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Are You Really Being Unfaithful to Reality if You Use Someone's Preferred Pronouns?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about the idea that you're not being unfaithful to reality by using someone's preferred pronouns since those pronouns correspond to the person's actual gender identity.

* How would you respond to the idea that you're not being unfaithful to reality by using a preferred pronoun because that is the pronoun that corresponds to the person's actual gender identity?

Transcript

[Music] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and with me it's Greg Koukl and we're here to answer your questions that you send us on Twitter or through our website with the #STRask. Okay Greg, here is a question from Brandon.

I recently read Preston Sprinkle's book Embodied. One argument he advances is that you are not being unfaithful to reality by using a preferred pronoun because that is the pronoun that corresponds to the person's actual gender identity. How would you respond? Well, it's frustrating to hear this.

Preston Sprinkle is kind of broadly in the Christian tradition. He has some different ideas that we do about a number of things I think I'll tell is one of them but it really troubles me to hear this. First of all Brandon, just for your information, this is not an argument.

It's just simply an assertion. When Sprinkle says what you cited him as saying, he's just saying it's so. You know, he's not telling you why it's so.

He's saying that a person's gender identity is their real gender. So why would I accept that? Why would I believe that as a Christian? Okay. And last year I wrote a piece called the Primal Herrissi.

I'm just rereading it because I'm cannibal. I seek some of that for a book I'm writing.

Amy, and in that I talk about what relativism is.

Relativism is when the truth is on the inside, not on the outside. It's the simplest way to characterize what relativism is. What a person believes is true simply in virtue of them believing it.

It has nothing to do with what the world is like on the outside. That's relativism. Alright.

Any version of relativism, it's mind dependent. It is not object dependent. It's subject dependent.

Okay. But of course, truth is not mind dependent. It is object dependent.

That's the nature of truth. If I say the house is on fire, it's only true if the house is burning as an object, not that I happen to believe it to be the case. Okay.

So when you ground the concept of truth in a subject's own awareness instead of the nature of reality on the outside, now that is relativism. This is not God's world. God's world is made a very specific way.

That's why it's ironic that someone in the Christian tradition or Christian context, best way probably to put it, is saying that a person's real gender is whatever they think their real gender is. There is no such concept of any kind in scripture. In scripture, it is very straightforward.

Male and female, he created them. Be fruitful, multiply, subdue the earth. Alright.

So the concept of male and female is an objective feature of reality. There is no distinction between what a person is physically and what they think they are mentally. God never makes this kind of distinction.

Actually, what this is, gender identity, it's a culturally manufactured concept that is meant to accommodate something that is contrary to God's design and also therefore unhealthy. This isn't a good situation. It's unhealthy for those that are suffering from this psychological disorder, and that's what it is.

It's a disorder because they believe something about themselves that is not true in the actual world. In this case, true about their physical bodies. So I don't understand this accommodation to the culture, this cultural notion.

When it's, like I said, it's not God's view, and that's a matter to a person who's speaking in a Christian context. And if it's not God's view and it's contrary to God's view, then it is minimally disordered. God created the world in a certain way, Amy, to accommodate human flourishing.

And virtually every single one of these attacks, these cultural diversions that everybody

is so intense about, and many Christians are just giving in to, if you notice there are attacks on the foundation of what God made for the purpose of human flourishing. So not male and female anymore, there's whatever. Marriage isn't one man with one woman becoming one flesh for one lifetime.

It's whatever. And sex is whatever. It's all whatever.

Where is that coming from? That isn't coming from God. You know, years ago we talked about this. I wrote a piece on it about three years ago for a solid ground, and the title was, "Faithfulness is not theologically complicated." Very simple.

Still have the post in my, inside of my Bible where I wrote the statement down, "Faithfulness is not theologically complicated." If we want to be faithful to God's world and God's truth over and against what the culture is saying on these issues, whether it's gender or sexuality or marriage or abortion or any of a host of things, these are not hard. They're right there, straightforward in Scripture from the beginning. That's what Jesus refers to in Matthew 19 when talking about divorce, all of that.

How is it we have Christian people that are denying what is obvious in Scripture? And this seems to me an example of that. It's a, it's a complicity with a corrupt culture. And when I say corrupt, I mean morally corrupt and rebellion to God.

Now they may not think this, but to me this is a broad scheme of the devil to undermine human flourishing, the flourishing of image bearers. All right? Paul talks about these schemes in Ephesians chapter 6. I've also written a piece on that as well, seeing the unseen. So I'm not just snatching these ideas out of the air because I don't like what I hear, and this is against my view.

No, these things are, they're not complicated. And I don't know how it is that people fall for this. Like, well, they're, what they believe in their heart is their real gender.

Why would, where did you get that idea? You got it for the culture. You did not get that from God. God's word? No, God's word is straightforward.

And by the way, so is common sense. Most of what God's word says about foundational issues is just common sense. You don't need a Bible to figure that out.

But when the Christians get hammered by the culture on these issues, this is what ends up happening. We often go along with the cultural view rather than what God's view is because it's just a whole lot easier. But allegedly, Preston Sprinkle, a verse here of firms, and I haven't read it, so I'm just going based on what Brandon said, is the cultural view.

And I don't know where he would sit broadly, theologically, on all these other issues that you probably know more about than I do, Amy. What I often see with many Christians is that when it comes to the controversial cultural issues that are not

complicated theologically, many of them just flow with the culture. And then they still call themselves Christian.

I'm not referring here to Sprinkle particularly because I don't know his range of views, but this is a pattern that I see. And my appeal here is let's just be faithful to the truth. If people get mad at us, I'm sorry, that's not good.

I don't like that. But I'd rather have people mad at me than God mad at me. You know, remember that verse from Mark 15, 15? Jesus is before Pilate.

Pilate asks the crowd whether they want Barabbas or Jesus. They say, "Give us Barabbas and crucify Jesus." And then text says in that verse 15, "Wishing to please the crowd." Pilate had Barabbas released Jesus, "scorched and crucified." That says so much about our age and our culture. And I think from what I could tell, this is just an example of that.

So Brandon, Sprinkle hasn't given you an argument. He's made an assertion that is consistent with the culture's view. I have given you an argument.

I say, "He's wrong," and I'll tell you why, because the scripture says he's wrong. And I cited the passages. When he says, "Here's what I think he's going for." He says, "If you're not being unfaithful to reality, if it really is who they think they are." Now the problem with this is that you are just because I really think I am something that doesn't make it part of reality.

Pronouns have always been used as a third person public thing, an identification that people can recognize that has to do with reality. It's not just what you think. So even if he's trying to find a way to accommodate this and say it's part of reality, you're still saying that their ideas are reality.

I think even if you don't mean to be saying that, even if you're just saying, "Well, this is who they really think they are," and so on, that's the truth about what they think. People are still taking that to mean that is reality. Yes, right.

And that's the mistake here. And if we read this charitably, then we could say that. But it is actually really true that they believe it.

Okay. And it's actually really true that Bellimics believe they're fat. Are they? No.

But they really believe it. So there is a reality about their belief, but their belief is false. That's the distinction that you see me made.

Yes, they really believe it, but the belief they hold is false because it doesn't match the objective world. And the minute we start saying that the significant reality is what's in somebody's mind and not in the world, that is complete, what's the word I'm looking for, capitulation to the culture's view. This is you, do you.

This is what's Truman's phrase. Expressive individualism. This is authenticity.

Authenticity is everybody affirming what any individual believes to be true for themselves, and they affirm it and live it out without repercussions or resistance from others. That's utter and complete relativism. All right.

That's giving up on reality, on actual reality, the reality that God made, the reality of God's world, the way he made it, the moral reality of how we're obliged to act and live in light of the way God made that. And most importantly, you brought up the analogy of someone who's Bellimic and thinking that they're fat. You're not helping them by agreeing with them that they're fat.

You're not actually doing them any good. Sometimes the nicest thing, or I shouldn't say the nicest thing, but the best thing, the most good thing you can do is something that will upset people. That's right.

And that's really hard for us to understand sometimes. We're very tempted to make people happy because we think that nice is better than good. Or we confuse goodness with niceness.

So, and then the question that can be asked here is, where does this end? Where do we press in? Where do we draw the line? Okay. Do you know about furies? Yeah, see, this furies, all right. The first time I heard this phrase was a couple months ago at one of our realities.

And one of the students was saying, "Oh, yeah, we have furies in our school. I was a furry." And then I realized it was a fulfillment of a parody that I did years ago and said, the problem with doing parodies, which is giving an extreme example of something that's happened to show how foolish it is, is that the parodies become reality. And so during this gender confusion and stuff like that, when it first began surfacing 10 or 12, 15 years ago, I said, "What if I believed I was a rabbit? What would it be appropriate to put me in a cage if I wanted to and feed me carrots? And if I said I wanted to get surgery done to my ears, so I had nice long ears and they put fur on my ears and all..." Well, I mean, this is a parody because I'm trying to say, "Don't you see how foolish that is?" But now people believe they are rabbits and all kinds of other creatures.

And it's accepted as... Well, that's all right. They're called furies. So, Preston, what is the reality there? Well, they really believe that they're animals.

Are they animals? No, but then the belief is false. I wrote about this in story of reality, talking about truth, you know, your truth, my truth. Look, if the thing you say is your truth is not a fact, then it's not any kind of truth at all.

It may be your belief, it may be your opinion, it may be your delusion, but it's not a truth. Why are we using the language that way? Because we are capitulating to the culture's

rhetoric, which destroys God's ideas about what God has done. That is obvious.

I mean, I feel like I'm getting worked up here a little bit, but it's maddening, Amy. It's, you know, the slogans, for example, in 1984, the government's slogans, they had three of them, but they're all opposites. Freedom is slavery, or slavery is freedom.

It was one or the other. And then the other two are opposites as well. This is what we're being fed.

It's the same like 1984. That was written back in the 40s. But we're being told the same thing, male is female, female is male.

That's the truth. Well, where do we have refuge? We have refuge in God's clear revelation about the nature of reality. When we are tempted to deny the obvious by the culture, and just to reinforce that, we don't need God's revelation to know that there's male and female, and male and female, males and females make other males and females.

No duh. Why is this so hard? So it's very, it's one thing to have to face this in the culture. It is extremely disappointing when you have someone with a Christian context that is advancing this foolishness.

This is foolishness, and it sets the stage for more foolishness along the same line. The same set of rules can be applied to a whole bunch of other things that just aggravates the foolishness and undermines the circumstances of human flourishing that God has provided. I honestly think this goes back to what I was just saying.

I think as Christians, we want to love people. We want to be kind. We want to be humble.

We want to help people. And I think that is what is behind a lot of this. I mean, I'm sure there are some people who are just trying to, they just don't want to, they just want to go along until they fit in with everybody.

But I honestly think a lot of people, what they want to do is they want to be faithful to God in being good and kind and helpful and making a difference in people's lives and all these things. But what happens is they're not well informed enough to know what that should look like. So they've bought into the idea of what love looks like.

Right. They've bought into certain other ideas that are playing into this and are misdirecting their love because they don't know what love should look like. And this is why, excuse me, I can't give the nod, the charitable nod.

Well, at least they're good at well intentioned. The intentions that you're referring to are, hold on, sorry, deeply misinformed because they're listening to the culture and not to God. They think that being faithful to God is being nice, will be nice.

We're going to be nice to people. And this gives into all kinds of ugly things, theologically, culturally, psychologically, ugly things when compared to what God intends. And then they reserve their hostility for the people who are faithful to the truth.

So the nicest thing, this doesn't work two ways because the nicest isn't there for people to disagree and are faithful to God. Christianity isn't about niceness. It is about the truth which entails a certain kind of love that is also defined in Scripture.

Many years ago I did a talk called "When Love Is a Lie" and this is when people use love as a justification for evil. What amounts to be evil? Proverbs says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 that love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

I agree. I think many Christians want to be nice and think they're being loving when they go along with nonsense, foolishness and damaging ideas. They need to be opposed.

Now they can be opposed in a gracious way but they need to be opposed. So to turn it back on the other side then, I think there are... We also need to be careful that when we are speaking the truth, like you said, that we are doing it in a gracious manner and that we actually do care about our enemies and we actually do desire to see their repentance. I was just reading Revelation this morning and looking at the letters to the churches.

What's really interesting there is that you see these two opposite sides. You see the people who were holding fast at doctrine but they were not loving. And then you see the people who were giving in to all sorts of... I'm trying to think sexual immorality and idolatry and different things.

So there are plenty of ways to go wrong on this issue and we all need to be aware of those things and make sure that we have them all in place. Because it's the truth in love. You have to know the truth and you have to also know what love is.

You have to have so much strength to love people in the way that they should be loved. To show true compassion which means to do that in truth and to tell them what they need to hear and to also do it in a way that is humble and kind. Those strong.

Who can be all of that? I think we are always falling off on one side or another on this. Well it's a struggle. It's interesting though Proverbs also says when you correct a fool he either screams at you or he laughs at you.

Only wise people are taught are teachable but the fool just rails or laughs. And this is exactly what happens when we try to. Even when we do it graciously and kindly stand for what is good and right and true and be faithful to Christ and to his world and his worldview and the world that comes to us.

And to the world view and the world that God made for the good of the people in question then we get either laughed at or screamed at. And it's good to know that because then another thing we do I think is we evaluate what we have said by people's reactions. And that's not a good way to evaluate just because somebody is angry just because somebody is railing against us or laughing at us.

That doesn't mean that what we said is wrong. They railed against Jesus. They laughed at Jesus.

They responded to him in all these ways. They thought he was crazy. He had been his own family.

And that didn't mean he was wrong. So we just need to stop evaluating what we say and do by how people respond. And again it all comes back to having our minds shaped by God's revelation, by who he is, by who Jesus is.

We can see how Jesus interacted with people he disagreed with. All of these things we need to be shaping ourselves constantly to avoid these potholes in the road here. That's right.

That's right. Well thank you Greg unless you have more to say. No, no we pretty much covered it I think.

Thank you Amy. So thanks for such a great question Brandon we really appreciate that. We actually have a way where you can send your question in through the website.

So if you go to our the hashtag #SDRaskpodcast on our website. There's a place where you can click on submit a question and you can send your question in just keep it short. And we will consider it for the show.

We hope to hear from you soon. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[Music]

(upbeat music)