



God and the Transgender Debate: What does the Bible actually say about gender identity?

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What is transgender and gender fluidity? What does God's Word actually say about these issues? How can the gospel be good news for someone experiencing gender dysphoria? How do churches respond?

These are questions Christians need to think through and this warm, faithful, careful book will help them do just that.

God and the Transgender Debate: What does the Bible actually say about gender identity? Details

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From Reader Review God and the Transgender Debate: What does the Bible actually say about gender identity? for online ebook

Matthew Dudley says

The book does a very good job at pinpointing how we have gotten to this point in society. It also does a very good job of clearly pointing out that Christians have historically failed to love and be compassionate to those in society that go against the "norm". The author used homosexuality as an example of how instead of ministering the gospel to them it was more a condescending treatment. The author asks for forgiveness a couple of times. He also shows how we can love and be compassionate without compromising our Christian principles. I would recommend this book for sure.

Kent says

The book emphasizes the importance of love/empathy/compassion for those who experience gender dysphoria as well as the importance of truth. The book shines when the author talks about both the brokenness and beauty of all individuals. He not only calls Christians to love those who are experiencing gender dysphoria, but he does a great job detailing what that love looks like. He also does a great job of explaining that discipleship, following Jesus, is not always easy in this life. Jesus calls us to a sometimes hard road of denying ourselves in this life, but the best is yet to come. In chapter 9 he explains that a life of following Jesus is harder now, but not forever, but it's also a life that is better, both now and forever.

John Majors says

Good book, but the Vaughan Roberts "Transgender" book covers the same ground more concisely. But this book does have some elements that are worth reading on their own, like how to talk to your kids about the topic, how churches should approach the issue, what to do if your friend is transgender and becomes a Christian, and an excellent Q&A chapter near the end.

Mitch Bedzyk says

A concise, gracious, and biblical introduction to the transgender debate. Andrew Walker does a fantastic job of presenting what the Bible says about sex, gender, gender identity, gender dysphoria, and transgender in a truthful but loving manner. At the end of the book he includes a chapter dealing with tough questions as well as an Appendix, both of which are very helpful.

All Christians, from pastors to lay members, would benefit tremendously from this book. Those opposed to what Scripture says about this issue will undoubtedly disagree with Andrews conclusions, but they will have a difficult time arguing that he is anything but loving, understanding, and compassionate.

Preach It Ray Ray says

A very readable and thoughtful primer to the Transgender discussion. What I love is that Andrew calls both sides to their respective repentance and with love.

Michael Philliber says

It's a touchy subject, full of societal pitfalls and skittish passions. But Andrew T. Walker, Director of Policy Studies for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, is not afraid of either in his 176 page paperback, "God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Dysphoria?" Truly he's not afraid, but neither is he mean-spirited or uncaring. In fact this volume is awash with sympathy and solicitude. The aim of the book is "that God's voice is heard in this debate." And it is written "for you if you want to learn more, love better, and are open to consider what God has to say about sex and gender in his word" (16).

The volume unfolds quite simply. The first three chapters tackle how we got to this point in Western society, following the trends of post-Christendom, radical individualism, the sexual revolution, Gnosticism, the confusion of sex and gender in modern discussions, and the elevation of autonomy (being a law unto oneself). I was delighted that the author recognized the place of Gnosticism in our present situation. I wrote about this in my book, "Gnostic Trends in the Local Church," and have warned others of it since then.

Next Walker takes up the Biblical paradigm that humankind was made beautifully by God to reflect his image, and that means humans were designed to be one of two sexes. Thus there is an innate, God-given dignity; "No one - not the state, not any philosophy, not any social movement - can give humanity more dignity and worth than God can. Our value and worth does not come from ourselves; it is God-given" (50). Which further affirms the value of our bodies and biological sex. Though we are more than our bodies, yet we are not less than our bodies. Though males are more than male, they are not less than male. And though females are more than female, they are not less than female.

Yet, as the author rightly notes, something has gone wrong with the original blueprint, and it is the cosmic consequence of the fall of humanity into sin. That fall has affected us - body and soul - as well as all creation. Therefore all creation - including humans - groan under the curse of the fall. And its here that Walker places gender dysphoria. Just like cancer, mental illness, and bad eyesight are not necessarily moral failures but a result of the brokenness of fallen creation, so it is with gender dysphoria: "The Bible nowhere categorizes unwanted psychological distress as sinful in itself. This experience is a sign that all of our selves are as broken by sin as creation around us is" (68). Therefore, "how should we think about gender fluidity and transgenderism? The feeling or experience of it is not sinful, but it is broken; and acting upon one's dysphoria is sinful" (74). The real hope for the dysphoria is found in Christ, who may not take the cross of our groaning from us just yet, but he does make us children of God and will one day heal all creation, including us.

The remainder of the book addresses how we as Christians should respond to gender dysphoria and someone who is transgender or even goes the length of gender reassignment. The author is clear about God's standard that someone "can embrace a transgender identity or find their identity in Christ, but not both" (146). Yet Walker coaches Christians to not be reactive or repulsed. Rather, "we need to listen to what it's like to struggle in this area. And we need to be willing to hear hard truths about how we in the church have - either

through lack of thought, or lack of love, or just with the best intentions - hurt people who encounter gender-identity issues" (125).

"God and the Transgender Debate" is an important book on multiple levels. It even includes a chapter on how to talk with your children when they are exposed to the subject at school or other places. Walker is not squishy on the topic, nor is he sadistic and spiteful toward those he disagrees with. Pastors, counselors, parents, and even people who are experiencing gender-identity issues will be encouraged and assisted by this book. The hope of restoration, redemption, and renovation found in Jesus Christ is the heart of the volume, and flows throughout the pages. I highly recommend the book.

Jonathan B says

A helpful book focusing on the pastoral and practical aspects of dealing with the transgender issue. Chapters 5 and 6 contain the core argument for why transgenderism is contrary to Biblical teaching and, hence, wrong. The earlier chapters provide the background for that argument and the following chapters focus on practical issues: the "What now?" aspect.

I will try to summarize Walker's argument in chapters five:

1. God designed humans as male and female.
2. God's design establishes authoritative boundaries for our sex.
3. If God has designed us with a male body, we have a duty to live according to our maleness (and vice versa for being designed with a female body).

Chapter six addresses the issue of the results of sin upon our psychology. Gender dysphoria is a non-sinful result of the fall. Transgenderism (choosing to live according to one's disordered desires or feelings) is a sinful response to gender dysphoria.

One obvious response to this argument that Walker never really addresses is this: just as our psychology can be disordered as a result of the fall, so too can our bodies be disordered. So maybe it's not my psychology that is disordered, but my body. Walker does touch on this, or on a related point, briefly in chapter six. He addresses the "brain-sex theory" (the idea that people with gender dysphoria have a "female" brain or a brain that has female characteristics) by saying that (1) there is no good evidence for this theory and (2) our bodies are broken. Point (1) is good, but point (2) doesn't really address the issue that the person's body is wrong rather than their brain.

Nevertheless, Walker does give us the seeds for how we might respond. At one point in the same chapter Walker quotes psychiatrist Paul McHugh, who notes that gender dysphoria is similar to other "disordered assumptions about the body" like anorexia or body dysmorphic disorder.

We could apply a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* to the person who takes this line of argument: if your assumption is that the body is wrong rather than the psychology, then on what basis do we decide that the anorexic's psychology is wrong rather than the body having the wrong weight? Our answer to the anorexic is that it is a matter of empirical fact that the body is a perfectly healthy and normal weight (sans the effects of anorexia). Likewise, it's a matter of empirical fact that the body of the transgender person is perfectly healthy and normal in regards to its sex. We already know that humans sometimes suffer from psychological disorders in which they believe their body is somehow wrong (either having the wrong limb, the wrong

weight, the wrong color (Rachel Dolezal) or the wrong species (Dennis Avner)). It seems much more plausible, given the health or normalcy of the body, that gender dysphoria is just another one of these types of psychological problems.

Furthermore, the claims of the transgender person (that it is their body that is wrong, not their psychology) has no empirical parallel. Some people are born with bodily defects (a missing or deformed hand, for instance). But in these cases it's obvious that the limb is not healthy or whole. It's never been the case that a person was born with a perfectly healthy and functioning hand that wasn't his hand. A transgender person's body is perfectly healthy and whole.

The question of people who are intersex often comes up at this point. Walker addresses this on pp. 157-159. He correctly points out that the narrative (my term) of transgenderism is not analogous to cases of intersex. In the case of people who are intersex, the sex of their body is unclear. In the case of transgender people, the sex of their body is clear. As Walker notes: "Transgender identities are built on the assumption that biological sex is known and clear--and then rejected" (p. 158). Intersex people have an empirically verifiable ambiguity in their sex, transgenders do not.

Another area that Walker could have fleshed out more is the relationship between gender and sex. According to Walker, gender is the culturally appropriate expression of our sex. He acknowledges the cultural subjectivity here but he also maintains that gender should follow sex. Thus, there are boundaries. But what are those boundaries? Walker doesn't really touch on these except to say that leadership and protection are appropriate for men and nurturing and mothering are appropriate for women. But we should probably cut Walker some slack for a difficult issue. There are clear physical differences between men and women, but for any specific man and woman the differences will not match up the same as for a different pair. Likewise, the gender boundaries are going to be somewhat fuzzy.

Regarding the rest of the book: The pastoral advice hits all the points one would expect (don't make fun of transgender people, be loving, humble, etc.). But the fact that most people could already guess all the main points that Walker is going to hit here doesn't make it worthless. His framing of the issue is impactful and he moves beyond generalities to give concrete particulars of, say, what it should look like to love our transgender neighbors.

I thought I might have a lot to say in disagreement with what he writes in chapter 11, regarding children and public schooling. The chapter makes it sound as though he is characterizing the decision to not put your child in public school as "panic." What he says on page 134 sounds as though we should let transgender activists (and others) dictate when we have a conversation with our kids about issues which they surely can't understand.

For instance, after saying "Will you panic, withdraw your child from school, and then aim to shield them from this--and everything else that is wrong 'out there' in the world? ... You can't avoid your child having this conversation, sooner or later. ... The temptation to shield our children from such topics is understandable, but it is not acceptable." These paragraphs had me vigorously scribbling notes of disagreement: Withdrawing your kids isn't "panic" but the reasonable response to schools seeking to train up our children in counter-biblical worldviews. Sure, we should eventually discuss gender issues with our kids. But why should we be forced to have this conversation with our five year olds just because trans activists have infiltrated my kids kindergarten class? Why do they get to dictate the time-table? Why does my kid have to be in public school to broach these issues? etc.

But reading into chapter 12 assuaged my concern here. Perhaps what Walker is trying to critique in this

section could be more clearly written, because what he states regarding schooling in chapter 12 falls in line with everything I was thinking as I read this section in chapter 11.

Over all this is a great book. I would be interested in seeing a more robust case against the transgender narrative situated in our contemporary political and legal context (hopefully Ryan Anderson's forthcoming book will address that). As I stated, the focus of this book is on the pastoral side. That's a needed perspective that if we neglect can easily lead to adopting unloving and adversarial attitudes towards our transgender neighbors.

C.H. Cobb says

Excellent book, filled with both truth and compassion for our friends who are wrestling with gender identity issues. This is a must read for Christians who want to learn how to love their transgender neighbor. Five stars.

Michelle Shaw says

Sloppy work. This book is a very weak position paper that gives the impression that the author set out to reinforce their pre-existing biases.

The theological analysis is thin, and does not look at the arguments made in a reasonable and critical fashion. Instead, the author largely repeats common “clobber” arguments that have been used against the LGBTQ community for years.

The second major problem is that the author relies on the work of people like McHugh and Mayer to provide supporting clinical perspectives. Unfortunately for the author, neither McHugh or Mayer have ever contributed anything useful to the clinical literature on the subject of transgender identity ... and the research literature on the subject pretty much contradicts everything that McHugh has ever said.

As for references, there is little presented that is particularly high quality. Most of the references are online blogs and magazines which are well known for their biases.

If this was presented as a paper for an undergraduate course in either theology or psychology, it would be rejected.

Braley Chambers says

Used this book for a Sunday School series at my church. Very informative and convicting. You should read it.

Melanie Mead says

I found this book extremely helpful. Andrew Walker approaches this very delicate and controversial issue with biblical clarity and compassion. I highly recommend it.

Jeff Enderle says

This is a good introduction to a tricky topic. If you are looking for in-depth psychological, biological, or medical explanations, this book won't satisfy you. If you are looking for lengthy theological treatments of the topic, it will come up short. It doesn't really provide lots of personal, anecdotal narratives about people who struggle with transgenderism. It does, however, provide a good overview of a topic that is so unclear to so many people. I would recommend this book for a Christian who is looking for a good resource on how to relate to others and share Christian truth in a compassionate way.

Wendy says

I'm not sure what to say about this book. I think pastors would find it useful in beginning discussions about acceptance within churches, although I find it very doubtful that those who are transgender will find comfort in the arms of churches since they are the very ones who so often turn transgendered individuals away even though the author makes clear what people should already know: "people who experience distress, anguish, and conflict from their perceived gender identity are not perverts or freaks. It is an unchosen experience—it is never something that someone should just 'get over' ".

On the one hand, I love that the author encourages that Christians be supportive of transgender individuals. He also exposes and recognizes that most churches will struggle with this topic and that most Christians will not approach transgender individuals within or outside of their church with an open heart. He discusses that we all sin and that all sin is equal (including the sin of judgement of others). Unfortunately, I don't think that most Christians will agree with him and think that homosexuality or transgenderism is in some plane with ultimate transgressions and sins like murdering someone. But, I am biased given my own experience with "Christians" who do nothing but seek to judge and display their own self-righteousness. Experiencing gender dysphoria is not a sin. He challenges most of his Christian peers with these thoughts, and for that I am grateful.

On the other hand, as most religious texts will do, it all comes back to "converting" the individual back to the biological sex if they have gone through sexual reassignment surgery or helping them get through their gender dysphoria so they can get back to the biological sex they were born with and that individuals would have to fight this sin within themselves.

So yay to being accepting and boo to the same ole' same ole' that transgender individuals are eventually going to be told within the church that they are wrong for feeling the way they do. At the end of the book the author answers questions, one of which is, "can someone be transgender and Christian?" And the answer is, "...there are practices and lifestyles that, if left unrepented of, can prevent someone from inheriting—that is, having a place in—the kingdom of God. To live as a Christian is to accept God's authority over your own. Transgender identities fall into this category—they are, as we've seen in this book, not compatible with following Christ." Following that, the author also says, "That doesn't mean someone who struggles with

gender identity conflicts is not a Christian. As we've seen, all Christians wrestle with life in this fallen world one way or another." Most of the book is like this—so you have to muddy your way through it because one statement will be made but then another statement will contradict. A statement will be made to accept and then a statement will follow saying that God's word doesn't allow that acceptance in the end.

Bottom line though...the book proposes supporting those experiencing gender dysphoria and that is a step in the right direction given the hostile nature of some churches.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." Colossians 3:12.

Kathy says

"God and the Transgender Debate--What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?" authored by Andrew T. Walker, Director of Policy Studies with the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), has been positioned as a book that will help readers "learn more, (and) love better" (p 16) as he takes "a careful look at what the Bible really says about gender identity." (p15)

Settle in for one of my epic reviews. I will be challenging the author's premises and conclusions in three sections.

Walker begins his book, "At its heart, this debate isn't about a debate. It's about people; precious people made in the image of God who are hurting." (p 14)

In light of the "transgender revolution" that is "flipping over the table of centuries-old norms," (p15) Walker wrote the book for busy people "who want to consider what the Bible says about transgenderism." (p 16)

Because transgenderism is "The most fashionable social-justice issue of our day," (p 20) Walker believes "it's important that God's voice is heard in this debate." (p 16) Further, Walker promises to tell his readers "what Jesus says to those who experience gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender." (p 17)

Should we use a literal reading of Genesis 1 to inform us about human sexuality in general, and gender roles in particular?

In 1982, the SBC published a Resolution on Scientific Creationism which has been marginally clarified publically by Mohler. The resolution states that evolution is not a scientific fact, but goes no further in establishing denominational uniformity in belief of old earth creation (OEC) (dating the earth as much as billions of years old with the creation of Adam and Eve around 12,000 years ago), or young earth creation (YEC) (God spoke the world and creation into existence between 6,000 and 50,000 years ago). I'll include both OEC and YEC views in my challenge of Walker's view of "God's blueprint."

SBC holds firmly to a story with the creation order depicted in Genesis 1. (Genesis 2 has a different order of creation than Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, the order is man, plants, animals then woman, rather than plants, animals, and man and woman depicted in Genesis 1.)

For this purpose of this review, the order doesn't really matter. But, for the emphasis widely placed on the creation story as a "blueprint" and to be taken literally, I would expect such a "blueprint" set by God to be the same in both chapters.

Haven't you ever wondered how day and night came to be without the sun, moon and the stars? Have you considered that the creation in Genesis should not be read and understood literally? Perhaps it is an account of how ancient peoples understood the natural world?

Such considerations however would be contrary to SBC's view of Scripture as "without any mix of error." Christians, it seems, are forced to choose between two alternatives -- either choose faith and literal reading of the Bible in intellectual exile, or be intellectually curious and honest and abandon your faith.

A majority of those with religious affiliations, and a majority of mainline Protestants and Catholics do not read the traditional creation story literally. For them, the tandem of Scripture and science is the most logical and compelling approach to understand the beginnings of humankind. Inherent in honoring science and other earth sciences with Scripture, a strict view "God's blueprint," such as the one espoused by Walker and the SBC, supportive of the dominant/submissive complementary structure of male and female relationships and gender binaries begins to crumble.

Staying within the belief structure of the SBC and the author and using a literal reading of Genesis 1, let's see if their interpretation can be accurately used as a "blueprint" for human sexuality and gender.

In both OEC and YEC, it is agreed that Adam and Eve would have been placed in/created in the garden no sooner than 6,000 years ago. This leaves little time for complex societies to develop, as archeologists indicate that about 5,000 years ago, the first kingdoms started popping up, and along with them, a crude form of writing and a way of keeping records was developed. The first records were more administrative in nature, along the lines of -- how many wives, sheep, bushels of barley and olive trees does Kushim have? Drama, storytelling, and poetry eventually came along as languages and writing developed.

In line with the evangelical view that Moses wrote Genesis 1 and most of the Torah, this would have occurred about 3,400 years ago, which is at least 2,600 years after the events of the creation story (or at least 3,000 years after the events if we accept the archeological biblical scholar view that Hebrew did not become a written language until less than 3,000 years ago.)

Things get a bit more dodgy when we begin to wonder which god talked to Adam and Eve and which god was the Yahwist/Moses listening to? It is clear with careful reading of the texts, we know the people of God were polytheistic. God's people did not become monotheistic for about another four centuries (Deuteronomy).

Science, in particular archeology and anthropology, substantially challenges the timeline of a young earth 6,000 year old creation story.

According to science, modern humans began living in permanent villages at the time of the agricultural revolution, about 12,000 years ago. This is the most likely timeframe for a creation story. This means another nine thousand years passed until Genesis was written down. During seven thousand of those years, there was no ability to make written accounts. Seven thousand years of accurate "blueprint" telling is hard to imagine.

Walker cautions his readers to make sure their understanding of gender and human sexuality is centered in a literal interpretation of Genesis 1. He cautions, "The Christian worldview is where we locate authority,

knowledge and trustworthiness.” (p 45) Walker evaluates a person’s spiritual integrity and worthiness of their worldview based on affirming “do I hold the Bible as my spiritual authority?”

Unfortunately, literal reading of the creation story and the Bible is the barometer by which they measure one’s spiritual integrity and authority under which they live. If one does not adhere to the creation story, and “blueprint” for human sexuality and gender depicted in Genesis 1, then we are judged as not spiritually centered in God.

Obviously, I don’t agree. Incorporating Scripture and science does not diminish my respect for and submission to God’s authority. I can both value the creation story as a different style and intention in writing than say, the New Testament letters and gospels.

I remain safe from a threatened slippery slope toward unbelief in Jesus while using my intellect alongside the Genesis 1 texts to establish a more realistic yet still God-honoring view of human sexuality and gender identity that also is reflective of what I witness in people before me with whom I have relationship.

Knowledge of human sexuality and biology are quite new and was certainly unknown to biblical writers.

I find it shortsighted that Walker believes he understands and knows “God’s blueprint” for marriage, human sexuality and gender identity based on literal reading and interpretation of Genesis 1. Our God is capable of creation far beyond our imaginings and limitations.

A challenge to Walker’s reasons the “transgender revolution” has happened, and a brief look at the history of understanding transgenderism in the culture and in medicine

Beginning in Chapter 2, Walker, via telling the story of Caitlyn Jenner (without using female pronouns), explains how “gender identity became the most fashionable social-justice issue of our day.” He asks then answers “how did we get here?” (p 21)

Walker posits on the “many streams (that) flow into the transgender debate” (p 21) and have caused the “transgender revolution.”

Included in his list is relativism, a belief that truth and meaning are relative, and not absolute. Of course, the “right” way to think about gender agrees with “God’s blueprint” laid out in Genesis 1. Understanding human sexuality and gender outside the literal reading of Genesis 1 is therefore cultural, anti-Bible and has fallen into relativism.

Next, Walker rightly states that we are in a post-Christendom period in the West. Christianity as the prime worldview has declined.

Next, there is radical individualism which “flows downstream from relativism” (p 23) and allows people to decide what is right or wrong, moral or immoral.

Walker sees the sexual revolution as another contributing factor toward acceptance of trans people. He actually gets this right, in part. While Walker centers on the impact of the birth control pill which “sever(ed) the connection between sex and procreation” (p 25), more widely, feminism brought additional freedom in reproductive rights and decisions, along with a slew of social, employment, academic, economic, and marital options.

Patriarchal structures (social and sexual male dominance) had been solidly entrenched since the agricultural revolution -- 12,000 years past. Within that structure, strict binary lines between male and female roles and limitations existed. Feminism, or the sexual revolution, vigorously challenged patriarchy.

Another contribution to the “transgender revolution” Walker says is Gnosticism. This ideology connecting gnosticism to transgender people has been floating around in conservative communities for about a decade. Frankly, when you pick it apart, it makes no sense.

Gnosticism was a heretical movement in the second century that espoused the need for a special knowledge from God that released a person from their material earthly body seen to be evil. Gnosticism believed in a tension between evil body and good spirit.

Calling transpeople Gnostic, according to the 2nd century model, assumes those who are transgender see their spirit (soul, psyche, inner sense of gender) as pure, but their material bodies as evil. Second century Gnostics kept the two realms (good spirit and evil body) apart so that they might greater spiritual and emotional well-being.

It is actually quite the opposite for transgender people. When they do transition and align gender (spirit/soul) and biological sex (body), they feel more integrated, not less.

Though Walker states his book is not a medical or psychological study and that “Christians must never fail to obey all that God says about gender; but equally, Christians should never go beyond what he says” (p 56), Walker clearly goes way beyond what “God says.”

Walker strongly objects to hormonal therapy or sex reassignment surgery. “To misunderstand, blur, or reject the Creator’s categories for humanity doesn’t just put us in rebelling against the Creator and creation — it puts us at odds with how each of us was made.” (p 54) “The impulse to live out an identity at odds with our biological sex is to indulge fallen desires that our heart believes will bring peace.” (p 67)

With this thought, we see a frequently used excuse/default that helps account for anything falling outside the perfect picture “blueprint” of creation in Adam and Eve. Because transgenderism is not part of “God’s blueprint,” it came after “the fall.”

Intersex conditions also came “after the fall.” “Intersex conditions do not disprove the sexual binary,” Walker assures us “because they are a deviation from the binary norm, not the establishment of a new norm.” (p 158)

I sure would like to see a categorized list of what is good and what is bad that came “after the fall.” Intersex people are “after the fall.” Homosexuality is “after the fall.” But, then again, so are children and races.

In order to comply with “God’s blueprint,” after a transgender person becomes a believer in Jesus, or falls under the conviction of “God’s blueprint” teaching, he or she needs to revert back to the clothing of their biological sex, their old name or a gendered name in alignment with their biological sex, stop taking hormones, and, if they can, even surgically revert as closely as possible to original physiology of their biological sex (though “Personally, I (Walker) don’t think repentance demands this.”). (p 117)

Though “gender dysphoria is the cross that some are called to bear,” (p 113) and that “. . . your life will be very, very hard” (p 109), Walker says transitioning will not bring happiness.

“(T)o strive to become different than or even the opposite of how God made us can never result in happiness, flourishing, and joy, whatever it promises.” (p 55) Hoping to convince the reader of this truth, Walker cites Dr. Paul McHugh, “one of the most esteemed psychiatrists of our time” (p 75): “It is a little reported fact that people who undergo sex reassignment surgery do not, statistically, report higher levels of happiness after the surgery.” (p 67)

Even McHugh, an 85-year-old Johns Hopkins University psychologist who believes transgender medicine is a “craze,” admits his oft-cited opinions are not peer reviewed. In a completely dishonest manner, McHugh bases his ideology and ideas entirely on one particular 2011 study from the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. Using this study, McHugh claims that trans people had high rates of suicide years after undergoing surgery.

However, McHugh’s assertions do not reflect the findings of the author of the study, Cecilia Dhejne. Dhejne has repeatedly asked people (including McHugh) to stop misusing her research “to support ridiculous claims.” Dhejne has written articles and spoken at conferences about McHugh and others distorting her research.

These accusations of abuse, misrepresentation of data, and truth of Dhejne’s findings are easy to locate, yet, those on the conservative right, including Walker, continue to misrepresent Dhejne’s study to support their anti-trans narrative.

What is true, as stated by Dhejne and others, is that transgender people do benefit from transitioning. The typical result of transitioning is that most people flourish.

Maybe you are curious along with me as to why it is that our spiritual relationship with our spiritual God is limited or impeded by whatever state or status our physical body is in? After all, I don’t seek God with a penis or a vagina; I seek him with my soul and spirit.

Shockingly, Walker believes that “When someone rejects this blueprint (of Genesis 1), they are not merely rejecting a thousands-of-years-old text. They are rejecting Jesus.” (p 59)

Because our “God-given task in the world to be fruitful and multiply. (Gen. 1:28)” and “humanity’s design is tied to humanity’s mission. To bring more children into the world, and man and a woman need each other,” anatomical body parts fitting together and creating children is part of “God’s blueprint.” (p 57)

It is worth noting that “Be fruitful and multiply” is a blessing, not a command.

Walker writes, “Christianity doesn’t sever gender from sex, because according to the Bible, the unique ways that God made our bodies are tied to our gender roles.” (p 57) Again, biblical writers would have never linked social roles or gender to anatomical body parts. It’s just a silly statement.

Continuing on, Walker states, “We are made quite literally, to fit together.” (p 58) Yet, even in Christian marriages, sex is not just for baby-making; it is a pleasurable glue that enhances relationship.

People fit together in all kinds of ways for sexual pleasure. A 2010 Indiana University study defined forty ways in which people regularly engage in sexual practice. If you only know of one way of having sex, you’re not trying hard enough.

Well, there you have Walker’s list of “a confluence of powerful cultural influences” (p 26) including what he believes the Bible “actually says about gender identity,” and by default, what God, and even Jesus think

about gender identity.

But, we progress, we learn, we advance socially, medically, scientifically and, more often than not, conservative denominations are “constantly playing catch-up in the culture.” (p 17)

Unsurprisingly, I have different insights as to why transgender people are more visible in our culture. A researched and accurate brief history follows.

A breakthrough in understanding human sexuality began in the late 19th century. Research and studies, geographically isolated and relatively small in number, began with Magnus Hirschfeld who founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Germany in 1897, and the Institute for Sexual Science in 1919. Hirschfeld collected interviews from over thirty thousand people who operated outside male/female normative roles in orientation or gender identity (though they would not have used those terms). His research was wiped out in the Nazi burning of his institute and records.

Christine Jorgensen, an American GI turned female in 1952, was the first widely publicized transgender transition. Until this time period, synthetic hormones were not available. Also, trauma surgery skills learned in WWII allowed for surgical transitions to be successfully attempted and more accessible for people who felt that their biological sex was not in accordance with their internal sense of identity.

One of the early doctors working in gender reassignment, Dr. John Money, wanted terminology other than “sex roles” to distinguish erotic and genital sexual activities from typical male or female nonsexual activities. In 1955, he appropriated the word “gender” to distinguish social roles from sexual roles. This was the first time “gender” was used in this way. It also marked greater understanding that people may not be in biological sex and gender alignment. (The concept of gender would have never been considered by biblical writers and certainly not transmitted in stories, legends, and oral histories from over 6,000 years ago. To believe so is to participate in outrageous biblical reconstructionism.)

Groups and publications supportive of transgender people began along with some visibility in pop culture. Misunderstanding what “transgender” meant was rampant. In one of the top selling books of the sexual revolution, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask,” (1968) transgender (gender identity) and homosexuality (sexual orientation) are conflated. Though bodies of information were growing, it was still slow moving.

Beginning in 1966, transgender people began fighting back against legal oppression by police officers. In 1980, transgenderism was officially classified in the Diagnostics and Statistical Manual (DSM) as gender identity disorder. PFLAG added the Transgender Network in 2002 which supported parents with transchildren. Visibility of transpeople increased both in the culture and online on the internet. In 2013, the DSM recategorized those who are transgender with gender dysphoria to reflect their feelings of stress. Experts who work on brain science and chemistry say we are likely several decades away from understanding why 0.25 to 1.0% of the population is transgender.

Reflection upon Walker’s pastoral and relational suggestion for engaging with those who are transgender.

I commend that Walker intentionally tries to be loving. If you listen to his speaking, he very much comes across with a gracious and compassionate tone. The problem with bad theology, worse ideology, and unsafe suggestions, even when they are spoken and written kindly, is that they are still destructive and untrue.

Walker makes several suggestions about how one might live out a loving attitude towards transgender people

in their Christian lives.

He suggests, we are to view transgender people with dignity, and patiently treat them with empathy.
(Continued on my blog or on Amazon.)

Aaron Shamp says

Excellent starting point for someone interested in this topic. I found the sections more focused on application to be especially helpful.
