

A Christian Critique of Transgenderism

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SEXUAL DYSPHORIA WAS RECOGNIZED and treated as a psychiatric disorder for many years. One of the first public cases was that of a tennis player by the male name of Richard Raskind, who transitioned to be Rene Richards in the mid-70s. In these classic cases, it was assumed that sexual dysphoria was indeed a disorder. There are still a small number of such persons suffering from that disorder, for whom Christians should show compassion and understanding.

However, what we are experiencing currently is something entirely different. A growing number of persons, centers, and proponents of transition are driven by a destructive and anti-Christian ideology that Christians must resist. The transgender movement is an “ism” capturing the minds and wills of an increasing number of young persons, even those who have not yet reached puberty. It is contagious among adolescents, especially girls, who are anxious and nervous about their sexual identity. Other young people have psychological and spiritual maladies that they think will be cured by transitioning toward the opposite gender and sex. Transgenderism—pushed by therapists, teachers, doctors, and other “experts”—persuades and cajoles those young people into making the first steps toward sexual transition. The movement even wants to invade children’s minds, a highly controversial and dangerous agenda eliciting political push-back. (The distinction between “transsexual” and “transgender” is now being collapsed for ideological reasons, but it is yet an important one. Transgenders aim at playing the role of the opposite sex without physical change, while transsexuals aim at both role-playing and physical change.)

While there may be some “successful” transitions (gender and sex), most, to say the least, are ambiguous. Even the successful ones give up the person’s fertility and their ability to express sexual love to the opposite sex and, in many cases, give up their sexual organs themselves, with ugly and inadequate surgical substitutes. There is also a good deal of disapproval of their choice and their looks by strangers and friends alike. Many people view them as freaks, some of whom react violently to them. This precariousness leads to high rates of depression and suicide. A portion even tries to re-transition to their original sex/gender.

One could account for this growing negative trend by merely recognizing that societies of high affluence and false notions of freedom (license rather than virtue-guided freedom) tend to experience a degeneration of wholesome values. Christians know that freeing selves from training in virtue will result in decay and chaos. However, a more detailed analysis might be offered by Carl Trueman's celebrated book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Trueman traces the intellectual lineage that finally results in the triumph of "expressive individualism," which means a life of "authenticity" in which the internal desires and definitions of the self are expressed onto the surrounding world. Disapproving such expression is "hate" speech and violates the individual's freedom. Expressive individualism is particularly regnant in the realm of sexual identity and behavior, though with an emphasis on the former. Thus, we have sexual and gender fluidity, wherein each individual expresses his or her gender identity. The epitome of such expression occurs in sexual and gender transition. It is so extreme that it sometimes entails changing sexual organs to conform to that internal sense of identity.

Christians should oppose transgenderism simply because of the harm done to young people and society. That harm to body and spirit certainly involves a high incidence of suicide but also the danger of psychological abuse and even physical attack. Further, there is a broader harm done to the society. When a significant portion of young people obsess about their sexual identity, it undermines many essential social practices: marriage, having children, and participating in voluntary activities. Self-obsession also undermines other concerns and care.

On a deeper theological plane, transgenderism is a rebellion against the God-given sexual order. Male and female he created them, and Christians happily accept and embrace what has been given, not what is "assigned" at birth. It is a serious sin to refuse one's sex if the desires of the expressive self generate that refusal. If the transgender condition is a psychiatric fixed disorder, then it is not so much a sin as it is a tragedy and should be met with patience and compassion. But such a disorder would disallow such persons from occupying important positions in the church.

Further, transgenderism as an ideology and movement encourages persons to have contempt for the body given to them by the Lord. The imperial self rises above the given natural body of the person and manipulates it according to the self's desires. Such a claim to mastery is a sin of pride and has Gnostic reverberations: The physical world is inferior to our spiritual and intellectual capacities and can be manipulated—and transcended—by them.

People who follow transgenderism's ideological agenda can end up as transsexuals, people who have destroyed their given sexual organs and capacities. Such self-mutilation is a sin against the giftedness of our bodies as created in

the image of God, which in turn prevents natural love-making, marriage, and procreation. It refuses our calling to marriage, one of God's routes to purpose and service to the neighbor.

All in all, transgenderism as a movement and an ideology should be resisted by Christians on theological-ethical grounds. It is incompatible with a Christian theology of the body. Going against God's created order will lead to great harm for individuals and society.

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