



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 2)
Genesis 1:27-28, Romans 8:18 and 23
July 26, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Recently, dozens of teenagers asked me some pretty personal questions about God, about gender, and about sexuality. "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?"

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. 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.

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? And so my asterisk is I'm not sure if we should even talk about this just yet. Until we know each other, love 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.

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.

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.'" That's probably why there's sometimes a big distinction between modern culture and the church. Modern culture says that your sex is just what's assigned at birth but your gender is something that you feel and express out of your own heart. And in Genesis 1, God would not agree. He says that gender's not something you decide; it's something that's given. And in the beginning, there was this perfect wholeness. God created a man who knew he was a man; he was attracted to a woman and they came together in perfect wholeness to be fruitful and to fill the earth. And when God looked at that, he said, "That's good."

Which kind of begs the question then, why isn't it? Why are there people who are made male but don't feel that way? Why are there people who are created female by God but aren't attracted to men? Why are there people with birth defects; born intersex with like both sets of body parts? Why is there so much tension and dysphoria and struggle?

Recently, I was at a coffee shop and the back of the barista's t-shirt had a quote from Lady Gaga that said, "Don't let anyone, not a single soul on the planet, judge you for who God made you to be." That's pretty good logic actually, right? God is good. God doesn't make any mistakes. So if that's how you were born, ever since you can remember there's been like this distinction between brain and body, maybe that's how God wants you to be. And that logic would actually work if there were only two pages in the Bible. But on the third page, we find God's explanation for all the struggles that we feel and we face. It's called the fall into sin. In the beginning, there was that male and female made in the image of God. They were created at this height of holiness. But when they sinned, they fell from such a height that everything got broken. Our sexuality, our gender, our bodies would break down, the world would fall apart, the relationship with God would be broken, our relationships with each other would be broken. It wasn't because God made us that way; it's because sin messed with what God made. And when sin messed with what God made, it made everything so hard. Everything. The Bible's really honest about that; that even if you're a Christian, even if you're filled with the Holy Spirit, like what you might experience right now in your heart and in your mind, what might feel natural and so easy and so desirable, what you might be drawn to in love, it can be so hard it's almost like a woman who's going through labor. Paul put it this way in Romans 8; he said, "We ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit," that's Christians, "we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies." But why is Paul and other Christians groaning inwardly? Why are they like a woman who's having contractions and just waiting until that moment finally arrives? Because he says our bodies have yet to be redeemed. That when Jesus came he saved our souls and he forgave every sin but we are still living in these bodies affected by brokenness.

And you get that, don't you? For some of you it's gender dysphoria; your body just feels so painful, it just doesn't fit. For others of you, it's anxiety. What you feel in your mind, what just pops into your head without choosing is like a worst case scenario and what if and what about and it just makes you so sick and it's just like your default setting. For some of you your struggle is depression and you never ever chose it but you're in the middle of it and every day you try to hold on. And you know the passage is right here, that God is working for my good. Romans 8, I memorized it when I was a kid, but it's not natural to believe that or to feel that. You have to fight for that. For some of you it's sexual purity. You know what God says, how he designed marriage, how good purity is to be faithful to your spouse but man, sometimes you're attracted to people you shouldn't be attracted to. For some of you it's an eating disorder. Like the distinction between your body and your brain, people would say, "Oh my goodness, you're so thin," but you feel overweight and disgusting and it's not true but it's just so natural to feel it. You know, a thousand different ways - like what's inside of us does not match what God wants us to be because sin broke us. God designed us so that as human beings we just match up perfectly with everything that he says but in this world it's hard in a thousand ways. And it's not because everything we feel is right; it's because sin messed with everything.

But do you know what I know about labor pains? They lead to something good. I mean, if you would tell a woman who's going through her first delivery, "It's going to be so good; you're going to almost forget about all this." She'd slap you in the face. But we'd be right. After my wife, Kim, had our first baby, I remember carrying this little girl that made us weep for joy and as we're like in the hallways, we see these other couples walking hand in hand, doing the breathing, and there was no way I could have explained to them that the pain they were feeling, as intense as it was, was about to be overshadowed and made nothing by what was coming. And that's what the Bible says. That because of Jesus, all the struggles we have with gender dysphoria, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, sexuality, they seem like so much we just want to escape it but Jesus said hold on and I'm going to give you something so good you'll forget it.

It'd be insulting to say that if you're dealing with a dysphoria but that's what Paul said here in Romans 8:18: "I consider that our present sufferings," gender dysphoria included, "are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." The day is going to come when God holds us in his arms as his adopted kids, righteous and better and fixed, and we will praise him for all eternity.

One of my favorite moments of meeting with that young woman at the coffee shop was what she told me about Jesus. You know, I've studied this book for a long time; it's my job. I got my degree and then my masters and then my doctorate in this book but that young woman told me something about Jesus I had never thought of before and she was so right. She said that Jesus can relate to dysphoria. I mean, think about that. Jesus is in heaven for all eternity. It's just him and the Father and the Holy Spirit and they're so happy. It's like euphoria times a million. There's no pain, there's no struggle, there's no sorrow, there's no brokenness but 2,000 years ago, what did Jesus choose? A body. Not a glorified body but a body that would be limited; a body that would get tired. What was it like for Jesus knowing who he truly was, his real identity, but he was in this body that he chose to limit and to humble? Like he gets it. When your body isn't everything God intended it to be, he gets it. And better yet, he chose it. The apostle Paul talks about how Jesus is true God and yet look at what he says in Philippians 2: "Being found in

appearance as a man, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." He came as a man and he humbled himself. After he was raised from the dead his body would be glorious but before his crucifixion, it was not. And here's why: Because he wanted to make you whole. Jesus was whole in heaven with the Father and he saw us so broken and dysphoric here in this life so what did he choose? He chose to embrace our dysphoria so that one day we could have his wholeness. He came to give his life on a cross so that we would know that all of our struggles and our daily sins, they are forgiven. That our sins might feel like so much and so constant and so many but his mercy is always more. And then on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead and he made you an insane promise. Jesus promised you that if you believe in him, you will not go to heaven forever. No, you won't. Heaven is not your eternal home. Heaven is just a sweet apartment you get to stay in when you die because do you know where your eternal home is? A new body. The Apostle's Creed says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church," and it gets this beautiful line, "And I believe in the resurrection of the dead." That's God's promise; that he always intended us to have a body; a body that felt like this. And one day, when Jesus appears in the sky, the dead will be raised and our bodies will be transformed and there will be no dysphoria, no distress. There will be no medication, there will be no eating disorders, no anxiety, no depression, no mental illness. Our backs won't hurt, we won't reach for our medication, nurses will be out of jobs, just like preachers will because we'll see the face of Jesus and his face will say everything we need to know. And that's going to last forever. It might feel like forever as you battle that thing in your heart but Jesus knows it's just this long and if you hold onto him and bear your cross, one day you'll get to put it down and he'll give you a crown.

So what does the Bible teach about transgender feelings? If you're taking notes, I'd summarize it this way: That God made us binary. He did create us male and female but sin broke our bodies; they messed with our gender, our sexuality, our everything. So Jesus came once 2,000 years ago to forgive us and he will come again to fix us. To restore us. To make everything new, including you.

So that brings us to part three and if your brain is tired, don't worry - I've only got four more minutes. So what do we do now as a church? If the transgender struggle exists among us and if the Bible says it's a heavy cross to bear, what do we do now? Well, write this down; the answer's simple: We actually do life together. Together is the best thing we can do. Now I love the conversation I had at the coffee shop; sometimes just talking with your pastor is a great blessing. And I love the benefit of counselors and support groups; sometimes just being with people who are in the same boat as you are is so helpful. But the best thing we can do for transgender people and for all people is just to do life together. To not think that our struggles and our sins are like so embarrassing and shameful that we can only talk if the door is closed and the pastor has sworn he'll keep it a secret. The best thing that we can do is right here in our church, in your homes, in our life groups, to do life together. That if you have a sin, you confess it. If you have a struggle, you admit it. If there's something embarrassing, you open up about it so that we can encourage one another and pray for each other and forgive each other in Jesus' name. So that we can let people know that you don't have to hide and that Jesus' mercy is always more. So that even if you keep doing the things that you don't want to do that there is no condemnation because Jesus gave his life and was raised from the grave. If there's one prayer I honestly have for our church for the next six months, it's this: That you stop making me your first stop. I love you. And I

would love it if you loved each other that much. That you wouldn't be scared of each other, this church would not be a spiritual competition of whose closer to Jesus, but instead we just be real and we can remind each other that we all have a real Savior. I think that would work because it did for her.

My favorite part times a billion of that conversation was when she told me that I wasn't the first person she told. That before she came to her pastor, she confessed to you; about 10 of you, I think. Gathered in a circle for life group, she was nervous but the Holy Spirit was kicking her through the door of honesty and so she went and do you know what you did? You loved her. You didn't bury your faces in your Bibles. You didn't take a step back in confusion. You took a step forward. You stood up, you hugged her, you loved her, you met with her and you treated her just like you would want to be treated; a person who's struggling in a broken world that's found hope in Jesus.

And I've got to tell you - I was so, so proud of you. You made me proud a lot of times in the last five years as your pastor but I'm not sure if anything comes close to that. That a person could go to a Bible study in a Christian church, admit that struggle, and be initially loved. Well done.

Brothers and sisters, that's how God is in the transforming business. He crosses us over from secrecy to confession, from despair to hope, from wanting to end our life to holding on to Jesus for eternal life and he does it through you. So let's love one another, confess our sins to each other, pray for each other, so that just as the Bible says, we can be healed. Let's pray.

Jesus, you know the people who were in the room that day when she confessed. And I'm so grateful your Holy Spirit filled their hearts. Thank you, God, for just another reminder at our church, reminders that I get every week, that when we're real with each other, you bless us in real ways. Heavenly Father, we need wisdom on this topic to know what to say to ourselves, to each other, to be filled with patience and gentleness and love. Without you, we're going to mess this up but with you, we can get this right. I thank you, God, for your infinite patience. I thank you that whether our struggle is short or long, whether our battle lasts just a few days or a few decades, that your mercy is always there for us and that we can always fall back into your forgiving arms.

Thank you, Jesus, for your dysphoria. You chose a life that you didn't have to choose so that we could have a life purely by your grace and we're so grateful. We're asking your Holy Spirit right now to open the eyes of our heart to glimpse your glory and to be so overwhelmed by it that we would actually believe that Paul was right and it's not worth comparing. No matter what we have to struggle with in this life, if we just follow you, Jesus, it's not even close.

I pray, God, for thick skin for us. I know this message will be hard for some people; some might not like it, some in fact might hate it. So help us to be like you, Jesus. To turn the other cheek, to love all people, even those who don't agree with us. Thank you, God, for sending your Spirit to this place today. For giving us ears to hear because faith comes from hearing your message. Thank you, Jesus, for being with us, for being for us, and being among us. We ask all these things confidently as your chosen, forgiven children, and we pray it all in your name, and all God's people said, "Amen."