

# OpenTheo

## How Do You Convince a Former Christian That Jesus Is God?

November 14, 2024



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to convince a former Christian that Jesus is God, whether Jesus' human nature was created, and what the Bible means when it says Jesus is the firstborn.

\* How do you convince a former Christian that Jesus is God?

\* Is it wrong to describe Jesus' human nature as created, and how should I respond to a Jehovah's Witness who says that a firstborn, if not the first to be born, must be a member of the group he is preeminent over?

### Transcript

This is the hashtag S-E-R-S podcast. Welcome, I'm Amy Hall, and Greg is here with me, Greg Koukl. I didn't say your last name.

I expect everyone to know if they're listening. Everybody knows Greg Koukl. Mr. G. So we have some questions about Jesus today, and this first one comes from Tina.

How do you convince a former Christian that Jesus is God? My close friend has been a Christian in majority of his life, and went through a season of wanting to get closer to God and understanding Jesus more. Within his searching, he came to the conclusion that things contradicted themselves. Things contradicted themselves.

I'm not sure that would be the question that I'd ask him, but let me offer kind of a procedural concern. The question is, how do I convince? And I think that that's the wrong way to think about it, as if the burden of convincing somebody is on you. It's one thing to offer good reasons, or a good response, or a thoughtful rejoinder.

It's another thing to have the onus of the convincing upon your own shoulder. We can't control whether or not we convince people. Because there's so many things that are in play here, and a lot of them have nothing to do with reasons proper.

They have to do with emotions. They have to do with histories. They have to do with blindness,

spiritual blindness, etc.

So we're just going to nix the convinced part. How do I respond, or what can I say to a person who now apparently rejects Christianity because they reject the deity of Christ? Because the notion is somehow contradictory. I'm not sure exactly what the problem is at this point.

What do you think? Maybe he just thinks... I guess you can take the question that way, because since that is the specific thing she was asking about, how do we convince someone? Jesus is God. So I guess you can address... What would you say to someone who thinks Christianity is false? Because it's contradictory. I'm not sure if that's specifically in terms of Jesus being God.

But if you can think of a way that might be... Well, it might be that the trinity is contradictory. Again, this is a question that I would ask out of the gate. What do you mean by that question? Obviously, what exactly is the contradiction that you're concerned with, or what appears to be the contradiction? And then let them talk.

A lot of people think that the trinity is contradictory, okay? Well, you have three and one. That's a contradiction. Now, when they put it that way, I have a question.

I said, how many in your family? Well, there's me and my sister and mom and dad. So there's four of you. Yes, four of you and one family.

Yes, that's not possible. What do you mean it's not possible? That's four and one. That's a contradiction.

Now, careful to point out that this is not meant to be a metaphor of the trinity. But notice the objection is, if you have three and one, in virtue of three and oneness, you have a contradiction. But of course, there are all kinds of things like that, and I just offer the family one where it's obvious.

It's not a contradiction. As long as the way people are, what way there's a multiple three is different from the way that there's a singular one, then there's not a contradiction. One family, three members, no contradiction.

If you said one member and three members or one family and three families, that would be a contradiction. But when you have one family and three members constituting that one family, it's not a contradiction. Same thing, if there is one God and three centers of consciousness, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, within the one God, that's weird, admittedly, but it's not contradictory.

Now, for me to make this point doesn't demonstrate the truth of the trinity, it just is meant to show that it doesn't fail in virtue of contradiction. So that might be one way that someone thinks that there's a contradiction regarding the person of Christ. Another way is the idea that God becomes man.

Well, that's nonsense. Okay, what exactly is nonsensical about it? And that's what I want to find

out. When people make these charges against Christianity, we need to request that they flush these things out, that they describe exactly the difficulty.

And this is one of those cases. People might say, well, believe in God is irrational. Well, what's irrational about it? This is just the first step of the game plan, gathering information, particularly about the challenge, the nature of the challenge.

Now, sometimes there's a lack of precision in the way we talk about this. We say God became man of Jesus. That's not actually theologically precise.

God didn't transform into a man. He didn't become a man. The divine nature added human nature when the second person of the trinity entered human history as a human being.

So strictly speaking, God added humanity to himself and he didn't become humanity. He didn't change from God to humanity. Then he sees being God.

That's hard to imagine how that could be the case. But he added humanity. That's classical doctrine, one person, two natures of the calcedonian formula.

Also knows the calcedonian box. Jesus is one person and that would be the second person of the trinity who has two natures. He has the nature of God, which was always the case because the second person is God.

But he also adds a human nature. Sometimes we see references in the gospels to him as God before Abraham was. I am referring to his human body, his human nature.

But then he says, the Father is greater than I or by thirst. These are expressions of unlimited human nature, not a divine nature. So you see both kinds of references in the scripture.

So those are the only two possibilities I can think of off the top of my head of how the person of Christ or the incarnation can somehow be a contradiction. And incidentally, I don't think it is a contradiction. And incidentally, this is also a revealed doctrine.

So it isn't like you're going to reflect on the nature of divinity and come up with the trinity. We know this element of God because it's what he's revealed to us. And it's a, in a certain sense, I want to say a synthetic doctrine.

I don't mean that it's a false doctrine or is it made up doctrine. I mean, it's an doctrine that is assembled from different texts that say different things about God. So the Bible teaches there is one God.

Then it's clearly distinguishes between the Father's Son and the Spirit. They are distinct from one another in personal ways because they interact with each other personally, but it calls each one of them God. And the only resolution to that is that there is one God in three centers of consciousness that interact personally.

And now you've got the trinity. So that is what I call a solution, not a problem, if you're considering the biblical text. So what would you say to a former Christian to try to convince them or, you know, using it in the sense that you said before that we're not convincing and we're just supposed, but we are supposed to lay out evidence.

What would you say to someone to try to show them that Jesus is God? Well, I'd look at the evidence and one of the one of the kind of cleverest ways of doing this, I think I got this for Josh McDowell and because I read it in evidence that demands a verdict was a fairly new Christian. He might have got it from somewhere else, but that's where I'm familiar with it. And he asks the question, if God were to become a man, take on humanity, what would that hand be like? What do you think? Just speculate.

Would it make sense that he would be, he would show love and compassion for people? Would it make sense that he would be able to control the forces of nature? Would it make sense that he would be able to be master over the demonic realm? Would it make sense that, and he goes and lists all of these things that seem to comport with the general concept of God visiting the planet in human form and what would he be like? Would he have the power over life and death, etc, etc. And after the list is complete, of course, you can see what he's doing. He's showing that, well, Jesus had all of these qualities, that the man Jesus had all the qualities you would expect would be characteristic of a human being who was also God incarnate.

And so I think that's a powerful way of arguing for the deity of Christ. And then, of course, you will end up having to argue for the reliability of the New Testament, both as an eyewitness account and in the transmission that it was accurate. So that'll come up too, because that's the only way we can evaluate historical events.

That's right. If that gets questioned, but to make clear, Amy's point, we are not arguing that the New Testament is inspired to make our point. We're arguing that the New Testament is a reliable historical record that has been transmitted down faithfully.

So what we have now is a faithful record or witness to what took place. And if this is what took place, and this is the man that we see, well, he has the kind of qualities that would be there if God did become a man. It seems so.

And I just, I remembered reading something from Rob Bowman in Ed Komachevsky's book, Putting Jesus in His Place, The Case for the Deity of Christ. And they give a, I can't think of a mnemonic device for remembering certain things about Jesus, and it's five things, and you're supposed to remember the acronym Hands. So here's what they said, Jesus shares the honors do only to God.

So that's the H. Jesus shares the attributes of God. Jesus shares the names that are used of God. Jesus shares in the deeds that only God can do.

And then finally, Jesus shares the seat of God, that is Jesus sits on God's throne. So what we

have here is just a short little acronym that you can use. And then of course you'd have to look up all those passages and you can look into their book Putting Jesus in His Place.

For more on those things, but I thought that was a good little summary. All right, let's go on to a question from Adam. Jesus existed eternally in the past, but is it wrong to describe his human nature as created? Responding to a Jehovah's Witness and says seeing that a firstborn, if not first to be born, must be a member of the group he's preeminent over.

Your thoughts? Well, first of all, again, we're looking for precision here. So we never would say that Jesus existed eternally in the past. We would say that was true of the word who became Jesus.

Jesus is the name of the human individual. Now I understand people use it kind of interchangeably, but sometimes an accurate answer depends on talking about the circumstances in very precise ways. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is that when the first born or there's actually two words that are problematic in light of Jehovah's Witnesses, understanding of who Jesus is, is the phrase firstborn and only begotten, okay? Firstborn and only begotten are two words, but they're actually coming from a single Greek word. So they're hyphenated words. They're not one word that's modified by an adjective.

First one born or he's the only one begotten. They mean something different. So firstborn means of first preeminent.

Okay, and we know there's passages, for example, in the Old Testament where the word firstborn is used of the one whose favorite and preeminent, even though they're not first in birth order. So this isn't talking about birthing at all or being created. It's totally misconstruing the point that's being made.

It's he is the preeminent one, but he's the preeminent one. This is from Colossians where this shows up. And then because of the description of Jesus that you see in Colossian, that he is the creator of everything.

And we see this in John chapter one verse three, the same concept there. So sometimes these mistakes are made because people are straining at little words that are describing Jesus without understanding the origin of the words and without looking at the larger context. If he's the first born of all creation, they presume that means he's the first one created.

But no, this is the all of the whole world. Jesus is the preeminent one because he's responsible for the whole world, which is part of the Colossians passage. You know, all things came, let's see, no mixing Colossians up with John.

But let me just look at the Colossians passage for a quick moment here. Go everywhere, preach Christ, J E P C, go eat popcorn. Okay, Colossians, is that chapter two? Oh, verse 16.

Oh yeah, okay, for 16, 17, and 18 of chapter one. And this makes it so much clearer too, when you read the whole thing. For by him, all things were created.

Now, if all things were created by him, then he could not have been created. That's entailed in that phrase. So you can't take what follows later as first born as being a created being because it says in verse 16, by him, all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and in him, all things hold together. I mean, this is like, there's no ambiguity here. The next verse, he is also head of the body and he is the beginning, the first born from the dead.

Now that's referring to the resurrection. So he himself will come to have first place in everything for it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness of deity to dwell in him. Gee, this is one of the strongest passages, verse 16 through 19, for the full deity of Christ, why would somebody strain at the word first born, which proto-tokos is the Greek word, as suggesting he's a created being when the surrounding text says he's not.

And when you look closely at the history of the word proto-tokos and it occurs in other places too, but it means that he is the preeminent one which fits with the phrase. So he himself will come to have first place in everything. Now, if somebody wants to strain at that, like the Jehovah's Witnesses do and say, see he's created, they're just not being fair with the text.

What would you say about his human nature though, was his human nature created? Yes, of course. I'm trying to understand this last part of the question and maybe that's as simple as it is, but it says the Jehovah's Witness is insisting that a first born, if not first to be born, must be a member of the group he is preeminent over. So maybe he's thinking that we're saying he doesn't have a human nature.

So maybe there's just a misunderstanding there. Let me ask, well, then I'd ask the question, I'm going to draw the question this point they're making. Is God over everything? Yes.

So wait a minute, how could he be over everything if he's not a member of the group that he's over? But I wouldn't say God is first born. So I understand why you would say that he has to be human, but we agree with that. He's prototochist though, he's the preeminent, I mean, first born means preeminent one.

So just to be preeminent does not mean he's got to be a member of the class. And anyway, we know he's not a member of the class because it says, by him all things are created, both in the heavens and the earth, visible and invisible. He really goes on and on about this.

And he has before all things that he himself and in him all things hold together. And it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell on him. You have to define the terms in light of the larger description we find in the context.

And if the description points him clearly being the uncreated creator who is over all things, then he can't be part of the group that he's over. Just like God is not part of the group that he's over everything, Jesus is a preeminent one. Now you might as the first born from the dead, okay, well, that's his human nature.

You can understand it in terms of his human, as a human now, he is still ruling over everything, but he's ruling over everything in terms of his divine role as the one who created all things. And I would say, honestly, I think there's some sort of a misunderstanding here in the part of the Jehovah's Witness because like you said, we agree his human nature is not eternal. His human nature was created and he took on this human nature.

So obviously he truly is a human being, even though he is also truly God. He has a fully divine nature and he is a fully human nature. So maybe they just don't understand that we would agree that yes, the human nature was created.

Yes, he truly is a human and is truly our brother in that sense. We don't deny that. But so maybe they just don't understand what we would say about the two natures of Christ.

Well, it seems to me that he is preeminent in light of the things that are set about him, verse 16 through 19. You can't divorce them. So it's his divine nature, principally, that makes him the preeminent one.

He is the human who is the God-man, and so therefore he's preeminent over all the things which he made and holds together. And he is also the firstborn from all creation, which is proto-tokos, and from the dead, rather. And so that seems to be referring to his resurrection.

But his resurrection was a display of his divine nature. Paul says this in Romans 1 verse 4. And that is that being declared the Son of God, which is a divine title, declared the Son of God through the resurrection from the dead. So these are all connected.

Well, these are great questions. Thank you so much, Tina and Adam. And if you have a question, just go to x. Use the hashtag STRask, or you can go to our website at [str.org](http://str.org). We look forward to hearing from you.

If you had a question in the back of your mind, please send that along. We love to have all sorts of different topics, so send your question on to us. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.