

# OpenTheo

## Wouldn't a True Christian Refuse to Leave People Behind in Hell?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether the fast rate at which Christianity spread is evidence it's true, whether a true, loving Christian would refuse to leave people behind in Hell by accepting Heaven, and challenging someone who favors religions that pre-date Christianity because they're older.

\* If the fast rate at which Christianity spread is evidence it's true, how do I square that with the fact that there will be as many Muslims as there are Christians in 2050?

\* Would not a true, loving Christian say that if anyone has to experience eternal torment, then they have to as well? Is it possible God is testing whether some of us will accept Heaven and leave others behind?

\* How would you go about challenging a person who favors religions that pre-date Judaism and Christianity because they're older?

## Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Kousser and you're listening to the hashtag S-E-R-S-C-R-S podcast. Welcome, Greg. Thank you, Amy.

And welcome, wonderful listeners. Famous, Amy. Oh, no, it's getting silly way to early read.

Okay. All right, here's a question from Christie. I hear that one evidence that Christianity is true is how fast it spread.

I read a Pew article predicting that there will be as many Muslims as there are Christians in 2050 and that we only account for 31% of the population. How do I square these facts? Well, I've never advanced the fast spread of Christianity as an evidence for the truth of Christianity. And partly because you have counter examples like this.

And now one factor that may be relevant is the fact that Christianity spread so quickly under tremendous opposition. And this, I think, is a significant factor. There are Muslims who have subjective experiences with Jesus that convinces them that Christianity is true in Islam as false.

I mean, this happens pretty regularly, actually. Supernatural, signs and wonders, kinds of factors, even Nabil Kureshi, our erstwhile colleague. He, in his own testimony, that happened even though he had a powerful witness coming from David Wood over the years that they were friends until he became a Christian.

But one of the reasons that David Wood became an expert in Islam is partly because of all the work he had to do, boning up to convince Nabil. And then he realized Muslims make great, former Muslims make great Christians. The idea there is because it costs them so much, they are to become a Christian in light of their environment, they are fully in.

Now, of course, that by itself is not a defense for Christianity, but I think what it does show, especially when there's these supernatural events that are factors in making their decision for Christ and against Islam. And by the way, if you meet a Christian who had been a Muslim, always ask them if there was a supernatural element. I rarely run into someone, former Muslim, currently a Christian who hasn't had an experience like that.

It's a truthful nature of the experience because if this wasn't a profound experience that really deeply influenced them, they would not stand against the tide that they have to stand against when they switch from their parents, from their family, from their Muslim community. And in Muslim countries, what they stand against is often a threat to their own life. So what this does is it lends credibility to the legitimacy of the testimony, just like it does to the apostles who said they saw Jesus.

Well, they didn't see Jesus as they saw something else. Well, tell you what, they were so convinced they saw Jesus that they staked their life on it. And that needs to be taken into consideration.

If this was just a dream or a momentary hallucination, they're not going to do that. So I think that there's an apologetic element in that, but simply the rapid rise or spread of it, I wouldn't bank much on that personally, partly for the reason that, let's see, Christy mentioned, although it is ironic that what the spread of Islam is to some degree do to the force that is often used or the threat of force, if you differ, where it was exactly the opposite with Christianity. So that's a great point.

Yeah, I think there are a couple things to note here. First of all, there is a difference between widespread and spreading the truth. So whatever is happening now in terms of how widespread it is, that actually doesn't address the question of how fast it spread, even if that were an argument for Christianity.

Secondly, you brought up the second one, Greg, is how did it spread? So this is key. The Christians were under persecution, yet they still converted, whereas the Muslims were converted under, well, not everyone, but the spread of it went through force. So that is a difference too.

They covered the Mediterranean region in 100 years. Battle of Tours was 100 years after Muhammad died. That's in France and that ended the northern spread.

And that's all through jihad. It took Christians 300 years, 300 or so, and the only blood they shed was their own. And then finally, I think Christy, you might be confusing this with a particular argument that adds another element into this.

So yes, it was fast. It spread quickly. But the point is it spread quickly in a location where people weren't in a position to know the historical situation.

Now with Islam, that was based on a vision that Muhammad had. There's no way to verify that historically, there's nothing involved with things people can look into or study or anything like that. Either accept his vision or you don't.

So again, that's a different situation. In Jerusalem, people were in a position to know, is there a dead body? Was Jesus here? Did he heal people? You know, all these... Is the tomb empty? Is the tomb empty? All these things were playing into it and available to them in the location from where it was spreading. Yeah, I think that Paul said to... Not Festus, but the other guy, Agrippa, I think it was, and these things have not been done in a corner.

You know about these things. So there's a difference between people believing somebody's vision and people believing something that they're in a position to look into and to assess in a concrete way. So I think if you add the element of the location into it, that could be where you've heard the argument about it spreading quickly.

Because without that element, it's not quite as relevant as it is when you know that it was spreading quickly in a place where people were able to look into whether or not it was actually true. All right, here's a question from Maria. Would not a true, loving Christian say, if anyone experiences eternal torment and anguish, then I have to as well.

No exceptions. Is it possible that it's God's test whether some of us will accept heaven and leave others behind? I guess I'm not clear on the question. Could you go over that again? Is it not true that a really loving Christian would... If you were really a loving Christian, wouldn't you say that if somebody is experiencing eternal torment, then I have to as well.

Then I should as well if you really loved them. And then, and she's wondering if this is a test whether if some people will just accept heaven and leave the others behind. Okay, I'm still a little confused, but let me just respond to the first half and then you can bring

me up to speed.

We'll see what I'm... It is our view that we all deserve punishment, commensurate with our crimes. That is going to... The amount of punishment is going to be different based on the different crimes, but the duration of the punishment is the same. Eternal separation and banishment from God.

So I am willing to say that about myself. Yes, I deserve that too. I have escaped that, not on my own merits, but in virtue of the rescuer who has done what was necessary to procure my forgiveness.

Okay, that's the first part. I think. Did I answer the first part? Well, I think what she's asking is... I think she's saying doesn't love of others require our solidarity and their punishment.

So, our saying, God, I don't want to go to heaven if they're not going to heaven. I'm going to suffer with them. I'm not going to leave them behind.

I don't. That makes no sense to me. I mean, I don't mean this disparagingly, but I can't connect those dots.

How does that work? See, I agree, Greg, and I think if I just use a parallel, it'll be clear to people why this doesn't work. Would you ever say if you really loved people, then you would put yourself in prison because they're suffering in prison and you should also suffer in prison. You shouldn't leave them behind.

You shouldn't be free. Look, they're in prison. You should also be in prison if you really love them.

Like, I think putting it in those terms, we can see that that doesn't make any sense at all. That's not the definition of love. What love, I think, requires is that we make clear to them that there is a way to get out of prison, even though they deserve to be in prison like us.

I'm wondering if for Maria, this is something someone else said to her. If you guys really believe that that's happening, and these should make common cause with them, you should be with them and be with them. If you are there in hell, you are not with them.

You are not there to comfort them. If you really love people who are living in poverty, an argument can be made is you're going to live with them in poverty and you're going to try to help them in the midst of that. Of course, lots of missionaries have done that out of love.

But this is an entirely different set of circumstances. This is a place of darkness and wailing and gnashing of teeth. I don't know if it's utter aloneness in the sense that

there's no sense of awareness that someone else is in a certain sense near you experiencing what you're experiencing.

But that's not going to be any comfort to anybody, even if that's the case. Because what the experience is going to be is individual misery, and that's what you're going to be aware of. If you're not going to say, yeah, that hurts.

But that guy over there is hurting too. So I'm going to hang out there. Maybe we'll both feel better.

It doesn't work that way. And we know that it's not possible that this is some secret test from God. And we know this for a lot of reasons.

I mean, just for example, what comes to mind is the parable of the 10 virgins where some were ready to go when the bridegroom came because they had their oil and then some weren't ready. And the point is the ones who are ready go in. The door is closed when the time is up.

And the point is you need to be ready because those who are ready will be with God and those who aren't will be shut out. So there's no sense in which anyone is ever lauded for saying, if you're not going to save them, then I'm going to love them enough to stay with them. That's just it's not a concept that's going on here because we are all we are all wanting this this this pardon and we accept this part and in some will and some won't.

There's no sense where we must, you know, express some solidarity in in punishment. We never that would never occur to people in terms of jail now. So I don't know why it would occur in any other situation.

My suspicion is that Maria got a challenge from an outsider along this line and she didn't want to respond to it. If you really loved if you really believed in hell and you really loved people, then you would want to go to hell with them and have solidarity with them. I mean, which my suspicion is she heard something like that did not respond.

And even in the case of Paul, because remember Paul says I could wish that I could wish that I were a curse for the sake of my brethren. My kinsmen according to the flesh. So even in that case, it wasn't well, I'm not going to leave them behind.

It was I could come to the point where, you know, I love them to the point where I could even say I will suffer for their sake so that they can be saved. It's a trade off. It's not to hang out with them.

It's not right. It's and there's and it's also the case that is clear. He doesn't think that's really an option.

Correct. You know, Jesus is the one who died. He's just saying he's talking about this.

This this kind of love, this self sacrifice that that he feels for them. It's the love of Jesus that he feels for them. So even in that case, if someone were to bring that up, he's not he's not expressing this idea of if you're not going to save them, then I'm going to then then not me either.

I mean, that's just the whole point of of being saved is to be with God. The point is not and it's hard for me to explain why this seems to me to violate that. The point is to be with God and so we're not going to trade that for anything.

That's that's the thing we were created to do. And this also feels a little manipulative. You know, I'm going to tell God, Hey, if you want me, you have to take these these others with me.

Like to me that turns this all into some sort of weird transactional loophole. And that that's not how God works. That's not how this works.

This is about a relationship with God and being restored to relationship. It's not about getting some sort of ticket to heaven from God and getting some ticket for other people. The ticket is not the thing that the thing is the reconciliation with God.

Well, I like your first first part of that point, especially because the the suggested here is that the most important thing is to love fallen people, not be with God. And so you choose to be with fallen people in hell out of love and solidarity instead of making solidarity with God as a forgiven person enjoying what he joined his presence forever. That's just wrongly ordered love.

There are greatest love is for God. When we put other loves ahead of that, now we've gone wrong. And thank you for putting that into words.

I couldn't I couldn't quite get that out. But yes, that is that is I think that's the problem that's happening there. They're trading God for the other human beings.

Okay, here's a question from Drew. A coworker recently told me she favors quote the oldest religions citing Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and other Eastern belief systems because they predate Judaism Christianity. She proved her point by a quick Google search on the oldest religions.

How would you go about challenging her position? Well, it's interesting because Zoroastrianism is a theistic religion, as I recall, and Hinduism, at least essential or foundational Hinduism. There are variations is not it's monistic. In other words, in in Zoro in monotheistic religions, there is a conscious God who is responsible for making the world in classic Hinduism.

I talk about this in the story of reality. Moan is one is this thing. So this is one ism.

Oneism is the idea that there's only one thing that truly exists. Nothing else exists. The only thing that exists is God.

And he's not personal. And we are just an illusion and have forgotten that we are actually God and Nirvana is extinction that is extinction of suffering, but also extinction of the self as we kind of like the drop falls back into the ocean. The drop of water that is distinct now drops back into the ocean.

Brahman is Atman. God is the individual and Atman is Brahman. You know, that's a saying from their religious view.

So how can it be? That Zoroastrianism, which is monotheistic and major portions of Hinduism, which is polytheistic, I'm sorry, which is a monistic. And the polytheism of Hinduism is just part of the illusion. How can they both be equally true? And why is it that age is the deciding factor? I'm not under you know, I was curious about that.

No one would say anything about like that about medicine. Oh, I go back to the 17th century of medicine. I still in favor of bleeding people because the oldest way must be the true way.

Well, to be fair, she could say that's more likely to be true because then people in, you know, they brought about these innovations later on. We learn more. Right.

With science. Yes. But why wouldn't the same principle apply here? Now we have Jesus coming on the scene 2000 years ago, actually representing a religion that goes back formally at least 2000 years before that.

And according to Romans, there's an indication that, you know, even before that, of course, everybody could see that there's evidence there that a God existed who was a personal God who made everything and displayed his power to buy an attributes for the world to see just because Judaism formally doesn't begin until the call of Abraham doesn't mean that the world view that was built. And this is another factor, I guess, though I'm thinking about it, that the worldview that was expressed through the Jewish nation to progressive revelation is a false worldview. And it's interesting that Genesis one goes back to in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

So the account is one that goes back to the very beginning. And the particulars that we see at the beginning, the genesis of all things, not just of the world and of all living things, but also the genesis of the human family. That's all right there in the beginning too.

So what that book has meant to show is the beginnings of all these things that help to explain how we got in the trouble that we're in. So once again, I don't know that. I don't see why the earlier religion is somehow has has dibs on being the accurate religion just because it came first.

We there have been there have been rebel arguably. There has been revelation from God that is meant to clarify in each of these religions have their own revelatory package. And what you have to do is you have to compare the worldview, the details of the worldview to the reality that we know and experience.

So Hinduism, let's just take that like classic, Vedantic, monistic Hinduism says that the world is Maya. It's an illusion. Well, look at if you and I are illusions, how can an illusion have genuine knowledge? How could I know that I'm an illusion? My line is just Charlie Brown.

No, he's a cartoon character. Do the the the individuals in your dreams last night have knowledge that they were in a dream? No, they're illusions. There is no there is no substance to their knowledge.

There is no such thing as knowledge of things that are illusory. You can have knowledge about illusions, but remember the claim here is that we are the illusion. So how could we know that we're the illusion? And this is there's an incoherence in my view in the in that religion, even if it's one of the most ancient.

My response is these ancient folk got it wrong. There might be some details in there that are accurate, but when you compare the details of the worldview to the way the world is, and that's all we have to go on. We have to use our assess the claims and look to see if it fits.

That's all. That's the classic definition of truth. I don't know that an older view is better or that a newer view is better.

That's called progressivism. The newer view is better. We're not going to go back to the old ways.

We're going to invent new things. Well, truth has no bearing to time. It doesn't change with time.

Older things aren't necessarily more true because they're older. Newer things are not necessarily more true or better because they're newer. Each claim has to be assessed on its merits.

Yeah, I agree with you, Greg. I think the question that needs to be asked here is why do you favor the oldest religion? You need to get to the bottom of why she is favoring them because she could say all sorts of different things there. And then maybe you could just say, well, what if I can account for why these are older? What if I can account for why people turned away from God? They turned away from God towards themselves, like you said in Romans 1. The Bible can explain how this all fits into there.

So you do need to look at what is true. And in fact, I would say the fact that such a



dramatic change in worldview, and I've mentioned this book before, there's a Bible, there's a book called the Bible Among the Myths, and I think the author is John Oswald. Oh, but or Ron Nash? Not Ron Nash.

But he makes the case that these other ancient religions were so dramatically different in their worldview that it's hard to see anything other than a supernatural event where suddenly this entirely different way of looking at the world breaks in to, you know, human civilization. And suddenly, instead of having this view of manipulating spiritual forces, like there's a God who created everything and the sun and the moon are his creations. They aren't any sort of God.

Like there are so many dramatic changes that happen. That's a major point he makes in there. How do you explain this shift? And so I think you could actually turn this into something that helps you by saying, you know, not only is that does that make the rise of Judaism inexplicable, but it, you know, we can explain within this worldview why, you know, how this happened.

And so we can account for that. Plus there's this additional point that this, this, you know, this isn't something that suddenly people would come up with. It's so dramatically different.

Yeah. And early on too, and I don't have any bib sources for this right now, but I remember studying this years ago. And there's a lot of evidence for what's called primitive monotheism.

In other words, the gut level reaction, even if the Bible is not a good thing, if there was a belief in spirits that manipulated controlled things and it was possible to manipulate control of spirits, that's animism, basically, if you do the right things behind that, there was this understanding that there was a great, a great God that was over everything, a primitive monotheism. And incidentally, you see that in scripture too, you see angelic beings, you see demons that have, have force and power and control over things and they express themselves in their, their, after fashion, divine beings. In fact, the word for, to describe them in the Old Testament is Elohim, which is a similar word that is used to describe God in certain circumstances.

In other words, they are invisible, powerful spiritual beings. Now, God is at the top of it all. He's the one who's responsible for the creation of it all and ultimately control it all.

So he's unique as an Elohim in that regard. And many passages indicate that. But that concept of their being, divine beings that were real and might be manipulated and could control us, yet there was a God over them all.

And not quantified in detail until, until Moses, of course, but the notion was there a long ago. And that's why it's called primitive monotheism. All right.

Thank you for your questions. You can send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag SDR. Ask her.

You can go through our website and we'd love to hear from you so that we can respond to the questions that you have. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason. Thank you.