**Gender Confusion[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**I. Introduction**

“By the time Coy Mathis was four years old, he knew one thing was for sure: that he wasn’t a boy.”[[2]](#footnote-2) That’s the opening statement from a Rolling Stone article in 2013 about a child in Colorado who was convinced that his physical body didn’t match his true identity. His parents were confused at first, but over time they accepted Coy’s professed gender. Soon, Coy’s closet was filled with pink dresses and his parents got involved in a legal battle over Coy’s access to the girls’ restroom at school.

Stories like this are becoming commonplace now --- some of you here this morning may be witnessing this first hand where you live and work. In fact, there are an estimated 700,000 people in the US who identify as “transgender”: *that is, they claim a gender identity different from “the sex they were assigned at birth.”*[[3]](#footnote-3) **Transgenderism** in recent years has permeated the news in debates about bathroom bills, workplace policies, and school locker rooms. But in all the flurry of the media, we can’t forget that this is ultimately about real people, created in God’s image, like Coy Mathis. **So what does the Bible have to say to those who feel like exiles in their own bodies? And what do we as believers say to people we love, if they “transition” to a different gender identity?**

That’s what we want to think about this morning. First, we’ll think a little bit about the Bible’s teaching on gender and the human body, and then consider some implications about how to love those we know who are experiencing ***gender confusion***. I’m not going to comment so much on laws or policies (that’s beyond the scope of this class) – rather we want to think primarily about *how God has made us*, and look to the ultimate hope we have in the gospel, no matter the extent of brokenness we may face. Another note as we begin: today we’re not primarily talking about homosexuality, though that’s certainly a related issue. There are several biblical texts that speak directly to the sinfulness of homosexual acts that we won’t cover this morning. That could be a whole different class. We’re going to focus more narrowly on the question of gender identity: what it means to be created male or female, how it could be that some people feel their body to be not a gift but instead a prison, and how all of us as broken people can find hope.

**II. A Biblical Theology of Gender and the Human Body** So let’s start at the beginning, with this fundamental biblical truth:

1. **God created men and women in his own image**.

**We read in Genesis 1:27-28**: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them.”*

*Then in* **Verse 31**: *“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”*

For the last 10 weeks in this course, we’ve stressed that men and women are 100% equal in dignity, value, and worth before God. And yet at the same time, we’ve also learned that we should unashamedly recognize the biological difference between men and women as a wonderful part of our Creator’s design! With sexually differentiated bodies, God chose to exhibit His image in men *and* women, and doing so in different, complementary ways.

In the goodness of God’s design, **Genesis 2:25** describes how Adam and Eve were fully at home with God and with one another, while also being perfectly comfortable in their God-given, gendered bodies: *“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”* There was no gender dysphoria, no internal conflict, and no discontentment with the way God had made them.

It’s important to acknowledge that human sexuality, being male or female, is an objective biological binary trait determined for each person by God Himself. What David says in **Psalm 139** is true of everyone: *“****You*** *formed my inward parts;* ***You*** *knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise* ***You****, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*

**So how might we summarize the Christian view of “gender”?** Well our “gender” isn’t *just psychological*.

* **Physical body**. It certainly involves our body, our physical sex. That’s partly how I’m using the term “gender:” to refer to the fact that you are created male or female, including your *physical body*. As a man or woman, with hormones, sex chromosomes, with flesh & bones, you embody the image of God on the earth.
* **God-given dispositions/inclinations**. In addition to our fundamental physical differences, God has also given men and women distinct dispositions and inclinations, which we’ve been discussing throughout this course. There *is* such a thing as masculinity and femininity, as we’ve seen in **Genesis 2-3**, and how those proclivities become more formalized through roles in the home (**Ephesians 5**) and in the church (**1 Timothy 2-3**).
* **Cultural Expressions**. And thirdly, the biblical view recognizes that there *are* also cultural expressions of gender that are value-neutral and can change from era to era. So ***men*** in Enlightenment France wore tights, makeup and wigs. Today… they don’t! Clothes, hairstyles, colors – the Bible doesn’t spell out *what* women or men should wear – though, it is significant to note that in 1 Cor 11 Paul does expect men and women to present themselves *as such* through their appearance in ways that made sense in their particular culture. So yes, there are some cultural expressions of gender that vary across time and aren’t core to being a man or a woman. But that doesn’t mean that gender is ***only*** cultural. The Bible says gender, fundamentally, is something you **are**, not just a way you dress or behave.

Now, let’s take a moment and contrast this with the **secular view** that’s become prominent today. Many say that your sex is *only* **biological**: you either have male or female chromosomes, anatomy and hormones. “Gender,” on the other hand, is *only* **psychological** – it pertains to your inner sense of identity. It’s socially defined and so includes things like behavior, appearance, clothing, roles, etc. Many theorists argue that there’s no necessary correlation between your physical sex and your gender. In this, they DIVERGE from the biblical view. A recent article in Slate put it this way: “*Gender is a kind of performance… something we actively create from the limited cultural materials we encounter*,” and the writer asserted that babies and toddlers are “genderless.”[[4]](#footnote-4) This view makes gender radically subjective, known only to *that person*. And this view opens up the possibility of having the “wrong” body for one’s true gender. Others report a gender identity that doesn’t correspond to masculine or feminine at all, but is somewhere “in between” the two. All of this can be summed up with a couple of popular slogans: Such as, “anatomy isn’t destiny.” [[5]](#footnote-5) Or “*Sexual orientation determines who you want to go to bed with and gender identity determines who you want to go to bed as*.”[[6]](#footnote-6) So, this way of thinking asserts that your sex, your sexual orientation (whom you’re attracted to) and your gender identity (who you understand yourself to be) are all separate and not necessarily correlated.

Even though it might be scandalous to say this within our culture day, we must be clear: the Bible REJECTS this understanding. Our “gender,” being *created* either male or female **and** *being* a man or woman, is a **gift** from God. And it’s a **holistic** gift, including our *body*, our sense of *identity*, and the *dispositions* and *roles* to which God calls us.

***QUESTIONS?***

All of this leads to a natural question, though: **Why do some people seem to experience distress or inner conflict about their gender?** That brings us to our next point:

**B. The fall has distorted us in body and mind.**

In **Genesis 3**, because of Adam and Eve’s sin, God curses the ground and death enters the world. Therefore the fall (mankind’s rebellion against God) is at the root of every physical and spiritual ailment that afflicts humanity.

So First, let’s talk about how the fall **affects our bodies**. We know that sickness and death are results of the curse. In conversations about sexuality and gender, sometimes the question gets raised about individuals who have ambiguous or intersex anatomy – both male and female characteristics. Statistics tell us that about 1 in 1500 children may be born with some rare disorder of sex development or intersex trait.[[7]](#footnote-7) **The Christian** can reply that this rare and challenging condition, like other physical and genetic disorders, stems ultimately from the fall. Therefore, doctors and pastors must apply wisdom in counseling such individuals, showing love and care for those created in the image of God.

But when we’re talking about ***transgenderism*** specifically, we’re **not** talking about ambiguous anatomy. We’re talking about someone who was clearly born male or female and yet doesn’t “feel” that way on the inside. This is where the debate usually comes in!

As Christians, that’s why we’ve got to remember that the fall affects not only our bodies, but our *inner person* too – what the Bible calls “the heart” of a person. **Romans 1:18** says, *that men and women SUPPRESS THE TRUTH about God. And in* ***verse 21****, men and women did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish* ***hearts*** *were darkened.”*

**Romans 1** and **Romans 8** teach us that nature as we experience is not nature as God intended it. Therefore, just because something seems “natural” in a fallen world doesn’t mean it’s RIGHT or WHOLE. In fact, the fall has distorted our ability to perceive creation correctly, including our self-perception.[[8]](#footnote-8) **Jeremiah 17:9** laments, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* Outside of Christ, all of us view ourselves inaccurately in various ways. “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*” (**Proverbs 14:12**). Our hearts aren’t infallible. We must listen to God to find out who He has created us to be!

While I can’t presume to understand *everything* going on in the mind of someone who identifies as transgender, there’s clear biblical precedent for having deep confusion in one’s heart about his or her own identity. And since we *all* have distorted views of ourselves in various ways, this means that we should be able to respond with patience and gentleness to those experiencing tension about their gender. We also know that by God’s grace and power, people really can change. **Through a greater knowledge of God and His Word, we can grow in having a more accurate understanding of ourselves** (*say twice*). All of us who are trusting in Christ can attest to this reality!

On the other hand, we must be clear that rejecting one’s God-given gender is SIN, and SIN ALWAYS HAS CERTAIN CONSEQUENCES. Like all sin, it will lead to pain, despair, and ultimately HELL. To reject your given sex is to reject God’s Lordship as Creator over your life. We must resist the world’s logic which is: how can something be wicked if no one else seems to get hurt? Friends, disobeying God is always evil.

Transgender ideology teaches us to think of our body as a blank canvas – you can do with it what you will. But the Bible’s teaching on creation and fall shows that we should see our bodies not as blank slates but as flawed masterpieces. Think of your favorite painting, and imagine that it had become broken or distorted. Would you erase the Mona Lisa and turn it into a sunset? Would you recreate it as you see fit? No, you would try to understand the artist’s *original* creation and seek to restore it, to live with the grain of how the Designer has created us to be.

So what is our hope as we consider the fall? Simply this: Jesus came and took on human flesh. He lived as a man, fully embodied, fully human. He came to redeem sinners from all the effects of the fall, no matter what type of fallen self-perception has defined us. Let’s not forget that Jesus was known as a friend of prostitutes and sinners. He came not for the healthy but the sick, for those who like all of us had rejected God in outwardly obvious ways. I love how Paul puts it in Titus 3: “*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”* Jesus, the perfect man, came to die in our place, to give new life and forgiveness to all who repent and believe. And he rose from the dead. That leads us to one more important theological point:

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**C. The resurrection affirms the goodness of the gendered body.**

The gospel boldly declares that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. In his risen body, he was still a man, and all men and women who are united to him by faith will rise bodily too. In **1 Cor 15**,Paul uses the image of a seed being buried in the ground and then rising up as a glorious plant. In other words, although our resurrection body will be unimaginably better than our current body, there will also be continuity between our identity here and in the new creation to come. God created us male and female in his image. And we will image him perfectly in heaven. This means, in some sense, we will still have our God-given gender in our resurrected bodies.

**Now, why do I say this?** Because in contrast to that teaching, a key pillar of transgender thought is that one’s internal sense of gender identity trumps their physical anatomy. It’s a classic case of mind over matter, like Greek Gnosticism of old. The person is reduced to two components, psychological identity and physical sex, and the psychological component is given ***greater priority***. When you come to think about it, people who do this are in some sense trying to *play God*, exercising sovereignty over their own existence!

But Christianity says that we need not pit the soul *against* the body in this way! God created us as united beings, body *and* soul. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s signature endorsing the fact that he sees the body as a core part of our human nature – both now AND in the world to come. The body is NOT an accessory. It’s not just a “housing chamber” for the soul. It’s part of WHO YOU ARE – now and in eternity as well. And we can have hope: On the final day, no child of God will experience any disconnect between his body and his sense of identity. There will be no more confusion, no more struggle, and the resurrection of Jesus helps us point our hope to that day. We are resurrection people, longing for the age to come.

**ANY QUESTIONS?**

**III. Loving Our Neighbors in a World of Gender Confusion**

So, how should we show the love of Christ in this world that celebrates gender non-conformity? Here are five suggestions.

First, **A. Seek Wisdom.** Brothers and sisters, we’re not called to walk this road alone. Study the Word together. Ask the elders for counsel. Read good books, like Vaughan Roberts’ new little book *Transgender*. Your job may be asking you to carry out policies that you disagree with – **should you protest? Should you implement the policy but with some sort of dissent? Should you quit the job**? I don’t know. Much will depend on your job, your situation, and the way the policy might be worded. Seek wise Christians for advice.

Second, **B. Adopt a Posture of Compassion.** When we think of someone we know who identifies as transgender, a whole HOST of factors need to be taken into consideration: A person’s sins, family dynamics, and pain or abuse inflicted by others are just a few of them. That’s not to say they’re right to embrace an alternate gender identity. No one gets a free pass on sin because they feel their sinful proclivities are natural to them. But no matter what, But we must have compassion on those who are going through what must be a radically confusing experience.

Remember, too, that many people who embrace an alternate gender identity have been sinned against in terrible ways. They may endure memories of verbal abuse –or worse—for what they wore or how they behaved growing up. We must share God’s disapproval of any bullying and vitriol that has been hurled at human beings created in his image who deserve respect and dignity.

Particularly if a family member announces to you that he or she is transgender, let me encourage you to make your first response an attitude of love. Hug them. Tell them that you value and care for them as a person. Beginning with a response like this doesn’t endorse the person’s decision. It conveys our commitment to love them in spite of how they are tragically rejecting God’s created design.

Which leads to our next point:

**C. Speak the Truth and the Gospel in Love**

If someone we know well, informs us that they intend to live as transgender, we need to pray for an opportunity to speak the truth to them in a way that’s appropriate to the relationship (Ex: sibling vs. stranger). And then I would urge you to be quick to listen and try to understand what has brought them to the point of adopting a new gender identity. When prayer and listening are present, then boldly share not just how you understand our gender to be a gift from God, but most importantly, the good news of redemption in Christ! Make sure they understand that *you* are the worst sinner you know.

**At some point, you may need to talk about some tricky details**. If the person is taking on a new name and pronoun, **should you use them?** It all depends. A person’s **name** can usually have more flexibility between the genders (ex: I’ve known men named “Leslie” and women named “Chris”). But when you begin talking about **pronouns, this** can become more difficult, because “him” and “her” are clearly in reference to a gender. Of course you want to show respect and be able to maintain a relationship, but you do want them to understand that you do not wish to endorse their decision through the language you use. As Christians we need wisdom here! We should AVOID *unnecessary* provocation (**Romans 12:18**), while at the same time recognize we are called to uphold the truth.

But remember that the gospel call isn’t primarily about gender and sexuality. It’s primarily a call to die to self, submit to Christ and experience the joy of walking in the light. What’s most offensive about Christianity isn’t the Bible’s teaching on gender. It’s the fact that we are sinners who deserve God’s wrath and can be saved only by trusting a Messiah who was executed on a cross. **Rosaria Butterfield**, a formerly practicing lesbian who converted to Christ, says something very profound, “*I wasn’t saved out of homosexuality. I was saved out of unbelief*.” All of us are born sinners and therefore all of us need a new birth. “We don’t say… ‘Get yourself fixed and then come to Jesus.’ … We say … ‘Come to Jesus and he will start to put you together again.’”[[9]](#footnote-9) **Russell Moore** has said that local churches need to be ready to receive the refugees from the sexual revolution. When the promise of gender fluidity doesn’t deliver the happiness people seek, will our church be ready to receive them with open arms? As you pray, imagine that God could lead your transgender friend to repentance and that friend could be up here teaching Core Seminar some day.

That relates to our next point:

**D. Call Others to Realistic Repentance**

For any sinner, including our transgender friends, repentance is **hard**. When you trust in Christ as Lord, you are declaring war against your sin as an enemy. And yet praise God that repentance is also a gift from God, and His power is able to produce real change in us!

But pastoral wisdom is needed here, to determine what repentance may look like in any individual situation. It could be complex. For the transgender person who has received hormone therapy or had a body-altering surgery, pastors may need to work with medical professionals to determine the safest and best ways for that person to embrace their God-given gender.

But when I say “realistic” repentance, here’s what I’m getting at: we can’t promise that any particular temptation or feeling of dysphoria will instantly go away when one becomes a believer, *though all things are certainly possible with God*. Those of us with a history of sin in greed, gossip, or lust may find that our old habits of mind still *feel* somewhat innate to us even while we walk in Christ. In the same way, we shouldn’t hold out false hopes that becoming a Christian will bring instant resolution to any experience of gender confusion. It’s possible to be in Christ, embrace one’s God-given gender, and still feel a battle from within, waiting for the day when we’ll be finally glorified and renewed.

To conclude,

**E. Persevere by God’s Grace**

Finally, let me encourage us to PERSEVERE. Continue to love show love to family members or friends who may disagree with you on gender and sexuality. God will be gracious to sustain us as we seek to hold onto our convictions, AND topour ourselves out in service and mercy. After all, isn’t that what Jesus did? He spoke the truth when it was unpopular, and yet He laid down his life for those who rejected him. May he give us the strength to love like he loves.

**QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?**

1. *Assembly Intro:* As Christians we know that the fall has impacted every area of life, including our gender. But what should we do if someone feels they’ve been given the wrong gender? How do we respond to the growing movement celebrating gender non-conformity? This morning in our Biblical Manhood and Womanhood class we want to find the clarity–and the compassion–that come from God’s Word for this topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sabrina Rubin Erdely, “About a Girl: Coy Mathis’ Fight to Change Gender.” *Rolling Stone,* October 28, 2013. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/about-a-girl-coy-mathis-fight-to-change-change-gender-20131028>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice “Dear Colleague” Letter, May 13, 2016, page 1. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf> The 700,000 number comes from the Williams Institute of UCLA, which issued a report in 2011 on “How Many People are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender?” <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/how-many-people-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender/> For other (already dated) examples of the growing movement to normalize transgenderism, see Katy Steinmetz, “The Transgender Tipping Point.” *TIME,* May 29, 2014. <http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/> and Mary Hasson, “Back to School: When Mr. Reuter Becomes ‘Ms. Reuter.’” *The Federalist,* August 5, 2014. http://thefederalist.com/2014/08/05/back-to-school-when-mr-reuter-becomes-ms-reuter/. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jessica Winter, “Are You a Boy or a Girl?” *Slate*, May 11, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/double\_x/doublex/2016/05/gender\_reveal\_celebrations\_for\_babies\_help\_explain\_transphobia.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Allan Metcalf, “What’s your PGP?.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* September 2, 2014. http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/09/02/whats-your-pgp/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Steinmetz, “Transgender Tipping Point.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/intersex.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Secular psychology too must recognize the reality of distorted self-perception. For example, the person diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia actually believes he or she is overweight, and this belief influences behavior. In that case, the mind is wrong about the body. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (The Good Book Company: 2016), 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)