

04/25/21 “What Does God Say About Gender?”
Various Scriptures

Welcome...

This morning I am starting a ten-week series on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Then in July we will go back to the future and study the book of Revelation.

But for the next ten weeks my aim is to give you an inspiring vision for your life of manhood and womanhood. When converted by the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we come to understand that our bodies are given us as vessels by which to put God’s wisdom, intelligence and love on display. We alone in all of creation are made in His image and made to display that image.

Whether single or married, whether young or old, we have been given our manhood or womanhood as a blessing. Our bodies tell us that there is a creator with a distinctive design behind our frame and form to bring God glory and to bring us great joy.

But it should come as no shock to Christians that the Bible’s teaching on gender and sexuality is unpopular in the wider culture. This has (to varying degrees) always been the case. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Bible’s teaching on gender is no longer viewed as merely outdated or irrelevant but rather unloving and hateful.

How should Christians respond when the topic turns to the Bible’s teaching on gender? To answer that question, we need to know what God says about gender and why we should believe what He says. So, in this message we are going to focus more narrowly on the question of gender identity: what it means to be created male or female, how it could be that some people feel their body to not be a gift but instead a prison, and how all of us as broken people can find hope.

Now, I have enough material to preach for 4 hours today, but don’t worry I won’t do that to you. My message this morning has three main points in the form of three questions:

I. Introduction: What is Gender Identity?

There’s been huge cultural change in the last few decades. Same-sex marriage would have been unthinkable 30 years ago. Now it’s almost universally accepted in the Western world.

Now the transgender issue is the next big social, ethical and cultural question that has come to dominate the headlines. Hardly a week goes by, it seems, without there being some kind of transgender story in the news—and the stories will keep on coming.

For example, in the fall of 2020 we read the following three headlines:

1. Pope Francis approved of same-sex civil unions.
2. Governor Newsom signed into law California bill AB2218 - which establishes the Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund within the Department of Public Health to pay for transgender medical treatment for all -including children who want to transition to a different gender.
3. At a town hall meeting, aired on ABC on Oct. 15, a mother asked President Biden how he would reverse actions by the Trump administration that had negatively affected LGBTQ+ people, including her 8-year-old

transgender daughter. President Biden responded, “I will flat out just change the law. I will immediately eliminate those executive orders, number one. The idea that an 8-year-old child or a 10-year-old child decides, ‘You know I decided I want to be transgender. That’s what I think I’d like to be. It would make my life a lot easier.’ We should support that decision. There should be zero discrimination.”

On March 31, less than 4 weeks ago, President Biden proclaimed [proclaim March 31, 2021, as Transgender Day of Visibility](#).

So friends, that is the policy from the top down and therefore we need to seek to understand the terms and then consider what the Bible says and know how to respond with grace and truth. Let me share a few definitions.

Gender dysphoria. Used to describe when a person experiences distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. And what is “gender identity”?

Gender identity. A person’s internal sense of their own gender. In other words what a person feels to be their gender.

Gender reassignment. Another way of describing a person’s transition. To undergo gender reassignment usually means to undergo some sort of medical intervention, but it can also mean changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in their self-identified gender.

Trans/Transgender. An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as their birth sex.

For example, Chastity Bono was born in 1969, the daughter of Sonny and Cher Bono, and later at age 40 underwent gender reassignment surgery and changed her name to Chaz. Bono said: “For me gender is between your ears not between your legs. Gender is about who you feel you are and your sex is about your physical biology. There's a gender in your brain and a gender in your body. For 99% of people, those things are in alignment. For transgender people, they’re mismatched. That’s all it is. It’s not complicated, it’s not a neurosis. It’s a mix-up. It's a birth defect, like a cleft palate.”

In the world there is a deeply rooted conviction that everyone is free to define themselves as they wish, and no one has the right to question that self-definition. Their conclusion is this: if you do not agree with their definition then you do not love them, in fact you hate them.

So, let’s look now to God’s Word and get His perspective on gender. Is God given gender a birth defect like a cleft palate?

II. What does the Bible say?

Creation is where the Bible story begins, and it is where our thinking about gender must begin. The Bible tells us that we did not emerge, by accident. It states clearly that we’ve been created by a loving God.

As David prays to the Lord in Psalm 139:13-14, “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

A. Creation Identity

Look at Genesis 1:26-28...

Notice verse 26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” The Bible doesn’t start with the differences between men and women but with our equality. This is the foundational truth about all humankind, all men and women: we are created in the image of God.

What does this mean? We can’t fully exhaust the glories of it. But here are three things we can say. First, the image of God defines the essence of who we are. We are beings in the likeness of God. In other words, unlike the animals, we have personhood. We have a soul.

Second, the image of God defines our function: what we’re called to do. “Have dominion.” “Fill the earth (procreate) and subdue it.” Only man and woman can have children together. We’re not only like God – we stand as God’s representatives, ruling his world as royal vice-regents, as stewards of his creation.

And, third, the image of God marks us as relational beings. Verse 27: “Male AND female he created them.” God is a relational God – one God existing as three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - in perfect love and harmony. So it makes sense that God expresses his image in a race that is differentiated: humanity has a male “kind” and a female “kind.”

Men and women are 100% equal in dignity, value, and worth before God. And yet at the same time, we will learn in coming weeks there is a biological difference between men and women that is a wonderful part of our Creator’s design! With sexually differentiated bodies, God chose to exhibit His image in men and women, and doing so in different, complementary ways.

Now we come to Genesis 2. If Genesis chapter 1 shows us the Google Earth overview, Genesis 2 zooms into the Google Street view. We see this in Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” The Hebrew *kěnegdô*, literally says I will make a helper “like opposite” him. Like opposite? Well wait a minute make up your mind? You cannot have both?

But you can, if the two complement one another. Your Bible probably has a footnote where it says, literally “a helper corresponding to.”

You see two pieces of a puzzle do not fit together if they are identical. On the other hand, they just can’t be any shape. They have to be rightly different, they have to be like opposite. They have to be perfectly complementary.

So verse 18 tells us that God is sending into Adam’s life, and God is sending into Eve’s life, somebody who is very powerful and different – like, opposite. An incredibly different person thrown into together into an incredibly close relationship. How close?

One flesh. Verse 24...

Genesis 2 ends in verse 25 with, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” There was no gender dysphoria, no internal conflict, and no discontentment with the way God had made them. There was only Created Identity.

B. Fallen Identity

Genesis 3:1-7...

Satan, who appears in the story as a serpent, tempts the man and woman with the promise that they can be like God. And what is it to be like God? It is to set the rules, to be in charge, to decide what is right and wrong. Adam

and Eve believed the poisoned promise of the serpent—with disastrous results, not just for themselves, but for all their descendants and for the whole world.

Sin has now infected humanity, so all of us by nature follow in the way of Adam and Eve, in rebellion against God. The act of eating the fruit was a bid for “freedom” but it didn’t deliver what Satan promised. Far from raising us up so that we are like God, our rebellion against Him drags us down. We have fallen and are all affected. All of us are broken. All of us are disordered.

The fall affects us all physically in many different ways. Our physical bodies get sick and decline as we get older. It’s a depressing thought that we reach our physical peak in our early twenties—and then it’s downhill all the way after that!

When I was visiting my mother recently, she said, “You are getting lines on your face. Where did those lines come from?” My reply, “You can thank Adam and Eve.”

But we must recognize that the fall of humanity into sin does not just affect the outer body, it affects the inner person. The greatest and most significant effect of the fall on all of us is that we have depraved hearts.

Look at Romans 1:20-27...

We can see here that the problem is not just that we sin—that we break God’s law. It’s that we want to sin. The problem is within; it’s in our desires. We have disordered hearts. One of the ways in which the sinful folly of our minds and hearts is seen is that we turn away from what is natural to what is unnatural.

Paul’s repetition of the word “exchange” is striking. Sinful humanity verse 23 “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.” Verse 25 “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie.” And that suppression of God’s truth was then worked out in sexual behavior in verses 26-27: “Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.”

Transgender ideology teaches us to think of our body as a blank canvas – you can do with it what you will. But the Bible’s teaching on creation and fall shows that we should see our bodies not as blank slates but as flawed masterpieces. Think of your favorite painting, and imagine that it had become broken or distorted. Would you erase the Mona Lisa and turn it into a sunset painting? Would you recreate it as you see fit? No, you would try to understand the artist’s original creation and seek to restore it, to understand and practice what the Creator has created us to be.

You see the Bible says: Your body is your sexual identity—let your mind be conformed to it.
Our fallen world says: Your mind is your sexual identity—let your body be conformed to it.

As Christians, we should never be surprised by the brokenness and confusion in our world, especially regarding gender and sexuality. Domination, disorder, disorientation, deceitful desires, dysphoria – these are the painful consequences of original sin. We have all experienced the effects of the fall. That means that as Christians we can respond to all these tragic realities with compassion and mercy, as those who have likewise been marred by the curse. And for all those who taste the bitterness of the fall, we have good news. Because, praise God, the fall isn’t the end of the story.

C. Rescued Identity

Our culture says our problems stem from the oppression of religion, society and traditional morality. It's true that religion, society and traditional morality can be oppressive, but they're not the fundamental problem. The fundamental problem is sin—human rebellion against God, which has tainted the whole created order, including ourselves. Where once there was perfect harmony, now there is disorder. And we can't sort that out, because we're part of the problem. We need a hero other than ourselves. Wonderfully, God in his grace sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be that hero. He is the rescuer we so desperately need.

Philippians 2:5-11...

Jesus was born, raised and lived as a man. And what a life he lived! He was so different from Adam, the first man. Adam was not content just to be human. He wanted to be like God. But, far from rising, he fell and dragged all humanity down with him.

But Christ, although he was “in very nature God ... made himself nothing ... being made in human likeness” Philippians 2:6-7. And he did it for us. Adam wasn't God, but he tried to become God. Jesus was God, and remains fully God, but he didn't cling to all his privileges. He became a man and then, in his earthly life, lived as Adam should have lived—as we should have lived, in perfect submission to his heavenly Father. His perfect obedience was seen supremely in his death: “even death on a cross” Philippians 2:8.

Because He never sinned, Jesus didn't deserve what Adam and Eve experienced and what all humanity experiences by nature—separation from God. But on the cross Jesus willingly stood in our place, representing sinful humanity as He died. He took our separation from God upon Himself so we needn't face it, if we trust in Him.

And then, wonderfully, Jesus rose again. His bodily resurrection is another massive affirmation of the importance of our bodies. The resurrection is a foretaste of what is to come when God will redeem the whole creation and establish “a new heaven and a new earth.”

Titus 3:3-7 says, “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,

5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We have seen Created Identity, Fallen Identity, Rescued Identity, and fourth:

D. Restored Identity

What about when we come to the very end of the story – when Christ returns and believers dwell with God in the “a new heaven and new earth” Revelation 21? The Bible describes that day as a day of new creation – Romans 8:21, “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Jesus teaches that human marriage will be no more in the new creation; we will all be married to Christ. But gender was God's good gift in the original creation, and we can infer that in the new creation we will live as glorified, gendered people. Why? Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15 that we will all receive renewed bodies, but we still be ourselves – there is continuity of identity. After all, Jesus was still Jesus – a man – in His resurrected body. And on that day we will perfectly bear God's image. It will no longer be distorted (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Andrew Walker in his book *God and the Transgender Debate* puts it this way: “We live in a Genesis 3 world with a Genesis 1 blueprint on the trajectory to a Revelation 21 future.” (Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, p. 88) One day God will restore creation.

And on that day the focus will not be on us, on our gender or our manhood or womanhood, but on the perfect God-man, our great bridegroom, Jesus Christ. And this bring us to our final question:

III. How Should We Respond?

So, how should we show the love of Christ in this world that celebrates rejection of God-given gender?

The goal is not to build a wall to keep people out of church, but that God might build up His church in truth and grace that we can welcome people in and teach the truth with a capital T – the truth from God’s Word, the truth about Jesus and how He will change you from the inside out, calling all of God’s image bearers to embrace the life that is truly life.

When it comes to our lives here, God calls us on two journeys. One is to know Christ and to be conformed to His image. The other is to make Him know.

That means that we should never be making jokes, either from the front in meetings, or in private conversations, about transgender issues or people. And if a Christian is struggling with their identity, let’s not expect instant Christian maturity from them.

Psalm 1 speaks of the Christian who delights in the Word of God. It says in verse 3, “He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

Have you ever planted an oak tree and then come out the next day and it is massive? No, growth takes time. Therefore, we need to be patient and continue to persevere in our own spiritual growth but also be patient when ministering to others. And how can we minister to those who are gender confused? Let me share three things:

A. Listen Compassionately

James 1:19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak.” Listen to those who struggle with gender identity. Listen to their experience: A person’s sins, family dynamics, and pain or abuse inflicted by others are just a few of them. That’s not to say they’re right to embrace an alternate gender identity. No one gets a free pass on sin because they feel their sinful inclinations are natural to them. But we must have compassion on those who are going through what must be a radically confusing experience. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.

B. Learn Wisely

Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.” In other words, we listen in order to learn. And we learn not only by listening, but also by reading and studying. We learn more about the issues involved so we are well-informed when we speak.

C. Love Truthfully

Ephesians 4:15 says, says we should “speak the truth in love.” Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If you hold to My teaching [which includes Genesis 1 – God created them male and female, man and woman], if you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

If we love people, we will want them to be free, which means we must speak the truth to them, and we should encourage people to live according to the truth, according to the reality of who God created them to be. For those who struggle with gender identity, this would mean living out their gender in accord with their bodily sexuality and not according to what they feel in their mind.

What should I do if my child talks about having transgender feelings?

First thing, don't panic.

Don't assume, just because your child doesn't always do what you think most boys or most girls do, that there's a great problem and you need to panic about it, or seek professional help.

I met with a family practice doctor on Friday and he said throughout history it has been shown that it is natural for a child to question who they are and how they are made. But parents, this is a time for you to listen to your child and shepherd them. To tell them we all struggle with sinful thoughts and how we all need to be rescued by Jesus and learn to take our thoughts captive and obedient to Him (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Parents, you need to be active in teaching children the goodness of God and the gospel of grace. Show them how the Bible makes better sense of the world than the other ideas they come across. Model for them what it is like to live as forgiven sinners who are wrestling with our fallenness as we look towards the new creation.

Research shows, that a child's confused feelings about their God given gender will disappear as they reach adolescence,

But the fact is, the distinction between the sexes is increasingly being undermined, especially in public schools, where the concept of gender fluidity is often promoted. Christian parents, you should express concern to the school board when this happens.

But the most important thing that our culture needs to hear is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The identity that we've been given at creation has been flawed and broken because of our sin, but God sent His own Son to rescue us.

The gospel call isn't just about gender and sexuality. It's primarily a call to die to self, submit to Christ and experience the joy of walking in the light. What's most offensive about Christianity isn't the Bible's teaching on gender.

It's the fact that we are sinners who deserve God's wrath and can be saved only by trusting a Messiah who was executed on a cross. Rosaria Butterfield, a formerly practicing lesbian who converted to Christ, says something very profound, “I wasn't saved out of homosexuality. I was saved out of unbelief.”

All of us are born sinners and therefore all of us need a new birth. We don't say... “Get yourself fixed and then come to Jesus.” Instead we say ... “Come to Jesus for forgiveness and a new heart and He will change your life from the inside out.”

Let's pray...