

Gender - Fixed or Fluid? - Colossians 3:1-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 January 2018

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] So that's Colossians chapter 3 verses 1 to 11. Since then you have been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now, you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these.

[1 : 13] Anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language on your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, scillian, slave or free. But Christ is all, and is in all.

Amen. Amen. Thanks, Sam. And thank you for passing some pens around as well.

If you've got the new sheet on the back of the new sheet, you can take notes. There's a blank page there. And I do encourage you, as we go through this short little series on identity.

Whoops. Everything's going... As we go through our short series on identity made in God's image, to come back if you have questions or feedback on anything, it helps me.

[2 : 40] And to be able to talk it out may also help you. And just by way of some helpful little books on what we have looked at already and what we're looking at today.

So, is gender fixed or fluid? So, this little book, written by somebody called Vaughn Roberts, is just simply called Transgender.

So, it's a little very easy, accessible introduction to what it is and how we should respond as Christians. So, that's that one.

Another helpful book, just covering a lot of different subjects, it's called Messy Grace. And this is the story of a guy who's a pastor now who grew up with both his parents, were both gay, and just his experiences in growing up in that family environment and, yeah, just how he has been able to relate to them.

So, that's called Messy Grace. It's very helpful. And then the other one to encourage you, they're all easy reads and accessible. The plausibility problem.

[3 : 51] So, the whole thing is that this is looking at is that as we read the Bible and what God has to say about our sexuality, our gender, just sounds so unreasonable to people.

How am I meant to live like this if I feel something else? It just doesn't seem plausible. Well, this book will help us to think through some of those questions, which is excellent.

So, they'll be available. Don't take them. If you want to borrow them, ask me first. But they are available to look at if you want to get your own copies. Well, with that in mind, let's pray and ask for God's help.

Father, thank you that you have not left us in the dark, but that you have given to us the light of your word, helping us to understand the world.

Helping us to understand the world in which we live. Helping us to understand our own lives, how we think about ourselves and how we feel.

[5 : 09] We pray, Father God, that your word would now speak truth into our hearts. Shaping our thinking.

Helping us in how we live and how we behave. And we ask this all for your glory and for your honour.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, we've been asking the question this morning, who am I? How would you define yourself? So, have a look at these following headings. How would you define yourself under these? So, your vocation, what do you do? What would you say your job is? Are you employed, unemployed, at home, at work? What's your ethnicity? Your race, your culture. How would you identify yourself in that way?

[6 : 11] Or your religion. Or maybe there's no religion. Or what about class? Would you say your working class, middle class? How would you define yourself in those areas?

What about the last one, gender? What would you say there? What's your gender identity? Well, a few years ago, Facebook launched a facility enabling users to select one of over 50, I think it's now moved up to almost 70, gender options.

So, when you're on Facebook, you can tick a certain box. You can say you're either male or female. And then below that, or including that, you've got 50 other options to choose your particular gender identity.

So, let me give you an example of some of them that are there. Agender, which simply means no gender at all. Androgynous, which means you're partly male and partly female.

Or cisgender, someone whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were assigned at first.

[7 : 33] Or you could identify yourself as two-spirit. Someone who has both a male and a female spirit. Then there's gender questioning.

So, for those who aren't quite sure yet who they are, well, you're gender questioning. And if you can't find anything in that list of 50, you've still got an option there to choose your own or to write in your own.

Commenting on the list, Facebook said this. We recognize that people face challenges sharing their true identity with others. And this setting gives people the ability to express themselves in an authentic way.

You see, you might think that identifying your gender is easy. But it's not for everyone. For some, gender is not something fixed.

It's something fluid that can change. And the umbrella term for this is transgender. And here's a brief definition.

[8 : 43] A person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person's biological sex assigned at birth. So, somebody may be born a boy or a girl.

But yet their inner feelings do not match their biological sex. And research tells us that one in 215 males, one in 300 females, struggle with their gender identity.

Sometimes it's referred to as gender dysphoria. Where people would describe it like this, that they're trapped in the wrong body. Now, this isn't just kind of makeup.

This is actually a very real experience for many people. And they need love and care and lots of support. So, back to the question, who am I?

Well, Dale Coohen, I think that's how you pronounce his surname, wrote a book called Sex and the Eye World. And in it, he's commenting on the success of Steve Jobs.

[10 : 00] If you remember him, he's the founder of Apple, the big computer giant. And he's commenting on the success of their marketing skills. And he says this.

The names of his Apple products, which we've heard of, the iMac, the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad, are striking.

Jobs knew that we live in the eye world, in which everything revolves around the individual. So, morality is something that I decide.

Identity is something that I choose. Biology or society no longer determines what I can do and who I want to be.

It's something I decide and I choose for myself. We live in the eye world. Everything revolves around me. If it feels right and if it makes you happy, then it's okay.

[11 : 04] But we are so much more than just our gender or our sexuality. You see, I am not what others may say I am.

I'm not what I even feel about myself. I am what God has defined me to be.

So, three things we're going to look at in terms of how God defines us. Here's the first one. First, we are created by God.

Let's go back to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1. We'll come to Colossians in a moment, but back to Genesis chapter 1. And look how Genesis begins.

The first Bible, the first words of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, God.

[12:12] Before we were, before we ever existed, God was. In the beginning, God. And as we read on, we see that God creates.

But I want us to notice how he creates. There is design in his creation, and there is difference in his creation. So, look at verse 5.

God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. So, we have night and day.

Then down in verse 10. And God called the dry ground land, and the gathered waters he called sea. So, we have land and sea.

Then in verse 17, we're being introduced to the lights. God set in the vault of the sky light to give light on the earth.

[13:16] So, we have sky and earth. So, we've got these different pairings. Night and day. Land and sea. Earth and sky. But yet, they're separate, aren't they?

They're distinct from each other. They have boundaries. They are fixed. Not fluid. They are not interchangeable. And then when we go on and read in verse 26.

Let's read there. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So, God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. So, we're introduced to another pairing.

Male and female. Male and female. Both are made in the image of God, so equal in value and worth. But both are separate, if you like. They're distinct from each other.

[14:25] Male and female. Just like night and day. Land and sea. Sky and earth. Male and female. So, gender is something that is fixed.

Not fluid. They are not interchangeable. This is part of God's design. Design in difference. Suppose I were to go into a carpenter's workshop.

And in the middle of his workshop, I discover a table and chair. Something designed and made by the carpenter. And I bring the table and chair home, and I put it into my kitchen.

Come home one day, and everybody's sitting on the table. And they're eating their dinner off the chair. Well, you could sit on the table and eat your dinner off the chair.

But it doesn't change what they are, does it? The table is the table, and the chair is the chair.

They're not interchangeable. In the same way, changing our gender identity, ticking a box, does not change the reality.

[15:39] Physical change, behavioral change, does not change who we are. We have been created by God, male or female.

Now, that raises a very important question. Sorry, that was all under creator's design. Creator's word, which raises an important question.

Who am I going to be listening to? What's going to be the authority in my life? Am I going to be ruled by God's word? Or will I be ruled by my happiness, my choice, my decision?

Will I choose what I want and who I am? Or am I going to trust God and what God says? You see, if we listen to God, if we trust what his word has to say about us, we will actually find the happiness that we're all longing for.

Have a look at Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19 is this wonderful celebration.

[17:00] It's divided quite neatly in two halves. So, verses 1 to 6 celebrates God as creator. And then 7 through to the end celebrates the creator's word.

So, let's read Psalm 19, verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. So, it's telling us how great God's creation is.

Design and order, it tells us something about who he is. But then when we get to verse 7, it celebrates the creator's word.

Verse 7. The law of the Lord is perfect. It's refreshing to the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy.

They make wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right. They give joy to the heart. You see, it's telling us that, well, not only has God created the world in a certain way, a certain design and a certain pattern, but he's also spoken into that creation to say, look, if we follow his word, if we follow the creator's design and what he has to say, then it's refreshing.

[18 : 23] It's something trustworthy. It makes us wise in the decisions that we make. It gives, in the middle of verse 8, joy to the heart.

Listen to this from C.S. Lewis. You can follow on the screen. When we want to be something other than the thing God wants us to be, we must be wanting what, in fact, will not make us happy. Let me start that again so you get it. When we want to be something other than the thing God wants us to be, we must be wanting what, in fact, will not make us happy.

Those divine demands, which sound to our natural ears, most like those of a despot and least like those of a lover, in fact, marshal us or guide us and direct us where we should want to go if we knew what we wanted.

You see, we may struggle with gender identity. You may be somebody here this morning who struggles with that. We may feel trapped in the wrong body.

[19 : 39] However, God's word is what brings clarity in the confusion. If we trust his word, if we trust that the creator and the designer of our lives knows what is best for us, we will find joy and contentment.

We will find a way to live as God has called us to be. So first, who am I? We are created by God. Second, we are united to Christ. And here we go to Colossians, chapter 3. Chapter 2 and chapter 3, Colossians.

I think it's on page... Well, I don't know. What's the page? Anybody? Hmm? 1-1-8-3. Thank you.

1-1-8-3. So, while gender goes some way to defining us, what matters most of all is our status. The primary issue is not, am I male or female? It's important as it is. It's not the primary issue. The primary issue is this, that each one of us has to answer, is, am I united to Christ?

[20 : 56] Am I united to Christ? Have a look at Colossians, chapter 2, verse 9. Chapter 2, verse 9.

For in Christ, in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. So, let's try and grasp this, this mental image before us.

All of who God is, everything that God is, is in Christ. The loving creator of the universe, who made us, who designed us, that God is in Christ.

The fullness of who God is, is found in Christ. Now, let's read verse 10. And, in Christ, you have been brought to fullness.

So, follow the logic. All of God is in Christ, and, in Christ, we find fullness of life.

[22 : 06] All of God in Christ, and so, in Christ, we find fullness of life. the only way that I could kind of picture this in my own mind, if you can think of an empty swimming pool, no water in it at all.

And that swimming pool is filled to its fullness. And then we're invited to jump in, and enjoy and experience the fullness, of all that's there.

You see, God, in, gives all the fullness of his love, in Christ. All the fullness of God's love is, is in Christ.

And so, in Christ, we get to know the fullness of his love towards us. It's in Christ, that we are filled and satisfied. It's in Christ, that we are complete and made whole.

It's in Christ, that we discover, who we really are. So, how can we experience this fullness of life?

[23 : 16] Well, let me try to explain it to you. Think for a minute of a marriage. The man and a woman, they begin separate. Let's think of the man as having great wealth.

He's somebody who's very, very rich, lots and lots of money. The woman, well, she has great needs, no money. She's poor. But in joining together in marriage, all that is his, now becomes hers. And all that is hers, now becomes his. His life becomes her life, and her life becomes his life. Martin Luther explained it like this.

Read it on the screen, you can follow along. He says, by faith, you are so cemented to Christ, that he and you are as one person, which cannot be separated, but remains attached to Christ forever, and declares, I am as Christ.

I am as Christ. And Christ in turn says, I am as that sinner who is attached to me, and I to him. So you see, we are joined to Christ, we are in Christ, by faith.

[24 : 39] And as we come into Christ, his life becomes my life, and that is where I experience fullness of life. Look at chapter 2, verse 20.

So we are in Christ, by faith, so his life is my life, and my life is his life. So, verse 20, since you died, with Christ.

Just that little phrase, since you died, with Christ. When Christ died, on the cross, by faith, I can say that I died, with him.

Johnny Grant died. My old way of thinking about myself, my old order of things, is now dead.

Johnny Grant is dead. He no longer exists.

He's dead. Now look at chapter 3, verse 1. Since then you have been raised, with Christ.

[25 : 43] We've died with Christ, now we've been raised with Christ. So when Christ rose from the grave, by faith, I can say that I rose with him. There is now a new Johnny Grant.

A new Johnny Grant in Christ, who has been born again, who lives a new way, who's been given a new identity, a new way of living. The old has gone, the new has come.

A brand new person. You see, by faith we are in Christ. In Christ we find fullness of life.

And that is something that is fixed, not fluid. Our new status of being in Christ cannot be changed.

We remain attached to Christ forever.

His life becomes my life. I am in him. What does all that mean for us? Not only are we in Christ, but we do have a new identity.

[26 : 48] Look at chapter 3, verse 3. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Hidden with Christ. His life becomes my life. I am as Christ. When God now looks at me, he doesn't see Johnny Grant.

He sees me as Christ. As his own child. Chapter 3, verse 4. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Where Christ goes, I will go. As Christ went to his death, I go with him to death. As Christ is raised, so I am raised. As Christ is in glory, so I will go be in glory.

This is what I was created to be. In Christ. Chapter 3, verse 11. Here, again with the theme of being in Christ.

[27 : 56] He says, there is no Gentile or Jew. If we are in Christ, there is no ethnicity. There is no ethnicity. It's not about your race or your culture.

No circumcised or uncircumcised. It's not about your religious background. Barbarian or Scythian. It's not about your education or your intellect or anything else like that.

It's not about slave or free. What your status is within society. Whether you are employed or unemployed or what you do. And, not mentioned here, but in the corresponding verse in Galatians, it talks about, and there is neither male nor female.

It's not about whether you are male or female. But Christ is all and is in all. That's what matters.

Am I in Christ? Christ. Because in Christ, I find my true identity. This is who I discover who I really am. The God who made me to be who I am today.

[29 : 06] This is where I find my fullness of life. In Christ is life. In Christ, I experience who I am. So, who am I?

Well, I'm created by God. And I am united to Christ. And third, I am filled with the Spirit. You see, if we are united to Christ, we are also filled with his transforming Spirit.

Because where Christ is, the Spirit also is. And where the Spirit is, the Spirit's work is going on in our lives, changing us and transforming us.

So, two things. First, be who you are. Chapter 3, verse 9. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self.

You see, if we are united to Christ in faith, he's saying, well, now start living out your new self. Start living out the new identity that you have been given.

[30 : 29] It's no longer about living in the I world where everything revolves around me, I decide what I want to do and who I am. But now it's about listening to God's Word and what God says about me.

And what God says is best for me. It's not about what I choose, but now living as God has made me to be. We've put off the old identity.

The old identity is dead. We now have a new identity in Christ. So, be who you are. Here's another quote.

Lots of quotes this morning, but this is very helpful. We'll follow along as we read it. It comes in two parts. This is Kevin DeYoung speaking. He says, if I had to summarize the New Testament ethics in one sentence, here's how I would put it.

Be who you are. That might seem strange, almost heretical, given our culture's emphasis on being true to yourself. But like so many of the worst errors in the world, this one represents a truth powerfully perverted.

[31 : 45] When people say, relax, you were born that way. Or, quit trying to be something you're not and just be the real you.

They're actually stumbling upon something very biblical. God wants you to be the real you. He does want you to be true to yourself.

But the you he's talking about is the you that you are saved by grace, not by nature. God doesn't say, relax, you were born this way.

But he does say, good news, you were reborn another way. So, be who you are.

Start living out your new identity. So, be who you are. And second, become who you are. So, look, let's read the rest of verse 10, chapter 3, verse 10.

[32 : 51] So, we've taken off the old self, verse 10, and put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge, in the image of its creator.

Day by day, we are being renewed. We are becoming more and more like the image of our creator. The image has been distorted because we've chosen our own path.

But now, in Christ, and because we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are now becoming more like the image of our creator. Look again at verse 10.

Renewed in knowledge. That is, we now begin to think about ourselves as God would think about us. So, I'm no longer thinking or shaped by my own thoughts or my own desires or my own feelings. I'm now thinking, what does God think about me? And I'm now beginning to live that out. and this can only happen as we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 03] Okay, the Holy Spirit isn't mentioned here, but it's implied that where Christ is, the Spirit is. It's the Spirit who enables us to be who we are and it's the Spirit who equips us to become who we are.

So, who am I? Well, I am wonderfully created in the image of God. There's a wonderful order and design to God's creation and who we are.

There is difference. It is fixed, not fluid. They're not interchangeable. We are male or female. But we've been given a new identity that we are now in Christ, united to him by faith, so that we are now hidden with Christ.

His life is now my life. And we are filled with his Holy Spirit so that we can be and start living as God has made us to be and called us to be.

Until that day we will see him and we will be like him. So, know who you are. created by God, united to Christ and filled with the Spirit.

[35 : 25] Let's pray together. As we pray, I'm just going to read out some verses that remind us about who we are in Christ.

Christ. So, if we are in Christ, let's start thinking and living and behaving as the people God has called us to be. So, as we pray, just listen and reflect on some of these verses.

us. Father, as we pray now, would you please do a work deep down in our lives so that we begin to live out our new identity, not living as I want or how I feel, but listening carefully to your word and trusting that it is right and best, asking that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we start living as your new people.

If anyone is in Christ the new creation has come. In Christ God forgave you.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[37 : 14] God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ.

In Christ you have been brought to fullness. us. We are seated with him in the heavenly realms in Christ.

God has called you to his eternal glory in Christ. Father we so quickly forget our true identity and we live according to a different pattern and a different way.

Help us to look afresh and see afresh that in Christ we have been brought to fullness.

Thank you that we find all that we need and could ever be and want to be in Christ. Amen.