

Different by Design
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I think I wrote about 4 introductions to this sermon; I struggled finding the right way and the right words to begin such a delicate topic. Imagine: your pastor doesn't know what to say to begin a sermon even after he spent time in prayer; it can happen.

We're talking about gender this morning and it's clear our world is quite confused about the topic. Take, for example, the very public transformation of Bruce Jenner, the famous Olympian. He's been living as a woman, speaking of himself as a woman, asking others to refer to him as a woman, even though he was born a man over 60 years ago. His transition is celebrated in our culture; he was even given the Arthur Ashe Courage Award in 2015. These kinds of dilemmas are coming to a town near you; they're not just playing out in Hollywood. Target changed its bathroom policy. The Boy Scouts of America are letting girls join their club if they say they are boys. A kindergarten teacher in California had a transition party for a kindergartener who changed into a dress and introduced himself with his new girl name... and parents weren't notified. Universities are telling their staff and faculty to stop using gender pronouns like *he* and *her*. Did you ever think you'd see the day?

Friends, we can not stay silent about such things. Maybe that's what some of you want to do. You're thinking, "Why are you talking about this, Brian? There are new people in the pews today." Trust me; I feel the tension. But we have to speak, my friends. What God created and declared as *very good* is being rejected in our culture as very bad. And God's way leads to life, not death. I'm not embarrassed by that; are you? You know me well enough; I'm not bringing this up to pick a fight. I'm bringing this up because I believe it matters. Friends, we abandon or attack God's creative design and purposes to our peril. And God has an order, friends, to gender. He has truth and commands concerning our gender. Right now, it seems the only ones speaking on gender are those who want to radically change it; well, God has something to say and I'm going to share that with you today. And you should care about that. You should care that our faith has something to say about this issue. Our faith has direction for fearful parents whose son says he feels like a girl. Our faith has some help for the teenager confused that her friend transitioning from one gender to another. Our faith has a rebuttal to the prevailing mood adopted by our popular culture and governing institutions. Our faith is relevant.

Like I've done in previous sermons, let's start by highlighting some mistakes we are tempted to make about this topic on gender. The first mistake we can make, I believe, is failing to distinguish between a new, unbiblical gender theory and ideology gaining traction in our world and people struggling with gender confusion and dysphoria. One we must oppose rather vigorously (this new gender theory) while the other (the human being created in the image of God) we need to extend the love of Christ to. Are you catching this distinction, FBC? The new gender message and beliefs must be opposed as harmful to humanity; but we must patiently care for people struggling with gender dysphoria and confusion.

This can be really hard to do, right? We tend to do one or the other; we usually don't do both very well. We usually either oppose all things transgender and treat people struggling with gender dysphoria and confusion rather harshly or we foolishly accept the new gender theory thinking that's what loving your neighbor looks like. It is not loving at all to accept, adopt, or approve a way of life that harms people. Do you get what I'm saying? We need to try and avoid these mistakes.

I'm convinced that gender dysphoria and incongruence is a real thing. Gender dysphoria is a psychological distress a person has when their sense of their own gender doesn't match their biological sex. Scientists don't know exactly why people have these psychological challenges, but here are a few contributing factors.

- Some people are born, for example, with male reproductive organs and female chromosomes. So their anatomy says they are men, but their inner makeup or DNA is female.
- Some people are born with ambiguous genitalia, meaning their reproductive organs did not develop normally as either male or female. This condition is referred to as *intersex*.

Imagine the confusion, the fear, of parents, of people, who encounter such challenges on a daily basis. These are real challenges; challenges that they didn't choose for themselves. Whatever a person's hardship, we should have compassion as ambassadors of Christ.

But the new gender theory in our world today goes far beyond helping the very small segment of our population dealing with these issues I just mentioned. It wants to redefine sex and gender. And, big surprise, these redefinitions are in contrast to God's design found in his word. Again, friends, we have to remember that God's word and way is good for us and good for the world. That's why we need to speak out; that's why we need to spread his good news. I don't share these things out of anger; and you shouldn't feel anger as you enter the dialogue. This isn't a personal thing; this is about the good way of our good Lord being presented to as many as possible.

What biblical truth do we find to help us understand gender distinctions? What does the Bible say about this topic and the hope for those struggling with gender confusion? The timeless truth from God about gender is rooted in the creation of humanity.

Turn with me to Genesis 1 and let's read vs. 26-27 (READ). When vs. 26 and 27 say, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image...'" *man* at this point is a reference to *mankind* or to *humanity*. It's not a reference to a *man* or a single individual who is male. That's fairly obvious by the wording at the end of vs. 27 where scripture says, "*male* and *female* he [God] created *them*." God made humanity, it says, and humanity consists of male and female - two sexes in the human race by God's creative design. There's not a third; there's not an endless number. That's the first obvious reality we need to see from the scriptures.

Now, the new gender theory doesn't always dispute the reality of two sexes (some actually do); what the new gender theory disputes is that a person's sense or experience of gender needs to match their biological sex. So, being born male with male genes and male reproductive organs doesn't mean you need to be a man or identify as a man; you can identify as a woman if you choose. This is a choice you can make. But when you go into Genesis 2 you discover that this binary reality of the sexes (binary means just two, male and female) gets developed into gender identities and gender roles. Look at 2:24-25 (READ).

At the end of chapter two, male and female are now *man* and *woman*, or even more specifically *man* and *wife*. Not only is the biological male and female identified as man and woman, but they also have gender roles. Men leave their families; they find a wife. The two together become one flesh in a procreative union of one species, but different sexes and genders. We learn in other places in the OT and NT that men and women are given different responsibilities. Our sex determines our gender, which also defines the roles given to us by God. That flies in the face of the new gender doctrine. The new gender doctrine says there is no reason why a biological male needs to identify or relate as a man or a biological female needs to identify and relate as a woman. But isn't that exactly how God created and arranged humanity by his creative design? Absolutely, it is.

Now, I want to point this out: oftentimes, critics will pull the Jesus card. They'll say things like, "Well, *Jesus* never said anything about (name the cultural hot topic... abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism)." Of course, such a statement reveals the lack of understanding that Jesus Christ is the Incarnate, Living Word of God. That means all of scripture is an expression of Jesus' words and teachings whether it's in red letters or from the book of Leviticus. So while it doesn't matter if we have a quote from Jesus or not, he does actually have something to say about when he teaches on marriage and divorce in Mark 10 (vs. 6-8), "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh." So, look what Jesus affirms and teaches. Humanity consists of male and female; those two biological sexes are man and woman and they have gender roles as husband and wife.

So, let's summarize this creative design from God's word. Here are a few things. 1) God made humanity male and female; God did that. When you hear it said: "We don't need to be defined by the gender we were *assigned* at birth." Who did that assigning? The doctor doesn't assign a baby the title "boy" or "girl." Mom's and dad's don't pick the sex of their children. God assigns gender. This is God's design. God made us male and female. 2) Our assigned sex has corresponding gender identities and gender roles. Those aren't up for grabs. And what's really interesting and what drives gender theorists crazy is the social sciences are proving that biological differences between men and women impacts our interests, competencies, and values (like we didn't know that already... that men and women are different).

Do you remember a few months ago, James Damore, the programmer from Google, got fired for saying that men and women are different biologically? The research proves him right and

so does God's word! And he wasn't saying that to hurt or insult woman; he was saying that to help us understand the differences between men and women so that both can be helped and put in positions to succeed! No matter; being politically correct is more important in our world today than being truthful and he got fired for it.

Friends, see and notice God's design. It's for our good. It's not oppressive or bigoted; I would argue it's liberating. Do you remember what God said at the end of his creative work? In Genesis 1:31 says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." What God did was very good. Making us male and female, man and woman, boy and girl is very good.

Now, let me hit on a few related topics. I provided for you a biblical foundation for gender, but maybe you have some questions still. If I don't answer them here, contact me and I'll be happy to talk to you.

First of all, can you see how living by your feelings or making decisions based on how you feel, can run amok? Trusting our feelings is common both inside and outside the church. We just do what we feel. We don't feel in love with our spouse anymore so we start slowly making plans to get out. We don't feel God at church anymore so we start looking for a new one. And now, more and more are saying they don't feel like the sex God assigned them so they transitioning. Friends, you've got feelings and so do I. And sometimes these feelings are confusing and even tormenting (like those struggling with gender dysphoria). All the more reason to show compassion. But we don't follow our feelings. We follow a Savior. Our feelings aren't the guide to truth; Jesus is the truth. We follow him and his Word.

There was a 12 year old boy from Australia named Patrick who told his mother he felt like a girl. And with medical advice, his mother started giving him medicine to block his male hormones and gave him female hormones to develop a female body. He's 14 now, and guess what? He wants to be a boy again. But sadly, his body is starting to grow in a feminine way because of the radical intervention they sought. This is a boy who felt a certain way. And I'm sure his mother was confused and scared; I'm sure she didn't know what to do. You make mistakes when you follow your feelings. Don't make the same mistake in your marriage, with your job, in your relationships, in your faith. Emotions are important; we need to listen to them. But we don't follow them. We follow Jesus' word.

Secondly, it's worthy asking, "Why do people struggle with these feelings at all? It doesn't seem fair that God would allow someone to be born with female reproductive organs and male genes. Or that someone's genitalia is ambiguous and malformed. What gives?" Our faith teaches us in God's word that when humanity fell into sin a curse fell upon this world. And now, this world is broken in every way. It doesn't work the way it's supposed to work. This is why we have these kinds of struggles like gender dysphoria.

My last sermon in this series will address this more specifically, but I wanted to bring it up now to let you know that while the world has been cursed by sin, Jesus is the curse-breaker. While everything in creation has been tarnished by sin, creation will also receive the redeeming, renewing love of Jesus. And the brokenness that we all experience won't have the last word when we trust the gracious love of Jesus.

Next, it's important for us to recognize that this new gender revolution is rooted in a more sinister and demonic ideology and belief: and that belief system is self-determination. The summary of that belief system is simply, "I get to decide what is good for me." This rejection and refusal to trust or submit oneself to the good and loving plan of God for my life is at the heart of these gender theories. And friends, we need to be careful we don't adopt the same belief in different areas of life. We may not say, "I'm going to pick the gender of my choosing," but many of us are sure tempted to say, "I'm going to share a bedroom with who I want and when I want." We may be tempted to say, "I'm going to use my money like I want to," or "I know Jesus said, but I'm doing my own thing." Friends, be careful not to adopt a life of self-determination. God knows what's best for you. Trust him.

Finally, I want to end by talking about our hope in Jesus Christ. Maybe you have friends or family members who struggle with gender confusion and incongruence. Or maybe you do yourself and it's secret you're keeping from everybody you know. And you're wondering, "Is there any hope?" This passage gives me great hope for those struggling with gender dysphoria or any other challenge. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." I can't think of any better news for all of us who have struggles. God makes people new in Jesus Christ. We are so new, God transform us so completely, that our struggles and fears and confusions become a distant past that's been swallowed up by our new life in Jesus. We no longer are identified by our hurdles, challenges, and struggles; we're not identified by our new life in God.

Life from God isn't found in trying to change who God made us. We find life when we submit ourselves to God's creative design and purpose and trust the cleansing power of Jesus Christ to cover all of our sins. Jesus died and was raised to make us all new no matter our struggles or sins. It's a life that's free from the prison of self-determination. I know self-determination feels like freedom, but it's not. Freedom is living in step with how God made us and who Jesus is. I pray you can see that today.

Key vs: Gen 1:26-27

Questions for the week

- How important do you feel are gender differences? What difference should it make?
- What was the most important word you heard today? How come?
- What should the church do to promote God's design of gender? What should the church avoid doing?