**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 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. They filled Coy’s closet with pink dresses and got involved in a legal battle over Coy’s access to the girls’ restroom at school.

Stories like this are commonplace now. 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 is all over 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. What does the Bible have to say to those who feel like exiles in their own bodies? What do we as believers have to 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 explore 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 – rather we want to go deeper and think theologically about how God has made us. 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: **A. God created male and female in his own image** and declared humanity very good. 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. And God blessed them.* Verse 31: *“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”*

We’ve already stressed in this course that men and women are equal in dignity, value and worth before God. But here it’s important to recognize that the biological differentiation between men and women is a wonderful part of our Creator’s design. God expertly crafted humanity, with sexually differentiated bodies, as the exquisite jewel of creation. God chose to exhibit his image in men *and* women. We image God in different, complementary ways. Men, generally speaking, display God’s fatherly care and protective, sacrificial love. Women beautifully enact for the world other aspects of what God is like: he is the helper of his people, the one who gives life, nurtures, and supports his children.

And in Gen 2:25 we see that Adam and Eve were fully at home in their God-given, gendered bodies: *“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”* Not ashamed of their bodies, not ashamed of who God made them to be. No tension. No confusion.

So, maleness or femaleness is a gift of God to every individual. God defines it and he imparts it for our good. 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? Our “gender” isn’t just psychological. (*First bullet point*) It involves our body, our physical sex. That’s 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, you embody the image of God. In addition to our fundamental physical differences (*second bullet point*), God has also given men and women distinct dispositions and inclinations, which we’ve been discussing in this course. There is such a thing as masculinity and femininity, as we’ve seen in Genesis 2-3. Broadly speaking, men are wired to provide for and protect others. Women are wired to nurture life and help others flourish. For more on that, just ask me and I can send you the notes from the last 5 weeks. Additionally, (*third bullet point*) the biblical view recognizes that there *are* also cultural expressions of gender that are value-neutral and 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. Now, Deut 22:5 did forbid cross-dressing in the nation of Israel. That should lead us to conclude that we should wear clothes that correspond to our given gender, but *what* those clothes are will change in various cultures. 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 privileges the individual’s psychological self-understanding. One’s gender is 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. All of this can be summed up with a couple of popular slogans: First, “anatomy isn’t destiny.” [[5]](#footnote-5) Or, second, “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 theory suggests that your sex, your sexual orientation (whom you’re attracted to) and your gender identity (who you understand yourself to be) are all distinct and not necessarily correlated.

Even though it might be scandalous to say, 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 confusion, 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. The fall is at the root of every physical and spiritual ailment that afflicts humanity. And we all ratify the effects of the fall with our own free choices to sin and reject God.

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, even though one may be more prominent. About 1 in 1500 children may be born with some intersex trait.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Christian can reply that this rare and challenging condition, like other physical and genetic disorders, stems from the fall. Doctors and pastors must apply wisdom in counseling such individuals, who are created in the image of God and worthy of our love, respect and care. Many of them will be able to identify as either male or female depending on which bodily characteristics are most pronounced. Romans 8 says that all creation is groaning in expectation to be set free from its bondage to corruption. So this is a serious physical issue that deserves our care.

However, getting back to today’s topic: when talking about transgenderism, we’re **not** talking about ambiguous anatomy, but when someone’s clearly male or female and yet doesn’t “feel” that way on the inside. *That’s* the hot button issue today.

That’s why we’ve got to remember that the fall affects not only our bodies, but our inner person – what the Bible terms “the heart.” Romans 1:18 says, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness**suppress the truth****.****.. (verse 21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*

Romans 1 teaches us that nature as we experience is not nature as God intended it. Just because something seems “natural” in a fallen world doesn’t mean it’s right. Not only that, but 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. Our hearts aren’t infallible. So, we can’t trust our self-perception in order to know ourselves rightly. 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 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. By God’s grace and power, people really can change. We can grow in having a more accurate self-understanding. All of us who are in Christ are a testimony to that.

On the other hand, we must be clear that rejecting one’s God-given gender is a particularly fundamental denial of God’s design, and as such, it is sin. It will result in certain consequences.[[9]](#footnote-9) Like all sin, it will lead to pain, despair, and ultimately hell. 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. To reject your given sex is to reject God’s Lordship as Creator over all of life. This goes all the way back to our first parents and their first sin! Satan tempted Eve to believe she could **be someone else** – she could be like God. The idea that you can change who God made you to be is the very sin that Adam and Eve fell into!

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:

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

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. God created us male and female in his image. 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 her 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 privileged. Even though modern science may try to alter someone’s body so it matches his or her psychological understanding, these so-called interventions can never re-create the body entirely. Not to mention, they seem scarily akin to trying to play God.

Christianity replies 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 is worded. Seek wise Christians for advice.

Second, **B. Adopt a Posture of Compassion.** When we think of someone we know who identifies as transgender, we should humbly acknowledge that it’s hard for most of us to even imagine the feeling of being a man trapped in a woman’s body or vice versa, which is how these individuals often describe their sense of reality. 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. Then all of us could sin without excuse. But we must have mercy 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.

Finally, particularly if a family member announces to you that he or she is transgender, let me encourage you to make your first response an affirmation of love. Tell them that you value and care for them as a person. Hug them. 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.

But we should also next: **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. 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. And 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.

You may need to talk about some tricky details. If the person is taking on a new name and pronoun, should you use them? I’m not entirely sure. Of course you want to show respect and be able to maintain a relationship, but I do think at the very least you want them to understand that you do not wish to endorse their decision through the language you use. Again, wisdom will be needed for each specific case.

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 receive joy eternal. 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, writes, “I wasn’t saved out of homosexuality. I was saved out of unbelief.” ALL OF US have to say no to the deepest sense of who we feel ourselves to be in our sinful nature. All of us have to deny ourselves. 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.’”[[10]](#footnote-10) 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**. We have to leave behind old friends, old habits, old comforts. But at the same time, because God is sovereign and delights to save sinners, repentance is **possible**!

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 surgical sex change, 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 uncomfortable in this area, waiting for the day when we’ll be finally glorified and renewed. The difference is that the Christian takes God’s view of him or herself. She doesn’t embrace her proclivities that run against the grain of God’s design. The Christian life is always a life of self-denial and waiting.

**E. Persevere by God’s Grace**

Finally, let me encourage us to persevere by God’s grace, continuing on in love for family members or friends who may disagree with us 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 then 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. Embracing the opposite gender essentially turns someone into a walking contradiction. This grieves God, and those who sow a life against their given nature will reap sorrow, difficulty and distress – now and eternally, if they don’t turn to Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (The Good Book Company: 2016), 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)