

OpenTheo

What Should I Say to Someone Who Claims to Be a Christian but Doesn't Live Like It?

March 9, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to talk to someone who claims to be a Christian, but doesn't live like it, without pushing her away and what a church should do about a "married" LGBTQ couple that's been attending.

* How can I talk to my cousin, who claims to be a Christian but doesn't live like it, without pushing her away?

* What should my church be doing about a "married" LGBTQ couple that's been attending?

Transcript

[MUSIC] Welcome to the #SDRaskpodcast. I'm Amy Holland with me is Greg Hogle. Hi, Greg.

[LAUGHTER] What do we got? Okay. Let's start with a question from Sarah. Hi, Greg and Amy, my question has to do with mentoring people who claim to know God, but don't have a question.

I don't live like it. My 16-year-old cousin came out as bisexual and hangs out with a rough crowd. But then when we talk about God, she says she's a Christian.

How do I talk to her about this without pushing her away? Well, first of all, I don't know if we can guarantee that. And this, let me say something about that to begin with. I was actually reading an article just yesterday about how the culture is turned so aggressively against Christianity that that people are bugged and angered about what we say and they get hostile about what we say and what our views are.

And the question is, now how do we adapt to all of that? And my response is, well, we don't. That is, it is our job, one to tell the truth. And we should do it in a gracious way, in a thoughtful way and in a persuasive way.

That doesn't change. What has happened is the culture has changed and gotten more angry at Christians. And this is why I don't trust, you know, the Barnast of Analysis.

Let me back up. I'm not saying I don't know just the Barna analysis with, there's this qualification. Just because a whole bunch of people in culture don't like Christians and think that their era getting narrow-minded and bigoted and opinionated and whatever you want to add doesn't mean any Christians, Christians, characteristically, are like that in a way that is inappropriate.

Christianity has always been judgmental. It's the bad news and the good news. The good news is the bad news is the bad news of sin and judgment.

So if you have a culture that is totally hostile to that whole notion, how do we communicate then our message without them getting mad? You don't. They're going to be mad at the substance. Now, I've mentioned before, if they're bugged because of us, the way we communicate will shame on us.

But if it's the content that they're reacting to, the truth that they're reacting to and suppressing and unrighteousness to use Paul's words in Romans 1, then shame on them. Okay. And so from out of the gate, I never want to suggest that I'm going to give a way of responding to something that won't make someone angry.

I think what we emphasize at standard reason, and this is a strength of our approach, is the is the ambassador approach, knowledge, wisdom, maneuvering with not just the information, but the maneuvering with tact and character, doing it in a gracious, gracious, winsome, and attractive way. All right. So on our side of the ledger, we don't want to put some negatives up, but we still need to speak the truth.

And we try to speak it in as persuasive a way as possible. And that helps if we can explain it in a way that makes sense that that makes sense, even if the other person doesn't make sense of it. So they see the sense of it.

Okay. Sexual sin is a deviation from a good plan of God. The good plan is Genesis 1 and 2. God made them male and female.

Notice the binary gender there and said, be fruitful and multiply. Well, it takes a male and female human beings to be fruitful and multiply. And then in the next chapter, we have a further description of the way that works of a man leaves his mother and his father.

Notice again, the binary gender and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh. And Jesus adds then what God has joined together, let no man, Terrace under. So as we've said in the past, God's plan for human flourishing is one man with one woman becoming one flesh.

That's where sex belongs between a husband and wife for one lifetime in a lifelong relationship. And that's a combination of Genesis 1 and 2 in Matthew 19 where Jesus adds this element about no divorce because God intended that union between a husband and a wife who is a man and a woman. And that's where sex takes place in the safe environment of a protected long term relationship to be a lifelong relationship, which then secures the family and an environment where children can be born and grow up in safety.

Human children take a long time to move to adulthood. Like what other mammal takes 17 years 18 years 19 years or 25 or 24 26 or 27. Nowadays, to move to adulthood, not many, not any, I don't think so, but because of the long gestation nine months in the long infancy and everything there's a plan to protect human family.

And human families and human relationships. These are all good things. And so when human beings deviate from that and there's a handful of various types of deviations by sexuality, homosexuality, which would include lesbians in the point I'm making.

Fornication, adultery, bestiality, these are all proscribed by scripture as being outside of the good plan that God has made for human flourishing. So when I say good plan I'm not just tacking on an adjective. I'm saying this is something that actually works well and better for everybody.

All things considered when the plan is followed. So when a person becomes a Christian, they are moving out of one way of looking at the world, which is a false view of the world. And they are moving into an accurate understanding of reality.

And there is a of necessity, a sense of commitment to live God's way rather than man's way. Okay, not according to the flesh Romans eight, but according to the spirit Romans eight, two different trajectories there. So if a person is becomes a Christian, what they're doing is they are turning from one way of looking at the world, one way of understanding reality, one path of behavior consistent with that false view of reality.

And they are accepting entering into a different understanding of the way the world is, and the behaviors that are appropriate to that, not simply keeping a new set of rules, but entering into a relationship where you are following a person. And, and that following the person entails living according to that person's directives commands, which are good for us. I went through a lot of detail explaining that because I don't want people to look at the sexual ethic of Christianity is just an awkward, inconvenient set of rules.

It is a way of living that provides a robust and satisfying life, the way God intended for those kinds of relationships. So now to the specifics. If there is somebody who says, well, I'm a Christian, but they are living just like non Christians, then I wonder what does that mean when they say that they're Christian and this is a fair question to ask.

You know, you say you're Christian, I'm confused, frankly, because when I see in the New Testament what Jesus requires in the New Testament requires of Christian living following Jesus. Okay, again, I'm trying to be careful not to just put it into a set of rules, but rather a relationship with Jesus. If we're going to follow Jesus, then their lives look different in these areas than the rest of the world.

So when you say you're a Christian, what is it that you mean by that? Now that, of course, our first columnal question, we're just getting clarification. Now, young Christians, brand new Christians, they are characterized by flexibly living because they're in transition. Paul talks about that in Galatians 2, I think, you know, you are as young, carnal Christians, you know, like you just, well, because in my view at least God catches his fish and then he cleans them.

Okay. But the, the, which is just to say we can't do this ourselves. We need God's help to straighten things out.

And even in my own life as a, for the first year or so as a Christian, there's a lot of really stupid things I did that were not consistent with what Jesus wanted. And, you know, I got taken to the woodshed a few times, so to seek spiritually and got his way of dealing with that. That might be one consideration.

But at least in my own mind, there was a proper, there was an understanding of what was appropriate. And I just kind of had to get up with a program. Think of what Jesus said.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord? And you don't do the things that I say. There are lots and lots of people who in some sense identify with Christ, they believe in Jesus. But, but, but they are, this doesn't seem to have any impact on living a virtuous life as characterized by scripture.

What it turns out they're doing is living the same kind of life everybody else is living, but they brought kind of brought Jesus into the mix here. And, and, and I think that needs to be addressed. And this is why I think this question, well, when you say you're Christian, I'm confused about what you mean by that.

Do you think that, and then let them explain, and then you might ask, do you think that being a follower of Jesus has any ramifications on the way you behave sexually? Now, I'm going to, I don't know what this person would respond to that question, but I tell you where a lot of Christians are going to respond. No, no, why shouldn't? And the reason is, is they're so completely sold out to the culture's ethic on that that so-called believing in Jesus or following Jesus is, it's, it's a non issue. And this raises questions about the, the, the legitimacy of their own confession.

And here I go to 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9 and Paul says lots of stuff that when evident

in a person's life is indication that they are not Christians. He puts it this way, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Don't you know? Don't you know? He says, don't be deceived.

He says. And there's a list of things there and three of them are sexual. One is fornication, one is adultery, and the other one is homosexuality, as I recall it.

If these are things you're practicing, then you're, you, you will not inherit the kingdom. And then he says, and by the way, this is the way many of you used to be, but now you're cleansed and new. And that's the order.

If you are cleansed and do these things left behind, and then you fall in place behind Jesus following him doing the things that he says we ought to do. It seems like there are two possibilities here since she's so young, 16. Either she, because of her youth, she really just doesn't understand what the view of our sex, of male and female, of the Christian view of that is.

That's possible. Or because of her youth, she's just in the habit of saying she's a Christian because her family says they're Christian. I think time will tell which one of these it is.

I'm sad to say that because the church has not done a great job at explaining the reasoning behind doctrines, or the doctrines themselves, say the idea that we're male and female, it's possible that she just doesn't understand how that relates. Right. So I'm not going to assume either one of these.

What you might want to ask her, I think you want to ask her, what is your view of God? How do you see God? Is he good? Do you see God is good? Do you see him as wise? Do you see him as wanting you to thrive? Or do you see him as holding out on people? Like, what is your view? Can I toss something in here? Sure. Here's the difficulty nowadays is it is because they think that God is good that they think they're free to do sexually whatever they want. I agree.

And if God didn't allow them to do that, he would be a good God. I agree. But we have to start there because if you can get her to say yes, I do think God is good.

Then I think the next question to ask is, okay, hypothetically, if it turned out that God said that we are male or female and that sex is only between a male and a female within the bounds of marriage, would you go along with that? Would you adjust your view to that? Or would you go with your view and reject Jesus? And I think that puts it in the right perspective because this is a question we all have to ask. This is counting the cost. Jesus said, count the cost.

She needs to understand what the situation is here. Now, if it's true that God is good, and again, we're just saying hypothetically right now because you haven't gone to the

scripture to find out. So there's still, she might still be thinking in her mind.

Yes, but it's really fine. At this point, all you've done is say, if Jesus told you not to do this, would you follow him into that? Now, she says, yes, you're in a great position to go through the Bible. Yeah, right.

If she hesitates and she says, no, which is my guess, probably what will happen, then you could say, all right, well, let's just look anyway, and I can just explain to you what it is. And then you, obviously you're going to make your decision, but I just don't want it to be, I just want you to be deceived into thinking you're following Jesus if you're not. Right, right, and or confusing other people.

And this is part of it too. I mean, I, I, you have such a nice gentle touch with all this Amy. Part of me wants to say, well, if you decide to go in a different direction, do you think I understand that's up to you, but please don't call yourself a Christian that just creates confusion.

Well, I, and I think that question helps with that, because it will help her understand you, if you're following Jesus, you're following Jesus. If you're not following Jesus, then her problem is she's not following Jesus. And this is when you have to present who he is, and you have to help her to see the goodness of God, because if you think God's holding out on you, that's, that's easy to do if you don't understand his goodness and you don't trust him.

So that's something you have to demonstrate to her through the Bible, through who he is, through theology, all those things. Now, it's important to keep in mind that even if you show her the beauty of God, and the fact that he's, he's good and he loves us and he's smart and he created us and all these things. Yes, our best interests are best interest.

It's still the case that the aroma of Christ is from death to death for those who are perishing and life to life for those who are not perishing. So she may still think it's very distasteful. All of it.

That's possible. But if you are showing the goodness of God, that the Holy Spirit can move in that and move in her heart and he may or he may not. If he doesn't, she won't see it.

But if he does, she will. And I think that's the way forward. If it's not just saying, this is wrong.

Don't do this. It's saying, this is God. He is good.

You want, this is what you really desire. You really desire to thrive and have joy and have a full life. And you think you're going to find it here.

And that's the way of death. You, you're going to find that out as time goes on. But I'd rather you find it out now.

So again, it's such a spiritual thing that we have no control over how she sees who God is and what he's asked of us. All we can do is clarify who he is as much as possible and create the space for the Holy Spirit to move in what we're telling her. Well put.

All right. I have a related question. This one comes from Brittany.

And this, this is about more from the, it's the same kind of question, but it's from the perspective of a church. Okay. How should we approach a quote married LGBTQ couple who claims Jesus as their savior? Our pastor doesn't want to turn them away in hopes they come to a true understanding.

But I don't actively see the church intervening. Paul calls the church to stand firm and protecting the body. Should we stay at this church? Well, this, I think is a very tricky issue.

All right. And I think that a reluctance to be more aggressive and dealing with it may not reflect an unwillingness to do what's right and to be faithful. But uncertainty about how to manage a really tricky situation.

Think about. So polygamy is condemned in scripture, even though some kings practiced it. Think what do you do when you have a. You're in a culture where that's polygamous and then a man and his wives all become Christian.

Now what? Well, they're married in a, in, you know, and they're dependent on each other. They have family, maybe children. So how do you navigate in that circumstance? By the way, I don't know the right answer to that and missionaries have worked on this and kind of figured out things, but I don't haven't faced the circumstance or I would have had to address it.

But I'm simply making the point that sometimes when you have these aberrations in the world, people become Christian in the midst of these radically aberrant circumstances. And then it becomes really difficult to know the best way judicious way, just way kind, loving way, whatever to kind of unwrap all of those things. So I'm simply saying, since the question was, maybe we should leave the church.

It may be that your pastor's reluctance to address this, at least immediately, is because he's not sure exactly how to do it. And I suspect there's no children involved. They weren't mentioned, but, but now you have two people that are in this relationship.

And I, and I remember somebody asking, maybe it was here or somewhere else they said, but and God hates divorce. Well, God hates divorce of people who are legitimately married. A same sex marriage is not a marriage, not a God's eyes.

So that is not a, wouldn't be a divorce. Now, ultimately, I think if there is a same sex couple who are cohabiting in a relationship that the state has sanctified, they need to eventually as followers of Christ, they need to separate that relationship. In the way that they've been having it.

In other words, as, as cohabiting sexual lovers, you know, well, love is love. Yeah, but love and sex are not the same thing. God's in favor of love, and he's in favor of sex in a particular environment.

But just because one says, well, love is love and they love each other does not mean it's okay for them to be considered to continue in a sexual relationship that is dishonoring to God. It is inconsistent with the way God made men and women to function sexually with each other. This is, this should be obvious.

It seems to me just a reflection, but it's the precise point that Paul makes in Romans 1 and verse like 28 and 29 right in there. So this is inconsistent with what God purposed for relationships. So though it's a tricky issue and it's a discipleship issue at that point.

If, if the couple is genuinely regenerate, that it was their genuinely board again, they have the spirit, then the spirit is going to be an ally in helping them understand as they are disciplined and talked with. The, I wouldn't demand as a pastor an immediate action on their part. I would, this would be a function of discipleship.

Now, a lot will depend on their response. If the scripture identifies this is the right thing and they just say, well, let's not, we're not into that. We're doing our own thing.

I want to find a church that is gay affirming. Well, okay, then they're, they're welcome to do that. But that isn't a Christian.

That is not a church that has the spirit. If they're gay affirming, just like a church that was adultery affirming or fornication affirming would not have the spirit. So, like I said, it's a tricky circumstance.

And, and I think it has to be handled carefully. Now, you may be aware of the something that may be. Butterfield, I'm always.

Rosaria Butterfield. Rosaria. There's like four ways to say her first name and I get it wrong every time.

And Rosaria Butterfield has written on this particular issue because of her own experience. And as a lesbian who eventually became a Christian. And I'm not sure if she was in a relationship or not.

If you recall that. She was when the whole thing started. Yes, she was.

Yeah. So she must, she's written a few books. I know three.

The most recent one is still doing really well. And it's called the gospel comes with a house key, right? And talks about the hospitality of a pastor for two years with her and her lesbian lover that was instrumental in bringing her to Christ. So she had to deal with that kind of relationship.

So maybe in her autobiographical work that came before she talks about how that happened. I'm not sure. But I just recommend her as an author.

Rosaria Rosaria Rosaria Rosario would be the guy, her brother. Okay. Yeah, I agree.

I agree that she's a good recommendation. Some of what's in here is a little bit unclear. I think before I would, I left, I would talk to the church and say and just get a better idea of what's going on.

What is your plan here? What's how are you handling this just so you have an idea of what's going on. Of what's behind how they're acting. Because like you said, Greg, it's not clear why they're doing what they're doing.

It's also not clear to me if the, the, the couple is just attending. Or are they trying to get part of the community? Are they part of the community? Are they saying they're Christian? Like none of that is clear here. If, if they're visiting and they want to hear what's going on.

I mean, I have no issue with that at all. Whoever will may come, right? But what's interesting here is it says our pastor doesn't want to turn them away in hopes they come to a true understanding. And I'm not sure what that means.

Right. Does that mean if you're, because if you're not addressing it, how will they come to a true understanding? So I think there's a lot of things here that you need to figure out what's going on with the church and how they're handling it because they, it's possible they are working with them and, and just talking to them about the gospel. Because once they're saved, the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts and a lot of these things will fall into place.

But if they're just visiting and they're trying to find out about Christianity, you're not going to kick them out of the church just because they're sinning. Because that's the situation everyone calls in. Sure.

Now, if it's not what he might do is just say, look, I just want you to understand this is where we stand on this and we want you to be here because we think you need the gospel. But you also need to know that this is where we are. Now, maybe he's done that.

So this is why I say you need to find out what he has communicated to them and why. And I think that will help. And be charitable about it.

You know, pastors are in tough spots, especially with issues like this. And it's not just straight ahead. The best answer.

I'm sorry. It's not obvious that there is that there's a okay, this is the way you deal with it, biblically, whatever. It has to be dealt with, obviously.

But the transition is what the question is. And in his mind, and you write, there's ambiguity in the question, in the pastor's mind, maybe they're not Christians, but they think they are. And so he's treating them like non-believers in an environment where they can get the truth, be regenerated.

And then with the Holy Spirit's help, see the best way to deal with this unusual or aberrant sinful relationship. And as long as he's being honest with them about what the church teaches, and especially if he's being honest with them and they're still coming, God could be working in their hearts for sure. So there's a lot.

It's such a tough time. I know it is. And getting tougher.

We need so much wisdom. So pray for wisdom. If you talk to the church and you find out that they don't think this is important, then I would say that's probably an indication that you should leave.

All right. Well, thank you, Sarah and Brittany. Thank you.

We appreciate hearing from you. If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk or go to our website. Just find our hashtag #STRAskPage and you'll find a link there.

And you can send us a question and maybe we'll answer your question. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[MUSIC]