

Transgender

Summary: *As Christians, we have a better story to tell about our sex; one where our bodies are a gift, where our identity is freeing and God-given and where the suffering of this world will one day fade away*

Key points - a clash of worldviews

- Sin and brokenness have infected every part of our existence, and that of the world around us. That means that they have also infected our very minds: all of us (in some way or another) experience mental distress, and so some do people experience distress around their gender.

But Transgender ideology clashes with a Christian worldview around some key concepts.

- Gender ideology says that gender is a spectrum, rather than there being two biological sexes
 - But the Bible declares that in the beginning God created "male and female", both made in the image of God, as two, binary sexes. This teaching is affirmed by Jesus. There are both inherent similarities and innate differences between men and women.
 - The Bible also speaks against unhelpful man-made stereotypes about what it means to male and female. God's abiding desire is for both men and women to become like Jesus. Jesus himself didn't conform to stereotypes of masculinity, and compared himself to a mother hen and a woman who had lost her coin. (This doesn't mean that there are no differences between men and women, but that we are freed from societal expectations of what it means to be a man/woman.)
- Gender ideology says that when your body and your feelings do not align, your feelings are the 'real you'
 - The Bible does not split humans up into a 'body' and a 'soul'. From the beginning, humans were created as embodied beings; unlike what other ancient philosophies (eg. Gnosticism) taught, Christian faith teaches that physical bodies are good things, and that one day we will be resurrected bodily. In fact, the Bible warns us that it is the human heart which is not to be trusted.
- Gender ideology says that you can construct identity for yourself
 - Our primary identity as Christians is being 'in Christ'. Our identity comes not as a result of what we have done, but by what He has done. Male and female fade into insignificance compared with being a 'child of God', although that doesn't mean that those categories have ceased to exist.
 - The Bible also points us towards a day when every distress will be washed away, and so any disconnect between our minds and our bodies will be gone.

Politics

- The Gender Recognition Act 2004 enables people to change their legal gender by means of a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). A GRC instructs the Registrar of Births to issue a new birth certificate with the applicant's acquired gender, but under requirements such as a medical diagnosis and proof that the individual has lived as their acquired gender for at least two years.

- The NHS has closed the UK's only dedicated "gender identity clinic", the Tavistock Centre, after a series of safeguarding failures, including fast-tracking children onto harmful drugs, after the Cass Review (the independent review into gender identity services commissioned by NHS England) found that it was not "safe" or "viable."
- Gender ideology is now routinely taught in classrooms as fact, and some advice issued to schools suggests they should not tell parents if their child wants to change their gender, or even that parents can be referred to social services for not affirming their child's choices.
- There are calls from trans activists to boycott 'transphobic' speakers, and protests to shut down them speaking at all, along with threats and statements that 'Terfs must die'. High profile recipients of such abuse include the likes of JK Rowling, Kathleen Stock and Joanna Cherry. However, gender-critical beliefs are protected by the Equality Law, as confirmed in the case Maya Forstater vs Centre for Global Development.
- Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has declared his belief in the importance of biological sex; Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer has stated his belief that parents ought to be fully informed about their children's activities, although he has struggled to answer the question 'What is a woman?', previously saying that 99.9% of women "haven't got a penis."
- The Scottish government passed The Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which would have changed the process required to acquire a GRC, in 2022. The Bill would have removed the requirement to have a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria and dramatically reduced the amount of time someone has to have lived in their preferred gender from two years to just three months (six months for those under the age of 18) before they can apply for a GRC. The Bill would also have lowered the age limit to apply for a certificate from 18 to 16 years old. In an unprecedented move, the UK government used Section 35 powers to overrule the legislation. The legality of this was confirmed in December by 2023 and the Scottish government abandoned its attempts to introduce the legislation.

Glossary

SEX - Sex can be male, female, or intersex, and refers to the biological make-up of the body based on chromosomes and reproductive organs. Biological sex cannot be changed, regardless of gender reassignment or other medical procedures. It is sometimes called 'birth sex' or 'sex at birth'.

INTERSEX - This refers to a person who is born with a combination of male and female biological anatomy, preventing clear identification of male or female sex. The prevalence of intersex is about 0.018%. It is biological, and is not the same as (or connected to) being transgender.

GENDER - This refers to the socially-constructed roles, behaviours of men and women, typically in relation to stereotypical expectations of masculinity and femininity. It is often used in contrast to sex, as opposed to being used interchangeably.

GENDER IDENTITY - A person's internal sense (subjective) of their gender, in line with or in contrast to their biological sex (objective). Although the most common gender identities are male and female, some people are now identifying as 'non-binary', 'genderqueer', 'gender fluid', amongst others (see below).

TRANSGENDER - This is a term to describe people whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex they were at birth, regardless of whether they have undergone gender reassignment. The term transgender is now almost always preferred to transsexual.

NON-BINARY - A broad term to describe those who don't identify as male or female.

GENDER REASSIGNMENT - Medical intervention usually beginning with puberty blockers and

cross-sex hormones. Surgery can include complete hysterectomy, bilateral mastectomy, chest reconstruction or augmentation, genital reconstruction and certain facial plastic reconstruction.

SELF-ID - The ability for someone to simply identify as 'male' or 'female', regardless of whether it aligns with their biological sex, based off their gender identity (what they feel they are inside). Proposals to introduce self-ID have been put forward in Scotland and are highly controversial.

GENDER CRITICAL - The belief that it is sex, not gender, that should define people as men and women.

TERF - An acronym which stands for 'trans-exclusionary radical feminist'. It is typically used, derogatorily, to describe a person who believes that trans women should be omitted from the feminist movements and frameworks.

DETRANSITIONING - The process by which a person who has previously transitioned (whether socially, psychologically or medically) returns to living according to their birth sex.

Key Bible Passages

GENESIS 1:27: "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."

GENESIS 2:23: "The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

DEUTERONOMY 22:5: "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this."

JEREMIAH 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

1 CORINTHIANS 6:13-14: "You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.' The body, however, is not made for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By His power, God raised the Lord from the dead, and He will raise us also."

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-15: "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-44: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

GALATIANS 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

REVELATION 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

For Further Research

<https://care.org.uk/cause/transgender/>

<https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>

Andrew Bunt: People not pronouns: Reflections on transgender experience, 2021

Glynn Harrison: A Better Story: God, sex and human flourishing, 2017

Vaughan Roberts: Transgender, 2016

Preston Sprinkle: Embodied, 2021

Andrew T. Walker: God and the Transgender debate, 2022

Mark Yarhouse: Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender issues in a changing culture, 2015

Quotes

"Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign." **John Stuart Mill**

"Authenticity is the key to living a fulfilling life." **Elliot Page**

"If you think it, want it, dream it, then it's real. You are what you feel." **Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, from Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat**

"Transphobes should not feel welcome in Oxford, or in this college." **Resolution passed by JCR of Christ Church College, Oxford in response to the invitation of Kathleen Stock to speak at Oxford Union**

"If sex isn't real, there's no same-sex attraction. If sex isn't real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn't hate to speak the truth." **JK Rowling**

"The further my transition went, the more I realized that I wasn't a man, and never would be. We are told these days that when someone presents with gender dysphoria, this reflects a person's "real" or "true" self, that the desire to change genders is set. But this was not the case for me. As I matured, I recognized that gender dysphoria was a symptom of my overall misery, not its cause." **Keira Bell**

"The reality is, I was punishing myself – my body – for having gone through puberty without my permission. I was disgusted by my own nature. I felt betrayed by it. And the betrayal was total. I wanted to escape it, kill it, obliterate it, so that it could never betray me again. But I am that body. It is not other than me. It is me. And I can't escape the make-up of my cells – no matter what any gender theorist tries to convince me of." **Charlie Bentley-Astor**

"The modern self assumes the authority of inner feelings and sees authenticity as defined by the ability to give social expression to the same." **Carl Trueman**

"Our culture says: Your psychology is your sexual identity – let your body be conformed to it. The Bible says: Your body is your sexual identity – let your mind be conformed to it." **Sam Allberry**

"Being creatures means that we cannot re-create ourselves in any fashion or form that we desire by a simple act of the will or the complex work of a surgeon. When we as creatures reject the Creator's blueprint, we are both rebelling against the natural order of how things objectively are, and (though it may not seem like it) we are rejecting the life that is going to be the highest good for us." **Andrew T. Walker**

"Not every impulse we experience should be indulged. We should be suspicious about "listening to our hearts." Actually, everyone knows this is true. Prisons are full of people who acted in accord with their feelings—and who have been told by society that they shouldn't...Our hearts' desires can be at war with what is actually good for our hearts. The real question is: which desires should be fed, and which should be starved?" **Andrew T. Walker**

Key Stats

- **The rise in identifying as transgender:**
 - Between 2009 and 2018, the number of boys referred to the Gender Identity Development Service rose by 1460%, and the number of girls by 5337%.
 - Whereas previously boys made up around 2/3 of those referred, the ratios have now completely flipped.

- Almost ⅔ of girls identifying as transgender have another mental health condition. Around ⅓ have autism or another neurodiversity.
- 41% of young people who identify as transgender do not identify as heterosexual, and links have also been established with eating disorders.
- **Education:**
 - Of the 47 main RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) providers in the UK, 27 are openly gender-affirming, and the other 20 are beyond a paywall. Not a single one is openly gender-critical.
 - 67% of 16 to 18 year olds have been taught that sex is merely 'assigned' at birth, as opposed to being rooted in biological reality. 32% have been taught that a woman can have a penis.
 - Despite the safeguarding implications, schools are already prioritising gender over sex. 28% of schools do not maintain single-sex spaces; 60% do not uphold single-sex sports.
 - A recent report found that 72% of schools do not inform parents if their child wishes to explore their gender. There have been cases of schools reporting parents to social services for not supporting their child's gender exploration.
- **Treatment:**
 - Transgender activists cite frightening statistics that 48% of young people experiencing gender dysphoria attempt to commit suicide. Although some young people do experience real mental distress, this statistic is a highly misleading one based on a self-selecting study of just 27 participants.
 - On average, 80% of children desist in gender dysphoria as they progress into adolescence and adulthood.
 - Only 29% of teenagers actually saw their mental health improve after puberty blockers, fewer than the 34% of teenagers who saw it actively deteriorate. Other treatments, such as the injection of cross-sex hormones, can lead to permanent infertility and loss of sexual function.

Stories

Keira Bell was, in her words, a "classic tomboy". She was athletic and "one of the boys." But when puberty hit, she hated her periods and how her breasts and hips were growing. She didn't feel like she belonged and had distant relationships with her parents. As a teenager, she became attracted to other girls, and wondered if there was something inherently wrong with her. She thought it would be best if she stopped becoming a woman, and was referred to the Gender Identity Development Service at the Tavistock Clinic. After superficial conversations with social workers, she was put on puberty blockers at 16, received testosterone at 17 and had a double mastectomy at 20. But the further she went, the more she realised she wasn't actually a man. At 21 she began detransitioning. She now has possible infertility, has lost her breasts and will be unable to breastfeed, and has atrophied genitals, a permanently changed voice, and facial hair. In 2020 she brought a legal case against the Tavistock Clinic on the basis that she could not have meaningfully consented to life-altering treatment at such a young age.

When the boys at school first started asking out the girls, **Charlie Bentley-Astor** wasn't interested. But she didn't think she was exclusively gay either, and she was terrified by the promiscuity of same-sex relationships. When seeking help, NHS therapists suggested she might be a man, and she was eager to escape being a woman. She shaved off her long hair and crushed her breasts with binders and bandages. But she felt more depressed than ever. When she questioned the course she was taking, she felt browbeaten to keep going. She describes the environment around her as "a cult." Eventually she deconstructed her desire to transition, and came to believe it had been driven by punishing her own body for going through a puberty she didn't want. When she detransitioned, she was diagnosed with a number of learning disorders, including autism. Her friends wanted nothing to do with her, but she is now healthier, confident, not gender dysphoric, no longer suicidal and is excited by the idea of marriage and motherhood.

The story of **Cynthia** (a pseudonym) is published in full on the CARE website. Cynthia is a 14-year old schoolgirl who has testified about what she calls the gender 'indoctrination' at her school. She describes the school 'Equalities Club', promoted by teachers, which promotes gender ideology, and wanted to send a survey to all students, including 11 and 12-year-olds, about their pronouns, "genders", and whether they were LGBTQIA+. Her friends have made comments like: "I hate anyone who supports JK Rowling", "I want to strangle transphobes with a rope", "I wish JK Rowling and all transphobes would drop dead". Some children are even refusing to use terms like "mother" and "father", and instead are talking about a "birthing partner" and a "non-birthing partner". There was a petition from students to get the head of year fired, for refusing to let biological males get changed in the girls' changing room. When one girl came out as transgender, the school changed her name, allowed her to change in a different space, and almost every other girl in her friendship group subsequently also declared that they were transgender.

Pastoral Issues

- **Pronouns**
 - Some Christians, such as Vaughan Roberts, argue that it is pastorally wise and a mark of respect to use a person's pronouns, even if they don't align with their sex: this allows a relationship to be formed with the person, rather than creating conflict, and in the long run, meeting a person where they are at is more likely to be effective in leading them to Jesus.
 - For other Christians, this goes against their conscience, as they feel like this is effectively going on with a lie (as a transgender woman is not actually a women, for instance).
 - Some may choose to avoid using pronouns altogether (such as by referring to a person by their name, rather than a pronoun). Whereas names indicate a particular individual, pronouns relate to the nature of that individual. Others may use a generic pronoun such as 'they'.
 - Some Christians use preferred pronouns for adults, but not for children, as social transitioning for children may make the ongoing experience of feelings of gender dysphoria more likely.
- **Parenting children and teens**
 - Do talk about what it means to be a boy/girl with your child, and about what it does not mean. It is important to ensure they do not feel bound to gender stereotypes. Provide them with positive stories about what it means to be a boy/girl and the advantages of both.
 - Do seek regular conversations from an early age around topics like sexuality and gender with your child. The age at which these topics are taught within schools is surprisingly young, and you want to be ahead of the game in shaping your child's worldview, rather than merely responding to what is being taught.
 - Do ask to see the RSE materials being taught in your child's school. If the school refuses to show you due to copyright reasons, you can complain: they are legally obliged by the government to show you. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons, but not relationship education.
- **If your child wants to transition**
 - Even if you are taken aback, it's important to remain calm (and to be seen by your child to be calm). Thank them for talking to you about it, and re-affirm that you love them no matter what. Don't panic: lots of children and teens who question their gender, are just questioning, in a confused world.
 - Ask questions about what has led them to this point, and see if you can discover the reason behind the desire. Make it clear that above all, you want to listen to them. They might have a number of other class-mates who are identifying as trans already; they might feel like they don't conform to gender stereotypes; or they might be struggling with the changes their body is making during puberty.

- Don't feel like you need to argue with them and change their mind straight away: this might lead to resentment. 80% of children and young people questioning their gender ultimately desist. It is important that your child continues to trust you, so be patient with them. Look to maintain a conversation with them.
- Do maintain boundaries with them: if your child wants to push back against them, that is normal, and it is a parent's role to set healthy limits. For instance, you may decide that while they are at home, they are not to explore things like alternative names, pronouns or clothing. Although it might seem simpler to keep them happy, you want to do what is best for them in the long run.
- Do seek support: Living Out and Christian Medical Fellowship both have useful resources for parents from a Christian point of view. Bayswater Support is a (gender-critical) dedicated secular website for parents of children who identify as transgender.
- Keep encouraging them to follow Jesus: the best thing we can do when struggling with anything is to love Jesus more. Reassure them that God loves them, point them to how Jesus draws near to those who are suffering, and show them how gentle and kind he is.