

# REFORMATION TODAY

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- ▶ What the Bible says about gender
- ▶ What is the Transgender Agenda, and how should Christians respond?
- ▶ The Secret Things and the Revealed Things (part 2)
- ▶ Help! I can't forgive! (part 6)

## The Bible, gender and identity





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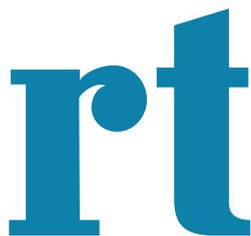
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## Editorial

### Finding a new identity in Christ

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

We read the following words in Isaiah 44:3-5: 'For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, "I am the LORD's", another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, "The LORD's", and name himself by the name of Israel.'

This is a remarkable promise which finds its fulfilment in the gospel of Christ. The text depicts in graphical terms the condition of people in sin; without hope and without God they seem to have as little hope as a desert has for producing flowers. Paul states that people are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).

But the text shows us that we need not remain stuck in this condition and accept this as the norm. We have been designed in God's image and the gospel message is that God will restore his image in us. What is impossible with man, God can do. And this points us to God's saving work in Christ through his Spirit; he will radically transform us, and make us spiritually alive with Christ (Eph 2:5-6), and unite us with him. Out of this flows a whole stream of blessings: our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). This includes forgiveness of sins and adoption as children of God.

The last point means that we find a new identity as children of God. This is also

what the text from Isaiah points to: people will identify themselves with the God of the Bible. He is also the God of Jacob who was transformed and became Israel.

Our text states that this is the result of God pouring out his Spirit. He has done this at Pentecost, and now continues his mighty saving work in Christ throughout the ages and across the world. The stream of the Holy Spirit throughout history right up to this day gives hope for us, for our offspring, for a new generation, even though people seem to us to be as spiritually dead as the dry ground of a desert.

The practical outworking in our lives may take a lifetime, but we can be sure that 'he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6).

The gospel calls us to find our ultimate identity in Christ. This applies to all people without exception.

This gospel message also surfaces in the articles on transgenderism in this issue of *RT*. We are especially grateful to Sharon James and David Magowan for addressing this topic which is the subject of so much attention also in the popular press.

I would like to invite you to contemplate afresh the biblical gospel as you read the articles in this issue of *Reformation Today*.

*Note: space limitations did not permit the inclusion of the usual items of News, APC News, and Books. They will appear again in the next issue.* ■



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# The Secret Things and the Revealed Things

*'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.'*

Deuteronomy 29:29

I began by describing four of the secret things that belong to the Lord, and now I want to continue to expand this theme by speaking of a number of contrasting truths found in the Bible that to us appear to be irreconcilable. The secret of their reconciliation is held by God. To us it seems that if one of them is true, then how in the world can the other also be true? There's a technical word – a buzz word – for this phenomenon and it is an 'antinomy', a conclusion that is discrepant but apparently true and necessary. It doesn't matter if that word and concept is a little perplexing to you. What I am going to say is going to be very plain and simple.

### How can you reconcile that God is one but that God is also three different persons?

Reconciling the fact that God is one and God is also three is a secret thing that belongs to the Lord. That God is one is the most basic claim of Christianity. Question 5 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, 'Are there more Gods than one?' It affirms this famous answer, 'There is but One only, the living and true God.' This statement is based on so many claims of the Bible; 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one' (Deut 6:4). 'the LORD is God and that there is no other' (I Kings 8:60). 'Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God' (Isa 44:6). 'Even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God' (1 Cor 8:5,6). 'There is one God and one mediator between God and men' (1 Tim 2:5). No truth is more emphatically or persistently taught in Scripture than this, that one God existed before the foundation of the earth, that that same God spoke and said, 'Let there be . . .' and the universe was created. There is but one God that all the world has to have dealings with today. The God who is the Father of Jesus Christ: he is the God of the Bible, the God of providence. Not two rival gods . . . not a million gods. One only, the living and true God.

Yet the Bible also teaches clearly that not only is the Father God, but the Son is also God and the Holy Spirit is God, and these three are one God. You have a hint of this at the beginning of the Bible where God says in Genesis 1, 'Let us make man in our image.' There are three different persons in the Godhead; each is distinct from the others. The Father alone is Father. The Son alone became incarnate. The Spirit alone is sent by the Father and the Son. What, then, do we have here? We have a being of whom we have no experience at all in this world. Every other being we meet is one and only one, but the God who is one is also three. Every other being we meet had a beginning, but God had no beginning. He is eternally God. Every other being we meet has dimensions; it has boundaries; even the vast universe has shape and size, but God is infinite and measureless. There is the immensity of God. God is different from any other being; he has no analogy. We cannot say that God is like this or like

that, because there is no one to whom we can compare God. God alone is the one living and true God.

Yet the revelation that God has given us of himself through his prophets and apostles and especially in his Son, is that God is three as well as one. For example, the Lord Jesus is called God very directly by inspired prophets and apostles. The prophet Isaiah says that the Messiah will come and his name will be called, 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6). David in the Psalms, addresses the Messiah, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever' (Ps 45:6). John begins his Gospel, 'The Word was God', and ends his Gospel with Thomas saying to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God'. Our Lord claims, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:31). Peter speaks of 'the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:1). Paul speaks of 'our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13). He tells the church in Rome of 'Christ who is God over all, for ever praised, Amen' (Rom 9:5). He tells the Colossians of Christ that 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Col 2:9). The Holy Spirit is also spoken of as one who possesses all the attributes of God, omnipresence, inspiration, omnipotence, creation, and the Spirit is joined with the Father and the Son in terms of equality, for example in the words of baptism, 'baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' or again in the words of the grace, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.'

So there is this emphasis in the Bible on plurality in our God, and it is important to remind ourselves that God's oneness, God's

unity, is not the singularity of loneliness. God was from eternity never alone. Before there was ever a possibility of fellowship with angels and men and other creatures God was never alone in that eternity, because we have this phenomenon of God with God. The Word was with God in the beginning. There never was a time when there was not God the Father and God the Word. The Word was with God, or perhaps more exactly, 'The Word was towards God.' And in many ways it is a marvellous picture of the pre-creation divine existence, where you have not simply God, and not simply God alongside God, but you have God towards God. You have the face of the Son towards the face of the Father in an outgoing of love, of adoration and of communication. There is perfect loving plurality and perfect love unity in God.

It reminds us that God created all things from nothing not because of any felt need arising out of his emptiness or loneliness or inadequacy or lack of fulfilment. He didn't create in order to have fellowship with something, because there had always been fellowship, the eternal fellowship of God and his Son, God and the Spirit, the Son and the Spirit. Instead, God creates into the fellowship. We may go into the marvels of John chapter 17 and see the consummation of Christian privilege as it is spelled out in Christ praying for all his people, 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me, because you loved me before the creation of the world' (John 17:23,24). Our future is going to end in our own involvement –

subject to our own limitations as creatures – in the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father. Our hope and longing is that we redeemed sinners will be drawn into the eternal fellowship of God with God. God is one and God is three but exactly how that is so is a secret thing that belongs to God.

### **How can you reconcile the fact that Jesus Christ is perfect man with the fact that he is also perfect God?**

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus Christ was in the beginning and he was God. He had the names of God, Jehovah Jesus, Elohim Jesus, El Shaddai Jesus, Jesus Tzidkenu, and he also had all the prerogatives of God, to create and sustain and save and judge. He was the glory of God, and then we are told that he became flesh. It was not the divine nature that became incarnate. It was not deity that was made flesh. It was not the Father who suffered. It was not divinity that died. It was the Word who was God and was with God. And John did not write that the Word 'took' frail flesh but that he became it. The second person of the Godhead, the Son of God added flesh to his deity while not ceasing to be divine. It was a real addition and a real transformation. The Creator became created; the omnipotent became weak; the sustainer of all things became dependent; the changeless changed; the eternal one entered time and became subject to it. Paul writes in Philippians 2 that Christ took the form of a servant – he who had been in the form of God, took the form of a servant. John and Paul are telling us in different ways that the eternal Word entered into a fully human mode and form of existence. He took humanness in all the implications of that humanness.

At one level he took on a human physical constitution, a constitution that was available and open to the senses. The apostle John could say that his eyes had seen him; his ears had heard him; his hands had handled the Word of life. He rested his head on the bosom of the Word made flesh. Jesus had taken a true body with a chemical composition, and an anatomical structure, a physiological constitution, a body which had its own genetic programme inherited to a certain degree from his mother. He was joined by the umbilical cord to his ancestors, to David, to Abraham, to Adam. He had a foetal existence; he was born in the normal way through the birth canal. He entered into this world and breathed its air and was subject to the pattern of daylight and darkness, work and rest, eating food and evacuating the waste products. And at that point Jesus was vulnerable; he experienced infantile vulnerability; he was subject to the contradiction of sinners against him, to misunderstanding, to the excruciating pain of torture, to the taste of death. God had given him no built-in analgesics when he prepared a body for his Son. Through his whole lifetime he was subject to the same laws of dependence and stress and frailty as we ourselves know today.

Then the incarnation was more than that. It wasn't only physical. It was surely that Jesus also had a fully psychological existence, on the one hand a true body, and on the other hand a reasonable soul. That meant surely that the Lord entered upon a full human emotional life, for example, the emotion of sorrow and the emotion of fear. 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful . . . he began to be amazed and very heavy.' We also know that he formed very close ties of human affection with particular individuals in a kind of

David and Jonathan friendship where there is affinity between one human being and another. We are told of David and Jonathan that their souls were knit together, and wasn't it like that between Jesus and John? They were bosom friends. One of the most moving utterances of the New Testament is surely that Jesus chose twelve in order that they would be with him. There could be no more eloquent pointer to his own emotional need than that. We are told that he took three of them into the agony of Gethsemane and they were there with him for that precise purpose, 'Watch with me.' There is real pathos in those words; it is almost pathetic. The God-man needs them, 'I just want you to be with me. I just want to know that you're there, I just want to know that you are listening and watching with me in this moment of agony.' And it is the greatest indictment on those men that at that point they failed him; 'Couldn't you watch with me one hour?' So I am saying that he entered into full physical identity with us men and women, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, that he was hungry and thirsty and weary and he slept on a cushion in a boat, and he suffered and died, but also that he knew a fully emotional existence, loving friends and weeping with them when they grieved over the death of a brother.

'In every pang that rends the heart the Man of Sorrows had a part.'

God the Son also had a fully human intellectual existence. We are told that he grew in wisdom as in stature. He learned by observing and studying and asking questions. He learned to speak Aramaic and then Greek. The human mind of Christ developed through childhood and adolescence and manhood. We find him

growing in understanding by asking people questions like, 'Who touched me?' 'Where have you laid him?' His human mind did not know everything. There was so much that had not been revealed to his human mind, as a man he had a creature's knowledge; but as God the Creator he knew everything. Think of the parallel with his omnipotence as God; the winds and waves obeyed him; he had power over disease and death. He was omnipotent as God, but as a man he experienced weakness, hunger and thirst. I am emphasising the humanity of the Word made flesh, and I am saying that he had a human intellect and a man's way of deciding what to do, and a human way of making choices, of learning, and applying what he had learned to what he chose to do in a decision process and the agony of decision-making. 'What shall I pray? Take this cup from me? But for this reason I came into the world.' The decisions of the man Christ Jesus were real, and that is why the temptations at every point were real, and the agony in the Garden was real.

So here is the mystery of two-nature Christology. On the one hand he is fully divine, as if he were not human, and on the other hand he is fully human, as if he were not divine. Yet here he is as one Jesus Christ. He is never 'we'; always 'I', 'but I say unto you . . . I am the way and the truth and the life.' All the qualities of humanness are the qualities of this person Christ Jesus, and all the qualities of divineness are the qualities of this person Christ Jesus, and that union between the human and the

divine has been irreversibly forged and it can henceforth never ever be broken. It is an indissoluble union of God and man in him alone. He is at this moment God and man, two natures are permanently joined. He is in the midst of the throne as fully human as he was at the moment of the manger of Bethlehem and in the darkness of crucifixion on Golgotha. That is how he is today, as we love singing Joseph Hart's hymn on these occasions;

So here is the mystery of two-nature Christology. On the one hand he is fully divine, as if he were not human, and on the other hand he is fully human, as if he were not divine. Yet here he is as one Jesus Christ.

A Man there is, a real Man,  
with wounds still gaping wide,  
From which rich streams of  
blood once ran,  
in hands, and feet and side.

'Tis no wild fancy of our brains,  
No metaphor we speak;  
The same dear Man in heaven  
now reigns  
That suffered for our sake.'

He is as much God as the Father is God, and as the Spirit is God, and he is not a half man; he is totally human, physically, psychologically, intellectually and emotionally. And now he is in heaven; he is there as the pledge that we shall be saved to the uttermost, that where he is we also shall be, but when we see him we shall be like him. Yet how he can possibly be divine and human in one person for ever is a secret thing known only to God.

### How can you reconcile the two great truths of human responsibility and divine foreordination?

We read in Scripture the apostle Paul writing by the Holy Spirit in the ninth chapter of Romans of the foreordination

of God 'before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad' (Rom 9:11). God has assigned the one to salvation – to be transformed into the image of Christ, and God has passed by the other – treating Esau with scrupulous justice. 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will have compassion on whom I have compassion' (Rom 9:15). That is the divine foreordination, and you remember Paul imagining the objector, and this man complains, 'Why then does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' (Rom 9:19). Who can go against what God has decided? Who can defy the determinate purposes of God? 'Why then does God hold us responsible? Why does he apportion blame? Why does he condemn if in fact he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass?'

What the apostle Paul says is this, 'But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?' (Rom 9:20), and that seems to me to be the total biblical philosophy in this great issue of reconciling these two. We have to affirm with all our might the foreordination of God. We preach it because it is a great biblical proclamation. We affirm it because it enshrines that whole principle of the graciousness and invincibility of God's application of redemption. We are dead in sins with hearts of enmity against God and left to ourselves we would all be with those angels who rebelled against God, in chains of darkness awaiting judgment. But God purposed that a multitude of men and women, as many as the sands on the seashores, would turn from their sins and trust in the saving work of Jesus. We affirm that to be a saving act of a loving God. We affirm it because it is a precondition of the intelligibility and the comprehensibility

and logicalness of the universe in which we live. It is in Christ that all things cohere. Our Lord is behind and above and beneath all things. God works all things after the counsel of his own will.

Notice that Paul nowhere modifies his commitment to foreordination. He doesn't face the man raising the objection to say to him, 'Oh! . . . then let me qualify foreordination.' He lets it stand, that foreordination that comprehends every physical movement in the universe. It comprehends the movement of every galaxy; it comprehends the movement of every atom. It lies behind the fall of the sparrow. It lies behind every good human decision. It lies behind the decision of the brothers to sell their brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt, in other words, behind every sinful human decision, so that Joseph could say to them, 'It was not you who sent me, here but God.' It is an utterly comprehensive foreordination. We do not solve the problem of God's sovereignty over our lives and over this cosmos by diluting it so that we have effectively denied it.

Yet equally we affirm the responsibility of man. 'You sold me into slavery,' Joseph said to his brothers. It was not God who did it, but his own brothers. Peter says to the men who God had determined beforehand would crucify his Son, both the Romans and the Jews, that they with their wicked hands had taken and slain him. Neither Peter nor Paul says that God doesn't find fault with Joseph's brothers or with Caiaphas and Pilate and the mob. Paul lets God's sovereignty stand. All things are foreordained and yet God finds fault. There is God's sovereignty and there

is also human responsibility, and there is within responsibility that element of freedom which responsibility demands, and if we are loyal to the teaching of the Bible then we will take both of those elements. We affirm the foreordination of God and the responsibility and freedom of man. You might hear the claim that 'Calvinism affirms the divine sovereignty while Arminianism affirms human responsibility.' That is a gross oversimplification. Every Christian is called upon to look at all the Bible, and to seek to understand what all Scripture teaches because it is all given by inspiration of God. It contains no booby traps, and no embarrassments.

I would hold today, in the present climate – or as the BBC newsreaders say at the end of their news report from London, 'And now to where you are ...' – where Wales just now is gripped by a most dangerous mentality. We are bringing into behaviour science, and into sociology, and into criminology, and into education a great stress on determinism. In other words, men and women are all being encouraged to believe that they are victims. They are the prisoners of their backgrounds, and the prisoners of their circumstances, and prisoners of the heredity and their DNA, and prisoners of their environment, and prisoners of their education. They are all victims. They are not responsible for how they live and the choices they make. I would say that in a climate of this kind the gospel pulpit needs to be emphasising unmistakably both these truths, that our God reigns and he does according to his will amongst the armies of heaven and here on earth. Yes! But that we also emphasise the Bible's declaration

of human responsibility, that man does answer to God, whatever his background, whatever his DNA, whatever the laws of psychology. Man has that freedom from his genetic make-up, and from his education, and from his own character, and from his sexual desires, and even from his parents' abuse. Man has a true freedom in all those directions that leaves him answerable to God for the choices he makes, and the words he says, and the deeds he does. In many ways it is just because God is sovereign that man is responsible; the creature answers to his Creator. Man who lives and moves and has his being in God must answer to that God.

My concern today is that we have no right to solve the problem of how we reconcile divine sovereignty with human responsibility by dissolving the problem, by denying on the one hand God's foreordination, or denying on the other hand man's responsibility. Both of these elements stand on their own independent evidence. Each is a great affirmation of God's revelation in Scripture. We must let them both stand. But when we come to asking how do you reconcile them, well the Dutch may have their theories, and the Scots have their suggestions, and the Americans their philosophies, and there may be schools of opinions and theological arguments as men look at the question, but no man has the right to stand and say, 'Here is the theology of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility' because no such theology exists. There may be theories but there cannot be a theology because that reconciliation is a secret thing that belongs to God. There is no way it can be found out.

### How can you reconcile the universal love of God which desires all men to be saved with God's decree of election?

We know from the Bible that God is a choosing God. He is certainly not a choosy God or he would never have set his love on the chief of sinners, or us, or the foolish things, the weak things and the lowly things of the world. If God were choosy he'd have chosen the righteous, but Jesus Christ came into the world in order to save sinners. In the Old Testament we meet a choosing God, one who chose both individuals and an entire nation. God chose Abraham, didn't he, and brought him from Ur of the Chaldees to the Promised Land? He chose Isaac, and not Ishmael. He chose Jacob, and not Esau. He chose Ephraim, and not Manasseh. God also chose a nation, the nation of Israel, the Old Testament 'Chosen People of God', not the Egyptians, not the Philistines, not the Syrians, not the Assyrians, not the Babylonians, not the Medes and the Persians, but the Jews God chose.

Why did God do that? Well, when he was giving them a reason for this in Deuteronomy 7:6 God said this: 'For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples; it was because

the LORD loved you.' So God chose them because he loved them. We can go back beyond the choosing to the loving, but we cannot go back beyond the loving to anything more rational or more God-like. The love of God is the bedrock; the love of God is the fountain-head. God is love. He chose us because he loved us, but why in the world he could have loved us is a secret thing belonging to God.

There may be schools of opinions and theological arguments as men look at the question, but no man has the right to stand and say, 'Here is the theology of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility' because no such theology exists.

Is it different in the New Testament? No, God's choice is emphasised there even more. Consider these statements of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Many are called, but few are chosen' (Matt 22:14); 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all that he has given me' (John 6:37,40); 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you' (John 15:16). This teaching continues in the

Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles: 'All who were appointed for eternal life believed' (Acts 13:48); 'Who shall bring any charge against those God has chosen?' (Rom 8:33); 'He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4); '...from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth' (2 Thess 2:13); 'We love him because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19).

That's a selection of some Scriptures. There are many more. You might look up such words as 'chose' or 'elect' or 'predestined' in your concordance. They are God's words not mine. We have to conclude that God's Word

does indeed teach that God is sovereign in his gracious choosing of many men and women, as numerous as the sands on the seashore. His choice of us is a saving work. Left to ourselves we would continue to be at enmity against him, dead in our trespasses and sins, but he took the initiative and determined to save all these sinners.

But there is another truth about God in Scripture and it appears to contradict that truth. It is an antinomy! It is this, the sincere desire in the heart of God that all men should be saved. For example, in this book of Deuteronomy hear God's longing as he speaks tenderly of them in the fifth chapter and verse 29, 'Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children for ever!' Here in the depths of the Old Testament God is expressing his longing that the hearts of the children of Israel would be inclined to fear and obey him. Again in Deuteronomy 32:29 he repeats that longing, 'If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be!' I can speak in the name of God and with all his loving authority say to you that he longs that you show wisdom to understand and discern that you are going to live as long as God. What a momentous eternity lies before you, and Oh that it might be well in your future and not ill. Or again God speaks expressing the same concern in Psalm 81:13, 'If my people would but listen to me.' God wants every single one of you, and all people to listen and to hear of his love in Jesus Christ!

Or again consider the words of Jesus speaking to the people of Jerusalem, the city he had visited three times a year at

the feasts for thirty years, the place whose citizens he knew so well, in the precincts of whose temple he often preached urging Jerusalem sinners to come to him and drink of the waters of life. He said to them, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing' (Matt 23:37). He is speaking to every single person in Jerusalem, to the Jews and Romans, to the corrupt chief priests and to the Sanhedrin, to the lame and blind, the prisoners and their guards. There is no one in the city that he is ignoring, and he says, 'How often I have longed to gather you together . . . but you were not willing.' Didn't he weep over them in his grief at seeing their obduracy and their resistance to his invitations, protesting, 'I would protect you from the enemy of your souls. Come to me for safety and security?' He tells his disciples that he longed to gather to himself the whole population of Jerusalem. That is the spirit he would see in all of them. Jesus is speaking as the God-man. He is not speaking simply as a Jew to his fellow-Jews. Behold the incarnate God, and he is showing us his heart and his longing to see all men saved.

Jesus is reflecting that earlier passionate prophet who was also filled with the Spirit of the Messiah and he too addressed the people of God in Jerusalem. I am thinking of Ezekiel and how he cried to the people, 'Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?' (Ezek 18:23). He repeats it more than once, saying on the second occasion, 'As surely as I live,

declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ezek 33:11). The Lord tells us that he has no delight in the destruction of the wicked. He does not at all desire the destruction of Judas, of Pilate, or of the mob that shouted, 'Crucify him!' Their judgment gives him no joy at all. What he wants is to see them turn from their ways and live. He pleads with them 'Turn!' he cries, and again, 'Turn from your evil ways!' (Ezek 33:11). He expostulates with them, 'Why will you die? Why would they choose death when he was urging them to live? I can say with all the authority God has given me that he desires all to turn from unbelief and come to him. He takes no pleasure in anyone's destruction. He sincerely pleads to take him as your Lord and Saviour. God desires to become your Sovereign Protector and for you to be safe under his wings.

What does God say through Isaiah, 'Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else' (Isa 45:22)? Here is an invitation. It is also a command. It is absolutely universal. No one is exempt from the invitation or the command to be saved in any part of the world. Peter in the New Testament says the same thing, that God, 'is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance' (2 Pet 3:9). You say that you believe in his decree to elect a great number of people to be saved. I too believe that, for that is what the Bible teaches. 'Then,' you say, 'that must rule out his universal longing for all to come to

him.' No! You don't appreciate the fullness and richness of the divine character. You must believe both these truths though they cannot be reconciled. That is a secret thing belonging to the Lord, but your life and the life of your church must function in terms of both, for humble looking to the God who loved you and chose you, and this same God who desires all the people who live where you live to turn and come to know the Lord for themselves. I am

**No one possesses a biblical theory that reconciles God's decree to save his elect with his longing that all should be saved.**

saying that God has an ardent desire that all men and women, boys and girls, should turn from their sins and entrust themselves to him. He pleads with them sincerely to do so and offers them his Son to be their Saviour. You are not to use God's eternal decrees as an excuse to refuse to come to him. You come to him.

No one possesses a biblical theory that reconciles God's decree to save his elect with his longing that all should be saved. That theory does not exist. It is a secret thing that belongs to God. We believe them both, and as we offer Christ to all men and women we believe that those on whom God's favour rests will most certainly put their trust in him. God's Word will not return to him void. I refuse to impose some logical system or some human philosophy or man-made theology on these two truths. I will not deny either one of them. I have no idea how these apparent contrary truths can be reconciled. I do not need to know the answer to that antinomy, but both of them are a constant source of comfort and strength to the church and will be for ever and ever. ■

*Dr Geoff Thomas served Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth for over 50 years until his retirement in 2016.*



# TRANSGENDER AGENDA

## AND HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RESPOND?

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

No-one can ignore the current demands for 'transsexual rights'.

Both the UK and Scottish Governments are expected to consult in the coming months on making 'changing sex' as easy as buying a TV licence.

Our instinctive reaction may be to assume that the demand for 'transsexual (or transgender) rights' is *mainly* about protecting a tiny minority of troubled people from unfair discrimination. But, *in reality*, the underlying ideology of 'gender identity' is toxic. Ultimately, it aims to legally eliminate male and female sex distinctions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Part of this article was delivered as a lecture at conferences held at London Seminary in 2016/17, and at Highfields Church, Cardiff, in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The Transgender Movement is a Vehicle for Censorship and State Power', Stella Morabito.net, 28 February 2016, see <http://stellamorabito.net/> as at 12 May 2017.

book will mean that 'Some children will realise their true identity is not the gender they were assigned at birth, and will choose to make a social transition to live as their true gender.'<sup>4</sup>

### Definitions

Throughout history there have been cases of (mostly) men who cross-dress for erotic stimulation, sometimes known as transvestites (the word was first coined in 1910).<sup>5</sup> This condition is not to be equated with transsexualism. Nor should homosexuality be confused with transsexualism. And the exceedingly rare biological intersex conditions are not to be confused with transsexualism either.<sup>6</sup>

Transsexuals are people who are biologically male or female (not intersex) but who believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex. What causes this condition? Dr Peter Saunders of the Christian Medical Fellowship in the UK writes:

'The mechanisms leading to transsexuality are incompletely understood but genetic, neurodevelopmental and psychosocial factors probably all contribute. Various theories exist and, as in the debate about homosexuality, their proponents tend to favour either nature (biology) or nurture (upbringing) ... It may well be that the causes are multifactorial and the

This ideology is now promoted in primary schools. *The Gender Fairy*, a story written for four year-olds, says: 'Only you know whether you are a boy or a girl. No-one can tell you.'<sup>3</sup> The author hopes that this

<sup>3</sup> Hurst, J, *The Gender Fairy* (Oban Road Publishing, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Hurst, J, *The Gender Fairy*, <http://www.thegenderfairy.com/> accessed 8 May 2017. Jo Hurst supported her six-year old son to 'socially transition' (use a female name, wear female clothes etc).

<sup>5</sup> The Guardian online, 2 June 2010, see <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jun/02/brief-history-transgender-issues> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>6</sup> van Gend, D, *Stealing from a Child: The Injustice of 'Marriage Equality'* (Connor Court Publishing, 2016), pages 173-176. Dr van Gend writes that 0.02% of babies are born with ambiguous genitalia; that is one in 5,000. The number is routinely exaggerated for political/ideological reasons, by including conditions which should not be included in the true 'intersex' category, such as Klinefelter syndrome, Turner syndrome, and late-onset adrenal hyperplasia.

combinations come from both nature and nurture.<sup>7</sup>

How common is this condition? 'Gender Recognition Certificates' are the mechanism in the United Kingdom for someone changing their legal sex. According to the most recent figures, just over 4,500 have been granted since 2005.<sup>8</sup>

True gender dysphoria is very rare. In 2016, K J Zucker et al wrote in the *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* that, although 'estimates vary widely', 'prevalence studies conclude that fewer than 1 in 10,000 adult natal males and 1 in 30,000 adult natal females experience [gender dysphoria].<sup>9</sup>

From the 1930s onwards, medical advances enabled doctors to 'treat' this condition by means of hormonal and surgical interventions.<sup>10</sup> It is possible, using hormone treatments and surgery, to transform a man into someone who looks like a woman and vice versa. The phrase 'sex-change surgery' is often used, but it is deceptive. No amount of surgery can truly change a man into a woman, or a woman into a man. But *appearance* can be changed quite effectively. And *names* can be changed very easily. An increasing number of countries have legislated to enable a complete identity change, offering changes to birth certificates and other documentation.

Since the 1980s, as the cause of transsexuals has been taken up as the

supposed last frontier of civil rights, there has been a deliberate conflation of those who have intersex conditions and those with other forms of what is described as 'gender variance', including the desire to cross-dress. The umbrella term 'transgender' has come to be preferred as a way of including all the different ways people experience or live out their 'gender identity' when there is any felt incongruence with their biological sex. The term transgender can imply an acceptance of 'gender fluidity' (the belief that it is inherently oppressive to divide people into two binary categories). In fact, the notion of 'gender fluidity' is a direct contradiction of the idea of 'transsexuality' – which involves a change of identity from one 'binary category' to the other.

Where did all this come from?

### The origins of Gender Theory

Certainly some ideas around masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. And of course, different men and women have a multiplicity of different gifts, aptitudes, and preferences. People do not all necessarily fit in with cultural stereotypes associated with masculinity and femininity at any given time. None of which proves that our fundamental understanding of humanity as male and female is socially constructed. But that is the central claim of gender theory.

Where and when did the concept of a division between 'sex' and 'gender' arise?

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) was a German doctor and campaigner for homosexual rights. He advanced the theory of 'a female soul in a man's body' in order to argue the case that homosexuality was innate (and should not be penalised).<sup>11</sup> At this time, the phrase 'sexual inversion' was used by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) to refer to homosexuals.<sup>12</sup> Male 'inverts' were thought to have a 'feminine soul in a male body'. This was the beginning of the idea that biological sex could be divided from the 'gendered experience'.

### The treatment of transsexualism

During the twentieth century the notion of transsexualism gained ground. Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956), a professional sexual 'researcher', produced the Kinsey Reports, which many believe sparked off the 'sexual revolution'. He aimed for the overthrow of all legislation which restricted sexual 'freedom'.<sup>13</sup> He cooperated with Dr Harry Benjamin (1885-1986). Benjamin introduced the term 'transsexual' in 1953, and wrote a book on the subject in 1966. He pioneered the idea that if someone was convinced they were living in the 'wrong' body, then the body should be 'fixed' to fit with what their mind said, rather than attempting to 'change their mind' to fit the biological facts. He provided patients with hormone treatment, and recruited other medical

colleagues to assist with surgery and other treatments.<sup>14</sup>

One of Harry Benjamin's colleagues was John Money (1921-2006). Like Kinsey and Benjamin, Money campaigned for the freedom to 'change gender'. Money was the co-founder of the John Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic, and he hit the headlines in America in 1966 with a ground-breaking case of a 'man who'd become a woman'.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, 'our sex is not a body part. It is inscribed into the DNA of every cell in our bodies'<sup>16</sup> and a male cannot be changed into a female. But Money was able to persuade many Americans that he'd managed to do just that. His most famous alleged success story related to a little boy, David Reimer, whose circumcision had gone wrong. Money persuaded David's parents to allow him to surgically change the child's genitalia to make him appear female, and he instructed them to bring the child up as a little girl. This did not end well. The child insisted, in the end, on affirming his true biological identity, but the systematic abuse received over many years from the doctor who was supposed to be caring for him meant that ultimately he committed suicide.<sup>17</sup>

In 1968, *Sex and Gender* by Robert J Stoller was published, arguing that 'sex' is biological (what we are born as), and

<sup>7</sup> Saunders, P, *The Doctor will see you now*, PRIMER, volume 3, page 68.

<sup>8</sup> Tribunals and gender recognition certificate statistics quarterly: April to June 2017, Ministry of Justice, 14 September 2017, table GRP 4.

<sup>9</sup> Zucker, K J, Lawrence, A A, and Kreukels, B P, *Gender Dysphoria in Adults*, Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12:217-247, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Britain's first Gender Identity Clinic opened in London in 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Person, E S, *The Sexual Century* (Yale University, 1999), pages 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis, H, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* (F A Davis Company, 1908), page 118.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, J H, *Alfred C. Kinsey: a public/private life* (W W Norton & Company, 1997), page xxi.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, H, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (The Julian Press, 1966), pages 8-9, 12, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Heyer, W, *Paper Genders: Pulling the Mask Off the Transgender Phenomenon* (Make Waves Publishing, 2011), pages 7-9.

<sup>16</sup> "Why You Should Stop Using the Word "Gender"", *The Federalist*, 31 May 2016, see <http://thefederalist.com/2016/05/31/why-you-should-stop-using-the-word-gender/> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>17</sup> van Gend, D, *Stealing from a Child: The Injustice of 'Marriage Equality'* (Connor Court Publishing, 2016), pages 152-153; "Sex-Change" Surgery: What Bruce Jenner, Dianne Sawyer and You Should Know", *Public Discourse*, 27 April 2015 see <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14905/> as at 12 May 2017.

'gender' is social (what we learn through socialisation),<sup>18</sup>

By the 1970s, as the ideas of postmodernism gained ground, reality itself came to be regarded as 'socially constructed'. What it meant to be male or female came to be seen as socially constructed as well. Radical feminists challenged the 'oppression' of sex roles, and some, such as Judith Butler, began questioning any distinctions between male and female.<sup>19</sup>

The transsexual cause underwent a setback during the 1970s. Dr Meyer and Professor Paul McHugh conducted a survey of 50 transsexuals who had been treated at the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic. Professor McHugh had been the senior psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins. He explained that those who had undergone 'sex reassignment' surgery were little improved in their psychological condition afterwards. He writes:

'Hopkins was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We psychiatrists, I thought, would do better to concentrate on trying to fix their minds and not their genitals.'<sup>20</sup>

The Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic stopped performing 'sex reassignment' operations, as did many university-based

gender clinics, but surgeons continued to perform these operations elsewhere.

### 'The Transgender Tipping Point'

Up to relatively recently, the ideology of gender fluidity would have seemed remote and alien to most people. But around three years ago the media began to focus on this issue relentlessly. *TIME magazine* named 2014 as the 'Transgender Tipping Point', where an ideology that had been largely restricted to academic departments and LGBT campaign groups hit the headlines.<sup>21</sup>

Family campaigner and academic Gabriele Kuby explains in *The Global Sexual Revolution* that this was no accident.<sup>22</sup> She points out that the gay rights movement had long since moved beyond the aim of removing legal penalties from homosexual practice. They were determined to abolish 'heteronormativity'; the very idea that the heterosexual union of man and woman is 'normal'.

As most people choose freely to live in heterosexual relationships, this would be an uphill task. In order to destroy the idea that these relationships are natural it would be necessary to capture the hearts and minds of children and adolescents, who are highly impressionable. Hence the drive to promote the false notion of gender fluidity among young people, whether by means of sex education or in the guise of

'anti-bullying' programmes, or through entertainment and social media. Many adults feel instinctively uneasy about this, but they are frightened to speak out, intimidated by the claim that objecting to gender fluidity implies 'discrimination' against transgender people.

Kuby's book also explains the global influence of the *Yogyakarta Principles* – a set of 'human rights' demands laid out by the delegates at a conference in Indonesia in 2006, and published in Geneva in 2007. The Principles listed the ways in which international human rights law should be applied to 'sexual orientation and gender identity'. They were non-binding, but they are often referred to as 'the gold standard' for 'equality' legislation. They define 'gender identity' like this:

UP TO  
RELATIVELY  
RECENTLY,  
THE IDEOLOGY  
OF GENDER  
FLUIDITY  
WOULD HAVE  
SEEMED  
REMOTE AND  
ALIEN TO MOST  
PEOPLE.

'Gender identity is understood to refer to each person's **deeply felt internal and individual experience** of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the **personal sense of the body** (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms [emphasis added].'<sup>23</sup>

Note that 'gender identity' is self-defined.

It is claimed that everyone has the right to be accepted by others in the 'gender identity' they choose, based on their subjective sense of themselves, separate from connection with biological sex. Internal 'experience' trumps what is presented as the arbitrary 'assignment' of biological sex at birth.

Yet, a comprehensive survey of the scientific evidence, published in 2016 in *The New Atlantis*, concluded:

'The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex – that a person might be 'a man trapped in a woman's body' or 'a woman trapped in a man's body' – is not supported by scientific evidence.'<sup>24</sup>

This survey was co-authored by two leading scholars on mental health and sexuality, and discussed over 200 peer-reviewed studies in the biological, psychological, and social sciences.

### Gender Identity Theory moves into the mainstream

Despite a lack of any scientific grounding, gender identity theory has become mainstream, and is increasingly being integrated into the legal and educational systems in a number of countries. There is pressure on all of us to accept people on

<sup>18</sup> Stoller, R J, *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (H Karmac [Books] Ltd, 1968), pages 9-10. Stoller further distinguished gender identity (personal awareness of belonging to one sex and not the other) from gender role (the behaviour one displays in society).

<sup>19</sup> Butler, J, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> 'Surgical Sex: Why we stopped doing sex change operations', First Things, November 2004, see <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex> as at 12 May 2017; 'Hopkins Hospital: a history of sex reassignment', *The Johns Hopkins News-Letter*, 1 May 2014, see <http://www.jhunewsletter.com/2014/05/01/hopkins-hospital-a-history-of-sex-reassignment-76004/> as at 16 May 2017.

<sup>21</sup> The Transgender Tipping Point', *TIME* online, 29 May 2014, see <http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Kuby, G, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (LifeSite, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> *The Yogyakarta Principles*, March 2007, page 6, see <http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles-en/> as at 16 May 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, L S and McHugh, P R, 'Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences', *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society*, 50, Fall 2016, page 8.

the basis of their 'deeply-felt internal and individual experience', and their 'personal sense of the body'. This 'deeply-felt experience' becomes a sufficient reason to be awarded a change in legal status. And there are demands for access to spaces designated as 'women-only' or 'men-only' for anyone who 'identifies' with that sex, regardless of their bodily attributes or appearance.

As of 2017, legislation allowing people to change legal sex has been passed in countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Uruguay, Argentina, Denmark, Malta, Colombia, Iceland, Vietnam, Ecuador, Bolivia, Norway and France.<sup>25</sup> In such countries, a man can legally take a female name, be given a new birth certificate, and be treated for all legal purposes as a woman (or vice versa). In some of these countries, there is no requirement for such a person to undergo any medical treatment at all (such as hormonal treatment or surgical 'reassignment'). That means that a physically normal man can demand to be recognised as a woman with free access to all women-only facilities.

Whether or not countries have passed such laws, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) want children in all countries to receive 'comprehensive sexuality education' (CSE).<sup>26</sup> The United Nations puts pressure on member states to adopt CSE, and so children in some of the most socially conservative countries are exposed to teaching which tells them they have the right to experience 'sexual pleasure' whenever and however they wish (as long as the other person consents), *and that they have the right to choose their own sexual orientation and 'gender identity'*. Young people in many countries have been exposed to the central claim of gender ideology: *that we are free to choose our own 'gender'*. This idea is celebrated and romanticised in films, and promoted on social media.

But this idea directly contradicts biblical truth. Advocates of 'transgender rights' are aware of this, and want to silence the testimony of conservative Bible-teaching churches, using legislation that outlaws challenge to the trans agenda. In Canada, Bill C-16 became law in June 2017. It adds 'gender identity and gender expression' to the list of 'prohibited grounds' of

discrimination.<sup>27</sup> That means that any questioning of a person's claims to identify as the opposite sex will be classed as 'hate speech'.<sup>28</sup> Penalties will be exacted from any who 'mis-gender' others, or who refuse to use 'gender neutral' pronouns. This poses an unprecedented challenge to freedom of speech and expression. It will directly impact churches and parents as they seek to teach the biblical truth: 'male and female he created them'.

### A false vocabulary

If you control the language you control the debate. Here are four words or phrases which are slippery and tendentious, and which we should resist using except in so far as we need to explain the views of others:

#### 'Gender identity'

Stonewall's definition of 'gender identity': 'Everyone has a gender identity. This is the gender that someone feels they are. This might be the same as the gender they were given as a baby, but it might not. They might feel like they are a different gender, or they might not feel like a boy or a girl.'<sup>29</sup>

There are plenty of non-Christians as well as Christians who recognise this as nonsense. For example, Rebecca Reilly-Cooper, non-Christian philosopher at Warwick University, responds:

'If we take an individual's self-declared

gender identity as the sole necessary and sufficient condition for membership in a gender class, the result is that the meaning of the word 'woman' is reduced to a subjective mental state, to a feeling in a person's head. The only answer to the question 'what is a woman?' becomes 'a person who feels like a woman'. But this is an entirely circular definition that tells us nothing about what a woman is.'<sup>30</sup>

#### 'Assigned' at birth

This phrase conjures up an image of a midwife maliciously and randomly putting a sinister label on an innocent infant. Rebecca Reilly-Cooper comments:

'Correctly identifying the genitals that a child possesses and therefore the biological sex to which they belong is not a matter of "assigning gender" to the child; it is simply to recognise the biological facts and to give them the correct biological label.'<sup>31</sup>

#### 'Transphobia'

An anti-bullying charity, Galop, defines 'transphobia':

'Transphobia is an intolerance of people whose appearance or behaviour challenges gender expectations and norms. An example of a non-criminal expression of this is purposely using the wrong male or female pronouns to refer to trans people.'<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Table of Gender Recognition Systems in Approved Countries and Territories Under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, HM Courts and Tribunals Services, 2011, see [http://hmctsformfinder.justice.gov.uk/HMCTS/GetLeaflet.do?court\\_leaflets\\_id=4521](http://hmctsformfinder.justice.gov.uk/HMCTS/GetLeaflet.do?court_leaflets_id=4521) as at 16 May 2017; 'Rights in Transition: Making Legal Recognition for Transgender People a Global Priority', *Human Rights Watch*, 2016, see <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/rights-in-transition> as at 16 May 2017; 'Bolivia Approves Progressive Law Recognising Transgender Rights', *teleSUR*, 21 May 2015, see <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Bolivia-Approves-Progressive-Law-Recognizing-Transgender-Rights-20160521-0018.html> as at 16 May 2017; 'Vietnam: Positive Step for Transgender Rights', *Human Rights Watch*, 30 November 2015, see <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/30/vietnam-positive-step-transgender-rights> as at 16 May 2017; 'Ecuadorian Lawmakers Approve New Gender Identity Bill', *teleSUR*, 11 December 2015, see <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Ecuadorian-Lawmakers-Approve-New-Gender-Identity-Law-20151211-0001.html> as at 16 May 2017; 'It's official - France adopts a new legal gender recognition procedure!', *ILGA-Europe*, 12 October 2016, see <http://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/france-adopts-new-legal-gender-recognition-procedure> as at 16 May 2017.

<sup>26</sup> 'Comprehensive sexuality education', *United Nations Population Fund*, see <http://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education> as at 16 May 2017; 'Education', *International Planned Parenthood Federation*, see <http://www.ippf.org/our-approach/services/education> as at 16 May 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Bill C-16, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Jordan B Peterson, 'Fear and the Law', 27 September 2016, see <https://youtu.be/fvPgjg201w0> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>29</sup> *Getting Started: A toolkit for preventing and tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in primary schools* (Stonewall, 2016), page 4.

<sup>30</sup> 'Trans Issues and Gender Identity', *Sex and Gender: A Beginner's Guide*, see <https://sexandgenderintro.com/trans-issues-and-gender-identity/> as at 20 September 2017.

<sup>31</sup> 'Sex', *Sex and Gender: A Beginner's Guide*, see <https://sexandgenderintro.com/> as at 20 September 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Galop, 'Tackling Transphobia: A Guide for Safety Services', see <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Tackling-Transphobia-A-Guide-for-Safety-Services.pdf> as at 22 September 2017.

Note that here 'disagreement' with gender identity theory is equated with 'intolerance' which is equated with 'phobia'. The clear implication is that it is hateful, bigoted, even evil, to disagree with gender identity theory.

### 'Cisgender'

Used to mean a non-transgendered person. American commentator Stella Morabito:

'Cisgender is a totally weaponized term that forces even more de-sexing in society. It's also a pejorative term that is supposed to mean that your mind just so happens to allow your "assigned sex" to exist alongside your "gender identity".'<sup>33</sup>

### How should churches respond?

#### 1. We need to provide biblical teaching about God's good purpose in creating men and women.

Our congregations need to be equipped to respond to the demands for 'transgender rights' with scriptural truth.<sup>34</sup> The transsexual maintains that their felt 'gender' overrides biological reality. But our creation design teaches us that God has made us male and female to reflect his glory in every age. This foundational creation reality is transcultural and a-temporal. Scripture simply will not allow the false split between sex and so-called 'gender'.

The supposed split between the 'real you' and the 'appearance of your body'

has been described as a new form of Gnosticism. It divides your mind from the physical reality of the body. It says that your thoughts can overrule the physical facts. In New Testament times, this heresy claimed that Jesus may have risen from the dead spiritually, but not physically. Gnosticism divides what God has united. We are made as 'whole' people. Our body, our mind and our spirit or soul are not to be divided or played off against each other. God specifically designs and determines our body. It reflects his intent. It is not irrelevant (Ps 139:13-14; Jer 1:5). God deliberately created male and female as different and interdependent (Gen 2:18; 21-24), and he prohibits the blurring of the distinction between the sexes (Deut 22:5).

The biblical position is that it is not possible to 'change sex'. Whatever temptation a person faces, they should not embrace the lifestyle of the opposite sex. Treating every individual with true compassion and respect means staying true to God's revealed will in all pastoral care and interaction.

In recent years the medical term 'gender dysphoria' has been used to describe the condition experienced by transsexuals. If 'gender dysphoria' simply describes a person's discontent with their biological sex, then that is non-controversial. However, recent definitions of 'gender dysphoria' increasingly embrace the false notion of 'gender identity' as something in conflict with biological sex.<sup>35</sup>

There are various reasons why an individual may feel a measure of unease with their biological sex. Some of those reasons (for example childhood trauma) may involve having been sinned against, rather than deliberately sinning. But assuming the identity of someone of the opposite sex does involve sin; medical interventions, whether hormone treatments or surgery, are to be rejected. It is absolutely wrong to encourage children to 'change sex'.

As we teach God's good design for men and women, we should avoid over-exaggerated stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which are cultural, not biblical. Yes, we believe that the complementary qualities of male and female are designed by God and mirror deeper realities within God himself. But superficial cultural expectations can be enforced in an unhelpful way. For example, just because a little boy is unusually artistic and gentle does not mean that he should be pushed into thinking of himself as homosexual or transsexual. A little girl may be sporty and tomboyish, but that doesn't mean that she should be pushed into identifying as lesbian or 'trans'. Behaviours that would have been accepted as within the normal range even a few years ago (girls wanting to play boys' games or boys not wanting to engage in rough and tumble games) are now being interpreted as 'gender confusion'. This defies common sense.

WE BELIEVE THAT THE COMPLEMENTARY QUALITIES OF MALE AND FEMALE ARE DESIGNED BY GOD AND MIRROR DEEPER REALITIES WITHIN GOD HIMSELF.

### 2. Be aware of the pressures on young people.

We need to understand some of the different factors that lie behind someone experiencing gender confusion.

The breakdown of the family has had devastating consequences. Fewer children experience the unbroken stability of

their own two natural parents staying together and with them throughout their developing years. Consequently, fewer have stable role models of mother/father and positive role models of healthy masculinity and femininity. We live in a time when there are no moral absolutes and the old certainties are being rejected.

Certainly our culture's distorted approaches to masculinity and femininity must play a part. The radical

feminist movement professed to abhor stereotypes, but campaigned for women to 'enjoy' exactly the same sexual freedoms as men, and so directly contributed to the 'sexualisation' of culture. Girls are judged relentlessly by appearance. If they don't relish the prospect of being sexually available to men from an unnaturally early age they are mocked as prudish virgins. If they don't want to engage in hours of expensive beauty maintenance and starve themselves to be unnaturally thin, they may be dismissed as ugly, or even labelled as lesbian. Some may conclude that if being a successful girl must mean looking and behaving like a porn star, they'd rather not be girls at all.

<sup>33</sup> 'Why You Should Stop Using the Word 'Gender'', *The Federalist*, see <http://thefederalist.com/2016/05/31/why-you-should-stop-using-the-word-gender/> as at 20 September 2017.

<sup>34</sup> A good resource for this is Shaw, D. ed., *True To Form - Primer Issue 3*, FIEC, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> NHS website: "Gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there's a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity." See <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/Pages/Introduction.aspx> as at 16 May 2017.

In our over-sexualised culture, there is almost as much pressure on young men to present an idealised male body. If a boy is smaller than average or bad at sport, he too may be bullied and cruelly mocked by children as being effeminate. Worse, if a boy has negative male role models in his own life, or if he has been exposed to violent pornography, he may associate masculinity with violence, and decide that he doesn't want to be male at all.<sup>36</sup>

While there are challenges and tragedies as a result of these pressures on young people, this situation does give us a great opportunity to share the good news of God's good design for all human beings. We are not chance collections of atoms. Every human being is created in the image of God, and to be treated with dignity and respect. Our identity is not to be understood in terms of 'feeling', but in terms of 'calling'. God has called us to live either as men or women, and his calling meshes with the way that he has created us. We don't underestimate the challenge that it will be for some to live out that calling, but long-term, to 'choose' an identity contrary to our created reality will only cause deeper distress.

### 3. We need to understand the current claims of the trans agenda, and ensure

<sup>36</sup> We need to understand the massive role social media play in promoting these stereotypes and the transgender cause. A lengthy article in the New Yorker (sympathetic to the trans viewpoint) is helpful in describing the peer pressure on young people to embrace the trans agenda: 'About a Boy: Transgender surgery at 16', Margaret Talbot, *The New Yorker*, 18 March 2013.

<sup>37</sup> 'I was a Transgender Woman', Public Discourse, 1 April 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14688/> as at 12 May 2017.

### that our congregations know where to access helpful resources on this issue.

It would be wise to provide some opportunity (for example an extra meeting) where church members are given the biblical teaching on God's good design for men and women, an overview of the current challenge and information about resources.

Every human being is created in the image of God, and to be treated with dignity and respect. Our identity is not to be understood in terms of 'feeling', but in terms of 'calling'.

Using personal testimonies is helpful. Walt Heyer is a Christian author who has written extensively on this, arguing that real compassion must involve telling the truth that it is not in reality possible to change sex. Heyer experienced gender confusion himself, and underwent both hormonal and surgical 'reassignment'. He lived as a woman for a number of years, but once he became a Christian he was convicted that he was called to live as a man, as God intended.<sup>37</sup> He has written

an autobiographical novel, *Kid Dakota and the Secret at Grandma's House*. His book *Paper Genders* gives a devastating critique of the pioneers of transsexual theory and sex reassignment medication and surgery.

Heyer now coordinates a ministry called 'Sex Change Regret'. He argues that 'changing sex' is short-term gain with long-term pain. Its consequences include early mortality, regret, mental illness, and suicide.<sup>38</sup> He argues that when children

and young people seem to exhibit 'gender dysphoria', there are often other psychological issues and traumas that should be addressed first.<sup>39</sup> Heyer argues that people suffering in this way should be treated with respect and love, but that ultimately it is not loving to endorse a lie and push them towards unnecessary and destructive surgery.<sup>40</sup>

Denise Shick leads a ministry called *Help 4 Families*, for families with transgender members.<sup>41</sup> She herself experienced the trauma of a father who 'transitioned'. When she was just nine years-old her dad sat down with her and told her that he wanted to become a woman. She writes: 'I lost my dad that day.' For the rest of her childhood and adolescence, he routinely helped himself to her clothing, and, increasingly, abused her. Denise found refuge in alcohol and boyfriends, and was considering drugs, when God intervened.<sup>42</sup> Since then, she has devoted her life to ministry with individuals and families caught up in gender confusion. Her collection of testimonies, *Understanding Gender Confusion*, offers vivid insights into this condition.<sup>43</sup> Denise now believes that God's truth can bring healing into the most damaged lives, and has written a helpful book of *Questions and Answers for Families*.

Keith Tiller is a Christian with a testimony

of having been released from deep gender confusion. He now runs the ministry, *Parakaleo*, for Bible-believing Christians who want advice on these issues.<sup>44</sup>

### 4. We must be prepared to extend love and compassion towards those who may be struggling with gender confusion.

The trans-affirming movement insists that human dignity is only respected when we accept the premise that we are autonomous (on the basis that there is no creator God, so we can determine who we are and how we live).

In fact, human dignity is only respected when we understand that we are made by God, and *in the image* of God. We must be careful even in casual conversation not to joke about, mock, or belittle people with this condition.

When a transsexual person walks into our church, we see them as a human being, made by God, with eternal significance and worth. We are to treat everyone with civility and respect. Ultimately we must respect them too much to go along with the lie of 'gender change'. Christ-like compassion will always be based on truth. The central point at issue is that a man cannot become a woman or vice versa. But that doesn't mean we abandon basic courtesy and kindness.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Mail Online*, 26 January 2015, see <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2921528/The-man-s-TWO-sex-changes-Incredible-story-Walt-Laura-REVERSED-operation-believes-surgeons-quick-operate.html> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>40</sup> 'I was just like the 'trans' 9-year-old in National Geographic, Now I know it's pure fantasy', *Lifesitenews*, 12 January 2017, see <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/a-nine-year-old-boy-is-spreading-a-contagion-of-mass-delusion-as-at-17-May-2017>.

<sup>41</sup> 'About us', *Help4Families*, see <http://www.help4families.com/statements-of-faith-and-doctrine> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>42</sup> 'When My Father Told Me He Wanted to Be a Woman', *Public Discourse*, 27 March 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/03/14661/> as at 19 September 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Shick, D, *Understanding Gender Confusion: A Faith-based Perspective* (Help4Families Press, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> 'People', *Parakaleo*, see <http://parakaleo.co.uk/people/> as at 17 May 2017.

Our churches need to 'be family' in terms of providing a loving community for those who, for whatever reason, may be struggling with this, or any other deeply troubling issues. Rosaria Butterfield gives eloquent testimony to the part that a loving church community played in her own conversion. She had been persuaded of the rightness of the LGBT cause, and was content living with her lesbian partner, but a caring and compassionate pastor and his wife extended love and concern, while never compromising on God's truth.<sup>45</sup>

We need to be alert to the fact that many professing Evangelicals now believe that personal experience is an authority alongside Scripture. Just as many Evangelicals have, over the past fifty years, 'accommodated' homosexuality, so now there is intense pressure to 'accommodate' transsexuality.

Perhaps the most comprehensive work to date from an Evangelical publishing house, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, is based on listening to the testimonies of transsexuals who profess to be Christians. Mark Yarhouse accepts that Scripture teaches that the ideal would

be for everyone to live according to their biological sex. But, in a fallen world, he believes that those who suffer extreme dysphoria may need to be accommodated, in order to manage their distress.

According to Dr Yarhouse, this may involve accepting them as the sex they believe themselves to be, and recognising the need for medical intervention in some cases.<sup>46</sup> (I have serious reservations about this book and hope to publish a detailed review shortly.)

**Christ-like compassion will always be based on truth. The central point at issue is that a man cannot become a woman or vice versa. But that doesn't mean we abandon basic courtesy and kindness.**

There is huge pressure from the culture, and even from within the Evangelical church, to accept and affirm individuals' own claims about their identity, especially if they are clearly suffering deep anguish. But, as in every pastoral interaction, true compassion has to be

grounded in God's good design for humanity. Our Creator has revealed his will for human flourishing. Testimonies from those who transition and then, sometimes many years later, regret it, point to the false compassion of affirming transition. They agree that when someone in the church affirmed their transition, it provided the euphoria of acceptance. Yet, deep down, peace with God was not going to be found until truth was confronted.<sup>47</sup>

So we need to help young people to see that holding onto the truth in this and every area is the most compassionate response.

Encouraging church members to address persons with gender confusion as the sex that they are not (ie using preferred names and pronouns) will, in many cases, mean the silencing of the conscience of believers, a conscience informed by Scripture. God's moral law tells us that we must always speak the truth. To force people to speak a lie is a terrible thing.

And affirming people in their false perception of their own identity, will only lead to further confusion about sex and gender.<sup>48</sup>

### **5. It is wise to update our church constitutions and doctrinal statements to clarify the biblical belief in the immutability of our created identity as male or female.**

A church whose doctrinal position on this is clearly laid down is better protected against potential hostile discrimination claims than one which does not have a clear positional statement. As well as updating the doctrinal statement and constitution, a church is better protected if they have a clear membership policy, a clearly defined marriage policy, and a clearly defined employment policy.

Activists could come to your church with

hostile intent. They may use this issue as a way of attacking what they regard as 'hateful' biblical teaching. They could threaten legal action if, for example, they are denied access to the toilets (rest rooms/bathrooms) or access to the single-sex meetings of their 'assumed' gender. But an individual cannot so easily take personal offence if it can be demonstrated that this is the established position of this particular church.

Churches in the UK could contact *The Christian Institute* if advice is needed. Churches in the US could consult Denny Burk's *How to protect your Church*.<sup>49</sup> If churches in South Africa face difficulty, they could consult *Freedom of Religion, South Africa*,<sup>50</sup> those in Australia the *Australian Christian Lobby*.<sup>51</sup> *Family First New Zealand*<sup>52</sup> is linked with *Ask Me First* (a project to protect the privacy of women and girls).<sup>53</sup>

### **6. It is helpful to be prepared ahead of time with regard to how to respond.**

Stewards in church services, or those on the welcome team, may want to think through how to give a warm welcome to transsexual people, but also to be aware of issues relating to use of public conveniences. If possible, it is wise, in addition to men's lavatories and ladies' lavatories, to also have a clearly visible accessible, separate, single toilet which can be used by both men and women.

<sup>45</sup> Butterfield, R, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Crown and Covenant, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Yarhouse, M, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (IVP, 2015), pages 12, 150, 154. Robert Gagnon provides a helpful review here: 'How should Christians respond to the Transgender phenomenon?' *First Things*, 16 October 2015, see <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/09/how-should-christians-respond-to-the-transgender-phenomenon> accessed 6 March 2016. David Shaw provides a thoughtful review here: <https://primerhq.com/issue-03/navigating-a-major-resource/> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Some helpful testimonies can be found in Shick, D (Ed.) *Understanding Gender Confusion: A Faith-based Perspective* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014). See also *Sex Change Regret*, [www.sexchangeregret.com/](http://www.sexchangeregret.com/), a website for support of those who have transitioned and later regret it.

<sup>48</sup> Shick, D, *Transgender Confusion: A Biblical Based Q & A for Families* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), pages 32-37.

<sup>49</sup> 'How to protect your church against sexual orientation and gender identity lawsuits', Denny Burk, 25 June 2015, see <http://www.dennyburk.com/how-to-protect-your-church-against-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-lawsuits-eric/> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>50</sup> See [www.forsa.org.za](http://www.forsa.org.za).

<sup>51</sup> See [www.acl.org.au/](http://www.acl.org.au/).

<sup>52</sup> See <https://www.familyfirst.org.nz/>.

<sup>53</sup> See <http://askmefirst.nz/resources/>.

## 7. We must not be naïve.

The tragic reality is that there are sexual predators who have used the legal rights afforded to transsexuals in order to pose as a transsexual person in order to gain access to female-only facilities to abuse girls and women.<sup>54</sup> We should be especially vigilant about protecting young children in everyday life (for example, ensuring they do not use toilets unaccompanied if there is any possible threat to their safety).

## 8. We must seek to protect children from harmful ideology and harmful interventions.

We should grieve over the way that the minds of children and young people are being poisoned against God the Creator. As Christian parents we need to be ensuring that we teach our children about God's good and wise design for men and women. *The Ology: Ancient Truths Ever New* is a beautifully produced picture and story book presenting a systematic theology for children, with an accompanying CD including the chorus:

*'We are the image of the God of all the world  
He made us boys, He made us girls  
Different pieces of the puzzle  
Joined together perfectly  
We are just the way God wanted us to be.'*<sup>55</sup>  
That of course is now deeply politically incorrect! But it is true.

On a wider level, we need to present the case for protecting children from dogmatic presentations of the 'gospel' of gender fluidity, which can only serve to confuse them. We should argue strongly against endorsing the 'social transition'<sup>56</sup> of pre-pubescent children. Glen Stanton writes:

'It is well-established today that the overwhelming majority of such children – from 75 to 98% – who experience gender dysphoria grow out of it by the time they reach puberty. It is not inborn. Thus, the leading clinics seeing such children – such as those in Canada and the Netherlands – do not recommend parents and schools facilitate gender changes in such children for various reasons. The push in culture today to embrace and affirm such children's wishes is founded more upon a political ideology than it is in careful science and experience.'<sup>57</sup>

We need to argue strongly against allowing children and young people to be subjected to medical interventions that are dangerous both physically and psychologically. To intervene medically is unnecessary and unwise.<sup>58</sup> Under-age youngsters are not mature enough to make such momentous choices and decisions.<sup>59</sup> As we noted earlier, Walt Heyer writes:

'Changing genders is short-term gain with long-term pain. Its consequences include

early mortality, regret, mental illness, and suicide. Instead of encouraging them to undergo unnecessary and destructive surgery, let's affirm and love our young people just the way they are.'<sup>60</sup>

Parents are often put under huge pressure to affirm their children in an expressed desire to 'change sex', and threatened with the prospect of their child being likely to commit suicide if thwarted in their wishes: 'would you prefer your child happy or dead?'<sup>61</sup> Walt Heyer turns that around by arguing that those who transition are still often likely to commit suicide.<sup>62</sup> And the statistics sometimes used to blackmail parents have recently been shown to be spurious.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

God has put us here, in this culture, at this time, for such a time as this. Some Evangelicals take the route of simply 'preaching the gospel' (defined in the narrowest possible way), and remaining

silent over contentious issues. But this means we will fail to protect children and young people from a dangerous lie, and that we will fail to engage with people who have been deceived by the claims of gender theory.

We could refuse to engage with anyone with problems. But that is not Christ's way. In the coming days, this will be a 'frontline' issue for Bible-believing Christians. It may not be long before gendered speech (use of terms man/woman/boy/girl etc) is regarded as hate speech. There may be pressure to censor sermons. There will be resistance to teaching children God's design for men and women. There will be huge free speech implications.

We need to be informed, wise, compassionate and courageous. Above all, we need to be prayerful. ■

*Dr Sharon James works for The Christian Institute*

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COMPASSIONATE  
AND  
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<sup>54</sup> Jane Williams, 'Women: Decide for Yourselves', March 12 2016, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzwMJAFLtQ&feature=youtu.be> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Machowski M, *The Ology: Ancient Truths Ever New* (New Growth Press, 2015); See <http://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/just-the-way-god-wanted-us-to-be/> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>56</sup> That is, affirming their 'self' identity as a member of the opposite sex, endorsing a change of name, allowing changes in sex-distinct hair styles and clothes, and even endorsing hormonal treatment and surgery.

<sup>57</sup> Stanton, G, *Boys, Girls, Other: Making Sense of the Confusing New World of Gender Identity* (Family First New Zealand, 2015), page 6, see <http://askmefirst.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Boys-Girls-Other-FULL-REPORT.pdf> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>58</sup> McHugh, P, 'Transgender Surgery isn't the Solution', *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014, <https://couragerc.org/wp-content/uploads/TransgenderSurgery.pdf> as at 12 May 2017. For medical risks of hormone treatment see Phelan, J E, 'Dangers of Hormone Treatments' in Shick, D, *Understanding Gender Confusion: A Faith Based Perspective* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), pages 20-24; and the chapter 'Transgender Children' in Heyer, W, *Paper Genders*, pages 25-45.

<sup>59</sup> 'Too young to cross a street but old enough for a sex change', *WORLD*, 4 May 2017, see [https://world.wng.org/2017/05/too\\_young\\_to\\_cross\\_a\\_street\\_but\\_old\\_enough\\_for\\_a\\_sex\\_change](https://world.wng.org/2017/05/too_young_to_cross_a_street_but_old_enough_for_a_sex_change) as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>60</sup> 'I was a Transgender Woman', *Public Discourse*, 1 April 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14688/> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>61</sup> 'The trans agenda is undermining parents', *Spiked*, 31 October 2016, see <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/the-trans-agenda-is-undermining-parents/18931#.WRxetYjyuUk> as at 17 May 2017; The Guardian online, 13 November 2016, see <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/13/transgender-children-the-parents-and-doctors-on-the-frontline> as at 17 May 2017.

<sup>62</sup> '50 Years of Sex Changes, Mental Disorders, and Too Many Suicides', *Public Discourse*, February 2016, see <http://winst.us7.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=776f667a54759f3894cdd0eee&id=d083940a0c&e=a124a06b84> as at 12 May 2017.

<sup>63</sup> 'A Scientist Reviews Transgender Suicide Stats', *Transgender Trend*, 3 December 2016, see <https://www.transgendertrend.com/a-scientist-reviews-transgender-suicide-stats/> as at 12 May 2017. This article challenges the statistics used by Mermaids, a lobby group which encourages children to be free to change sex, and threatens parents who resist with the prospect of their child committing suicide.

## Organisations

Parakaleo <http://parakaleo.co.uk/>

Help 4 Families <http://help4families.com/>

Sex Change Regret [www.sexchangeregret.com/](http://www.sexchangeregret.com/)

Transgender Trend, a group of 'parents questioning the trans narrative' (not a Christian group) <https://www.transgendertrend.com/>

## Briefings

Christian Institute Briefing Transsexualism <http://www.christian.org.uk/resource/transsexualism-briefing/>

The Christian Institute, [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk), has a briefing for parents, available on request: Radical Gender Ideology: Protect your Child.

Sharon James, 'Are We all Omnigender Now?' <http://www.affinity.org.uk/downloads/The%20Bulletin/32.1-are-we-all-omnigender-now.pdf>

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Heyer, W, *Paper Genders: Pulling the Mask Off the Transgender Phenomenon* (Make Waves Publishing, 2011).

Heyer, W, *Kid Dakota and the Secret at Grandma's House* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

Kuby, G, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (LifeSite, 2015).

Mohler, A, *We Cannot Be Silent* (Nelson, 2015).

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Shick, D, *Transgender Confusion: A Biblical Based Q & A For Families* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

Stanton, G, *Boys, Girls, Other: Making Sense of the Confusing New World of Gender Identity* (Family First New Zealand, 2015), see <http://askmefirst.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Boys-Girls-Other-FULL-REPORT.pdf>.

DAVID MAGOWAN

# WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GENDER



## Introduction

Within the space of a few years, we have all become familiar with the word 'transgender'. Transgender refers to someone who sees their gender identity as different from their birth sex. Transgender is different from intersex, which is when someone is born with ambiguous sex characteristics or anatomy; with transgender, the person's biological sex is not in doubt.



Reformed Baptist Fellowship youth conference held recently in India

Transgender is top of the social agenda and is being normalised at an incredible speed. The unquestioning acceptance and positive affirmation of people wanting to change their gender is now part of the cultural air we breathe. People share their experiences of gender transitioning on radio phone-ins; programmes on television and feature-length films present personal stories of people struggling with their gender identity; legislation is being passed to prevent transgender discrimination; advice is being given on how to use personal pronouns to ensure gender neutrality.

As Christians, we are deeply concerned at the speed and the direction in which society is moving morally. On issues such as transgender, we feel pressurised, even bullied, either to accept these moral changes, promoted under the banner of equality and diversity, or to remain silent.

But the church has a responsibility to articulate clearly and compassionately what the Bible teaches about gender, even though we may be denounced as intolerant and judgmental and lacking in love, and accused of transphobia. If the church remains silent on gender issues, then we ourselves, and others, will simply soak up the atheistic humanistic worldview around us.

For many people in church congregations, transgender is not just an issue out there in wider society. They work alongside someone who is transgender or study with transgender students. Maybe a family member is transgender. Perhaps they have transgender feelings themselves.

We need wisdom and grace to respond biblically and compassionately to issues such as transgender that are being actively promoted by popular culture, and to people who are transgender.

### How we got to where we are today

In the book *A Better Story* (IVP, 2016) Glynn Harrison identifies major shifts in thinking that have taken place over the last few decades that have brought us to where we find ourselves today. Then, he encourages us, as Christians, to tell a better story about human identity and human sexuality.

The first major societal shift is the growth of personal individualism. We live now in an age where individual choice is king. Society says, 'Be yourself – follow your heart, pursue your dreams, do what you want to do, be whoever you want to be. Don't be restricted or suffocated by the expectations of others or by the moral standards of the past. Live in freedom. Anything goes as long as everyone consents and nobody gets hurt.'

Society encourages individuals to discover who they really are, to choose who they want to be, to create their own identity, and people are told that nobody else has the right to question another person's self-definition. Vaughan Roberts, in his book *Transgender* (The Good Book Company, 2016), refers to us living in i-world – a world where everything revolves around the individual. But it seems that the extensive freedom of individualism has only left many people feeling lost, asking questions such as 'Who am I? Who do I want to be? Who should I choose to be?' Faced with so many options, we live in an age of identity confusion.

The second major societal shift is the dominance of feelings over thoughts. These days we are governed less by what we think and more by what we feel. Increasingly, people respond emotionally rather than cognitively to moral issues. We are ruled more by our hearts than by our heads. What we feel about something carries more weight than what we think about something. We respond instinctively. Our hearts are easily captured by emotive personal stories in magazines or on television or in film or circulating on social media. We decide what is right by what feels right to us.

The third major societal shift, and this is most significant, is the abandonment of a theistic and biblical worldview. Atheistic science has displaced creationism as the widely accepted means to explain the origins of the universe and the origins of humanity. It seems that there is no room for God or no need for God. Humanity has grown up. We understand so much more today about how the world works; we can change and modify nature; we no longer need a divine being to tell us what to do, or to define us – or so we think. Society has dethroned God and enthroned self. We define ourselves; we make ourselves what we want to be. We regard our bodies not as the product of divine design but simply as a collection of chemicals and constituent parts that can be changed and adapted as we like.

Putting those three major shifts together: if we have no sense of accountability to anyone other than ourselves, and if our inner feelings are the most important voice for us to heed, and if we think our bodies are not that important and we

can change and modify them; then if you think you are not the gender you were born as, and if adopting a new name and cross-dressing is not enough to satisfy your gender dysphoria (distress), why not change your body to reflect the gender you want to be? Why not pump your body full of hormones to stimulate the enhancement of the characteristics of the other sex, such as facial hair to be more manly, or bigger breasts to be more womanly? Why not undergo surgery to alter your genitalia?

We live now in an age where, rather than change our minds to correspond and conform with our bodies, we change our bodies to correspond and conform with our minds.

But it is important to realise that, even with hormone therapy or sex-reassignment surgery, the person still remains biologically the sex they were born as. These changes are only external and superficial – they simply synchronise the outward appearance with the inner perception of gender.

### What does the Bible say about gender?

Genesis 1 teaches us that God brought the whole universe into being. There is a God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all being. This is God's world – designed and created and ruled over by him. And what is true of the universe and the earth as a whole is true also of humanity.

#### Genesis 1:26-28

*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the*

air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

Humanity was created by God. We are not on the throne of our lives – God is king over us, whether or not we recognise his existence or his rule.

God fashioned and formed the human body – God built us, and we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14). As God's workmanship, our bodies are important and have value; our bodies are an essential part of our true selves. Yes – we have souls (an inner being), but our physical bodies are not simply worthless packaging for the soul. Our bodies are divinely designed, and are to be treated with respect. In 1 Corinthians 6:20, we are told to honour God with our bodies.

Genesis 1:27 tells us two things about humanity.

Firstly, we are told in Genesis 1:27 that humanity was created in the image of God: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'

To be created in God's image means that human beings exhibit something of God's nature which is not true of the other living creatures God has made.

There is much discussion about how exactly humanity bears the image of God.

The image of God is seen in humanity's rationality (the ability to think and reason), in humanity's creativity (our inventiveness and resourcefulness), in humanity's morality (our conscience, our sense of right and wrong), in humanity's sociability (the need for relationship – wanting to love and to be loved – we are made for friendship and community), and in humanity's spirituality (seeking purpose and meaning beyond what is physical and visible – a sense of eternity).

But the image of God is seen also in the roles that are given by God to humanity. Human beings are to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to rule over the other living creatures, and to take care of creation. In all these tasks, we see the image of God reflected.

Secondly, we are told in Genesis 1:27 that humanity was created as male and female: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'

Today a distinction is drawn between

gender and biological sex. It is said that gender is what you feel inside, and that it is fluid, not fixed; whereas sex is what you physically are. But the Bible makes no distinction between gender and biological sex. The Bible presents gender as binary – you are either male or female. Your gender is defined by anatomy, chromosomes (XY for male and XX for female), and sex hormones (testosterone for male and oestrogen for female). Biologically, genetically, and biochemically human beings are either male or female. People can be born with an intersex condition, where their sex is ambiguous – but that's rare.

According to the Bible, men and women are different by God's design. But what is God's purpose behind this gendered difference? Why is humanity male and female?

One of the elements of the creation mandate given to humanity by God (Gen 1:28) was to be fruitful and increase in number, to fill the earth and subdue it.

For humanity to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth requires children to be conceived and born, and that requires male and female to be working together. Both male and female are needed for children to be born – the man provides the seed (sperm) and the woman the egg to be fertilised. The woman also has a womb in which the child can develop and grow until birth.

But are there reasons other than procreation why humanity is gendered? Are there purposes and benefits of

gendered humanity over and above the physical partnership necessary to produce children?

In Genesis 2:15, we are told that God made Adam (the man) first and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. But then (in v18) God says, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' And so, God creates a woman (Eve) as a suitable helper for Adam.

Without the woman Eve, the man Adam was in need. Something was lacking or missing. Adam needed help to fulfil his role in God's world, and so God provides for Adam a suitable helper, a woman. Eve is like Adam but she is not identical to him. She is his counterpart. She is a match for Adam. Adam and Eve are similar yet sufficiently differentiated that together they complete one another. They are fitting for one another – they are mutually dependent.

God's intent is that as male and female we are to live and work together to fulfil God's creation mandate, not just in being fruitful and multiplying but also in taking care of creation. Gender distinctiveness enables humanity to fulfil its God-given roles. But exactly how are men and women different from each other and how do they work together to fulfil humanity's God-given roles?

In very general terms, men and women are often different in how they feel and think and communicate and in the way they relate to others. But there are wide variations within gender – we must not

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be too narrow in defining masculinity and femininity. Many of our ideas about what boys and men should be like and what girls and women should be like are socially conditioned and cultural, and not everyone fits the cultural stereotypes for gender. If someone does not fit the cultural stereotype, it does not mean that they should question their gender.

We must acknowledge also that sin has had, and continues to have, a destructive and damaging effect on gender differences. Twisted by sin, gender difference has led to the domination of women by men, and serious gender inequality. But that doesn't mean that gender distinctiveness is wrong in itself.

Today gender distinctives (other than anatomy) are denied and complete gender equality is actively promoted. When gender is thought to be irrelevant and meaningless, then it matters little whether you are male or female or somewhere in-between.

But if we negate gender distinctiveness, we lose something of the richness that God intended for humanity by creating us as male and female. Masculinity and femininity, however they might be defined, are complementary, and we are the poorer if we deny all gender differences other than physiological. We need each other, as men and women.

God has made us similar but different, and that difference between men and women is intended to enrich our lives. We are to work together as men and women, playing to our respective strengths, to rule well over creation and to be wise stewards of creation.

### How to respond as Christians to transgenderism

The Bible says very little directly about transgender, although cross-dressing is expressly prohibited in Deuteronomy 22:5. But we can consider transgender from a broader biblical perspective, as we think about God's plans and purposes for humanity as expressed in the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

The opening two chapters of Genesis describe the world and humanity in God's

original design. In Genesis 3 we read of Adam and Eve sinning and disobeying God and being subject to punishment, and we are still living with the consequences. Sin has spoilt both the world and humanity, and we are broken people living in a broken world.

That brokenness caused by sin is experienced by all of us in various ways and is expressed in all aspects of our being – in our thinking, in our feeling, in our consciences, in our emotions, and in our desires. We turn away from God, we reject God's rule and we crown ourselves sovereign over our own lives. We appoint

ourselves as judges of what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, what is helpful and harmful. Because of sin, our minds are confused, our consciences are unreliable, our hearts are selfish and proud and rebellious towards God, and we are prone to self-deception. This is true of all of us.

One of many consequences of this human brokenness is that some people experience confusion about their identity and their gender. They express it as feeling as if they are a woman trapped in a man's body or a man trapped in a woman's body. There's a disconnect or a conflict between how they perceive themselves to be and what they are physically and biologically. Whatever the source or the origin of that sense of identity, that is how transgender people feel, and it causes them distress – gender dysphoria. Often as a result they feel rejected and vulnerable and lonely.

As Christians, we are called to respond with compassion to people around us who are suffering or struggling, whatever form that takes – physical illness, bereavement, unemployment, drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, gender dysphoria. We are to show love and extend friendship towards others, especially those in need.

As Christians, we can be welcoming towards people without affirming their

lifestyles or endorsing their beliefs or excusing their behaviour. Jesus acted kindly towards people from all walks of life without condoning their sin. And we should always remember that none of us is perfect – we are all sinners; we are all messed up in some way.

But as Christians, not only are we called to love others, we are called also to speak truth to those around us. We are to speak the truth in love. And the greatest need of someone who is transgender (and this is true of all people) is to hear the truth of the gospel. The Bible offers good news to people who are broken and confused and lost and struggling and searching for meaning and purpose.

Wonderfully, God has not abandoned humanity to suffer the consequences of our sinful rebellion without relief.

God the Father sent God the Son (Jesus) into this sin-sick world to save sinners – to rescue those who are perishing. Jesus came to live for us the perfect life we cannot live ourselves and to die in our place the death we deserve so that our sins are fully forgiven.

Jesus comes to give rebellious sinners a new identity. Through Jesus, people who are alienated from God because of their sin become the adopted and much-loved children of God. Jesus comes to offer forgiveness and healing and wholeness. Jesus comes to restore broken lives.

BUT IF WE NEGATE GENDER DISTINCTIVENESS, WE LOSE SOMETHING OF THE RICHNESS THAT GOD INTENDED FOR HUMANITY BY CREATING US AS MALE AND FEMALE.

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As Christians, we believe that no-one is beyond the reach of Jesus; we believe that there is no sin that is greater than God's grace; we believe that there is total forgiveness for anyone who repents of their sin and puts their trust and hope in Jesus Christ as Saviour; and we believe that everyone who believes in Jesus is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, who renews us from within – transforming our thinking and feeling, producing in us right desires, and promoting holiness in our lives. We believe that God changes lives.

If someone who is transgender professes faith in Jesus, we should expect them to have the desire to overcome their gender confusion, and to strive with the help of the Holy Spirit to resolve their gender dysphoria in keeping with their birth sex. We want to help them towards acceptance of the reality of their biological sex. We want them to find their true identity in Christ, not in their felt gender.

That's not to say that change in how they think about themselves will necessarily be easy or rapid. But we do believe that God changes lives, and that God is committed to making us increasingly over time into the people he designed us originally to be.

The church will need to provide support and encouragement, and exhibit grace and patience and perseverance. Counselling, mentoring, and accountability will be necessary as part

of ongoing discipleship. And we need also to realise that the work of restoration and renewal that God undertakes in Christians will not be completed until the return of the risen Jesus to earth. Until then, we still live in a fallen world and (as Christians) we still have an active sinful nature, though we are no longer enslaved by it.

Even as Christians, some aspects of our thinking and feeling remain confused and distorted. We are all still works in progress. Even after our conversion, we are engaged in a spiritual battle and we struggle against sin. We must actively resist temptation and reject error. We must pursue righteousness and truth. But, praise God, we have help and hope in this conflict.

And we know that one day, thankfully, all our struggles with sin will finally be over, forever.

May God help us as Christians to respond compassionately and biblically to people who are transgender. May we hold out to them the hope of the gospel, conscious of the power of God to renew and restore, and to heal the brokenness of our lives. ■

*David Magowan is Co-Pastor of Carey Baptist Church, Reading, UK*

**Note:** For more on this topic, please also take a look at the Nashville Statement published by the CBMW in America; see: <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>

*Editor*

## PART 6

PHIL ROBERTS

# HELP! I CAN'T FORGIVE



## A SERIES OF STUDIES ON FORGIVENESS

THIS IS THE SIXTH PART IN THIS SERIES; SEE RT275 FOR PART 1 / SECTIONS 1-3, RT276 FOR PART 2 / SECTIONS 4-5, RT277 FOR PART 3 / SECTIONS 6-7, RT278 FOR PART 4 / SECTION 8-9, RT279 FOR PART 5 / SECTION 10.

### 11. If I'm forgiven, isn't that an end of it? Forgiveness and restitution:

It is commonly thought that forgiveness absolves one from all consequences of an action and any obligations towards the offended. According to the Scriptures this is not the case. In many cases of injustice amends cannot be made and mere forgiveness must suffice, but where restitution is possible it must be taken seriously. God's law is explicit concerning this and we must now consider its enduring principles.

*If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed; he should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he*

shall restore double. If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution. If a man delivers to his neighbour money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbour. If a man delivers to his neighbour a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn. And if a man borrows anything from his neighbour, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not being with it, he shall surely make it good. If its owner was with it, he shall not make it good; if it was hired, it came for his hire (Ex 22:1-15).

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'If a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbour about what was delivered to him for safekeeping,

or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbour, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely – in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses. (Lev 6:1-7).

These passages contain various penalties depending upon circumstances. The Leviticus passage deals with an offence to which the offender confesses before being found out; the Exodus passage to offences where the offender is caught out before confession. The differing penalties reflect this fact.

1. There is a two-fold penalty generally, the victim having his goods restored two-fold (Ex 22:4, 7). From this we see that there is a principle that the thief should suffer to the degree that he expected the victim to suffer. If the victim was down by one sheep then the thief will suffer that same loss but the victim will be compensated.

2. The penalty increases to four-fold for stealing a sheep, and five-fold for

stealing an ox (Ex 22:1) where the animal in question has either been sold or slaughtered and cannot therefore be returned. There is here an implied incentive not to kill or sell the ill-gotten gains. Why the difference between sheep and oxen? Probably because the ox was a working animal and the extra penalty compensates for loss of work.

3. The Leviticus passage imposes a 20% penalty in the case of the thief not owning up to the crime – this is implied by the atonement offerings made. Again there is every incentive in the law to encourage the thief to confess his crime before he is discovered.

4. In all the cases it is the victim who is compensated. In our legal system the penalties have little if any regard to the needs of the victim. The offender is punished (at the expense of the tax-payers, which includes the victim) and the victim either suffers the loss or faces higher insurance costs. Either way crime is an expense borne by the victim. Not so in God's wise law.

And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? (Deut 4:8).

To see how the underlying principles work out we may consider the great example of forgiveness in the Old Testament, the sin of David with Bathsheba resulting in the great psalm of confession: Psalm 51. If anyone knew what forgiveness was, David did, but were all the consequences of his dreadful sin removed? No, as the subsequent history tells us.

In the parable told by Nathan the prophet, David is likened to a rich man with many flocks who steals the ewe lamb belonging to his neighbour. Without confessing his sin, he tried to return Bathsheba, but Uriah is too honourable to sleep with his wife when his companions are on the front line in the army. David then resorts to premeditated murder to cover up his sin of adultery. Uriah is killed and David takes Bathsheba to be his wife. Nathan now exposes David, 'You are the man!'

*Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die' (1 Sam 12:9-14).*

David does not voluntarily confess. He is found out, and therefore the penalties are greater. Yes, his sin is forgiven but he will suffer. His wives will be taken and given to another who will commit adultery with them openly. The son that is in Bathsheba's

womb will die and the sword will never depart from his house. In fact, David will witness the premature death of three more of his sons, a four-fold penalty for the death of Uriah.

Yet, in all this, forgiveness is a reality. It is remarkably to a son of Bathsheba, Solomon, that the succession goes and through whom ultimately the Messiah comes as to his human nature. God is gracious – even such an appalling sin as David’s can be forgiven and he can still know future blessing.

If we have wronged another, then we have a duty to do what we can to make it right. Not only do we seek their forgiveness but we are to compensate them for their loss. If we have publicly defamed them then we are obligated to put this right equally publicly. Additionally, if we have been wronged and forgive an offender it does not mean that we should dismiss any thought of restitution. We may take into account their ability to pay but it may not be the most loving act to totally release them from their obligation.

## 12. I won't forgive! The sin of unforgiveness.

We saw earlier in this series that forgiveness is a command; we now see that unforgiveness is consequently a sin.

*And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things*

*which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; [they are] whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning,*

*untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practise such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practise them (Rom 1:28-32).*

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving,*

*unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Tim 3:1-5).*

Unforgiving is translated in the AV 'implacable', 'trucebreakers'. It denotes one without a treaty or covenant with another. Such people cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant. There is no agreement. The word is the negative form of a derivative of the word meaning 'ready to be offered'. The connection is that an offering of peace, a libation, was offered up following the establishing of a covenant between individuals.

*Yes, and if I am being poured out [as a drink offering] on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all (Phil 2:17).*

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand (2 Tim 4:6).*

The covenants in view in these passages are those natural civil obligations pertaining between individuals. The natural man is one who is war-like, implacable, unwilling to make peace, but desirous to hold on to the grudge. There is, however, a greater covenant that the Christian breaks by an unforgiving spirit—the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is based upon the work of another, not the merits of the other party. What underpins forgiveness is grace. Our unforgiveness reveals our lack of understanding of grace.

*For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when he came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you*

*had no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do your will, O God." Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin you did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then he said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.' He takes*

*away the first that he may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit*

*also witnesses to us; for after he had said before, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,' then he adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin (Heb 10:1-18).*

The Christian shows his understanding of grace by his forgiveness. There is no forgiveness under the law. The law spoke of forgiveness because it spoke of Christ, but it could not grant it of itself.

*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And*

GOD IS GRACIOUS – EVEN SUCH AN APPALLING SIN AS DAVID'S CAN BE FORGIVEN AND HE CAN STILL KNOW FUTURE BLESSING.

WHAT UNDERPINS FORGIVENESS IS GRACE. OUR UNFORGIVENESS REVEALS OUR LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE

do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt 6:11-15).

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses (Mark 11:25-26).

So my heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matt 18:35).

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Eph 4:32-5:2).

Therefore, as [the] elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do]. But above all these things: put on love, which is the bond of perfection (Col 3:12-14).

Infinite goodness and grace [are] the soil wherein forgiveness grows (John Owen).

Who is a pardoning God like thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free? (Samuel Davies).

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph 1:7).

Grace is, then, the deepest and divinest word of the gospel. It opens a window to that which is deepest and divinest in God himself; that reality of God which disposes him to forgive sinners. To speak of grace is in truth to speak of God. Grace is then but another way of saying, gospel. For everything, absolutely everything, and to the last degree, is determined and conditioned by the fact that forgiveness of sins is gifted to man, and received by him as a gift (Karl Barth).

It is grace which becomes the active principle in the Christian after conversion

### 13. I'm wrong: must I seek forgiveness? Seeking and accepting forgiveness.

Here is the final great obstacle to forgiveness. We have seen how a demand for justice and the experience of hurt must be dealt with if we are to forgive and we have seen the keys that God provides. Now we turn to the great issue of pride that prevents us from either forgiving or seeking forgiveness.

Pride firstly denies sin, then excuses sin. The effects of the failure to seek forgiveness are manifold, including:

#### 1. Physical ailments

When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long (Ps 32:3).

#### 2. Divine chastisement

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me (Ps 32:4a).

### 3. Lethargy

My vitality was turned into the drought of summer (Ps 32:4b).

### 4. Deceit

Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit (Ps 32:2).

All these are seen in David when he sinned with Bathsheba. At this point we can see how pride will cause us to take one of a number of wrong turns.

#### 1. Self-solution: works

We try to make amends without confession. We don't own up to our sin and so pretend that we have done nothing amiss, though to salve our consciences we try to make it up to the person we have wronged.

#### 2. Self-solution: self-pity

We wallow in our sin saying such things as, 'I can't forgive myself.' We feel awful, but rather than confess our sin openly and humble ourselves to seek forgiveness, we look for sympathy and pity.

#### 3. Forgive yourself

We want to feel good and engage in a form of self-indulgence, self-forgiveness. We see our problems deriving from a poor self-image – a teaching that finds much support in the modern therapy movement with its self-esteem philosophy. At root it is a denial of guilt.

#### 4. Forgive God

Surprising as it sounds, a number of modern writers counsel that we forgive God. They hold that this helps us psychologically if we feel that he has

hurt or injured us. Whether they actually believe that this is a reality is unclear, but pride derives justification from injury or supposed injustice arising from God's actions. We have not received what we deserve. Why has God done this? If we don't deny God's existence and sovereignty, then it is a tempting road to go down to find fault with God and blame him. This is, of course, as old as the Bible. Adam ultimately placed the blame on God: Then the man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate' (Gen 3:12).

We believe him to be unjust and unloving; we become angry and bitter, filled with resentment, feeling trapped and bullied. God's plan does not appear to be for our good. As we are angry and holding grudges against God (and many are), is forgiveness appropriate? No, because the offence is only perceived, not real. The fault lies on our part (as is often the case when we are angry with others). We judge wrongly as we see only in part. Like Job we use the 'facts' to interpret God's character. Rather than justify God, we engage in self-justification. The course required is repentance:

Then Job answered the LORD and said: 'I know that you can do everything, and that no purpose of yours can be withheld from you. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; you said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42:1-6).

We have seen some of the wrong turns pride makes us take, but what is the right way to go?

### 1. We need to take a biblical course of action.

We are to do the right, that which is commanded. 'Trust and obey, for there's no other way...'

### 2. We need to deal with pride.

'What will they think?' 'How will I appear?' What are we guarding – our self-image? Pride says, 'I deserve better.' It gives us an inflated view of self.

### 3. We must seek and accept God's forgiveness.

This is the way of humility, the way of repentance and change, and the way of responsibility involving restitution. Where appropriate, we are to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).

### 4. We need to recognise the sinfulness of refusing to forgive.

When we refuse to forgive and go through the biblical procedures of confrontation in love, we sin.

The opposite of pride is humility; with this we are to clothe ourselves.

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do (Col 3:12-13).*

It requires humility to seek forgiveness, but also humility to forgive. Only a humble

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person forgives as pride holds out for its rights.

One final thought: when we seek forgiveness it is far preferable to ask, 'Will you forgive me?' rather than simply saying, 'I'm sorry.' Forgiveness is a gift granted by the offended person, not something to be taken for granted. You are far more likely

to have a true indication of the person's feelings if you request forgiveness rather than offer the *fait accompli* of an apology.

### Conclusion

Divine forgiveness is a blessing beyond riches, one we should seek to experience at all costs.

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Ps 32:1).*

Our God is a forgiving God. If he were not, then we would flee in terror. He is, that he might be feared – revered, loved, trusted, adored.

*If you, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared (Ps 130:3-4).*

Forgiveness is only found at the foot of the cross and there grace to forgive is also found. We have both the responsibility and privilege of forgiving and by so doing of displaying the character of the God who has overcome us with his grace. Love has conquered us, so in that love we go forth as God's means of conquering others. ■

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- ▶ Biblical Antidotes to Racism (part 2)
- ▶ The Covenant of Works
- ▶ The Secret Things and the Revealed Things (part 3)