

Social Awareness. Living Truth.

Human Sexuality – Understanding Gender

The purpose of this paper is to give EMCC pastors and leaders a tool to address one of the most culturally sensitive and inflammatory issues of our day– gender identity. This paper is not meant to be an academic discourse. By presenting a resource on gender, it is desired that you will be able to more comprehensively understand the issues, which will then equip you to sift through the sensational “news” so prevalent in the reality of social media. By examining the theology, it will also provide insight for dealing with this in your community, congregation and family. This paper is very long but it has only skimmed the wide scope of topics. We encourage you to tap into the noted references and bibliography to dig deeper and to understand this very complex and ever changing topic.

Part 1: Understanding the Issues

Prior to the 21st century, one of the easiest questions on government issued forms was to identify your sex. The question had two options: male or female. The biological science was evidenced in one's anatomy. The belief that sex was binary, either male or female, was seldom questioned, let alone challenged.

In the latter half of the 20th century the word “gender” started to shift away from the biological evidence, focusing more on the expression of masculine and feminine. Gender stereotypes perpetrated by culture, families and religion, were challenged by attempting to break down the definitions of what being a man or woman should look like, and the restrictions on how either should behave or what roles they should have. “Gender meant a form of identity, located in and asserted by the individual rather than imposed on them from outside. It wasn't just distinct from sex; it had no necessary connection to sex. And it wasn't a binary division; there were many genders, not just two.”¹ Such was the advent of “Gender Theory”. The gradual expansion of this ideology in the first decade of the 21st century, was then propelled by the explosive events of the second decade. In 2014, Time magazine declared American culture had reached a “transgender tipping point”² with transgender people achieving unprecedented media visibility. In April 2015, nearly 17 million people watched (Bruce) Caitlyn Jenner, a well-known Olympic gold medallist and TV personality, come out as transgender on a Barbara Walters special. Two months later Caitlyn appeared on the front page of Vogue magazine celebrating her femininity. The simmering gender movement now had a celebrity. Media jumped in full force normalizing transgender.

This issue is morphing at unprecedented speed as we have moved from resistance to cultural tolerance to acceptance to celebration. The preferred terminology continues to expand and change. What was appropriate (not necessarily just politically correct) to say a year ago, may be viewed as phobic or archaic

today. For example, there has been a shift in language away from biological sex that was innately identified at birth by the doctor to the language of “gender assigned at birth” which suggests that gender is an arbitrary social construct assigned or given to the baby by the doctor or parents. This is not just a change in terminology but an ideological shift that encourages parents to allow their children to discover their gender for themselves. Feelings will be given precedence over biological fact. As a well-known trans activist put it “It used to be that gender was about what was between your legs. Now it's about what's between your ears.” (Chaz Bono).

If someone feels deeply that they are a man or a woman, they are encouraged to identify as and be that gender. Being transgender is to experience and/or present and express (or live out) a gender identity differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent (or matches) with their biological sex.” Gender fluidity allows for varied expression, such that you may choose to identify as male, another time as female or perhaps as neither. Whereas sexuality identity describes who you go to bed with, gender identity described who you go to bed as.

‘Queer’ used to be a derogatory term and now it is the preferred umbrella term for those who identify as part of the LGBT community. To transgender people, the term “transgenderism” is considered offensive because it portrays their experience relegated to the realm of ideology. Asking for definitions for words such as “omnigender” and “cisgender”, casts a shadow on one's progressive thought and concern that if you are that out of touch, you are probably also transphobic. It's within the realm of possibility that some of the terms used in this paper, will be further updated by the time of publication. (check out Appendix 2 for a full list of gender terminology).

Following on the heels of the legalization of same sex marriage, this is viewed as another civil rights movement poised to challenge long held cultural norms and beliefs based on sex-based oppression. Trans-activists and their supporters are pushing for change and new policies in schools, hospitals, workplaces, prison and the military.³ Claims of human rights violations are now being debated in the courts. High profile cases such as Yaniv v. Various Waxing Salons⁴ pits a transgender woman (biologically male, presenting as female) against immigrant aestheticians who refused to perform genital waxing on the complainant's male body. Such is an example of the tension between human rights, conscience and personal freedoms.

Within the educational sphere, SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) resources are widely available in many jurisdictions across the country. Proponents argue that these resources are needed to reflect modern culture, teaching children tolerance, respect and self-actualization. In many school districts, parents are not to be notified regarding any shift in their

¹ <https://debutk.wordpress.com/2016/12/15/a-brief-history-of-gender/>

² <https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/>

³ <https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/>

⁴ <https://www.jccf.ca/our-cases/jy-v-various-waxing-salons/>

child's gender expression while at school. Supporters herald this as providing a safe environment for children, while others lament the erosion of parental rights.

From a medical perspective, the spectrum of physical and mental health issues, as well as ethical questions make this an issue fraught with complexities. The Canadian Psychological Association "affirms that all adolescent and adult persons have the right to define their own gender identity regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role. Moreover, all adolescent and adult persons have the right to free expression of their self-defined gender identity. (October 2010)"⁵ (Go to Appendix 1 for greater detail on medical interventions.)

One political focus is banning conversion therapy. Attempts to limit behaviour modification therapy, talk therapy or even prayer with people who experience gender dysphoria may soon be banned and even criminalized within Canada. Conversely, any practices to help a person transition to their desired gender, such as sex-alignment surgery, are not included in the proposed amendment to the criminal code. Its perplexing that engaging in therapy as a consenting adult in order to talk through one's gender dysphoria is considered destructive while undergoing hormonal treatments and radical surgeries is considered affirming.

With gender identity being explored and exploited in so many realms of society, it is a challenge to sift through the sensational news and the knee-jerk reactions to understand the true personal issues and ramifications.

For a Christ follower, who believes in the infallibility of Scripture, including the dignity of men and women created in the image of God, the challenge is how to remain firm in our belief of the created binary of biological sex, that is male and female versus a spectrum of gender identities. Our sexed bodies (biologically male and female) are not an imposed social construct nor an arbitrary choice for us to select. Our biology creates different hormonal environments that shape our thoughts, feelings, relationships and behaviours. These patterns are not rigid but there are characteristic patterns of male and female brains with differing ways of engaging with the world.⁶ The variety of characteristics within male and female is encompassed in God's good created design.

Our gender which is understood as particular patterns of thought, feelings, relationships and behaviour, including characteristic dress, gesture and patterns of physical demeanor is largely, but not entirely culturally constructed or shaped. Feminine and masculine traits are observed as statistical patterns across populations and many behaviours and attitudes are gendered differently in different cultural context; they are not eternal, trans-cultural, binary categories. Allowing for a degree of fluidity in expressions of gender would most likely alleviate the distress of at least some people with mild gender dysphoria.⁷

CBC ran a story of a transgender male named Kian, who was born a girl and has transitioned to male and self-describes as "a tomboy, who hated wearing dresses and preferred hunting in

the woods over shopping at the mall. My whole life I felt like I was in the wrong body."⁸ The question that begs asking is "Does a girl have to wear dresses and enjoy shopping to be female? Can a female go hunting and still be female?"

When a Spanish bullfighter was caught washing the dishes by one of his dinner guests and was questioned how he could engage in what was considered "feminine activity" or "women's work," the bullfighter responded "I am a man. Everything I do is masculine."⁹

It is culture, families and the church that have put boxes around masculine and feminine by trying to define what it should look like. Instead of breaking down those culturally defined boxes, God gets blamed for creating us with the wrong body. God's not to blame; it's the stereotypes that we've created. The challenge is to acknowledge and celebrate the differences in men and women and how those differences compliment each other, without either key-holing people into certain roles or throwing out the distinctions that come with our biological sexed bodies.

Intersex is a real, although infrequent, medical condition in which a person is born with sex characteristics or anatomy that does not allow clear identification as male or female. The causes of intersex condition can be chromosomal, gonadal or genital. Gender dysphoria, on the other hand, is much more common. People with gender dysphoria generally have a fairly clear biological sex, but they do not identify with that sex or the gendered behaviors that go with it. Their experience is one in which they are alienated from their bodies; they are at home neither in their bodies or in the social worlds in which they find themselves. And this causes them significant distress – hence gender dysphoria. For some of them the distress is so great that they feel they must change their bodies to match their experienced gender identity if they have any hope of feeling at home in the world.¹⁰

Many in Western culture deal with some discomfort with our bodies as we experience a mismatch between our feelings and reality. An extreme example is a person suffering from anorexia that feels fat even when they are at a dangerously low body weight. Culture gives predominance to perceptions of self and inner feelings even to the point of an iconic hatred of one's body where our will seeks to dominate and control, conforming the body to the image of what we choose. This is an ultimate form of commodifying our own bodies.¹¹

The greatest challenge with the gender issue is that it is not just an issue. These are real people. More and more of our congregants are being personally impacted. For those who have children, grandchildren, siblings, spouses, dear friends or are personally dealing with gender dysphoria, this is definitely not an issue, this a very personal experience. How we, the leaders of the body of Christ, respond to and interact with the people involved will give evidence to our willingness and capacity to live out the greatest and second commandment. "The goal is not to win a culture war or to impose our views on others but to love our neighbour, which means working for our neighbour's good."¹²

⁵ https://cpa.ca/aboutcpa/policystatements/#Gender_Identity

⁶ Weerakoon and Weerakoon, "Biology: Looy and Bouma, 'Nature of Gender', pp. 166-71 as quoted by Andrew Sloane, 'Male and Female He Created Them? Theological Reflections on Gender. Biology and Identity. London: Appolos/Intervarsity Press. Marriage, Family and Relationships,, 2017, pp 233.

⁷ Looy and Bouma, 'Nature of Gender', pp. 173-4.

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/trans-teens-ottawa-cheo-demand-1.5026034>

⁹ Nate Collins, All but Invisible. p218.

¹⁰ Andrew Sloane, 'Male and Female He Created Them? Theological Reflections on Gender. Biology and Identity. p. 227.

¹¹ Andrew Sloane, 'Male and Female He Created Them? Theological Reflections on Gender. Biology and Identity. p. 235.

¹² Nancy Pearcey, Love thy Body. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018. p46

Part 2: Understanding The Biblical Statements on Gender

Understanding that as a Christ follower our identity needs to be primarily grounded in who we are as a human created by a loving God, and who we are through Christ's life, death and resurrection. Identity that is described by our sexuality or gender is far less important and narrowly descriptive.¹³

To start at the beginning is not to just look at gender but to understand the difference between gender and sex. Biological sex describes our God given physical anatomy. Gender is now commonly viewed as a social construct distinct from biological sex, that describes our personal identification of maleness or femaleness based on internal awareness. As students of the Word and how it applies to our culture, we need to be able to decipher what is cultural and what is biblical.

The First Creation Account

Genesis 1:26-27, 31 NIV Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them... God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."

From this passage there are three things that are pertinent to understanding gender:

1. Humans were made in the image of God
2. Humans were created as male and female
3. God views the creation of sexed humans as males and females as very good

The creation of male and female humans in the image of God (imago dei) conveys that our sexed differences have a likeness to and reflect God. God is Spirit (John 4:24) and as such does not have a body and so one cannot attribute a sexed being upon God. However, in contrast to the creation of fish, birds and all sorts of animals, where it is stated that these were created after "their kind" (Genesis 1:21, 24,25), male and female humans, were created in the image of God. Mark Cortez, a specialist in theological anthropology, writes: "Although recognizing that God is not a sexually differentiated being as humans are, we can affirm that human sexuality mirrors something important about the divine nature."¹⁴

To provide a simplified understanding of imago dei we look to the Trinity which is made up of three parts that are same and different. "In God, we see three persons, who are both 'other' and 'same' eternally bonded in intimate community. Males and females are relational creatures who are both 'other' [sex difference] and 'same' [human]"¹⁵ – similar to our triune God." Our imago dei includes our ability to reason, feel, and communicate as well as our fiduciary duty to care for the earth. However, it is our distinction as males and females that most compellingly represents our likeness to God as relational beings.¹⁶

It is also noteworthy that to get a more complete image of God, we need to include both male and female in that picture. In contrast to patriarchal environments where men are superior

to women, the creation account indicates that women are as much a reflection of God's image as are men. The creation of the female did not "water down" the image of God, much like in the childhood game of Telephone where the story gets misconstrued each time it is told. Male and female uniquely reflect the image of God and both are needed to give the fullest picture of imago dei. This is a compelling argument for the equality of women. The creation of the male first does not denote superiority. God looks upon his creation of male AND female and He says, "it is very good!" This is an important part of the gender discourse. The inequality and subservience of women throughout history, in culture and the churches, has contributed to the present opposition towards sexual binary, fuelling the belief that sex and gender are antithetical and that gender should trump sex. Its worth noting that the EMCC affirms the equality of men and women and puts no limits on the leadership of women in the church.

This first creation account is central to the tenant that biological sex was binary at creation and is repeated without variation throughout Scripture. Even the eunuchs referred to by Jesus in Matthew 19:12, were not considered a "third sex" within that culture. Rather, they were considered an abnormality of the male sex. The medical reality of intersex individuals are also not a "third sex" even though they may have some ambiguity of obvious sexed biology.¹⁷ One of the key arguments put forward to support a non binary position is that God created the binary of night and day, but the variation of dusk and dawn are also part of the created world. However, dusk and dawn are spoken of many times in Scripture but there is no mention of any sexed being other than male and female humans.

The Biblical interpretation that humans have embodied sex differences is confirmed by science

Sex differences (the unique characteristics of male and female) are inscribed on all humans. These unique differences between male and female are:

- Genetic – the final pair of chromosomes are either XY (male) or XX (female)
- Hormonal – at around 8 weeks gestation, the Y chromosome activates the process that sets in motion two separate but complimentary development tracks: 1) stopping the feminization of the baby's body 2) begins the masculinization of the body. The female/male hormones naturally continue to be produced in the body and shape the unique characteristics of male/female
- Sex organs – comprised of both physical structure (internal and external) and glands, which are primary participants in reproduction
- Secondary sex characteristics – for males: hair growth, depth of voice, development of an Adam's apple, increased muscular mass; for females: development of breast tissue, broadening of the hips and the development of fat deposits on the thighs and hips
- Every cell in a human's body is coded as male or female and operates as male or female. As an example, the Canadian Heart and Stroke foundation states "Women's unique

¹³ For a deeper discussion on this topic consult the SALT paper on Human Sexuality: Understanding Identity

¹⁴ Mark Cortez, Theological Anthropology: As Guide to the Perplexed (London:T&T Clark, 2010), 66. As quoted in The Center For Faith, Sexuality & Gender, Pastoral paper #12, p4.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Recommended as a concise examination of the concept of Imago Dei: Nate Collins, All But Invisible, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. p203-208.

¹⁷ See Appendix 1 for greater detail on Intersex

physiology poses distinct challenges in the prevention and management of heart disease...Women's heart disease tends to appear in the smaller, blood vessels of the heart (microvascular disease) rather than the major coronary arteries."¹⁸ Likewise, many types of cancers and addictions are treated with sex specific protocol. Biology is critical in these situations.

The first statement in Genesis 1:27 "God created mankind in his own image", speaks to humanity, as a whole being designed in God's image. The second statement "in the image of God he created them", reiterates that God (a three part being) created humans in a plural type (them). The third statement "male and female he created them" gives a more specific delineation of this plural type into male and female. This speaks to our human identity and the high value God places on our sexed body.

The Second Creation Account

The second chapter of Genesis retells the creation story in an intimate and poetic fashion as the concepts of gender and sexuality are introduced. To understand gender, it is important to look at the meanings of certain Hebrew words that are used in the creation narrative. In Hebrew, Adam has a dual meaning: 1) adam - simply meaning human being, whether male or female 2) Adam - the specific name given to the first man.

To help clarify the Hebrew, we'll use the following lexicon:

- uncapitalized adam = human – male OR female
- capitalized Adam = the proper name of the first man

Genesis 2:7 "Then the Lord God formed a man/adam/human from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man/adam/human became a living being."

This new created human came out of the earth, for which the Hebrew is adama. The play on words is unmistakable. The first adam came out of the adama. Some scholars suggest that the moment of God's image being imprinted upon humans occurs when God breathes into the human as humans are the only part of Creation that receives the breath of God.

The creation of male and female, two uniquely sexed humans, goes beyond biology and anatomy. There are God-given differences in the nature of men and women. At times, esteeming these differences has been a casualty of the reaction to inequality. Difference does not erode equality.

Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable."¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

The word "suitable" comes from the Hebrew word kenegdo made up of "ki" which means "as, alike, like" which conveys similarity (Eve was a human like Adam), and neged which means something like "in front of" or "opposite from" which conveys dissimilarity (Eve is a female unlike the male Adam). In other words, kenegdo

highlights Eve's equality and sex difference.¹⁹

The word "helper" comes from the Hebrew word ezer. Our cultural picture of a helper is often subordinate but elsewhere in Scripture ezer is never subordinate, in fact it "was almost always an equal and sometimes even a superior power, who came to the aid of someone in desperate need, often arriving at the eleventh hour to save the day. ...In four out of the five occurrences of the Hebrew word ezer in the first five books of the Bible, it refers to God's saving activity on behalf of his people Israel. The same word occurs twenty-seven times in the book of Psalms, and every single time it refers explicitly to God or to the kind of rescuing help only God can provide."²⁰ Ezer is not used as a descriptor of rank. Rather, the word provides a picture of the created design. God declared that it was not good for man to be alone. His design put men and women together and proclaimed it "very good".

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man/Adam to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's/Adam's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman/ishah from the rib he had taken out of the man/Adam, and he brought her to the man/Adam.

²³ The man/Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called 'woman/ishah,' for she was taken out of man/ish."

²⁴ That is why a man/ish leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2, NIV)

Awaking from his nap, Adam discovers someone who looks more like him than did the mosquito, dog or gorilla but he's also very quick to notice the differences. Our English translations euphemize the exuberance in the Hebrew poetry of vs 23 which conveys absolute wonder and fascination. "For the Jews 'flesh and bones' signified the whole human being, not just a few visible body parts."²¹ The differences between men and women are complex, each has a unique, noninterchangeable glory that the other does not. Attempts to eradicate or neuter these differences goes against God's good design.

This leads into the declaration "this is why" or some translations say "for this reason" that a man and a woman are what is needed for becoming one flesh through the union of marriage. This is reiterated by Paul in Ephesians 5:31-32, which provides one of the main positions for the traditional biblical ethic that states that marriage is to be between one man and one woman. For further analysis of this topic see Conversations paper #2 Human Sexuality: Understanding Homosexuality.²²

Understanding Male and Female in the Rest of the Bible

For this section I rely heavily on the biblical exegesis published by Dr. Preston Sprinkle in his Pastoral Paper: A Biblical Conversation About Transgender Identities, #12. I highly recommend reading his full paper as it is a concise and thorough examination citing many resources that are worthy of a deeper read. I will only

¹⁸ <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/heart/what-is-heart-disease/types-of-heart-disease/women-and-heart-disease>

¹⁹ Preston Sprinkle, People to be Loved. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), p.32.

²⁰ Nate Collins, All But Invisible, p210

²¹ Christopher West, Our Bodies Tell God's Story. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020. p33.

²² Conversations Human Sexuality: Understanding Homosexuality #2

provide a brief synopsis.²³

Biblical Observations About Gender:

- Jesus cites the “male and female” statement from Genesis 1:27 in Matthew 19:4-5 and correlates it with the marriage statement in Genesis 2:24. It appears that Jesus sees God’s original creation of humans as male and female as normative and not just relevant for the beginning of creation.
- Whenever Scripture mentions crossing gender boundaries, it speaks negatively:
 - Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9 uses the term *malakoi* (“soft, effeminate”) which covers a broad range of what were considered feminine activities or “men who fundamentally confused gender distinctions.”
 - 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 – this discussion on the order of public worship is predicated on the assumption that the church consists of men and women, whose sex and gender distinctions reflect God’s created order.
 - Romans 1:26-27 speaks negatively about same-sex sexual relationships and roots its language in God’s created design for humanity as sexually different people.
- Biological sex is integral to human identity. To be human is to be embodied and to be embodied is to be sexed.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 - “our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit”. We are not souls with bodies, but embodied souls. “The good spirit/bad body dualism that often passes for Christianity is actually an ancient Gnostic error...and it couldn’t be further from a biblical perspective.”^{24 25}
- It appears in Scripture that sex difference is maintained after the resurrection.
 - Not only is sex difference part of God’s pre-fall creation, it’s a central part of human personhood and integral to how we mirror God’s image. Although Jesus’ sex is not explicitly mentioned after the resurrection, there is no evidence he is no longer a male. There is little evidence in Scripture that our “mortal bodies”, which were created as male and female and declared “very good” by our Creator, will be sexless in our resurrected state.²⁶

Wonderfully and Fearfully Made

The core biblical question at stake in understanding gender is the degree to which we espouse to Psalm 139:14-16 NIV I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Do we value our God-given bodies or have we given into Gnostic thinking that purports that the mind takes precedence over the body? Such dualistic thinking pits theology and morality against

science, facts against values, and secular against sacred. Our bodies are God’s work of art and an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:13 NIV).

“All created reality comes from the hand of God and is therefore originally and intrinsically good. Yet all created reality is marred and corrupted by sin. We all suffer the effects of creation being put out of joint. But in the end, all creation will be restored and renewed by God’s grace. The reason the fall is such a tragedy is precisely because, by design, humans have such high value. When a cheap trinket is broken, we toss it aside without a second thought. But when a priceless work of art is destroyed, we are heartbroken. The reason sin is so tragic is that it destroys a human being – a priceless masterpiece that reflects the character of the Supreme Artist.

To protect gender, we must stand solidly on the created binary of male and female while holding to the biblical description of a man and a woman uniquely designed to work and love side by side. But when it comes to gender expression, rather than key-holing people into certain roles and stereotypes, let’s point people toward the gender-neutral fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). These spiritual characteristics are to be cultivated in the lives of all God’s people. They are human qualities. We all have the capacity to develop them, none more natural to one sex or the other. “Jesus’ life teaches us what it is to be a true human and how important it is to subvert our own cultural expectation of gender when they are not in line with the model and work for his kingdom.”²⁷

Part 3: Understanding How to Respond

As Christ followers, our understanding of gender and sexual identity, how it fits with our biblical understanding of God and ourselves, and how we respond in truth and grace are the greatest challenges of our day. Much of culture views the church not just as irrelevant but as harmful. We live in a societal climate where even our offer to pray with someone who is seeking God’s love, comfort and restoration may be construed as coercive and harmful.

It easiest and quite natural to respond either by cowering in fear, saying nothing or shifting our long held traditional biblical understanding and ethics in attempts to gain favour and keep the peace. Alternately, we react in anger, spewing accusations and taking on the activists. Such extremes may be beneficial in gaining political ground but may be void of the grace and love that were characteristic of Jesus’ response. As Christ’s representatives we need to interact with our culture, including the LGBTQ+ community, in a Christ-like manner that is full of grace and truth. In doing so, we offer hope.

Lean in with Love

Jesus’ clear commandment is to love God and then love our neighbour and as we follow this new commandment to love one another, people will know we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). Scripture is full of examples of Jesus, not just loving people in a reactive way, but also reaching out to meet people where they were at, even while they were outcasts. For example, He went to Zacchaeus the chief tax collector and told him he was

²³ The Centre For Faith, Sexuality & Gender, Pastoral paper #12, p5-8

²⁴ Christopher West, *Our Bodies Tell God’s Story*, p8.

²⁵ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*.

²⁶ Ian Paul, “Are We Sexed in Heaven? Bodily form, sex identity and the resurrection” *Marriage, Family and Relationships* (London: Appolos/Intervarsity Press, 2017) p. 101.

²⁷ Deborah Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex*. p.96.

coming to his house (Luke 19:1-10). In the parable, The Good Samaritan, the Samaritan goes out of his way to love someone he had been told to exclude and avoid (Luke 10:30-37). In the Prodigal Son parable, you have an image of the father who went against cultural norms and protocol to run out and throw his arms around his son who had just broken every family rule (Luke 15:11-32).

Following are some specific ways we can be proactive with love:

1. Begin with love/grace. Don't begin with judgment/law
 - i. Jesus didn't open up relationships by giving His stance on this topic. For a person with gender dysphoria, this is not an "issue" but is deeply intimate and personal. We must see everyone firstly as a child of God to whom He promises His love and grace. Convey the core truth that everyone is broken and we don't get to chose our struggles. But God's love empowers us to face those struggles and God wants all of us to grow to be more like Jesus. Attempts to medically, surgically or even psychologically change ourselves will only be cosmetic and temporary. It is an ongoing relationship with God that changes us from the inside out.
2. Acknowledge grief and pain. Don't ignore or gloss over the missteps or pain caused by churches and the Christian community
 - i. Don't trivialize the difficult journey LGBTQ+ people have experienced. Rather, show how you are emotionally grieved and spiritually broken by the sometimes disrespectful ways churches have treated those within the LGBTQ+ community. As people share their personal experience, don't hesitate to apologize for the hurt and pain they have received from the church and Christians. Remember that people want to know that you care, more than they care what you know.
3. Begin with asking and listening. Don't begin by telling.
 - i. Don't lead a conversation on gender by telling a person everything about your biblical beliefs and understanding on gender. Don't use this paper or the Bible as a big stick to attempt to force people into line. Rather, ask people to tell you their stories, listen with compassion, seek to understand and love without judgment. Listen for the Holy Spirit's directive and wait on His timing. Truth and love will come naturally through the discipleship journey.
4. Be sensitive to the uniqueness of individuals. Don't lump individuals into an oversimplified understanding of a large people group.
 - i. Do not assume or describe people with gender dysphoria or who support a fluidity of gender in a way that suggests they are a homogeneous people group. Avoid assuming stereotypes and making broad statements that lump people together. Rather, treat each person's journey and understanding of gender with respect. Remember that there will be differences of opinions even within our communities, churches, and families as there are even within the queer community. As we speak about gender, ask ourselves "How would I hear this if I were a visitor exploring or questioning my gender? Or as a parent that had lost a child to

suicide due to bullying? Or whose child had undergone sex realignment surgery?" Our words must always be seasoned with grace (Col.4:6)

5. Cultivate a healthy environment. Don't create an "us versus them" mindset.
 - i. Avoid offhand comments that are overgeneralized, labelling and judgmental. Being categorized or boxed in can feel controlling, dismissive and diminishing. Rather, let's create a safe honest environment where all people can talk openly about their struggles with gender, the same way we encourage a Christian to talk about any of their other struggles (e.g. pride, a weak prayer life, sex before marriage, pornography, etc.). Just because someone is experiencing gender dysphoria does not mean they are involved in the political or activist sphere. "They may simply be looking for support as they navigate this terrain."²⁸
6. Build a welcoming culture. Don't isolate people groups in your programs or facilities.
 - i. What changes might need to be made to your facilities in order to make a transgender person able to attend your programming? If requests or demands are made for accommodation, ask to meet face to face. Invite dialogue. Rather than resisting these changes, we should take the stance of gifting hospitality towards those who come into our Christian community. Extravagant and radical love opens the door to welcome everyone who comes. We want people to know that they can come just as they are. No one has to get cleaned up, fixed, reoriented, de-transitioned before coming into our churches. The people of God should be the most welcoming people on earth.²⁹
7. Use respectful terminology. Don't use phrases that are dehumanizing, outdated, unhelpful, cavalier or hurtful.
 - i. Avoid trite Christian phrases such as "love the sinner - hate the sin". Rather use phrases that focus on the affirmation of humanity and the high value of both women and men. Remember that the focus of this whole topic is not the issues but people who God loves unconditionally and unreservedly and we are called to do likewise.
8. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit regarding whether to honour a person's chosen gender. Don't disrespect a person by making a show of your gender/pronoun use towards them.
 - i. The Bible contains no direct statements about the use of what pronouns to use when speaking about or to transgender people. Rather this gender ethic has to be informed by the other direct principles of speaking truth and showing compassion and love. "Pronoun hospitality"³⁰ would consider it an act of Christ-like love to call someone by their preferred pronoun out of respect and the opportunity to remain in relationship with that person. Each Christ-follower needs to prayerfully weigh the consequences of the decision they make on this matter. Additionally, we need to support each other, allowing others to follow their conscience and love them even when their decision differs from our own.

²⁸ Mark Yarhouse, Understanding Gender Dysphoria. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015. p24.

²⁹ Andrew T Walker, God and the Transgender Debate. The Good Book Company, 2018.

³⁰ The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender. Pastoral paper #11, p1.

Uphold Truth

Jesus says “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) and “you will know the truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The Truth is not an abstract concept, it is a Person. When we are deeply in love with that Person, we will want to lead people to Him. Remember, the Truth is something that everybody needs to be set free, and it is our role to bear witness to that!

1. We uphold truth when we focus on what we affirm
 - i. We affirm everyone’s humanity and their desire and need for relationship and love. We affirm a biblical sexual and gender ethic that is in keeping with historical Christianity.
2. We uphold truth by understanding and educating people on the Bible’s teaching.
 - i. We affirm that God created male and female as similar and different. We acknowledge that the Bible teaches that we all will struggle with the temptation to veer from God’s ideal, but the struggle does not constitute sin. A struggle with gender dysphoria³¹ (that feeling of incongruence between our sex at birth and our expressed gender) is not a sinful struggle. It is the giving into the temptation to control our own lives rather than surrendering to the will of God, that gives birth to sin. (James 1: 14-16). Inviting people into discipleship will enable them to encounter and grapple with God’s word and what it means for their lives.
3. We uphold truth by remembering our role in God’s redemptive work is to bear witness to God’s truth and love.
 - i. We affirm that it is the Holy Spirit that convicts, Jesus that saves and God that judges. Whenever we try to take on one of their roles, we risk coming across as judgmental, unloving and even harmful. Our primary role as Christ followers is to bear witness by telling others about the difference God has made in your own life. It is sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our concern is people’s spiritual orientation not their gender or sexual orientation.
4. We uphold truth when we focus on what unites us.
 - i. We affirm that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We affirm that everyone is loved by God and called to live a life of relationship and intimacy with God through Jesus. We affirm that the sexual and gender ethics of Jesus are based on God’s original design for males and females, and for marriage between a man and a woman. This design is for everyone but not all choose to live according to His design. These ethics should not be forced upon any individual. Jesus always was invitational, giving people the opportunity to make their own choice.
5. We uphold truth by acknowledging that this is a very difficult conversation for everyone.
 - i. We affirm the need for careful, prayerful and diligent interpretation of Scripture. “The modern questions related to transgender identities are very new and there has been relatively little interaction with the complexities of this discussion. Since this conversation is so fresh, any thoughtful interpreter should humbly be open to the possibility that their current assumptions

should be reconsidered (or corrected) in light of further studies and research... (we) need to exercise great caution, and in some places tentativeness, in drawing conclusion of what the Bible says and doesn’t say.”³²

Offer Hope

Our culture often paints the biblical ethic as restrictive, a kill-joy, a list of don’ts and even harmful. People who struggle with the biblical sexual ethic may find themselves feeling hopeless and doomed to a life of loneliness. We need to be able to provide an alternative viewpoint - that God designed our gender and sexuality to be His gift to us and that by following the biblical ethic, we will experience life to the fullest (John 10:10). We must be able to demonstrate that A) nothing is beyond God’s redemptive power and B) eternal life with God and the church are the reward Jesus promises to those who leave everything to follow Jesus. The hope the Bible offers does come with the hope of community (Mark 10:29-30) and a full life.

1. Regard discipleship as a journey.
 - i. Sanctification is a process of becoming more and more like Jesus. Everybody’s journey is unique and everyone travels this road at a different pace. What has been witnessed among people who are wrestling with gender dysphoria or identifying as transgender is that as people discover how much they are loved by God and as He works in their hearts and lives, their struggles may not disappear but their priorities change. People begin to orient themselves more towards Jesus versus their challenges.
 - ii. NOTE on Conversion Therapy. The Canadian Psychological Association has said, “Conversion therapy, or reparative therapy, refers to any formal therapeutic attempt to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual”.³³ Although conversion therapy has historically focused on sexual minorities, with the increased prevalence of transgender people, a similar reproach is considered best practice. The shift away from viewing gender dysphoria as a psychological disorder has removed stigma but it has also created a greater challenge for those seeking psychological support without pursuing transitioning. Proposed bans on conversion therapy are needed to eliminate psychological, psychoanalytic or psychiatric treatments that are trying to change an individual’s gender identity through pressuring, harassment, alienation or bullying. These harmful tactics need to be eliminated. However, psychological support through talk therapy, support groups, prayer and pastoral support are being included in the political push to ban and even criminalize all practises that are not affirming.
 - i. It is important that our churches clearly state that we do not attempt to change people’s gender orientation. Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms has upheld the right to preach against same-sex activity as long as it is not conveyed through hate speech. We must be careful to always speak with kindness and respect. Our spiritual communities should be focused on prayer, support and encouragement, strengthening our relationship with Jesus and how that impacts our lives. Our goal is NOT to change people’s gender or sexual orientation; it is to see a shift in people’s spiritual

³¹ Mark A Yarhouse, Understanding Gender Dysphoria. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015. p19.

³² The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, Pastoral Paper #12, p1

³³ <https://cpa.ca/aboutcpa/policystatements/#ConversionTherapy>

orientation.

2. Make sure people know you are for them and not against them.
 - i. Gender dysphoria and gender identity results from a complex set of circumstances, ideologies, biological and psychological factors. Don't quickly associate someone's struggle with emotional instability or any particular root cause. Don't get into arguments about what causes someone to be transgender. Rather bring the discussion back to God's love for everyone and His design that created each person. Our primary goal should be to know God first and foremost
 - ii. Transgender and people suffering from gender dysphoria have an elevated risk of various mental health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse all of which often lead to suicide (41%, compared with 4.6% of the general population)³⁴ These statistics are alarming and should provide in and of themselves the impetus for Christ followers to act out of love, grace and truth so that we can be the purveyors of hope.
 - iii. It is an emotionally charged accusation to suppose that disagreement with any given identity or feeling is the cause of someone's emotional stress. And it raises an important counter-question: is the emotional distress caused from identifying as transgender the result of not being affirmed, or is it a feature of the underlying emotional and mental difficulties that come with gender dysphoria, which are not solved by embracing a transgender identity? Your presupposition about whether transgenderism is good or not good will tend to dictate how you read the statistics that are available (about depression, self-harm or suicide). Someone who affirms or promotes embracing a transgender identity will assume the distress is caused by societal rejection; someone who believes transgender identity is not in line with God's good purposes will tend to argue that the distress is caused by the dysphoria and responding to it by adopting a transgender identity.³⁵
 - iv. "We live in a moral wasteland where human beings are desperately seeking answers to hard questions about life and sexuality. But there is hope. In the wasteland we can cultivate a garden. We can discover a reality-based morality that expresses a positive, life-affirming view of the human person – one, that is more inspiring, more appealing, and more liberating than the secular worldview."³⁶
3. Provide supportive and loving community for all members of your community.
 - i. Often a forgotten part of the transgender story are the parents. Many parents silently grieve the effects of transitioning on their children. All too frequently when someone comes out as transgender or non-binary, the other family members may feel they have no option but for them to go into the closet. Shame and misplaced guilt of what they may have done to cause their child to turn out this way, regret for harsh words spoken out of fear and frustration, and a deep-seated fear that no one will understand or that their community will shun them

because of their child's choices. Another level of grief develops as their children choose hormone therapy or surgical interventions as part of their transitioning journey. I remember one parent telling me about the devastation they felt on the day their daughter, now a transgender male, had had a hysterectomy. That day they grieved the loss of grandchildren.

- ii. As leaders and pastors, we pave the way for doing everything we can to ensure that our small groups, church programs and our faith community are safe places for everyone. Educating our congregations on a proper Christ like response to these tough situations is a critical first step. Lead the way in praying that God will bring transgender people into your life and those in your church who are ready to show them love. Be prepared to be uncomfortable but rest in the assurance that God's power is made perfect through our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9)

Conclusion

Understanding gender requires the leader to be able to interpret the cultural movement within the context of Scripture and then mobilize their beliefs by reaching out with grace and truth.

Gender is not just an issue that begs to be understood. Gender represents people who are deeply, passionately and unconditionally loved by God. As leaders our greatest mandate is to help people know how much God loves them. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

"We value people and so when people share their questions and struggles with us, they are giving us an invitation into relationship with them. Ravi Zacharias says, 'behind every question, there's a questioner – a person who is created in the image of God, and therefore has value and dignity and should be treated with respect.'"³⁷

³⁴ Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*. (New York: Encounter books, 2018), p.93.

³⁵ Andrew T Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*.

³⁶ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*. p15

³⁷ Sam Allberry. <https://www.rzim.org/watch/video/what-does-the-bible-say-about-gender-identity>

Appendix 1 – Medical Interventions

Hormone Therapy

Hormone therapy (HT) is the name for a medical intervention in which a person takes the hormones associated with the other sex. This is usually done to support or facilitate a cross gender identity for people who have gender dysphoria.

- EG A biologically-born male feels he is a female or has gender dysphoria such that he strongly identifies as a female, HT will typically include taking estrogen and progesterone (hormones typically produced by biological females) and antiandrogens to block the production of testosterone.

Hormone blockers are given at the onset of puberty as a means of delaying puberty. This “buying of time” for a year or two, allows the teenager to have a better sense of their gender identity to decide whether to resonate with being male or female.

Sex Reassignment Surgery

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is also known as Gender Reassignment Surgery or Gender Affirmative Surgery (lay person might call it “sex change”). This process usually requires a series of surgeries that enable the person to adopt a cross gender identity

- EG a male undergoes procedures such as electrolysis for hair removal, breast implants, removal of the penis and/or testicles. Some may undergo a vaginoplasty, a surgery in which the penis is essentially inverted and shaped in a neo-vagina.
- EG a woman undergoes surgical procedures such as chest reconstruction, hysterectomy, vaginectomy (removal or closure of the vagina), removal of one or both ovaries and fallopian tubes. Some may undergo a procedure that cuts loose the clitoris which has been enlarged by hormones so as to function more like a penis.
- These procedures would need to be supported by Hormone Therapy in order for the body to transition to the desired gender.

Arguments/Concerns about these procedures:

- high levels of hormones that come with a host of dangerous side effects
- elevated risks associated with surgeries
- permanency – should someone change their mind and desire to go back to their biological sex (de-transition), there are long term/permanent impacts of surgery and HT
- EG irreversible infertility results from having the testicles/uterus removed
- All of these procedures DO NOT actually change the person's DNA which is, from the point of conception, either male or female.

Intersex

- Individuals who are born in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish them as male or female. The medical term is Disorders of Sexual Development or DSD. These are people who are born with secondary sexual characteristics or anatomy that does not allow for clear identification as male or female.

- E.G. A baby looks like it has the outer genitalia of a boy but upon further investigation an ultrasound detects that the baby actually has a uterus and two ovaries. The baby that is originally identified as a boy is actually a girl.
- Statistics indicate that 1.7% of babies have some form of chromosomal, gonadal or genital disorder. But only 0.2% have a level of ambiguity that makes it a challenge to easily classify as male or female.
- The Intersex Association of America clearly distinguishes between the physical abnormalities of an intersex person to be different from the transgender or transsexual person who has the typical anatomy of either male or female but feels they are born into the wrong body.³⁸

Appendix 2 – Glossary of Gender Identity Terms

1. **Sex** - “either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and that are distinguished respectively as female or male especially on the basis of their reproductive organs and structures.”
2. **Gender** - “May be used synonymous with sex but typically used to describe one (or all) of the following: 1) your own internal sense of self-harm. 2) how you express yourself (clothing, mannerisms, interest, etc.), 3) cultural expectations for what it means to be a man or a woman.”³⁹
3. **Cisgender** - “a word to contrast with transgender and to signify that one's psychological and emotional experience of gender identity is congruent with one's biological sex.”
4. **Transgender** - “an umbrella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present and express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex.”
5. **Transsexual** - “a person who believes he or she was born in the “wrong” body (of the other sex) and wishes to transition (or has transitioned) through some form of medical intervention, such as hormonal treatment and sex-reassignment surgery.”
6. **Male to Female or Female to Male** - “a person who is identified as male or female at birth but experiences a male or female gender identity and has or is in the process of adopting the alternate gender identity.”
7. **Sex assigned at Birth** - “a favored phrase indicating that the baby's sex was imposed from the outside versus indicated by biology”
8. **Third Sex or Third Gender** - “a term used to describe persons who are neither man nor woman, which could reference an intermediate state or another sex or gender or having qualities of both man/woman in oneself.”
9. **Gender Dysphoria** - “the experience of distress associated with the incongruence wherein one's psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one's biological sex.”
10. **Gender Fluid** - “a term used when a person wants to convey that their experience of gender is not fixed as either male/female but may either fluctuate along a continuum or encompass qualities of both gender identities.”

³⁸ <https://isna.org/>

³⁹ The Center For Faith, Sexuality & Gender, Pastoral paper #12, p 2

11. **Queer/Genderqueer** - "an umbrella term for ways in which people experience their gender identity outside of or in between a male-female binary (e.g. no gender, gender fluid). Some people prefer a gender-neutral pronoun (e.g. "one")."
12. **Gender Bending** - "intentionally crossing or "bending" gender roles."
13. **Drag Queen (or Drag King)** - "a biological male who dresses as a female (typically flamboyant dress and appearance) for the purposes of entertaining others. Such a person may not experience gender dysphoria and does not tend to identify as transgender."
14. **Transvestism** - "dressing or adopting the presentation of the other sex, typically for the purposes of sexual arousal (and may reflect a fetish quality). Such a person may not experience gender dysphoria and may not identify as transgender. Most transgender persons do not cross-dress for arousal and see transvestism as a different phenomenon than what they experience."
15. **Intersex** - "a term to describe conditions (e.g. congenital adrenal hyperplasia) in which a person is born with sex characteristics or anatomy that does not allow clear identification as male or female. The causes of intersex condition can be chromosomal, gonadal or genital."
16. **Questioning** - "a term often used by youth when they are in the process of discovering their sexual identities."

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Recommended video resources and podcasts:

<https://www.centerforfaith.com/>

<https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-psychology-counseling-and-family-therapy/sexual-and-gender-identity-institute/resources/videos/>

Sam Allberry. <https://www.rzim.org/watch/video/what-does-the-bible-say-about-gender-identity>

https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet_GenderDysphoria_Adults_Adolescents.pdf

<https://dredles.com/2018/12/20/the-curious-case-of-jack-and-jill-unabridged/#more-2029> Dr Ed Les is a physician who has written a series of blogs about transgender from a medical perspective.

<https://www.cschurch.ca/bydesign/>

Editorial Comment

If you have questions or would like to discuss this topic further, the EMCC SALT Board, recommends Rosemary Flaaten as a knowledgeable resource. She can be contacted at rosemaryflaaten@gmail.com or as part of the EMCC Enrich Resources <https://emccenrich.ca/rosemary-flaaten/>

The SALT Commission (Social Awareness Living Truth) is a commission of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada.