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GOD  
*and the*  
TRANSGENDER  
DEBATE

What Does the Bible Actually Say  
about Gender Identity?



## 6. BEAUTY AND BROKENNESS

At the end of the last chapter, we left Adam and Eve naked and unashamed. They were living in perfect harmony with one another and with God.

Had the story ended there, the book you have in your hands would not have needed to be written. But the story did not end in Genesis 2 with a “Happily Ever After” picture of Adam and Eve. Paradise didn’t stay paradise.

The story took a turn—the chapter of history that is often called “the fall.”

Adam and Eve sinned. God had instructed Adam and Eve to not eat of just one tree. Everything else was freely available (Genesis 2:15-17).

But Satan offered Eve a pathway of her own choosing, promising her pleasure and enlightenment. Choice had a seductive power long before modern advertising companies were invented. The serpent cast God’s rule as restrictive,

unfair and petty: “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (3:5).

And so Eve ate of the tree she was instructed not to eat from. Of course, at that moment, it did not seem she was going down the wrong path—because why could denying someone the offer of pleasure and enlightenment be wrong? How could something that looked appealing, appetizing, and beautiful ever be bad? Eve had seen that “the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (v 6). Her decision was a rational, reasonable calculation, supported by what her feelings were saying to her. How could it be wrong when it seemed good, looked delightful, and seemed wise? Especially when her husband agreed and shared the fruit with her.

Isn’t that our story, too? We do not cast our decisions to reject what God says as the actions of rebels. We really just see ourselves as owners and masters of ourselves. What could be so wrong?

This is the drama of Genesis 3: the casting off of God’s rule. They cast off the role of being God’s royal ambassadors assigned to rule over creation in relationship with him, and instead struck out on their own. *You can be like God in your own life*, Satan told the first humans. *You can have the authority. You know what’s best. You can’t trust God—but you can trust yourself.* And the humans said, *Yes*.

## THEIR STORY AND OUR STORY

In reaching for the fruit that represented authority to rule, Adam and Eve denied God's authority, doubted God's knowledge, and disputed God's loving goodness. They would take up the mantle of their own authority; they would see their knowledge as perfect; and they would trust wholly in themselves. They wanted to make the rules for themselves and remold the world to fit a new narrative, one in which they sat on the throne of their lives and they decided what was right and wrong.

This was not just an accidental slip-up; Eve's choice was the choice of an alternative lordship. That is why a seemingly innocent solitary act of eating from the wrong tree put all of creation in a death-spiral. And that is why eating a fruit was an act of treason.

But the Bible's story isn't left in the past tense. It's in the present tense. What occurred in the garden has made its way down to you and me:

*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God ... no one does good ... there is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:10-11, 12, 18)*

Adam and Eve's story is my story. Adam and Eve's story is your story.

We cannot stand in judgment over Adam and Eve, since each day we choose the same as they did—to sit on the throne by seeking to force God off. And,

whoever you are, you cannot point a finger at anyone who disagrees with you when it comes to questions of gender identity. Why? Because we all inhabit a creation marred by sin, and we all contribute to its brokenness by our own sinful choices. We all sin differently, but we all sin, and we are all equal in our sin.

This is our story. And Genesis 3 is a story that does not have a happy ending. In 3:7, as soon as they have eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve begin to discover that their choice has not brought enlightenment so much as shame:

*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

The first result of the first rejection of God is that people feel ashamed of, and awkward about, their bodies. That is their first experience of living in a world that is now beautiful thanks to its Creator, but broken thanks to their sin. The first experience, but by no means the only one, nor the worst.

## A BROKEN STAGE

Humanity was the highpoint of creation. Therefore it shouldn't surprise us that their rebellion affected the whole of creation:

*And to Adam [God] said,  
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
'You shall not eat of it,'*

*cursed is the ground because of you;  
 in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
 By the sweat of your face  
 you shall eat bread,  
 till you return to the ground,  
 for out of it you were taken;  
 for you are dust,  
 and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:17-19)*

The picture the Bible paints of sin's effects over the world are catastrophic and comprehensive. Creation is broken. The Garden of Eden was a place where work was hard yet fulfilling, because the earth would grow trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food and free to eat. The cursed world is a place full of thorns and thistles, where work is frustrating and sometimes futile. Floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes are the result of a world thrown into chaos by humanity. We choose to assume God's throne, but we cannot rule his creation.

Humans break. We are dust, and we are frail and failing. Cancer. Depression. Eating disorders. Heart disease. Gender dysphoria. Each of these painful realities testifies to the brokenness of creation. And that is before we add the pain caused by moral failures, whether on a global scale (the Holocaust) or a familial one (domestic violence, neglect).

Humans die. The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We shall return to the

dust from which we were taken—and that reality overshadows our lives, giving a sense of futility to all our efforts and mocking all our achievements and accumulations. And we face an eternity outside Eden, outside the perfection of God's presence. This is the worst consequence of our sin.

We are broken actors living on a broken stage, and we do not stand on the stage for very long.

To think about gender dysphoria or transgenderism in a way that listens hard and humbly to God, we need to let him tell us that this world is not how it was intended to be—and why. And we need to understand that the effects of the fall are not only around us but within us. That is going to be really hard—but as you read, please be aware that we finish this chapter with a promise of hope, and that the next chapter (and the rest of the book) is all about that hope. This chapter is not the end of this book and the fall is not the end of our story.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR HEARTS

*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)*

Inside every heart, there's a war; and the heart is both the victim and the culprit. Why? Because every person's heart is inhabited by sinful desires, and produces sinful desires. There is an ongoing battle within the heart in which unhelpful desires wage war with our conscience.

Bitterness. Anger. Envy. Greed. We cannot trust our feelings or all the passions that reside within us simply because we feel them. Our hearts are not pure—far from it:

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick;  
who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)*

The nature of deception is to convince us that our hearts will not be satisfied unless we indulge what our hearts desire. But our hearts lead us astray in countless ways. Envy robs people of joy and contentment, sours friendships, and can lead to compromising morality in order to “get ahead.” Envy does not produce flourishing or joy in people. Indulging envy only results in misery for yourself and others. But none of us think this way as envy rages on. In the moment, the wrath and bitterness of envy assuages the sense of loss and jealousy residing within each of us.

Not every impulse we experience should be indulged. We should be suspicious about “listening to our hearts.” Actually, everyone knows this is true. Prisons are full of people who acted in accord with their feelings—and who have been told by society that they shouldn’t. Every time a therapist tells a patient to view themselves more positively, they are accepting that there are feelings that are unhelpful to someone’s fulfillment. Our hearts’ desires can be at war with what is actually good for our hearts. The real question is: which desires should be fed, and which should be starved?

What does this have to do with transgenderism? In the same way that fallen desires pervade the hearts of all of us, individuals with gender dysphoria experience real feelings of distress about their gender identity. These are au-

thentic experiences, where their heart’s desire is telling them one thing about themselves while their body is saying something else. No one should dismiss this, or belittle this, or joke about this. To feel this way is to experience real, deep pain.

But experiencing that feeling does not mean that feeding it and acting upon it is best, or right. The impulse to live out an identity at odds with our biological sex is to indulge fallen desires and perceptions that our heart believes will bring peace. But internal longing for peace does not mean that finding peace is possible through breaking the boundaries of human limitations and rejecting the way we have each been created. It is a little-reported fact that people who undergo sex re-assignment surgery do not, statistically, report higher levels of happiness after the surgery.<sup>[14]</sup> Transition and its social acceptance do not deliver on the promise they make. That is, acting on the desire to live as the opposite gender to the one that accords with biological sex does not bring peace to a heart. This is consistent with a “Genesis 1 – 3” worldview, because the Bible tells us that embracing a desire at odds with the Creator’s design will never bring ultimate happiness. The passion to live as a member of the opposite sex isn’t simply satisfied by surgically altering your body. There are deeper issues at stake than exterior, physical and cosmetic alterations.

## GENDER DYSPHORIA IS NOT SINFUL

It is vital to pause here to make very clear a distinction between experiencing an unwanted feeling and acting on a feeling. Come back to Eve in Eden at the start of Genesis 3. Satan’s effort to tempt Eve was not a sin on her part. She

sinned when she went beyond observing the fruit's beauty, began desiring what God had forbidden, and took and ate the fruit.

In the same way, it is a category error to say that gender dysphoria is sinful. Gender dysphoria simply refers to the *mental distress* that an individual experiences as a result of feeling misalignment between their biological sex and so-called “gender identity.” That distress may or may not have a sinful root cause, but the distress itself is not the main moral concern. No one needs to repent of “mental distress” (although they might have reasons to repent of what has caused the distress). To *desire* or *embrace* misalignment is, however, sinful.

The experience of gender dysphoria is a sign that all of our selves are broken by sin, just as the creation around us is. The reason that any person ever experiences a physical ailment or a psychological state or perception that goes against God's creative intentions is because this world is fallen. So, for example, having depression—or experiencing gender dysphoria—is not a sin but is a reflection of an impairment, and these experiences occur because we live in a world broken by sin.

It is, then, not experiencing the feeling but deciding to let that feeling rule—to feed that feeling so that it becomes the way you see yourself and the way you identify yourself and the way you act—that is sinful, because it is deciding that your feelings will have authority over you, and will define what is right and what is wrong. It is to act in the same way Adam and Eve did in eating from the tree.

## THINKING IT THROUGH

When our hearts are hardened—when we have decided not to love God or to treat him as God—our minds are affected, too. That is, not only our feelings and desires, but also our logic and reason are touched by sin. In speaking of the difference it makes to live under God's authority rather than how those who live in rejection of God's right to rule (“Gentiles”) do, Paul says:

*You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:17-18)*

Without God in the picture, our reason is impaired. We can think brilliantly, but not necessarily truthfully. Our reason is flawed, because it leaves out the Creator in trying to understand his creation and ourselves as his image-bearing creatures. We grope around for answers that cannot be found, like blundering around in the dark in the middle of the night, trying to find the light switch in a room without switches.

In many ways, the heart and mind work in tandem. Our hearts can have a pull or attraction or desire toward one thing, but our mind might know that such attraction or desire should not be acted upon. Equally, our mind often seeks to justify the decisions of our hearts. This explains why individuals like the atheist scholar Richard Dawkins can be both very clever and very blind—because his cleverness is all being used in the service of his determination to reject God. His logic is actually just following the decision of his heart to be hard to God.

Our minds matter in the transgender debate because it is the mind that processes the experiences of those who suffer gender dysphoria. If you like, our minds tell our hearts whether our feelings are reasonable. But just as with our desires, in a world broken by sin we cannot be sure whether our mind's reasoning is valid. It is not intrinsically more reasonable to follow the feelings of your heart than to reject the feelings of your heart.

## CAN A MAN CHANGE HIS HEIGHT?

It is worth following through the logic that is used to validate the view that how I feel about who I am should trump what my body says about who I am. A viral video from 2016 shows a young Caucasian man in his thirties interviewing college students at an American university, and demonstrates the slippery slope of taking the implications of transgender ideology to its logical conclusions.<sup>[15]</sup> He first asks a variety of students how they would respond to him telling them he is a woman. The replies include:

“Good for you.”

“I’d be like, what? Really?”

“I don’t have a problem with it.”

Next, he asks how they would respond to him claiming to be Chinese...

“I might be a little surprised but I would say, ‘Good for you!’ Yeah, be who you are.”

“I would maybe think you had some Chinese ancestor.”

“Umm, I would have a lot of questions—just because on the outside I would assume you are a white man.”

The next questions are whether the students would be happy with the interviewer claiming to be seven years old and seeking to enroll in a school class for seven-year-olds, a first-grade class. This time, there is more hesitation among the students—but the answers include:

“I probably wouldn’t believe it but, I mean, it wouldn’t really bother me that much [that I would] go out of my way and tell you, ‘No, you are wrong.’ I’d just be like, ‘Oh, he wants to be seven years old.’”

“If you feel seven at heart, then so be it—good for you.”

“If [first grade] is where you feel mentally you should be then I feel like there are communities that would accept you for that.”

“I would say, so long as you are not hindering society and you’re not causing harm to other people, I feel like [joining first grade] should be an okay thing.

Lastly, the interviewer asks the same students what they would say if he told them he was 6 feet 5 inches tall—around 10 inches taller than he appears to be.

**Student One:** (No answer.)

**Student Two:** That I would question.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Student Two:** Because you’re not. No, I don’t think you’re 6’5”.

**Student Three:** If you truly believed you're 6'5", I don't think it's harmful. I think it's fine if you believe that. It doesn't matter to me if you think you are taller than you are.

**Interviewer:** So you'd be willing to tell me I'm wrong?

**Student Three:** No, I wouldn't tell you you are wrong.

**Student One:** No, but I'd say that, umm, I don't think that you are.

**Student Four:** I feel like that's not my place as another human to say someone is wrong or to draw lines or boundaries.

**Student Five:** No, I mean I wouldn't just go like, "Oh, you're wrong," like that's wrong to believe in it. Because again, it doesn't really bother me what you want to think about your height or anything.

**Interviewer:** So I can be a Chinese woman?

**Student Two:** Umm, sure.

**Interviewer:** But I can't be a 6'5" Chinese woman?

**Student Six:** Yes.

**Student Seven:** If you thoroughly debated me or explained why you felt your were 6'5", uhh, I feel like I would be very open to saying you were 6'5" or Chinese or a woman.

Deciding that the only reasonable course of action is to affirm every feeling about self-identity is a blind alley that leads to absurdity. Worse, it is dangerous. In the transgender debate, the argument is that we must accept the claim that a man who identifies as a woman is really a woman. But work that backwards on a different example: would it be kind to tell someone suffering

from anorexia that their self-perception of being overweight is correct simply because that is how they perceive themselves? Would it be kind to tell someone who feels as though their life is not worth living, and whose mind tells them that view is reasonable, that they should act on what their heart and head tell them? Absolutely not. That would be cruel, not kind.

## THE WAY WE'RE PUT TOGETHER

There is one more personal aspect of living in a world broken by sin that we must consider:

*To the woman [God] said,  
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children" ...  
And to Adam he said ...  
You are dust, and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:16, 17, 19)*

Physical pain is a part of life from the moment we enter this world through childbirth. And from birth onward, we're on the slow journey back to what we are made of: dust. Between birth and death, no one enjoys a body that works as they wish it would, and as it should. All of us live in bodies that in one way or another remind us that we are neither perfect nor self-sufficient. The way we are put together is no more immune from the effects of the fall than the way our hearts feel or the way our minds reason.

This means that arguing, "I was born this way," sounds compelling, but is not ultimately a clinching argument. All of us have characteristics that we have



always had and that we ourselves wish we could change, or that our society, or our family, or some of our friends tell us we should wish to change. In one way or another, we are all “born that way”—but we’re born that way in broken bodies. People are born with all sorts of predispositions that do not produce joy and wholeness. The way I was born still requires evaluation to determine whether that “way” is a positive one, to be affirmed, embraced and lived out; or a negative one, to be rejected, moderated, or treated. If I am born with a predisposition toward aggression, Western culture would not tell me, “Go for it—you were born that way, there’s nothing you can do about it” (though many societies 2,000 years ago may well have done). Whatever “we are born with” is to be evaluated by Scripture.

The same is true for people who experience gender dysphoria. One prominent theory about what “causes” gender dysphoria is what’s called the brain-sex theory. This concept states that individuals with gender dysphoria have a brain structure that mimics the brain-type of the opposite sex. Evidence is inconclusive on this, however, meaning that currently there is no known cause for gender dysphoria. This is at best a hypothesis. But our bodies are broken—what we are born with is not necessarily what we are created to live out.

## THE BLUEPRINT PERSISTS

So how should we think about gender fluidity and transgenderism? The feeling or experience of it is not sinful, but it is broken; and acting upon one’s dysphoria is sinful.

And the act is doomed to frustration. Even in a Genesis 3 world, the Genesis 1

blueprint persists. God has not given up on his creation and he does not let us rip up his blueprint. Whatever the perceptions and desires that we experience internally, an objective order exists that our biology attests to.

So when Adam and Eve grasped at being gods instead of humans, acting as Creator rather than creatures, God did not allow them to have what they wanted in full. They did not cease to be creatures under God’s rule simply because they had decided not to live that way anymore. They did not become divine, or self-ruling. That lay outside their reach.

We can grasp at being men instead of women—or genderless humans instead of gendered humans—but God does not allow it. We are unable to do it. We can change our form, but we cannot change our formatting. We might be able to alter our body’s hardware, but our genetic software is fixed and unalterable. In truth, there is no such thing as “transgender,” because you cannot change your gender. The word exists, but not the reality that it seeks to describe.

As Paul McHugh states:

*“Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men. All (including Bruce Jenner) become feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they ‘identify.’”* [\[16\]](#)

Many would be outraged by that statement—so it is worth noting that Paul McHugh is one of the most esteemed psychiatrists of our time. He serves as the University Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical

School and was the former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He offered these remarks on how to assess the transgender movement:

*“In fact, gender dysphoria—the official psychiatric term for feeling oneself to be of the opposite sex—belongs in the family of similarly disordered assumptions about the body, such as anorexia nervosa and body dysmorphic disorder. Its treatment should not be directed at the body as with surgery and hormones any more than one treats obesity-fearing anorexic patients with liposuction. The treatment should strive to correct the false, problematic nature of the assumption and to resolve the psychosocial conflicts provoking it.”* [\[17\]](#)

As the author Tony Reinke has written:

*“Chromosomes cannot be re-engineered, removed, or scrubbed from the software of our bodies. It may be possible for a ‘trans woman’ to ‘pass’ for a woman on the street at the visual level, but it is not possible for a man to morph himself into a biological woman, with all the experiences and functions of natural femaleness. The biological narrative doesn’t exist. While medical advances make it possible to suppress or change some of the outward appearances of our bodies, and change our patterns of speech and dress, it is not possible to raze our bodies to the ground and rebuild them without shortcutting all the essential formative experiences that make the biological sex expression and gender authentic.”*

*“A ‘trans woman’ can grow his hair long and wear high-heels and pump estrogen into his body. And a ‘trans man’ can cut her hair short, and force*

*testosterone into her body. All of this is an active pushing against the body’s internal software. Unable to decode ourselves from the genetics of our physical becoming, we are left to rearrange anatomical aesthetics and coerce ourselves in a direction that runs against nature.”* [\[18\]](#)

This is a bleak picture of humanity and the world—every part of which is marked and marred by sin. It’s hard to read if you or a loved one are experiencing gender dysphoria, or are in the midst of or out the other side of hormone treatment or surgery. But in fact, it should actually be hard for *all* of us to read—because we all suffer from living in a fallen world, and we all contribute to its fallenness. We all sin. To transition is *a* sin—but it is not *the* sin; it is not worse than lust, adultery, envy, greed, and all those other sins that middle-class heterosexual guys try to explain away or excuse themselves for. We all coerce ourselves in a direction that runs against nature each time we seek to sit on God’s throne.

The person who feels morally superior or self-righteous at the sins of others—including those who have followed the transgender path—is feeding a feeling that wars against their own soul no less than the person who would like to be of the opposite sex. Jesus’ strongest words were reserved for those who defined themselves by comparing themselves favorably with others, and who felt their own goodness was enough to earn them approval from God. None of this to say that we should suspend judgment on the severity of transgenderism’s attempt to nullify the Creator’s blueprint, but rather to bring us to a place of humility that means we avoid pouncing on others while ignoring the log in our own eye.

## WE ARE NOT LEFT WHERE WE ARE

This is a beautiful world. But it is also a broken one. And it is filled with humans who are capable of great good and of great mistakes, who can reach great heights but who are fundamentally flawed. Our hearts, our minds, and our bodies are beautiful things, and they are broken things. They have been since Adam and Eve first decided they would be better rulers of this creation than its Creator.

But there is hope buried in brokenness. In the same chapter where humanity

descends into an abyss of sin and brokenness, God announces in germ form the promise to rescue his image-bearers:

*The LORD God said to the serpent...  
“I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:14, 15)*

God does not leave us where we are. God promises to send someone into where we are to lead us out...

*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20)*

## 8. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Love can never be an optional extra for a Christian.

To be a Christian means to love as you have been loved by God:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)*

Did you catch that? Jesus says that if we fail to love others, we show we do not really love God. And his famous parable of the Good Samaritan shows that by others, he means all others (Luke 10:25-37). My neighbor includes anyone and everyone.

Jesus' apostle John spells it out:

For followers of Christ, love is not just an attitude tacked on to the Christian life as an afterthought. Love is not an appetizer or a dessert; love is the main course. A heart that cultivates love for God and love toward others is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus even says that the love we foster in our hearts toward others is a reflection of the love we have for God. You cannot be a Christian and harbor hatred toward others, because love is the foundation of the greatest commandments:

*Jesus answered, "The most important [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)*

The centrality of love must be the foundation for our interaction with friends, family, neighbors, and fellow citizens—including all those who are experiencing gender dysphoria or who have embraced a transgender identity.

A biblical response to transgender people is to see them as our neighbors; and then to love them, because they are our neighbors. But this is easier said than done, even if we are determined to turn our back on unloving, knee-jerk reactions of one kind or another. From the Bible to the Beatles, we're told that "all you need is love"—but what does it actually mean to love someone? I

may want to act lovingly toward all people, regardless of their race, age, background, or gender identity—but how do I do that?

## LOVE PROMOTES DIGNITY

First, we need to understand who our neighbors are: people made in God's image, as we've already seen:

*God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)*

The truth that man and woman are made in God's image is the foundation for human dignity—the concept that individuals possess an inviolable worth, deserving of honor and respect. There are no exception clauses to this truth; there is no way for someone to be a human and not bear God's image, even though they may obscure or mar it. Nothing they can do with their lives, or do to their lives, can eradicate the image of God. No human authority can take it away. All humans possess God-given dignity, and possess it equally.

President or peasants—both are exactly the same in God's eyes. Christian or non-Christian—both are made in God's image. Gay or straight—both possess the same inherent dignity. A person confused about their gender and someone at peace with their gender—both possess the same dignity.

Failing to understand how this truth applies to every single person equally is at the foundation for all sorts of abuse and atrocities.

- In Nazi Germany, a failure to see the full dignity of Jews led to the Holocaust.
  - At the founding of the US, a failure on the part of most white people to see the full dignity of persons with black skin led to the evils of racism and slavery.
  - For the last fifty years, a failure to see the full dignity of persons who are not yet born has led to fifty million legal abortions in the US alone.
- History's greatest crimes result from denying God's image in every single man and woman.

A transgendered person is made in God's image, and that means that respect and honor are due to them as people, regardless of whether we agree with their self-perception.

To see the full dignity of a transgendered person means to abhor or reject any mocking humor that would demean them. It means to stand up and defend them against bullies or abuse. Dignity demands that we speak up in the defense of someone's worth, even when we disagree with their way of life.

## LOVE REQUIRES EMPATHY

Understanding the perspective of someone unlike you is absolutely vital to developing empathy and building relationships. Empathy is the prerequisite for speaking meaningfully and authoritatively into someone's life.

Paul tells the church in Galatia to...

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)*

To love someone, we must work hard to empathize with them. And that means seeking to look at life from their perspective and walk in their shoes:

*"You cannot help with a burden unless you come very close to the burdened person ... so in the same way, a Christian must listen and understand, and physically, emotionally, spiritually, take up some of the burden with the other person."* [\[20\]](#)

So we need to ask ourselves, "Have I actually made an effort to understand the perspective and pain of someone experiencing gender dysphoria?"

This is why it is crucial to read testimonies of people who experience dysphoria; to make more effort, not less, to befriend someone in your neighborhood who lives out a gender identity different than their biological sex; and never to dismiss them out of hand because their struggles seem alien or strange to you, or because you disagree with the choices they have made or the identity they have assumed.

Extending empathy does not mean that you accept or affirm or encourage someone to embrace the desire to live contrary to their created gender; it does mean, however, that instead of rejecting a person outright, you take time and make the effort to listen and seek to understand.

There are going to be people in our lives who experience gender dysphoria. It

is inevitable. They will be in our churches, in our families and in our schools. What are you doing now to cultivate a spirit of tenderness? What are you going to do when you encounter someone who admits to these struggles? Will you respond with your jaw on the floor? Will your facial reaction turn someone away, or will you extend a hand or a hug of friendship, and make sure you ask questions and listen hard? What our eyebrows and noses do when we meet someone tells them much more about how we truly feel than our fine words or our reflective blogs.

The Bible says we are not only to get to know people, but we are to bear their burdens—which means someone's struggles become our struggles. You cannot love your neighbor if you will not empathize with them.

## LOVE SHARES TRUTH

*[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (1 Corinthians 13:6)*

Here is perhaps the most delicate aspect of loving our transgender neighbor: how can we love our transgender neighbor while not sending signals that we approve of someone living in a gender opposite of their sex, or no gender at all?

The Bible's definition of love runs contrary to the Western world's definition. According to the world, loving someone means giving them license to pursue whatever they believe will bring them happiness or fulfillment. The Bible says that love requires truth. Love does not mean looking someone in the eyes and



affirming every desire they experience. Love means looking someone in the eyes and communicating the truth of Scripture. We are to do so gently, but we are to do so nonetheless.

It is very important to bear in mind that what Christians call “loving” will not often be considered loving by the world. So we should never assess whether we are truly loving by the world’s response to our message of love. Love and truth are never determined by whether they are popular—often, what is loving and true is very unpopular. Increasingly, speaking truth out of love is called “hate speech.” But Paul says love cannot exist without truth and love cannot rejoice at wrongdoing. If we accept the authority of the Bible, we must understand that affirming people in a path that is contrary to what the Scripture teaches is never loving. If I affirm transgenderism, I am actually doing an unloving thing. I am withholding truth because I value my own reputation or my own friendships or my own comforts more than I value the eternal happiness of the person made in God’s image who stands in front of me.

At the same time, speaking truth is not necessarily loving. There is a way of speaking biblical truth that is the opposite of loving—truth-speaking that is motivated by self-righteousness, pride, fear, or a desire to win an argument. It is loving to speak truth, but only if we speak truth lovingly:

*A soft answer turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)*

No arrogance. No dismissal. No harsh words. No trite sayings that gloss over deeply personal experiences. No jokes, including those made behind someone’s back.

Communicating truth and love requires relationship. If we really care about someone, we must tell them the truth. We have to love the truth so much that we care about truth more than we care about how the world thinks of us. We have to love people so much that we care about their souls more than we care about their approval. This means that the pursuit of truth and love may cost us friendships. People rejected Jesus for speaking the truth in love, and so we should expect the same.

## LOVE PRODUCES COMPASSION

*Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. (Colossians 3:12)*

If your experience is anything like mine, you might have first encountered the discussion around transgenderism with scoffing disbelief: “Ha! How absurd it is that people think they are a member of the opposite sex.” I am deeply, deeply sorry that I felt that way. It was wrong. It would hurt me if someone dismissed my feelings and my struggles as “absurd.” I am sorry. I have needed to pray for forgiveness and for compassion. While on the one hand it is shocking that Western culture believes the radical idea that gender is interchangeable and increasingly marginalizes those who disagree with such a claim, on the other hand it is important to separate the noise of the culture war from the struggling sounds of those plagued by gender confusion.

A Christian’s tendency is often to feel alarm at new ideas, especially when those ideas deny rather than support biblical truths. But compassion means

we must disarm and deliberately lay down any negativity we have toward those who think or feel or live in that way—including those who experience gender dysphoria, or are seeking to become and live as the opposite gender to their birth sex, or to live with no gender at all.

After all, we claim the name of the sinless, divine, holy Son of God, who did not laugh at, mock or turn his nose up at all the great gamut of human sin that he encountered, for the first time in all eternity, during his time on earth. He met those who had rejected all his plans and desires for them not with fear or scorn but with compassion. Not only that—if you look at Jesus' stance toward "sinners," he was far more challenging to those who called themselves religious, thought of themselves as righteous, and looked down on others than he was of those who had deliberately chosen to follow a disobedient path. He called compassionately to the latter to return to the God they needed, even as those around him called him to reject them (have a read of Luke 5:29-32 and 7:36-50). Nowhere in the Gospels will you find Jesus pronouncing "woe" on anyone who is not the kind of proud, professing religious guy who looks down on others and thinks their views and decisions are absurd.

Compassion does not mean approval. But neither does compassion mean silence. Compassion says, "I'm so sorry you are experiencing deep inner anguish about your gender. I cannot fathom the types of struggles you experience, but I would like to listen to you and I would like to be here for you. I'm sorry for any hurt or rejection you've encountered from others. I want you to know that I am your friend and will walk with you through the valleys of your struggles. I want you to know that I may not agree with you, but I will never look down on you. You are loved."

## LOVE HAS PATIENCE

Compassion means entering into someone else's pain with the confidence that the gentleness and kindness of God—and not the self-righteous, haughty correction of his people—is what leads to repentance:

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant. (1 Corinthians 13:4)*

A believer who experiences gender dysphoria may never be freed of their gender dysphoria. Or maybe they will. The militant transgender activist who accuses those who disagree with pro-transgender ideology of bigotry or worse may never change their mind and place themselves under Christ's loving lordship. Or maybe they will. God saves the most unlikely persons (just check and see what Paul's prior life was like).

That's the beauty of Christianity: we have a patient God. All too often, God's people act as if we believe that smugness, superiority, and angry moral pronouncements are what draws people to the gospel. In God's economy, kindness, forbearance, and patience are his instruments. God is rich in "kindness and forbearance and patience"—and "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Do you realize how patient God was with you, when you lived in deliberate rebellion against him? Do you realize how patient God still is with you, as you fail to love and obey his Son each day, despite knowing who he is and what he has done for you? No one should be more shocked that you have been born again than you. Though people's rebellion against God may differ in degree, it



does not differ in type. Any rebellion is enough to separate us from God. And no rebellion is horrendous enough to put us out of the saving reach of God.

No one is more patient than our God; and if he is patient, so must we be, too.

We must be patient as we walk alongside those experiencing the anguish of gender dysphoria. We must be patient as we engage with those angry at the Christian gospel's good news about God's design for gender. We are not here to win arguments. We are here to love people.

It's so, so important to learn that the purpose of love, compassion, kindness and patience isn't simply to get a hearing in the culture, far less to make us popular in the culture. As Christians, we demonstrate these virtues not because they are methods for gaining popularity but because the Bible commends them as reflecting the character of God, and tells us that they are pleasing to God. We cannot ever be sure that our kindness and patience will win a hearing for the gospel. But we can always be certain that our self-righteousness and impatience will lose a hearing for the gospel.

## FACE TO FACE

We live in the age of social media—and it is an age that is corrosive to loving our neighbor. Social media enables us to select our neighbors, and ignore everyone else. Facebook's algorithms mean that almost everyone we hear from via Facebook already agrees with our position (or is sharing a funny video). When our safe social-media bubbles are pierced by different views, it tends to be because something extreme has happened—and so we grow fearful as we

see or hear how those who seek to love with truth are treated. Perhaps worst of all, we can pontificate without needing to listen or to see the effect of our reactions on those whose lives we are talking about.

Love requires relationship—real, face-to-face relationship. That's where we can learn how to love our neighbor.

Several years ago, I and some Christian friends were involved in a prolonged and emotionally-fraught conversation with members of the LGBTQ community. It was a charged atmosphere. Prominent leaders and influence-formers from both sides were in the room. It looked like a set-up predisposed to conflict and civil war. The evening began with a commitment to ground rules that could be summed up as “Respect.” Everyone took turns discussing why they were in the room and why they had an interest in bridging the gap between the Christian and LGBTQ communities. While in the back of everyone's mind there was hope that people from both sides would change their mind, the biggest hope was to de-escalate some of the tensions that were engulfing the U.S.

At one point a transgender woman (a biological man who self-identifies as a woman) stood up and pleaded, with great emotion, that all they wanted was to be able to go to the bathroom without fear of abuse or mockery in the restroom that aligned with their new identity.

While we were not persuaded by the bathroom argument being made, hearing the emotional plea of one person as they looked at us, face to face, helped us all understand that the person talking was not a bad person. They were not absurd. They were not intending harm. This was a human being made in God's image who thought God's blueprint was wrong. This person was not our

enemy; this was a person to be embraced as a friend, listened to, and understood, even when (especially when) we disagreed.

There was no fighting that evening. No insults were thrown. Even when people disagreed, they did so charitably and without questioning the other person's motive.

No one expected one side to agree with the other or vice versa. We did hope that a discussion centered on controversial issues could proceed civilly and respectfully. And it did.

No one walked away from that evening convinced that the other side was right; but we did all walk away without feeling bitter or angry with one another. Dialogue happened. And though no side lessened their grip on their convictions, basic aspects of respect and extending dignity to one another allowed conversation and understanding to proceed.

This is just one example of what is required of every Christian. We are to love our neighbor. Every neighbor. Before we challenge another person about their life, we must challenge the person we see in the mirror about their love. Love does not mean we sacrifice truth on the altar of popularity. Love does not require sacrificing conviction. In fact, love demands that we don't. But love does mean deliberately, prayerfully and thoughtfully extending respect, empathy, compassion, and patience to everyone, equally, and indiscriminately.

In the past, I have failed to do this, in my thoughts if not in my words and actions. Many of us likely have failed in this way. For that sin, we need forgiveness, and in the gospel we have it. If we would claim the name of Christ, then we must live like him, and love like him.