

The Beauty of God's Design for Human Gender

Genesis 1:27

January 19, 2020
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This is Family Month at Bethel Church. This is a month of focus on the blessings and challenges that go along with being in family relationships. Gender is my assigned topic. I assigned it to myself. I did so because the last couple years have seen nothing short of a revolution in the area of gender in Western civilization. And we have seen the deconstruction of human gender in our society and the attempt to reconstruct gender without God.

Suddenly, new and confusing words are thrown around assuming we all know and agree with them. Words like binary, cisgender, transgender, intersectionality, gender dysphoria, LGBTQ, pansexual, bisexual, omnisexual. Webster's Dictionary can hardly keep up, much less the rest of us. This conversation isn't limited to certain halls of academia or social liberal talk shows. This is very much in the flow of our lives now.

I recently purchased plane tickets on American Airlines. I was filling out the normal information, when under gender it gave the options: male, female, non-binary. Facebook allows you to identify as male or female but includes 71 gender options. Mark Zuckerberg says there are 71 genders. How many does God say? Who should we trust?

You may say, *but I don't fly, and I don't do social media*. Ok. Do you go to the bathroom? Who are you going to see next to you in the men's or women's bathroom? You can't be sure anymore. Why? Because a born sexual male may or may not choose to identify his gender as male. Or vice versa. This led our church lawyers last year to rewrite our church constitution to include a bathroom use policy. Did I ever think when I was in seminary that my church constitution would need a bathroom use policy? Doctrine. Yes. Polity. Yes. Bathroom use? No. But such is the day we live in.

I want to be clear that this is a sermon of information, and I hope, inspiration. It is not a rant against the way the world is or gender dysphoria and certainly not against any person in our church who struggles in these areas. To the contrary, I would like to present God's plan for gender as not only true, but also more redemptive and ultimately more satisfying than any other gender lifestyle. Further, I think the church should be a safe place for people with every kind of struggle to be heard and loved. Too many Christians put gender or sexual identity struggles in a special category. Just because it's not your struggle doesn't mean you get to be the priest who passes by the gender-hurting on the other side of the road. If you happen to be a person without any struggle with any effect of the Fall, please come forward so we can worship you. Seeing none, I'll move on.

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to walk through God's plan for gender, show how Jesus himself affirms this definition, then deal with our culture's attempt to redefine it, and show how Jesus doesn't redefine, but he does redeem.

The Story of Human Gender

Where did human gender come from? By gender I don't simply mean gender sex. And by sex I don't mean reproduction. I mean the actual XX or XY chromosomes and the correlating sexual plumbing, genitalia, that goes with those sexual chromosomes.

The biblical narrative of gender is found in the very beginnings of human creation.

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

This is certainly one of the most important verses in the Bible because it tells us who we are. Created "in the image of God" gives humanity its inherent dignity, worth, and spiritual dimension. We are not the same as the animal world. We have mind, emotions, will, and a spiritual yearning for worship and relationship with our Creator.

Our focus today is on how and why God chose to create his image *male and female*. Notice the verse begins by saying God created humanity. How? By reflecting his own image in human gender identity. Male and female. Both in his image. This is not to say that God is either male or female as God is not a sexual being. The Bible uses male pronouns throughout as God's leadership and authority call for such. But somehow both male and female together reflect the fullness of who God is.

We should be glad because if God only made males, the world would look and smell like a men's locker room. And what if there were only females? On the way to school this year my daughter summarized what that would mean by asking me, *Daddy, what if the whole world was pink?* Critics would say I'm utilizing patriarchal stereotypes there. Perhaps. But we must see in the text that human gender is a created reality by God. Human gender is God's idea and is rooted in God's character. It has an objective foundation. It is divinely defined.

You may say, but what if we are misunderstanding Genesis 1? It's possible. But then Jesus gives his commentary on it:

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'" (Mark 10:6)
"He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?'" (Matthew 19:4)

These are two accounts of the same episode. Jesus was asked about the viability of divorce. He answers by going back to Genesis 1 and reminds them of God's purpose for marriage. In doing so, he also affirms God's purpose for gender. *"Male and female he created them."*

He adds, the unity of human gender is a God-ordained and God-established unity.

"So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:6)

"What...God has joined together, let not man separate." We think separate means divorce, and in context, it does. But if you redefine male or female or marriage, you are separating marriage and gender from their divinely ordained purposes.

When it comes to defining male and female, the Bible says biological sex at birth is God's created purpose for that individual. The Bible clearly teaches there are only two human genders. Male and Female. Science tells us God gives males XY chromosomes and, with the exception of the very rare people born without them, genitalia that corresponds to maleness. Women are given XX chromosomes and genitalia that corresponds to femaleness. God's design is gender identity that corresponds to sex at birth.

We must also see one more thing about this—all of this is prior to the Fall. It is part of God's perfect creation and falls under his moral and aesthetical evaluation, *"God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31). The Hebrew word for "good" can be translated *morally good* but also *morally beautiful*, including human gender image bearing.

Quick Summary

- Human gender is God's design.
- There are two human genders, male and female. These correspond to our sex at birth.
- God's purpose in human gender is that they together and equally reflect his likeness.
- God calls human gender very, very good.

Dysphoria about Gender

So, what's all the fuss about? Most of human history has believed there are two genders; how does Facebook see 71?

To understand, we have to see gender dysphoria as a painful implication of Romans 1—

"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (Romans 1:21–25)

What was the Fall? Adam and Eve rejecting God's purpose for them. They wanted to become like God; indeed, they desired to be their own god. We must see it as much more than eating fruit, but a rebellion and a rejection of the highest order. Romans 1 adds the commentary that humans exchanged the truth for a lie, refused to worship our Creator, and rejected his purpose for us on all levels. Romans 3 tells us we fall short of God's purpose for us to glorify him.

We see this rejection all around us and we all live in the shattered society it created; on the big scale of war and violence and the smaller scale of this terrible flu season we are enduring. But what does it look like on the most personal level of self-identity? Sexual identity? Gender identity? What if our rejection of God's purpose was right at the core of what it means to be human? What if we rejected *"male and female he created them"*?

But how do you reject a created purpose that you can see in the shower every morning?

Here is where things get potentially confusing. We must understand rejecting God not simply as the removal of God but the replacement of God and the enthronement of self. Western culture has arrived at a radical individualism. The supporting principles are religiously believed. *You must be yourself. Be true to yourself. Nobody can tell me who I am, etc.* It is a gender existentialism that rejects biological sex as determinative for gender. Our culture encourages separating them and vociferously defends the right of the individual to be whatever gender he or she or zhe chooses to be.

How? By separating biological or birth sex from gender. Genitalia from gender. Chromosomes from gender. Whatever sexual plumbing you are born with has no determinative bearing on whether you live as a gendered male or female, heterosexual or pansexual or homosexual or bisexual or whatever-sexual (71 on Facebook). There are no rules except the individual is god over their lifestyle.

"Our culture says: Your psychology is your sexual identity – let your body be conformed to it. The Bible says: Your body is your sexual identity – let your mind be conformed to it" (Sam Allberry).¹

"The ideological assumptions driving the transgender revolution did not even exist until very recently. This revolution required certain epistemological and moral shifts in order for

¹ Sam Allberry as quoted by Vaughn Roberts, *Transgender*, p. 43.

it to emerge as legitimate. Transgenderism is birthed out of Western society's challenges to the institution of marriage and out of the project of social revolutionaries to redefine sexuality and normalize same-sex relationships. These shifts deconstructed objective social norms and instead advocated a "social construction" of reality." (Andrew Walker)²

This is nothing short of a revolution. But it didn't start with a politician or Supreme Court decision; it started way back when Adam and Eve decided they wanted a garden without God.

Isn't it fascinating that with all these millennia of time and generations of people who have lived, we still don't know what it means to be human, to be a man or a woman? As Francis Schaeffer said it, *"We are people with our feet firmly planted in mid-air."*³

The most famous gender moment of my lifetime was when Olympic star Bruce Jenner became Caitlyn Jenner. Andrew Walker ends his book on the subject of gender by pointing out that in her famous coming-out photo, they don't show Jenner's hands. Why? Because you can airbrush and make up a face, but you can't hide the man hands. He suggests this as a metaphor for our society trying desperately to remake itself and escape God's created purpose. But there are always reminders of God's purpose for us. Our society is like Jason Bourne. We have memory loss. We know we used to be something important; something great. We have flashbacks and powerful capacities, but we are still searching for our identity. We don't know who we are.

Fundamentally, this is a question of authority. Is the Bible the authority? Is God's purpose the authority? Or do we define our own reality? Christopher Yuan, a Moody Bible professor, said this, *"Transgenderism is not exclusively a battle for what is male and female, but rather a battle for what is true and real."*⁴

This is where Christian compassion more than condemnation needs to be evident for people who are struggling with gender identity. Gender dysphoria is when who you are on the outside (biologically) is different from how you feel on the inside. Think of how hard that would be. This is a real struggle. Are those feelings necessarily sin? I don't think so. They are the result of the Fall, but so are a host of difficult emotions like fear and worry. Dysphoria is a very difficult and painful experience. Just because it is a different kind of struggle than you or I may have doesn't justify us rejecting them. God's plan for all our brokenness is not rejection but redemption.

Redeeming Gender

Know the terms

So, here is a quick tutorial:

- *Gender Dysphoria* – dissonance between biological sex and psychological gender
- *Binary/Cisgender* – person whose biological sex is the same as their gender identity
- *Transgender* – a person who expresses a different gender from their biological sex (700,000 in America)
- *L (Lesbian), G (Gay), B (Bisexual), T (Transgender), Q (Queer or Questioning)*
- *Gender-fluid* – people whose gender identity fluctuates
- *Transvestite* – a person whose dress is opposite their genetic sex

Many of these in some way see gender and sexual orientation as a social construct. One helpful distinction I heard between sexual orientation and gender orientation says, *"Sexuality is who you go to bed with. Gender identity determines who you go to bed as."*⁵ For centuries these were

² Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, p. 10.

³ Francis Schaeffer, Source Unknown.

⁴ Christopher Yuan, "He Made Them Male and Female: Sex, Gender, and the Image of God," www.desiringgod.org, December 14, 2019.

⁵ Brendan Jordan as quoted by Cydney Adams, www.cbsnews.com, "The Difference Between Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," March 24, 2017.

assumed to be the same. Not anymore. Good to understand the terms. If you have children, they likely will hear them and talk about them, and you need to know them too.

Guide your children

Speaking of children, they represent a key battleground in this social struggle. It's in the news all the time now where a child thinks he or she is transgender. One or both parents want to give gender transferring hormonal treatment or puberty blocking treatment immediately. Yet the most exhaustive study ever made shows 80-95 percent of kids with gender dysphoria end up identifying with their genetic sex after puberty. I suspect the reason the transgender community wants immediate treatment is they want the ideological victory, child by child.

We need to teach our children what it means to be a boy or a girl. That doesn't mean guns and football for boys and dolls and pinkalicious for girls. It means boys learning to lead and love as servants and protectors of females. And girls learning to relate in feminine ways to Dad and boys while becoming godly young women.

To that end, one little resource that came out recently, that we've read to our girls is *God Made Boys and Girls: Helping Kids Understand the Gift of Gender* by Marty Machowski. You may want to check that out. We have some in our Bookstore.

Love the hurting

We have a saying around here, *if we have to err on any side let's err on the side of love*. I personally think this has great application with people struggling not just with gender but same-sex attraction or the brokenness of past gender/sexual sin.

Should we refer to a transgendered individual by their preferred gender pronoun? Personally, I think we should. There is the air war here and the ground war. The air war is the big ideological/theological/cultural/political battle for which Christians must be courageous and stand for truth. We will increasingly be the minority saying, there are two genders. Someday that may get you jailed.

But the person you work with or live next to or meet in church is not a global ideologue. They are simply a person living their life. Not all struggle, but many do. One study says that after a sex change operation an individual is 20 times more likely to commit suicide. Real people are really hurting.

Your relationship with them is not a battleground, it's a relationship. I would recommend calling them by whatever they would like to be called. Refusing to do so will tell them you reject them at the personal place of their self-identity. Take a deep breath. It will be OK.

The goal is to see all the dysphorias every sinner has redeemed by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus died for sins that flow from sexual identity confusion too. If Jesus was willing to bear it on the cross, we should be willing to bear with it too—not normalizing or affirming—but redeeming by the power of God and the gospel. The gospel offers to the gender bending or gender breaking the possibility of being a new creation. A new person. A new primary identity not in gender but in my relationship with Christ.

I'll give you one example—Rosaria Butterfield. She was a very liberal, feminist, lesbian professor at Syracuse University. She was teaching and promoting that whole ideology. But she happened to live next to a Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) pastor and his family who invited her to dinner, so she would come over for dinner occasionally. They were nice to her and it was a pleasant experience, but they would have their family devotions and she would just sort of sit there and "endure" that, but guess what happened over time? She saw in the way that they were

living, and the way that they were loving, and the way that they were relating to each other something that was appealing, and God used their neighborliness and their Christian hospitality to win her to Christ.

And Rosaria Butterfield today is married to a pastor. I mean what could be better than that? She's written books and speaks all over the country. God is using her in tremendous ways. Out of a lesbian, feminist, university setting and into an identity with Jesus Christ. Oh, that we would be that kind of church and that all of us individually in all our places would connect with people going through all kinds of manner of dysphoria and pain and brokenness where we love them, we're neighborly to them, and we live out our faith before them—which is a better way to live because it's the way that God ordained. Christian neighboring and Christian hospitality and gospel mission should produce this sort of welcoming.

"When we meet someone who is struggling, we meet ourselves—and we should lovingly point them toward the same truth we'd want them to leverage for our encouragement. That especially includes the truth that making choices against God's Word won't bring ultimate joy, peace, or fullness of life" (Todd Wagner).⁶

Light it up

Our greatest offense in this social struggle is displaying the beauty of God's plan for gender, marriage, singleness, sex, and family. Jesus described us as a city on a hill and in our day the brightest light might just be masculine men and feminine women in the church.

"Finally, a complementarian church filled with loving marriages, gracious leaders, and divinely empowered men and women serving together as co-laborers for Christ and His kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 4:12) is a powerful witness against the flawed rubric of intersectional epistemology. As complementarians, we believe not only that gender distinctions and roles are God's design, but that they are good gifts for humanity. Let us live out this truth, adorning the gospel with the testimony of our lives." (Pat Sawyer and Neil Shenvi).⁷

Amen. Let's adorn the gospel with the beauty of God's plan for human gender.

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⁶ Todd Wagner, "Talking to Kids About Gender in a Gender-Confused Age," www.thegospelcoalition.org, November 15, 2019.

⁷ Pat Sawyer and Neil Shenvi, "Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory," www.cbmw.org, November 20, 2019.