. Your friend is not biblically informed.

The fact is there is a two class system. There are those who are in the church and they are believers and they are called saints. Now, people may misunderstand the terminology here, but in the context of the cultures, these made sense to people.

Those who are outside of that community are called Gentiles or sinners. This is the language that is being used not just by the apostles, but by Jesus himself. He is making a distinction between those who are inside of the kingdom and those who are not inside of the kingdom, or maybe not yet.

Now, that distinction does not mean that we have freedom to disparage people outside of our group, or to treat them ill. When Jesus engages with sinners, he engages with them as sinners, not as members of a righteous community of Jewish believers. And by the way, some of those people were religious people too.

No question about that. But the church is the kind of place where whoever will may come, but it is not the kind of place biblically that whoever will may belong. And if that were the case, there would be no role of church discipline.

Yet Jesus himself talks about the expulsion of people from the community for persistent sin. And he has either Matthew 16 or 18, I get him mixed up. And so does Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And I was just reading in either Titus or 2 Thessalonians, or 1st, I read the last two weeks, I read all three of them.

But it says, "Do not associate with certain types of people who are living undisciplined lives." In other words, lives that are inconsistent with the way Christians ought to live. Do not associate with them. So you cannot read the New Testament.

If they claim to be Christians. Yes, that's right. These are so-called brothers is actually the way Paul describes it, I think in 2 Thessalonians, a so-called brother.

And maybe Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, but the point is, is that this binary distinction is in scripture. And the idea that Jesus just loved and accepted everybody is not a biblical idea, the way it's being played out here. Yes, he did love it in a certain sense accepted, but he called them to repentance.

Just like John the Baptist did. What do you need? And John the Baptist said, "Do this. Don't tax gatherers.

Don't cheat people. Soldiers, don't do you satisfied with your wages?" And Jesus had recommendations as well. In fact, Jesus' problem with the Pharisees was that they weren't repentant.

Yeah, right. They weren't repentant. That was the problem.

They thought they were not sinners like the other people, but the people who recognized their own sinfulness and repented and came to Jesus, he welcomed. Think of the parable of the tax gatherers of the Pharisees, Pharisees in the front of the synagogue, tax gatherers in the back, beating his breast. And Jesus said, "It's the tax gatherers of the sinner who in virtue of his repentance there have mercy on me a sinner was justified," Jesus says.

So Jesus and the other writers in the New Testament make clear this distinction. But the distinction is that those who are inside the church then have a certain requirement to behavior. By the way, whether somebody signs a membership sheet or not, to me, is not so relevant.

I've never signed up as a member, even in my own church. I'm a functional member, but I haven't signed the membership. If you have signed memberships and people who are living patently immoral lives are on there.

That's a problem that needs to be dealt with. Okay? So to me, this isn't so much of a membership issue, technical membership issue or not. It's whether a person is a defactile member of the community of Christians.

And if you are a member of the community, well, then there are standards. And there is an enforcement of the standards that's based on the directions of Jesus and the other writers in the New Testament. Outside of that, the standards don't apply.

Those are the sinners and the Gentiles that are beckoned to repent and believe. Turn from that lifestyle, become a member of this community. So those are the distinctions that are important.

And I think what your friend has done is kind of bought into an inaccurate generalization about Jesus as the kind of the lover of all in an unconditional fashion and just accepted and loved everybody. That's not true. There are all kinds of places where he says,

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa." There's condemnation for sinners.

And that's Jesus. But a willingness to communicate with sinners, be with sinners. He says, "The sick that need a doctor, that means they're sick," spiritually speaking.

That's Jesus' metaphor. I come to call sinners to repentance. I came to save sinners.

All of this language of Jesus, I acknowledge it, identifies a binary system in that regard. And I think when he talks about Jesus hanging out with sinners, Jesus reached out to the Pharisees too, but didn't consider them part of his band of people because they were unrepentant. But hanging out with and reaching out to is not the same thing as a membership, as being a member of the covenant of the people who are repentant and joined to Christ.

That's different from hanging out. And I think that's maybe this is a misunderstanding of what the church is for. And we've talked about that in the last episode, what the church is meant to do.

And so this could all be playing into his misunderstanding here. Yeah, I was just thinking strategically, maybe the best way to approach this with his friend is to go to Jesus' own remarks. And we cited some different examples of this.

You'll find him in the Sermon of the Mount. You'll find them in Matthew 16 or 18, and you'll find them in other places as well. But where Jesus makes this distinction between insiders and outsiders.

And again, it doesn't mean you can't talk to outsiders. Even Paul said when he says, "Do not associate with the so-called brothers." He says, "Well, I don't mean the people who are in the world." That's right. Because then you have to go out of the world.

That's 1 Corinthians 5, right. So you can always reach out, but there is a definition of those who are joined to Christ and those who are not. And so Jack asks here, his friend's asking, "Where would we draw the line with sin?" Well, I think the clearest place to draw the line with sin is that you need to be in agreement on what sin is.

You need to be in agreement on what the standards of morality are for Christians. That's the problem here. You can fail.

You can mess up. That happens with everybody. We all repent of sins and we all sin.

And we all talk to God about that later and confess it to our friends. But if you disagree about what is sin, that is where it becomes a real problem. Because Christianity has a meaning, we have a standard.

We have something that we're all agreeing to. And if you can't agree to that, it doesn't make sense to say that you're a member of that group. So there could be somebody who

has a problem with cussing or porn viewing or whatever.

But if that person is saying, "These things are fine." In fact, you should accept me with these things, because this is who I am. Well then they should have the same sort of discipline as anyone with any kind of sin who rejects the idea that it's a sin. And that's kind of what happens when Jesus is giving those instructions.

I think it's Matthew 18. First you go to the person, then you bring someone, leaders of the church, etc. And they're doing that because they're denying that it's a problem.

Either that they're doing it or that it's wrong. And so that's where the line is. It's interesting in the 1 Corinthians 5 passage and in 6, we have a list of things that Paul says are the kinds of things that are dividing points, so to speak, with so-called brothers.

In verse 11 of chapter 5, he says, "But actually I wrote to you not to associate," and this is by contrast to the immoral people in the world, which you mentioned, Amy. I'm not telling you, hang out with them. "I actually wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person or covetous or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or a swindler, not even to eat with such a one." Okay? So what do we have to do with judging outsiders? The rhetorical question, we don't.

But do we not judge those who are within the church? The answer is yes. Now it's interesting in chapter 6, he goes to the same list, except for he doesn't just say those who are immoral. He clarifies what he means by immoral.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? So this is the same letter, almost in the same area, he's referring to the same kind of people. Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. In verse 10 there you have some of the same words from chapter 5 and verse 12, but then you have more clarification of what he means by immoral and it has to have sexual issues as well.

Notice these are the lines that Paul is drawing regarding people in the church who are living in a way that is not appropriate for Christians, and actually if this is their lifestyle, is evidence that they're not Christians at all. They will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived.

Very strong words he uses here. So Amy's point is really, really good. They've got to acknowledge what sin actually is.

And I also want to point out, because we also have instructions on how to manage it when someone is, when we see that someone is in sin, there is a way to manage that. You don't just eject them immediately. There's always the going to them and telling them about confronting them with their sin, giving them a chance to repent, and then it's

fine.

Those are the instructions that Jesus gives. So it's not as if somebody does one thing and they're out. That's not how it works because we all are sinning.

It's an attitude towards your sin. It's a denial of your sin. Those are the things that make it impossible to be part of the community.

Right. Paul puts it this way too in terms of the method. There's humility involved.

This is a Galatian 6, and he says that if anyone has caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves, lest you also be tempted. So that's all part of the package here. And I think it's very easy for, especially for outsiders who don't have a clear picture of the biblical teaching or of Jesus' own teaching to characterize these kinds of distinctions as bigoted.

There is a distinction between holiness and ungodliness. And this is all through the scripture from top to bottom. And we are called to be godly.

Tight as I mentioned earlier, the grace of God has appeared of bringing salvation to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness. And that's really important to God. It's also important to remember, just with that example you gave, Greg, there's somebody saying that, "Oh, this is bigoted.

Therefore you are not part of my community." They've got their own standard. And we all have our own standards for our communities. This is something we all do.

So it's not unusual. It's not something that only Christians do. But if you disagree on what the morality is, and it's just not possible to be part of the community.

All right, Greg, well, we went over that one. He's good stuff, though. Thank you, Kiara and Jack.

We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk or through our website. This is Amy Hall and Greg Koko for Stand to Reason.

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