

God's Good Gift of Sex and Gender

Lesson 5: Transgenderism and the Christian Response

Opening Questions:

Other than using anatomical descriptions, how do you describe what a man is or what a woman is? What scriptures inform your understanding of each gender?

Which of the following is a feminine characteristic, which is masculine?

- Does manual labor
- Does the grocery shopping
- Helps family during snowfalls
- Makes real estate purchases
- Has strong arms
- Doesn't care about beauty or charm
- Sews clothing
- Gives to the needy
- Works outside of the home
- Is a wise teacher
- Is known to be hardworking

Biblical Gender Identity

Vaughan Roberts in his book *Transgender* comments, "Scripture nowhere gives a clear, narrow set of rules as to what a man or woman should be like, or a boy or girl."

Likewise, in his book *engendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship*, Sam Andreades argues that the "Bible says not 'a man is this' but 'man, do this for her' ...Not 'woman is this' but 'woman, do this for him.'"

"Manhood," he continues, "is defined in relation to woman and womanliness in relation to man."

"In church and home, your relationships are meant to be closer, fuller, and involve more of your identity, so there the Bible directs divine image-bearers to embrace your difference and explore what the complement means. Together you collectively identify the image of Christ. Further along the continuum, in marriage, the most intense relationship of all, as we have already seen, gender really matters."

Conversely, the more distant the relationship, the less gender matters.

Andrew Wilson adds that these gender roles do give us some general guidelines beyond church and family, but again, it is less "being" and more about "doing."

He points out how Paul's instructions assume sexual differentiation: "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

"So," Wilson concludes, "with my relatives, in my church family, in the workplace, and even on social media, I am to interact with older women specifically as mothers, and with older men specifically as fathers—not as gender-neutral units or sexless atomized workers."

Transgenderism: Seeing the Person

Before we raise concerns about gender dysphoria, let's consider the experience of individuals who identify as transgender.

- 34% of trans people attempt suicide.
- 64% are bullied.
- 73% of trans people are harassed in public.
- 21% of trans people avoid going out in public due to fear.”¹

Many Trans individuals are not politically active or desire to fight in a culture war.

There is no known cause of transgenderism, biological or environmental.

Some trans individuals will revert to their birth gender over time. According to one study of children without medical intervention, 70-80% with gender dysphoria spontaneously lost those feelings.²

Being transgender is not related to who they are sexually attracted to.

The Statistics are Changing Rapidly

Gender identity variations were thought to be extremely rare a generation ago. While the incidence in youth had not been officially estimated, in adults it was 2-14 per 100,000. However, around 2006, the incidence among youth began to rise, with a dramatic increase observed in 2015. Currently, 2-9% of U.S. high school students identify as transgender, while in colleges, 3% of males and 5% of females identify as gender-diverse.

We are experiencing a mental health crisis among our youth. This has been a major motivator for the cultural shift in the last 10 years toward accepting, affirming, and advocating for LGBT individuals.

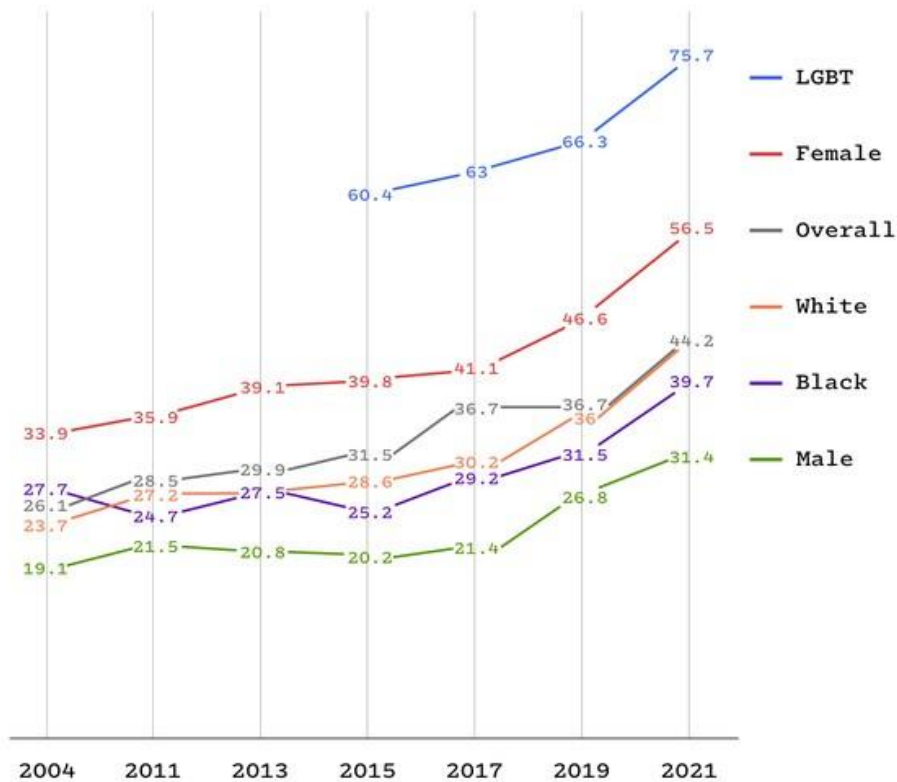
And, yet, there is no clear evidence that acceptance is making things better. Teen mental health is worsening at a startling rate.³

¹ According to a recent Transgender Remembrance Day poster

² Wall Street Journal June 12, 2014

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2022/04/american-teens-sadness-depression-anxiety/629524/>

Percent of High-School Students Feeling Persistently Sad or Hopeless



Before we begin critiquing transgenderism, there is a need for compassion for individuals so distraught and hopeless. Before we discuss how to engage in a culture war, Christians are called to engage individuals who are clearly suffering.

How are we contributing to this trend? How can we become a place of hope for the hopeless?

Biological Sex and Gender: Are they different?

Assigning someone's sex has traditionally been based on biology (people's chromosomes or their genitals). Modern culture has separated gender from sex, leaving gender to be self-determined; it's about how they feel inside.

What about those with ambiguous biological sex (commonly referred to as intersexual)?

There are rare genetic abnormalities in appearance. The vast majority are treated with surgery shortly after birth. Others are born with XXY chromosomes (Klinefelter syndrome), most do not manifest symptoms (when they do it is typically infertility). Those who identify as transgender are nearly always not those with abnormalities in genetic and anatomical sex.

Transgenderism and Gender Stereotypes

When we claim that gender is culturally determined, rather than biologically determined (or biblically determined!), we need to identify what our culture considers masculine or feminine. These conclusions are often stereotypes of masculinity or femininity.

If our culture tells us that girls have to wear frilly dresses, like dolls, and tea parties, does that mean a boy who likes these things is not a boy? If our culture says that boys must like be rugged individualistic, more direct, does that mean a girl who acts this way is trans?

There has been long standing conflict on this issue between radical feminists and transgender activists. They fought hard to overcome cultural stereotypes that insisted women fit a particular mold. The gains they made in rejecting conformity to a particular body image or fashion or demeanor are threatened by an ideology that requires femininity to match cultural expectations.

Feminists have argued that anyone born a man retains male privilege in society; even if he chooses to live as a woman. As one feminist said, “the fact that he has a choice means that he can never understand what being a woman is really like. By extension, when trans women demand to be accepted as a woman they are simply exercising another form of male entitlement.”⁴

“Having rejected this supposition, radical feminists now find themselves in a position that few would have imagined when the conflict began: shunned as reactionaries on the wrong side of a sexual-rights issue. It is, to them, a baffling political inversion.”⁵

Gender Difference from General Revelation: Secular Research⁶

Despite the problems that come with stereotyping genders, we have to acknowledge there are many observable differences between men and women that go beyond anatomy. The bell curves for men and women are centered in different places with regard to all sorts of psychological and interpersonal traits.

At War with Our Bodies

The statement: “I feel like a woman trapped in a man’s body” is a further example of the tension all of us face with our physical bodies. We all are, to varying degrees, fighting our biological bodies.

As we get older, we feel the limitations and degradation of our muscles and joints. We fight the limitations these impose on us. We spend small fortunes trying to look and feel youthful.

⁴ “What is a Woman? New Yorker, Aug. 2014 =www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/04/woman-2

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beautiful-complementarity-male-female/>

Anyone who has suffered a debilitating injury or has a chronic physical impairment battles to regain strength and mobility.

Through pain, sacrifice, surgery and more we try to mold our bodies into an ideal that we refuse to admit is fleeting.

Yet, God created you with a body, and he has declared that it is good. Jesus Christ did not just redeem your soul but has redeemed your body. Our future hope is a physical and bodily hope.

A major Christian discipline is finding contentment with the body we are given.

Sam Allberry puts it this way:

“Our culture says: Your psychology is your sexual identity—let your body be conformed to it.

The Bible says: Your body is your sexual identity—let your mind be conformed to it.”

How to love a person who identifies as transgender?

Christians are called to love all people and hold out the hope of the gospel to every person. The church is always open to all. There are not sanctification prerequisites to being welcome here. Christ meets us where we are, even if he never leaves us where we are.

We are called to protect the sanctity of life, which would seem to obligate us to stand up against bullying or harassment.

If a believer has a friend, co-worker, or family member who identifies as transgendered—and who requests to be referred to by gender-neutral pronouns—how should the believer address them? How do we speak the truth in love in such a situation? How do we show our love for the person? How do we show our love for God?

This tension between wanting to be hospitable and respectful of others’ preferences and not wanting to enable or affirm what undermines God’s word.

Some of these discussions are not simply about you and the individual. With children, the answers to these questions must involve the parents and their call to raise the child.

If a biologically male friend asks you to call him by a female name, is that any different than other name changes or nicknames that cause us little concern? There are, it seems, countless names that have been used by both genders irrespective of the transgender issue. Christians have the liberty to refer to a person’s name of choice without it being a sin.

What about pronouns? Some argue that it is dishonest to use a pronoun that does not accord with biological gender. Others argue that using he to refer to a woman undermines the biblical understanding of gender.

Here are some options. Rather than telling you which is right, I'm framing the options under the category of liberty of conscience. In other words, what does a Christian have freedom to say.

1. Use gender inclusive pronouns like "they" or "them." It is clunky but not uncommon. We do this already when talking about a person we haven't met: "I need to see a doctor so that they can tell me what's wrong."

2. Be honest about your own convictions. You can say something like: "I truly want to respect you, but I also need to honor my God. I believe that God created people as either male or female, and that gender-specificity is part of the created order. I will be as respectful of you as I can, but I'm asking you to also respect my religious beliefs and freedoms. I don't believe that I can refer to you with gender-neutral pronouns and be faithful to God."

3. If people we meet in the transgendered community are convinced that Christians are hate-filled bigots, homophobic and transphobic, do we need to take our stand immediately on the issue of gender-neutral pronouns, or is that a secondary issue on which we can be flexible, so that we have more opportunity to share the gospel? I have referred to a Catholic priest as "Father" out of hospitality and collegiality. There are times when you can agree to use another person's terms while making it clear you affirm the biblical understanding of gender.