

The Faith We Believe, Share, and Defend Part 7 - What About Gender and Transgenderism?

"What does the Bible say about men and women? Is Christianity good or bad for women? Does following Jesus mean you have to fit in with everything people expect of boys and girls? Should Christians be free to identify as the opposite sex, or with neither sex, if our bodies don't match how we feel inside? What does the Bible say about people who are born "intersex"—with bodies that are not typically male or female? What does it mean to be a man or a woman?"¹

IMAGE OF GOD

In the beginning, Genesis 1 and 2 say both man and woman are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). It says both men and women are given dominion over creation (Gen 1:26, 28). Both men and women are given the responsibility to multiply and fill the earth with generations of people. And the Bible is addressed to men and women equally.

In Genesis 2 Eve is created out of Adam's rib but that does not mean Eve is inferior to Adam. Being created out of something does not mean inferiority to that something, otherwise that would mean Adam would be inferior to dirt since God created Adam from the dust of the ground. Adam and Eve are co-equal in substance.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that men and women are created with different natures. They are both created with human nature as man and woman. This is the same human nature that the Son of God takes on in the incarnation in order to redeem humankind, both men and women. Jesus is

able to save both men and women, even though he is a man and not a woman, because as a man he shares the same human nature as both man and woman.

Galatians 3:28-29 says, "28 *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.* 29 *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*" All the promises of the gospel belong to men and women equally.

JESUS AND MEN

What are men supposed to be like?

The Bible gives us a picture of the one and only perfect man. Jesus is the perfect "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). He had the power to stop storms (Mark 4:35-41), summon angels (Matthew 26:53), and defeat death (John 11:25). But his arms held little children (Mark 10:13-16), and his hands reached out to heal the sick (Matthew 8:3; Luke 4:40).

Jesus drove money-changers out of God's temple with a whip (John 2:13-17). But he tenderly welcomed the lonely, rejected, and weak (Matthew 11:28-30). When his friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept (John 11:35). When his friend Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus from getting arrested, Jesus healed the man Peter had hurt (Luke 22:49-51).

Jesus is the greatest hero in the history of the world. But he fought his greatest battle by dying on a cross. Jesus is the rightful King of all the world, but he came "not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45). Before his crucifixion, Jesus washed his

¹ Rachel McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask about Christianity* (Crossway, Wheaton 2021), 135-136.

disciples' feet (John 13), and after his resurrection, he cooked them breakfast (John 21:9).

Some people think real men don't cry. But Jesus cried.

Some people think real men sleep with lots of women. But Jesus never even had a girlfriend.

Some people think real men don't stand for insults. But Jesus took insults all day long. He defended the weak, but he wouldn't fight back to defend himself.

Some people think real men don't cook or care for kids. But Jesus did both these things.

If we want to know what it means to be a perfect man, we must look at Jesus.²

Men often have more physical strength than women and in most cultures throughout history men have had more power than women - men are to look to Jesus, the God-man, as the model for wielding strength and power to love and serve others (Philippians 2:1-11).

JESUS AND WOMEN

What are women supposed to be like?

Jesus is the perfect man AND he is also the perfect human, so all Christians—male or female—are called to imitate him. Both men and women are sanctified by the Holy Spirit to be more and more Christ-like. Women are co-heirs of the grace of life (1Pet 3:7; Gal 3:28); women are a part of the unity of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit (Eph 4:3, Phil 2:1); and women have been baptized with the Spirit (Acts 2:17; 1Cor 12:13).

Jesus made lots of female friends and treated them as if they were equal to

men. For instance, when his friend Mary was sitting at his feet to learn alongside his male disciples, Jesus defended her (Luke 10:38-42). He particularly cared for women other people looked down on. Jesus shocked his disciples by befriending a Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands and was now living with a man she wasn't married to (John 4:1-42), and he held up a "sinful woman" who loved him as a moral example to a self-righteous man who didn't (Luke 7:36-50). As we saw in chapter 5, the first people to see Jesus after his resurrection were women—even though women at the time weren't trusted as witnesses in court!

Some of my friends think that Christianity is "misogynistic"—which means hateful toward women. Just like with any other sin, Christians have sometimes acted that way. But from the very beginning, Jesus has especially drawn women to himself. Historians believe that in the Greco-Roman empire into which Jesus was born, there may have been twice as many men as women, because women often died in childbirth and baby girls were often left outside to die. But the church seems to have been the other way around, with perhaps twice as many women as men. The second-century Greek philosopher Celsus mocked Christians saying that they "are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, only slaves, women, and little children." Today, both in America and across the world, there are significantly more Christian women than men, and women are more likely to go to church, read the

² Ibid, 137.

Bible, and pray. Christianity isn't against women: it's the greatest movement of women in all of history!³

MARRIAGE & FAMILY

How are husbands and wives supposed to get along in marriage?

When God creates Eve to be the wife of Adam she is given the role of "helper". Genesis 2:18, *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."* In no way is that insulting!!! Both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are described with same term as the "helper" of Israel (Ex 18:4; Dt 33:7, 29; Hos 13:9; Psa 20:3; 70:6; 89:20; 121:1-2; 124:8; 146:5). God has given Adam work to do, like having dominion over all the earth and filling it with people, and Adam can't do that alone. God's design is for husband and wife to do the work he has called them to do as a family TOGETHER. The literal translation of "fit for him" is "like/opposite him."

Who's in charge in marriage?

In Ephesians 5 Paul the apostle tells wives they are supposed to "submit" to their husbands "for the husband is the head of the wife" (Ephesians 5:22-23). But, that word "submit" does not mean "obey" like wives are supposed to obey whatever their husbands say. Husbands are not the boss of their wives. And, Paul is not saying all women should "submit" to all men. Paul is giving instructions specifically to husbands and wives. And, you have to remember the awful Greek culture in which the church was born. Wives in that culture were treated like they were a subspecies, like they were inferior to their husbands. Wives were treated like property that their husbands could do whatever they wanted with.

And the apostle Paul also said in Ephesians 5,

"Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Husbands are supposed to love their wives sacrificially. That's what it means for husbands to be the head of the family. Husbands are supposed to put their wives first. Husbands are supposed to lay down their lives, their desires, their dreams for their wives. And in that Greek culture the world would have laughed at Christian husbands like they were a bunch of sappy weaklings for loving their wives sacrificially. So Paul tells Christian wives they need to be the ones who respect their husbands. That's what Paul means when he says, "wives submit to your husbands." That word "submit" is a term of respect.

The only time the regular word in Greek for "authority" in the New Testament is used in regards to marriage is in 1 Corinthians 7:4, *"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."* Both the husband and the wife have authority over each other's bodies.

Who's in charge of the kids, the mom or the dad?

In Ephesians 6:1-2, Paul commands children, *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right..."* and then he quotes the 5th commandment given to Israel at Mt. Sinai: *"Honor your father and mother."* The dad and mom have equal authority over the children in both the New Testament and the Old Testament. There is no hierarchy the children are supposed to observe with regard to their dad and mom. Both mom and dad are equally in charge of their kids.

And since human beings themselves are the greatest cultural products in the world, and the only cultural products from this world that will be in the new heavens and new earth -

³ Ibid, 138-139.

raising kids is one of if not the most important job there is. And while raising children is one of the most important jobs there is, some moms also work. We also know that Jesus himself was supported by money from some of his female followers (Luke 8:2-3), so there is no reason to think that Christian women should not work outside the home and be paid fairly for their work.

THE CHURCH AND GUYS AND GIRLS

Who does what in the church - what do guys do and what do girls do?

Both men and women in the church are called to spread the good news about Jesus. "But a few Christians in each church are called to teach the Bible to the whole church and lead God's family in that place. These people are often called pastors and elders, and these roles seem to be given in the Bible to qualified men"⁴ (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The reason is the very first man, Adam, was given the role of being head/king over all of humanity and his one big job was to guard the garden against the devil. And if he had successfully kicked the serpent out of the garden of Eden then he and Eve would have had dominion over the earth and multiplied and filled the earth with people who all would have worshiped God together. And the heads of all the families would have been those dads who came from Adam and they would have lead their families in worshiping God with Adam as king. Well, Adam totally messed everything up in the garden of Eden. BUT, the good news is that Jesus came and did what the first Adam failed to do and he paid for Adam's failure and for all our sin to make us the church his new family.

And so the church now looks like what it would have been before the Fall. The elders

and deacons are like the heads of the church family leading the church in worshiping God with Jesus, the Second Adam, as King.

God has given men a particular responsibility to teach and lead in the church. This is not because women aren't as intelligent or as faithful as men, or because a woman couldn't be as good a speaker or leader as a man. As we have seen, the first people to see Jesus after he was raised from the dead were women, and it seems like the women believed that Jesus had been raised, while the male disciples still doubted (e.g., Luke 24:10-11).⁵

Paul's letters and the Book of Acts mention twelve women by name who were coworkers with him in the gospel ministry. Four women are known as leaders of house churches: Lydia (Acts 16), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Apphia (Phil 2), and Nympha (Col 4:15). Paul also highly commends a woman named Phoebe to the Roman church and tells the Roman church to "*help her in whatever she may need from you*" in order that she might continue in her labor (Rom 16:1-2). Paul wrote that four women - Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:6, 12) - had "*worked very hard in the Lord*." In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul mentions two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who "*labored side by side with me in the gospel*".

The fact that men are called to lead local churches also doesn't mean that men are more important than women. When two of Jesus's disciples, James and John, asked to have special leadership positions in his kingdom, Jesus explained to them that leadership in his kingdom was the

⁴ Ibid, 142.

⁵ Ibid, 143.

opposite of leadership in the world. In the world, people take charge so they can get their own way. But Jesus explained that in his kingdom, “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man [that’s Jesus] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43–45). Leaders in Jesus’s kingdom don’t come first. They come last.

At the time when the New Testament was being written (and in many parts of the world today) teaching the Bible in public often meant getting attacked or arrested. So perhaps it’s not surprising that God calls men to sacrifice in marriage and to lead in church. It’s not about power and privilege. It’s about his special call on men to serve and sacrifice, like Jesus served and sacrificed for us. So God made men and women equal, but in some areas he has called them to different roles.⁶

Will it be like that in heaven?

We know that in the new heavens and new earth we will still be male and female BUT male headship and exercise of spiritual authority in the family and in the church will disappear! There will be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven (Matthew 22:30). So while those roles in the family and in the church are important now, they will become totally unnecessary and cease to exist in heaven.

INTERSEX

What about people born intersex? What about people who are born with bodies that

are neither fully male or fully female?

A few years ago, a good friend of mine had a baby who was born intersex. The baby looked physically more like a girl. But when the doctors checked, they found the baby didn’t have a uterus (the organ designed to carry a developing, new baby) but did have testes (the organs that produce sperm). My friends are raising their child as a girl. Right now, this child seems comfortable as a girl. In fact, she seems to like all the things that our culture usually associates with little girls. But we don’t know how she will feel when she grows up, and her parents are ready to give her lots of space to work through that as she gets older.

In Jesus’s day, some people were also born intersex. Other people were born male, but had their testes removed so they could do particular jobs—like sing with a high voice or protect a king’s wives. This is a horrible thing to do to a child, but sadly it was quite common in the ancient world. People who had had this done to them were called eunuchs. One of Jesus’s first followers was a eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), and Jesus talked about eunuchs, right after he taught that marriage was between one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:3–12). Jesus valued marriage. But he also valued singleness and taught that people who don’t get married or aren’t able to have children are very valuable in his kingdom too. So the fact that intersex people are often unable to have children doesn’t make them any less precious in Jesus’s sight or any less useful in Jesus’s mission. Jesus himself never had

⁶ Ibid, 143–144.

kids, and he is the perfect human!⁷

The Bible also says singleness is a gift from God. In 1 Corinthians 7:7 Paul says, "I wish that all were as I myself am [SINGLE]. But each has his own **gift** from God, one of one kind and one of another." Singleness is not only NOT a bad thing, it's also NOT just this thing. Singleness is a GIFT from God. Each has his own one of one kind, one of another - marriage is a gift and singleness is a gift. Jesus was single all his life. And he was not alone in life. He had incredible friendships, deep relationships. His life was full of joy, connectedness, fulfillment, passion, and committed relationships. The gift of singleness allows you to live a maritally-distraction-free life with more freedom to give yourself to Jesus and others.

TRANSGENDER

What about people who identify as transgender?

Some people argue that because babies are occasionally born intersex, "male" and "female" are not clear categories, but that everyone is on a spectrum with completely male at one end and completely female at the other. They also say that our bodies don't have to define whether we are a man or a woman, but that if someone's feelings don't match their body, they should be able to decide whether they want to be recognized as male or female—or perhaps as "non-binary" or "gender non-conforming," meaning they don't want to be recognized as either a man or a woman.

Someone who was born with a male body but later identifies as a woman would be described today as a trans

or transgender woman and someone who was born with a female body but identifies as a man would be described as a trans or transgender man. Transgender people often take new names. For example, someone called John might switch to Jane and ask people to talk about "she" or "her" instead of "he" or "him." Someone who identifies as non-binary or gender non-conforming might ask to be talked about as "they."⁸

Some people choose to dress in ways typical of the opposite sex. They might also take medicines or have surgeries to make their bodies look like the opposite sex.⁹

How do we defend the Christian faith against transgenderism?

Remember, first things first - in sharing and defending the faith it is important to listen to other people to try to understand what they're saying, what they're feeling, and what they've experienced. Like you, everybody wants to be heard and understood and to feel like someone cares about them. Some people feel like the body they were born with does not match with how they feel on the inside. And usually they are laughed at and bullied. It is never right for a Christian to mock or bully another person, even if they're making bad decisions or living in sin. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor and our enemy!

And, it's not surprising that if people reject the Bible and that it says God made mankind male and female in the image of God - then it's not surprising that our culture is now redefining what it means to be male or female. So we need to listen and if we listen we'll hear they're struggles but we'll also hear the problems with their problem.

⁷ Ibid, 144-145.

⁸ Ibid, 145.

⁹ Ibid, 146.

What Do “Man” and “Woman” Mean?

Problem: “Our bodies don’t define what is male or female - it’s however a person identifies.”

Problem with the Problem: If we no longer let our bodies tell us if we are male and female then male and female don’t mean anything - culture decides what’s male and female. But culture is always changing so why listen to how culture defines what male and female are right now? “If we no longer let our bodies tell us if we are male or female, stereotypes are all we have left.”¹⁰

Earlier this year, the actor (Daniel Radcliffe) who played Harry Potter in the films of J. K. Rowling’s books made a public statement: “Transgender women are women.” When he said this, he meant that people who were born with a male body but feel like they belong in the world as a woman should be recognized as women just as much as people who were born with a female body. Daniel Radcliffe said this in response to J. K. Rowling herself saying that—while she personally thinks it’s okay for people to live in the world as the opposite sex—the bodies we are born with and grew up with still matter, and that someone who was born male should not be treated as female in every situation. Some people were very angry with J. K. Rowling for saying this, and Daniel Radcliffe wanted to make clear that he didn’t agree. But Daniel Radcliffe’s statement highlights an important question: What does “man” or “woman” mean?

Up until recently in our culture, for me to say, “I am a woman” would mean—first and foremost—that I was born with a female body. There are significant differences between male bodies and female bodies. Even beyond what we can see with our eyes, scientists could tell whether you were a boy or a girl by examining a single cell from anywhere in your body. But if Daniel Radcliffe’s claim that “Transwomen are women” is true, and being born with a female body isn’t at the heart of what it means to be a woman, then what does it mean to be a woman? Does it mean wearing dresses and makeup, or wearing your hair long rather than short? Some women in our culture do those things, but no one would say that was the definition of being a woman. Does it mean other people thinking you were born with a female body? If so, then the identity of a transgender person would depend on people not knowing the truth about his or her past.

In conversations about transgender questions, people often talk as if there is something deep inside of us—not connected with our bodies—that defines whether we are male or female more than our bodies do. But while some people struggle with their gender identity throughout their life, others who feel uncomfortable with their bodies as teenagers find that those feelings change as they get older.¹⁰ If there was something other than our bodies that more truly defined us as male or female, we would expect that sense of identity always to stay the same throughout someone’s life. Many people today think that Christians are foolish for believing things that

¹⁰ Ibid, 149.

cannot be measured with the tools of science. But the idea that there is a thing deep within us that tells us if we are male or female against the evidence of our physical bodies does not line up with science at all. And we are still left with the question: What does it mean to be a man or a woman, if it doesn't relate to our biological sex?¹¹

What are we supposed to say as Christians to someone who is transgender?

Gospel Answer

First, we know that Jesus cares a lot about our feelings. He knows us from the inside out. He knows what we love and what makes us scared or sad. He knows when we feel like we don't fit in and when we wish we could be different. He loves us so much that he died for us! So if you are a boy, but you desperately wish you were a girl, or if you are a girl who longs to be a boy, Jesus sees you and knows you and loves you with an everlasting love.

Second, the Bible tells us that God created everything through Jesus (John 1:3). Jesus made you. If you were born a boy, he meant for you to be a boy. If you were born a girl, he meant for you to be a girl. This doesn't mean that it will always be easy, or that you have to do everything other people expect from girls or boys. As we saw earlier, Jesus cried, and cooked, and loved babies, and when people beat him up, he didn't fight back. If you're a follower of Jesus, it's okay to be different...

And, the Bible also teaches us that we shouldn't always trust our feelings. We find our true selves not by following our feelings, but by following Jesus, so when our desires don't line up with following Jesus, we need to trust him...

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). But Jesus doesn't ask us to do this alone. He gives us his Spirit and he gives us his body (other Christians) for help. So if you are struggling with being a boy or a girl, look for a Christian friend to talk to about your feelings. If you feel comfortable with your body, try to be the kind of person who could support a friend who was struggling in this way.¹²

Jesus tells us that God created humans "from the beginning male and female" (Matthew 19:4). If we're trusting in Jesus, he knows us from the inside out, and he makes us belong even when we feel like we don't fit.¹³

How Should Christians Relate to Transgender People?

If you know someone who identifies as transgender or non-binary, your job is not to avoid them or make fun of them. Jesus wants you to love them, listen to them, be there for them, and when there is opportunity to tell them about Jesus. Loving other people doesn't mean you agree with all their decisions. "Telling a friend that you love them

¹¹ Ibid, 149-151.

¹² Ibid, 146-147.

¹³ Ibid, 151.

Mar 26, 2023

as they are, and that you think the body they
were born with is good isn't hateful."¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid, 148.