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1. THE BIBLE ON GENDER AND IDENTITY

Have you ever stopped to think about what a revelation your body is to you?

Perhaps you read that sentence and sigh. You think, *Yes, my body is revealing to me that I need less sweets and more jogging.* Or maybe you say to yourself, *my body is telling me I'm aging – and I don't want to!* We all deal with such matters, it's true. But we don't mean that our body tells us first and foremost a bunch of nagging demands or disheartening details. We mean that the body displays clear evidence of design. There is a designer, an aesthetic Creator who has made us just the way He wants us to look.

As Christians, we believe in what theologians call 'general revelation' and 'special revelation.' We'll talk about special revelation, the witness of Scripture, in a moment.¹ General revelation

1 Special revelation can include any direct communication from God to man through media like dreams, spoken

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is God's public truth, accessible to all. You don't need faith to see the truths of general revelation; you just need a functioning self. Many of us have heard about how the ocean, mountain cliffs, and starry skies reveal the Lord. How true this is! But fewer of us have thought about how the human body points to divine design. Manhood and womanhood, complementary in nature, tell us a good deal about God's intentions for the human race. The sexes are alike made in God's image, yet the Lord clearly delights in what we could call 'unified diversity.'

The body is a battleground today, the site of so much cultural and political debate. Yet in Scripture, God's revealed Word, the body is not made to cause dissension. The body, as we will see in a moment, is a gift, the gift of God. It is a blessing that tells us much about who we are and who we must be. The body is not a curse, or a sentence of living imprisonment. The body is God's revelation to us of His good will and wise creation order.

speech, and more, but in this era of history, we access God's special revelation through the Word of God, the Bible, God's final Word spoken through His Son (Heb. 1). We all need to hear from God, and so it is of special importance that we 'hear' by studying the Bible with all due diligence, not reducing revelation to mystical impressions and special personal words as so many do.

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Sadly, many people do not share this understanding of the body. As we covered in the Introduction, they think of the body in very different terms. They think they should fit the body to their true and authentic identity, an identity which may well conflict in major ways with the form and shape of their physical frame. They may go so far as to embrace a ‘transgender’ identity. People experience what is called ‘gender dysphoria’—the feeling of one’s body not fitting with one’s identity—for many reasons, and those who do need compassionate help to be sure. Their primary need, however, is just what we all most need: the wisdom, plan, correction, and teaching of God.

Understanding Ourselves in Light of God’s Word

In order to help people understand God’s design of man and woman, androgyny, and transgenderism, we must go to the Word of God, the one source on planet earth that offers us timeless truth. Strangely, Christians sometimes focus a great deal on what psychologists and doctors say about gender dysphoria and related issues. We do not deny that people who feel like they are trapped in the wrong body need counseling, care, and possibly medical attention. As Christians, we

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recognize that God made the mind, body, and soul, after all. Yet if we wish to give people hope, we can go nowhere first but the Bible.

The Bible treats our identity in theological and moral terms, as we shall see. God gives us a body in bringing us into this world. His gift of a body tells us who we are: either a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. The Scripture also shows us, however, that people have tried to embrace the identity and appearance of the opposite sex for a very long time. Surely people behave this way for different reasons, and we do well in soul-care and pastoral ministry to tease those out. But we cannot miss that the Scripture expressly forbids what some call ‘gender-bending.’ There is no holy way to do this; we will only disobey and sin against God by such action.

Christians believe that the Bible is wholly true. It is the very ‘God-breathed’ revelation God wanted us to have, authored in full by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is wholly true, and the Bible is also wholly good in all it teaches (Ps. 19:7). We can go still further, though. The Bible is wholly sufficient. It gives us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). We need this affirmation right up front in the conversation over gender dysphoria, transgenderism, and personal identity. While the Word of God never uses the term

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‘transgender,’ it covers the matter with clarity. We will face some hard questions on this subject, yes, but where we need to help people reject cross-dressing and gender-bending, we have. The Word of God is true; the Word of God is good in all it teaches; the Word of God is sufficient for every struggle and spiritual situation we face.

Some may hear these convictions as a battle cry, but they are truly a declaration of hope. This hope is not found in us, in any wise guru, in any activist, in any scientist or doctor, but in God. We have all gone astray in Adam as we shall soon see. Adam’s sin is the fountain of 10,000 other sins including our own – the wrong actions we perform, the wicked thoughts we entertain, the sinful impulses we feel in a momentary flash. Praise God that our sin cannot hold us hostage. Through repentance and faith, we gain freedom from the flesh. Through the application of biblical truth, we can overcome our sin.

But we need to know the Word if this victory is to take hold in us. We need to search the Scriptures to understand the divine mind and divine design. When we do so, we will discover that the Bible has a great deal more to say about our trials, temptations, and inner desires than we initially thought. The Bible teaches us much about what some call ‘transgenderism,’ and it fundamentally

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tells us to flee it. It makes this point negatively in places as we will note later, and it makes this point positively in the very opening chapters of the Scripture as we now observe.

Genesis 1-2 and the Glorious Design of Man and Woman

Sometimes the book of Genesis is treated as if it is a creation myth. The early chapters of Genesis, some seem to think, give us a poetic treatment and a spiritualized portrayal of the foundation of the cosmos. While we do glimpse poetic structuring in Genesis 1-2, we come face to face with the actual making of all things. Through His speech and then His action, God makes life. On the sixth day, the apex of all His creative work, God makes man.

Genesis educates us not only about human origins, important as this is, but also about who the human person is created to be. Think of Genesis 1:26-28, which introduces us to humanity, and communicates that humanity is made in God's image:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'