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Should I Call a Man's Partner His Husband if They're Legally Married?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether we should call a man's partner his husband if they're legally married and whether it's appropriate to remove kids from a middle school youth group where a male high schooler who has socially transitioned to female is serving.

* What are your thoughts on calling a man's partner his husband or a woman's partner her wife if they have had a same-sex wedding?

* A male high schooler who has socially transitioned to female is serving in our church's middle school ministry. If I pull my kids from their youth group, am I punishing them for someone else's error?

Transcript

You're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag STRask Podcast with Amy Holland, Greg Kockel. Hi, Amy. Greg, you're already tuckling.

I don't know. You're just funny sometimes. You bring me joy, Amy.

Well, I'm glad. Here's a question from Richard Thompson. What are your thoughts on calling a man's partner their husband or a woman's partner their wife if they have had a same-sex wedding? Does this in some way imply agreement with a concept of same-sex marriage in the way that calling someone by pronoun that doesn't match their gender slash sex would imply agreement with trans ideology? Or is it simply a recognition of the reality that in the eyes of the law they are married? Let me address the last part of that first and make kind of a parallel that might seem a little bit different.

It's a little extreme, but it strikes me as apropos. Abortion is legal in this country. Those who are pro-life properly understand abortion to be taking the life of an innocent human being without proper justification.

When you do that, that's usually called murder. All right. So would it be since abortion is

legal in this country, would it be inappropriate to describe abortion as an act of murder because it's legal? And I guess the answer is no, because the fact of the matter is this regardless of the law, this still is what it is.

Okay. So what the law has to say about marriage is irrelevant to how we comport ourselves with regards to the terminology we use regarding same-sex marriage couples, all right? And I'm just using same-sex marriage here in the case of for descriptive purposes because I don't think it's a real marriage, all right? And nor should we treat it like one or at least refer to it like one, all right? So I think it is exactly parallel to the pronouns issue because in many cases it is getting more and more so, not just kind of social pressure, but legal pressure to use preferred pronouns. In order to satisfy the narrative of the left on this issue, if it becomes a legal issue, should we then? Well, this is what the law says, so we have to obey this.

I think no, not in this particular case. So I think it's a huge mistake to refer to a same-sex couple as being married and husband and the husband or wife and wife in whatever case. But there's an alternative that is completely safe, it seems to me, that gets you through any social discomfort and that's just referred to their partners.

And in fact, that's the way it was referred to when there were domestic partnerships that were made legal. I didn't, I never agreed with the idea of domestic partnerships as a policy issue, as a licensed or legal affair and because they were de facto marriages under another name. And so once we approved of that and the government would issue essentially a license for domestic partnerships, then that was the end of that.

It was just a small step to say, well, look at if you're doing this, why can't you just call it a marriage? Because this is de facto what it is and you're just holding out because we are same-sex couples. And so that's looked like a type of illicit discrimination. Of course, it's not an illicit discrimination because the word marriage does not even apply properly to same-sex couples.

Nevertheless, I wrote a piece, by the way, that you might remember it was a while back when we first started talking about this, maybe 20 years ago. And the piece was titled, you can't marry your canary. And the reason is, is because that's not what marriage is.

But if you ask people, can you marry your canary, they're going to say no. Of course, back then when I wrote that, I assumed that would be the response. Nowadays, I don't know.

This is why you can't parody things like this because eventually the thing that is parody becomes reality. But there was a common sense notion that marriage is not for humans and animals, all right? And so when people say, no, you can't marry your canary, they have in mind a normative that is an appropriate prescriptive definition of marriage. Now, if marriage is a particular thing that doesn't include animals, then we have to ask, what

is that particular thing? And we don't need this.

We've already had this discussion in the past, I've written on it, and that material is available on [stanteries](#) and [str.org](#). Quite a number of articles. But the point is, when you get down to what society has always understood marriage to be, and the reasons why culture has privileged and regulated, a particular relationship, it turns out that those reasons don't apply to same-sex couples. And to put it simply, the reason that cultures in the beginning of time have done this is because as a rule, and as a group, and by nature, and I would say by design, long-term monogamous heterosexual unions produce the next generation.

The purpose is to protect the family structure that raises children, because that's a cornerstone. It's a foundation, in fact, of all cultures. And that's why cultures who understood this did this.

Now marriage is nothing. As someone once said, it's just a list of names that someone's applied the word marriage to. And this is why people are saying, well, why can't we just have instead of two names, four names, or whatever? Once you remove the natural reason for this institution, and why cultures have characteristically protected and regulated that very particular kind of relationship, you remove that, well, then everything's fair game now.

There's no definition, so anything could be called a marriage. You can still marry your canary. I imagine.

Sorry. The man-woman union is unique. Like you said, Greg, it's the only one that creates new life.

It's a unique type of union. And you'll notice that now that the definition of marriage has changed because same-sex couples don't create life. Now you have to bring in all this intrusive government and law to try and make up for that.

So now there's surrogacy. Now they have to have all the law regarding that. Now there's all sorts of problems with that.

We've talked about that in the past. But because you need all this law and force to prop up something that isn't actually marriage, to try and make it look similar to the man-woman union. And I think a lot of Christians, even Christians, have not thought about what marriage is and why.

And it's been a few years now that since we've really talked about it a lot, so if anyone hasn't seen this on our website, just go to [str.org](#). We have so many articles. I think one of them is called [understand the same-sex marriage issue](#). And there are a ton of links.

There are different things we've written and other people have written because the way

this was presented, Greg, was that certain people were being left out of marriage, that they were being denied marriage. But the truth is nobody was denied marriage. Marriage was a particular thing.

A man-woman union. And anyone could get married regardless of their orientation, regardless of- Right. Of what they thought about anyone.

And they often did, regardless of their orientation. Right. So everyone had the right to marry.

What changed was not right. What changed was the definition because they wanted something else to be called marriage. That was what they wanted.

But it was sold to everyone as a matter of people being denied rights. And there just is no right to have your own definition of marriage. Just like there's no right for a man to have a hysterectomy.

When I say man, of course, now he got to qualify it. A male with sexual organs to have a hysterectomy because men don't have uteruses. So it doesn't properly apply to them.

There's no violation of personal rights in that situation. And another thing that's really important here, because getting back to the original question, is the way language is being used to change people's thinking about things. And I remember, for example, part of the challenge to people who believed in the traditional, accurate understanding of marriage is people would say, well, you don't believe in marriage equality then.

Okay. Well, now what do you say? Well, I figured out a response. I said, well, do you think that children should be allowed to marry adults? No, of course not.

Well, then you don't believe in marriage equality either. You have standards. You have guidelines.

You have boundaries to this kind of thing. We just have different boundaries. Now the discussion ought to be about which boundaries are appropriate.

But notice, by the way, that they get away with this language and the language has power. And this is why we shouldn't be calling same-sex unions marriages. Even if the law says it's a marriage, it doesn't mean it is.

I think Frank Beckwith, who said, he is quick with phrases, you know, he said, just because you can eat an ashtray doesn't make it food. All right? Now you might have to think about that for a moment, but he's the same guy who said, I used to be a believer in reincarnation, but that wasn't a former life. Not in any event.

Frank sometimes gets to the heart of a matter with a quip like that. And just because you're living together and you walk down the aisle and pledge your trough until death do

you part, doesn't make it a marriage. It just makes it what it was, a commitment to two people.

A marriage is something entirely different. Anyway, I want to repeat this phrase because to me, this is the core phraseology that it took me actually months and months and months of thinking and working with to come down with this concept of what a marriage, why it is that cultures from the beginning of time, regardless of their religion, regardless of their point of view, politically, have always regulated and protected a very particular kind of relationship. And the reason is, is because in the wording here is very important, as a rule, are there exceptions to this? Yes, there are exceptions to this, the capability of people to have children, for example, but as a rule and as a group and by nature.

And you can throw in by design if you're a theist. Long-term monogamous heterosexual unions produce the next generation. And that is the reason that cultures have been concerned about that relationship and it's only that relationship was called marriage.

And that was the relationship that they promoted and protected and regulated for the sake of culture. If your relationship is not one of those kinds of relationship, the law has no business regulating your relationship. But of course that's all changed because now we're using law for social, what's the word I'm looking for? Engineering.

Thank you. Social engineering. And then the language is used to make it all sound good and fair and right.

This is why we have to be careful. We don't give in to the linguistic maneuvers and this is one of them. And notice, Greg, that when you change the definition from what you described to two people who love each other, it's actually completely arbitrary.

The number is arbitrary. You know, for a man and a woman, there's a reason why it's two people. It's because you need two people to complete this whole union.

You have the male reproductive system and the female reproductive system. No doubt. And they need each other to work.

That's why there are two. There's why in this new definition are there too. It's completely arbitrary and it won't stay that way.

I mean, if you don't have a foundation for why we have commitment for two people, then there's no reason why it will stay that way. So changing the definition has consequences is the point I'm making. So check out our website.

We have a lot of posts on there about this topic. Changing the definition is linguistic. It's de dicto of philosophically.

It doesn't change reality. It doesn't change the nature of things. And that's the key here

that we're standing behind.

Let's go into a question from a discouraged mom, a male high schooler who is socially transitioned to female is being permitted to serve in our church's middle school ministry. He runs games and participates in Bible study, but does not teach. Is pulling my children from their youth group merely punishing them for someone else's error? Well, let me start with the last part first, like I did in the previous question.

If it turns out that a person, a parent has to make a decision regarding a circumstance like that that has ramifications, negative ramifications for their children, that's not punishing the children. All right. And here again, the way we use words is important.

That's not punishing them. It turns out that many times when we have to do the right thing, it creates an inconvenience, a trouble, a difficulty, a hardship for us and maybe for others. That's the price of doing the right thing to call it punishment.

I think is to put an entirely different spin on it. You're not punishing your children. In fact, if you needed to make a decision that had an influence on the children, not being part of this social group, this youth group or whatever in the church, what I think is appropriate to do is to explain to the children.

I know this is hard for you, but here's the reason we're doing this. And we think it's the right decision, even though it inconveniences mom and dad, it inconveniences you. There's a sacrifice we make, but that's what doing the right thing often requires the sacrifice.

Okay. So now having dealt with that, I'm not convinced. And I've done some thinking about this and actually I wanted to ask Alan Sleeman.

I didn't because you gave me a heads up on this yesterday. And I wasn't able to get back to him, but I have thought about this. And the concern that I have is not so much that there's a transition to person in the youth group.

I think this represents a problem, but of sorts, but it's because the question is, what does the parent do with regards to that? That's the first question. I think what the parent is to do is, and you know, this is a tough one, but my impulse right now is to just let it slide. Okay.

But be communicating to your children. Here's the circumstance that we are going to show a grace and be charitable regarding, even though it's a wrong situation. It's an emotionally charged circumstance, because you do have, pardon me, you have children that are for whatever reason, whether it's a genuine psychological difficulty, which is gender dysphoria, or whether it's a contrived psychological difficulty, which I think is the majority of what we see today.

This is a social contagion. This is when the statistics have changed radically on this kind of thing. And I'm trying to think of her name.

Abigail Schreier has written on this in irreversible damage, that it used to be gender dysphoria happened to males almost completely to young males from the age of three, four, five, or six right in there. Now it's massively females who are teenagers, and this suggests that this is a largely contrived circumstance. And I think she's right on that.

But nevertheless, the person who is a teenager going through this situation is still deeply conflicted, or else they wouldn't be pursuing the transition. And so therefore, out of a gracious charitable attitude towards them, I wouldn't make an issue out of it. But I would communicate to the children, this is not God's purpose, this is not God's plan.

What I'm a little bit more concerned with is the church's approach to this, because the church has approved of allowing this individual to be involved in some capacity of service. And this might suggest that the church is fine with this. And if they're fine with this, I think that's a concern.

And so it might be helpful for the parents of the children in question that are part of this group to ask the leadership, what is your policy about this? Now they might be saying the same thing that I've just suggested. You know, we can't change the circumstance from everything we could tell this young man, or, and I don't know what it's called. Okay, this young man loves the Lord and is deeply confused.

And we figure that it's best not to pillory this young man or put him in a situation where he receives disdain or whatever, you know, has looked down upon. And so we've just tried to do it best I can. Well, I can understand that.

I'm not sure if that's the right approach. I think this is a harder question. But if it turns out the church has no problem with gender transitioning, well, that's a whole different kind of thing.

And so I'd want to find out about that. And then the parents are going to have to weigh whether this particular point of view, if they're going in that direction, is just one of a number of issues that they are, in a sense, shifting left on. And then that reflects more on the leadership of the church than it does on this individual.

I think this individual, the transitioned young man, is in a awful circumstance. And that whoever or whatever is responsible for it. And that bringing harsh judgment on the individuals probably not going to be helpful.

I don't know what the best pastoral thing to do here is. I'm not a pastor. But you can't make the right pastoral choices unless you have the moral issues in the right order.

First, get the moral issues in the right order. This is the wrong situation. This person

needs help.

The problem is, I don't know what state this person lives in, but in the state of California, it is illegal to get help for minors in this area. It's illegal to do anything, but promote what they're doing. In fact, in some places, and this is in Canada, I think it may be, and as I see it popping up the US, there is a possibility if you are not affirming it and using the appropriate gender pronouns to satisfy the minor, you could have the minor taken away from you.

I mean, this is how crazy it's gotten. So it's a tough situation. Yeah, I think there are one distinction that has to be made that you touched on this, Greg, is if there is a child in the youth group who's coming to youth group who has transitioned, I don't think there's anything wrong with allowing that person to be in the youth group, as long as everyone is aware that this is not what God wants, or this is not what the Christian worldview accepts or anything like that, but still be welcoming to him and still love him and still allow him to be there and hear what's going on.

But as soon as you put them in charge of younger kids, because if you're taking a high school student and you're holding them up as a model for the younger students, now you're endorsing it. That's a good point. Yeah, I would not put him in leadership, for sure.

Or in servanthood, maybe that would be a distinction someone would try to make, but to your point, it doesn't matter. He's a model, no matter what, if he's the older child coming in to help out with younger kids. Now, I know this is going to sound really harsh to people, but remember, our society says that the way to help someone and to love someone is to enable them to express everything they're feeling.

That is not the Christian view. If it is harming him, it is harming this child to transition, it is not the loving view to pretend like it doesn't matter, and to pretend like it's okay to model it for others. Now, expressing that to the child is going to be really difficult because they will hear anything that you say against what they're feeling as hatred, as bigotry, condemnation.

Yeah. And all I can say is, I would just pray about this and ask for the Holy Spirit to help you to communicate this, communicate your love for them, and communicate the idea. You can even say, look, I know you disagree with this, but I just want you to understand where I'm coming from.

This is our view. We want you to hear what we have to say. We want you to know Jesus, but we also want you to know that if you want to follow Jesus, you're going to have to leave this behind.

Okay, so this conversation that you're kind of role modeling here, is this a conversation you think that the mother of these children should have with the transgender child? No, I

think the leadership should have with the child. I just wanted to make that. Yeah, the leadership should have this conversation with the child.

Now, the mother has no control over who's leading in that group, but I agree, Greg, that if that's happening, she needs to figure out what the leadership's view is of this. And maybe they're just making unwise pastoral decisions, as you said, or maybe they agree. So that really needs to be determined.

Yeah, and I think this is different than someone who's living in a sinful pattern of behavior, because even though, you know, I think this is a terribly wrong circumstance in the direction that it's going, you have these legal restrictions for one. And secondly, it isn't like someone can just simply repent of this. Okay, I'm not going to pursue this sexual behavior that's not right, or something like that.

It's much more complicated than that. And so that's why I'm not, you know, this is why I think this requires a more nuanced touch from the leadership. Also, I think what the leadership ought to do is talk to the youth group apart from the presence of this individual and say, this is an issue, this is a problem.

But the fact is we are going to go out of our way, and I want you to as well, to show kindness and charity and love towards the individual. Okay, regardless of what their difficulties is that they're dealing with. And I think that's a real important step too, because they might offer the cold shoulder to this young man because of his social transitioning.

And that's not appropriate either. So this is a bit of a complicated circumstance. I'm glad we get to speak to it a little bit.

But part of the problem here, it seems to me, at least might have to do with the leadership of the church and how they address this. And the fact that they are putting this person in some kind of leadership role, even if it's not teaching, is putting this person up as an example in some measure. And I think I agree with you.

I think that's a mistake. It's going to be hard to reverse that now. But I think your point is really good in that this is not the loving thing to do.

This is not being loving our neighbor. Actually, I talk about this in a little more depth in the street smarts in the chapter where I deal with gender sex and marriage. Because the suicide rates for these gender dysphoric individuals are very, very high.

Even in cultures that are very sanguine regarding this issue, like Sweden. And in our culture, just about every single area, there's support. There's just lack of support among conscientious Christians.

So I don't think it's Christians who are causing people who are transgender to commit

suicide. Although that's the charge that's made. But nevertheless, they are doing that.

And it's because they're in a very, very compromised, emotionally compromised circumstance. So we need to be sensitive to that. Yes.

Sometimes true compassion involves doing things that will cause people to hate you. And what we can't do is let other people's hatred indicate to us what is true and what is good. And all we have to do is look at Jesus to see that he never did anything wrong.

He was perfectly good and perfectly kind and perfectly just. People hated him. And we don't judge Jesus's love by the hatred of others.

In fact, this is why true compassion is so difficult because it costs you. It will cost you to do the right thing in the eyes of others. It will cause them to hate you.

You will feel bad about yourself. You'll question yourself. It's a lot easier just to go along and do what the culture wants you to do.

That's right. This is why Jesus said, be careful when all people speak well of you. That means that you are right in the groove of the culture.

And that's exactly where so many Christians seem to place themselves. They don't want to get any pushback and they buy the rhetoric or back to language now. That if they go along with it, they're being loving.

And if they don't go along with it, they're being hateful. But that's a distortion. That's both a distortion of love and a distortion of the concept of hate.

So as Christians, what we need to do is let our souls and our minds and our hearts be shaped by the Bible. We learn in the Bible what love is. We learn it through the Mosaic law.

We learn it through God's actions. We learn it through what we see in Jesus. What He teaches, what He does.

The more that we are reading our Bibles, the more that we will be shaped into people who love correctly and love in a way that reflects God's love and not the world's love. How about 1 Corinthians 13? Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. So all the other nice things there in 1 Corinthians 13, which labors to clarify what true love is, all are modified by this statement.

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. Well, thank you, Richard and discouraged, Mom. We hope that helps.

These are such difficult topics. And so hopefully you don't act on any of these things without prayer and advice from others and with as much wisdom as you can discover.

And our heart goes out to all of you who are dealing with these tough questions right now.

All right. Thank you so much for listening. If you have a question, you can send it on Twitter with the hashtag STR.

Ask or through our website at str.org. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.