

How the Gospel Affects Our Understanding of Gender

As Understood by the Potomac Baptist Church Elders

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As a follower of Christ, the gospel affects every area of our life, including the way we approach gender related issues (sexual behavior and male-female roles). By “gospel” we mean the good news, that although we are inherently dominated by things like selfishness, pride, greed, and rebellion, we are also made in God’s image and have the capacity of having that image restored to us through the shed blood of Christ. We then have the capacity to imitate His character and His goodness. This imitation of Godlikeness can only happen through a relationship with Jesus Christ, as only he can radically change our understanding of who we are as male and female, forgiven and free.

To embark on a respectful discussion about gender today requires a grace born of the gospel, which will lead to listening instead of labeling, loving instead of judging. Why? Because if we all desperately need God’s forgiveness and grace, then even though we may be struggling with gender-related issues, we stand on equal footing before the Lord. At PBC, our people wrestle with a variety of sexual issues, but we do so as a church family... together, speaking truth in love to one another. Our desire then is that this position paper might reflect the truth of the gospel in both content and tone.

The place to start such a discussion is by defining the issue. What are “gender” and “sexuality”?

Definitions

Not until the 20th century were the terms “gender” and “sexuality” separated to mean different things. Previously men and women were understood as a whole, body, soul, and spirit. Now however our cultural understanding of sexuality has devolved to reflect a dualistic view of humanity which separates biological male and female (“sex”), with masculine and feminine identity (“gender”). However, for thousands of years, the Bible has defined humans as A SIMPLE, INTEGRATED, WHOLE. We are a UNIFIED material body and immaterial soul. Biblically then, gender is inclusive of both dimensions of humanity, body, and soul. For men and women then, the gospel tells us how God’s design for us as sexual beings have been lost and regained.

The Gospel and Gender

The GOD of Men and Women

Men and women are “made in God’s image,” so His character and nature become the “template” for male/female relationships. To understand ourselves as human beings, we must first understand God.

God is the loving Creator, Designer, Owner and Judge of all things including our sexuality. As such, only He has the right to define who we are as male and female. We are not self-defined.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.
Acts 17:24-25

God is a unified whole and not three separate beings, nor is there disunity between his substance and his personhood. Scripture does not teach dualism, either with man or God.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Deuteronomy 6:4

God exists as a trinity of co-equal persons, each having a role and function complementary to the other. There is both equality and subordination within the Godhead. Therefore, to define “submission” then as something fundamentally negative or demeaning speaks poorly of something in God that is good and lovely.

⁵ *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
Philippians 2:5-8

³ *But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*
1 Corinthians 11:3

God is holy, meaning he is perfect in all that he is and all that he does. He does not make mistakes. God's design of men and women is perfect, and no one is mistakenly given the wrong body. There are no mix-ups in his creation, either collectively or individually.

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isaiah 6:3

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Numbers 23:19

Our being made in God's image means that He is the pattern from which we are made. This is the foundational building block for us understanding the meaning of male and female.

God's Design for Men and Women

Men and women are created in God's image, each wonderfully unique. God created two types of human beings, male and female. This is not merely a human construct determined by culture and socialization. This male/female distinction, which is not meant to be interchangeable, is His design. As our Creator, he has the right to expect we act according to his design.

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

Men and women are equal in value and worth before God. They are both created in the image of God, and both are given the command to "have dominion over the earth," meaning both are responsible and required for the care and cultivation of our world together. They are co-equal vice-regents of earth.

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:28

God's design for men and women is that they both subject their dreams, ambitions and plans to the needs and betterment of each other. Under God's leadership, men and women must learn to "submit to one another", or in Jesus' words "die to self" in order to serve and lift each other up. In serving each other, they are serving Christ. This is the baseline commitment men and women must make to each other.

... be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

The gospel erases any hierarchy of value or worth between human beings (Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.). However, the gospel does not erase, minimize, or blur the distinctions between men and women which is affirmed in scripture.

Leviticus 18:22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Titus 2:1-3 You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. 2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. 3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

In the spheres of church and family, men and women are given roles whereby they can complement each other instead of competing. These roles do not come because of the fall, nor are they a hold-over from traditional patriarchy. Instead these roles come directly from the imprint of God's image on our souls.

²² Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church [in] all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

Ephesians 5:22-28

³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 11:3

Also: Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-2,7

Men and women both exercise dominion over the world, but they do so in uniquely masculine and feminine ways. While there is obvious overlap in these characteristics between men and women, and while

circumstances may demand that one play both roles (such as when one is a single parent), the scripture puts an emphasis on certain characteristics for each sex. Here is a summary:

- **Men affirm their masculinity when they: Lead, Love, Serve, Protect, Sacrifice**
1 Corinthians 11:3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.
1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.
1 Corinthians 16:13-14¹³ Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.
Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
Hebrews 12:4-9 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ...
1 Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
- **Women affirm their femininity when they: Submit, Respect, Support, and Nurture**
Proverbs 31:10-31
Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
Genesis 2:18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."
Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.
Ephesians 5:33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.
1 Timothy 3:11 In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do.
Titus 2:3-5 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Sin's Effect on Men and Women

Men and women are born with a sin nature, a propensity to selfishness, pride, and rebellion. The gospel tells us that both men and women are equally fallen and born into sin. Therefore, the ideas of women being the root of all temptation, or conversely "toxic masculinity", are foreign to the gospel. This corruption of the soul is passed down from generation to generation.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 51:5

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8

Sin brings to mankind a separation of body and soul (physical death) and opens the door for separation between our biology and our psychology (gender confusion). While many experience gender confusion at some point in their lives, it is most often a phase we move through in route to adulthood. Some struggle here more than others, but for all there is hope that God can redeem us and unify us body, soul, and spirit. However, a determined rejection of one's own sexuality and an attempt to change one's sex is an affront to the One who made us, and in fact does not actually change a person's DNA. Gender reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy cannot change a person's genetic make-up and therefore are simply cosmetic. Surgery does not correct the root of the problem, which is the heart.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Romans 5:12

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:8

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

Not only is our own sexual identity tainted by sin, but sin also bends men's and women's will against each other. In the Garden of Eden, the curse of sin is explained to the woman, Eve.

Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

Genesis 3:16

The woman's "desire" here is not a positive longing, but rather a destructive desire to possess and control (see how the same word for "desire" is used for sin crouching at the door in Genesis 4:7). The man's "ruling over" the woman is not describing positive leadership but abusive and oppressive dominance. Men and women were designed to live in complimentary relationships (not competitive) where they bring out the best in each other. Sin makes us bring out the worst in each other.

So internally our understanding of our own sexual identity as men and women is corrupted. Externally, our relationships with one another are also corrupted. We are in desperate need of redemption.

Redemption of Manhood and Womanhood

Only through a personal relationship with Christ can our identities and our relationships as men and women be healed and redeemed. Our primary identity becomes "Christo-centric," or centered on Christ (Philippians 1:21 "For me to live is Christ"). He redeems us out of sin's grasp so we can become more like him. This is the goal... to be like Christ.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. *Romans 12:1-2*

The Gospel and Sex

When the gospel is applied to our sexual relations, grace and tenderness set the tone, not a wounded withholding or insecure demanding. Sexually, men and women were designed to fit together for emotional and physical intimacy as well as procreation. This intimacy between a man and a woman is meant to be protected by a life-long commitment we call marriage. Sex is not merely a physical pleasure of today's "hookup culture". We don't "try out" someone sexually before we're married. Sex bonds us together spiritually with the one we are intimate with. One man, one woman, for a lifetime.

This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:24-25

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!¹⁶ Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh."

1 Corinthians 6:15-16

The gospel makes it clear that celibacy (remaining single and pure) is a good thing (notice verses 1 and 7 below). Men and women do not need a spouse to be complete as the Lord is the one who completes them. Simply in the way they live life in community with other men and women, they can reflect the beauty of God's design. However this lifestyle must never be commanded (I Timothy 4:3).

However for those who desire to be married, this too is a good thing. Men and women can complement and lift one another up in the Lord. Men and women can provide moral guardrails for their spouse by fulfilling their obligations for emotional and physical intimacy (notice verses 2-5), and joyfully mirror, in a much lesser way, the intimacy we will experience someday with Christ.

⁷ Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. ³ The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ But this I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷ Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Men, Women, and the Church

The collective church, God's body on earth, is made to be a beautiful demonstration of the "gospelized" man and woman, complementing each other for the glory of their Lord Jesus. It is in the church (I Timothy 2) and in the home (Ephesians 5) that God gives specific instructions about how men and women relate to one another in

a complementary way. It is difficult to find a better description of these roles than article 6 of the Danvers Statement put out by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW)

6. *Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.*

1. *In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership ([Eph 5:21-33](#); [Col 3:18-19](#); [Tit 2:3-5](#); [1 Pet 3:1-7](#)).*
2. *In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men ([Gal 3:28](#); [1 Cor 11:2-16](#); [1 Tim 2:11-15](#)).*

The church must also deal kindly and patiently with those who are struggling with sexual issues, providing a loving environment within which they can sort things out with the Lord.

Men and Women in Eternity

Because in Matthew 22:30 Jesus said there would be no marriage in heaven, some have argued that after we die, we lose our identities as male and female, but this is not what Jesus said. He said there would be no marriage in heaven, not there will be no gender in heaven. Our resurrected bodies will be “perfected” not neutered. In Luke 16:19-31 Abraham and Lazarus, both deceased and yet revealed in a vision, were recognized as men. In Matthew 17:1-13 when Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration they were referred to with male pronouns. Most convincingly Jesus’ resurrected body (the pattern for our resurrected bodies) was in the form of a man, not a neutered heavenly being. In Revelation 21-22 when it describes our condition in heaven, what is taken away is not our gender but rather the effects of sin. God’s ideal design for us will be revealed. Gone will be our wounds, our twisted identities, and our ability to hurt each other. We will worship, serve, and enjoy the Lord together as perfected men and women according to God’s intention.

In the future, men and women will both rule with Christ:

If we endure, we will also reign with Him... 2 Timothy 2:12

Addendum

The PBC Elders believe that the Danvers Statement of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) which is an overview of core beliefs on manhood and womanhood, aligns well with our understanding of scripture. This statement was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December of 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, Illinois in November of 1988.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

2. Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood ([Gen 1:26-27](#), [2:18](#)).
3. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart ([Gen 2:18](#), [21-24](#); [1 Cor 11:7-9](#); [1 Tim 2:12-14](#)).
4. Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin ([Gen 2:16-18](#), [21-24](#), [3:1-13](#); [1 Cor 11:7-9](#)).
5. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women ([Gen 3:1-7](#), [12](#), [16](#)).
 1. In the home, the husband’s loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife’s intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 2. In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
6. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women ([Gen 1:26-27](#), [2:18](#); [Gal 3:28](#)). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community ([Gen 2:18](#); [Eph 5:21-33](#); [Col 3:18-19](#); [1 Tim 2:11-15](#)).
7. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 1. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands’ authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands’ leadership ([Eph 5:21-33](#); [Col 3:18-19](#); [Tit 2:3-5](#); [1 Pet 3:1-7](#)).

2. In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men ([Gal 3:28](#); [1 Cor 11:2-16](#); [1 Tim 2:11-15](#)).
8. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin ([Dan 3:10-18](#); [Acts 4:19-20](#), [5:27-29](#); [1 Pet 3:1-2](#)).
9. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries ([1 Tim 2:11-15](#), [3:1-13](#); [Tit 1:5-9](#)). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
10. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world ([1 Cor 12:7-21](#)).

We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.