



Gender Identity and Transgenderism: A Christian Perspective

Written by the Elders of Cherrydale Baptist Church

In this document, the elders of Cherrydale Baptist Church seek to provide a framework for viewing issues of gender identity and transgenderism from a Christian perspective—one that is rooted in God’s design as revealed in Scripture and faithful to our mission of making disciples who love God and people above all else. We are writing this in response to the rapid cultural shifts and ongoing discussion across the nation and in our own community about gender identity and transgenderism. While this document is relevant to issues related to sexual orientation, it does not address them directly.

Our goals in this document are: to show the way of love, compassion, freedom and goodness that is offered to us in God's revelation to us about who He is and who we are as the men and women that He created; to help us welcome those experiencing gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender into a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ; to express our strong desire to help those already in our midst who are experiencing gender dysphoria and desiring relief; and to provide guidance to parents in teaching their children of God’s good design in creating them as girls and boys. In this document, we seek to defend neither “traditional” nor “progressive” conceptions of gender identity, but to offer the glorious, God-given design that is bigger and better than either.

In this document, we seek to use terms and language that are both faithful to Scripture and sensitive to people who struggle with gender dysphoria or who identify as gender non-conforming or transgender. We also recognize that accepted terminology related to sexual orientation and gender identity continues to evolve. We have included a glossary of some basic terms as an appendix to help promote clarity.

God has created every person in His image as a reflection of Himself. We value all people highly because the God who created us values all people highly.

God’s way is the way of value and dignity for all people. Every person has great worth because God has made each one of us in His image and He has declared us to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). Our inherent value and dignity as humans are objective and unchangeable. As Christians who believe that God created men and women in his image, we have the calling to affirm, support and defend the value and dignity of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Recognition of each person’s inherent dignity as God’s image bearer provides vital protection for the weakest and most vulnerable among us and a creates a special responsibility for followers of Christ to care for those at the margins just as He cares for us.

God created us male and female as bearers of His image.

Scripture affirms—and genetic science reflects—that our sex as created by God is objective and binary (Gen 1:27). Further, our different genetic, physiological, and physical characteristics correspond to this good creative order, divine purpose, and biological identity as male and female. Our sex and gender identity are neither subjective social or cultural constructs, nor subjectively assigned at birth. This is true generally (God created two sexes, male and female) and individually (He made each of us—even in the rare instances of genetic disorders affecting biological sex—to be clearly male or female before we were born). In God’s good design for creation, He made each of us as unique individuals and designed us to be whole, integrated beings who have a self-conception of gender (i.e., our gender identity) that corresponds to our biological sex at birth.

In Scripture, we also see portrayed the distinct, co-equal role of men and women as God’s image bearers when we read “...in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27b).

God made us male and female to give us a picture of His love for us in the love between a man and a woman.

When God created us as male and female, He made two distinct, complementary sexes that He intended to come together in the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. God institutes this covenant in the second chapter of the Bible (Gen 2:18–25; cf. Mal 2:10–16). In the Old Testament book the Song of Solomon, we see a picture of God’s passionate love for His people displayed in the passion declared and celebrated between a husband and wife (Song 8:6). Both Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul affirm this divine design of marriage in the New Testament (Matt 19:4–6; Eph 5:31), and God declares consistently throughout His Word that He has established marriage to provide a living example of Christ’s relationship to His bride, the church. Just as we encounter a wedding on the opening pages of Scripture, we find one on the closing pages as well, when Christ is united, in perfection and for eternity, with His bride, the church, at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–10; 21:1–4).

Scripture clearly affirms that men and women can and do love and serve God and bear His image just as effectively (and sometimes more effectively) when they are single (1 Cor 7:6–8). Scripture is equally clear that our sexual expression is designed to find its fulfillment in the context of a marriage relationship between one man and one woman, and that this relationship provides a powerful picture of God’s love for us.

We all are broken and need restoration, including in our sexuality or gender identity.

While God values each of us greatly, we are nevertheless profoundly broken as a result of sin’s entrance into the world at the fall (Gen 3:1–19). The fall has distorted and disordered all of us, which necessarily includes brokenness in human sexuality and gender identity.¹

We all experience brokenness in our sexuality or gender identity to some degree. For some, this brokenness expresses itself through gender dysphoria and transgenderism. Our sexual brokenness will never be fully healed until God restores us in Christ as part of His creation, when He returns. This restoration will be physical as well as spiritual (1 Cor 15:35–49; Phil 3:20–21). As Christians we recognize we all have sinned and experience the effects of our fallen state, and we welcome all equally because we are all equally unworthy of Christ’s love and mercy.

We can find our truest identity, deepest meaning, and most fulfilling purpose only when we go to God through the cross and we give Christ all of ourselves, including our sexual and gender identity.

Although we all fall short of God’s good design for us, we all have the same hope of reconciliation and restoration through Christ. God offers this hope to each of us, not because of who we are or what we have (or haven’t) done, but because of what His Son Jesus Christ has done (i.e., offer Himself as the sinless sacrifice for us). Indeed, if anyone can relate to the struggle of gender dysphoria it is Jesus Christ, who experienced the ultimate rupture between his physical identity and spiritual identity when God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus also rose from the dead as the first-fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20–23), which teaches us about the goodness of our physical bodies while promising future resurrection for all who have trusted in His saving work (1 Cor 15:42–49; 2 Cor 4:14). Just as our fallenness touches every aspect of us, so the redemption through Christ’s death and transforming power of His resurrection encompasses and claims every aspect of us, including our sexual and gender identity. Whether in our present physical bodies or our bodies as they will be transformed, we have the assurance that God will fully heal us and restore us (1 Cor 15:42, 52; 2 Cor 5:1; Phil 3:21).

We find freedom to express our sexual and gender identity in God’s design.

God’s design and purposes in creating us male and female came before the fall, and He, our Creator declared humanity to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). In acknowledging that God has created male and female, we look to His design and purpose as revealed in Scripture to guide our expression of our sex and gender identity (Deut 22:5). At the same time, in acknowledging that we each have a gender identity that is God-given and corresponds with our biological sex, we have freedom to look beyond traditional cultural norms and embrace a broad spectrum of experience and expression of our manhood and womanhood. As Christians, we are free to embrace the diversity of expressions of manhood and womanhood that we see in Scripture, and we are not bound by (sometimes narrower) cultural conventions or norms. Further, recognizing that our Creator has given our sexual and gender identity to us lifts from us (and in particular, from young children with more malleable understanding of sexual and gender identity) the burden of determining our own sex or gender identity.

We welcome those who are experiencing gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender with kindness, compassion, and grace.

Some children and adults experience gender dysphoria, a condition in which an individual's perception of his or her gender identity does not correspond to his or her biological sex. As Christians, we affirm the full and equal value and dignity of those experiencing gender dysphoria or identifying as transgender. We also affirm God's desire for them to be restored to a perception of gender identity that corresponds to their biological sex.

As Christians, we have both the obligation and privilege of relating to and welcoming those who experience gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender; to treat them with the same kindness, compassion, and dignity that we ourselves have experienced in Christ; and to recognize and defend their inherent worth and dignity as persons created in the image of God. We also desire to communicate to them God's good design in making us men and women who have a self-conception of gender that is fully integrated with our biological sex.

The primary responsibility for teaching children about sexual and gender identity resides with parents.

Christian parents have an obligation to teach their children God's love and compassion for all people, and God's good design for sexuality and gender identity. One of God's purposes in marriage is procreation and the raising of children by their parents, which shows the life-giving nature of His love. A healthy transition from childhood to adulthood includes a growing awareness of sex, sexual attraction, and gender identity, and a growing ability to relate to those who are different with kindness and compassion. A child's parents, as spiritual leaders, should be the primary determinants of both the content and timing of instruction about the issues of sexual and gender identity (Eph 6:1–4).

Glossary:

Female: the biological sex that produces ova (egg cells)

Male: the biological sex that produces sperm

Gender: the culturally appropriate expression of biological sex

Gender Dysphoria: a condition marked by discomfort or distress that stems from a person's conflict between his or her own biological sex and gender identity

Gender Identity: a person's self-perception as male/masculine or female/feminine

Sex (or biological sex): in humans, one of two distinct types of reproductive anatomy, male or female, that develop for the production of sperm and eggs, respectively, and associated functions in sexual reproduction

Transgender: an umbrella term for the state or condition of identifying as or expressing a gender identity that does not align with one’s biological sex

If you have additional questions or to make an appointment for pastoral care and counseling, please contact our Main Office at (703) 525-8210 or info@cherrydale.org.

¹ In rare instances, this brokenness expresses itself at the genetic level. One example is intersex, an incredibly rare condition where a newborn infant’s sex is ambiguous. The frequency of intersex is a controversial topic because not everyone agrees on what counts as intersex. If using the term intersex as we are—noticeably atypical genitalia—the Intersex Society of North America, a now-defunct advocacy group, estimated the number to land between 1 in 1500 and 1 in 2000 births, which is a frequency of 0.05% to 0.07% (“How Common is Intersex,” Intersex Society of North America, isna.org/faq/frequency). Jesus acknowledged this abnormality in the gospel of Matthew, noting “there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb” (Matt 19:12), but He did so without mitigating or eliminating the reality of the gender binary. Brokenness at the genetic level also manifests itself in several chromosomal conditions that do not fit a typical XX female or XY male, such as Klinefelter Syndrome, i.e., males with an extra X chromosome, 1 in 500 to 1 in 1000 births; Jacobs Syndrome, i.e., males with an extra Y chromosome, 1 in 850 to 1 in 3000 births; Turner Syndrome, i.e., females with only one X chromosome, 1 in 2500 births; and Triple X Syndrome, females with an extra X chromosome, 1 in 1000 births (Carlos A. Bacino, “Sex Chromosome Abnormalities,” *UpToDate*, 2013; uptodate.com/contents/sex-chromosome-abnormalities). While these rare conditions are abnormal, individuals with these genetic makeups are still either male or female, because cells with Y chromosomes are always male and cells without Y chromosomes are always female.