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CREATION, SEX, GENDER, AND JESUS

by Greg Couser



When my wife and I started our family in the early 1990s, sonograms were standard practice in prenatal care. Back then, when the sonogram technician looked at us and said, “It’s a girl!” that was such a blessed announcement (and for us the same announcement for each of four pregnancies).

We could go home and confidently decorate the nursery. Friends and family could plan the baby shower and buy their gifts. We could even turn to trusted sources and start reading about “raising girls.” The technician’s announcement not only conveyed something about our child’s biology, but also said something about her identity. To say that her sex was female meant she was genetically hardwired, to some degree, such that her identity would and should express itself in feminine terms. The potential boy names could be scratched off the list, and all we had to “haggle” over were girl names.

We cannot abandon someone to their Creation-nullifying desires. We must stay in their lives and lovingly contend for God's perspective on sex and gender because it's both good and right.

It did not give us tidy boxes to put our daughter in so we knew exactly what to expect, but it certainly put her in one of two boxes — boxes agreed upon, though variously expressed, in all cultures from the beginning of time. And beyond that, it meant that as responsible, loving parents, we should guide her toward what God in His providence had indicated about her identity via her biology.

GENDER REVOLUTION

Today, many would speak harshly about, or even condemn, the way we thought about gender in the “naïve 90s.” In many influential quarters, sex has no necessary connection to gender identity. Some say a person’s genetics and associated anatomical features should not have any necessary ramifications for their sense of self, nor should they be encouraged to think there is a connection. In fact, such individuals would say a person’s gender identity is something they should identify for themselves; their biology may even need to be “fixed” to bring it in line with who they think they are.

To put it theologically, this perspective seems to argue that any difference between the heart’s sense of self and a person’s physical anatomy is an effect of the fall; a person’s heart, what Scripture sees as the center of thinking, feeling, and willing in a person, should make the final decision about gender. So apparently, my wife and I were wrong to think that the sex of our children had any more significance for their identity than the color of their eyes. It was misguided, oppressive, and even abusive to assume that, because our children had female bodies, it was good and right to raise them to be

women. We could have served our children better by leading them to think something like this: “Your body may be a mistake, but you will figure out who you are if you listen to your heart — and you can count on us to affirm and help you fully express whoever you think you are!”

THE SUPREME AUTHORITY

How should followers of Christ respond to this conceptual earthquake that is toppling and shattering long-held beliefs about what it means to be a person? Is this a moment when the “foundations are being destroyed” so the “righteous” find themselves set against cultural trends on sex and gender (Ps. 11:3; 82:5)? Or is it something that largely needs to be embraced and affirmed? Here we turn to Matthew and Christ’s teaching on sex and gender in Matthew 19:1–11 for some guidance.

Matthew is a manual for Christ-followers, i.e., disciples. He wrote to remind Christ-followers who Christ was and what He taught and did. Matthew intends to sweep them up into God’s mission in Christ and keep them on that mission until Christ returns at the end of the present age (24:3). He wants them to know they are authorized by Christ to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (28:19–20). Moreover, as they join Christ on God’s mission, Matthew wants them to know that Christ assured them of His never-failing, enabling presence “to the very end of the age” (v. 20).

Matthew makes it clear that Christ-followers believe in Jesus, learn from Jesus, obey Jesus, depend on Jesus, and represent Him in the world as they eagerly await His return. Jesus is the supreme authority that structures their vision of God, themselves, their neighbors, and the world. And for Jesus, a disciple’s love for God is the love that shapes and drives that disciple’s love for themselves and their neighbors (22:37–40). This means that the disciple personally assents to what God has created them to be and wants to redeem them to become. It also means that they live toward their neighbor to promote God’s creative and redemptive purposes for them.

GOD’S INTENT

In Matthew 19, Jesus goes back to God’s intentions in creation to address the basis and nature of marriage before He attempts to address issues related to its dissolution. Here we find that Jesus affirms “at the beginning the Creator made them male and female”

(v. 4). Jesus cites creation to affirm that humanity can be divided into two categories, but only two. Jesus not only affirms there are no other biological options beyond male and female, but there are also no historical or biblical grounds to suggest that Jesus decoupled sex from gender. From here, Jesus connects marriage to God's created intentions for men and women. The "for this reason" of verse 5 assumes that God created them for each other.

God's creation of Eve is meant to end Adam's loneliness as there was nothing in creation that "fit" him (Gen. 2:18). God brings the woman out of the man as someone both intimately like him but different, a helper corresponding to him (Gen. 2:20–22). As intimated earlier in Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2 makes it clear that both male and female constitute humanity and both contribute uniquely, but complementarily, to one another in constituting God's image in humanity.

DIVINE DESIGN

Now that we have looked at Matthew's purpose generally and Jesus' words in Matthew 19 specifically, what are some of the implications for Christ-followers today?

First, Matthew wants us to know that Jesus' teaching should be believed and taught by His disciples until "the end of the age." As an aside, the fact that elsewhere Matthew makes it clear that the expression of sex or gender changes in the era beyond the present age, "the resurrection" (22:29–30), only makes it more clear that what Jesus teaches in Matthew 19 is binding on His disciples until He returns. Second, He teaches that God's creation design must shape our understanding of ourselves and our relationships. Third, Jesus teaches us that gender, as sex, is not constructed; it's created. Fourth, Jesus teaches that God made men and women unique *from* each other but *for* each other at the same time.

Fifth, Jesus leaves no room for any other gender options, and He makes no distinction between biological sex and gender. The idea that you could be born biologically male or female but separate your biology from your own ideas of your gender is a concept foreign to Scripture and to the world of Jesus' time, not to mention all cultures throughout history until the late 20th century. Sixth, this suggests loving your neighbor includes encouraging them to embrace their sex and gender as one in the same and to treat that aspect of their identity as something to celebrate, nurture, express, and protect. Moreover, Jesus' teaching suggests that disconnecting biological sex from gender distorts humanity, harms people, and strikes out against

God as Creator and His created design. Finally, Jesus suggests that love cannot endorse and celebrate the disintegration of God's good gifts and the disintegration of the person that results from it.

LIFE-SATISFYING TRUTH

Though there is much more that needs to be said, Jesus' teaching in Matthew assures me that my "naïve 90s" take on sex and gender was not so naïve. At the same time, Matthew affirms that the whole of Jesus' life was an expression of God's desire to deliver sinners from sin's bondage (1:21; 20:28). Jesus eagerly and willingly stepped into our mess at God's behest to deliver us. All that He taught and did was intended to point sinners toward a right understanding of God, themselves, their neighbors, and the world. As His followers, we should love our neighbors struggling with gender confusion (dysphoria) by acknowledging their struggle and grieving over their suffering.

We should also come alongside those struggling with gender identity, and the family members affected by their struggle, as people who truly know the struggle with sin. Yet, to love like Christ, our compassion must be driven by Christ's teaching about God's intentions for sex and gender. We cannot abandon someone to their creation-nullifying desires, even if they abandon the struggle against their desires and embrace them. We must stay in their lives and lovingly contend for God's perspective on sex and gender because it's both good and right. As fixed points of compassion, let's call those we love back to what God created them to be and longs for them to enjoy. Christ's love also calls us to protect the vulnerable when transsexuals and their allies aggressively promote their creation-nullifying identity as normative or attempt to force approval of it on others.

May Christ enable us all to hold "justice and mercy and faithfulness" together (Matt. 23:23) as we bring the life-satisfying truth of Christ to bear on a culture increasingly at odds with God's created purposes for sex and gender.

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