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What Did Jesus Mean When He Said We Should Wash One Another's Feet?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about using the services of a Christian photographer who took professional photos for a divorce mediator, what is being symbolized by Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13, and whether it's okay to live with a member of the opposite sex if you're not sexually active.

- * Should I not use the services of a Christian photographer who took professional photos for a divorce mediator?
- * What is being symbolized by Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13, and what does he mean when he says we should wash one another's feet?
- * Is it okay to live with a member of the opposite sex if we're not sexually active?

Transcript

[Music] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRaskPodcast I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl is here with me. I answer your questions. Hello Greg.

Let's start with a question from Catherine. We have used the same family photographer for years. We are not close but friendly.

I know her to be a Christian. Recently she took professional photos for a divorce mediator and has shared this person's social media posts with a photography on her own social media pages. I feel convicted about this enough to potentially not hire again.

Should I say something? Okay I'm not sure I understand what took place. She took pictures of a divorce mediator. Sounds to me like she's a professional photographer.

A divorce mediator had her take her professional pictures. And so then the divorce mediator is using her pictures and the... To promote the divorce mediator. Right and then the Christian is putting those pictures to promote her work as a photographer on

her social media.

Does that make sense? Yeah. I think so. Right.

So yeah this is another one of those tricky questions. Is serving the needs of a business? Which business is a divorce mediator? Is that doing something immoral? Because if it's not then putting the pictures as part of the portfolio of the community. I think the Christian photographer wouldn't be a moral either.

So I think that's the real question. Now I don't... It's not clear to me that a divorce mediator is someone who's doing something immoral. Now agreed the vast majority of divorces do not satisfy the biblical requirements but if they are not... Well let's see.

I was gonna say if they're not Christians then they're not held to the biblical requirements but even so it's still be wrong in God's eyes. Divorce mediators... I'm just trying to work this through and maybe I'm just thinking out loud a little bit but divorce mediators mediate divorces that is people who have already decided to get divorced. Alright and what they do is they try to make the circumstances less harmful and more equitable for each party.

I think that would be a fair presumption about that. So arguably at least they are taking a bad circumstance and they are taking some of the evil out of it. They're making a bad thing as best as best as it can be given that the bad thing is going to be bad.

I have a suspicion that some divorce mediators are successful in repairing the marriages too. I don't know. It's not my feel I haven't talked to a lot of them but I would be surprised if because there's so many difficulties that are added to a relationship when a couple decides to get a divorce.

This is why you have a mediator to help manage all of these awkward things. It might turn out that it's better not to get divorced and rather work out your own problems and I would not be at all surprised that that sometimes happens with a divorce mediator. So you might have a totally different take on this Amy.

I'm just thinking that it's not clear to me that a divorce mediator is doing something that is immoral because the issue in question is divorce. If the divorce is a fatal complete and you have somebody that's entering in that is trying to minimize the negative impacts of this well even pastors do that for goodness sake. So why would that if the divorce mediator was trying to create divorces that wouldn't happen otherwise so they get the business.

No that's a different situation but I don't see it doesn't seem to me that's the case. So I'm just like I said thinking out loud what are you thinking what are your thoughts on this Amy. I similar to you I'm not entirely sure about this about the morality I think it might depend on some things.

I don't think she's increasing divorces I it seems like if she were out there advocating for divorces that would be one thing but I agree that this seems to be different and what comes to mind here is the idea of say a public defender. So the idea with lawyers this is I'm giving an illustration I'm not saying she's a lawyer but the idea with lawyers is that every person deserves representation in front of the you know before the law even if they're guilty. And that that has a long standing kind of tradition in our law.

Although people now are having a hard time with people who defend certain people but it used to be you know think of John Adams I think yeah that's right and who defended the British who were responsible for the Boston massacre and actually got an acquittal for all the soldiers because they in fact were not guilty of the crime that they were being accused of. Right so there's nothing there's nothing wrong with that there's nothing wrong with that and this seems to me to be something a little bit similar to that in that when a divorce is happening now you need some some kind of fairness and working out of the situation where you can actually you know this this is also like the law that that God gave about divorce God hates divorce but he gave provisions for divorce to mitigate kind of the evils of it. Right.

So that seems like this might be what's going on with her unless she's increasing divorces somehow which we don't know. We don't know. You mentioned Greg that would be.

Yeah but that would seem weird. Yeah. Look at there's plenty of divorces available just like you've got a shortage in the market.

Yeah and and finally there are legitimate reasons for divorce. So it's not that every single divorce is illegitimate so I would recommend if it if it's bothering you maybe you could get some more information from her and maybe express your concerns and say what do you know about this organization how have you worked this out because maybe she actually has an answer for why she's comfortable putting these pictures on there and she could probably give you more information about what's going on with this woman's organization. But imagine imagine there are there that somebody has a legitimate reason for divorce and then this woman is available who will deal fairly with her and make sure she's not taken a you know the wife or whoever has been wronged has not taken advantage of in the divorce.

Surely you would not have any difficulty with that so I think there's a lot to consider there. Right. Hard one.

Let's go into a question from Rick. What is being symbolized by Jesus washing the disciples feet in John 13 and what does he mean when he says we should wash one another's feet. Okay he doesn't mean we should wash up one another's feet.

It's interesting the question what is being symbolized. It is being symbolized. The

disciples didn't all give up their roles to become foot washers.

In fact some of the disciples even refused to wait tables. Acts chapter seven I think. And the reason is that they each understood that they had different responsibilities and those who are capable of teaching the word and leading were not going to suffer the distraction of having to wait until the day of the day.

The distraction of having to wait tables and then not be able to do the thing that they were uniquely qualified to do. So the point of Jesus having the disciples of rather washing the disciples feet. This is John 13 which is the first chapter of the upper room discourse and he explains it to them.

Okay and let me just I don't know if I could find the exact passage to read it to you somewhere in John 13 but I wasn't. What I do for seven you do not realize now but you will understand hereafter. Okay notice the statement what I do you do not realize now wait a minute didn't they know he was washing their feet.

Of course they did he wasn't referring to that but you will understand hereafter. You're going to understand why I'm doing this symbolic thing I'm teaching you a lesson. And when he's done he says when he had washed their feet take it his garments reclined a table again he said to them do you know what I have done to you.

You call me teacher and Lord you're right for a.m. if I then the Lord teacher washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you. Chulé say a slave is not greater than his master nor one who is sent greater than one who sent him.

If you know these things you are blessed if you do them. So it seems clear to me that he was not commissioning his disciples to become foot washers but to do the kind of thing that foot washing represented in that circumstance which he spoke of it other times that the greatest will be the least or the least of you would be the greatest and that we are to give ourselves over to serving other people. This is even means doing what otherwise might seem to be demeaning or humbling tasks because our job is to serve and not to be served.

And that's what Jesus said I came to serve not to be served but to give my life a ransom for many which is what he did soon after he died in the cross that next day. This is the last supper and Thursday night good Friday is when Jesus was crucified. So this is a visual example of the greatest be acting as the lead at least lowering cell himself.

And the act of lowering oneself relative to others or boosting others up relative to oneself is called humility. And so he shows humility it was shocking even Peter says you're not going to touch my feet. And she said yes I am or else you have no part of me.

And he said okay then give me a whole bath you know Peter man of extremes. But I do

not think it strikes me as this is pretty straightforward obvious this is not about learning to wash people's feet but learning to do the kind of thing that foot washing represented in this circumstance. Okay we hear no more about foot washing in the book of Acts for example.

Or anywhere. So he wasn't commissioning foot washers he was commissioning servant leaders. And the servant part of leadership manifests itself in different ways in different circumstances.

And so when Acts seven I think that's where it was when the women who were Hellenistic Jewish widows were not being cared for like the the the Israeli or is the regular Jewish widows the domestic the the ones that were Jewish who lived in Israel. We're being treated then there is a problem okay somebody had to take care of this and this is where the deacons came in. But the apostles said we're not gonna we're not gonna weigh tables we got more important work to do so their servant leadership looked different than say the servant leadership of the deacons which included Stephen by the way who we read about in the chapters later and the first martyr in the text.

So I think that's what Jesus was after we see a lot of this in first Peter where Peter compares to Christ when he talks about Christ being humble and serving others and then he and then Peter says we should be humble he he says this over and over and serving others so I think that is the idea. I just want to also point out that this whole story is framed by Judas's betrayal it starts off by mentioning the the devil being put into the heart of Judas is scary it that he would betray him and it ends again with Jesus saying he's he's gonna be betrayed. So what we have here is Judas who is betraying Jesus for personal gain he's trying to gain something through betrayal and then you have Jesus who at the very beginning of this whole chapter it talks about how he has it says Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands and that he had come forth from God and was going back to God so here here you have Judas trying to gain something and have Jesus who has everything laying it aside to wash people's feet and serve them.

I think that also underscores his the confidence in his own identity who he was that gave him the latitude to humble himself it wasn't sacrificed but it isn't an ego sacrifice he knew who he was so he could let go. And this is where there's very broad application to this and lots of relationships some think of marital relationships sometimes we don't have to press an issue if we are confident in where we are in Christ and in the role we're playing in a family for example and then we feel ill treated or whatever we can still take the lower station in virtue of our confidence of where we know we belong. Yes so so Jesus served others rather than using them for his gain and so that's what he's demonstrating he's he's lowering himself to serve the needs of others in humility.

All right Greg let's squeeze one more in here this one comes from Dave is it okay to live

with a member of the opposite sex even though we are not sexually active we are single individuals living together and not married. Well I think there are some circumstances in which especially nowadays that doesn't look like a compromising situation no there are I know there are people that are going to disagree with me on this and that's okay. It may not always be a good idea all right but at the same time if there's a relationship involved and we're cohabiting and we're boyfriend girlfriend it's going to be really hard to stay out of each other's beds.

But if you have you know another roommate who shares part of the house and has their own private section of the house and you have yours and that's a member of the opposite sex. Now I'm I guess I'm more comfortable with that. The one complaint would be or concern that's raised is well that gives the appearance of evil.

Well I don't know that it does. I don't know that everybody who sees people walking in two different sexes walking in is assuming that they're doing evil things. I don't know if that's true anymore there's there seems to be quite a bit of this going on this kind of cohabiting circumstance.

And it doesn't seem to raise any eyebrows so I don't I don't know. I tend my my tendency is to be in this situation to be a little bit flexible on that because I think it can be a harmless circumstance but I think we have to be careful how it looks to others you know. But again I'm some Pete Christians are going to say no no never never that's all wrong.

Okay. Well I respect that. Well I might be one of those people.

I think what I would say is I I definitely would not recommend it and the reason why. Well one reason why is because you're opening yourself up to all sorts of issues that you might end up having to deal with that you can't foresee. But secondly I think it's similar to to what Paul talks about encouraging others to go against their conscience.

So let's say you have a perfectly reasonable situation where you have separate parts of the house or whatever and it's it works out fine maybe your long time friends I don't know what the situation might be but. Christians see that they could be emboldened to go against their conscience or they could be that you could be normalizing the situation in a way that could encourage other people to send. And there's really no reason to because there are just a clarification when you say encourage others to send that they would be emboldened to do the same thing even though they believe it was actually wrong.

Is that what you mean? Okay. Yes or they could be they could get into a situation that ends up being a really unwise thing. I mean I think I think it's better that we do not normalize this is kind of what I'm saying because the more kind of barriers we have in terms of expectations and the situations.

Yeah and the situations we put ourselves in it's just there are so many people of the same sex as you. I don't know why you would invite all of these difficulties by. By sharing a house or an apartment with somebody of the opposite sex.

So I think what it sounds to me like what you're saying is it's unwise and was the question whether it was moral or not. It just said it's okay. Is it okay? Yeah.

So it may not be immoral but it may be unwise and it may be immoral. Sometimes you can put yourself in a situation where that specific situation is not immoral but you're putting yourself in a situation that could very easily become immoral. Yeah well that's a casual slippery slope situation.

Well it's yeah so it's a wisdom issue because you cannot foresee the issues that will come up and so why even put yourself in that situation. Now maybe this person who's asking is already in that situation and I don't know but Greg you said people don't think it's evil but I think also the people who are not Christians who see this they will be assuming something is going on. See that's what I mean don't you think? Well when you say people don't see it as evil I was what I meant was I don't think that non-Christians are going to assume something's going on.

That's what I don't think is the case. Okay that's where I think. Because culture has shifted so much.

But my thinking on that would be that culture has shifted in a direction where it's so commonplace that they assume that's what it is. And if that's the case now. Yeah and if that's the case now you're communicating something about Christianity to them.

So I think there are a lot of things to consider here. Yeah yeah I agree I agree I don't think it's cut and dried and I'm not advocating it you know I was trying to press the issue of it's in a sense the absolute morality or whatever but you still have a good things here. And a lot of these questions.

I'm sorry. I was just going to say a lot of these questions are really hard to answer if we don't have all the details. So whoever's listening we're trying to give you overall ideas to consider in your situation and hopefully you can apply that to whatever your details are.

And it may be a good policy to just say whenever there's a kind of ambiguity better air on the side of safety. And this is a big part of what you're saying you know even if I could stretch it and say well it might not be morally wrong it's just there's so many liabilities it might be best just to avoid that entirely that's smart. Well thanks everyone for your questions we hope to hear from you soon on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.

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