

What Does the Bible Say about Gender?

The Age of Fluidity Series, March 5 & 6 | Psalm 139:1-18
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TODAY WE ARE CONCLUDING OUR SERIES ON "THE AGE OF FLUIDITY."

This series claims that what our culture believes about human intimacy is fluid or changing.

The culture's boundary between appropriate and inappropriate intimate activity changes.

Modern Western culture claims that our attractions should be fluid.

Many people even say that gender itself is fluid and changing.

Today we are asking, "What Does the Bible Say about Gender?"

Increasing numbers of people in our society identify themselves as transgender.

Transgender people live differently from what their biological sex would otherwise indicate.

This discussion is new to most of us.

We have had centuries to think through what the Bible says about human intimacy.

We have even had decades to think through what the Bible says about homosexual activity.

We have only been thinking and talking broadly about transgender identifications for years.

When a topic is new, it's easy to get things wrong. Worse, it's easy for our words to be insensitive and harmful. I don't want that.

Let's make some promises to each other today.

Let's promise to learn and listen to God together.

Let's promise that we will approach this topic with grace *and* truth.

Let's ask what God thinks, what God wants from us, and what God wants for us.

To find that out, we turn to the Bible, God's revelation of himself and his plan for us.

As we ask what the Bible says about gender, we will understand transgender people better and grasp God's plan for each one of us better.

GOD INTENTIONALLY CREATED EACH ONE OF US MALE AND FEMALE.

Genesis tells us that God created us male and female.

In **Genesis 1:27**, God created humanity:

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Notice that God's creating humanity male and female is intentional.

God's creating humanity male and female reflects his own nature. Humanity is one and two (male and female) as God is one while also being three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Having created humanity, God saw everything he had made and called it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). But is that the last word? After the fall are we still good? Let’s turn to Psalm 139 for answers. The Psalmist’s answers are poetic but clear.

Psalm 139:1-6 argues that God knows us.

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*

These are David’s words, his experience, and his own confession. However, David is describing the human experience, particularly our experience as God’s people.

If we now put ourselves in David’s spot, God searches us and knows us down to fine details. It’s an overwhelming thought that God knows us so personally.

Psalm 139:7-12 reminds us that God is with us.

*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*

No matter where we go, God is there.

God is in heaven, in the underworld, at the horizon, on the sea, and even in the darkness.

We may want to hide our deeds, our thoughts, and our hurts, but God is always there.

We can’t escape God’s presence, nor can anyone or anything can take us away from God.

Psalm 139:13-16 adds that God created us intentionally.

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

Verse 13 starts with the claim: God formed us from the inside out.

Then verse 13 and following repeat that thought poetically.

God shaped us inside our mother’s womb as if he were a person knitting.

To say that God knew that the Psalmist was being formed in the depths of the earth is to speak about God's forming the small and unseen details.

To say that God knows the days of our lives is to say that he superintends the big picture as well.

David says that God's work is fearful and wonderful. It's right, and we know that it's right.

Then Psalm 139:17-18 praises God's lovingkindness in creating us.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

God created each one of us.

He made us male and female in his own image.

He created us intentionally on the microscopic and macroscopic levels.

We cannot escape him, nor can anyone stop him.

Instead, we should praise him because his work is good. Is that true for transgender people?

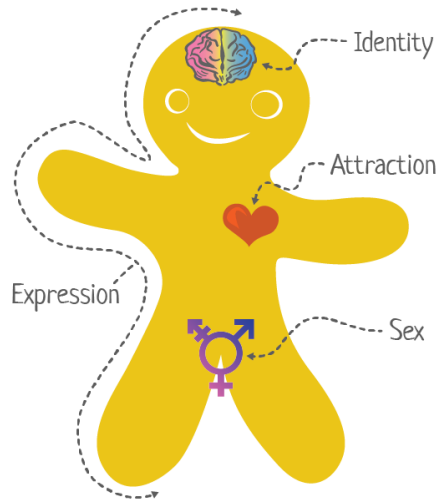
LET'S DEFINE SOME TERMS.

The Genderbread Person is being used in many places to explain the most basic terms.

This tool is used in lots of different settings, including schools.¹

¹ More information is available at www.genderbread.org.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual



⊖ means a lack of what's on the right side

Gender Identity

Woman-ness
 Man-ness

Gender Expression

Femininity
 Masculinity

Anatomical Sex

Female-ness
 Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex
 Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth
 Female Intersex Male

Sexually Attracted to... and/or (a/o)

Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
 Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Romantically Attracted to...

Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
 Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Genderbread Person Version 4 created and uncopyrighted 2017 by Sam Killermann [For a bigger bite, read more at www.genderbread.org](http://www.genderbread.org)

I am not endorsing it; I am simply using it to orient you to some of the terms and concepts.²

Sex: In this way of thinking, sex refers to one's reproductive system, the endocrine system, secondary sex characteristics like body hair and bone structure, and chromosomes. Some people refer to this as biological sex or sex assigned at birth.³

Gender: Traditionally, gender has been used almost synonymously with sex. However, gender also refers to the cultural associations and expectations attached to being a man or woman. Some people now use this term to describe how one thinks about or experiences one's own identity. It might align with one's sex, or it might be something else entirely.

Gender Expression: Gender expression refers to how one presents themselves to others.

² Preston Sprinkle, "Pastoral Paper 12: A Biblical Conversation about Transgender Identities," The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field_product_category_tid=1.

³ <https://cmda.org/mental-health-advocacy-for-gender-dysphoric-youth/>

Transgender is an adjective that covers many ways in which people experience their gender misaligning with their sex. A person who was born female may think of herself as more or less like a woman, more or less like a man, or as someone who is neither and defies all categories.

Gender Dysphoria is a psychological term used to describe the distress that some people feel because they believe their gender differs from their sex. Gender dysphoria is associated with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and many other symptoms.⁴

Transgender people frequently transition in one or more of three ways:

Social Transitioning involves behaving and/or dressing like a different sex. People may change their name and the pronouns they use to refer to themselves.

Hormonal Transitioning means taking hormones associated with the opposite sex.

Surgical Transitioning involves steps to remove their own sex organs and may involve steps to approximate the sex organs of their chosen sex.⁵

None of this is easy to hear.

The perspective I am describing is very different from our traditional concepts of gender.

These ideas challenge basic pieces of our language and involve drastic procedures.

Suddenly, this perspective seems to be everywhere, even altering the signs on restrooms.

This idea is very upsetting. However, people are hurting.

Let's talk about truth. Let's do so with grace. Let's talk about this as Jesus would. As we do so, let's bring light to dark places and hope where there is despair.

LET'S UNDERSTAND OUR BODIES.

Gender Dysphoria requires that we think of some part of ourselves as being at odds with our bodies.

The transgender perspective acknowledges that our bodies are born with a sex.

However, the transgender perspective requires that we think of ourselves as having a mind or "true self" that stands apart from that biological reality.

The mind or "true self" can be at odds with or contradict our body.

This is a question of anthropology. Who or what are we as humans? Let's examine three basic options.⁶

Option #1: Bodies without Souls: Many today say that we human beings are physical beings and nothing more. We consist of atoms, cells, tissues, organs, and systems. These things all somehow work together naturally to produce what we think of as thought, mind, and self.

Option #2: Souls with Bodies: This is essentially the view of the ancient philosopher Plato, of several major world religions, and of many people today. In this view, the soul is an independently existing

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Preston Sprinkle, "Pastoral Paper 14: Guidance for Churches on Membership, Baptism, Communion, Service, and Leadership for Trans* People," The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field_product_category_tid=1.

⁶ John W. Cooper, "The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no 2 (2009) 32-50.

spiritual entity containing a person's thoughts, true self, and even memories. The soul exists independently of the body, it may pre-exist the body, and it will exist once the body dies. In this view of anthropology, it is easy to conceive of a soul that is out of alignment with a body. In other words, it is easy to think of a female soul mistakenly taking up residence in a male body. However, this is not the Christian view of anthropology.

Option #3: Embodied Souls: Christianity teaches that we are embodied souls. We are created as bodies with spirits or souls, a union of spiritual substance and physical substance.

The Bible teaches that we are embodied souls.

In **Genesis 2:7**, God fashioned Adam from clay; that's the body. Then God breathed his own breath or spirit into Adam; that's the spirit. Together body and spirit become living soul.

... [T]hen the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Death has the unfortunate effect of separating our spirit or soul from our bodies for a time. We see the spirits or souls of the dead existing apart from bodies in heaven with God right now. In Revelation 6, the souls of dead martyrs are in heaven waiting for God's final judgment.

However, the Bible teaches that we will be resurrected and that our resurrected bodies will embody our souls once again forever. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52** says:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

We are embodied souls.

Biblical anthropology does not leave room for souls at war with bodies.⁷

The body and soul are the two sides of one person.

The soul and body are not independent, nor can they be at war with one another.

Biblical anthropology leads us to think of transgender people as suffering people.

The wrong soul didn't go into the wrong body. That's wrong anthropology.

God didn't make a mistake. That's bad theology, and it doesn't make sense.

We are left to conclude that something has gone wrong. Something is broken.

If we understand our bodies, then we know that transgender people deserve our compassion and need our help.

LET'S APPRECIATE OUR GENDER.

We need to appreciate fully what it means to be men and women.

To be a woman is a wonderful gift of God. To be a man is a wonderful gift of God.

In the book *Love Thy Body*, the author shares the experience of a girl named Alex. As a two-year old, Alex told her parents that she was a boy. When her parents refused to treat her as a boy, she would explode with angry tantrums. Life with her was like a war.

⁷ Robert S. Smith, "Body, Soul, and Gender Identity: Thinking Theologically about Human Constitution," *Eikon* (Fall 2021).

Alex's parents tried to help her find good, healthy ways to be a girl. It was only when Alex joined a girl's baseball team at age eight and found other girls who liked some of the things that she liked that Alex was able to enjoy herself as a girl and later as a woman.⁸

We need to understand and appreciate fully what it means to be men and women.

Stereotypes limit our options and drive a sense of dislocation.

We have had stereotypes of how men and women are to think and act.

Those stereotypes are real with real world consequences.

When I was growing up, I liked to read and study. I liked music, art, television, and science fiction. I didn't like sports and was afraid of guns and loud noises.

I got called lots of names in elementary school and junior high.

I grew up in a supportive family, and I'm confident enough in myself that I just learned to do my own thing and be my own person. The world around me caught up with me by the time I was a teenager, and as a young adult I started loving a lot of things that I didn't like as a child.

But stereotypes cause lots of problems!

The Bible tells us bluntly to align our gender and our gender expressions with our sex.

The Bible forbids cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5).

It discourages us from acting like the opposite gender (1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

The Bible encourages us to follow the nature with which God created us (Romans 1:26-27).

However, the Bible defies our culture's gender stereotypes and broadens our options.

Jacob stayed around the house while Esau went out to hunt. Both were men (Genesis 25:27).

Bezalel and Oholiab were men who designed things with their minds and made them with their hands (Exodus 31:1-10).

Deborah (a woman) made a great judge of people and a great military leader (Judges 4).

David killed giants, fought battles, wrote poetry, and played the lyre.

The woman in Proverbs 31 cooks and cares for people. She also works with her hands and is skilled in business.

Jesus turned over tables when angered (Matthew 21:12-17) and cried and spoke about gathering his people together the way a mother hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:37).⁹

The Bible didn't give us Barbie or G.I. Joe; the culture did.

Let's learn to appreciate being men and women without some of the rigid and unbiblical stereotypes our broken culture has tried to force on us.

LET'S APPRECIATE HOW WE WERE CREATED.

Transitioning doesn't resolve the pain that transgender people feel.

Johns Hopkins Hospital pioneered reassignment surgeries to resolve gender dysphoria.

⁸ Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2018), 223.

⁹ Sprinkle, "Pastoral Paper 12."

Then Dr. Paul McHugh became the psychiatrist in chief.

Dr. McHugh takes a scientific approach to psychological questions and looks at data and outcomes. When Dr. McHugh studied the data and the outcomes, he found that gender reassignment surgery did not resolve the suffering associated with gender dysphoria.

So, in 1979, he closed Johns Hopkins Hospital's Gender Identity Clinic.¹⁰

A major, peer-reviewed, large-scale, multi-year study of outcomes from gender reassignment procedures demonstrated that transgender individuals who choose this path frequently face immense suffering afterward. They face high rates of mental illness. They have dramatically higher suicide rates. They encounter multiple additional health risks as well.¹¹

Transitioning does not resolve the pain most transgender people experience.

Rather than helping people with gender dysphoria to remake their bodies into the image they see in their minds, we do better to help them see the beauty and possibility in who God made them to be in the first place.

We do better when we help them to find themselves in God's Story.

Like all of us, people with gender dysphoria were created by God in his image and by his plan.

Like all of us, though, they are broken and unable to repair what is broken on their own.

Like all of us, people with gender dysphoria need Jesus; he forgives us of our sin, frees us from our prisons, and begins to heal us from our brokenness.

Like all of us, people who live with gender dysphoria need the Holy Spirit and their brothers and sisters in the Church.

Like all of us, people with gender dysphoria long for the day when Jesus returns and remakes the world as it is as the world as it should be.

Many of us ask questions like those transgender people ask: Are we a mistake?

We routinely ask explicitly or implicitly if God made a mistake when he made us.

We ask questions like, "Did God make a mistake in my being born in this era?"

Did God make a mistake when I was born introverted or extroverted.

Did God make a mistake when I was born liking tasks and concentrating on details?

Did God make a mistake when he made me without the ability to sing?

At some point, we all ask these questions.

Let's learn to appreciate how we were created.

Loving the way God made us does not mean that we indulge our sinful tendencies or fail to fulfill the basic expectations life has of us. Those are matters of sanctification and growing up.

However, loving the way God made us means accepting who we fundamentally are, thanking God for the way he made us, discovering the gifts that God has given us, and using them for his great glory in the most skilled, effective ways possible.

¹⁰ Abigail Shrier, "Standing Against Psychiatry's Crazes," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2019.

¹¹ Cecelia Dhejne, et. al., "Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden," *PLoS ONE* (Volume 6, Issue 2, February 2011).

May we all accept and appreciate the gift of life God gave us when he created us.

We have so much to offer the world in The Age of Fluidity.

Rather than deconstructing the flaws of the world around us, let's construct a positive view of human intimacy that flows from the Bible.

Let us construct our lives—our sense of ourselves, our plans for living, our hopes and dreams for relationships, and our approach to human intimacy—from God's plan revealed to us definitively and reliably through the Bible.

Let's begin by admitting that we are born imprinted by the brokenness of the world.

Let's admit that we have sinned and fallen short of God's holiness.

Let's turn to Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay the entire price for our sins and who rose again three days later victorious over sin, death and evil. Let's accept the forgiveness that comes from him and the new lives his Holy Spirit enables us to live.

Let us embrace God's plan for human intimacy. Let's pursue celibacy in singleness and intimacy in thriving, life-long marriages between one man and one woman.

In doing so, we will show the world what wisdom God has and what joy our Creator offers!

Then we can offer the most radical hope to the world!

We can offer the world righteousness—the full and right love of God produced by obeying him.

We can offer the world justice—the full and right love of our neighbors, particularly those neighbors who are or might be closest to us and most intimate with us.

We can offer the world the peace that we get when justice and righteousness meet.

We don't just offer a plan and an option for how to make life work. We offer a Savior, forgiveness, restoration, and hope when we fail.

Let's offer all of it to a world in desperate need.

That's how we live in The Age of Fluidity.

Discussion Questions

1. What has surprised you the most about our culture's recent move toward redefining gender?
2. How does Psalm 139 impact your understanding of gender? Are there other passages that affect your thinking on the subject?
3. Do you personally know someone who identifies as transgender? How has that relationship informed this discussion for you?
4. What does it mean for you to be able to appreciate your gender?
5. How can God's word help answer the question "Am I a mistake?" What makes this question so destructive?
6. In your opinion, have traditional gender roles been hindrances or helps in forming positive self-identity?
7. What can the gospel offer to those who are transgender or suffer from gender dysphoria?