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How Can I Make Sure I Will Honestly Consider People's Arguments?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to make sure we will honestly consider people's arguments and why God doesn't give more evidence to the "non-resistant non-believers" who are seeking truth.

* It's frustrating when someone doesn't seem to be honestly considering a persuasive argument. How can I make sure I don't make that same mistake?

* Why doesn't God give more evidence to the "non-resistant non-believers" who are seeking truth?

Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason's hashtag-STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and I have here with me today. Greg Koukl.

You do today and every day. It's been a long time since we've had a sub for either of us. It has been a while.

We got to get more of our team in here because we have a nice deep bench. We do. Let's start with the question from Tracy.

It's frustrating when someone does not seem to be honestly considering a persuasive argument. How do I make sure that I do not make that same mistake? Well, it is frustrating. We face it a lot.

I probably the safest thing to do is to make sure that I don't make that mistake. protection is for Tracey is already in place. She's aware that it's possible to make a mistake, and there's actually a name for this.

It's called Confirmation Bias, and that is that you just want to keep believing what you believe. There's a bias to believe it, and so therefore it's easy to push out contrary

evidence to what you believe. And so you want to hear only the things that confirm what you already believe.

That's why it's called a Confirmational Bias. But if you're aware of that, that helps. I don't think anybody can completely get away from it, and I'm aware of it when it happens with me.

I'm thinking, oh, wait, you really want your view to be right. Somebody else is to be false, the opposite view to be false, which is natural. But if we are aware of that, particularly when it comes to really important issues, we're going to be willing to give the other side a hearing.

And by the way, this is the difference between being narrow-minded and open-minded. Narrow-minded doesn't mean having a narrow view. It means you have a narrow mind about your views.

That means you have blinders on, so to speak. You don't look to the left or to the right. I think of the monkeys, and I have a little emblem of that, a little kind of statue of the three monkeys.

Hands in the mouth, hands over the eyes, hands on the ears. I think that's where like here, no evil, see no evil, say no evil, or something like that's the original characterization of it. But I just think of it in terms, and the monkeys are good.

Remind me of the Darwinian issue, actually. These are a bunch of chimpanzees in order there. And the idea is, don't confuse me with the facts.

That's the attitude. I have my beliefs, and I don't want to consider alternatives. That's a close-minded kind of person.

Now, we don't want to be close-minded. We want to be open to considering, if there's merit, views contrary to ours, because I think we'd like to think, certainly as Christians, that we have a commitment to what's true. We want to know the way the world really is.

It's a private professor. I had a bible, a Talbot philosophy professor. We want to increase our stock of true beliefs and decrease our stock, a false belief spoken like a professor, right? So that's actually what we're trying to do here as individuals.

And sometimes the issues don't matter that much. And so maybe our conformational bias overwhelms it. I like what I believe about this, and who cares? It's not a big deal.

But when it comes to really critical matters, then we want to be much more careful. Weighty theological issues, worldview concerns, those are ethical elements. These are really weighty.

And if we have the attitude as Tracy has expressed, I don't want to be taken in by my

close-mindedness. That itself is a good kind of evidence or a good practice or a good guard protection against being close-minded, against being taken in by conformational bias and being willing to consider the merits of other views. I remember having a conversation with a woman on the airplane once.

She said, now this is a number of years ago, so maybe it was 20 years ago. So what I would have been in my 50s, right? And she said, you know, it was almost like a, you know, sunny kind of, you know, patronizing as we were talking a little about Christianity and Jesus being the way or whatever. And she said, you know, sunny, there are lots of people in the world that don't believe the way you believe.

There are all kinds of other religious views in the world. And she kind of was presuming that I was holding my view in virtue of my ignorance of alternatives, as if you can live in America, certainly nowadays, and not be fully aware of all alternatives or many of them. And because also Christians are shamed now, in many ways, for holding their own view.

So there's lots of variety out there, lots of diversity of ideas that are right, standing, staring us in the face. The fact is, at that time, I'd probably been about different, 25 different countries, maybe 30, I don't know, and then spoken in half of them and spoken in, you know, every continent in the world is Sefaran article. My convictions are not based on my lack of exposure to alternatives.

But in her mind, just because there were a variety of different views, this cast into a question that whether my view was actually accurate, you know, well, everybody can't be right. And everybody can be wrong, they can all be right. But let's just say somebody's right.

I mean, what good would it be to go to that person saying, well, Sonny, you know, there's a whole lot of people who don't actually, who don't actually believe the earth is round, who don't actually believe that the sun is at the center of the solar system. So I know young man, one day, when you grow up, you'll expose yourself to these other views. It's like come on.

It's so patronizing. Now, I don't remember how I responded to it. I wasn't rude to her.

I know that. But nevertheless, this is something that kind of comes up. It's like, well, you, you hold your views because you're close to alternatives.

That actually is characteristic of the other side in my experience. And that's why Tracy's frustrated. Why is it that these people wouldn't even consider a view that's well defended or well evidenced? Why wouldn't they even consider it? I hope I don't fall into that trap.

And I think Tracy, you're unlikely to fall into that trap if you're mindful of the liability that the traps are there. And so now you can walk around them. You could be more vigilant.

And this is what we teach people to do here. We teach people not just what to think, but how to think most of the world, the educational system, they give no time to teaching kids how to think. If they did, they wouldn't be thinking what they do on so many issues.

They indoctrinate. In other words, they say, this is how you're supposed to think. There's a lot of, what's the word, a kerfuffle of sorts about Dennis Prager's YouTube presence, PragerU, which is all kinds of educational material.

Some directed kids has been being allowed to be used in public schools in different states. And they did a CBS TV, especially a lot of the portions of it. But what the woman said is, look at, we are teaching kids how to think.

We are not teaching them what to think. And I thought this woman is not in touch with reality. Who was saying that the teacher was defending against the incursion of conservative views into the school, Allah PragerU, those five-minute segments.

And no, we are not teaching them what to think. We are teaching them how to think. I thought, give me one example.

Anyplace, this is not the truth. Separate issue, but it's tied broadly to this concern here. There is close mindedness and close mindedness in my experience is coming from the other side, not characteristically coming from thoughtful Christians.

Now, there are Christians they have blinders on. But in the cultural discussion, this is not the issue because the people engaging in the cultural discussion on both sides are bright and intelligent, but one side refuses to listen to reason. And this is why they try to silence the opposition.

This is a red flag whenever you see an attempt to silence the opposition. That's just, no, their ideas can't compete. And that's why they try to get rid of the competition rather than compete against the competition in the world of ideas.

Well, I wish I thought that it was a matter of one side versus another, but my fear is that in this culture, this situation is increasing. I'm seeing more people not knowing how to think through things. And because of that, they tend to get in their little tribes and protect themselves from the other positions rather than engaging them.

And I think this is increasing. And I'm not exactly sure why it probably has something to do with the way people have been taught over the last 20 years in schools and not being not being taught, not being taught how to think, but being given certain things that are the right things to think and then kind of repeating those things. I'm not sure what is causing all of this, but I'm seeing it happen in a lot of places.

So I get your concern, Tracy. And I think you hit on this one already, the most important thing that you need to do in order to avoid making this mistake is to care about truth

above everything else. You have to care about truth.

You have to be willing to sacrifice your ideas for what's actually true. And even this is a reflection of our Christian worldview, because if God doesn't exist, truth doesn't really matter all that much. What matters is what you want.

And so you can adjust the truth in order to get what it is you want. But if God is real and he's true and he created this world and he wants us to align our thinking with what's true, that's why we care about it. So I'm not surprised that as Christianity wanes in this culture, that there's less of a value on truth and more of a value on what works for me.

And how can I get what I want? And how can I be with on the good side, on the right side of history where everyone agrees with me? Well, of course, the right side of history is always this thing always think that history is going to go their way that 10, 15, 20 years ago, people are going to agree with them because they're enlightened. It's it's a meaningless statement because of course, however, we're convincing people that will be the way history goes and history has no moral judgments whatsoever. Only God, we can only be on the right side of good or evil.

History is just the way things are happening that it's it's meaningless. But you have to care about you have to fight that that tendency in our culture to use quote truth for your purposes and and rather to conform your purposes and your ideas to the truth. So that's that's the first thing.

Secondly, I would say, when you're in a situation where people are presenting an argument and you don't really want to listen to it, I would just slow down. I would I if you take that pressure off of yourself of having to make a decision right now whether or not they're right, just slow down and be willing to say, Hey, I don't know what I think about this. So why don't you just explain to me explain to me what you think and and just internally take that pressure off of yourself to make a decision right then and instead slow down and make your goal just to understand your goal is only to understand their position.

You don't have to make a decision right now. Take that pressure off yourself. That way you can just gather the information and you can tell them, Hey, I just want to understand at this point because obviously, I'm not going to change my mind on something of this nature so quickly.

So why don't you just make your case? So you're you're kind of giving them an expectation where they're only trying to help you to understand and that takes maybe the the urgency out of what they're doing and the and the anger or you know, whatever it is they're feeling the intensity that was the word I was looking for. And then finally, I would say another thing that really helps is don't stop worrying about defending your name. So sometimes we make an argument and we feel like we have to defend that

argument to the death because otherwise I'm going to look bad.

So remember that this isn't about your name at all. You can give things up. You can give up ideas.

You can you can look like an idiot. Our goal is to glorify God's name and promote God's name and all truth will end up doing that. So you can sacrifice looking good in front of others for the sake of truth because that's what will honor God.

So those are all things I think could help. Last one's a tough one to apply though. Yes.

But you know, when I remind myself of that, hey, you don't have to defend your name, it really solves a lot of problems and a lot of pressure on yourself and a lot of fear and anger and all those things. Great advice. Okay, Greg, let's go on to the next question.

This one comes from Tim. A former Christian co-worker asked why God doesn't give more evidence to the quote non-resistant non-believers who are seeking truth. Many of his replies accused me of using dogma ending our last dialogue with Christians should avoid philosophy and critical thinking if they want to remain Christians.

There's a lot there. There's a lot there and it doesn't entirely make sense to me because I was going to write some things down but then I thought, I'll just repeat it. But now there's a whole bunch there.

So let me just look at the at the wording here. A former Christianist, why doesn't God give more evidence to the non-resistant non-believers? Now this, of course, non-resistant non-believers is a kind of a self-serving way of describing an individual who rejects God's existence or Christianity. We are not really resisting.

We just don't believe because there's not enough evidence. Okay. I think there are some people that genuinely think that in their minds but underneath we know that something else is going on.

It isn't that they're non-resistant. What Paul says in Romans 1 is that the evidence is there, at least for God's reality, his divine attributes, his eternal power are clearly seen to what has been made. But what do human beings do? They suppress or hold that truth down because of their unrighteous motives.

They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They do want God ahead of them. They want, they don't want God interfering.

It kind of reminds me now what people say. The problem of evil in present culture is changed a bit for many people. It's not that there's evil in the world and therefore God doesn't exist.

It's if God is the way you say that he is and he won't let me do whatever I want,

especially sexually, then you're God is evil. And so this is a very aggressive demand for autonomy that people are having. And so I take exception with the notion of the non-resistant non-believer.

Now I'm not going to go to a resistant non-believer and say you're a resistant non-believer, not a non-resistant. This is kind of the approach of some of the presuppositionalists who kind of you're just, you really know God just trying to deny them. And that's consistent with the view of apologetics.

And I think there's certainly a measure of truth to that. But I don't think it is an effective way of a practical apologetics. Okay, it doesn't work well.

So nevertheless, I'm aware that there's a somebody who's fighting against the truth down in there. And now of course there are people that are under conviction and they're in a process and that was at one point in my life. And I remember going talking to, I was in the army, talking to another soldier.

I said, oh, I understand you're a Christian. Tell me more kind of thing. He was really shocked.

We were going out to have a pizza. And I saw a Christian symbol on his dashboard. He was driving.

I said, hey, well, you're a Christian? Yeah. And I said, oh, well, I got lots of questions. So that's a little different.

I did have a point of view, but no, I'm in the flow. God's working on me and I'm trying to figure things out. So I'm, I'm a, I am a non-resistant non-believer at that point, but I'm moving in a direction there and you're going to run into people like that.

But most of the time people who are non-believers that you're talking with are not non-resistant. When they say, well, there's not enough evidence. Really? Why do you, do you ever use the term boy? It's so easy to anthropomorphize what we see happening in the natural world because it just looks like somebody's involved with it.

So there's an intuition there that for that, that stimulates us to make a reference to mother because we don't want to make a reference to father who is the one responsible. But notice that there's a, there's a design intuition that's at play there. Well, that's it.

That's Romans one. That's exactly what Paul's getting at. And there's a whole bunch of other things like this.

Morality, you know, we are, we go through moral motions. Everybody does. That's a shape for points itself.

Why? Because we're human beings made the image of God. Now, notice that moral

motions are, he's not speaking near the content of morality. He's, he's, he's talking about our, our, our moral machine that we think in moral categories.

And we, we, we think in terms of morally right and wrong. And this is most powerfully evidenced by the ubiquitous complaint about the problem of evil. Okay.

So I mean, I'm just saying there's another, what, what, how much you want? I could sit here all day long and give you all kinds of really good reasons. And I've never returned to the Bible once. You know, well, maybe I'd get there eventually.

But the point I'm making is you don't need God's word. Paul's point is without God's word, God's evidence is obvious through what has been made. And, and so it isn't like, and that's part of it, you know, we're just, we just, why doesn't God make himself more clear? Someone referred to this as the hiddenness of God.

I actually think the hiddenness of God applies more to Christians who are, who are struggling with life and would like God to show up more aggressively. Just like people said, where's Aslan, you know, when they were in trouble in Narnia. And of course, aslan existed, he was always around, but he showed up when he was just needed, right? So that's the problem.

You know, nonbelievers will say that, not enough evidence. That was the Bertrand Russell's famous comment. When you, when you die and you face God, what are you going to say to him? He's going to, he said, I'll say not enough evidence.

Why didn't you give me wherever this? Well, the evidence is profound. And in any event, so that's, I don't take this nonresistant nonbeliever seriously, especially when it's based on God hasn't given us enough evidence. I'm seeking truth.

And that's part of the qualification here. And then many of his replies accuse me of using dogma. I'm not sure what that means.

If we are trying to make an explanation of why the world is the way it is, these of necessity require foundational claims about the Christian understanding of reality. Now that's called dogma. It's also called theology.

All right. Man, God made the whole world. That's in the beginning, God created heaven's the earth.

God made human beings in his image. Okay. All both of those statements, by the way, are part of the foundation of Christianity, the Christian worldview.

But they all are comport in many ways with the world as we experience it. We know human beings are different. That's why we can we gas termites, but not Jews.

Because you don't do that to human beings for the reasons that the Nazis did that. So all

I'm saying is that we have all kinds of things that are accessible to us that our evidence is for God. And they they entail dogma because dogma just are statements of truth of a theological nature that are foundational.

So I don't know how can a person ask why you don't ask him on Christianity and then complain that you're just giving me dogma. Now maybe the person here is not giving evidence, but just giving statements, Christian platitudes. I don't know.

Maybe that's what they're doing. I doubt that if he's having a conversation like this, it seems unlikely and he listens to this and he likes to stand a reason. That seems unlikely.

Yes. But then the interlocutor here, the opposition says Christians should avoid philosophy and critical thinking if they want to remain Christians. What's up with that? That reminds me of the opposite quote from C.S. Lewis about how people have to be careful about what they read.

Do you remember what I'm talking about? I don't remember the exact quote, but something about you can't you can't I mean it might even be from the Screwtape letters, but you have to guard carefully what you read or you'll become a Christian. Oh, I see. It's something to the opposite effect of this.

But I do think you need to kind of bring out what the real problem is because I agree, Greg, this person sounds pretty hostile. So there is probably something going on under there that's not really being addressed here. And I think it is this Romans one situation that you talked about.

So I have a couple questions that might make that more clear in your conversation. And the first thing you could ask is he says, why doesn't God give more evidence? And then you could just say, well, would you like to look at that? Let's just look at the evidence together. Why don't we take some time and you can see what evidence there is and then tell me if it's not enough.

And then we'll just keep going until it is enough, or you just get tired of us never stopping talk about evidence. So that's the first thing you could do. Just see if he'll go through the evidence with you.

Now, one thing I've told this story before, but I can remember when I was in college, there was a guy there who was very aggressively hostile towards Christians openly all the time. And I finally one day, I said, I'm just going to wear my cross necklace and see what happens. I was really scared.

And I got there. And he says, you're not one of those Christians, are you? And I said, yes. Well, after the class, he followed me out and started talking to me about Christianity for a really long time and was very interested.

And very, so sometimes the people who are who seem the most hostile are actually the ones who are wrestling with it. So that's not necessarily a bad sign. It can be, but it's not necessarily.

So see, offer him the opportunity to look at the evidence and just say, look, you can respond to it. You can let's not do dogma. But you can't do dogma either.

You can't just say, there's no God. We have to reason. So you want to do philosophy and critical thinking.

So do I, let's look at the evidence and you can critique it. And we can have like a little discussion back and forth using reason. Are you interested in that? See what he says.

The second thing I would say, it's important to note here that, and this goes back again to Romans 1. The biggest difference between Christians and non-Christians is not whether or not you think God exists or the Christian God exists. The biggest difference is the person who doesn't believe in God hates him. And one way you can bring out this idea is if you ask, hey, if I were to put out just amazing evidence that proved that the Christian God is true, that all of this is true, would you follow him? See what he says.

Yeah. That's a favorite question of Frank Turrax, by the way. Oh, really? In college environments.

And he's just testing their intellectual integrity at that point. Well, that will, and it's not necessarily that because what they could say is, no, I wouldn't follow him because I think he's terrible. And then you can say, oh, so your real problem isn't necessarily that there's not enough evidence, but that you think the bigger problem here is that you think this God's a bad God.

Well, then you can move it to, well, why don't I just explain to you who the Christian God is? Because it sounds like you've got a wrong idea about him. And that's kind of a backdoor way in where you're not fighting over whether or not it's true, but now you're actually getting the message out to him and you're clarifying what Christianity teaches. So that might be a way, a way into a conversation.

Well, right of time, Greg, that was fun. Thank you, Tracy and Tim for your questions. And please send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag STRS or go to our website at str.org and send us a question through the hashtag STRS page.

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This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.