

**A Theology of the Body and Transgenderism**

By Ryan Pauly

## **My Goals for the Research**

This paper is the result of my research into gender and sexuality for my Doctor of Ministry degree in Engaging Mind and Culture at Talbot School of Theology. The scope is limited to a positive theological vision for our bodies and the cultural issue of transgenderism we now face as a result of the fall. I hope to expand on this research by adding additional arguments from transgender advocates and addressing practical questions related to gender like pronouns, hormone therapy, surgery, and relationships with transgender individuals in the family and church. The goal is to publish the project as a small booklet that can be given out to pastors, youth workers, and parents. One printing company has quoted \$5,000 to edit, design, and print the booklets. Please email [ryan@think-well.org](mailto:ryan@think-well.org) if you have practical questions or topics that you would like to see included, feedback on what you read below, or if you would like to contribute financially to the publishing of this research. Thank you!

## **Group Training Available**

Part of my research project was to identify a local issue related to transgenderism and propose a practical solution to help make it a little better. The issue I identified was youth workers not being able to confidently engage with questions related to gender identity and transgenderism. Many Christians want to love transgender students and treat them with dignity, but they don't know what that would look like. During my interviews, 50% of youth workers rated themselves as a level 3 (out of 5) or lower in feeling confident to talk about transgenderism with students. Not one youth worker felt completely confident in explaining what the Bible says about gender identity, and another youth worker said they avoid the topic when it comes up. 75% reported a level 3 or lower when asked if they felt comfortable responding to a student who shared their gender confusion. Because of these findings, I have created a training seminar for Christian educators and pastors to help them confidently and biblically respond to this issue. Email [speaking@think-well.org](mailto:speaking@think-well.org) for more information on having me out to your group.

## Introduction

Christians have a choice to make. Are we going to love people in the way that Jesus calls us to love, or are we going to fall to the pressures of society? Many in society do not just see the biblical views of sexuality and gender as simply wrong. Biblical morality is frequently seen as being sexist, oppressive, outdated, and in need of being discarded. Christians today who hold to biblical views of sexuality and gender are rendered “haters, bigots, and people who should be banished to the margins of polite society.”<sup>1</sup> Not only are biblical views not welcomed in the secular domain, but one-quarter of people who were raised in Christian homes and walked away cited the treatment and teachings about LGBTQ people as a factor in their decisions to leave the faith.<sup>2</sup> If Christians want to continue to hold to their convictions and keep from losing young people, we must think deeply about what Scripture says about our bodies and sexuality.

Unfortunately, both conservative and liberal Christians are susceptible to responding to this issue with simplistic slogans. Conservatives commonly respond to transgender people by saying: “God only made male and female!” “Find your identity in Christ!” “Carry your cross!” “Are you saying God made a mistake?” Liberals respond by saying: “God loves everyone!” “Don’t judge, lest you be judged!”<sup>3</sup> While these statements may have some truth, they miss the deeper revelation of God’s Word. In order to respond well, Christians must see transgender issues in light of the biblical metanarrative of creation, fall, and redemption. We must start by looking at God’s creation and his intention from the beginning. Next, we recognize that the Fall

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, eds., *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), 29.

<sup>3</sup> James K. Bailey and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 136.

has impacted the way that we think and behave in our current cultural moment. Finally, we take heart that this is not where the story ends. God has a plan to redeem his creation, and this includes our bodies. Seeing transgenderism along God's greater story will help us better love and care for hurting and struggling people in the way that Jesus has called us to do it.

### **Creation**

The creation account of Genesis 1 presents truths that inform our theology of gender and sexuality. Humans make their appearance in God's story from the very beginning and are uniquely created in his image. Genesis 1:27 states,

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.<sup>4</sup>

The verse not only states that all of mankind is made in God's image but it specifically references that God also created us male and female. This is the first mention of our biological sex and implies that males and females are distinct yet equal. "We're all bearers of the divine image, and we bear that image in the diversity of male and female flesh."<sup>5</sup> This distinction is not a biological accident or socially constructed but is of divine origin.<sup>6</sup> God had looked at his creation up to this point and called it "good," but divine image in male and female is called "very good."

Genesis 1:27 not only teaches that men and women are distinct and yet equal, but it also teaches that maleness and femaleness are physically grounded. Being made male and female is in reference to the physical creation and not a psychological determination. The account presents

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<sup>4</sup> All Scripture quotations will come from the ESV.

<sup>5</sup> Hiestand, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis in Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 12.

two biological sexes, not any other number. This indicates that sex is not a spectrum or continuum but a binary.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Christopher Yuan believes that “Genesis 1:27 conveys an undeniable connection between the image of God and the ontological categories of male and female.”<sup>8</sup> This means that male and female go to the very nature of our being and therefore cannot be socially constructed. This God-given biological category is highlighted by the command given to Adam and Eve in the next verse when God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28).

God created all things with an end goal or purpose in mind; a telos. Professor Nancy Pearcey says, “If nature is teleological, and the human body is part of nature, then it is likewise teleological. It has a built-in purpose, part of which is expressed as the moral law... A Christian ethic respects the teleology of nature and the body.”<sup>9</sup> This must prompt the question “Why has God designed men and women differently?” The different biological sexes determine the different genders and key gender roles. “That is, human males grow into men (and potentially husbands and fathers) and human females grow into women (and potentially wives and mothers).”<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1 clearly presents biological sex and our gender identity that is found in the body as a binary.

While the fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3 distorted God’s good creation, it did not erase the image of God or destroy God’s intended design for our gendered bodies. Notice the gendered distinction continues with the same language of being made male and female repeated

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<sup>7</sup> Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Bodies* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 52 and 54.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (New York: NY: Multnomah, 2018), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Rob Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution,” The Gospel Coalition, October 12, 2017, accessed October 1, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/responding-to-the-transgender-revolution/>.

in Genesis 5:2. Corruption continues to increase on the Earth to the point where God sends a flood to “make an end of all flesh” (Gen. 6:13). However, once the flood waters subside, we see God give Noah and his family the same command that was given in Genesis 1. God told them to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1). There was still a purpose for their sexed bodies and gender roles as they needed to repopulate the earth. Our bodies, created in the image of God, inform how we are to engage sexually with others.

A few verses later God commands them that they should not kill each other. Why? Because “God made man in his own image” (Gen. 9:6). This shows that the image of God was still in humans and provided a foundation for our intrinsic value. Our bodies, created in the image of God, inform us of how we are to treat each other.

We also see that our bodies inform the way that we express our gender identity. Deuteronomy 22:5 states “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” Austen Hartke, a transgender man, comments that we cannot take this verse strictly because it’s not possible in an era of global Christianity to expect different cultures that have contrasting ideas about gendered dress to all dress the same.<sup>11</sup> This is mistaken because it isn’t claiming that all Christians around the world have to dress in what a certain region declares proper clothing for males and females. Notice that what should be worn is not mentioned. As Professor Denny Burk comments, “What is specified is that no one should dress themselves in a way that obscures the sexual distinction between male and female. Where there are culturally encoded norms distinguishing the presentation of male and female, those norms are to be observed in order to

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<sup>11</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 92.

affirm the Creator's distinction between male and female."<sup>12</sup> Our bodies, created in the image of God, inform us of how we are to present ourselves to others.

Even Jesus assumes that God's created purpose for male and female is still at play and informs our view of marriage. Jesus is asked if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife in Matthew 19. Instead of pointing to the current laws and cultural ideas for his answer, Jesus points back to Genesis 1 and 2. He not only affirms that "the two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24), which is relevant to the question about divorce, but he goes back further to Genesis 1:27 when he responds, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" Jesus reaffirms the existence of the male/female binary and shows that it remains the basis on which marriage exists.<sup>13</sup> Gender cannot be a social construct if God created gendered beings before there was a society. In the words of Christopher West, "Whatever number of 'gender identities' the modern world may claim exists, Christ's teaching is definitive: 'at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female.'"<sup>14</sup> Our bodies, created in the image of God, continue to provide a foundation for marriage today.

Finally, the apostle Paul had a lot to say about God's design for our bodies. We read that we are awaiting the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). God does not plan to destroy our bodies because they have been utterly corrupted by the fall. Instead, he plans to redeem our bodies. This is "the untwisting of what sin has twisted so we can recover the true glory, splendor, and inestimable value of the body."<sup>15</sup> In another letter, Paul writes that our bodies are not meant for us but are meant for the Lord (1 Cor. 6:13). Our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.

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<sup>12</sup> Hiestand, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher West, *Our Bodies Tell God's Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 29.

<sup>15</sup> West, *Our Bodies Tell God's Story*, 9.

6:19), and we are called to glorify God in our bodies because we were bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). Our bodies are meant to be oriented toward God and used for him. “It is not spiritually irrelevant. It has a purpose that is found in service to God. He has a plan for our whole self, body included.”<sup>16</sup> Our bodies, created in the image of God, find their purpose in living for God.

For the transgender community, our identity is not found in our bodies. Our bodies do not determine who we are and should not contain us. It’s only the internal sense of identity that matters. Even in areas of Christian discipleship we have separated Christianity from our bodies.<sup>17</sup> It is not uncommon for Christians to narrowly assume that the Christian life is about our spiritual relationship with God and has nothing to do with our bodies. However, throughout all of Scripture, we see that our bodies are intrinsic to who we are. In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Paul uses “you” and “your body” interchangeably. “When people hurt your body, you know that they have not just damaged some of your property; they have violated you. What you do to someone’s body, you do to a person.”<sup>18</sup> Philosophers will disagree about whether we are embodied souls, ensouled bodies, or the union of body and soul, but one thing is clear, our bodies, created in the image of God, are central to our identity.

This broad overview of Scripture gives God’s purpose when he created male and female. We see that our biological reality has implications for our gender identity, gender expression, moral commands, marriage, and identity. When we engage with transgender individuals we

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<sup>16</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 41.



cannot stop here and neglect the middle and end of God's story. In light of God's grand story, our response must include God's created purpose but also the effects of the fall.

### **Fall**

God's story continues to unfold in Genesis 3. We are immediately given the account of humanity's fall into sin and the corruption of God's good creation, the true account of why we experience pain and suffering. As Sam Allberry writes, "God has given us a unique backstage pass into why this has happened and what it means. We should be able to make sense of it in a way that no one else can."<sup>19</sup> Not only can we make sense of the brokenness in our world, but our understanding of the fall should make Christians the most compassionate people. We should also remember our own fallen state and the judgment of God that we have been saved from. "In other words, as we engage others and mirror Jesus, we need to recall that there was a time when God was gracious to us while our backs were turned on him."<sup>20</sup> Our response must show a fuller grasp of the fall as we make sense of the world's brokenness.

One effect of the fall is to deny God's created order and God's truth revealed in Scripture. Christopher West says that if our bodies and sex proclaim the divine mystery (Eph. 5:32), then the enemy would have every reason to try and keep people from recognizing the mystery of God in their bodies.<sup>21</sup> Rather than seeing ourselves in a world that God created and conforming ourselves to his purposes, we begin to see ourselves as the ultimate author and creator of our lives. "It is increasingly easy to imagine that reality is something we can manipulate according to our own wills and desires and not something that we necessarily need to conform ourselves to or

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<sup>19</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Darrell Bock, *Cultural Intelligence: Living for God in a Diverse, Pluralistic World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 21.

<sup>21</sup> West, *Our Bodies Tell God's Story*, 18-19.

passively accept.”<sup>22</sup> When we deny God’s design for our bodies they instead become a barrier to living out our true selves.

When the true creator is rejected, then we lose the purpose for why everything was created. This leads our culture to reject what is called “freedom for,” or the freedom to do what you were created to do. Without a creator making you for a reason, then there is no “freedom for” but only “freedom from.” This is the type of freedom where we are free from constraints and restrictions. In other words, if our bodies were not created for a specific purpose, then the only freedom that matters is to be free from constraints, including the constraint of my body. The fall has misled our world into manipulating our bodies to serve our own purposes rather than aligning them with God’s intended plan.

This “freedom from” view also leads to the devaluing of our bodies. A culture whose people see their bodies as a barrier to personal freedom does not love their bodies. In her book *Love Thy Body*, Professor Nancy Pearcey writes “By contrast, Christianity assigns the human body a much richer dignity and value. Humans do not need freedom from the body to discover their true, authentic self. Rather we can celebrate our embodied existence as a good gift from God. Instead of escaping from the body, the goal is to live in harmony with it.”<sup>23</sup> One of our roles as believers is to help our loved ones see the value and goodness of the bodies that God created.

This failure to love our bodies has resulted in a negative self-image. One study from 2014 stated, “54 percent of women described themselves as ‘unhappy with their body,’ and 80 percent said that looking in the mirror “made them feel bad.”<sup>24</sup> This is why comments like “Do you

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<sup>22</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 41.

<sup>23</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 210-211.

<sup>24</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 85.

want to know what you are? Just look in a mirror” do not reflect the compassion that Christians should have. In the same way that you would never tell an anorexic teenager to simply look in a mirror to see the truth, we have to recognize that there are individuals who are truly unhappy with the bodies they see in the mirror. This creates what is called gender dysphoria, the conflict that occurs when a person’s perceived gender identity does not match their biological sex. This is a painful reality for many, and should not be taken lightly by Christians. In a secular view, when there is a dissonance between the mind and the brain the body is dismissed as irrelevant and the mind wins.<sup>25</sup> The Christian view should have a high view of the body and recognize that it is the mind that is mistaken. Similar to anorexia, the pain from the dissonance is real but the response must not ignore the physical body.

Transgender advocate Austen Hartke believes that the only proven remedy for dysphoria is to allow the transgender person to transition—“to allow the body and related social expectations to change to match the person’s brain.”<sup>26</sup> The problem is that this simply isn’t true. There are many people whose gender confusion desisted without transitioning. We know that close to 80 percent of children who experience gender confusion at a young age abandon their confusion as they pass through puberty.<sup>27</sup> Yet when children are encouraged in their new gender confusion and put on puberty blockers, almost 100 percent go on to transition and use cross-sex hormones.<sup>28</sup> This means that many children who would have abandoned their gender confusion and realigned with their biological sex are instead transitioning because of the intervention of

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<sup>25</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 195.

<sup>26</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Bailey, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (New York, NY: Regnery Publishing, 2020), 82.

adults. While short-term studies show that some people report higher levels of satisfaction after transitioning, it's clear that transitioning isn't the only proven remedy for dysphoria.

Rejecting God's design has left us in a state of cultural confusion. It begs the question that if biological sex is not used to define male and female, then what is? Psychologists Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky state that "online content may encourage vulnerable individuals to believe that nonspecific symptoms and vague feelings should be interpreted as gender dysphoria stemming from a transgender condition."<sup>29</sup> Gender identity is left to vague feelings and symptoms because it doesn't have any biological markers or measurable signs. It is a self-reported feeling. What are the feelings based on? They are based on rigid and socially constructed gender stereotypes. Austen Hartke had gender confusion because "I didn't fit into the roles that I was supposed to fit into."<sup>30</sup> Professor Nancy Pearcey shares the story of Jonah Mix, formerly a gender-nonconforming man, and makes the point, "If we are not men by our bodies, we are men by our actions... Do you act stereotypically masculine? Then you are a man. Do you behave in ways that are stereotypically feminine? You must be a woman. Ironically, queer theory actually reinforces rigid gender stereotypes."<sup>31</sup> What were previously sexist gender stereotypes have become the foundation of queer theory in understanding gender identity.

Jonah Mix goes on to say, "By contrast, 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."<sup>32</sup> This means that a man can engage in stereotypical

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<sup>29</sup> Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Today's Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 150.

<sup>31</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 198.

feminine behavior like cooking without treating his masculinity, and the same for women. The problem is not our bodies but the rigid gender stereotypes that cause individuals to doubt God's design for their bodies. I spoke to one middle school girl who told me that she identified as a boy. When I asked her reason for this identification she replied, "Because I like to play in the mud and chop down trees." What messages are being taught where girls don't think they can play in the mud or chop down trees? There are indeed traits that are more typical of women and others that are more typical of men. But as Sam Allberry puts it, "If, say, gentleness is more typical of women, it isn't equally true of all women to the same extent. And some men are gentler than some women. This does not mean that such men are in any way lacking in their masculinity; it simply reflects that we manifest the ninefold fruit of the Holy Spirit in differing proportions, between the sexes and within them."<sup>33</sup> The Fall has caused some individuals to see their bodies as a problem and others to create such narrow classifications for gender that there is no freedom to live in the unique way that God has created us to live.

Some transgender advocates claim that not all people are born male and female. While Genesis 1:27 says that God created male and female, Hartke claims that "this verse does not discredit other sexes or genders any more than the verse about the separation of day from night rejects the existence of dawn and dusk."<sup>34</sup> Hartke argues that Genesis 1 talks about God creating land and sea, but there are marshes and rivers. God created day and night, but there is dusk. Similarly, Hartke reasons that while God created male and female in the beginning, there are people between and beyond the binary.

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<sup>33</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 79.

The problem with this argument is that it commits a category fallacy. It assumes that since earlier categories are not a strict binary neither is the category of gender. We know that land and sea or light and dark come in a matter of degrees. It can be brighter and darker, drier and wetter. However, gender is not like this since it is a non-degreed property. Similar to the property of being even where every integer is either even or odd, and no integer is both or neither. Gender is either male or female, and you can't be both or neither. And just like you can't have one integer be more even than another, you can't have someone be more male than another. It's a property that you either have or you don't. Liberal sex researcher Dr. Debrah Soh confirms this when she says, "Humans are a sexually dimorphic species, with two types of gametes: eggs and sperm. Intermediate gametes don't exist. Since biological sex and gender are both defined by these parameters, gender is, by definition, like sex—either male or female; binary and not a spectrum."<sup>35</sup> While other parts of God's creation are not binary, God created gender and sex as a binary, and scientific research continues to support this conclusion.

What about those who are born intersex? Don't they prove that sex isn't binary? Such people clearly exist and we cannot act as if they don't. However, "the presence of intersex people represents a biological aberration rather than a biological norm or additional third biological sex."<sup>36</sup> Similar to how a person born without legs would not change our understanding of humans having legs, intersex individuals do not change our understanding of sex being binary. Dr. Soh believes it is better to define sex based on gametes and not chromosomes because there are only two types of gametes: small ones called sperm produced by males, and large ones called

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<sup>35</sup> Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York, NY: Threshold Editions, 2020), 71.

<sup>36</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 54.

eggs that are produced by females. Current research has not found someone whose body has been able to produce both types of gametes.<sup>37</sup>

Austen Hartke makes the case that eunuchs are an example of gender-expansive people in Scripture. Hartke says, “Throughout the Gospels Jesus never once heals a eunuch or uses eunuchs as a negative example.”<sup>38</sup> Eunuchs were men who had been castrated for a certain reason. Matthew 19:12 tells us that some eunuchs were born that way, some were made eunuchs by others, and some were made eunuchs themselves. The issue is that eunuchs were biological men who identified as men. Maybe they are gender-expansive because they do not fit into the strict gender boxes of queer theory, but they in no way make a case for transgenderism. “The duality exists, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that everything is straightforward, any more than the presence of biological irregularities doesn’t mean that God hasn’t made us male and female.”<sup>39</sup> The Fall has affected our bodies to where people are born different, but we are still made in the image of God as male or female.

What we see in this section is that the fall has disordered God’s good creation and left us to deal with a range of issues and objections. The reality is that life is not simple, and cultural issues are not always straightforward. At the same time, we have God’s word and his created order to reorient ourselves when sin has disoriented us. We also have the good news that our story does not end with the fall. God has initiated his redemption plan that will culminate in the restoration of all things.

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<sup>37</sup> Soh, *The End of Gender*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 143.

<sup>39</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 56.

## Redemption

The beauty of the Gospel is that God has not left us dead in our sins. Our bodies are currently in a state of decay, but Christ has come to redeem our bodies. The Gospel is not only good news for our souls, but it is good news for our bodies since we have a glorious physical future awaiting us. It is the resurrection of Jesus that will bring life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11), and until then, we will “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). Beth Felker Jones writes, “Either gendered bodies are a problem to be wiped away in redemption or they are an intrinsic part of that nature which God, in making all things new, will take up into grace.”<sup>40</sup> Our secular culture attempts to solve the transgender experience with only a temporary solution, and one that ultimately can not heal our brokenness. It is Christ and His restoration that will heal us for all of eternity.

The Gospel of Jesus will not only restore our bodies but is also focused on redeeming our desires, not repressing them. While many Christians present Christian moral living as a long list of “don’ts,” Christ instead points us to a better “yes!” Our culture promises immediate gratification through the indulgence of our desires, while the church often teaches what Christopher West calls the “starvation diet gospel.” This happens when there is no “why” behind the “what” and we only communicate that desires should not be satisfied. If only two options of either immediate gratification or a starvation diet are presented, it is clear why the culture’s view is winning over many people. The truth is that the starvation diet is far from the “living morality” that Christ proclaimed. “Christ didn’t come to repress our desires; he came to redeem our desires

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<sup>40</sup> Hiestand, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 24.



—to heal them, to redirect human hunger and thirst toward his eternal banquet of love.”<sup>41</sup> This is the beauty we can share with a starving world around us.

God’s plan of restoration is good for our world and it is good for us. Contrary to the secular view, following God is never dehumanizing. His plan includes what is best for us even though it may not seem that way in the moment. It can be helpful to keep this in mind when trying to persuade others of the Christian view. “The vision we set forth must be not only true and good but beautiful as well.”<sup>42</sup> Virtually all people are drawn to things that are true, good, and beautiful, and our message becomes that much more compelling when we can communicate how God’s plan fits this picture.

Finally, as transformed Christians who understand transgenderism within God’s big story, we should know that people are the goal, not the enemy. Austen shares that when people began to know him, it “helped them move from thinking about transgender people as an ‘issue’ to seeing us as human beings.”<sup>43</sup> We are engaging with human beings who are created by God, fallen, and in need of being redeemed. They are under the control of sin, and our struggle is ultimately against “the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). This should change how we view people struggling with gender confusion. “If I see the person across from me not as an enemy but as one who needs to be recovered, as lost and needing to be found, I will engage differently.”<sup>44</sup> This is how we are called to be part of God’s receptive plan until Christ returns.

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<sup>41</sup> West, *Our Bodies Tell God's Story*, xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Hiestand, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 198.

<sup>43</sup> Hartke, *Transforming*, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Bock, *Cultural Intelligence*, 14.

## **Conclusion**

Scripture is clear that God has created us as male and female for a purpose. Our bodies are not an accident but allow us to live and fulfill our divine calling. Our fall into sin did not erase God's design. The Image of God is still at work in us and provides an objective foundation for how we identify and live. This fallen world and our fallen bodies provide us with many challenges including body image issues, gender confusion, intersex people, and a misunderstanding of God's World. The hope is that Christ is in the process of redeeming all things and has called us to participate in his redemption work. This is the glorious task that awaits all believers.

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