

## Doctrine of Gender

Jonathan K. Dodson | November 14, 2017 | Gen 1:26-28; Gal 3:23-29

We're thinking about the winds of doctrine that blow all around us, and how if to be people of wisdom and depth, we need something sturdy, true doctrine, to be keep from being blown about. This is particularly true when it comes to *gender*. We're experiencing massive headwinds in gender: gender oppression, dysphoria, confusion. So to ground us in what's good and true we should cover three perspectives: Gender in Culture, Gender in Scripture, Gender in Order. Preparing this message I've wanted to offer pastoral comments throughout, but because its important to understand how these winds are working I've saved those to the end.

### Gender in Culture

One day my wife returned from the doctor's office and told me an embarrassing story. While sitting in the waiting room with one of our children, our child pointed to someone and said out loud, "Mom, is that a man or a woman?" Kids say the darndest things. She was pointing to a transgender person, raising a question front and center in our society, "Should gender be restricted by biology, to male and female?" Do we have to be so **binary**, so X and Y? We've entered the age of the Fluid Self where gender exists on a spectrum, fluid not static, porous not dense and fixed. Facebook introduced 71 different gender options, ranging from polygender to two-spirit. Why? To allow you to be your "*true authentic self*." But the gender confusion isn't restricted to social media; it's in here, in our relationships, in some of us. We have around sixty children in this church. Many of them, according to experts, will experience some kind of gender **dysphoria**. Some boys will like typically feminine things and some girls will like typically masculine things, a tomboy. Some of this is entirely natural, a way for a child to honor and attach to a parent of the opposite sex. Psychologists say most of this dysphoria resolves naturally by early teens. But for some, it doesn't. This can be very disorienting and isolating. Is this because society has been too rigid or because gender impulse is off? If gender is entirely socially constructed, then bathrooms should be neutral. Fashion shouldn't appeal to binaries. But Bruce Jenner took it further. In his final interview as a man, he explained his femininity isn't located in his sexuality or appearance, but in his soul. He took a public step beyond dysphoria, beyond social construction, claiming gender is attached to the soul, spiritual. Some say he didn't go far enough. One social theorist concludes, "*All labels are a power-laden burden*," suggesting we abandon all labels because they're oppressive. Canadian parent refuses to assign her child a gender, saying her child should have room for *self-determination*. All this confusion and fluidity does point to a burden, but the burden is greater than a label; it is the burden of living in a fallen broken world, in search of true identity. On the one hand we say sex and gender don't matter you can make them whatever you want, and the other hand we have heated marches and speeches saying my sexuality matters and it is who I am; it's in my soul. This reveals our society a crisis, a crisis of identity. It is spiritual, just not in the way Jenner thinks. We are looking for an identity outside of physical traits, beyond biology, gender. Something more transcendent and weighty. And to find it, we have to reach beyond this world, into ultimate reality to discover who we truly are.

### Gender and Scripture

What do the Scriptures have to say? Explaining Genesis 1:26-28, I want to show you three transcendent truths about gender from scripture. **First, God's authority establishes a baseline for what humanity is.** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." God speaks and we exist; we do not speak to make God exist. The Creator precedes the creature; he is infinite, we are finite. This distinction is the starting place for true human identity. Here's why. When God speaks, he establishes a basis for self-conception. Not I think; therefore I am. Or what I feel determines who I am. God speaks and I am. We are defined by revelation. If we deny this, then who's to say what it actually means to be human? Without a revealed basis for humanity everything about us is up for grabs: as some philosophers are suggesting, humanity may be a Matrix-like illusion. But Scripture provides an ancient and fixed meaning for what it means to be human. It is given. This means that FB gets it partially wrong: to be human is not to be true to yourself; though there is a true humanity, it is to be true to the Creator, the God who speaks. God establishes a baseline for what humanity is. Be true to your Creator and your true humanity will follow. How? What does He say next? He creates something *in* his image. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." He creates man, the word is *adam*, but not as in Adam. It's use here is in the common, meaning a plurality. He creates *humanity*. To be human, then, is to be in God's image which gives us incredible dignity and worth. Now apart from that, it's difficult to account for why we should treat any gender, sexuality, or races equally. Because the dominant secular narrative is that humanity is made in an animal's image. We are merely evolved beasts, and if that's true any kind of law, or social contract or human rights is a fiction, a mechanism for the survival of the fittest. if we are made merely in the image of an animal, then there's no firm basis for thinking it unjust when one ethnicity or gender snubs, devalues, or tries to overpower another. And the next fittest version of us may come along and say, you're all wrong; we need to be machine and man. But with the God of the Bible, God makes man in *his* image, which actually gives us a basis for respecting every person, gender, wherever they are on the spectrum. And it goes further. God makes a diversity in his image, *male and female*. The words refer to sexed difference, a biological maleness and femaleness. God does not create an androgynous person, or three sexes, or all male or all female. He creates his image *Male and Female*. Which brings us to the second truth, **Made in his image as sexed beings means our gender and sexuality are essential not accidental.** It is not happenstance but the result of divine touch, imbued with dignity and divine purpose. In other words, your "soul" cannot be female if your biological sexuality is male. The benevolent Creator determines the nature of the soul, and in Gen 2 he does: "then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul" (2:7). The first soul is a sexed male; the second female. Our sex is essential not accidental. As Todd Wilson emphasizes Jesus is born he is born, not androgynous, but with a specific sex and gender. He is male, has facial hair, masculine traits. Jesus gives sex/gender dignity and meaning. So, Gen 1 shows we are created as sexed beings who equally bear God's image. This has huge implications for sexual assault. It means it *is not* survival of the fittest, gender dominate gender, but both are *equal* and deserve *respect* since both are created in God's image. Brings us to our third truth. What then does it mean to be male and female? **Third, our sexuality is intended to be expressed in gendered ways.** Adam and Eve express their sex in gendered ways. Adam is made to lead his wife. He is entrusted with God's commands, responsible for passing on God's Words to Eve. He names

the animals and Eve. Naming was a sign of *authority*. The parent names the child; the child does not name the parent or herself. Eve is given the unique capacity to bring life into the world. She is named, the mother of all the living (3:20). She is made as a suitable helper, created to *support* and *join* Adam in the grand task of expanding Eden. But she is not inferior. She is fashioned from Adam's rib, not from his head or his feet, above or below, but from his side. The first humans' sex affects gender roles. They are tethered but not rigidly. What do I mean? When I was in SE Asia, where I worked for several summers, the women smoked pipes and wore wraps on their heads, something associated with masculinity in other cultures. We have to have room for gender roles to flex from culture to culture, but if we reject our gendered uniqueness altogether, we risk losing a part of ourselves. A Harvard Study revealed that women tend to attach as they mature and men tend to detach. Men are meant to initiate, lead, look out. Women, are inwardly perceptive, in touch with emotion, possess more empathy. This shows up in how my wife and I relate to our kids. When they get sick or hurt, they want mom. Why? She's more nurturing and empathetic. The study said men tend to instruct, compel, exhort, and women tend to nurture, empathize, support. These differing tendencies align with the Bible's vision of gender complementarity. Both are necessary and important part of who we are and a child's formation. Society needs both male and female strengths. In the *film WW, we have a heroine who is strong and sensitive. She doesn't overcompensate like her mother, but shows empathy to Steve Trevor. If she didn't Steve wouldn't have led her to the front lines where they fight together and save the world. You see, we're not meant to be a gender fluid society, to shy away or criticize sex-informed gender but appreciate and celebrate different roles.* But with all the confusion, it can be a struggle, and Christians have made too much of gender promoting hypermasculine hyperfeminine ideals. It's important to get gender in order.

### Gender in Order

Gender in culture, gender in Scripture, gender in order. Galatians: **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."** This sounds like one side of the cultural confusion—gender doesn't matter, no male/female, race doesn't matter, social status doesn't matter. But that's not what it's saying. Back up, and we find this sentence falls in a discussion about God's law. Like an annoying tutor, the law stands over us constantly guides and corrects us. It shows us the disparity between who we are and who we are meant to be. But the promise given before the law was given to Moses, Abraham was promised a special Son who would change everything. That Son, from a long line of special women, gives us a renewed identity, an identity we don't have to construct. One that is so secure, and deep, meaningful, and utterly spiritual we could never create. How do you get it? It is given, *through faith*; we put on Christ, the loveliest identity of all; the one true human who kept the law perfectly, who embodies total goodness and is faithful to the Creator at every turn, who embraces the Father's authority even when it meant being rejected, slain, by us. By putting our search for meaning in *Jesus*, he gives us an identity that cannot be eclipsed—**sons of God**. May sound sexist again, sons of God not sons & daughters? But its even better than gender equality. In the ancient world it was sons, not daughters, who received the inheritance: land, cattle, wealth, security. Now, because of faith in Jesus, *all* are sons, men and women *are heirs of the inheritance. What inheritance? The transcendent, eternal: perfect love, acceptance,*

*righteousness, and kingdom.* With this **identity** in place, eternal son, all other labels are a far second—gender, race, social status. He’s essentially saying Christian comes first because Christ comes first. Asian, African, Caucasian, male, female, rich, poor, that is second. You are not a male Christian or a female Christian. You are Christian who is male, who is female; better than that you are an heir of Christ. If you think about it, frees you to not make so much out of other labels, but to relate to others in the love you’ve received. It puts gender, and all else, in proper order, behind Jesus. Now, for many easier said than done. Living out our new identity in your gendered ways can be hard. Sometimes the church makes it hard, raising a finger and pointing, is that a man or a woman. When I was mentoring a young man with SSA, he shared “The thought of being with a woman makes my skin crawl.” I needed to hear that because I couldn’t relate. The church needs to be a safe place where men and women can share that without fear of judgment and isolation. But also a place where they are offered hope in their struggle. If you struggle or know someone who does, a few words:

- **Take the long view of the struggle.** After some turn to Christ for a transcendent and true identity, they never struggle again but most do. You need to know that Jesus takes the long view of you. He sees you as pure, forgiven, a new creation but he also knows it takes time to close the gap between what he sees and what you see.
- **Invite friends to help in the struggle.** Struggles with gender and sexuality change over time, from explicit acts to triggering images to old memories. You need help, encouragement, direct questions from friends. When we fall down a hole, it takes take several people to pull us up.
- **It’s worth it.** The trade-off in renouncing the claim of our feelings for identity for identity in Christ is off-the-scale. When we turn to Jesus, we get a life that God blesses, and with that comes a never-failing companion, deeper and truer intimacy than we can find in anyone else. It’s worth it.

As our text said earlier, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Let’s treat one another from this new identity, deeper and truer than we can imagine but one day will be total reality.