

OpenTheo

Is God Good?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to teens who are asking whether God is good, a good way to respond to coworkers who joke that they would burst into flames if they entered a church, how to engage with an apathetic person, and evangelism tips for a high school freshman who has non-Christian friends.

- * How would you respond to teens whose questions are about whether or not God is good?
- * What's a good way to respond to coworkers who joke that they would burst into flames if they stepped into a church?
- * How would you engage with an apathetic person who keeps saying they "don't know" in response to everything?
- * Do you have any evangelism tips for a high school freshman who has made new friends who aren't Christians?

Transcript

You're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag, S-T-R-S-C-Podcast with Amy Holland, Greg Cokel. Hi, Amy. Hi, Greg.

Alright, we have a few questions about talking to people, you know, apologetics, evangelism, that sort of thing, as we do. I'm amazed. We never get those kinds of questions.

And this first one comes from Michael. Okay. I teach teens in Awana.

One question is not whether God is true, but whether he is good. How would you respond? Well, the simple response is, if God isn't good, then nothing is good. There is no goodness.

Now, I say that from the perspective, and this is a little bit complicated to try to, I think,

explain to Awana, these are younger people. But it all goes back to the grounding problem. If there is evil in the world, that means there's a departure from good.

That means there's a transcendent standard for good and evil. If there is no transcendent standard, then there is no good and evil. Relativism is true.

You can't break a law that doesn't exist. You can't break the speed limit on the Autobahn in Germany, because there is no speed limit. If there is a speed limit in the universe, if there are moral rules that allow us to distinguish what is good from what is being done.

If there is bad, there's got to be a governing authority that establishes those limits. So this is a fairly straightforward characterization of the moral argument for the existence of God. And if God isn't good, that means he isn't the standard of goodness, and there is no other standard of goodness.

Therefore, there can be no goodness. The difficulty here is that what counts as good, and you and I both know, this is a fairly recent challenge to Christianity. It has in the past it's been, well, maybe God doesn't exist.

Okay, now it is, even if he does exist, he's not good. Why is he not good? Because he doesn't let me do whatever I want to do, especially sexually. And that's the mentality of the culture.

How can God be a good God if he tells me I can't do the things I want to do? No, it's a crazy thought because if people are allowed to do whatever they want to do, that means other people are going to be harmed in the process. So people want to be relativists for themselves, but they don't want other people to be relativists towards them. They want people to act virtuously towards them.

But of course, there is no virtue in that system except for the virtue of doing whatever you want. And when everybody does whatever they want, that's chaos. And there's a lot of harm that comes from it.

Okay, now this is because people have not thought through through it all, though all it takes is one step of thinking to realize that if everyone does whatever they want, this is not going to be good for me. Now, just thinking narcissistically, if you're like, what's good for me and what I want, satisfying my own wants, if I were a narcissist, I would want people to believe in objective morality. I would want people to live virtuously.

I just would try to get away with whatever I could get away with to satisfy me. Then I get what I want and other people have to be nice towards me. Okay.

But they haven't thought it through that much. All right, they just advanced narcissism. And therefore, the idea that God would get in the way of what I want, well, that's not good.

It's a twisted understanding of goodness, obviously. But that's, I think, what motivates this, this fairly new response from people regarding God, even if God does exist, he isn't good. If he says, if this is the kind of God he is.

Of course, that's not goodness. What they're describing, that's just pure, unadulterated self-interest. That's self-ishness.

Why would selfishness be considered virtuous? But that's the way the culture is thinking. Now, you do you live your truth, you know, that kind of stuff. So the answer to the challenge and the hard part is trying to help kids to understand this.

The answer to the challenge is if God isn't good, then there is no goodness because there's no other standard for goodness that's available. What could you possibly judge God by? Exactly. Where is the standard coming from? And this question is in the Streetsmart's book because it's a fair question.

If you're saying God is not good, then where are you getting the standard you're judging God by? You're going to have to get it from somewhere. You are judging by a standard because you have in your own mind some idea of what good is. So what is good? In your mind, what is good? And maybe that's the question to ask, the meaning of good, and get people to try to cash that out.

What is the meaning? When you say God is good, what do you have in mind? What would it take for God to be good in your mind? Okay. Now, sometimes this is a principled challenge against the God of the Bible, not against any old God, but the God of the Bible because people read things in the Bible that strike them as immoral, like alleged genocide in the Old Testament or race is, I'm not sorry, slavery in the Old Testament. And there's the problem here is of course understanding of the culture context and a whole bunch of other things that are involved here, but in that case they're saying, well, it's the God of the Bible, that's not good.

But again, the question can be asked, since that's often raised by atheists is where are you getting the standard by which you're judging God? Now, that's just one angle. There are lots of particular details that one might focus on, and I do in the Street Smart book on this issue to help people see that they're misunderstanding things from the Hebrew text. But nevertheless, that's going to be a concern.

So I guess my strategy would be, what is it that wouldn't be good about God? We know lots of things about God. Why would we say God isn't good? And if God isn't good, where are you going to get your standard of goodness? Well, let me add a second part to that because I think that is definitely a foundational idea that you need to get across to the students. As a second part of that, because as you mentioned, Greg, I think there are a lot of people who don't know how to make sense of certain things in the Old Testament.

Part of the reason is they just haven't thought carefully enough about it. Part of the reason is because they have been conditioned by culture to have certain views about justice and sin and judgment that are actually not accurate. So what happens is the first thing you can do, if they have a specific issue, you can talk to them about that issue and you can explain how God's goodness is reflected in whatever, if they're upset about a commander, they're upset about something God did, you can, you know, try and explain it to them.

But you won't always have an answer. I mean, sometimes there are things that we don't understand that we have to think about some more. You might need to go get help for it, whatever.

So what I recommend is that you look at the cross because now we have an objective event in history that we can look at to see whether God is good. The Bible will sacrifice and his grace. And that is, that's the obvious thing.

I mean, he, Jesus died for enemies. He loved them enough to die for them. Greater love has no man and this that he laid down.

Well, that's not the one I want. The one I want even while we were at sinners Christ. Right.

And it says, and this is love. This is the very definition of love. He demonstrated that objectively for all to see.

So even if you can't understand some other passage, you can look at that and say, okay, but this is the God who died on a cross and gave up all of his advantages in heaven and came to earth, became a man and died for people who hated him in order to save him. Now, if that isn't the definition of love and goodness, I don't know what is. That's great.

So even if you can't understand those other things, you can hold on to that. And the second thing is that we see on the cross, and this is what makes it so brilliant, is we also see God's justice. We see that he does not let evil go unpunished.

He didn't sweep evil under the rug in order to bring people into his family. He actually brought about real and complete and perfect justice. So not only is he loving and good, but he also cares about defeating evil and triumphing over evil and punishing evil.

And when you put those two things together, I don't see how you can deny his goodness. Even if you can't understand certain things in the Bible, you still need to look into it and try and figure out. You know, that's a great approach.

And that's why you should be first string, that second string in the show here. Who was it Frank Turic said, just shut up and let him answer all the questions. But this is what you've done, you know, my, what I suggested first is, well, what do they mean by good

and how do they figure that out and how they can make sense of goodness if there is no God? Okay, that is a legitimate approach.

But you said, you said, let's just go to Jesus and you see God is good. God is good. Look at what he did.

He's good in sacrificing when he didn't need to sacrifice. And he's good in judging judging sin. And he's just so he is good.

Now with that in place, okay, now what do we do about some of these other things that give us pause. All right. And so that's great.

I'll remember that. Okay. Well, it's nice.

Next time, we but you're covering all the bases here, you're covering philosophy, you're covering history, you're covering theology, and all these different aspects point to God's goodness. And people respond to different things, you know, you might have a student who responds better to the philosophical thing or, you know, just try it all. Okay, here's a question from and those who are longtime listeners of the show will catch the joke here.

Square root of Vega. The root of Vega is back, Greg. And we go to Vega.

Oh, yeah. All right. Here's the question.

When I mentioned the church to coworkers, they often respond by joking that if they stepped into a church, they would burst into flames. Other than asking what they mean by that, can you or Greg come up with a casual response to this joke that puts a stone in their shoe? Well, you gave me a heads up on this last night. And so I've been thinking about it.

And I do have a, at first, I thought, I don't know how we're going to do that, you know, like a clever response. But I did think of something that is substantive, and I don't know if it'll get them thinking or not, but it does require that they answer a question. And my presumption is they would burst into flames.

They are joking that they burst into flames if they go into church, because there's such sinners all they do is get close to God and God's going to just come and them, right? Something like that. All right. So, but what I, what I would for the response I thought of, and I know you probably have a better one, so you're saving it to Trump me in just a minute.

Okay. But what I thought about is that if you asked them, why, why would you say that? He said, man, because I'm such a sinner, man, God's going to hammer me the minute I get in. Well, it might be his response.

It might be that when you go into church, you burst into joy, because Jesus said I came

not for the righteous, but for sinners. And you're going to find forgiveness and a brand new life there. I like your answer better than mine, Greg.

That's good. I think we're both heading towards the same direction here, which is the idea that he's got it backwards. He has it completely backwards.

The church is where you go to get rescued from judgment. Yeah. And so I think that captures it really well.

And it focuses on the the church is where you go to be rescued from judgment. And you're in much bigger danger of bursting into flames out here. That is a good point.

I like that. Because I've got bad news for you. God is out there too.

He's not just in church. Yeah. Yeah.

All right. That was kind of a fun one. Yeah.

Thanks for the Vega. Okay. So here is a question from Christina Misker.

How do you engage with someone who is apathetic saying, I don't know to everything? Well, yeah, just for the record, I hate this question because it's so difficult to answer. I think the best way of dealing with apathy is through questions, but this is something Christina's already trying. And this is why the people keep shogging their shoulders.

So because, you know, apathetic people, genuinely apathetic people don't care. And they don't care because they don't see the importance of whatever it is that you're talking about. Okay.

What about the price of butter in the Ukraine? I don't care. It's not an issue to me. You know, however, if a person lived in the Ukraine, you know, that might be an issue.

So I don't have any clever way of responding to this. I've always been frustrated by people who are apathetic. And frankly, I just, I don't, I don't spend my time on people like that.

I'm going to try to find, as I've said in the past, I'm looking for the person is looking for me. They may not know they're looking for me, but as something that someone that God is already working in their heart so that I can offer something that will be useful, given the circumstance that we're in other way they're thinking. And if they're mad at God, okay, that's all right.

I can work with that. If they're completely, they lack interest because they are disinterested. And that word means that they have no stake or they think they have no stake in the matter.

Then it's hard for me. It's hard for me to know how to motivate them to think they do have a stake. This is about them.

And they're not going to escape this. I remember my count, my, my own mentor, my original first mentor, Craig Inglert, as I recall, I think he said, this is the kind of response that really bugged him. And he'd really go after that.

It's one thing to a jacked or to agree, but to act like it's no big deal, he wanted to say, listen, this is the most important thing. I just remember that this, this fired him up, you know, to try to show people that you're, you're playing with fire kind of thing. But at least that's the way I recall it with Craig.

But for me, it just, it just leaves me flat. And I know this is no help for Christina. Maybe you have something to offer.

But again, I'd rather spend my time with people who are somehow engaged with the issue than people who just don't care. I remember starting a conversation with a guy sitting next to me on the airplane who was reading a book about New Age. And so I joined the book.

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

What's it about? Well, I saw the title so I knew it was about and he explained a little bit. I said, did they ever quote Jesus in there? Oh, yeah, they quote Jesus all the time. I said, Oh, it's interesting.

Did you ever read Jesus for yourself? In other words, instead of reading quotes from New Age's who cherry pick, did you, what do you mean, did I ever read it by for myself? You know, did you ever read Jesus? Did you ever read the, the, the, the accounts of the life of Jesus and what he said himself in their context? He said, no, no, I never did it. And that was really clear to me. Like, you mean the Bible? No, of course not.

And he's just completely shrugging me off. And it was clear at that particular point that he had no interest in pursuing this conversation with me at all. He wasn't curious.

I didn't peak his interest of any, in any way, he just was like, it was like subtext. Can you please let me get back to my reading? So here's a guy who was, was completely apathetic regarding the concern I had. He was, he was fine with me at about New Age.

He didn't want to hear about the real Jesus. And so I just let it go. There's no reason for me to continue.

I just did not think that was a fruitful encounter. So I just let it die in natural death, which is basically my counsel in these kinds of things. Others might be more effective in getting a rise out of somebody in a good way.

No, of course, if you try to get rise out of somebody, it could be a negative as well. Could work against you. So anyway, that's those are my thoughts about it.

How about you? Well, it's hard to actually make a case and have a back and forth if they don't care. I don't, I agree. I don't think that's really fruitful.

I think all you can do is plant a seed so they know where to go when they do have questions. And I think what I might do is say, look, you know, right now you probably think you're a pretty good person. And so you don't really think this applies to you.

But someday you're going to do something you feel really guilty for and you're not going to know what to do. And I just want you to know that this is where you find forgiveness in Jesus. So come find me when that happens.

I mean, I don't know what else you can do. Just something to get the gospel out there very simply in a way that someday may have an influence on them. All right, let's squeeze one more in here.

This one comes from Cole. I'm starting high school and I've made some friends who aren't Christians. One has gay dads.

Do you have tips for evangelism? Wait, he has a gay dad? Is that what you're saying? One of his friends has two dads. Oh, I still hear. Yeah.

Do you have tips for evangelism? Well, my general approach is I never make any particular sinful circumstance an issue in evangelism. Regardless of any person's sinful tendencies or sinful set of circumstances they find themselves in, if all those were to change, what wouldn't change is their need for Christ. And so this is where I'm going to focus in not on some particular thing like that, which could be a distraction.

A person might get defensive. Maybe they feel very defensive about their dads because this is an unusual circumstance in the culture. And even though it's widely accepted, in some ways, they realize that a lot of people don't accept that.

And so they might be defensive on behalf of their dads. It's strange even to say it that way. But of course, that's the concern that they have.

And the key is no matter what their circumstance, no matter what their personal proclivities, they still need Christ. And that's what I'm going to want to focus in on is their own sinfulness before God and their lostness apart from forgiveness by the rescuer Jesus. And of course, there are the Colombo questions, which they can learn about in tactics.

If you haven't read tactics, Cole, then I definitely recommend that. There are simple questions you can ask. What do you mean by that? How did you come to that

conclusion? And tactics will help you with those questions.

All right, Greg, we're out of time. Thank you, Michael, square root of Vega, Christina and Cole. We appreciate hearing from you.

If you have a question, you can sit it on Twitter with the hashtag STRask. Or you can go through our website at str.org. Just look for our hashtag STRask podcast page and you'll find a link there where you can send in your question. All we ask is that you keep it tweet sized, which is very short, you know, just two sentences, maybe three sentences, and we will consider it for the show.

X size. Yeah, that's weird. A big mistake.

What are you going to do? All right, thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.