



TIME OF GRACE®

God & Gender: What About Transgender? (Parts 1 and 2)

Study Notes

Summary

If God created us male and female, why have so many of God’s sons questioned if he actually created them to be his daughters? And why have so many Christian women wondered if they were really made to be God’s sons? Paul indirectly answered these questions when he wrote about the struggles of life in this broken world. Both parts of this message intend to explain the transgender temptation and offer hope and encouragement to those facing it.

- Transgender = Your _____ doesn’t agree with your _____.
- 1 Corinthians 13:2: If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

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- Genesis 1:27,28: ²⁷ Male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number.”
- Romans 8:23: We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.
- Philippians 2:8: And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

- Summary: God made us _____, but sin broke our _____, so Jesus came once to _____ us and will come again to _____ us.
- What now? _____!

Points to Ponder

1. What has been your experience with gender dysphoria? Based on this lesson, did you balance God's grace and God's truth well?
2. Why is understanding the two separate comings of Jesus so crucial to a hopeful view of sexuality? In other words, why is grasping today's summary (confer the blanks above) essential to being full of grace and truth?
3. Homework: Read [Gay & God](#) and share your top three takeaways with a Christian friend.

Homework for Next Week

Read Luke 24:50-53

Time of Grace Ministry
God & Gender: What About Transgender (Part 1)
Genesis 1:27-28, Romans 8:18 and 23
July 19, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

As I left the conversation that day, I realized how personal the transgender issue can be. It's not just a headline, it's not just the latest celebrity thing that you see in the newspapers or on social media. It's something that happens in our homes and in our church and with us.

Recently, dozens of teenagers asked me some pretty personal questions about God, about gender, and about sexuality. They had just read that little book that I wrote called "Gay and God" and their teacher at their Christian high school asked them to respond and to react. And I got lots of questions about gay and lesbian and bisexual friends, and how we personally deal with those feelings as Christians when they come up in our own hearts. But there were a number of questions not about the sexuality side of things but about gender. What happens, Pastor, if I feel transgender? What should I do if it doesn't fit; how my body is and how my brain feels? What does God want me to do?

What would you say to those humble and honest teenagers? And maybe way more importantly, what would God say? And maybe even more importantly, does what you say and what God say actually agree? Today's the first of a two-part message about God and transgender. By this point in the world's history, I'm sure you're familiar with the topic. Maybe you have felt what some of those teenagers have felt; a disconnect between your body and your brain. Or maybe you've worked with someone in that situation. Maybe it's your son, your daughter, your brother, your sister, your mother, your father, your roommate, or your best friend; we're going to come face-to-face with it sooner or later so the question is do you and I agree with God? There are plenty of spiritual people, Christian people, who have very strong opinions on this matter: It's good, it's bad, it's all right, it's all wrong. We should open our arms, we should set people straight. They're strong voices but the question that our Father in heaven cares about is does your voice, does my voice, agree with his?

Today, we're going to begin a journey that is pretty tough, to be honest with you, but it is so essential in our world. I was reminded of that the other day when I attended an online conference and heard the story of one woman who had been down that road so far. She was born as a biological female but later on, just after her college years, I believe, she transitioned into presenting herself as a male. And then after another few years of spiritual struggle, she came back to being female. And as I listened to her story, two things really struck me. I was struck by what a difficult life she had faced; this was a challenge she didn't choose. She never would have. Something that I've never dealt with but it sounded so difficult what she had been through.

But do you know what else I learned? I learned about the power of Christians who act like Jesus Christ. Christians who agree with our Father; who don't feel like they have to choose between grace and truth, between love and patience and justice and righteousness. And today, that's what

I hope this message does. Sooner or later, you and I are going to come face-to-face with this situation with a real person, with a real story, someone who God really loves. And I pray this message sends us down a path of grace and truth; not choosing between one or the other but embracing both just like Jesus did. So enjoy this message; the first of a two-part series that deals with God and transgender.

Transgender is different when it gets personal. Like you in recent years, I've heard a lot of stories and read a lot of headlines about transgender people in America. And like you, when I heard all those stories, I had a reaction; thoughts and emotions flooded my head and my heart. But I want to tell you, it was really different when transgender became personal and that's what happened a couple weeks ago. I was thinking about speaking to you today and I remembered a text I had received from a member of our church a few years ago on one of our question and answer Sundays; a question that seemed to hint at an internal struggle with gender identity. And I reached out to this member of our church and I gently asked the question, "Was that thing you asked me - was that personal to you?" And she admitted that it was. And I asked, "Would it be okay if we sat down and talked and I asked you some questions and learned from your experience?" And she said yes. And I asked if I had her permission to share anonymously that conversation with you today and she said that I could. And that, for me, is when the transgender topics stopped being something out there and started becoming something right here. Because I was sitting this far away at a coffee table from a young woman that I knew, that I cared about, that I pastored, and that I respected. She was a young woman who had a strong faith and strong family, a mom who loved her and loved Jesus, a dad who loved her and loved Jesus, a marriage that she got to see in her home that was strong and centered on Jesus. Here was a woman who was pursuing God with her whole heart, a young woman who had good roots in Jesus. She gathered and would worship with us regularly, open her Bible at home, a strong prayer life. She cared deeply about her faith and she also faced an often daily struggle that I had not been through and she told me what it was like.

To try to pick out her clothes each day when there's a difference between her biological body and what she felt in her brain. She told me how it felt, just a gut reaction, when someone called her "Miss." Like it just didn't seem to fit with what she felt in her heart. It kind of felt like how I might feel if I was walking through the lobby after church and you said, "Hey, lady!" It just wasn't right. She told me how she felt when someone mistook her for a man and said, "Excuse me, sir," that something just smiled in her heart; it felt like the right thing, like her very identity. And she told me how hard it was to talk about it even with people who knew her and loved her and promised they would be there for her unconditionally.

As I left the conversation that day, I realized how personal the transgender issue can be. It's not just a headline; it's not just the latest celebrity thing that you see in the newspapers or on social media. It's something that happens in our homes and in our church and with us. And so, I wonder as I look out at all of you here today, has the transgender topic gotten personal for you just yet? And maybe for a few of you, that young woman's story really rings a bell; you've felt the exact same way. The struggle, the confusion, the tension; you're not quite sure what to do. Or maybe you're one of those many people that knows and loves someone who's struggling with their gender identity; a classmate or a coworker, your godson, your niece, your nephew, your brother, your sister, and you know them and you love them and you know that they love God but

they feel kind of stuck between their brain and their body. Or maybe you're just like one of those many Christians who wants to do the right thing. You don't want to have to choose between love and truth; you want to be like Jesus and be full of both. You want to love every single thing that God said in the Bible and every single person that God made and that you meet. But in this world and in this culture, where so much has changed so fast, maybe you're not quite sure what to do just yet. I mean, there's so many new words that come out every year. There's transgender and there's cisgender, there's pansexual and asexual. There's gender fluid and nonbinary and sometimes you feel like you need a dictionary just to know what it means, much less knowing how you should react in the moment when your cousin posts something about her gender identity.

And for all those reasons, I want to talk to you today. I want to talk to you personally and hopefully, humbly and biblically about a topic that will eventually affect all of us in a very personal way. I want to talk about transgender. But before I jump in, I need to put a big asterisk on the message I'm about to share with you and the asterisk is I'm still not sure if I should. You know, if you and I happen to meet today in the lobby of church for the first time and you told me you were transgender, I'm not sure if I would actually talk about that topic until like our 62nd conversation. First, I'd want to go and pay for coffee and I'd want to hear your story about your family, your friendships, your experiences with religion and with Jesus. I'd want to know about your faith and your struggles, your ups and downs, your idols and your joys. I'd want to tell you where I come from, what I struggle with, why I love Jesus, follow Jesus, and trust in Jesus. I'd want to talk to you about the Bible, where it comes from, why I love it, why I trust it, why I cling to it even when I don't understand it. I'd want to tell you about the Christian life, what it is and what it isn't. I'd want to talk about eternity, what it's going to be like, how long it lasts, and this life, how short it is in the grand scheme of things. And after we had talked about that long list, then I think I'd be ready to talk about something as personal and as emotional as gender or sexuality. But as I look at all of you here today, I realize that I don't know most of you that well. Some of you don't know my middle name, the names of my kids. Some of you I don't even know your first name and here we are talking about something this deep, this personal, and this profound. I learned over the years as a pastor that truth is great but if the airplane of truth can't land on the runway of trust, sometimes it just crashes and burns. And so my asterisk is I'm not sure if we should even talk about this just yet. Until we love each other, know each other, and trust each other, I'm not sure if this topic is right. It's why I think that Christians have to be so, so careful what they put on social media that's read by all sorts of people that they don't know and haven't built a relationship of trust with just yet.

But here's what I also realized: That if I waited, if I push pause right now, walked off this stage, and got to know all of you that well, if we spent a whole year building the runway of trust and 52 Sundays from now I got up to preach on transgender, guess who would show up? New people. And so there's never going to be a perfect Sunday; there's never going to be a perfect world. And so I'm just compelled to talk about this today. I'm not sure if it's wise or not but I'm about to. And that's why when you leave church today, I'm going to give you a gift. Maybe you saw it when you came in; there's stacks of books, a little book that I wrote about four years ago, based on a sermon series from this church called "Gay and God." And I'm totally aware that sexuality, being gay, is a little bit distinct from gender identity but in that book, I hope you're going to hear how much I love the Bible, why I love the Bible, and how much I'm trying to love people no

matter what they believe and how they behave. And I want you to grab a copy of that book when you leave today and I want you to read it so that you know my heart and hope that it builds enough trust for the truth of God's word to land in the right place today.

So with that asterisk being explained, I have three goals before I say, "Amen." First, I want to teach you what transgender is. Second, I want to talk about what the Bible says. And third, I want to talk about what our church should do. And so when you leave here today, if you know what transgender is, what the Bible says, and what Christians should do, I'll consider that mission accomplished. I won't be able to answer every question you might have, especially about how you deal with it out there at work and at school and in the world, but when it comes to the church, Christian people, let's figure out what it is, what God says, and what we should do.

Alright, part one: What transgender is. The word "trans" in Latin means to crossover. If you've ever heard of a transatlantic flight, it's a flight that crosses over the Atlantic Ocean. If you've ever had a job transfer, you're crossing over from one company to another. If the transmission on your car has ever broken, it's because you're crossing over from rich to broke, alright? Sorry, that's a heavy - that's not even true. Alright, you just need to laugh for a second. It means to crossover. So what is transgender? Transgender is when a person wants to crossover from identifying as male or female to the opposite gender. And for you, that might seem baffling. I mean, you can understand why you take a transatlantic flight but why would someone go through the cost and the emotional distress of crossing over when it comes to gender? And if you're taking notes in your program, I want to give you the answer. It's because transgender people would say this: That their brain doesn't agree with their body. The experience is what doctors will call gender dysphoria. So euphoria is feeling good; dysphoria is when you feel bad. And sometimes, you feel so bad and you feel so bad for so long that you consider crossing over, changing gender, hoping that will fix the feelings that you feel.

In other words, people that have transgender feelings are kind of like the doorknob in my bathroom. Five years ago, my wife and I moved to Appleton with our kids and after a couple times using our bathroom, I noticed something about the doorknob. It didn't match. The outside of the doorknob was gold and the inside was silver and I honestly don't know who did it or why they did it or if they ran out of parts but there's a distinction, right, between what you'd see on the outside and what it was like on the inside. And that's a little bit of how trans people feel. Like, on the outside, you might say you're a girl or you're a boy, you're a man, you're a woman. But what they sense, what they deeply feel on the inside, was so real, is a distinction and a difference.

How many people have that experience? Numbers are debated, of course, but recently the Williams Institute in 2016 reported that 0.6 percent of Americans will experience gender dysphoria. And that might seem so small, like it's insignificant, less than one percent of the population, but consider this: Our church on both of its campuses, between St. Peter and The Core, has just over 2,200 people. So 0.6 percent of just our church family equals like 12 or 13 people. Faces that you would recognize. People that we love and know and pray with and sing with and worship with. People that God loves so much that he gave his only Son. Right here, in our church family, statistically there are people who deal with the dysphoria.

So what do you do? Like when you find yourself stuck between brain and body, what options do you have? There's a lot of ways to try and fix that feeling. Some people will just wait and pray and hope that the dysphoria goes away. That might not seem like a good option but it actually works for a lot of kids who think they're boys, if they're biologically girls, with enough time and enough years, that feeling kind of passes and the majority of kids will grow out of their gender dysphoria. But for many people, that doesn't work, so what do they do then? Do they just grin and bear it? Do they carry that cross for decades? For the rest of their lives? Seventy-five, eighty, ninety years? For some people, that doesn't seem like an option so they take the next step and they adapt their gender expression. If I was dealing with gender dysphoria, I might express myself differently. I might wear a dress or women's shoes, women's underwear, I might wear makeup, jewelry, style my hair differently, some way that I can outwardly express how I feel in my heart and in my mind.

But for other people, that still doesn't fix the way they feel and so they'll ask other people to address them in a different way. Now, don't call me Mike anymore; call me Marissa. Don't call me he; call me she. And maybe if you identify with what I'm feeling in my brain that will make me feel better. For other people though, that's still not enough because their bodies are still their bodies. And so they'll reach out to an endocrinologist and they'll adjust the hormones that are put into their body. They might receive a boost of testosterone or estrogen. If the person with gender dysphoria is young, they might receive puberty blockers so their body doesn't develop in male or female ways. But for some people, that's still not enough and so they take probably the most extreme step and they go through surgery. A woman might have a double mastectomy to remove her breasts. A man or woman might have bottom-half surgery to adjust their private parts. They might have vocal surgery to address the pitch of their voice. If you have strong, masculine features, you might go through facial reconstruction surgery to soften it. All these different ways so that outwardly, I'll try and match my body with how my brain feels inside.

Now before you react to any of that, I need you to know something really, really important. It's the really important thing that I forgot the other day at KFC. I was grabbing lunch here at the office, there's a KFC just down the street, and when I walked in there was a guy who was taller than me - I think about 6'4", 6'5" - he was twice as big as me and he was dressed as a woman. And I'm not quite sure what the expression was that immediately popped onto my face but I'm guessing surprised and curious and maybe a little bit uncomfortable. But I wish I could go back and tell my face about the facts that I recently learned. Today's going to be kind of a long message as I try to put truth deep into your heart and so if I lose you, I get it. But I really can't lose you for the next minute, okay? The fact that I need you to know is that according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 42 percent of teenagers who experience this dysphoria will try to kill themselves. Forty-two percent. They won't think about it, they won't have suicidal thoughts, they will actually attempt it. You know, sometimes online you see these snarky memes like, "Well, I'm identifying as a unicorn today," like it was some flippant choice just to be funny. But it's not funny. Before that guy dressed up as a woman and went to his job at KFC, he had probably been carrying a burden so intense that four out of 10 of his trans friends tried to kill themselves; maybe he, himself.

And this is why it is so, so important - before we react, before we even open this book - that we remember one of the foundational principals of this book: That love does not discriminate. That

differences do not deter love. That no matter how a person dresses, how they believe, how they behave, how they identify, God so loved the world and it's so important that we do, too. The apostle Paul talked about this in 1 Corinthians 13; he said these words: "If I have a faith that can move mountains but do not have love, I'm nothing." Which means if you have a faith that can move mountains and you do have love, you're something and you're someone really helpful for a person who is bearing a very, very heavy burden. When we come first with compassion, when our first reaction is thanking someone for their story, when we reach out in Christian love and we don't change, we don't get weird or awkward, we just want to know where they've been and how we can help, we become someone very powerful as they battle a distinction maybe many of us have never been through.

Two days ago, I interviewed a pastor who has ministered to many transgender Christians. And he told me, "You know, Mike, when I hear about the struggle that these men and women have, I start to thank God for something I never thanked him for before; that I've never had to wrestle with my gender. When I stand in front of my closet, like my biggest struggle is picking out what to wear; not what gender to express myself as. When I stand in front of the mirror, I'm thinking about the pounds I've put on since college; not if I'm in the right body." And so if you've never battled the dysphoria, I mean, thank God that you've never had to bear that burden and think deeply, kindly, and compassionately about those who do.

Brothers and sisters, this is vitally important for us because here's the truth: Before your son or your daughter tells you about the dysphoria, before your godchild or your classmate or your next door neighbor tells you about what they're going through, first they will watch you. They'll sit in the living room as Caitlyn Jenner comes on TV, as Jazz Jennings TV show runs its commercial and they're going to watch how you react. Are you disgusted? Is your heart broken? Do you care? Are you quick to listen, quick to speak? They're watching to figure out if we're safe and if we're loving. The best thing we in the world can do as a church is to lead with love. We'll talk about truth in a second but transgender people have a body and a brain that don't match and they're in desperate need of unconditional love from those who have first received it from Jesus.

So that's part one. What is transgender? It's a struggle that many people have; a dysphoria between body and brain. And that leads us to part number two; not what transgender is but what the Bible says. Now, it's true we're supposed to love everyone but that doesn't mean that everything is okay. So where does transgender fall? Is that how God made you? Should we affirm that? Applaud that? Whatever a person decides, what their name, their pronouns, their dress, their surgery - should we be okay with that? Supportive of that within the church? Or does the Bible say something different? And the hard part of those difficult questions is that if you type "transgender" into like a Bible search engine, you would get zero responses. The word isn't used - binary, nonbinary, asexual, intersex - like there aren't direct answers to these questions. And yet, the Bible has so much to say. You know, throughout this series, I've been referring you to a chart that we created from the first three pages of the Bible. When it comes to male and female, we talked about what makes us unique and what God made us united. And I think in that chart - I'm not going to teach through all 10 of those phrases - but there's some real clues and keys to helping us understand how Christians should react to transgender experiences within and outside the church.

The first one comes from Genesis 1. In a perfect world without brokenness, without sin, without struggle, it says "Male and female, God created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number.'" This is a super important verse, alright? So God created them male and female. Now modern culture would like to say that gender is like a social construct; it's what you feel, what you think, almost like a personal identification. But in this passage, God is the one who creates not just people but people with gender.

Well, I told you this is a really important and really difficult journey so thanks for sticking with us through part one. We have so much more ground to cover so I pray that you can join us next week for part two so we'll see you then on Time of Grace.