

1. To be a Christian voice on ethical issues based on Biblical values



2. To analyze, interpret and engage with the existing and emerging bioethical issues pertaining to health care and research



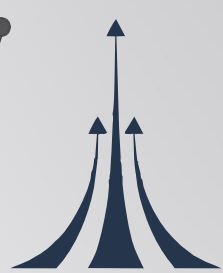
3. To facilitate upholding the sanctity of life and dignity of humans in medical practice and research



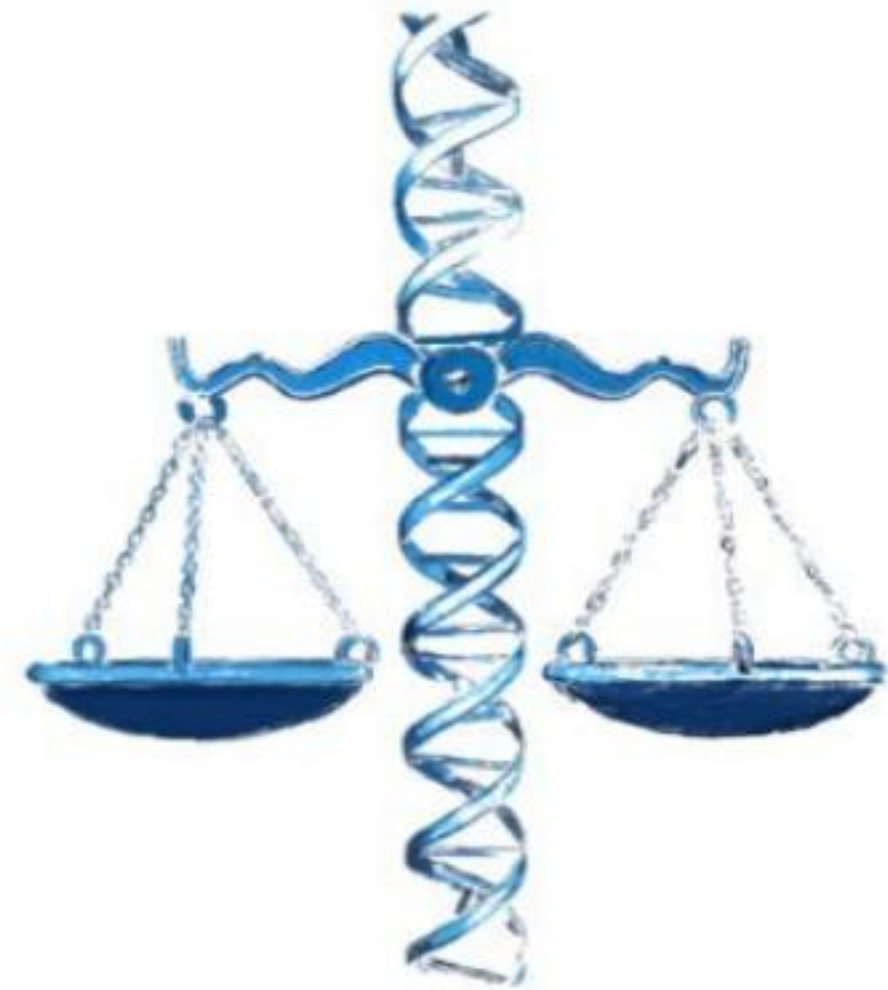
4. To promote ethical medical practice



5. To build leadership in the field of Bioethics, in the areas of Medical education, Medical practice and Medical research



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Gender Identity: A Crisis Confronting Us

Dr. Satish Thomas

Hello everyone, in this edition of The Bioethics Bulletin we have chosen to bite the bioethics bullet!!

We take head on one of the most sensitive and polarizing discussions of our times – sexual identity or gender dysphoria. It has become the rallying point of all activists against discrimination or divide. The denominator for the cry against discrimination used to be class, colour

or race earlier. But with the gender issue, it has now extended to the entire human race. In my view, the stakes in this kind of debate have never been higher, because at the core lies the question of how we define a human being. If the LGBTQ issue was primarily about discrimination and acceptance, the transgender issue has elevated it to the redefinition of a human being.

Different worldview perspectives on this question, will lead to very divergent answers. These different perspectives on fundamental realities initially get played out in smaller and more peripheral issues of life, but if followed through to their logical consequences, will eventually end up in such drastic outcomes. In the Western world, it began as a distrust of metanarratives or grand stories explaining the world and its predicament, and painting these as attempts to exert power over others. It resulted in rejection of all absolute truth and the embracing of ‘your truth for you, my truth for me’ (even if they are mutually contradictory!). In this postmodern mind-set, truth is not absolute or objective. It is a social construct. Is it any surprise then that this idea fostered once upon a time in the academia, would find its way decades later into popular culture in gender being only a social construct?

As Bible believing Christians how do we make sense of this whole LGBTQ and Transgender movement? I believe that as followers of Christ who are called to be salt and light to a degenerate and dark world, we need to engage with this at two levels.

At the macro level, we need to address the battle of the mind. We need to see this as an ideological battle, between the truth of God as revealed in the Bible and the distortion of it by the devil.

We need to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and bring captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). We need to see and let others willing to see, that the two sexes were part of God’s original “good” design for creation, as the means for human flourishing. And how the Fall is the correct diagnosis for the human predicament, including the gender identity confusions and sexual orientation distortions. And we need to point to the right treatment, the hope that is available through Jesus Christ alone, out of this universal condition. As pointed out earlier, ideas have consequences, and if we as a society hadn’t ceded much ground to the distortions of truth in their infancy, it would probably not have come to this state now. The ideological debate turns on the nature of truth – whether it is a given from above or a construct from below, and on the nature of reality – whether spirit or soul alone matters excluding the body, psychology above biology, feelings over objective facts, and so on.

However, while we engage at the Macro level, we must not lose sight of the micro level, the individual struggling and suffering with the burden of the Fall. At the foot of the cross, we are all on even ground, bearing the wounds and scars of the Fall in its varied manifestations. How can we not reach out, but in empathy and compassion? How can we not listen and journey with the sick and the suffering, for that is what we ourselves are? The terms gay and straight are least helpful here. They blur the truth that were are all alike victims of the Fall and the curse. No one of Adam’s race is straight. We are all alike twisted and curved inwards (*incurvatus in se*). How can we discriminate or take a higher ground if we understand the truth of the Scriptures?

We present a mix of articles from different perspectives, reflecting this tension of engaging both with the ideology and the individual, struggling with the Bible’s exhortation to speak the truth in love. The articles reflect the various authors’ own opinions and not a positional stance of the TCB. As in all matters let us take care to avoid errors at both extremes – diluting truth thinking that this is a loving act, or coldly giving propositional truth without being willing to carry another’s burden. We hope that these articles will be of help to us in following our Master who, while being truth embodied in His person always welcomed the marginalized and outcasts to Himself.

Sexual Identity & Orientation

Dr. Rajini Hermen



My intended desire in writing this article is to help the readers understand transgenderism and develop ways we can engage and respond in a compassionate and sensitive way to those who identify themselves as transgenders.

To get an understanding of transgenderism one needs to understand certain terminologies.

What's gender identity?

Gender identity: one's deeply held sense of what you identify yourself as, it's how you feel inside and how you express those feelings. Clothing, appearance, and behaviors can all be ways to express your gender identity. Most people feel that they're either male or female. Some people feel like a masculine female, or a feminine male. Some people feel neither male nor female. These people may choose labels such as "genderqueer," "gender variant," or "gender fluid".

Assigned sex (OR "biological sex") Assigned sex is a label that you're given at birth based on medical factors, including your hormones, chromosomes, and genitals. Most people are assigned male or female, and this is what's put on their birth certificates. When someone's sexual and reproductive anatomy doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male, they may be described as intersex.

Gender Dysphoria: Condition when a person feels discomfort or distress because of a mismatch between biological sex and gender identity.

Cisgender.: When people's assigned sex and gender identity are the same, or in line with each other.

Transgender: Transgender (or trans) is an umbrella term used to describe people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth -in other words Transgender people have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their sex assigned at birth. Some trans people may also identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, while others identify as heterosexual, but typically in India they identify as "neither male nor female" but rather as a third gender. Transsexuals identify with the opposite gender and attempt to 'correct' their body using HRT (hormones and hormone repressors) or SRS (surgery). There are some reasons why Transgenders who feel they are the opposite gender do not pursue a sex change for a variety of reasons, e.g., insufficient money or life circumstances (e.g. wife/children).

In India, a common term used to describe transgender people, transsexuals, cross-dressers, eunuchs, and transvestites is: "Hijra" -who are transgenders -they are biological males (born with male genitalia and chromosomes) who reject their masculine identity, and identify either as women, or "not-men", or "in-between man and woman" or "neither man nor woman" they refer to themselves and each other as 'she' even though they don't regard themselves as women, they dress as women and are voluntarily emasculated by another Hijra, which is the culmination of the ritual to become a Hijra and join the Hijra community. Hijras are an old, institutionalised, religious community. Typically coming from a Hindu background, they consider themselves devotees of Bahuchara Mata, a goddess who is believed to be able to bestow the blessing of fertility. They are believed to be a vehicle through which the goddess Bahuchara Mata blesses people with fertility. This belief is held by the wider Hindu community, not just the Hijra community.

Kothis are also transgender. They are generally effeminate men who live in the wider community, either alone, or with a wife and family or with a homosexual partner; they may however live within a Hijra community, their identity is often hidden from the wider community who consider them males. They may be homosexual or bisexual, they wear pant-shirts, are not emasculated or castrated, and at times they do dress up as women, when they dress as women they may join a Hijra community and work with them.

How as Christians should we be engaging?

For a believer the definition of gendered personhood is found in Genesis1;27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them”. Our sexuality is God’s intentional design for our lives, whether single or married, male or female, we are bearers of God’s image [Imago Dei] and as we affirm our belief in the one who created gender – “binary sexuality “and hold true with what is consistent with Gods will, there will be some among us who want to intentionally engage with transgenders or work /walk alongside them. This intentionality means a walk on the long hard road, and it requires time, energy and commitment and courage to love and engage with those who struggle with gender identity,

From the perspective of working with Shalom -which is a Palliative care unit of Emmanuel Hospital Association offering palliative care to transgenders, some of our learnings in the past decade as we have willfully sought to engage with transgender’s has been the following

The need to show that we care and are there for them ,to put it in context -a remarkable ruling In April 2014,by Justice KS Radhakrishnandeclared transgender to

be the third gender in Indian law, in a case that was brought by the National Legal Services Authority (Nalsa) against Union of India and others. The ruling said:

“Seldom, our society realises or cares to realise the trauma, agony and pain which the members of Transgender community undergo. Our society often ridicules and abuses the Transgender community and in public places like railway stations, bus stands, schools, workplaces, malls, theatres, hospitals, they are side-lined and treated as untouchables.”

As we have journeyed with many of them in their trials and struggles, we have witnessed the trauma, the psychological, medical, emotional, and social issues they struggle with, and it’s all often mingled with guilt, shame, deep hurt and pain. We can show that we care for them by building friendly, safe, loving, and welcoming communities.

To Serve-in ways we can -with truth, wisdom, and grace. In our work at Shalom we have intentionally sought initiating friendships, and long-term relationships with them. We have been passionate about our care for the transgenders from the start and have learnt with time that our communication plays an extremely important role in our work/journey with them, and this begins by the way we address them -A patient person

who was assigned male sex at birth and identifies as a woman today (Trans woman) should be addressed by their “self-determined identity” regardless of whether they have pursued any hormonal and/or surgical interventions to align their gender expression with their gender identity.

- At our centre -clients are always referred to by the name they prefer or at times if it’s a trans-woman we address them as “Didi”- The purpose is to respect them for who they are and who they identify themselves to be. Many of us might struggle with the pronoun predicament whether to call a “he” a “she” and vice versa but if one wants to start engaging with them then its good to start with where they are at.

- Another important aspect of our journey with transgenders is spending time hearing and listening to them well. The more we hear them out, the more we sense and realize of who they are, where they’ve come from, where they’re at.Each of their painfully tragic stories are ridden with deep hurts, betrayals and often very complex in all the relationships.

We have all at times failed in loving fellow image bearers who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, let us take time to listen, to love and respond correctly. In some ways to ease the pain, in not judging them and developing a safe friendship.

Some Recommended Books:

The Struggles of Gay Christians by Wesley Hill

- The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert by Rosaria Butterfield.

- Out of a Far countryby Christopher & Angela Yuan.

- Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating transgender issues in a changing culture, by Mark A Yarhouse (2015)

- Ex-Gays: A longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation, by Mark A Yarhouse and Stanton Jones (2007)

- A Change of Affection: A Gay Man’s Incredible Story of Redemption, by Becket Cook

- Holy Sexuality and the Gospel, by Christopher Yuan (2018)

- A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing, by Glynn Harrison (2017)

- Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis, by William J

Through a Gynecologist's Eyes

Dr. Roopa Verghese



A 36-year-old well-educated, reputed person presents to the gynecology office in a semi rural area in India considering the possibility of having a hysterectomy done. The person claims he is transgender and would want to discuss options of how to go about having his own biological children. The person prefers to use the pronoun “HE” as a form of recognition. He tells, he has never had a gynecologic examination. As he felt he was sure of his decision since age 24, he has been on testosterone therapy. Although his menses initially ceased, each month over the past 2 years he has had breakthrough spotting lasting 2 to 4 days, sometimes accompanied by pelvic pain and cramping. Presently he wants to discuss hysterectomy as gender dysphoria treatment and has come to me for the same.

My initial reaction is like of a person who is sitting numb without knowing what to say or ask further. All that I mentioned above then came out in a bit more detail, letting me understand that this individual has been quite alone in making most of these decisions.

His parents have almost abandoned him and he does not have many friends. All the above-mentioned treatment he received when he was doing his postgraduate training in a city. Currently he was in this small semi- rural place as a part of the posting he had received on the job. So, he felt coming to a Christian hospital may be easier for him because he felt Christians were more understanding.

Is his thought correct is a question to me?

Gender nonconforming (GNC) is a broad term that includes people whose gender identity isn't strictly female or male or moves between the two. Other terms for this include genderqueer, gender creative, gender independent, bigender, noncisgender, nonbinary, and third sex.

Gender dysphoria is a condition that causes distress and discomfort when the gender you identify with conflicts with the sex that you were assigned at birth. You may have been assigned a male sex at birth but feel that you're female, or vice versa. Or you may believe yourself to be neither sex, nor something in between or fluid. These disconnect between how society regards you and how you feel physically and mentally can cause severe distress, anxiety and depression. Over the past decade, transgender health care has moved to the forefront of the medical conversation. Outcomes are being studied, and the literature is becoming more robust.

Children as young as 2, can start showing cross-gender behaviors. Not all of them will continue to feel gender dysphoria into their teens or adulthood. If gender dysphoria goes past puberty, studies show that the young person will likely continue to feel that way. For them, their internal sense of gender is not a choice. It is who they are, and they need professional and social support. Gender dysphoria isn't an illness. But the distress from it may be linked to mental health problems, such as anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. Some estimates say that 7 out of 10 people with gender dysphoria will have some other mental health diagnosis in their lifetime.

Transgender patients remain under served because of the health care barriers they encounter. Factors contributing to poor access include lack of health insurance, inability to pay for services, clinician insensitivity and hostility, and fear of exposure of transgender status during health care encounters. There are enough studies, where transgenders have responded, indicating that they delayed or did not seek medical care as a result of discrimination. The truth is that majority of the ObGyns' current knowledge and practice regarding LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) care is limited.

Only a few were comfortable caring for transgender patients including a personal few friends of mine who say they would somehow refer them to other doctors if approached. The knowledge about the steps transgender patients must take to transition to their self-identified gender, and less than half were familiar with the recommendations for the routine health maintenance and screening of these patients.

“Talk” therapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist is for a key part of treatment for gender dysphoria. Many people also decide to take at least some steps to bring their physical appearance in line with how they feel inside. They might change the way they dress or pick a different name. They may also take hormones and other medication or have surgery. Treatments include: Puberty blockers, hormones and surgery. The goal is not to change how the person feels about their gender. Instead, treatment is to address their distress and other emotional harm. With the help of therapists and doctors, people can choose the treatment that is best for them. That may depend, in part on if they’re satisfied with their new social role, hormonal side effects, and whether they want surgical changes.

There is another facet to this whole issue, in the past decade; there has been an increase in visibility, social media, and online content about transgender issues and transition, which may act as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, an increase in visibility has given a voice to individuals who would have been under-diagnosed and under treated in the past. On the other hand, it is plausible that online content may encourage vulnerable individuals to believe that nonspecific symptoms and vague feelings should be interpreted as gender dysphoria stemming from a transgender condition.

My heart breaks thinking about the pain that this man went through while trying to understand his identity. All that he went through, majority don’t stand up to what they think, usually in a place like India they even don’t have enough money or knowledge to go or approach for help. They are just suppressed in their own families. As individuals, more than that as clinicians who are approached by such children/ individuals what would be the first thing you want to do, like with any other sense of identity, is instill pride in the person, rather than shame.

The reality is that he could have been saved from so much turmoil if he understood that God had made him male for the glory of God! Genesis 5:2 states that God created humanity male and female. This brings clarity to the question of difference between sex and gender. The Bible sees no distinction. God created each person biologically male or female. The sooner they realize that the sooner they will find peace with how God made them.

The problem is that this is a philosophical claim. A man’s chromosomes cannot be engineered into female chromosomes. Altering one’s appearance cosmetically or surgically cannot change the underlying reality of a person’s biological make-up. The psychology of the mind cannot override the facts of a person’s biological markers. The transgender revolution demands that we believe falsehoods about human nature. And truth and falsehood have never been a matter of majority vote, because we know that there is a Creator who has the authority to decide and state what is right and wrong. The transgender debate is ripe with controversy. Holding a biblical conviction in this debate means that individuals will find themselves in disagreements with friends, families, and co-workers. We must avoid trite explanations or knee-jerk reactions, but we must continue to say that, since God made us, he gets the ultimate say in who we are.

But all the conviction in the world won’t matter if we act or speak without compassion. Making these patients feel comfortable could be how we start to know them better and then eventually may direct them into the right path. Jesus did not aim to win debates. He sought to love people. So must we as his followers. As we ground our convictions in God’s unchanging, perfect, Word, we must speak with compassion in our hearts. As humans we know our feelings can mislead us. The Bible gives us the truth that we are not capable of discovering on our own. We need the supernatural truth of God's word to guide us through all of life’s confusion. We need the local church to help us understand God’s word and apply it to our lives. That is how people can come to realize the reality of their sin and the need to repent and be made right with God.

At this present moment in all I did was politely try and make the person understand my viewpoint or ideology for the same and excused myself from doing the surgery. Although the person went ahead saying he will think about it, I still feel he will go to another center where none of these questions are asked and get it done. Well!! no one till date questioned him till the level he has reached.

Is it because they did not know about it or they don’t know what to do about it!!

Church and LGBTQ+

Dr. Starlin Vijay Mythri, MD
Dr. Johann Alex Ebenezer, MD

Introduction

Christians in the west and the LGBTQ+ community have been engaged in a culture war of sorts. This adversarial engagement, marked more by shouting and sloganeering than by respectful listening to the other side, has been marketed to various nations including India through the globalized media. The LGBTQ+ movement become the ‘civil rights movement’ of our time, playing a similar role in the public imagination as the class and racial divides of previous generations did. This has led to two opposite errors – either uncritical acceptance of the freedom to choose, or fierce denial of the struggles that some individuals go through regarding their sexuality. Not succumbing to such a thing, we need to look at this phenomenon with both truth and grace.

It is important to remember that both the Church and the LGBTQ+ are ‘communities’. Both these communities have their own internal narratives which help foster a sense of solidarity and mutual support among their members.

Desperate people in search of a meaningful identity join these communities. The said communities however orient themselves towards radically different telos(1)– the Church towards Christ and His kingdom and LGBTQ+ towards People and their kingdom. The question now is - how can the People of God or the Church understand and respond to this other community and their kingdom?

Let’s look at 2 stories(names have been altered to protect identity, and each of the stories described is a composite of the experiences of more than one patient)

1. Jonathan, 28 years old man wanted to have a sex-change surgery, but according to the protocol he had to undergo counseling prior to it. During counseling, he related how he started cross-dressing when he was 4 years old and how his grandmother used to stitch him frocks as it amused her. He had a distant father and an almost absent mother and he was practically parented by his grandmother. He used to like how his grandmother talked, walked and related to her friends. He idolized her and wanted to become like her after he grew up.

For many years he hid his feelings and was comforted only with God as he felt understood by Him. He was a regular church attendee. At 27 years, after he survived an advanced cancer he told himself that he can’t hide his feelings anymore and would transition into a woman as, he reasoned, only then someone would love and accept him for who he really is.

2. Liza, 19 years old came for counseling after a recent break up with a boy. During the course of counseling, she recounted how she was always yearning for love which was lacking in their home. There were constant fights and her father was physically abusing her mother. Her parents eventually went through a divorce which affected her a lot. Apart from this, she was subjected to intimate abuse by one of her elderly male relatives. All these experiences made her to be suspicious of men and their intentions. Unable to cope with her relationship break up, she went through a period of erratic brief sexual encounters with multiple people which couldn’t satisfy her deeper self. She was wondering whether she was actually bisexual or lesbian and wanted to discuss about it in the counseling.

How shall we understand the LGBTQ+ phenomenon?

Same-sex relationships were known even in antiquity and there were cultural and moral prohibitions to same-sex physical intimacy considering them as unnatural, i.e. they did not fit into the natural reproductive and social orders. This was also the case in the Christian worldview. The Scriptures are explicit in the division of male and female genders as an essential characteristic of mankind, with both genders being described as being ‘made in the image of God’ in Genesis. Sodomy and similar same-sex sinful acts were strongly prohibited from Leviticus all the way to Romans, a stand that was carried on by later Church tradition for centuries.

It was only in the nineteenth century, with the waning of the influence of the Christian worldview in the modern world, that a new allegedly ‘scientific’ category called ‘homosexuality’ was created. Along with this came the corresponding idea of the ‘homosexual person’, claiming that people who indulge in sodomy are not just committing a wrongful action but also have an entire personhood which is different from the majority who were called ‘the heterosexuals’(2). So, it was only as recent as the nineteenth century that what was considered a sinful or an unnatural act/desire became an identity/nature.

In other words, instead of just two kinds of human beings namely man and woman, we now had a new kind of human being called the ‘homosexual’. Since then, this addition of newer kinds of human beings has only increased, aptly indicated by the ‘+’ in the LGBTQ+ acronym.

When the construct of homosexuality was framed as a condition affecting the human nature, scientists started searching for any biological evidence which would give it a scientific credence and endorsed medical treatments including sex-change surgeries. This gave birth to the ‘born-this-way’ notion of the LGBT movement, which is being discredited now. Scientists were unable to find any evidence for the biological source of the homosexuality-construct(3,4). In the last few decades, the new gender theorists encouraged people who were struggling with their sexual desires and gender to ‘choose-their-way’ by undoing the human sexual difference saying that it is part of a structure of exploitation which deserves deconstruction. This strange new option goes against reality as we experience it and is sinful according to the Scriptures. Many people who surgically transitioned and have gone down that path have borne witness to the loneliness, regret and despair that awaits one who ventures there(5).

In retrospect, we now know that these new categories of homosexual and heterosexual have caused more confusion than brought any clarity to the complexities of the human condition involving the entangled issues of sinful/fallen nature, misdirected desire and sexuality.

How shall we respond?

We have seen through the two stories that the struggle is real and that the situation is complex, which is why oversimplified sloganeering cannot really understand people who go through such problems. We have also seen that what these constructed terms and social movements do is take people who are struggling with misdirected sexual desires and self-understanding and give them an artificially constructed and false narrative to make sense of their suffering. People always deeply yearn to find ‘meaning’ for the experiences they go through, and people struggling with sexual and gender issues are uniquely vulnerable to such false narratives of identity.

People of God should stop being hateful or afraid of others who are culturally or behaviorally different from them. We have to realize that churches are heaven’s outposts on earth where people who suffer due to the individual and relational outworking of Sin and Fallenness, may come to experience redemption even as we await its completion at the coming of Christ and His Kingdom. We should work towards building godly families which are safe environments for the couple and their children to know God and understand their identity in Him. s they enjoy cultural privilege.

We should encourage humble discipleship which pervades all of our lives whether that is in the area of relationships, work or sexuality. In our churches, we should preach against the spiritual evils of domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse and self-centeredness, more to men aSocial movements and communities can only provide support to some extent and cannot address deeper spiritual needs of love and belonging, which only Christ can give. Christians have to pray and walk alongside people who suffer with their sexuality, gently guiding them with the Spirit’s help, towards the grand narrative of God, which alone gives us deeper satisfaction and meaning in this broken world.

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Gender Identity in Today's World

Dr. Vikram Tirkey

INTRODUCTION

We live in the Post-modern era, where everything is “grey.” It seems that a well-defined set of rules in black and white has become old-fashioned. In general, while the present generation is disinclined to the boundaries set by the community; and their abhorrence to specific fences is obvious. The previous generations are challenging this new generation to adhere to certain principles that seem obsolete to them. The need of the hour in this fast changing world is to preserve and uphold unchanging-values.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER IDENTITY TRENDS

GENDER DYSPHORIA

A major concern nowadays is the issue of gender identity. According to some, a person's thoughts and feelings of their desired gender are not consistent to the defined gender at birth. “Gender dysphoria” is the term used to define such inconsistency and it is explained as the struggles and challenges some have with their gender identity in the community. As a result, gender advocates point to the fact that there may be harassment, discrimination, and violence leading to anxiety, depression, and suicide. There may be other psycho-social trauma and disorders as well.

GENDER SELFHOOD

It is generally understood that many have a gender identity issue at one point of time in their life. For some people, it is said that their gender identity corresponds with the gender assigned at birth, for others it does not. Gender selfhoods that differ from the one assigned at birth, including ones beyond the binary, has existed across the world from ancient times.

However, not only are we beginning to see a communal understanding of kaleidoscopic terms associated with the matter and coming across people who are not only openly speaking on cognate matters but are also presenting their self-defined gender identity with increasing openness.

Gender identity can be stated to be a person’s understanding and experience of their gender. Everyone has a gender identity. It is claimed that for some people, it corresponds with the gender assigned at birth, and for some others; it does not. Corresponding to this belief, gender individualism is extended and need not be confined within one inclusively agreed-upon term. It is asserted that no one authority should command the boundaries of gender, except the individual concerned.

NEW GENDER TERMS

In the light of the growing acceptance of gender fluidity, people have come up with different gender definitions like: Gender expression, Agender, Cisgender, Demigender, Pronouns, Femme, Masc., Androgyne, and so on. These are used to define the various shades of what people with gender fluidity use to identify their gender with.

SELF-DEFINED IDENTITY

Another important aspect of gender identity is self-defined identity, which can be more or less fluid or change over time and climes. For some people, gender identity is stable throughout life, whereas for others it varies either from one time to another in life; or over time or in day-to-day life.

MALE, FEMALE AND GENDER IN THE POST-MODERN WORLD

The post-modern world views sex and gender as performativities. In this context, the word sex is used to define an individual’s biological reproductive function based on the specific traits – “male” and “female,” to procreate and propagate through sexual reproduction. Social scientists tell us that the word gender is used socially or culturally to define masculinity or femininity based on a spectrum of characteristics based on social structure with certain gender roles and identities. Both the sex traits and the characteristics are used to differentiate between the two – masculinity and femininity. Also those who fall outside these norms may be called as transgender or third gender.

In many parts of the world, patriarchy is the normative social construction where the superiority of male is proclaimed. Men and women have divinely ordained roles in such societies, related to their biological differences.

It is emphasized that we learn to become a man (boy) or a woman (girl) by following the gender scripts that our society has handed out to us, through their traditions and culture.

And that stepping out of those norms or roles lead to social and theological – spiritual disorder. However, this narrative is evolving rapidly; when some people throw away the scripts then the non-natural nature of sex and gender is highlighted.

Increasingly, across the world; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) are considered a people group with a rapidly rising population. This is viewed as both a biological as well as spiritual problem. Other associated problems are social delinquency. And the fact that the LGBT do face discriminations - there are issues for their employment, housing, education, and so on. Often they are involved in violence and harassment. They continue to demand their rights – for reservations in jobs, and recognition of their identity. And many companies, nowadays, openly state that they do not discriminate on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.

Some countries have given the legislative rights for consensual sex whether heterosexual or homosexual. The age for such indulgence can be legally as low as 16 years. Contrary to this, in many countries homosexual activity is illegal. It is punishable. Same sex couples are denied rights for pensions, immigration, parenting, fostering, and adoption.

GENDER IN THE INDIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

When I was born, somehow the news went around that my mother gave birth to a female child. Consequently, all the people brought plenty of frocks as gifts for me to wear. Well, I am sure it didn’t make any difference to me then. But later I was brought up with “boyish” things.

We also live in a society that is market-driven. The market and advertisements dictate certain norms ...blue color for boys, and pink for girls. So, even the stereotyping of “maleness and femaleness” is dictated by those who control the market. Friendship or companionship between opposite sex is always looked adversely in most of our cultures in India. It is often associated with having sexual relationships. However, going out with same-sex persons is much more culturally acceptable

It is entirely possible that two persons of the same-sex can indulge in sexual activity to fulfill their sexual urges without allowing anyone to point fingers on them. Because of the cultural norms prohibiting healthy relationships between the opposite sexes, it is easy, convenient, pleasurable, and safe for such homosexuals.

The idea that we are “conceived that way” is more complicated on account of sexual orientation personality. In one sense, the proof that we are brought in to the world with a given sexual orientation appears to be very much upheld by direct perception: guys predominantly recognize as men and females as women. The way that kids are (with a couple of special cases of intersex people) conceived either as organically male or female is past banter. The natural genders assume integral parts in a generation, and there are various populace level normal physiological and mental contrasts between the genders. Notwithstanding, while organic sex is an intrinsic element of individuals, sex personality is a more subtle idea.

While there is a growing vocal minority that presses for freedom for gender-fluidity, and rights for transgender people, and those who are LGBTQ; by and large in India there is little acceptance for the biological argument that people who identify with a gender apart from that “assigned” at birth. The Indian government does support a third-gender identification for transgender people and allows them to register as such in official identity documents such as voter identification cards.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GENDER?

The Bible believes that God created man and woman. In Genesis 1: 27 we read, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” When God made human beings he made them as two distinct people with two different genders that corresponded with their physical attributes and commands them to be fruitful and multiply. In a more detailed explanation in Genesis 2: 18-23 we see the actual process by which God created woman. Since it was not good for a man to be alone, God creates a suitable help-mate – one who will help man to not be alone. Adam is made to fall asleep and from his bone, Eve is created for him and he was to, with her be blessed to be man and wife. In creation there was no ambiguity of gender.

There were no assumed genders as God was the one who assigned maleness and femaleness to Adam and Eve respectively. In the fall to sin we see that human beings becoming estranged from God and becoming slaves to sin. As a result, it also affected every aspect of human life – including gender and gender roles. In successive generations after Adam and Eve, culture and society defined what gender was and how each gender must behave. Since most cultures in the past were patriarchal – there came about a set of definitions. And in current times since cultures are increasingly blurring the lines between genders – a new set of definitions as the ones mentioned above show – are evolving.

The Bible does talk about eunuchs. There are three types recognized in Scripture – Those who are born, those who are made or become eunuchs due to the crushing of their reproductive organs and those who choose to refrain from marrying for the sake of God’s Kingdom. In the Old Testament most references speak of those who were made eunuchs for particular reasons – When one kingdom invaded another – Young men were seized and made eunuchs to serve the kings as officials, as those who guarded the harem and in whatever capacity they were assigned to do so. There were rare instances where eunuchs were born. It is only in the New Testament that we see Jesus himself refer to all three types in Matthew 19:12, “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

God in his grace allows for eunuchs to be part of his world. They are given places of honor; “...and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” (Isaiah 56:3-8)

When it comes to how God treats those who are eunuchs or the “third gender” as they are called now it is the same as how he treats men and women. “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 3:22b-24).

Returning to how the Bible views gender – We have seen that it was defined by God from the moment he created MAN and WOMAN. In the fall there was a rejection of God and his ways and this was reflected in society, culture, and individuals’ defining what gender is. Because humanity is sinful, there is always going to be a rejection of what God ordains and this is true even of gender definition. While the Bible is clear that there is a place of honor for those who are made or born as eunuchs in God’s kingdom, there is no room for self-defining or societal defining of gender in God’s word.

SHOULD WE VIEW GENDER THROUGH THE CULTURAL OR THE BIBLICAL LENS?

How should we view gender? This is the question that we need to wrestle with. Society, culture and individuals all want their view to be adopted and made as the norm. In secular societies the view that gender is what the individual wants it to be is the most popular one and this is endorsed and disseminated through every means possible. A biblical viewpoint that gender is what God determines is not very popular.



There are many factors that affect how a person views their gender; upbringing, culture and traditions, religion, relationships both affirming and abusive, etc. Many think that it is okay for gender to be defined by the individual based on their journey through the factors mentioned above. In some cases parents mistakenly impose gender upon their children other than what God has given them. Still others argue that they feel that they do not belong to the gender that corresponds to their physiological features. And that gender can be divorced from physicality.

These views are not how the Bible views these. We have discussed in detail as to what the Bible says about gender. We have to make a choice as to how we view gender — As believers in Christ; we are bound to the Word of God and cannot compromise what society holds as true with what we know to be true from the Scripture.

How then should we respond to those who hold these views and how to relate with them? We do that as Christ would — In love. It doesn't matter who a person may think that they are gender-wise. We are called to show them the love of Christ. We must call sin as sin and in the same breath love the sinner; sharing the Gospel of Christ so that all may repent and be saved. We must teach what the Bible has to say about these issues in a way that honors God. 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

This is true of why we believe what we do about anything, including gender. Gender identity ought to be looked through the biblical lens as trends and culture orient from humans and are always relativistic in nature unlike the biblical view.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both gender identity and gender roles in society are neither innate nor socially constructed. The notion of “gender” is both biological and cultural. Gender roles are the result of these two factors. People's daily life interaction and linguistic codes, family life, parental guidance, parental selection of toys and clothes, role modeling creates a constructed perception of gender. To understand the secret of gender and gender roles attached to both men and women, it is necessary to focus on both biological and social factors. We cannot understand one without understanding the other. Above all, we must turn to scripture to understand gender as God intended it to be and let that guide and inform our views.

Life between Day & Night!

Rev. Alex Peter

We are living in a world where most of the time things are perceived in binaries. Binary perceiving is easy and comforting. But truth is always multi facets. There is not only day and night but also dusk and dawn. There is not only black and white but also grey. And above all there is not only male and female but also transgenders. Now we are in a time when it's become necessary for Christians to think about the peoples with Gender Identity Issues more seriously.

An ongoing journey:

Any dialogue related to Gender Identity Issues is always overwhelming and scary, as it questions our age-old beliefs and understandings of God – His World and way God works in & through His creation. After going through so many unexplainable life experiences and pondering over them for a long time, at the end Job said, “Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” We are still unaware about so many things about God, ourselves and world around us. And one such thing is people with Gender Identity Issues. It's an area where still so many things are in shadows. Hence any effort to get into conclusions must be a very cautious process. And this cautious process must always include three things:

- We have to rely on God who reveals everything through our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ & Scriptures.
- We have to open our hearts to the experiences of people with Gender Identity issues
- We have to be in constant dialogue with the Scientific Community engaged in process of scientific understanding of people with Gender Identity Issues.

People with gender identity issues are included in a larger umbrella of the group called LGBT+. And it’s necessary that we must understand this group first. LGBT+ can be again divided into two parts:

A.LGB+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals & others) are included in the group which has Different Sexual Orientation or Gender Expression from the Heterosexual People (Heterosexual People are sexually & emotionally oriented towards people of opposite gender). Here Sexual Orientation means, to whom a person is physically or emotionally attracted and Gender Expression is the way a person may reflect their internal sense of gender through presentation – such as clothing, hair, voice and body language.

B.Transgenders comes in the group of People with Gender Identity Issues. At this point now it’s very necessary to make one thing in our mind very clear that Gender Expression & Sexual Orientation are entirely different from the Gender Identity. Hence the People with Gender Identity Issues are different from the People with different Sexual Orientation and Gender expressions. Even though in some cases they overlap with each other but both are two different distinct categories.

In this article, we are dealing only with the People of Gender Identity Issues or PGIIIs.

Mystery of GII:

People with Gender Identity Issues are always a matter of mystery for the rest of community. And to enter into that mystery it’s necessary to know the meaning of word “Gender.” The dictionary meaning of Gender is – “The physical, psychological & behavioural traits that are associated with a particular category & determines the sex.” On the other hand, “Gender Identity” is the way someone experience himself or herself as male or female or the way someone feels his/her masculinity or femineity. Now people having any .incongruence, abrasions or deflections from the set norms of the Gender Identity are called the People with Gender Identity Issues. Usually, people with gender identity Issues are further divided into two sub categories. But that categorisation was based on the American – European Standards. If we take the rest of the world also in consideration, we can have 3 sub categories of the PGIIIs:

1.Intersex/Intersexual: The term Intersex/Intersexual is used to describe the conditions in which a person is born with such gender characteristics or anatomy which does not allow clear identification as male or female. And there are certain clearly defined medical reason for that:

- True Hermaphroditism: It’s a condition where a person is with either incomplete or mixed ovarian & testicular tissues.

Klinefelter Syndrome: It’s a genetic disorder of gonadal differentiation where a person has an extra X chromosome (XXY) instead of the normal XX or XY pairing.

Androgen or Estrogen Insensitive Syndrome (AIS/EIS): It’s a particular physiological condition caused by the malfunctioned sex glands or because of some prenatal conditions. In this syndrome a person has external female genitalia and also has an outward appearance as female but having XY male chromosomes or vice versa.

2.Gender Incongruence (GI): Gender Incongruence is a condition in which the gender identity of a person do not align with the gender assigned to that person at the time of birth due to his/her physical gender determining features. It’s an experiential mismatch between one’s psychology and one’s biology. This incongruence creates a lot of stress, uneasiness, dissatisfaction and frustration. And this condition of extreme distress due to Gender Incongruence is called Gender Dysphoria.

3. Eunuchs: Eunuchs are also called Male – To – Female (MTF) Transsexuals. They include the Intersexual as well as People with GI. But there is one more group which comes into this category – They are the male who are castrated for religious, social or cultural reasons before or after puberty.

In light of God’s Word:

The question is very important, “What is the response of Holy Word to the PGIIIs?” There are three specific references found in the Bible regarding People with Gender Identity Issues:

1.“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of Lord.” (Deut 23:1) This specific reference of castrating is not at all the condemnation of the people who have gone through such procedure. Instead, it’s a warning & check to stop such practices entering into the community of God’s People. There were two reasons behind it:

- There were communities around them where young males are castrated for socio – religious – cultural practices. And God wanted his people to be away from such practices.

- Human body is beautiful creation of God and its wholeness and sanctity be always preserved.

2.“For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matt 19:12) In this statement we find Christ’s compassionate acceptance of three things:

✓ Helplessness of those who are Eunuch by birth.

✓ Pain, suffering & hurt of those who are made Eunuchs by others .

✓ Dedication of those who chose to be Eunuchs for God’s Kingdom.

3. But the ultimate acceptance of Eunuchs is seen in Acts 8:26 – 40. Philip baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch and brings him inside the Kingdom of God. This is the affirmation of faith that salvation through Jesus Christ is for everyone and there is no one condemned in God’s Kingdom.

A Theological & Ethical Response: Up to this point we tried to understand the form of the PGII and also the response of Holy scripture to the Eunuchs. On the basis of these two it’s necessary that we must have our own Theological & Ethical Response to the People with Gender Identity Issues:

1. Response to PGII as whole: The question is very important, “In creation what was the priority of God – Creation of a particular Species or the male and female of that particular species?” If we study the Creation Narratives carefully, it becomes very clear that God’s primary intention was to create a species. The creation of male and female is the later decision for procreation and companionship. Hence the Sanctity, Dignity, Wholeness & Beauty which is assigned to humans as God’s Creation is for everyone in spite of their gender categorization. Like all other human beings PGII’s also have following rights:

o They are wonderful and beautiful creation of God. (Ps 139: 14)

o As God’s creation they must have dignified existence in uniqueness, equality & justice

o It’s their right to experience God’s Love and other people’s love in their life.

o As God’s creation, God has set them apart for God’s eternal purposes.

o They also need God’s grace, encouragement and hope to move forward in life.

2. Response to Intersex/intersexual: God is God of freedom. He has given freedom to everything in this universe to make choices for their growth. This freedom is given even to the smallest cell of human body. And so many times under different situations even the cells or organs of the body decide to grow differently from the intended ways.

Intersexual people are one such category where their body has made wrong choices in the time of growth. But even when the wrong choices are made our God gives the chance for restoration and course correction. And this restoration and course correction is God’s grace. As God’s children we must accept Intersexual people and become God’s channel of grace through all medical, psychological and spiritual interventions.

3. Response to Castrated: Jesus Christ always accepted & restored all those who were the victims of any Socio – Religious – Cultural Practices. Any MTF transsexual who is castrated for socio – religious – cultural practices is the victim of a system. They need God’s love & compassion to be restored back to the fullness. And God’s people are the channel of God’s restoration.

4. Response to Gender Dysphoria: All other responses to the different categories of PGII are easy to form, but the most difficult is the forming one for people with Gender Incongruence and Gender Dysphoria. Their biological Gender identity is determined but that is very much in conflict with the way they experience their Gender Identity. For an example a biologically fully grown male but feeling and experiencing himself as female. The usual Christian response to such people is: They are sinful in nature or psychologically pervert. But this outward condemnation is not the right response. There are so many studies conducted on such people but till now no conclusive answers are received. The things become more complicated by knowing the truth that in some of them this incongruence started in a very early age. In some of those children lengthy and continuous medical and psychological interventions helped them to attain the correct alignment between what they are and what they experience they are. But in other cases, their incongruence was never corrected and the interventions further aggravated their Gender Dysphoria. Usually, the People with Gender Incongruence end up in sex change through long, painful and very expensive surgeries and hormone treatments. For a Christian community the thing that makes it more difficult is the silence of God’s Word regarding such cases. Surely there are reasons and answers and one day it will be revealed but till that time what must be our response?



- Even though people with GI are having issues, they are still human beings hence they have every right of having God intended dignified human existence. And Christian communities must be places where such a dignified existence be possible,
- People of God must accept them as their cocreations and must patiently walk with them and do whatever is possible in their own capacities to lessen or win over the gender dysphoria.
- People of God keep on searching for the answers by engaging themselves in the theological dialogues & scientific studies.

I am closing with the words of a very famous transgender person, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, “Society tried to put us aside, but this society is my world.” Yes! That is the truth. There is a space reserved for People with Gender Identity Issues in this God’s world. Ultimate truth is:

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28.

We all are God’s children and brothers and sisters in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Gendering the Others

Dr. Shantanu Dutta



These days the passport application forms(and many others) have an extra option in the gender column . It is blandly called - “ Others”. The word hides an umbrella of identities. Some of the” others” we have all met at traffic junctions begging for money. The eunuchs. They usually live in communities and in many areas they turn up at auspicious occasions like weddings and child births to sing and dance and earn some money. Arundhati Roy’s novel, “ The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness” has a lot to say and talk about their customs in its early chapters. The eunuchs are the most visible among the community often covered under the umbrella of LGBTQI or more recently LGBTQI+. Eunuchs have also had public roles as gatekeepers of harems in the Mughal empire and elsewhere and some times could wield a lot of influence. They also find mention in the Bible. Except for the eunuchs, the others are relatively invisible. Eunuchs in the general public arouse attitudes ranging from derision to indifference or ridicule. Gays or lesbians or others under the umbrella are almost always the subject of stigma cutting across ethnicities and religion. However in the larger cities, with Gay parades and other public events, perception is slowly beginning to change. changing ?

But what about Christians. Among Christians , is the traditionally hostile attitude to LGBTQI people. Well that depends on who you talk to and I have talked to people who are happy that it is changing and those who are not. Should it change ? Well that too depends on who you talk to. But there are certain things one should not lose sight of. The historical background is interesting. To set some context :

The early Christians chose to include Gentiles in the church without requiring them to be circumcised and obey the Old Testament law—and they made this decision based on their experience. Peter declared of early Gentile believers, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us... Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:8, 10)

- In the 19th century, Christians reconsidered longstanding interpretation of Scripture that supported slavery. William Wilberforce and many other Christian abolitionists appealed to the horrific reality of slavery to urge other Christians to change their understanding of Scripture on the topic.

For the first 1,600 years of the church, nearly all Christians believed that the earth stood still at the center of the universe. But the invention of the telescope led Christians to reconsider their interpretation of the Bible.

- Psalm 93:1 says, "The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved." Joshua 10:13 says the sun "stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day." Ecclesiastes 1:5 says, "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.”

- Galileo argued that the biblical authors used figurative language when describing the heavens, so the text "would be accommodated to the understanding of every man.”

- Despite the weight of tradition, the telescope presented Christians with new information that required them to reconsider some of their beliefs—and their interpretation of Scripture.

All these changes notwithstanding, not much has changed in the manner in which the church and christians in general have welcomed others with a different sexual identity other than heterosexual male female relationships. And yet, While the church’s official stance prohibiting sexual relations between people of the same sex has remained constant, the importance the church ascribes to the “sin” has varied. The Bible places as little emphasis on same-sex acts as the early church did, even though many Christians may have been taught that the Bible clearly prohibits homosexuality. Actually the scriptures rarely mention same-sex sexuality though the few verses that do have been given a lot of importance .

There is reason to believe that Christians before the late 19th century had no concept of [The History of Sexuality: An Introduction by Michael Foucault] had no concept of gay or straight identity.

For example, Genesis 19 records God's destruction of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, by "sulphur and fire" for their wickedness. For 1,500 years after the writing of Genesis, no biblical writers equated this wickedness with same-sex acts. Only in the first century A.D. did a Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, first equate Sodom's sin with same-sex sexuality. It took centuries for a Christian consensus to agree with Philo's misinterpretation, and it eventually became the accepted understanding of this scripture, from which the derogatory term "sodomite" emerged. Today, however, theologians generally affirm that the wickedness God punished was largely the inhabitants' arrogance and lack of charity and hospitality.

For example, instead of labelling all homosexual acts as sinful in the eyes of God, ancient Christians were concerned about excesses of behaviour that might separate believers from God. The apostle Paul criticised same-sex acts along with a list of immoderate behaviour, such as gossip and boastfulness, that any believer could overindulge in. He could not have been delivering a blanket condemnation of homosexuality or homosexuals because these concepts would not exist for 1,800 more years.

Today, at least some churches would teach that desiring others of the same sex is not sinful but acting on those desires is. Churches today are influenced by a century of psychoanalytic thought promoted through a powerful minority in the field of medicine. They see homosexuality as some kind of sickness. Although this view has now been soundly discredited by the medical profession, some continue to be influenced by the idea. They say that homosexuals are "imperfect" and in need of "healing."

However, scientific awareness of homosexual orientation did not exist until the nineteenth century. For those of us who believe the Bible was inspired by God, what the Bible teaches on any subject, including sexuality, is of great significance. The problem, however, is that sometimes the Bible says very little about some subjects; and popular attitudes about those matters are determined much more by other sources, which are then read into the biblical statements. A growing number of biblical and theological scholars now recognise that gay men and lesbians should be accepted and in the inclusive community of the church.

What influences lead us to new ways of understanding Scripture? New scientific information, social changes, and personal experience are perhaps the greatest forces for change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs.

A survey in the US estimates [<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/how-many-people-lgbt/>] that about 3.5 percent of the adult population identify themselves as gay. There is no corresponding data available for India but if we are to extrapolate, one can conclude that a corresponding number exist in Indian society and the Indian church. If this is the case, gay people are likely to be a significant, if covert, presence in Christian churches too. Some churches in India might claim that they are welcoming, but not affirming of gay people in their congregations. This means that gay people are welcome to attend, but their sexuality cannot be "affirmed" by allowing them to volunteer or minister. However volunteering is not only symbolic of acceptance and inclusion by the church community, it's also a pathway to ministry and leadership. Faced with the behavioural conservatism of many congregations, gay Christians may live hidden lives.

A friend of mine, now with the Lord, had helped start a church for gay people in a large city in India. She was a doctor, not a pastor and not a bible teacher, but God led her to a man who was willing to pastor just such a church. It may sound bizarre that such a church was needed but there it was. Members who eventually joined when the church was set up said that visibly "different" people were shunned in the church and those who were gay could attend as long as they suppressed their sexual preferences and talked and behaved like "normal" people.

A church comprising almost entirely of gay people might look a bit bizarre. After all the church is supposed to be a microcosm of the society with members of all kinds, not just in terms of sexual orientation but in terms of education, profession, wealth and ethnicity. But that is like expecting the fullness of the Kingdom of God ahead of its time. Even many so-called liberal and mainline denominations whose statements and documents are inclusive in nature may not in their local church expressions be actually so. The members there may be just as socially conservative as anywhere else and even if intellectually inclusive, quite apt to be tongue-tied in actual fact when a gay person is seated next to you in the pew or receiving communion from the same cup.

The dichotomy is thus two fold. At one level , church leaders , theologians and pastors are not of one mind when it comes to their attitude towards gay persons. Possibly including doctors, particularly psychiatrists as well as counsellors, therapists and social workers in the discussions where a christian stand is deliberated upon will add a new dimension to the conversation as these are the people who are in contact with gay people in a care giving and serving roles and are in a position to provide perspectives that theologians possibly may not have. The generally favoured stance now seems to be that churches should be welcoming of gay people in their services and church activities but not endorsing their sexual behaviour. This however does not clarify much as gay behaviour can range from anything from complete celibacy to an active sex life. Besides the lines between welcoming and “ not endorsing” are blurred.

About a decade ago, I used to work for the Indian affiliate of a London based charity. The mantra of the organisation was inclusive communities. Both through its community development work across Asia, Africa and in the UK , as well as through a church than met in its London offices , it tried to walk the talk. As long as the charity worked with the homeless or street children, coloured people, ethnic minorities and the disabled, all was well. But then the founder of the charity , an articulate speaker and author went a step further and chose to welcome the LGBTQI community into the church by openly speaking and advertising in the Christian media inviting them to come. And evening apologising for the manner in which Christians had treated them thus far. All hell broke loose.

I don't know much about the push back in the UK or elsewhere but in India, faced with hostility if not social boycott from the churches, the Indian board of the charity had to make a statement publicly disassociating itself from its founder's position. I had left the organisation when all this happened. I came to know though that some staff too had to face the heat and faced with a dressing down and scorn from their own local churches for working for such a deviant organisation and calling itself

So far whatever progress has been made in making the church an inclusive community has been made has been at the level of specialists - be it theologians or pastors or bioethicists. However the Christian life is lived out in the midst of ordinary people in the context of various forms of corporate worship. It is there stigma has to be addressed, discomfort removed and concerns - theological or otherwise understood and explained. However from the pulpit , these subjects are rarely addressed meaningfully. I guess that my example above provides an example of the kind of price that a church will have to pay if it dares step out of the straight and narrow as defined by its peers. And that is a big deterrent.

1.The History of Sexuality: An Introduction by Michael Foucault

2. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/how-many-people-lgbt/>

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Christopher Yuan



DEFINITION

Sexual orientation is an enduring and unchosen capacity or predisposition for sexual desires toward one or both sexes. The modern redefinition of gender is the subjective self-perception of being male or female.

SUMMARY

When discussing same-sex sexual behavior and desires, some assert that the Bible has nothing to say about sexual orientation. But Paul’s use of *sarx* (“flesh” or “sinful nature”) can be a helpful category to better understand and minister to individuals who have an enduring and unchosen predisposition. What is at the root of the confusion today over what is male or female, is the elevation of subjective experience over objective truth. In other words, self-perception eclipses biology. But those struggling with gender dysphoria should not be unduly stigmatized. They wrestle with the consequence of the Fall as with all humanity and the solution begins and ends with faith in Christ.

Understanding Sexual Orientation

The concept of sexual orientation originates from the secular disciplines of psychiatry and psychology. Unfortunately, Christians often pigeonhole themselves into these social science constructs rather than grounding their critical understanding of sexual orientation around biblical and theological teaching.

Gay advocates and even some Christians assert that the Bible has nothing to say about “sexual orientation” and therefore does not condemn or is ambiguous about condemning same-sex relationships.¹ After all, they say, this term does not appear anywhere in the pages of Scripture. But this naïve understanding of how systematic theology is formulated—that the absence of a word is equivalent to silence—would mean that the Bible has nothing to say about many core doctrines, not the least of which being the Trinity. Rather, Scripture paints a theological picture which frames all of life.

Even if the phrase “sexual orientation” does not appear in Scripture, does the Bible address something similar to it? We should begin with a definition. The American Psychological Association describes it this way, “Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes.”² The APA also states that these attractions are generally not chosen.³

In 2006, international human rights activists produced the Yogyakarta Principles, defining sexual orientation as a “capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction.”⁴ In his book *Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation*, gay neuroscientist, Simon LeVay, defines sexual orientation as “the trait that predisposes us to experience sexual attraction.”⁵ By consolidating these definitions, we see that sexual orientation is understood as an enduring and unchosen capacity or predisposition for sexual desires toward one or both sexes.

Defining Enduring and Unchosen Sinful Desires: The Flesh

Before we consider whether the Bible addresses any enduring or unchosen predisposition, we must first break out of the secular paradigm of opposite- and same-sex desires and instead use the biblical categories of good sexual desires and sinful sexual desires. Good sexual and romantic desires are those whose end is within the context of biblical marriage. Sinful sexual and romantic desires are those whose end is outside the context of biblical marriage.

Because all same-sex sexual and romantic desires are sinful, is there any biblical concept describing an enduring and unchosen capacity or predisposition for sinful desires?

Does Scripture provide a lucid, theological framework to disentangle the complex and confusing conversation around sexual orientation? Yes, it is called flesh (sarx) or sinful nature—in other words, a sin orientation—and the doctrine of sin (hamartiology). Some English translations of the New Testament render the Greek word sarx as “sinful nature,” while others render it literally as “flesh.” Sarx is an important and particular concept in Paul’s theology. Pauline expert Douglas Moo explains that especially in Paul’s writings (such as in Romans and Galatians) the meaning of sarx conveys “the limitations of the human condition that have been imposed by sin.”⁶

In Galatians 5:16–17, Paul explains how the flesh fights against the Spirit and the Spirit fights against the flesh. This dichotomous tension does not suggest that we have split natures inside us warring against each other; rather, sarx refers to the whole person marked by the rebellion—the “corruptibility and mortality”—of this present evil age.⁷

This reflects the redemptive-historical reality between the old self, characterized by the flesh, and the new self, characterized by the Holy Spirit. This tension between flesh and Spirit is evidence of the overlap between the present evil age and the coming age.

The flesh represents this wicked era and our position under the dominion of sin and death. The Spirit represents the coming age and our freedom from the power of sin and the law.⁸ In this overlap, aspects of both ages are present together.

The reality is that “the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4) has not passed away and the implications of sin and the “old man” linger. As redeemed believers, though we are being renewed and transformed day by day, we live nonetheless with the vestiges of our old self and with our distorted post-Fall image. Therefore, we must be vigilant in the midst of temptations. As Denny Burk and Heath Lambert put it so well, unlike Jesus, who had no sinful nature, we have a “landing pad” for those temptations that can quickly turn into sinful desire.⁹

Doing Battle with the Flesh

A spiritual battle is raging “between God’s Spirit and the impulse to sin.”¹⁰ This impulse no longer enslaves the believer, but it can still have an influence. We therefore face a daily fight. In Romans 8:13, Paul pleads with us: “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Christ’s salvific work certainly has inaugurated a new era, but this new era is also not fully consummated—the already but not yet. We have been set free, but we must continue to persevere in the battle until that glorious and final day arrives. What does this mean for those who have a predisposition for—but daily mortify—same-sex sexual and romantic temptations?

We should recognize that predisposition is not equivalent to predetermination. In Romans 6:6–7, Paul writes that the individual by virtue of union with Christ is emancipated from the bondage of sin and fallen human nature: “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

This freedom from sin’s reign does not imply freedom from all sinning or a complete absence of temptations, but it is a decisive break with sin and a qualitative change in which our mind is less dark and our will is less rebellious. This new life is the sovereign work of God.

The Holy Spirit is the divine cause of our rebirth (John 3:5–6), and this freedom from sin is an act of God’s grace: “Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom 6:14). As John Piper explains, “Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is power, not just pardon.”¹¹

The other thing to remember is to avoid extremes. At one extreme, we must not to cheapen God’s grace and assume that we can keep on sinning because “love covers a multitude of sins” (1Pet 4:8). This would be a distortion, and Paul speaks directly to this: “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6:1–2).

But at the other extreme, some who have same-sex sexual temptations are overburdened with shame and guilt because they feel they are not worthy of God’s grace. They have repented and are not acting out, but believe this struggle is the unpardonable sin. By recognizing that the issue is our flesh—our fallen human nature—we can daily realize that we are not that much different from anybody else.

At the root, it all comes down to original sin. The moral consequence of the fall has corrupted every person. The exact form of temptation may be different, but the root cause is still the same. The issue is not whether we are tempted, but how we respond.

Comfort comes from knowing we are not alone. We need to be honest and transparent with trusted others about our struggles with unchosen and often ongoing temptations. Further segregating ourselves into “straight Christians” and “gay Christians” gives the false impression that we are fundamentally different at the core of our being.

Instead, we must find solidarity in the fact that we all suffer from original sin—the moral consequence of the fall—and that we are all in need of grace. Together we remind one another of our desperate need for the only solution for our sin nature: Christ and his body, the church.

Male and Female: Gender Identity

Is “gender” a social construct? Are there more than two “genders”? Although the modern West has lost its boundaries and celebrates a plethora of so-called gender options, how should Christians understand and critique today’s redefinition of gender in light of Scripture?

The term sex has a couple of definitions. It often refers to the act of sexual intercourse, but it also can mean the categories of male and female. For this discussion, we are focusing on the second definition. Sex as male or female is an objective, binary category describing the body’s reproductive classification.

Many today, however, claim that sex is not objective but arbitrary—for example, asserting sex is “assigned” at birth. But this is not arbitrary: the sex of a newborn is observed physically by the baby’s visible sex organs and can be confirmed genetically through a DNA test. Sex has very explicit phenotypic traits. To say otherwise is completely unscientific and would mean we must rewrite every single biology textbook ever written.

But what about people who are “intersex”? Does this exceptionally rare condition (by all counts, one in thousands, not hundreds) prove sex is non-binary and on a spectrum? No. Intersexuality is a biological phenomenon where an individual may have genital ambiguity or genetic variance. In human biology, however, anomalies do not nullify categories nor abolish binaries.

The modern redefinition of “gender” refers to a psychological reality independent from biological sex. It is the subjective self-perception of being male or female. Given that sex is objective and gender is subjective, you would think we would value conforming one’s

subjective ideas to objective truth. Instead, the opposite is the case: our culture now values altering the objective, physical reality of our bodies to accommodate the subjective impression of ourselves.

This new form of gnostic dualism separates mind from body and elevates self-understanding as the determiner of personhood—hence the neologism gender identity. The truth of the matter is this: sense of self at best describes how we feel, not who we are.

The Bible and Gender Identity

In the first chapter of the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth and fills the earth with living creatures. The crown of creation is adam, or man (humankind). And among all the various human characteristics, God highlights one in particular: male and female.

Genesis 1:27 conveys an undeniable connection between “the image of God” and the ontological categories of male and female. This verse consists of three lines of poetry, with the second and third lines structured in parallel, communicating a correlation between God’s image and “male and female.”

So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them.

Being created in the image of God and being male or female are essential to being human. Sex (male and female) is not simply biological or genetic, just as being human is not simply biological or genetic. Sex is first and foremost a spiritual and ontological reality created by God. Being male or female cannot be changed by human hands; sex is a category of God’s handiwork, his original and intended design.

As hard as anyone may try to alter this fact in his or her own body, the most that can be done is artificially remove or augment body parts or use pharmaceuticals to suppress unnaturally the biological and hormonal reality of one’s essence as male or female. In other words, psychology usurps biology; what I feel becomes who I am. When denying this physical and genetic reality we allow experience to supersede essence and, more importantly, the image of God. Transgenderism is not exclusively a battle for what is male and female, but rather a battle for what’s true and real.

So how did we get here? Transgenderism is the fruit of postmodernity. Postmodernism, coming out of romanticism and existentialism, tells us that “you are what you feel.” Thus, experience reigns supreme, and everything else must bow before it. *Sola experientia* (“experience alone”) has won out over *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”).

But God is saying, You are who I created you to be. The truth is not something we feel; it is not based on our self-perception. In fact, Scripture tells us that the fallen heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). We cannot trust our own thoughts and feelings, so we need to submit them to God because we can “trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” (Isa 26:4).

Most people’s self-perception is congruent with their biological sex. For a small percentage of others, it is not. The mental distress from this dissonance is called gender dysphoria. Some choose to identify as transgender male-to-female or female-to-male, in essence elevating psychology over biology.

Although identifying is a choice and going through “hormone therapy” or surgery is a choice, the struggle is not. For some, the struggle is very real. Yet as peculiar and unusual as it may be, we must recognize that having unchosen and even persistent thoughts incongruent to one’s actual sex is a psychological consequence of the fall. Every Christian shares the experience of daily mortifying the consequences of the fall.

Put in the context of human brokenness, one’s incongruence between gender and sex may not be as bizarre as many think. Just as giving-in to temptation is sin while being tempted is not, giving-in to a fallen self-perception of gender is sinful, but the fight is not.

Should it surprise us that the Deceiver whispers to some regarding their sex, “Did God actually say?” Let us commit to pray for those with gender dysphoria to follow Christ and his truth rather than their darkened minds and the worldly agendas of social justice and identity politics.

In our own churches, there are those afraid to confess and seek prayer, lest they be shunned and ridiculed. Let us come around sisters and brothers who do not conform to this world but are renewing their minds, resisting fallen thoughts of gender dysphoria, and taking every thought captive.

Let us all join as we fight against placing our psychology over our biology. Rather, let us submit it all to God and recognize that he makes no mistakes and created us in his own image.

FOOTNOTES

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- This essay is part of the Concise Theology series. All views expressed in this essay are those of the author.***
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/gender-identity-and-sexual-orientation/>***
- Dr. Christopher Yuan taught the Bible at Moody Bible Institute for over ten years and his speaking ministry on faith and sexuality has reached five continents. He speaks at conferences, on college campuses, and in churches. He has co-authored with his mother their memoir, Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God, A Broken Mother’s Search for Hope (over 100,000 copies sold and now in seven languages). He is also the author of Giving a Voice to the Voiceless. Christopher graduated from Moody Bible Institute in 2005 and received a master’s in biblical exegesis in 2007 and a doctorate of ministry in 2014. Dr. Yuan’s newest book, Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story, was named 2020 book of the year for social issues by Outreach Magazine.*

Will I still approach...

Anonymous



Why didn't I share with my mother the first time he approached me? I don't know.

Maybe it was because I received mixed messages at home. When I was molested by my uncle my mother didn't believe me. When she finally did, she didn't confront him. Later she almost sent me to live with him. He kept calling and asking her to send me over. I was 14 years old then.

My father himself wasn't safe. As a young girl I learnt to ignore his prying eyes and his perverse curiosity. I also feared his uncontrollable rage. He was a violent man and all of us lived in fear of being beaten by him. I had seen my mother choose to live with him rather than take a stand for herself or for any of us, her three children.

Surely, my father would kill me if he found out what had happened. It happened when I was 17.

Our pastor announced one Sunday that the church needed help cleaning up. I signed up. I had just finished school and was alone at home with nothing to do. Looking back, years later, I know he had laid a trap.

I was in 11th grade when we joined our church. My mother told me the pastor was an anointed speaker. He sure was a good speaker. He knew his Bible well. I saw him as the father I never had. A strong, clear man who loved God - unlike my father who was weak. My father beat up his wife and bullied his children.

I used to call him 'Pastor Uncle' and he was always there for us. So I was confused when he told me that I needed to sleep with him in order to please God.

He quoted Jeremiah 20:7, "You deceived me, Lord and I was deceived, you over powered me and prevailed." He used this verse to convince me that it was God's will for me to be used in this way. He told me that I would bring a curse upon my family if I resisted. I resisted, for a long time. He would keep speaking to me and each time he would get a little further.

If I cried he would get angry. So I stopped crying. My desperate prayers to God were not being answered - so one day I became numb. I stopped struggling and fighting back. I said to God, "if you want this, I will do it." My family pastor then sexually abused me for the next three years.

I blamed myself for everything.

The first few years while I was being raped, I blocked the memory and pretended nothing had happened. I was part of the worship team. My songs and praises were the loudest. It felt easier to be what people wanted me to be. The irony is that I was extremely angry with God. I hadn't spoken to Him for years.

In college I shared my story with a friend for the first time. It brought back waves of emotion that I didn't know how to handle. All of my past memories of abuse within my own home were also triggered and I ended up in bed with severe back ache. I mostly slept through those days. While sleeping I had nightmares of my abuser crawling up on my bunk bed in my hostel room. I didn't know what was going on with me. It was extremely confusing and felt even more traumatic than the abuse itself. Now I know that I was suffering from PTSD and experiencing flashbacks.

The only good thing that came out of this was that the abuse finally stopped. I finally had the courage to say no to my abuser. My friend happened to be his relative. She threatened to expose him if he touched me again. It felt good for the first time in those three years. But that was only momentary relief. My friend was herself a victim of abuse. So when we found each other, it turned

into an unhealthy bond. That experience taught me that I could use my story to become intimate with people. When this girl left college, I found another girl. I craved to be loved and to feel valued.

These experiences, however, only added more shame to the deep shame that I already carried. “My story is bad. I am bad.”

Years later, I became part of a good community and a church that was healthy. I felt safe to share my story again. But sharing an account didn’t bring change and healing and it didn’t bring the kind of relationships I was craving.

My relationship with God remained on auto mode for years. For someone coming from an abusive past, it was easy to find worth in what is temporary - even in something as pious as church ministry. It was easy to put on a mask to hide the fading glory. Churches are good places to find affirmation and to feel valued. It’s good to feel 'needed', in a worship team, or to care for people who are in need.

Surviving an abusive home and an abusive church I was a survivor and I was permanently in survival mode. I had no faith in my judgement. I hated myself.

I felt unlovable and like something was terribly wrong with me.

There was also a strong urge to protect my heart from any more pain. I locked the gates of my heart tightly. No one was going to hurt me again. As far as I was concerned, no one understood me and no one even cared. I had to fend for myself.

Now I realise I had strong contempt for others. "This is who I am..this is how I think.. people can decide whether they want to be with me or not. It doesn't matter either way. I don’t need them.”

I found that relationships with the opposite sex always crossed the line. I had no sense of boundaries. By the time they were crossed, I would implode with further shame and anger. A fine mesh of self pity and sadness wrapped around my heart hardly allowing any light to come through.

Matthew 6: 22-23 says, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light .But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, How great is that darkness.”

It's been 20 years since my abuse. Today it's easy to box it off as a bad memory. It's easy to say, “I have too much happening in my life to put energy into something that happened two decades ago." The truth, however, is that it has shaped my thinking. It has strong influence on my character.

It shapes the way I view myself, my spouse, my marriage, my other relationships, the way I view God. It colours every aspect of my life. I have found that it is impossible to have genuine relationships and real intimacy if I don’t I pay attention to this deep chasm I feel between my feelings and actions.

For a while it felt doable to dish out whatever was demanded of me but the source ultimately ran dry and the feelings didn’t run very deep. Once the flurry of activity was over, deep cracks began to show. I was not being able to survive on my strength anymore.

Like a broken pot, a broken soul doesn’t seem to hold in any love, care and friendships. The healing of our souls is a long journey. It is found in submitting the cascades of emotions to Jesus. I used to think my circumstances were different from His. I used to think Jesus chose to suffer but I was forced to suffer. The truth, however is Jesus didn’t have any control. He was like a “lamb led to the slaughter.”

Henry Nouwen in his book, ‘Life of the Beloved’ says, “The great spiritual call of the Beloved Children of God is to pull their brokenness away from the shadow of curse and put it under the light of the blessing. However, great and heavy burdens become light and easy when lived under the light of the blessing. What seemed a reason for depression becomes a source of purification. What seemed punishment becomes a gentle pruning. What seemed rejection becomes a way to a deeper communion.”

I am yet to discover who I am. But the wait doesn’t feel as tiring and despairing as it once felt. It's not daunting anymore, knowing that I am in the loving hands of my Maker

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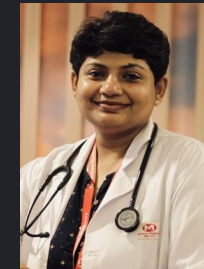
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