

OpenTheo

Is Christianity Just a Brainwashing Ritual?

November 3, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether Christianity is only a brainwashing ritual involving rejection of the outside world, affirmation within the tribe, ritualistic chanting, etc. and whether denial of a biological man's womanhood is comparable to an atheist denying someone's belief in Christianity.

* How do you respond to the claim that Christianity is only a brainwashing ritual, with rejection of the outside world, affirmation within the tribe, and ritualistic chanting in the form of prayer and worship music?

* Is my denial of a biological man's womanhood comparable to an atheist's denial of my belief in Christianity?

Transcript

Hello and welcome to Stanterreason's #SDRaskpodcast with Amy Hall and Greg Cochle. Hello Amos. Hello Greg.

We're going to start today with a question from Sarah. How do you respond to the claim that Christianity is only a brainwashing ritual in which evangelism is a pain reward cycle? That is, "rejection when exposed to the outside world combined with affirmation within the tribe mixed with ritualistic chanting in the form of prayer and worship music." Well this is a, here's my first response, this is a huge exercise in the genetic fallacy. All right, it is taking a completely psychological perspective.

Here is the reasons why you do what you do. You believe what you do because you have all of the sociological factors, you're indoctrinated a certain way, there's this chanting that helps you, "Nah-di-da-di-da-di-da-di-da." Well it could, all of those things could be true. But it tells you nothing about whether Christianity is true or false.

That's why we call it genetic fallacy. Genetic fallacy is when you fall to point of view simply based on its source, not based on its content. So this is like a woman saying, "Well you're a man, so you can't have a legitimate say in the abortion issue." Well you

know as France, rather Frank Beckwith also known as Frances, Dr. Frances Beckwith says, "Arguments don't have sex organs, so it's irrelevant what gender, sex, whatever a person is with regards to an argument.

This is the same kind of problem." And that is looking at all of these sociological factors that might compel a person to believe a certain way. Incidentally, this kind of criticism can be leveled at a host of different beliefs. You could say the same thing about atheism for example, or other religious views and everything.

None of this kind, no assessment like that is going to get you to the question, to the answer to the question of whether the view is true or not. You're barking up the wrong tree. In fact I'd like you to read the characterization one more time just to make sure that I covered the basis.

Okay, so is it a pain reward cycle, a brainwashing ritual? Okay, pause just for a second. Notice that now we're already talking about psychology. We're talking about and it's brainwashing.

This is a term that shouldn't be used because there is no such thing as brainwashing. I mean they try, there's movies about it back in the 60s, you know, and the Koreans, this and there's a, it's just the mentoring and candidate, but you can't control brains like that. All right.

What you can do is indoctrinate to a certain point of view because you have limited amount of information and people believe based on the limited information. But people who leave abusive groups leave for reasons. They've been persuaded that the group is bad, unsound, false, whatever, and then they leave.

People do leave. So there's no brainwashing, but I do want to focus on the fact that now we're talking about psychology right out of the gate. Go ahead.

So then she says it's a pain reward cycle that is rejection when exposed to the outside world combined with affirmation within the tribe mixed with ritualistic chanting in the form of prayer and worship. Yeah, okay. There is a pain and reward cycle.

This is how you train children to be morally sound. So just because that factor is involved doesn't mean that there's falsehood or inappropriate behavior involved at all depends on the nature of the thing. And then there's chanting and psychological things.

Well, prayer is not chanting. There is music. There is singing, but music is kind of like a human thing.

So you have rock groups, you've got classical music, you have all kinds of things that are musical that are meant to elevate the emotions or something like that. So notice how she started though with the charge. I think you started with the phrase that Christianity

or whatever is only, right? Well, the only way you'd know whether it was only is by looking at the other details.

If it turns out that Christianity is completely false, demonstrably so by looking at the claims and the evidence for Christianity, Christian theism, then it's fair to ask the question, why would so many believe this false thing? Okay. Oh, this is what C.S. Lewis called Bolvarism. In fact, that's the title of a short story or a short article that he wrote.

It's in *God and the Dog* if you want the volume where it's located, Bolvarism. And he was referring to an individual during that time who made this mistake. But his point was first, you have to show that a person is mistaken before you can talk about why he is mistaken.

The presumption here is Christians are mistaken. And it's only because of these other things that they believe what they believe, but you have to show that first that it's mistaken before it's reasonable or meaningful to ask the question, well, how could they be so wrong when the truth is obviously something different? Oh, it's all these psychologically manipulative techniques that are used in that religion. So my point broadly is this is the genetic fallacy.

And it presumes Christianity as false without showing it. Then it just appeals to the psychological elements, which the ones that were identified appear all over the place, whether it's music or reward or punishment cycles. There's all kinds of stuff like it's called opera and conditioning, for goodness sake.

It's standard way of learning and instructing other people. It's also going to be used in a manipulative way, but you have to demonstrate that it's actually manipulative and contrary to the truth in question before that challenge can stick. So this is one of those challenges that sounds, wow, I don't know how to respond to that.

I get that. But it's utterly and completely vacuous. It fails on a number of different levels.

And I just touched on those and you probably will see some other things as well. Well, you touched on what I was thinking, Greg, and it's the idea that we have all sorts of rituals in society to teach people things and to just think about sports rituals and things. Think about teaching rituals when people go to school and there are certain ways they learned and you brought up the idea of a pain of reward when you're raising children and you're maturing them.

And in the church, it is supposed to be a kind of family where there is somebody who is looking out for us morally and is maturing us. So there will be some accountability for behavior and that sort of thing. But these are all models that we already see happening.

We see them happening in the family. We see them happening in the church. And there's nothing unusual about what's happening.

It's not like a cult. But I think a cult involves things beyond just these regular teaching things. But also arguably that cultic teachings are false.

Of course. And can be demonstrated independently. And so once we determine these are false, then, and then we see abusive means.

Now I think, atheists, and this has come up on the show. This is a carrot and stick religion. Okay.

And if you do the right things and believe the right things, you get rewarded with heaven. And if you don't, then you get, then you get punished in hell. Carrot and stick, like we're mules or something like that.

Now this shows a complete misunderstanding of Christianity. And I've talked about this and even written about it a bit. And this particular atheist was actually came on the show when we talked about that.

But that's the way Christianity is being characterized in this particular challenge. It's just a mere reward punishment cycle, or the threat of punishment and the promise of reward if you toe the line. The person who says that does not understand the nature of Christianity.

And then one last thing I wanted to say about worship music. Music is a way that human beings praise things. It has always been that way.

It's a way of expressing love for things. It's a natural thing people do. It's not some crazy thing.

So you can look at all these things here and you can say, yes, I recognize all these things in other areas of life. And that's what they're doing in this case. Or you can just look at it in the worst life possible.

And I don't know how much you can convince people that it shouldn't be seen in the worst life possible. But I think the idea that it's true is the biggest thing you have to start with here. Well, as you mentioned, Greg.

Okay. Let's go to a question from Megan. For some reason, I was just thinking of Buddy Holly's Peggy Sue when you were talking about Peggy Seaton and Pete.

Well, that's a love song, right? It's kind of a rock, a ball. He kind of loves on. But there's a song written to express loving intentions towards another person, you know? It's a natural thing.

Poetry. Exactly. All these.

There you go. Okay. Here's a question from Megan.

An atheist acquaintance of mine compared my denial of someone's quote womanhood if they are biologically a male to his denial of my belief in Christianity. How would you go about navigating this conversation? Although these two things do not seem analogous to me. To what was the hate denying? So denying that someone's a woman who's a biological male is he compared that to him denying their belief in Christianity.

Well if a person denies the belief in Christianity because they think it's a false belief, then it's perfectly parallel to a Christian saying that that woman is not a man if that individual has female sexual organs. It's perfectly parallel. It strikes me.

But it is not a difference in kind and it's certainly not hateful in either case. It seems to me it's a disagreement about matters of fact. But it seems to me that one sex is a lot easier to determine as a matter of fact than one's religious claims.

What we are claiming, it's interesting because there is a difference in the kind of claim being made. What we are claiming is that Christianity is true to the way the physical world, the external mind independent world is in itself. Our beliefs match the way the world is.

That's an objective truth claim. Now he could say it doesn't match and give the reasons why. Okay fine.

That's what these kinds of discussions entail. But in the case of gender, what the claim there is is my belief about myself for the transgendered person does not match the way the objective world is and the way the objective external mind independent world is irrelevant to the truth of my claim. Truth is all in my head, not in the world as it were.

So in this sense the kinds of claims being made are opposite of each other. Where the Christian is making objective claims about the world that are either true or false, the gender dysphoric person or the transgendered person is making subjective claims about their beliefs which can't be false because just simply believing them makes them true in their system. So on the one hand they're exactly the same in one sense but they're exactly the opposite in another sense.

And that's the way to answer this. I think the distinction is if you think my view is false, well we're similar because I think that view is false. But notice there is a difference in the kind of claim we're making.

We're making claims about the objective world which can be assessed and analyzed and that's the classical definition of truth. The Christian is making the same kind of assessment of the transgendered person and looking at the objective world. Yet the transgendered person and their advocates like this other individual is saying truth is actually in their head subjectively.

That's where the real truth is. So there's a very different way of understanding truth.

Now it just occurred to me the way to play their rules against them is to say in my head that person with male genitalia is a male.

In their head they're not. So that's not true for them but it is true for me. So even if we play the relativist rules by the relativist rules they're still not going to be able to ground us a reasonable objection against our view.

If reality is in our heads then I'm going to tell you what my reality is regarding that other person. Now they're not going to like that. They're going to consider that cheating but it's playing by the same set of rules which just goes to show what's mine is mine and what yours is mine too.

That's kind of their approach. As I'm looking at this I'm wondering if because we are thinking of this in terms of what's true about reality in both cases what's true to reality about their sex and what's true to reality about Christianity because they're thinking that your beliefs make you a woman what I'm seeing here and I'm wondering if what they're saying is that they're denying that they're a Christian because saying denying that someone's womanhood is wrong because that's what they think therefore that's what they are. Or I'm going to deny that you're a Christian because just because you think you're a Christian doesn't make you a Christian.

So they're presuming you're playing by the same subjectivistic rules that the transgender person is playing by whatever's in your head. That's what I think. But they might not even be asking about whether or not Christianity is true.

They might just be saying well I don't have to accept that you're a Christian just because you say you are just because you believe you are. But of course this is where we can explain to them. We're talking about something different.

Talking about two different things. I can think I'm a Christian or I can identify as a Christian and it's not a fact of our physical bodies whether or not we're a Christian. That actually is dependent on our beliefs.

Whether or not I'm a Christian actually does depend on what I believe. Yes, but what you believe about the nature of the objective world. Right.

Yeah, and that's where it's different. Right, one could also say and see this is why I think that the Christian is not actually cornered in any way shape or form with this challenge for some of the reasons that we've been discussing already. But although I think it is a sophisticated kind of challenge and I can see how Christians will get, oh what do I say? What do I do? How do I get there? Because we could just say all right you're free to do that.

You're free to do that. You can diss me or you could say you're not really a Christian just because you believe it. I said, okay, you're welcome to that.

Okay, they're not willing to do that with us. If somebody just thinks that's a mere belief in my head and has no relationship to object of reality, look there's the number of people are legion who actually think that about Christians. I'm not losing any sleep about that.

I'm not saying you must affirm that I hold this as objectively true. No, I'm not going to do that. That's not our style.

It doesn't even matter to us in a certain sense, okay, but it matters to them. We must affirm their view of things or else we get canceled or we get called names or we get fired or a whole host of things. So this is another way where the Christians just say, well if you're going to dismiss me because it's merely my belief, okay, go ahead.

If you want to do that, no skin off my nose. I mean, this would be a great chance to bring up all these different things. It's a great chance to say, look, whether or not a person is, you could even make the point, look, I think Christianity is true because it accords to reality and I think a person's sex is part of the physical reality.

And that's where I'm coming from. Now if you're saying that you're denying that I'm a Christian, well, when I say that that person's not really a woman, I have a reason for that. I'm saying that it does not accord with reality.

So what is the aspect- Oh, that's another angle. Okay, I got you. Go ahead.

What is the aspect of reality that makes you think I'm not a Christian? Because if you have a reason like that, then I think it's legitimate for you to question that. Yeah, yeah. Great point.

This is just, oh, yeah, well, I'm going to say that back at you too, instead of having a purposeful reason for raising that objection. It's not. It's just a bang.

Oh, yeah, well, you stink too, kind of, you know, schoolyard nonsense. And I think it's legitimate. I think they legitimately don't understand our issue because people in this culture have been so trained to think of things like gender as being a matter of our own beliefs that they genuinely don't understand why we're opposed to it.

So I would definitely, if starting off answering this question, I would start with, you know, it could be that you really don't understand where I'm coming from. So let me just explain to you why I think our sex, it lines up with the biology that I'm connecting it with reality that I think it's part of the natural world that God created. And you can say, look, you probably won't agree with me, but I just want to make sure you understand the claim I'm making because it can sound, I could sound crazy or just mean if I go against somebody saying that they're a woman or they're not.

But I want you to know that's not coming from a place of hatred. That's coming from a place of principle. And here are my principles.

And you could also ask, just occurred to me, what do you mean by that? In other words, clarify for me why you think that there is actually parity in our two claims, my claim about the transgender, the new claim, how are these similar? Now that's where they might clarify for themselves all of reality is in our heads. So if you're going to deny the reality in their head, then I can deny the reality in your head kind of thing. But then there's this other element.

I have a reason for questioning the reality in her head. An external reason, objective reason, what is your reason for denying the so-called reality of my head, except for just kind of, well, you don't have to say this, but this is what I'm asked to just simply mean spirited retaliation. Because I think that's part of what's going on here.

But it'd be interesting to hear why they think that the circumstances are actually parallel. And of course, you can also make the distinctions that you just suggested. And I do agree, you said earlier, Greg, finishing this off with, you know what? It's okay what you think about whether or not I'm a Christian.

That doesn't affect whether or not I'm actually a Christian. And that's okay. And I'm not threatened by.

We can disagree. Yeah. All right, Greg, we're out of time.

Oh my goodness. Well, thank you, Sarah and Megan. We appreciate you sending in your question.

If you have a question that you'd like us to answer, you can send that on Twitter with the hashtag #strsk. Or you can go through our website, just go to our podcast page, look for #strsk. And then you'll find a place to input your question.

Just make sure it's two to three sentences about the size of a tweet. Most people don't know how short that is. But you guys are doing great.

Keep sending those questions. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[MUSIC]