

D. Preparing for Gender Identity Conversations

The Nature of the Challenge

We live in a world broken by sin. The result is that confusion extends everywhere including into such things once considered obvious. Now culture is speaking into those once settled ideas and telling us to change everything we thought we knew. We have seen this change occur regarding the definition of marriage and gender identity seems to be the next such topic.

Transsexualism, also known as transgenderism, Gender Identity Disorder (GID), or Gender Dysphoria, is a feeling that your biological / genetic / physiological gender does not match the gender you identify with and/or perceive yourself to be. Transsexuals / transgenders often describe themselves as feeling “trapped” in a body that does not match their true gender. This confusion may result in them doing different things to act on their feelings such as cross dressing, practicing transvestitism, or seeking hormone therapy and/or gender reassignment surgery to bring their bodies into conformity with their perceived gender.

The world is becoming more and more filled with messages of confusion. Children are growing up being told gender does not matter and the regular stream of messages about gender-neutrality, unisex restrooms and sexual identity being a choice is leaving them more susceptible to being lost and confused.

Culture is moving toward normalizing such behavior and activity, calling for special protections under Civil Rights Protections. Culture is also pressing to teach young children that gender is a choice they can make. It is reported there are up to 72 different Gender Designations with 78 Gender Pronouns.

We live in a confused and fallen world, and that confusion extends everywhere, so that even the most basic questions, like “what gender am I?” become difficult for some people to answer. Some people claim they were born as the wrong gender, or at least in the wrong body. A man may believe he is actually a female, but his soul is “stuck” in a male body. Such claims receive support from those who advocate a “gender-neutral” society. But those who view gender distinctions as nothing more than arbitrary labels or a “box” to be broken out of are actively rejecting God’s design in creation.

As culture more readily accepts transgender behavior, it is important to understand if the person is simply experiencing gender dysphoria or confusion versus having completed steps for transition or reassignment. Either way, transgenderism or gender dysphoria are very real, emotional and personal issues. We understand that people can have very strong and genuine attractions and desires; however, that ***does not mean those feelings are from God or that He wants us to act on them.*** It is not about having those feelings, as God loves each of us even as we are all sinners. However, it does matter what we do with those feelings and how we choose to act on them. It is always harmful when we substitute our own feelings or desires for what God tells us is best for us.

The Biblical Response

The Bible nowhere explicitly mentions transgenderism or describes anyone as having transgender feelings. However, the Bible has plenty to say about human sexuality. Most basic to our

understanding of gender is that God created two (and only two) genders: “male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

All the modern-day speculation about numerous genders or gender fluidity—or even a gender “continuum” with unlimited genders—is foreign to the Bible. The closest the Bible comes to mentioning transgenderism is in its condemnations of homosexuality (Romans 1:18–32; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10) and transvestitism (Deuteronomy 22:5). The Greek word often translated “homosexual offenders” or “male prostitutes” in 1 Corinthians 6:9 literally means “effeminate men.” So, while the Bible does not directly mention transgenderism, when it mentions other instances of gender “confusion,” it clearly and explicitly identifies them as sin.

What about the possibility that those suffering with transgenderism have a brain that functions as one gender while the rest of the body is biologically the other gender? The Bible does not even hint at such a possibility. However, neither does the Bible mention hermaphroditism (a condition in which a person has both male and female sexual organs), which undeniably occurs (although extremely rarely). Further, people can be born with or develop all kinds of different brain defects or malfunctions.

With hermaphroditism as evidence, it cannot be said that if the Bible does not mention something it does not occur. So, it might be possible for a person to be born with a brain wired in such a way that it contributes to gender dysphoria. This could also be an explanation for some instances of homosexuality. However, just because something might have a biological cause **does not mean** embracing the effects is the right thing to do. Some people are wired with a sexuality on hyper-drive. That does not make it right for them to engage in sexual immorality. It is scientifically proven that some psychopaths / sociopaths have brains with severely weakened impulse-control mechanisms. That does not make it right for them to engage in every deviant behavior that crosses their minds.

Why did God choose to make men *and* women?

*God didn't have to make two different kinds of human beings. He didn't have to make us so that men and women, on average, come in different shapes and sizes and grow hair in different places and often think and feel in different ways. God could have propagated the human race in some other way besides the differentiated pair of male and female. He could have made Adam sufficient without an Eve. Or he could have made Eve without an Adam. But God decided to make not one man or one woman, or a group of men or a group of women; he made a man and a woman. **The one feature of human existence that shapes life as much or more than any other—our biological sex—was God's choice.***

In an ultimate sense, of course, the world had to be made the way it was, in accordance with the immutable will of God and as a necessary expression of his character. I'm not suggesting God made Adam and Eve by a roll of the dice. Actually, I'm reminding us of the opposite. This whole wonderful, beautiful, complicated business of a two-sexed humanity was God's idea. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The whole human race is, always has been, and will be for the rest of time, comprised of two differentiated and complementary sexes. This perpetual bifurcated ordering of humanity is not by accident or by caprice but by God's good design. And why? What is at stake in God making us male and female?

Nothing less than the gospel, that's all. The mystery of marriage is profound, Paul says, and it refers to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32).

"Mystery" in the New Testament sense refers to something hidden and then revealed. The Bible is saying that God created men and women—two different sexes—so that he might paint a living picture of the differentiated and complementary union of Christ and the church. Ephesians 5 may be about marriage, but we can't make sense of the underlying logic unless we note God's intentions in creating marriage as a gospel-shaped union between a differentiated and complementary pair. Any move to abolish all distinctions between men and women is a move (whether intentionally or not) to tear down the building blocks of redemption itself. (1)

Fundamental to our understanding of human sexuality is that God created sexual relations as a gift to be shared between a male husband and female wife, always within the confines of a covenant marriage relationship. Any sexual activity outside that perfect design is sinful, whether that be homosexual, heterosexual, transexual, pre-marital or extra-marital. That said, we live in a fallen world, a world gripped by sin. We face temptations all around us as the evil one wants to kill, steal and destroy. ***The Bible tells us that the temptation is not in itself sin, however, it is what we do with that temptation that can result in sin.*** So, having a "feeling" toward something that is outside of God's perfect design may not be sinful in and of itself. However, if we act on those feelings we are living outside his perfect design and that is a sin that ultimately hurts us and our relationship with God. The Bible is ultimately clear that all sexual activity outside God's perfect design for marriage is sin.

This we know, we are involved in a spiritual battle for our souls. The world seeks to conform us to its mold, which is why we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1–2). Satan attempts to deceive us and urges us to question God's plan. One of the devil's ploys is to make us dissatisfied with how God made us. To some he whispers, "You're fat and ugly." To others, "You're stupid and clumsy." And to still others, "You look like a boy, but you're really a girl." In each case, the underlying message is the same: "God messed up on you."

A Loving Approach

No matter if the gender distortion has a genetic, hormonal, physiological, psychological, or spiritual cause, it can be overcome through faith in Christ and continued reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. Sin can be overcome, and lives can be changed, through the salvation that Jesus provides. If a person feels they have been born as the wrong gender, the answer is not gender-reassignment surgery, hormone therapy, cross-dressing, etc. Those are simply worldly ways of acquiescing to the lies of Satan. God does not make mistakes. The one who feels they were born in the wrong body needs, first and foremost, to experience the transformative power of Christ. When we "participate in the divine nature," we escape "the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4).

Healing can be received, sin can be overcome, and lives can be changed through the salvation that Jesus provides, even if there are biological / physiological factors. The Corinthian believers are an example of such a change: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our

God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). There is hope for everyone, transsexuals, transgenders, those with gender identity disorder, because of God’s forgiveness available in Jesus Christ.

Christ sets us on the path to victory. Hebrews 12:1–2 states, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The cross is key. Jesus pioneered our faith, and He will perfect it. His victory will be ours as well.

We should always view these conversations as an opportunity to minister to people and speak biblical truth in grace and love. We need to avoid the common trap so many Christians falls into of making transgenderism or gender dysphoria into some special category of disobedience that hurts God more than all other sin. ***We encourage you to listen well and share the one true source of hope found only in Jesus.*** That hope in Jesus is for everyone, including those who battle gender dysphoria or confusion. God loves them and wants them to experience the transformative power of His presence and grace. God wants each of us to become the child of God that He created us to be and not someone that identifies themselves simply by their perceived sexuality or gender.

Footnotes:

- (1) Crossway Publications – Kevin DeYoung
- (2) GotQuestions – Contributions of Material for Article