

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines

Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24

30 | Marriage, Sexuality & Gender, cont.

## APPLYING OUR UNION WITH CHRIST: MARRIAGE, SEX, AND GENDER

### TURNING TO GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION QUESTIONS

#### PART 1 - HOW TO ENGAGE IN OUR WORLD

##### 1. Personally and interpersonally

1. *Love, love, love* - remember the context and the world we live in. Many who struggle with what we'd call sexual sin have only experienced the church through the media or hateful and self-righteous aberrations. We can even think of it as forms of communal repentance that we need to ask for forgiveness for the sins of our Christian brothers and sisters (as the PCA did re:racism).
2. *Prioritize the Gospel* - we may get people to stop any behavior, but they're still in need of Jesus!
3. *Holy Curiosity* - ask questions and get to know their story. No one acts in a vacuum and with no reason/motivation. Don't assume you know the reason for why anyone sins!
4. *Pray for Wisdom and Boldness* - for insight into your own heart, whether you confuse love for cowardice or speaking up for self-righteous virtue-signaling; and for the Holy Spirit to be at work.
5. *Promote the Beautiful Vision of Marriage* - the church has largely lost the "PR" battle, but the biblical view of marriage is not one of drudgery, oppression, and loveless unions. It should be a compelling vision of a life - though not a calling for every Christian - that enables deeper love and grace.

##### 2. Communally in the Church

1. How could we be a church where people feel comfortable exploring Jesus even before they agree on sex and marriage? Or where real sexual sins are confessed and forgiven?

2. Our biblical principles are clear on where we stand, but how can we be consistent in our hatred of ALL sin, not ones we single out, yet radical in our love of ALL people?

### 3. Politically

1. ***Remember the difference between the Church and State!*** They simply have different purposes and callings, which should change our goals for them.
  1. This is partly why uniting Christianity with any political party does damage to the Christian witness. If you can't disagree with any parts of your political party or favorite candidate, you're not listening with biblical ears.
  2. If we prioritize the gospel, we will have lower expectations for the state's ability to be moral or Christian, whatever that would mean. Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as a "Christian nation" since the church alone is called a "holy nation" (1Peter 2) with no particular political state that is closer or further away.
2. ***Promote humility in your own heart,*** especially on issues that you know Christians differ on. Try to ask and genuinely explore how a Christian can be motivated by Christian convictions and yet end up with different political views. Our unity in Christ should VASTLY override our political differences.
  1. For example, a Christian who is orthodox on marriage and sex can believe for common grace reasons that the state should sanction homosexual civil unions, just as a Christian with the same biblical view can believe the state should promote only heterosexual marriage. The difference is not their biblical orthodoxy but their view of the state's purposes, which are much less clear in Scripture.
3. ***Christianity is not a tribe or a civilization to defend.*** There are many non-Christians ways in which Christians now engage in tribalism and virtue-signaling that undermine Christian integrity. In our sound-bite culture, we often just shame and demonize the other side in order to show to those in our "tribe" that we're on the right side.
  1. We are called to die to our self and live new lives of sacrifice and love.
  2. We can certainly be passionate about political causes, but Jesus is not a cause.

## PART 2 - CONTENT OF THE ISSUES

### On Biblical Gender Norms and Roles

1. **Within marriage** - see Eph. 5, Col. 4, 1Cor. 11
2. **Within society universally** - see ???
  1. **WCF** - though our confession clearly defines marriage, it makes no definition of what it means to be a man or woman, or what is universally masculine or feminine. If the Church's confession takes no stance, we ought to be VERY hesitant in making universal declarations.
  2. "Nowhere in Scripture are men or women exhorted to question their gender identity based on tastes and mannerisms—let alone their sexual orientation. A noteworthy biblical example that warns against being over-dogmatic about identifying certain traits with certain genders is provided by the brothers, Jacob and Esau. While Esau was favored by his father and had many "man's man" characteristics and skills, Jacob evidently identified better with his mother and, we are told, was more domestic in his leanings. . . . Men like Jacob and men like Esau have very different personality traits, but biblically they are both equally and thoroughly male." (RPCNA paper). See Gen. 25.

### On Sexual Orientation

1. **By Christian authors who are "affirming"**
  1. If the gospel proclaims "there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female" (which it certainly does, hallelujah!), why can't that be expanded to include "neither gay or straight, bi or trans"?
    1. What's wrong with this argument?
    2. Another common argument is that "homosexual orientation" or lifelong monogamous homosexual fidelity was unknown to the ancient world, so the biblical prohibitions do not apply.
      1. This is largely false, since ancient authors were aware of natural dispositions for the same sex, and the biblical authors are certainly aware that sexual behaviors are rooted in the heart. Moreover, Gen. 1-2 assume two genders and the natural need for both sexes in procreation.
2. **In Cultural Discourse**
  1. The word homosexuality was originally coined in German (Homosexualität) in 1869 by Karl-Maria Kertbeny to oppose the adoption

of Prussian anti-sodomy laws. The new term was quickly adopted in German discourse, and was brought into English in 1892. (RPCNA)

2. Christians should never naively adopt the world's terminology. We may have various deep desires, but none of them define my identity as a Christian. "Sexual orientation", though it may be valid to use in certain political situations, need not define or override other aspects of who we are as humans or Christians.

## Gender and Transgender

### 1. Understanding the Debate

1. *Let us not lead with hate!* Cultivate humble curiosity, since Christians are always commanded to love, and never meet evil for evil.
  1. We should be very wary of those who are quick to speak and confident in their views on, say, the pronoun debate, but who don't actually have anyone meaningfully in their lives to engage on the other side. Common grace tells us that *every* desire is God-given at its core, so we need to discover and facilitate what that is, even in our political enemy, in order to love them well.
2. *"Transgenderism" is largely just the next step in a consistent worldview* that began in the Enlightenment of the 18th Century. If there is no objective truth, and I belong to myself ultimately, then I should be able to determine what is right for me, including my morality, motivation, and even my body. Note how this should naturally lead Christians to prioritize the gospel over behavior modification.
  1. We largely view nature, including our own bodies, as objects of our control. Especially *post-Industrial Revolution*, we are never content with any limits put on that, but "the body itself is a limit" given by God.

### 2. Questioning Assumptions

1. *Recognizing Power Dynamics in Society* - None of these issues happen in a vacuum, and now the power structures of our society largely wield power through shame against those who question social orthodoxy. Social media largely operates on a honor/shame, rather than right/wrong, dynamic, which has bled into all aspects of society, but is hardly a vehicle for loving, truthful conversation.

1. As Comedian Dave Chappelle put it, "Why was it easier for Caitlyn Jenner to change her gender than for Muhammad Ali to change his name? Because white men started to wanna do it."
2. *Why do we lump "T" in with "LGBT" as if they're the same issue?* They're clearly very different. One could be open and affirming in sexual orientation, but not follow "social orthodoxy" on transgender issues. Likewise, consider those labelled "TERFs" - trans-exclusive radical feminists. If you don't "become" a woman until later in life, are you really able to identify with the unique battles that women face and life issues that they deal with? Feminism's birth of transgenderism has become Oedipal.
3. *Can someone "change sex"?* Changing one's secondary sex characteristics - genital appearance, breast development, etc. - is clearly possible, but does that change one's sex? There are biological and gamete-level differences between male and female that do not change with secondary changes. (see Favale, ch. 5)

### 3. Speaking into the Debate

1. *On the Importance of the Body and Sexual Difference* - "The body reveals the person. Our bodies are the visible reality through which we manifest our hidden, inner life. [Adam and Eve] have not yet spoken; she has not verbally introduced herself. Her body speaks the truth of her identity, and this truth is immediately recognized by the man, who is struck with joy and wonder at the revelation of a person with whom he can—*at last!*—have true communion. Our bodies, then, serve a sacramental function, by revealing and communicating a spiritual reality. *It is not good for the human to be alone.* This lacuna in the created order is mended not by the formation of more generic human beings or by male bonding, but by sexual differentiation. Sexual difference is a particular kind of difference because it is a difference that is arranged purposefully to correspond to the difference of the other. We are not talking about superficial differences here, like hair or eye color. We are talking about a body that this designed to another kind of body, in an entirely unique way. Maleness points toward femaleness, and vice versa. **Our sexed body signals our inherent capacity and need for interpersonal communion....** Only sexual difference is capable of bringing another human being into existence. The

one-flesh union between man and woman is not exclusive, facing inward and closed off to others. Rather, it is expansive and open, because this union alone has the potential to create new life. **Communion and procreation:** this is the twofold potential that is recognized and celebrated in the Genesis text through the man's cry of wonder. . . . The full spousal meaning of the body, outwardly declared by our visible sex characteristic, is the power to express love, to give oneself fully in love to another. This is the true *telos* or purpose of the human being: to become a *reciprocal gift*, to give love and receive it in turn." - A. Favale [Note that marriage only points to this purpose of gifting love, and it's fulfilled, in Christ and the Church, by anyone in Christ.]

2. *Confusing Gender Stereotypes with Gender Paradigms* - many in our culture would agree that it is not inherently masculine to like trucks as a little boy, or feminine to play with Barbie as a little girl; and yet some in the transgender movements describe their identity in similar terms. Some ironically justify the very stereotypes they're trying to overcome by wanting to change their body.
3. *Who is the "I" whose identity is hidden under the "wrong body"?*
  1. There is a strange assumption of something like an immaterial soul that makes up our identity that cannot be defined by our body. So there's metaphysical assumptions, even though we live in a culture that denies that anything immaterial is real.
  2. *We also are left with strange body-soul dichotomies;* for instance, my soul claims that my body is wrong, so I can change my body without changing my soul? Or is my soul always right, such that it dictates what my body must be? But where did my soul come from, if not from God? And how do I know my soul is correct or access it's insight? If I don't have a soul, who/what is the person that needs to change the body? Moreover, we believe in radical equality of the sexes, but they can't be the same, otherwise changing one's body would not be necessary. "If girlness and boyness no longer reside in the body, there is no other ground for these concepts *except* stereotypes." (Favale)

#### 4. *On the Difference between Love and Sameness*

1. Notice that the Christian doctrine of love, and even unity in Christ (“no male or female, slave or free...”), does not mean that we are all the *same*. **Unity** among people who are the same is not unity, it’s *uniformity*. We are called to unity in Christ through love precisely because we’re different. If we were the same, there would be no need for Jesus to overcome boundaries. Heaven will be a place of love where all different peoples, remaining who they were made to be in creation (without sin), will be fully redeemed and worshipping the one Christ.
2. Hence, heterosexual marriage is actually **truly diverse** because it’s about uniting two different types of people, male and female! It’s not a surprise that homosexual couples experience plenty of joy and agreement since there’s less difference to overcome.

**Additional Resources** (certainly not exhaustive, but I recommend them all)

- **On Philosophical and Theological Underpinnings of Modern Sexuality**
  - *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, by Carl Trueman (2020)
  - *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*, by Jonathan Grant (2015)
- **On Homosexuality & Sexual Orientation**
  - *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (2016) - wonderfully encouraging in sanctification in general as well as sexuality issues
  - *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, by Rosaria Butterfield (2014) - a former lesbian English professor who converted to Christianity. She has unfortunately become less charitable and humble in her tone and reasoning as compared to this wonderful first book.
  - *Is God anti-gay?* by Sam Allberry (2013)
  - *Born again This Way*, by Rachel Gilson (2020) - former Cru campus minister at Yale, who was a lesbian, and now married to a man
  - *Gay Girl, Good God*, by Jackie Hill Perry (2018)
  - *Still Time to Care: What we can learn from the church’s failed attempt to cure homosexuality*, by Greg Johnson (2021). This is controversial in the PCA,

but a wonderful resource on how to minister lovingly from a pastor who himself is same-sex attracted but committed to chastity.

- RPCNA (sister denomination) paper, “Contemporary Perspectives on Sexual Orientation: A Theological and Pastoral Analysis” (2011)
- **Transgender**
  - *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*, by Abigail Favale (2022)
  - *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, by Ryan T. Anderson (2018) - on current trends in transgender debate (banned from Amazon)