

Transgender: What is it and how did we get here from there?

*This article is a brief explanation of transgender issues and how the American culture came to a place of acceptance and promotion of transgender ideology. Future newsletters will explore the roots of gender confusion, and the healing process. This article is a very simplified summary of a very complex issue. Two excellent resources for a deeper understanding of transgender issues are *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew T. Walker, and *Understanding Gender Confusion* edited by Denise Shick. Both books are a major resource for this article.*



As we begin this newsletter article on transgender issues, it is important to remember Christ-like compassion. It's easy to condemn things we don't understand... things we don't feel comfortable with. As a conservative, it's even easier to condemn something when there is a whole group of people who get all up in our faces about things that we don't agree with. Such is the case with LGBTQ issues, and such is the case with transgender issues in particular.

However, just as we don't want the LGBTQ community to focus on the small percentage of self-identified Christians who are truly hateful bigots and think that they represent all Christians, we shouldn't look at the small percentage of the LGBTQ community and think that everyone in that community are mean spirited activists. In both communities, some are. Most aren't. Most people just want to live a peaceful life and do their own thing. As we look at this issue, it is important to remember Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 4:15 to speak the truth in love.

Both Denise Shick, editor of *Understanding Gender Confusion*, and Andrew T. Walker, author of *God and the Transgender Debate*, do an excellent job helping us understand the emotional and spiritual pain experienced by someone who truly believes they are a man or woman trapped in the wrong body. It is indeed a traumatic and painful experience. Both authors also do an excellent job helping the reader understand the turmoil that the family of a transgender individual experiences. I've seen this pain often as I've led the *Healing Hearts* group for parents of LGBTQ identified individuals. The goal of *Healing Hearts* is to love our LGBTQ identified sons and daughters without compromising our Christian convictions. I've seen godly parents who dearly love their kids, grieving deeply that the son or daughter they've known since birth is now embracing the identity of the opposite gender. He or she may even be in the process of transitioning physically to the opposite gender, and insisting that the parents start calling him or her by a new name. Parents are teary eyed as they explain that it isn't only the appearance of their son or daughter that is transitioning. His or her personality is also changing. The pain is very real for the family. The pain is very real for the struggler.

How did we as a culture move from a place where divorce was rare and homosexuality – let alone transgender issues – were seldom talked about? Walker explains the cultural transition in Chapter Two of his book starting with relativism. Relativism means that there is no absolute truth. What is true for you in your experiences may not be true for me in mine. Christianity declares absolute truth; however, we are living in a post-Christian society that rejects absolute truth. Without absolute truth, we lose our moral foundation and our very ability to determine what is right and what is wrong. The sexual revolution of the 1960s



brought further eroding as it celebrated an “if it feels good, do it” culture. Along came the introduction of the birth control pill to further separate the idea of sexual intimacy in the context of marriage and the potential of giving birth. Homosexuality, identifying as the opposite sex, declining marriage rates, rising divorce rates, and cohabitating are all symptoms of our individualistic, Post-Christian society rejecting absolute truth. Unfortunately, we find the same attitudes and actions in the hearts of many in the church today.

Walker explains that Gnosticism, an ancient belief that the physical realm is bad and that seeking spiritual fulfillment is key to personal flourishing, is of primary importance to transgender ideology. Gnosticism, even if it isn’t specifically named, is strong in our culture today. Walker writes, “Gnosticism emphasizes that a person’s self-awareness is different than and more important than their physical body.” (p. 25) Since there is a powerful tension between our physical bodies and our spiritual selves, Gnosticism supports the idea that we can transform our bodies to, and identify with, whatever gender identity we feel we are; regardless of what our bodies and chromosomes reveal. Joe Dallas, in his 2008 article “The Transsexual Dilemma”, explains the Gnostic belief that our human imperfections are the result of an imperfect creator. Therefore it is completely up to the individual to use his own intuition to form his “true identity” and determine the proper use of his body. Dallas quoted a transgender man who came to him seeking help who fervently declared, “I know I’m a man because I feel like one!” The biology of the imperfect physical world becomes irrelevant as someone embracing Gnosticism formulates her own identity based on her own human intuition. As Walker writes, “...there are two unforgivable sins in a postmodern, post-Christianized, individualistic world. The first is to judge someone else. The second is to fail to fulfill your desires.” (p. 26) In other words, not only are you very wrong to judge me and tell me that I’m wrong; I’m very wrong if I don’t obey my intuition and embrace whomever I feel like I am, even if my own body and my own chromosomes say otherwise. Gnosticism, combined with today’s entitlement culture, is an extremely powerful force.

This may help explain how someone struggling with his or her transgender identity can come to the conclusion that he or she is in the wrong body; yet the question remains, how did transgender ideology become so engrained in the rest of our culture that does not personally embrace an LGBTQ identity? The transgender community is following many of the steps taken by the homosexual community to make transgender issues not only mainstream within the rest of society, but also celebrated and protected. LGBTQ characters are common in movies, television series, and even children’s programming. Laughable homosexual and transgendered characters were first introduced in movies and TV shows to bypass our emotional resistance. Once we were familiarized with comic characters, others were introduced to portray that LGBTQ people were the same as heterosexual people. Rarely are the negative aspects of the LGBTQ community talked about. Those embracing an LGBTQ identity are also at risk for increased substance abuse and domestic violence, and a higher than average number of co-occurring mental health disorders compared to the heterosexual community. A few of the honest characters hinted at the emotional conflict that LGBTQ people experience as they wrestled with their sexual identity; however, that identity is framed in the inaccurate context of being inborn and unchangeable. Other LGBTQ characters were introduced to teach that many in that community were suffering great emotional pain because of discrimination from



conservative Christians and downright hateful bigots. Most people, especially Millennials, love to help the disempowered and marginalized. Very often LGBTQ issues are framed in the context of a culture discriminated against and in need of the support from the non-LGBTQ community. That approach has gained the LGBTQ community a lot of support.

The terms used to describe transgender issues have changed quickly in the last few years. The words widely accepted in an article written by Joe Dallas in 2008 are different from the currently accepted words used by Walker in 2017. The American Psychiatric Association changed the official diagnosis of what most of us would call transgender from Gender Identity Disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV [DSM-IV]* published in 2000, to Gender Dysphoria in the *DSM V* published in 2013. This article presents just a few of the most important, current



definitions offered by Walker. **Sex**, refers to the biological sex we are born with as evidenced by our chromosomes and our sexual organs. **Gender** and **gender identity** is how we internally perceive ourselves as male or female, masculine or feminine. Thus, a person's gender identity may be different from his or her sex. **Gender dysphoria** means that a person experiences emotional distress due to perceived differences between his or her biological sex and his or her self-identified gender identity.

Gender dysphoria is experienced on a continuum ranging from “mild” to “severe”. As Walker points out, not everyone who experiences dysphoria will identify as transgender (p.33). Some who experienced gender dysphoria will continue to live with the identity of their biological sex. A person who is **transgender** will live with some identification and outward expression of his or her gender identity which is different than his or her sex. This expression may be anything from dressing in the culturally accepted dress of the perceived gender, taking hormones to bring the body closer to alignment with the perceived gender, or undergoing sexual reassignment surgery. Other expressions of a transgender identity include **gender fluid**, which means that the person fluctuates between male and female identities; and **non-binary** or **agender** in which the person does not identify as male or female at all. A gay or lesbian identity is a completely separate from gender identity. A person can be transgender and straight, transgender and gay, or any combination the perception of a broken heart can assume. The LGBTQ community refers to individuals whose gender identity matches his or her biological sex as **cisgender**.

If all of these definitions seem confusing to you, imagine the inner turmoil of a person who genuinely feels like they are trapped in the wrong body. We don't pick our struggles and temptations. They just happen. True, sometimes we humans put ourselves in long-term situations that can lead us into long-term struggles. Sometimes, life throws us into situations that can create long-term struggles through no fault of our own. No matter what the cause of a person's struggles, we Christians must react with the compassion of Christ and speak the truth in love to those who are struggling with their identity. Remember the words of Jesus to the Pharisees who just couldn't wait to throw stones at the woman caught in adultery? “Let Him who is without sin cast the first stone.” And to the woman caught in adultery,



“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” (John 8) A harsh judgmental response to members of the LGBTQ community isn’t the answer. Neither is false love in the guise of full acceptance of someone’s broken identity. We must show love, and we must call to repentance. We in the church must be willing to show those who are struggling with any life dominating issue that Jesus Christ can heal their broken heart and help them live according to their true identity in Christ.



Most of us in the Christian community don’t really realize what we are asking member of the LGBTQ community to give up when we call them to repentance. Do we really realize that the LGBTQ community has likely been far more loving to them than the typical Christian? Do we realize that the person’s very livelihood may be enmeshed in LGBTQ culture and is likely very difficult to walk away from? True, the pain of change is far less than the pain of an eternity in hell, but the pain of change can be excruciating. Are we willing to be inconvenienced and imposed upon by men and women who are in deep pain and need our help? Men and women we may not fully understand? I hope so. These precious souls desperately need the redemption and transformation that Jesus has to offer. These precious souls desperately need our support. Jesus calls us, His broken vessels, to walk alongside of other broken vessels and help them transition from the LGBTQ community, into the Body of Christ.

As I was researching this topic, I ran across an article by Joe Dallas that got my attention. He talked about one of the first transgender people who came to him for help many years ago. The question she asked him pierced my heart. It is the same type of question that many in the LGBTQ community would ask each one of us. I hope her question pierces your heart too... “You’ve got some pretty clear answers, Joe. But tell me honestly: if I go home and break up with my girlfriend, then put on a skirt and try to live as a woman, leaving behind everything about my life as I know it, will the church be there for me? Will they welcome me, even though I’ll look like a man wearing a dress? Can I be honest with fellow Christians about the surgery I had? Will I really be a sister in Christ, or will I be the resident freak?”

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