

Made male and female

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[0 : 00] And it's Matthew chapter 19, verses 1 to 12, page 993, Matthew chapter 19.

Now, when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan, and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

[1 : 29] And I say to you, Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.

But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this, receive it. Great, do please sit down. Let me add my welcome. My name is Simon Dowdy, and I'm the pastor here, and we're delighted to have you with us this morning.

This is the fourth talk in our series of four on identity, what it means to be human. The other talks are all on the website, so if you've missed those, then do please listen to them if you're able to.

And today we're thinking about transgender, and just thinking about the whole transgender debate. So why don't I pray for us as we begin. In that reading from Matthew 9, the Lord Jesus Christ says, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks.

[3 : 03] Thank you that in our confused world, in so many, many ways, that you speak words of truth that we are able to trust and build our lives upon.

And we pray, therefore, this morning, as we think about this whole area of transgender, we pray you'd help us to take your word to heart and to have confidence in it.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I wonder when you first became aware that transgender was something that you had to give serious thoughts to.

Perhaps it was July 2015 when Bruce Jenner's journey from American Olympic icon to transgender woman was announced to the world on the front page of Vanity Fair magazine with his, her picture and underneath simply the words, Call me Caitlin.

Or perhaps it was a year later, in 2016, when the BAFTA Awards included the Danish girl starring Eddie Redmayne as Ina Veneger, a Dutch painter who, in the 1920s, was one of the first people to undergo gender reassignment surgery.

[4 : 21] Or perhaps it was Chastity Bono, now known as Chas Bono, who summed up this whole new world by saying that gender is between your ears, not between your legs.

Just get that? Gender is what's between your ears, in other words, how you think of yourself, not between your legs. In other words, gender is not about biological facts, but about the way in which we see ourselves in the world.

How should we respond? Well, it's a complex issue. Clearly, it's a personal and pastoral issue. It may well be for some of us, perhaps personally, or directly through friends, or colleagues, or family members.

And yet it's also a political issue. It's an ideological issue. And it's an issue which our culture is singularly ill-equipped to deal with.

in part because so much of our public debate is framed and shaped by feelings rather than thinking. So often, our emotions get pulled, don't they, by compelling personal stories, which are so much more powerful in getting us to follow what they are saying than facts and scientific evidence.

[5 : 51] But also because our culture is so inconsistent. I don't know if you remember the case of Rachel Dolezal, the American former civil rights activist who was outed as being a white woman while claiming to be black.

Many people ask the question, if a woman can self-identify as a man, why can't a white person self-identify as a black person?

Or what about the fears that the transgender movement will overthrow many of the gains for women's rights over the last 50 years? Our culture is inconsistent.

And the result, of course, is that issues of enormous social change with huge implications are simply being decided upon by whichever interest group shouts the loudest.

Which seems to me gives Christians a wonderful opportunity to speak compassionately and truthfully. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are always called to love our neighbour.

[7 : 06] So what does that love look like? Well, you'll see on the back of the service sheet as an outline of the talk with a couple of headings. First of all, the love of Jesus affirms the givenness of gender.

The love of Jesus affirms the givenness of gender. The love of Jesus, of course, because we've seen over these last three weeks in this whole series on identity that God creates the world good.

As he looks at things, his creation is good. And so the love of Jesus, the love of the creator affirms the givenness of gender. If you close your Bible, turn, will you, back to page 993 and to Matthew chapter 19.

Matthew chapter 19, page 993. Last week, you'll remember that we saw that we are created gendered. We are created gendered.

Genesis 1, 27, it's there on the outline. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

[8 : 15] Do listen to the talk if you missed it. God is the one who's created our sexual differentiation. It is part of his good creation design. And that is then affirmed here by the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 19 verses 3 to 5.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Notice that the Lord Jesus quotes from Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 in verse 4. Now that is very significant because what Jesus is saying is he's saying that Genesis, you see, gives us the blueprint, the creator's design pattern, the blueprint for what it means to be gendered.

Just as he creates Genesis chapter 2 verse 24 in verse 5 as the blueprint for marriage. That means, of course, that gender being made male and female is not a social or cultural construct which can simply be overturned but it is part of God's good creation design.

In other words, you say to Jesus, Jesus, show us where we go to understand what it means to be gendered. And Jesus says, go back to Genesis.

[9 : 57] And no doubt there were some there who might have said, well, hang on a moment, Jesus, I mean, you know, we're living more than 2,000 years later. We're living in the Roman Empire, this modern, cosmopolitan, technologically advanced society.

Surely, you can't still take Genesis seriously. And what does Jesus say? Yes, you can. Genesis is the template.

Which means, of course, that if we ignore Genesis, we are ignoring the Lord Jesus and turning our backs on what he says. Gender, says Jesus, is a given.

You are either male or you are female. It is binary. It's either one or the other. It's not a spectrum.

Gender isn't fluid. Something, of course, that transgender ideology seeks to overthrow. In one secondary school in Brighton, the pupils are asked, how do you define your gender?

[11 : 04] And there are 20 options. But you see, how do you define your gender actually is the wrong question. Because I don't define my gender.

God defines my gender. My gender is a gift to me from God. I am created by God to be the gendered person he has created me to be.

And, of course, this binary understanding of gender, it fits our biology, doesn't it? Genetically, males have XY sex chromosomes, females XX. Morphologically, males have testes, females have ovaries.

And it's that essential genetic programming, as we might call it, that then determines our secondary sex characteristics, such as voice, body hair distribution, and so on.

There was a cartoon in one of the papers several weeks ago sharing a company board meeting in the city. All the members of the board were middle-aged men of a certain size and weight, one imagined.

[12 : 18] the chairman speaking, gentlemen, it would be extremely helpful if some of you could start identifying as women. But here's the question, you see, would that really deal with the gender pay gap?

Would that really ensure that there are more women on the boards of city companies? Of course not. our chromosomes cannot be re-engineered or removed or scrubbed from our software, if you like, of what it means for us to be us as men or women.

Paul McHugh, formerly psychiatrist and chief at John Hopkins University in the States, has written, people who undergo sex reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa.

rather they become feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they identify.

In the words of the feminist academic Germaine Greer, transgender women are not women. Being Australian, she of course is blunter than the American.

- [13 : 37] I guess the heart of the issue really is who knows best. Does God know best or do we know best? Keep a finger in Matthew 19 and turn back to Psalm 139.

Psalm 139 verses 1-4 O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold O Lord, you know it all together.

God knows this, you see, better than we know ourselves. He knows that half form sentence before the very first word comes out of our mouths. He's made us as we are.

Verse 13, for you formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works.

- [14 : 47] My soul knows it very well. God has knit us together as the gender that we are. We cannot divorce the sex we are on the inside from the gender we are on the outside.

we are made as a whole person. Gender is between your legs not between your ears.

And yet of course the very heart of sin, all sin, is that we reject God's authority over us. Which means actually that every one of us in this room has far more in common with a transgendered person than we might imagine.

the urge to be God. It's the very first temptation that we've seen that in the Garden of Eden over the last three weeks. You be God, you decide what is right and what is wrong in God's world.

Why? You can even reject the way God has made you and reinvent yourself as someone totally different. After all, who else can you trust to determine what is right for you apart from you?

- [16 : 03] The last ten years has witnessed a breakdown of trust in the institutions that people might once have trusted. The banks, politicians, the police, the church, the BBC. So who can you trust?

Well, our culture says you can only trust yourself. But can I? Can I really trust that what I want to do and who I want to be and the way I want to express myself?

Can I really trust that that is right? Why should something be right just because I desire it? Why should something be right just because it feels good?

In the biblical worldview, none of us can trust ourselves to know what is right and what is wrong. Which is why, of course, we need to listen to the loving and liberating words of Jesus.

So, first up, the love of Jesus affirms the givenness of gender. Secondly, the love of Jesus affirms the complexity of gender. Back to Matthew chapter 19.

- [17 : 21] You and I live in a fallen world that has turned its back on its creator. It's why here in Matthew 19 verses 7 to 9 there's divorce because as we saw last week, we now live in this world where there is this battle between the sexes.

And in verse 12, Jesus recognizes the gender complexity of our world. Have a look at verse 12. For there are eunuchs who have been saved from birth and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Notice really that Jesus speaks of those who are eunuchs from birth, those who at birth don't have the right physical bits and pieces as you might say. You can tell I didn't do biology own level and who at birth their gender is unclear at least at birth.

It may become clearer later on. He talks secondly about those who have been made eunuchs by men. In the first century a slave or servant might have been castrated so he could serve in an important household without any danger that he would run off with his master's wife.

And then finally Jesus talks about those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God. Which I take it means that they have chosen to remain unmarried for the sake of the gospel.

[18 : 52] And I guess many of us can think of great Christian leaders who have done that. So men like John Stott and Dick Lucas or women like Helen Rosevear and Gladys Aylwood who went on the mission field knowing full well that it is very unlikely that having made that decision they would then marry.

But notice really what Jesus doesn't say. Jesus doesn't say that because gender is complex that it is therefore fluid and not binary.

So often arguments are kind of argued aren't they by way of exception. Someone will say to you well you can't possibly say that because what about such and such exception?

As if the exception completely invalidates the rule. As if the fact that some people do feel as if they're born in the wrong body means that gender is fluid.

And Jesus says yes there are exceptions. We do live in a fallen world. Gender is complex. And yet he still says God has made us male and female.

[20 : 06] In other words gender remains binary. Now to say that in our current climate is to be labelled transgender phobic.

But I suspect that future generations may thank us for standing up for something which is obvious and nonetheless at a time when to say so is costly and unwelcome.

Now I put some key terms there on the outline which I hope will just help us as we think about the kinds of people we are talking about. The first so-called intersex which is a physical condition where it is impossible to tell at birth what sex someone is.

I gather it's thought to affect one in 5,000 people. But interestingly the great majority of people who are born with the intersex condition would still identify as either male or female rather than transgender.

So in other words it's a separate issue to what is commonly known as transgender. The second key term is gender dysphoria where unlike intersex the biological gender is not in any doubt.

[21 : 32] And rather than being a physical condition it is a psychological condition. It's about how people think, how people feel about themselves. The NHS website Gender Choices describes it as a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there's a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity.

And again it's thought to affect a very small number of individuals one in 10,000 males and one in 20,000 females. The third term is transgenderism as an ideology by which I mean the radical new gender ideology that is challenging what gender actually is.

And especially the whole movements in favour of self identification. Now at one level it is plainly ridiculous as in the case you may have seen it of the Labour Party activist David Lewis who back in May stood for election in his local Labour Party as women's officer on the grounds that he self identified as a woman on Wednesdays between six o'clock in the morning and midnight although he self identified as a man for the rest of the week.

More broadly however transgender ideology is pushing a social revolution which if it continues will result in the disappearance of the body in the eyes of the law whether you are male or female would actually be completely irrelevant and inevitably all the gains therefore of the feminist movements would be completely wiped out at a stroke.

Now what I want to do in our remaining time is to think about how to respond in particular to those gender dysphoria as Christians we need to have compassion and yet without signing up to the transgender ideology that says that gender is fluid and that you can be one of those 20 choices or whatever it is.

[23 : 53] Gender dysphoria is often accompanied by mental health difficulties high rates of depression and suicide while for those who pursue transition to the opposite sex you may have seen that Lord Winston in Imperial College London recently expressed his concerns about gender transition surgery saying the results are horrendous in such a big proportion of cases and there's also evidence that rates of mental health don't improve afterwards either.

So what might Christian compassion look like? Well I take it that we won't encourage those who experience gender dysphoria to try and change their body to match the way they think but instead to help them to alter the way they think and their perception to fit the body that they have been given.

Dr. Paul McHugh who I mentioned earlier worked at St. John Hoskins Hospital in the States a hospital which interestingly pioneered gender transition surgery and they later scrapped the program and said we're not going to do any more people.

And this is how he explained that decision. He writes I concluded that to provide a surgical alteration of the body is to collaborate with a mental disorder rather than to treat it.

in other words he puts gender dysphoria and anorexia in a very similar category in terms of the way in which people think of themselves and just as someone with anorexia if they went to their GP and said I feel as if I'm fat and overweight the GP doesn't say okay let's put you on a diet.

[25 : 54] The GP thinks we need to try and help you in terms of your self perception it's a similar kind of thing. What should you call someone who's transitioned?

It's worth thinking about the language I think language is important isn't it? Language communicates a lot so the media talk about assisted dying for example because that sounds so much more compassionate than complicity to murder.

It's interesting how language changes our perceptions. So some may wish to call him a her out of respect but others I take it won't because they feel they are colluding with a lie that he still is a he which of course he is.

But above all as followers of Jesus Christ what is it that we long that those with gender dysphoria might come to understand? Well surely that we are all made in God's image.

Once we understand that it humbles us we are merely an image but actually it also gives all of us great dignity because we are made in God's image and yet also to see that all of us fall short of that image.

[27 : 20] I take it that Christians of all people we should get and understand why it is we live in a world of sexual confusion and identity crisis because of sin.

We should get that. We need saving from our desires. We need saving from ourselves. And wonderfully Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sin so we might be forgiven and restored to our original creation purpose.

Knowing God knowing his son Jesus Christ. So what we're about to celebrate as we share bread and wine together and of course it's as we put our trust in Jesus that we receive a new identity.

I've put 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 on the outline. Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away behold the new has come.

This is the wonderful news of the Christian faith. As Christians we have something far more wonderful. Jesus offers something far more wonderful than transition.

[28 : 31] He offers transformation. Indeed as the message of Jesus swept across the first century Roman empire one of the very first people to turn to put their trust in him was a eunuch from Ethiopia turning to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Now to become a new creation in Christ does not mean that the world we live in or the bodies that we inhabit or the minds that we think with will be totally freed and completely healed.

But it is to be a forgiven person. It is to be a person in whom God dwells by his Holy Spirit. And it is to recognize that what ultimately matters is not the way in which I think about myself and I feel about myself but who God made me to be and the new creation to which I am destined for.

That is wonderfully liberating when I start thinking not in terms of myself and how I think of myself but in terms of God and how he thinks of me.

And many of us in this room will know just how wonderfully liberating that is. To be a new creation in Christ is to be able to anticipate that certain future day when the disorder of this present creation is all put back together.

[30 : 00] When there will be no more discomfort or dysphoria or pain of any kind. When it will be replaced by the joy of having a new resurrection body and living in the new creation.

To be a new creation is to know why the world is as it is. To know and understand why I am as I am. Why our bodies are as they are and why our minds think as they do.

In the words of C.S. Lewis it is when I trust in Christ when I give myself up to his personality that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

Let's spend a few moments in quiet and then I shall lead us in prayer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old has passed away behold a new has come.

Heavenly Father we praise you that as those who trust in the Lord Jesus we praise you that we have the best news in the world to share with our culture which is so astray in so many ways we praise you for the way in which the gospel humbles us the way in which you show us that we cannot trust our feelings and our desires we we we we we we we we we we we pray heavenly father please would you help us to be those who are able to share confidently this wonderful message with those around us and we pray even this week that we might have the opportunity to do so with those who experience gender dysphoria for themselves and we ask it in his name amen