

OpenTheo

Should I Stop Telling People That Attempting to Speak to Ancestors Is Demonic?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to someone who says we should stop saying that attempting to speak to ancestors is demonic, how to answer a Sikh who doesn't understand why a Christian wouldn't marry a non-Christian, and a response to the claim "God is not out there; he is in here."

- * How would you respond to someone who says from an African spirituality perspective we should stop saying that listening to or attempting to speak to ancestors is demonic?
- * How would you answer a Sikh who is questioning why a Christian wouldn't marry a non-Christian if all gods are the same?
- * What would be a tactical way of responding to someone who says, "God is not out/up there; he/it is in here" (pointing to himself)?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag STRask Podcast. Ready for the first question, Greg? Maybe.

We'll see. Ask me any questions. I'll tell you.

So this question comes from Matthew. Oh, no. I'm not ready for Matt's question.

Okay. How would you respond to someone that says, from an African spirituality perspective, we should stop saying that listening to or attempting to speak to their ancestors is demonic? Okay. I'm a little, I want to read that again because if it, if it, if the question is what it sounds like, I'm surprised.

Okay, so. How would you respond to someone that says that from an African spirituality perspective, we should stop saying that listening to or attempting to speak to their ancestors is demonic? Oh, okay. And it's interesting because all that amounts to is a

statement of what African spirituality believes.

Now there's a hidden, I think request would be putting it too lightly. There's a hidden demand. And the demand is we ought to affirm what other people, the beliefs of other people and other religions.

That's what's hidden there. Well, wait a minute. They, from their perspective, they should not be told that it's demonic to try to talk to your dead relatives.

Yes, or what? So what? That's the next question. So we ought not be telling them that. Why? Because they don't believe that.

Okay. I can think of a half a dozen illustrations to counter it, but like, um, okay, it's like, but, but the point is here, is it true that trying to conjure up dead relatives is, is messing with the occult? And demonic things. If that's true, then why should we tell them the truth? We can be careful how we tell them whatever, but what you're saying is that's there in a certain sense.

That's their truth. And therefore we should comport our language to them to be consistent with their truth. Now, that sounds to me like what's going on.

But of course that's self-refuting because that is our understanding of reality. And why are they the person who is raising the issue and telling us about that? Why are they implicitly demanding to that we change our views so that it comports with the sensibilities of African spirituality? You know, it's like the anthropologist who says to the Christian student, you should be a missionary because it's wrong to try to change other people's religious views. But of course that statement itself isn't attempt by the professor to tie it to alter or object to the religious views of the Christian, which is a missionary religion.

The same kind of thing is going on here, the same kind of, you know, self-refuting element is in place here, but it's politically correct. It's just the way people do things now. You always have to affirm whatever anybody else believes or you're the bad person in this conversation.

Well, of course that completely nullifies all evangelism because of whenever we're talking to somebody of a different persuasion, we are essentially countering their false persuasion with something that's true. And the issue matters. So how is it that this demand that's being made implicitly here in this statement isn't really a demand not to evangelize, not to tell people to change their views and adopt a different view? This treats all religious views basically as an ice cream kind of thing instead of an insulin kind of thing.

And some of the illustrations that bounced around in my head when I first heard that had to do with medicine. Oh, I feel like I'm fine. Don't start telling me I'm sick.

I don't want to hear that. Well, we have this MRI and here's a big giant tumor. It's a silent tumor.

You don't feel it, but it's going to kill you in two weeks. Well, that's not the way I feel. Well, you're making me feel real bad.

You're making me afraid of death. You're just scaring me with all of this stuff. That's not my feelings.

Okay. Well, we never do that. We would do that with a human life, but we are doing natural life, but now we're doing it with someone's eternal life.

It's even worse than that, Greg. It's like somebody trying to treat their tumor with Drano. So now they're, why would you tell him? Why would you tell him from his perspective that's going to heal him? But it's actually going to kill him.

So why, from his perspective, why would you, you know, it's going to heal him? So why are you telling him to stop? So I think you've hit the nail on the head, Greg. The problem right here is an idea of religion that has nothing to do with reality. It's just about preferences.

Totally subjective. So I think what I would ask to somebody who said this to me, you know, stop saying that listening to or attempting to speak to their ancestors is demonic. I think I would just ask, what if it is demonic? What if it is? Let's just, you know, just hypothetically, if it's demonic, what should I do? Should I just not say anything? Is that the better option or should I say something? And at least then you're starting, they might be a little confused by the question because if they have such a strong view of religion as being a matter of preference and not a matter of reality, they may struggle to even make sense of your question.

So you might have to work at it a little bit, but if you can get them to understand that that is the real question, what if it is demonic? Then you can say, okay, so now the question is, is it demonic or isn't it? Let's just think about what is true here. And that should determine how we act, whether or not we warn or we don't warn. Of course, the relativistic comeback is, well, it may be demonic to us, that is, from our point of view, from our ice cream preference.

So they continue to relativize it, but it's not true for them. And that's when the clarification is necessary. The question I'm asking here is whether it's actually true, not whether it's true for me, but whether it's true.

Is in reality, in the real world, are there demons? And is this an activity that is complicit with the demonic? That's the real question. And by the way, that's the kind of issue or the way of putting it that a lot of people aren't even going to begin to understand because they never thought of it that way. They think, I'm thinking of John Noise when

he was doing an interview at UC Irvine, and there were some Muslim people, and they asked, he asked, essentially, do you think Islam is true? And they all said, yes.

And they said, so therefore, somebody else's view, contrary to Islam, would be false, which that follows. And they were unwilling to say that. And there was another Christian guy who said, yeah, my view is true.

And he said, okay, then other views are false. And they said, well, wow, wow, wow, wow. And so, notice the discomfort.

The comfort of using the word truth to describe one's own view, but the discomfort with playing that out in its natural entailments that if you believe something is actually so, and someone else disagrees with you, then they must be mistaken. Or your conviction is that they're mistaken. If your view is right and there's this contrary to it, how could it not be mistaken? But that, of course, is dealing with religious claims as if they are claims about the nature of reality.

And that's the way they ought to be taken. And that's what you have to get down to. And it might take a while to get there.

Another way you could ask is maybe say, if you were stirring up things into the demonic world without realizing it, and you thought you were doing something good, but what you were doing was actually demonic. Would you want someone to warn you? I wonder how they would answer that. I don't know, because again, they might fall back into the whole idea of relativism.

But I don't know. It's just you need to find a way to help them to understand the claim we're making, because it's so hard for people to understand that we're making a claim about reality. Okay.

Let's go on to the next question from Megan. How would you answer a Sikh questioning why I wouldn't marry a non-Christian if all gods are the same? I tried explaining Jesus and the one true God, but he continued to believe in respecting that every God is the same God. Well, I'm a little slow to respond partly because it sounds like you have a person who is not dealing with reality, so we keep coming back to the same word.

If every God is the same God, then that means everything that people believe about them should be the same too. If it's all the same God, then that's God looks the same in all these different religious iterations. So Greg Cokal being the president of Standard Reason, I am the same Greg Cokal no matter what circumstance that I'm in, or who I'm talking with or carrying on with or visiting with or whatever.

I'm still me because I am a certain thing, a particular individual with particular characteristics, but if it turns out that they are describing the president of Standard Reason as a female, for example, rather than a male, in the conventional sense of those

words, it's clear we're talking about two different individuals. They can't both be right. And that's the problem with these religions who want to treat all gods as the same.

Well, the God that I believe in became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ and condemned other religious views. So is that your God too? Is that your understanding of who God is? No, not at all. Well, then you have a different understanding of God.

It can't possibly be the same. God we're talking about because our characterizations of them are radically different. And they're not just inconsequential differences.

They're big differences. So, but this is why it makes me frustrated a little bit because I would think that a thoughtful human being could be aware of that and would see that, that that's a difficulty of their view. I actually don't remember much about Sikh theology.

I, at one particular point, I think I did a TV interaction with a Sikh on Lee Strobel's show many years ago, 15 years ago. But I can't remember all that took place there. I just know that I engaged the Sikh, but they have a prophet in there, a major prophet in their religious views, and he's the one who establishes what their religious views are.

So it just turns out, though, if Sikhism is a different religion than Christianity, it's because they have a different understanding of God and what God wants. If Christianity and Sikhism are pursuing the same God, then why are they a different religion? Because they have entirely different understandings of who God is and what God wants from us. I think one thing that might be helpful to ask is, what do you mean when you say every God is the same God? Because I think you need more information about this.

I don't really know anything about what Sikhs believe, so I would need to know, what are you saying? Are you saying that all of these ideas we have about him are just illusions, that just they're man-made ideas, but there's a reality behind that. And that reality doesn't really care what we think about him. Are you saying, I just wouldn't even know what he was saying by that? What do you mean by that, right out of the gate? And I think maybe don't have your goal to convince him, but just say, this is really interesting because we have such radically different understandings of reality and spiritual reality in God.

So why don't we just make sure we understand what the other person is saying and just focus on clarifying your views so at least he understands your claim. So like you said, he continued to believe in respecting that every God is the same God. That's okay.

You might not convince him, but just make your goal. I want him to understand how I understand who God is. That's clarity, not agreement, clarity, not agreement.

Or even persuasion. I mean, it's just you're putting the truth out there. It's going to take a while.

People rarely become Christians when they hear a radically new idea. That seems impossible to them especially, right? Yeah. So just start laying some groundwork so he understands what you're saying and you can say, look, you don't have to agree with me, but I just want to explain to you why I don't date you.

I'm not not non-Christians. And just if you can understand my perspective about how what I think reality, spiritual reality is, I think that will make sense. Even if you disagree with me, you think I'm wrong and I should date people who aren't Christians.

At least you'll see that I'm not just, this isn't just a matter of bias or hatred of other people. No, there's actually a reasonable explanation that fits within my worldview. So let me try and explain that to you.

So this raises another thought here that I'm not sure I wish I would have thought of it earlier, but this conversation is a good example of why you should marry somebody with radically different beliefs. So a question for the Sikh at this point is, so your view is radically different from mine. Would you say that's true? Do you think we would make good marriage partners then? I suspect not.

So why is it, why would you consider it's wise for two people who have radically different views on the most important things to be married to each other? Kind of another way of saying, you know, you actually probably agree with me when you think about the wisdom of this issue. Regardless of who's right on theological element, many God's different views of God's or all the same God, regardless of that, the real question is about marriage and marital relationships. So when I'm just saying, you want similarity, especially on the things that really matter.

When it comes to religious views, there you go. Those are one of the most important things. If you want a stable marriage, doesn't mean you can't have a fulfilling marriage, but you know, if you marry somebody with very different religious views.

But the illustration there in 2 Corinthians about not being unequally yoked is the illustration of two, two oxen that are pulling a load or that are plowing, and they're trying to go in different directions. They're not going in the same way, same direction. They're unequally yoked together, and that creates problems.

And marriage is difficult enough to soften individuals throwing in their lot together. You don't want to make it more difficult than it has to be by making bad choices, like this one. Okay, let's go on to another question.

This one comes from Donald. What would be a tactical way of responding to someone who says, God is not outslash up there. He slash it is in here, pointing to himself? Well, of course, I'd want clarification at first.

What do you mean? So if you didn't exist, would God disappear? If God is in all human

beings and he's not out there in any sense, then before there was any human beings, was there a God? These are fair questions to ask, because this seems now they're probably making a separate kind of point, not that God is God's existence is dependent on our existence, but rather that God isn't far off that we have to come to him and discover him and receive him and be reunited with him. But we all have kind of a spark of the divine in us. And so we are one with God in a certain sense.

So that's new thought kind of idea, the spark of the divine that's in all of us. But I need to get clarification. All right.

That's a very popular view now with a lot of people. And it's been around for a long time. This is it has kinship with ancient Gnosticism in the second century.

So you're going to run into this, but this is the where the first two Columba questions are just golden. What do you mean by that and try to get a clarification? So why would you think that's the case? Why would you think that? What are the reasons why you think that what we're searching for and many people are searching a large portion of the population is trying to figure things out that what's the truth of the battery they already have what they're searching for inside of them? That seems to go against the common sense too. So why would they think that everybody's got this spark of the divine or however they characterize it God within them? I wonder also if he's if he's saying something about like if you're looking inside of yourself for guidance and you're looking to your your ideas and your feelings and what you love.

I'm trying to think if there's a good example of why that's a bad idea. Well, this is the way people who are not guided by externals are all guided by internals and this is what this this is the consequence. I should say the consequence of that view oftentimes not all the time, but oftentimes is following your emotions, your passions, your desires to do what you want and those are sinful things and people end up justifying sinful behavior by I say I'm being true to myself.

I did it my way. I'm UBU kind of thing and I'm going to be me and that's cool. So there you go until until you have Jeffrey Dahmer who's doing his own thing.

I don't know if people remember him as a murderer and a cannibal, I think, but you've got people like that. So that's the outworking of this concept. I'm trying to think of a quick way to make a point with this person and I can't come up with anything clever, but one thing that what strikes me when I hear this is the idea of don't you know that you do bad things like don't we all know that we need someone outside of ourselves to rescue us from our own sin and our weakness and our failures? Do I want to be my own God? Like I it strikes me as someone who has very little self-awareness and maybe the younger you are, the easier it is to say things like God's inside of me, but I think maybe where I would take this is just you know, I just think I'm aware of my need to be saved.

I'm aware of my own sin and if God is in me, that means God is simple. And I don't want that. I mean, I'm just really grateful to know that there's a God who's outside of me who's actually perfect and who's in his son to die for me so that I could be forgiven and be with him and ultimately be completely redeemed because I need someone outside of me.

I can't pull myself up by my own bootstraps, my own moral bootstraps. I think this is an example of trying to have your cake you needed to. You acknowledge the spirituality, but then you adopt a spirituality that acknowledges that the human being is a spiritual creature good, but then it makes no demands on them.

God's in me. That's who he's not out there. Somebody have got to please or obey.

He's already in me and that makes me good just the way I am. If that's true about everybody, maybe that's a question. Is that true about everybody? Yes.

Within all of these, it's easy to think of individuals in the world today, probably reflecting on your friend's political convictions that they would think are really bad. People who are contrary to that person's political convictions, yet those people are going to have to be considered good based on this criteria that God is in everybody. And so none of these people doing all these things that you object to are doing bad things at all.

God's in them. So help me understand how this works. I think this is why I'm having a hard time coming up with something clever is it just seems so obviously insufficient to explain what's going on with the world.

You just have to look around to see the evil and you have to look in your own heart to see the evil. And it just kind of blows my mind. So I don't have a quick thing to say, but maybe those are some ideas to help you figure out a direction you can go in, Donald.

All right, we're out of time. Thank you, Matthew, Megan, and Donald. We appreciate hearing from you.

Send us your question on X with the hashtag STRask or go to our website at str.org. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.