

# OpenTheo

## What Do I Say to Friends Who Have Deconstructed and Left the Faith?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to say to friends who have deconstructed and left the faith that will acknowledge their pain but also point them back to God and how to respond to someone who says Christians don't think for themselves but only blindly follow.

\* What do I say to friends who have deconstructed and left the faith that will acknowledge their pain but also point them back to God?

\* How would you respond to someone who says that Christians don't think for themselves but only blindly follow?

### Transcript

[Music] [Bell] Welcome to the #STRask podcast with Amy Hall. I can't even get my name right with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. I just combined our names there.

[Laughs] What would that be, Hokel? Yeah, I guess so. I don't know. Or Call.

And this is only our third recording today so I have no excuse. That's right. See, you're letting the whole world know that Amy K. Hall is fallible.

She has made a mistake. Hopefully they already know that. You're without flawed only so I don't want to do so.

Okay, good. Alright, Greg, let's go. Let's go over the question from Bronco Girl.

What do I say to friends that have deconstructed and left the faith? I still pray for them but it absolutely breaks my heart. I want to say something to them and acknowledge their pain but also point them back to God. Well, I can think of two questions that would be worth asking.

And one of them is why did you reconstruct, deconstruct rather? Why did you leave? I

don't know how they're going to answer. I have an idea because there are some standard things. The two standard things are bad experiences in the church with other Christians.

That's one. And the second is bad theology. In other words, they had a whole bunch of misunderstandings of what the Bible taught.

They might be hit with the slavery question or the genocide question which are admittedly difficult to answer. But they are answerable and this is what Paul Copan has done with his book. He's got a moral monster but he gets it goes into all the background and that changes things significantly when you see the whole story.

But sometimes there are other unanswered questions but we don't know with an individual unless they're asked. And so I would suggest that is it Bronco? Bronco Girl. Bronco Girl asked the questions with a genuine curiosity in a non-judgmental way.

I just want to understand and do not be prepared at that point to counter anything they say. If these are friends of hers then she's going to have other opportunities and if she asks a question about the reasons and then she counters, then they're going to feel maybe like they were asked disingenuously or maybe they were trapped. There'll be other opportunities to revisit these but you want to have a clear understanding of what the concerns and objections were.

And they generally fall in these different categories, bad experiences with Christians or misunderstanding now of Christian theology. Now the third one though is an attractiveness of things of the world. That is I don't like what the Bible teaches about hell.

I don't like that Jesus is the only way. I don't like especially the sexual restraints and boundaries that the Bible gives. I don't like those things.

Now this is called volitional dalt and that's another reason why they would move. That's a very different kind of thing. They're their own standard of morality or the culture is and they want to go with the culture rather than with Christ.

So that's one question that they could ask. Just the reasons. And here's the second question that should be asked a lot.

I think, okay I understand that you love Christianity. What's the alternative? Everybody goes somewhere. They land somewhere because humans have this desire to have their life make sense.

Now maybe they land in atheism. Maybe they land in progressive Christianity which is a veneer of Christianity but none of the doctrine. So I don't even know why they keep calling it Christianity.

There's various versions of progressive Christianity but the main thing is they reject the Bible. Blood atonement, they reject the sexual standards, they reject hell. So these are all pretty solid core things that relate to central Christian doctrines.

So that might be another reason. They go to that and that's part of the volitional dalt. I talked about earlier.

They don't like these things so they're going to adopt a faux Christianity and I'm using my words advisedly here. It's a phony Christianity as Elisa Childers says with her book title. It's another gospel and of course salvation on that is social justice.

It is a rescue from sin. And so asking what's the alternative is important because people always have to go to something. Now if they go, no matter what they go to, there are going to be problems with that.

In fact, there's going to be more problems ideologically with what they go to than what they came from. However, if they're leaving and it's because of a volitional doubt, I don't like this. Well, you're going to, atheism is better.

You do whatever you want. No standards except for your feelings. What seems right to you at the moment? Oh, that gives you a tremendous sense of liberty.

That was me in the mid 60s. And I wrote about it back then. I know it's journal, whatever.

Wow, what a tremendous sense of liberty. I've cast off all the shackles. I can do what I want.

Of course, I was also marching against the war in Vietnam because that was a new moral war. So that was an obvious glaring contradiction which I was aware of. But the appeal is do your own thing.

And it feels good to do it. Live for today. These are all slogans of the 60s that are now in the DNA of our culture and in the blood of all young people now to the degree that it's not just I get to do my thing.

You get to do your thing. But rather I get to do my thing and you have to agree with it and you have to prove of it and you have to celebrate it or else we're going to hurt you. That's a big difference between now and the 60s.

But the same kind of licentiousness was in place because that's human nature. When I read this question, the thing that stands out to me is she says she wants to acknowledge their pain. And I don't know what she's referring to there.

And that makes me think. Bad experience. Bad experience.

It seems less likely to me that the pain is coming from leaving and separating from

Christians and more likely that it comes from whatever bad experience they had or perceived bad experience. Sometimes people who deconstruct will interpret the upholding of standards as a bad experience and that causes them pain. So it's unclear to me what she's talking about there, but I agree Greg.

Your categories were great of reasons why people leave. But the first thing to say is if there's something they don't like or there's something that Christians were not nice to them, that doesn't change what is true. And that should be what people care about.

What is true? Now people have a hard time wrapping their mind around that idea because first of all they think religion is all a matter of subjective preference. They're not thinking of it in categories of truth or thinking of it in categories of what will help me, what will make my life nicer, what will give me a community. In the moment.

Right. They're not asking what's true. And so then Christianity fails them because it's not giving them what they want in the moment and what they want to hear and the kind of community that they want.

So maybe a topic to discuss with them is the idea of truth. Do you think that there is a spiritual truth out there? By the way, there is a spiritual truth. And it might be that there's no spiritual reality, but that is the truth.

There is a truth of the matter here. Whether any particular religion is a true religion or none of them are true because there are no religious views accurate, then that's a truth as well. So there's a truth out there and the question is whether people are interested in finding out what reality is actually like and this is what you're getting to, I think.

Or they just want to do whatever they want to do. And that's also what people often gravitate towards. So then after I established the idea that, well, I guess before you can even get in a conversation, what you have to ask is, are you interested in hearing answers to your concerns? Are you interested in finding the truth? Do you care about the truth or do you have some other thing that you're placing above that? Because if they have some other thing, then all you can say is, look, I would really like to talk to you about what's true.

If ever you want to do that, I'm open to hearing that. Now, if they are open to hearing answers, I think the first thing I would ask is, okay, if Christianity is true, then shouldn't we expect to see people sinning? Shouldn't we expect there to be a standard that we expect that they should uphold and shouldn't we expect to see them fail at that standard? And shouldn't we expect our own desires to be confronted by the truth of Christianity because we are falling to? Yeah, one of the reasons, and many people have heard this, why I think the Christian worldview is compelling is because it's the best explanation for the way things are. That is, every particular detail is exactly what you'd expect of a religious view that matches the way the world is, okay? And this whole point,

Amy, about in a sense, judging the claims of Christianity as a worldview by the behavior of Christians is such a big mistake.

It's like, as if I said, well, I thought about atheism for a while, and then I read about all these mass murderers who are atheists, so I never gave it another thought. Well, obviously, the conduct of some atheists doesn't tell you about the credibility of atheism as an ideology. By the way, I do think that there is a connection between the belief that there is no accountability of any sort, and there are no moral constraints, and the accesses that we see atheists do.

I mean, there is a connection between beliefs and actions, but there is also a disconnect, and so you can have people who are Christians, or say they are, and live totally non-Christian lives in their behavior. And then we can ask you, by what standard are you judging the Christians? Where does your standard come from? So then you can get into the moral argument and the idea that requires a standard above us, above human beings, by which we can judge everyone otherwise, no matter what the Christians do in the church, their standard is correct because they're all agreeing on it. They're doing what they do, what they want to do, and some of you might say, "Well, it's their standard I'm judging them, I'm judging them by their standard, they're not keeping it, so they're hypocrites.

Oh, right then you just inserted your standard. Hypocrisy is wrong." Which I agree with you, but the point we're making is that this turns out to be a self-defeating kind of analysis. You can't get away from these kinds of assessments.

And I also suspect that this goes back to what we've talked about a couple episodes ago about the idea that Christianity is about making you good, and so therefore Christianity doesn't work. It doesn't work because it doesn't make you good, you're still a sinner. And you discuss this with the C.S. Lewis's idea about you have to judge the person before and after they became a Christian, not just against other people.

And that was, I don't know, two or three episodes ago now, I can't remember, but this is... 30 minutes ago as I recall. This is where you need, again, to talk about the purpose of Christianity. Don't assume that they understand the gospel.

They might not ever have understood it. They might think it's just a way to be good. And if it doesn't work, then I want to do it a different way.

So when somebody says that Jesus didn't work, the question is, what is it that you expected him to do? Jesus works really well for what he was intended to accomplish. If we have false expectations, and there was a lot of this during the Jesus movement, how we drum up, how wonderful the Christian life is going to be in Jesus will get your kids off drugs and will make you happy all the time, and you'll never have any difficulties and all that stuff. Well, this is not true.

And so if you expect Jesus to do something that Jesus was not intended to do, well, you're going to be disappointed. So just to sum up, as if they're open to hearing responses to their concerns, if they want to know if God exists, do they want to know? And have them think about that. I think some people would say no, actually, if they're really honest about it, they don't want to know because their issue is with what this God demands.

If the God of the Bible exists, do you want to know that? Should you want to know that? Obviously, you should want to know that because this has some implications for everybody's life. But what you're going to find out is that they don't really like the God of the Bible all that much. So there's a spiritual issue here, and I think praying is definitely a good way to go, and thankfully you're doing that.

So that's great. All right, here's a question from Jeff Downs. How would you respond to someone who says Christians don't think for themselves, they blindly follow? Well, there's some truth to that, but it's not limited to Christians.

This is characteristic of human beings in culture. Most of what human beings believe and do, they do as a result of the culture around them. They're socialized to act in believe a certain way.

So this isn't a failure of Christians. I would say, certainly when it comes to Christianity proper, Christianity is much more self-reflective about the ideas that it promotes than secular culture, much more. This is why you have theology books.

You have systematics. You have systematic theology. In other words, you have books about how to live a good Christian life.

This is why you have apologetics books. We have a vast resource demonstrating the thoughtfulness of Christianity regarding the ideas of Christianity. In fact, the bookshelf through the window, there used to be there, it's moved now, but had a set of Copelston's history of philosophy.

It's maybe 12 volumes. It turns out, just about everybody after the time of Jesus and up until the 19th century, virtually every one of them, the major thinkers of Western civilization were Christian theists. So it isn't as if Christian theism hasn't produced good things to think about.

It hasn't produced a lot of people who take these things seriously. However, Christians are people like others and they don't think through a lot of what they just get socialized. The issue isn't whether they get socialized to believe things.

The issue is whether the things they get socialized to believe are true or not. You know, Greg, when I hear this question, I think of there have been times when I've been on Twitter and I've talked about something about God being trustworthy and not being a

Christian. But trust worthy in what he says about morality, and then the atheist will get upset and say, "Oh, you're outsourcing your moral thinking by just trusting what God says." Or what the Bible says.

But the truth is, if the Bible is the Word of God, then it makes sense to accept what God says about morality. And this is where I think part of what's going on here is sometimes atheists, in the past they've really objected to the idea when I've said that they've had a worldview. And I couldn't figure out why they were objecting to that idea.

A world that just means that all of your ideas fit together in some sort of coherent way. Or I guess you could have a worldview that's incoherent. A lot of people do, but you're right.

It's a view of the way reality is. So if let's say there's no God, well, there are a lot of ideas that follow from that. And so to be consistent, to be logical and rational, you would accept those other ideas.

Well, they really objected to that. And what I finally think would dawned on me one time because of what they were saying is that they didn't like the idea that one idea would entail another idea. They wanted to choose every idea for themselves.

They didn't want to have to accept some sort of bigger picture that resulted from one of their ideas. So odd because these are the, these are the brights as Daniel Bennett refers to atheists. These are the rational folk.

These are the skeptics who are trying to have a coherent, rational, reasonable worldview when then they push back on the whole notion of entailment. And that's a standard. Look at if, if, if, if, if, if I'm just trying to think of the notion here, if, if, if, if Nancy's taller than Mary and Mary is taller than Beth, then Nancy is taller than Beth.

That's an entailment relationship. It's a transitive property, has a name to it, but that's an entailment. When you say certain things, it entails other things that are native and belong to that thing.

That's called reasonable rationality. That's called coherence. You know, if you say, I walked through the front door of my house, what's entailed is that your house has doors.

And if they, if they are not willing to do that, then all that means is they are, they are just committed to their own fantasies. However, they want to construe them. And by the way, the, the giveaway here is the complaint that we are outsourced, outsourcing our morality to God.

Okay. What's the alternative of outsourcing morality? You don't outsource it. You do it yourself.

That's relativism. All the failure to outsource is, is to say, I am an adequate source of my own morality. That's Stalin.

That's Mao. That's Lenin. That's Pol Pot.

That's Jeffrey Dahmer. Yeah, I mean, the list goes on and on and on. They're the source of, they're not outsourcing their morality to anybody.

They're doing their own thing. Okay. There's an entailment.

Okay. Now, if a atheist complains you're outsourcing, well, what's the alternative? This is a question that needs to be asked a lot. What's the alternative? You don't outsource it.

Then you do your own thing. Okay. You do your thing.

Hitler did his thing. Mussolini did his thing. Pol Pot did.

I'm just using, you know, clear case examples where people followed their own impulses and their own sense. They didn't outsource to anybody. They did their own thing.

You do. You. Look what happened.

So do you complain about that? And Christians are forcing their morality and you. They're not outsourcing it. They're just doing their own thing.

So what is the basis of your complaint when they are doing essentially what you tell them? You say they should be doing. So I think what I would say here is as Christians, we're beholden to reality. Okay.

So we're, we, we want to think consistently and we want to match our ideas to reality. And we want to receive the ideas from others that match reality. Just as we do with any area of knowledge, we take in the ideas that match reality.

By the way, can I just offer an adjustment? I think it's not as Christians, but it says human, thoughtful human beings were trying to do this. And we are Christians because we think that the Christian take of reality does match reality the way it actually is. That makes sense.

Yeah. And is it the case that some Christians have never thought about why they're Christians? Sure. Of course.

Of course. I'm sure they're saying this truth or something. That's why we have a job.

You and I. But, but like you pointed out, Greg, there are certainly plenty of people who have thought about it. And the fact that, you know, it's just like, let's say I'm growing up and I'm in a calculus class. Well, I didn't have to discover calculus in order to learn calculus.



There are people who thought about calculus before. And I could look at what their reasoning is and I can see that it works and I can accept that. And the same is true for even those who have never worked out why Christianity is true.

They've received it from people who have and who have thought about it a lot. And this is no different from anything. So if we have, you know, let's say a Christian has found that God actually does exist, that he inspired his word.

We can see in the Bible what the truth is about morality. Well, it makes sense to, to follow that. Even if we don't understand it at first because there are a lot of things we don't understand since we're categorized by our culture.

Right. And we, we think all sorts of wrong things about what it means to be human or what it means to have a human body and all these different things. We can look at the Bible for the first time when we're just learning it and it might not make sense to us yet because we just don't understand it well enough yet.

But it still makes sense to accept what it says, even in that case, if it is true that God exists and that Christianity is true. And I don't know if I would call that blindly following. I think I would call it, again, in tailman, if God exists then, and Christianity is true, then therefore these things, these other things, these other things follow, even if we wouldn't have come to them on our own.

It's trusting a reliable authority. I mean, this is just like we do with almost everything else we know. Almost nothing.

Or let me back up and put it this way. The vast majority of things that we know, we do not know through personal experience. We know because somebody we believe is trustworthy has told us.

And finally, I think if somebody asked me this, you know, Christians don't think for themselves, they blindly follow. I think I would start asking, what is your response to the column cosmological argument? What is your response to the moral argument? What is your response to the argument from contingency or... -Tealological argument to sign. - Yeah.

And just see how much they have thought about this. And again, they might find that maybe they haven't thought about it quite as much as they have, that this is just a slogan that they've picked up. It's hard for me to think of a religious view where there has, that has put anything even close to the kind of thought into it, that Christianity has put into it.

Maybe Judaism, but Islam a little bit more than certainly Hinduism, Buddhism. I mean, these are complex worldviews, but it isn't like they are displayed for us to accept. They are not thought through.

They are... In my experience with them, there are a series of assertions about the way the world is. It's not an assessment. It's an assumption that one lives by.

Now, the assumption may include complexity to it, but there's no complexity to the analysis or the assessment of it. And that's why people say, "I'm Buddhist because I like Buddhism. I like this idea." Or this, or in a very general sense, it makes sense to me.

You get reincarnation, what goes around comes around. You live through the cycles of life, and one day you'll just disappear into the spiritual ether if you live long enough. Of course, not live long enough, but have successful series of reincarnations.

Well, thank you Bronco Girl and Jeff Downs. We really appreciate hearing from you. If you have a question, send it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk.

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

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