

Leadership Speaks

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO TRANSGENDERISM



GOD HAS CREATED US AS either male or female (Genesis 1:27). He wants each of us to express our God-given gender identity through our behavior, clothing, and hair. (See Deuteronomy 22:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 11:1–16.) Scientific studies demonstrate this truth.

Everyone's identity as male or female is recorded genetically in every cell of the body. This difference affects not only the reproductive system but the brain, bones, muscles, and other organs. Prior to and shortly after birth, hormones shape the child's brain to be distinctively male or female. While there is wide variation among individuals, girls and boys differ significantly in brain development, hearing, vision, sense of smell, risk taking, aggressive play, nurturing behavior, learning style, friendship formation, and sexuality. Studies show that these differences are rooted in biology, not merely caused by social influences.

However, the recent ideology of transgenderism says a person's inner identity as male or female is socially constructed. This "gender identity" can supposedly be different from a person's sex and can change. Transgender persons often modify their bodies through hormones and surgery; thus, transgenderism is artificial, possible only through modern medical technology and lifelong intervention. These modifications don't change biological identity, for to provide appropriate care, doctors still need to know a person's true sex. Moreover, studies show that this transition doesn't lead to greater happiness or contentment. Many people now advocate giving puberty blockers and opposite-sex hormones to minors, practices which typically harm physical development, bone structure, and future sexual function as well as causing lifelong sterility. Instead of privileging feelings over science and sacrificing children's future, we should affirm body integrity, biological reality, and divine design.

A pioneer of transgender ideology was psychologist John Money, who introduced the terms "gender identity" and "sexual orientation." Raised as a conservative

Christian, he rejected biblical morality, practiced extreme behaviors, and endorsed pedophilia. He convinced the parents of a baby boy who suffered a botched circumcision to raise him as a girl without telling the boy the truth. Over the years, Money reported this and similar human experiments as great successes, but follow-up studies eventually proved he had lied. The subject of his original experiment exhibited typical male behaviors as a child, rebelled against feminine identity, and when he learned the truth as a teenager, transitioned to being a man. He remained troubled, however, and eventually committed suicide.

In the twentieth century, society engaged in an unprecedented experiment to promote sexuality in everyday appearance and dress and to blur the distinction between the sexes by females adopting masculine styles of hair and dress. The result is a generation that has little concept of biblical modesty and morality. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in transgenderism because of cultural advocacy, educational indoctrination, social media, and peer influence. Girls are particularly vulnerable as they struggle with puberty, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and poor body image, which are exacerbated by the cultural sexualization of girls and the pervasiveness of pornography.

A basic principle of psychology as well as biblical teaching is that when we act according to knowledge, then our feelings conform to our will. When the Bible commands us to love our neighbor and even our enemy, it focuses on the will, not emotions. For instance, when we are upset with our spouse yet act in a loving way, our feelings change. When we worship God because He is worthy, even if we don't feel like it, our feelings follow. Thus, cognitive behavioral therapy—a form of talk therapy that reveals negative or inaccurate thinking—is the preferred first approach to most psychological and conduct disorders in children and teens. For example, some people have "body integrity dysphoria," in which they desire a physical disability. Nevertheless, doctors don't amputate a limb but recommend cognitive therapy.

To support transgenderism, activists cite infants who are born with "disorders of sexual development," which can cause them to be ambiguous or misidentified at birth. The number of such "intersex" individuals is extremely small, less than 0.02 percent. The standard treatment is appropriate assignment as male or female followed by hormone therapy or surgery as needed. The main argument for transgenderism is that some people experience "gender identity disorder," now often called "gender dysphoria," or feelings of belonging to the opposite sex. Many such children are simply "gender atypical," meaning they don't conform to rigid gender stereotypes. Instead of promoting immature and often transitory feelings over biological reality, we should affirm a child's true sex while not enforcing certain stereotypes. Atypical boys and girls should not be ridiculed or pressured; instead, parents should affirm them as boys and girls respectively. Extensive research has shown that 80 to 90 percent of children with gender dysphoria grow out of it without medical intervention.

Regardless of cultural opinions, God's Word is true. We should live according to His plan. **PL**

Excerpted from David K. Bernard, *Anchor Points*. See also Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*; Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*.

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