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Why Is It Wrong to Have Surgery to Alter Your Sex?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why it's okay to have plastic surgery to alter your appearance but wrong to have surgery to alter your sex, whether a tactical, winsome approach is still viable in a non-civil culture, and whether the time for winsome Christianity has passed.

- * How is claiming to be a different gender different from claiming to be a blonde if you dye your hair, and why is it okay to have plastic surgery to alter your appearance but wrong to have surgery to alter your sex?
- * Can a tactical, "winsome" approach still be viable in such a non-civil culture?
- * Has the time for "winsome" Christianity passed, and is it now time for a more direct, hard-edged approach?

Transcript

[Music] [Bell] I'm Amy Hall and you're listening to the #STRask podcast with Greg Koukl. Famous Amos. Hi Greg.

Hey. Okay, so this first question comes from Ellie. How is claiming to be a different gender from claiming, oh, how is claiming to be a different gender different from claiming to be a blonde if you dye your brunette hair? How do you explain how it's okay to have plastic surgery to alter your appearance but wrong to have surgery to alter your gender/sex? Well, I guess part of my response is there is an obvious difference between having your hair color changed and removing your breasts or your penis and your testicles.

And I presume this was a challenge that was given to her by somebody else, my suspicion is. And I've noticed with a series of challenges kind of on these kinds of issues that the people who make the challenge have abandoned all common sense about these issues. You know, there was a challenge that Tim Barnett took on red panel logic about, well, if women can't have abortions, then maybe men should be forced to have vasectomies because that's both their violations of the body.

And Tim just made the obvious distinction that this isn't parallel because abortion is meant to kill a child and vasectomies are keeping people from giving life to children. Why is it that distinction obvious to people who raised the challenge? And so I feel we're facing something similar here that when you have, well, what about getting a suntan for good to seek? You go out and lay in the sun to get darker skin color. Okay, where there you're changing your body.

Well, that's different from amputating your arm. And if people can't see the distinction, the substantive distinction that has moral ramifications, then it's, I don't know what one is going to be able to say to that person to persuade them. I'm struggling right now because I'm doing a book called Street Smarts and engaging these kinds of challenges with questions.

So it's an extension of the tactics approach. It'll be available sometime next year, mid-year, next year. But the struggle that I'm having is there is a difference between giving a sound, gracious response to a challenge and having that response persuade somebody.

And I never want anyone to think that they can pick up any of my books or anybody else's apologetics book and that have good responses and good answers to challenges and think that these are silver bullets that all you need to do is give this response and people will go, oh, really? Oh, I get it. Okay. I'm on your side on that issue.

Now, that's going to happen sometimes when you have a genuinely inquisitive person who is really wants to know the Christian view on something and will be willing to consider it. But I think that the culture by and large, now the individuals that are representing these kinds of challenges, especially with gender, et cetera, they are so vigorously socialized by the culture. And so the verse in the end of Romans one applies so thoroughly.

Not only do they do these things but give hearty approval to those who do them. This is such a powerful thing that is appealing to individuals self-interest. I want to be this way or I don't want your rules applying to anybody, certainly not me, but anybody else.

And so therefore, since they're deeply committed to that, there's almost nothing anybody's going to be able to say that's going to make a difference as long as their commitment is to themselves or to their ideology, which applies to others but may not apply to them. So that is maybe they don't want to have a gender change, but they are bugged when anybody is saying that it's wrong that someone else changes their gender. It's all part of the whole package that people are buying into.

It's all the progressive thing. We have moved beyond all of those conventional things. We have bought into a whole different worldview all your conventional things.

We want nothing to do with them and we want to poke you in the eye every time they

come up. So this is all a predicate for my response. A big part of my response I've already given.

It's obvious that there's a difference between coloring your hair or getting modest cosmetic surgery or even breast augmentation, which is a type of cosmetic surgery. These are meant to facilitate and affirm the natural self. So that breast augmentation is different from removing the breast because you don't want to appear to be a woman.

You want to appear to be a man and then you take hormones that allow you to grow a beard and deepen your voice or all these secondary male characteristics. So this is one of those things where if it's not really obvious to somebody what's going on here that the distinction between hair color or even certain types of plastic surgery and a sex change operation, then it's hard. I don't know what I can tell people that's going to be persuasive.

If it's not already obvious, there it is. I used to tell me you don't see a distinction. This person wants to cut off his arms and legs because his self perception is that he's a quadriplegic.

And by the way, there are these kinds of people. That's his self perception. So that's not right.

Well, people dye their hair. They get their haircut. Excuse me.

You don't see a difference between amputation and cutting your hair. No. Okay.

Well, I got nothing else to say. So to some degree, there is an abandonment of common sense. If I want to give a little principled content to answering the objection, a substantive content for those for whom this is not obvious, I already just mentioned that in one case, you're augmenting or supplementing something that is already part of the established sexuality or gender, however you want to characterize it of that person there.

You are not trying to obliterate that. All right. You're not trying to change.

See sex is part of one's nature. Okay. Women are females by nature.

It's not just their physical body, their whole self or female. And this is why sex change operations are not possible. You can't change your sex because it's not just somehow attached to you and you just change the attachment.

I'm going to get a new set of tires. You know, these tires are for off road, you know, because that's what I do now. I do off road stuff.

So I'm changing the tires. You can't change the tires on a human body for a different kind of activity. It's inherent to the human being.

Their sex slash gender, biblically, they're the same. All males refer to as he's and all females as she's, you know, the pronouns apply to the, to the sex. Now, it's certainly sex.

One's sexuality gender is much deeper than just body parts. Of course, you can't say that if you're not a dualist, if you don't believe there's a soul or human nature, you know, so maybe, but, but still they are, they are, they include that. The question Matt Walsh asks, what is a woman? You feel like a woman in a man's body.

What is a woman that you feel like one, but don't have the body of a woman? And it's very difficult for people to respond to this because it's clear that a woman is a physical body with kind of sentiments that a bet or go along or are unified or consistent with that body. And so these things biblically in God's creation, the nature of reality, all of that you can, you can do the biblical side of things. You can do the just nature.

If you want just look at the world and you can see how reality is structured. We can explain why reality is structured that way has purpose and it's a good purpose, but you don't need a Bible in order to know this. Okay.

So I gave, I gave some, maybe I'm what I had probably do much better than what I've offered, but part of me wants to say, excuse me, but no duh, right? You can't see this. This is not a heart issue, but it is difficult in conversation because those who raise a challenge like this have lost their ability to, to have these issues informed by common sense because they've been so deeply and profoundly socialized by the world and part of them wants to cooperate with that. It's the whole progressive thing.

We're progressing past all these conventional things. We're making our own reality. You do you and that's a big part of what's going on here.

I think also Greg, you touched on the idea that our self is gendered and I, I think these, I think the people who would argue this way, I think they get that. I think their problem is that they do think the body is merely cosmetic. They don't think the body has anything to say to inform them about their sex.

So I think that could be playing some role in this confusion that they think the body is not speaking any truth about who they are. So I think that's a big problem here, but you've explained the difference here, Greg. I will also say that changing your hair color actually does change your hair color.

Your hair color, if you dye your hair, your hair is a different color, right? But removing body parts doesn't change your sex. Now all you have to do is look at a woman who's had breast cancer. She has a mastectomy.

Is she now a man? No, because changing your body does not change your sex. It's completely a different thing from most plastic surgeries. Now there are some people who

desire plastic surgeries that do amputate parts or mutilate their body parts in some way.

And I would say that is also wrong. I don't think we should be mutilating our bodies. And that is a different thing from shaping your body according to your preference.

Or say, you know, people who want to do really radical things to their faces to make them look like animals or there's all sorts of things people want to do. And as soon as you start either removing healthy body parts or mutilating your body in some way, I think that's where it gets to be a problem. It's interesting.

I used to parody using the animal illustration many years ago. I mean, for 20 years, I would raise this issue. But I'd also qualify to say the problem with using a parody.

Like if a person thought he was an animal, should we do cosmetic surgery to make them look like the animal they think they are, is that the parody becomes reality. You can't parody these things because the culture is moving so fast towards the ridiculous that they are adopting these things as part of the trend. And so just, you know, you heard it here first, okay, told you so.

That's basically what I'm saying here. And so Amy now is reporting current events, people, they're called furies. They have a name.

In fact, I heard that. I don't know that these are the people that are, we're doing the cosmetic surgery. Well, that's a broad category of people in the, the, I first heard the word furies from a high school kid who told me, oh yeah, we have furies at our high school, you know.

So I suspect, I think this is a fad with a lot of these people. However, there are people who have pursued things like amputations because of their self-concept, you know. And so the, I don't know about the, you know, changing your facial features, you know, stitching hair fur on your face.

I don't know about that. But again, if that's part of the parody at this moment, just wait another few years and it's going to be surfacing actually in the world somewhere by people who, and the rest of the culture is going to go, yay, yay, look at how you do you, you know, and then I can do me. So ultimately there are boundaries to things we can change and not change in our bodies.

All right, so let's go on to a question from Jonathan Marks. Actually, there are two questions here and I think they're related. So I'm going to read both of them and you can kind of take them together.

The first one's from Jonathan Marks and he says, I've been noticing an increasing lack of civility in political discussions, even among Christians and an increasing hostility to the idea of being winsome as if that's associated with being susceptible to unbiblical causes,

can a tactical approach still be viable in such a non-civil culture? And then Timothy Turner says concerning a recent evangelical debate, has the time for winsome Christianity passed? Is it now time for a more direct hard edge approach? Well there's an article that I read. It was about the Southern Baptist Convention and they're adapting to things and adjusting and they're actually responding in this article to another larger piece that I actually need to read this fall after I'm done with my manuscript. But it raises the same question.

There was a time when a winsome approach was effective and they used as an example Tim Keller. Okay, so here's this winsome warm engaging intellectual speaking to a cosmopolitan crowd. Oh, that works.

But now everything's gotten a steer. Maybe we ought to step up and go with the flow in some sense. I do not believe that matching the mood or temperament, the hostile temperature, the temperament of the other side is going to be persuasive.

I'm just thinking here pragmatically, how is that going to make our job better? How are we going to be more effective? Okay, you yell at me, I'm going to yell at you. And when I yell at you as much as you yell at me, then you'll change your mind. You go, oh no, what happens is the yell louder, a harsh word stirs up anger.

And a gentle answer turns away wrath. So how long ago was that written? Three thousand years ago? And it's still true. That's just on the pragmatic side.

But we have another issue and that is virtue. We have a responsibility to be winsome and attractive. Doesn't mean we can't be, I'm trying to think of the right way to characterize this.

We can be a velvet covered brick. This is a, there was a book by this title a number of years ago. We can be strong and hard and I describe Jesus this way in the story of reality.

You know, he wasn't like meek and mild the way we think of that. Meek this, the way that word means is strength under control. But he was hard and direct and firm and aggressive and unyielding.

And we can be that as well. But that doesn't mean we have to then adopt the hostile mannerisms of the other side. You know, we are ambassadors for Christ is the way Paul puts it.

So standard reason is always emphasized a kind of genial diplomacy. That's why I don't like the word evangelism because in most people's minds that sounds confrontational. And when I offer, when I give the tactics talk, the alternative approach, a different mindset of genial diplomacy of a, a diplomat or an ambassador of this has a totally different feel to it.

And it actually helps people feel more relaxed. I think there are some people that are so aggressive that are Christians that they, this is the only way they know how to do it. And it's satisfying for them to get into verbal fights.

But Paul says, Lord, bondservant is not to be quarrelsome, but patient when wronged. If God might grant them repentance and they will come to their senses, having escaped, having been held captive by Satan to do as well. That's in Second Timothy.

By the way, last book that Paul wrote, Second Timothy, the last part of that chapter, chapter two, I should say, of Second Timothy. See, so we have biblical injunctions about this, but I, to be honoring to God, I think we have to continue to pursue engagements with manifesting these kinds of characteristics. However, and, but there's, there's also a practical element.

It's easier to do that in a way. Some people are just not quick on their feet, right? They're not clever or they can't go, okay, take that, you know, kind of deal. Some are, but that's a liability because then we make these conversations, whether semi-private conversations or public interactions, into gladiator events.

And our engagements are, if you will, witnessing the demonstration of our life bearing witness and testimony is not to be a gladiator event who can draw the most blood quickest. You know, that's the way the world is going. But even if it wasn't more effective to be gracious, we would still have a responsibility to do that.

I don't, I don't get this. This goes back to a faithfulness of this value that Stanneri has and it's printed out. It's on our website somewhere.

It's faithfulness over results. We don't figure out bottom line results. What is going to get us, okay, let's be really nasty.

That'll get us better results. That's not going to, but that is the temptation there being now see. So we're going to, the bottom line is our integrity and the way we communicate.

And if we communicate with integrity and God, God chooses not to bless that, that's up to him. Okay. We're not getting enough people at our church.

So we should have some, you know, some crazy thing, get more people come in. No, that isn't the, our goal is to communicate a certain message in a certain way. And when we do that, an honorable way to God our job is done.

If people don't listen, then they don't listen. If we're doing things properly, then that's on their side of the ledger and God's side of the ledger. I don't know.

I'll kind of beat the same horse here, but Greg, your last point is exactly where I was

going to start. And that is that this is not all about what works. So even if it worked to attack people and to treat them without the human dignity that they, that we owe them, even if that were the case, we still should not do it because we have been called to a certain thing.

And I, and second Peter, I mean, not second Peter, first Peter is the book to go to for this because he says over and over that no matter how you are treated, if you're treated unfairly, if you are hurt because of your righteousness or your position or for following Christ, you have to still do what God has called you to do because it's better to suffer at the hands of men than to suffer at the hands of God. And also we are representing him. That is our job.

And our job is not to convince other people. That's not our main job. Our main job is to convince, or is to show people the excellencies of God, which is what Peter says in first Peter.

So as we are talking to people, as again, Peter says, we are to respond to them the way Jesus responded to the people who hated him. That is how we are supposed to respond no matter how people treat us. And we're supposed to keep in mind that God is just.

So no matter what happens to you now and no matter how things go and no matter whether or not you convince people and you're persuasive, God is just and in the end, his justice will reign. The truth will be known. You will have glory with Christ if you have suffering with him now, suffering now, glory with him in the future in his resurrection.

I was reading "Wait of Glory" last night and the last couple pages. And Lewis there says, but he's talking about the glory, but the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is Monday. Now some people may not get the second reference, but he's saying, "We're in church on Sunday and all seems..." But then you got to get out and walk this out in the world and that's where you come out of that protective enclave and now you're tomorrow's Monday.

And that's the cross before the crown. And in our Lord is leading us into the fray and we are to follow him. And but there are very clear directives on how to do that.

First Peter 3, that famous passage about defending the faith says, "With gentleness and reverence." I mentioned 2 Timothy chapter 2, the word sponser, it is not to be quarrelsome. You mentioned 1 Peter, other passages, you know, when we suffer for Christ we entrust ourselves to a faithful creator in doing what is right. That's the last verse of chapter 4. And then Jesus uses an example in a number of cases in 1 Peter and then we go back to Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 5, "When you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness and because of your faith in me, you're blessed." Which is the same thing Peter says, the Spirit of Grace and glory rests upon you when that happens.

Okay, so now I'm going to come at this from the other side because I suspect that a lot of the people who are listening to this right now may err on the side of being too harsh. Just because we like to get into these discussions and it is hard to resist responding in kind to people, it really is, I get that. But from the other direction I would also say that the question about winsomeness depends entirely on how you are defining winsome.

There are certainly some people who define being winsome as not talking about anything controversial. And that I think is not the way to go either. I think what we need to do, and you said this earlier, Greg, is to be the velvet brick, to speak the truth, clearly, calmly, don't do it defensively, don't try and, you don't have to even be angry as you're doing it, but just make your case clearly.

And you don't need to hang back, you don't need to be, don't avoid things simply for the goal of being, quote, "winsome." Because now that's the opposite problem of being too harsh, is just never saying anything that's controversial. Because we're also called to speak the truth. Well, there's this line that I use in talking about ambassadors, one of our first things that we developed in it, and it says we can't be too naughty, we can't be too nice.

And the gospel is offensive enough. Don't add any more offense to it, all right? That's the naughty part. But too nice, we cannot remove the offense that's inherent to the gospel, because then we have no gospel.

How do we approach that? As you described, and remember, look at Jesus. Jesus was shrewd, which is what he told us to do, to be shrewd, gentle, but shrewd. And I think that's a good way of thinking about the bill.

It's really hard, it's a hard line to walk, and we will fall off on one side or the other, and we have to just keep correcting ourselves. But one thing that I read a quote, I was reading a book by Hadley Arcus, I think that's how you say his name, Natural Rights and the Right to Choose. For a more or a philosopher.

And so he wrote this book about abortion. Well, he said in that book something that now I think about all the time, he said of a politician that quote, his desire to remain civil fed a willingness to keep backing away from an argument. And I thought, oh, I do not want that to be us.

A desire to remain civil should not mean backing away from an argument. It should mean you speak with clarity, you give the other person dignity, and if they want to become uncivil, that is on them. So these are the all the things that this is not an easy thing to figure out.

It really isn't. And it's something we're all going to have to struggle with, I think. And it's also not natural for me, people need to know that I'm almost 49 years in the Lord and I'm

still working at these things and God's still working on me in these.

It's a challenge to be gracious and civil in the midst of weighty concerns that you disagree with people on. I mean, just today, I got an email from somebody who was unbelievably rude and I was kind of looking at it. And now pretty much I just put it away.

I don't engage. But sometimes I just go for hours just thinking, I could say this, I could say that and I won't. I'm not going to respond to them.

This is why doing these things by writing is a lot easier because you can resist the temptation, but there's always this this zinger you can come back with or you can try to hurt them or whatever. That's what we have to fight. And I think what they're gosh, I need to write something on this because I think Ephesians and first Peter right now are the books that we need because Ephesians talks about how God's grace towards us turns us into loving people.

And so and then, you know, first Peter again, it just it talks about how Jesus is grace towards us turns us into people who reflect Jesus. So we just need to be constantly shaping our minds in the gospel because that's the only way we will survive this as fallen people renewing our minds. Yes.

All right. Well, thank you for your questions. If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #strsk or you can go through our website.

If you just go to the hashtag #strskpodcast page on our website, you'll find a link there where you can send us a question. So just keep it short and we will consider your question. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.

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