



The Gendered Body

Genesis 1:24-31
Part 2 • 5.13.18

Summary: All things were made by God in goodness and beauty, but human beings are his special creation. Several aspects of the poem in Genesis 1 mark off humanity from the rest of God's creation:

- Whereas God typically initiates his work with the words, "Let there be," in the case of humans he said, "Let us make."
- It is most often said of other things that God "made" them (Hebrew "asah"). It's a generic word for any manufactured thing. But in Genesis 1:27 we read three times that God "created" humans (Hebrew "bara"); that's a word denoting something entirely new that only God can do.
- All the plants and animals are made "according to their kinds," but humans are made "in God's image"—in other words, according to *His kind*.
- And whereas nothing is noted about the sex of plants or animals, it is said specifically of humans, "male and female he created them." Sex and gender are essential to our nature and integral to our imaging God in the world.

All told, we learn at least three foundational truths about sex and gender in the Bible's first chapter:

1. Maleness and femaleness are created in us.
2. Maleness and femaleness are essential to us.
3. Male and female are the only two types of us. (With the exception of those who suffer dysphoria through genetic defects.)

This simple, biblical understanding of ourselves as gendered humans flies in the face of the prevailing cultural winds. More and more, people of the world conceive of themselves in radically dualistic terms, their minds and bodies are distinct. Sex only refers to the anatomy, but gender refers to psychology—which can be completely different. Moreover as free, autonomous beings it is our prerogative to create any gender identity we want. In fact, many people consider gender to be a restrictive social construct, not part of any divine design for our lives. Therefore transgenderism is more than a civil rights issue; it's the latest, most progressive way to conceive of oneself. The more hip and enlightened one is, the more he or she will eschew binary terms like "male" or "female." Even the pronouns "he" and "she" are considered stilted and restrictive. The most important thing about you is not who God created you to be as male or female, but how you identify.

However, in rejecting the world's philosophy we must be cautious not to reject people who experience gender dysphoria—whether caused by genetic defects, chromosomal irregularities, personal trauma, or a chosen way of being. All people are created in God's image and are worthy of our love and respect. Neither a dismissive "Yuk!" nor a permissive "Yes!" is the right response to dysphoria for people of faith. Rather, it's just "You." We care about you. We love and welcome you. You matter to God and you matter to us. All of us are broken and in need of grace, so let's journey toward Christ together.

Jesus is the ultimate image of God. All things were made through him and for him. All things are reconciled in him and held together by him—including our gendered lives. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Discussion:

1. Read Genesis 1:24-31. Simply upon hearing this passage, what do you like best about it? Is there anything you find difficult to accept or agree with in it?
2. Review the three main sermon points. Do you agree with them? Are there any additional insights you see regarding our being created male and female?
3. What is at stake for people of faith when it comes to understanding our gendered bodies in this biblical way? What difference does it make to us and our children?
4. Process these quotes from the sermon—two radically transgender affirming, two radically biblical affirming:

“I consider myself neither gay nor straight, neither male nor female, neither human being nor animal.” *Camille Paglia*

“When we no longer ask ‘boy or girl?’ in order to start gendering an infant, when the information is as irrelevant as the color of a child’s eyes, only then will men and women be socially interchangeable and really equal. And when that happens there will no longer be any need for gender at all.” *Judith Lorber*

“The culture says your psychology is your sexual identity—let your body be conformed to it. The Bible says your body is your sexual identity—let your mind be conformed to it.” *Sam Allberry*

“If you take your identity from your body, you can engage in a range of diverse behaviors without threatening the security of your identity as a man or woman. When we are defined by our bodies, the whole width of human experience remains open. There is freedom in the body.” *Jonah Mix*

5. Like Jonah Mix, a young man named Brandon who was gender non-conforming from toddlerhood eventually found restoration through discipleship to Christ. He learned to accept his anatomical and chromosomal gender. He learned to embrace his unique body and personality. And he found biblical role models in people like Jacob who—unlike his swarthy, outdoorsy, “man’s man” brother Esau—preferred to be with women. He was “content to stay among the tents” (Genesis 25:27). Do you think Brandon’s story could be true of more people? If we believe in the fact of neuroplasticity, not to mention transformation through the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2), why couldn’t many gender confused or dysphoric people take dominion over their own psychology?
6. Read and meditate on Colossians 1:15-20. What hope does this passage have to offer all of us?

Additional resources:

- *Transgender*, by Vaughan Robers, an excellent booklet on the subject.
- *The Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender*, a website with numerous resources.
- The various works by Mark Yarhouse, the foremost Christian researcher and therapist on matters of sex and gender dysphoria.