

STANDING FIRM TOGETHER ON GENDER

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Matthew 19:4-6

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

A few years ago all of this was taken for granted, but today the binary nature of gender ('male and female created he them') is under serious and concerted attack. New terms like transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender-neutral, agender, non-gendered, and gender non-conforming have emerged to describe those who identify somewhere other than in the designations of male and female. One website lists 112 genders and 70 sexual orientations

One concerning place where a new view of gender is being promoted is with children in the Safe Schools program. Promoted as being an anti-bullying program it contains a deliberate ideology designed to break down the 'male and female' view of humanity. This in turn erodes the centrality of the biological family.

Children are taught that if you don't like the sex you are born with, you can change it. In a curriculum story for four year-olds, entitled *The Gender Fairy*, pre-schoolers are told, 'Only you know whether you are a boy or a girl. No one can tell you'. If you are a boy who doesn't like wearing the boys' uniform, you can wear the girls' one. The girls' and boys' toilet rule is loosened to allow gender-questioning children to use the toilets of their choice. Teachers are encouraged to introduce discussion about gender in every aspect of school life, and children are actively discouraged from regarding heterosexuality as normative. Asking the usual question about whether a new-born baby is a boy or a girl is discouraged as "heteronormative", and terms like 'boys and girls' are considered non-inclusive.

Someone who has become concerned about the new views on gender is Dr Paul McHugh of Baltimore who, out of his extensive experience in the field, has published a paper entitled *Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme*. Here is a selection of quotes from his paper:

For forty years as the University Distinguished Service Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical School—twenty-six of which were also spent as Psychiatrist in Chief of Johns Hopkins Hospital—I've been studying people who claim to be transgender. Over that time, I've watched the phenomenon change and expand in remarkable ways.

...The idea that one's sex is fluid and a matter open to choice runs unquestioned through our culture and is reflected everywhere in the media, the theatre, the classroom, and in many medical clinics...It is doing much damage to families,

adolescents, and children and should be confronted as an opinion without biological foundation wherever it emerges.

...The champions of this meme, encouraged by their alliance with the broader LGBT movement, claim that whether you are a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, is more of a disposition or feeling about yourself than a fact of nature.

...At Johns Hopkins, after pioneering sex-change surgery, we demonstrated that the practice brought no important benefits. As a result, we stopped offering that form of treatment in the 1970s. Our efforts, though, had little influence on the emergence of this new idea about sex, or upon the expansion of the number of “transgendered” among young and old.

...The most thorough follow-up of sex-reassigned people—extending over thirty years and conducted in Sweden, where the culture is strongly supportive of the transgendered—documents their lifelong mental unrest. Ten to fifteen years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to twenty times that of comparable peers.

...Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men. All...become feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they “identify.” In that lies their problematic future.

Speaking of the professional help available for children suffering from gender dysphoria Dr Hughes laments:

The grim fact is that most of these youngsters do not find therapists willing to assess and guide them in ways that permit them to work out their conflicts and correct their assumptions. Rather, they and their families find only “gender counselors” who encourage them in their sexual misassumptions.¹

Dr Ray Blanchard, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, best known for his research studies on paedophilia, transsexualism, and sexual orientation, has created an expression which he calls “autogynephilia”—from gynephilia (attracted to women) and *auto* (in the form of oneself). Autogynephilic transsexuals are men who are sexually attracted to women, but whose sexual interest makes them want to go farther and permanently change their bodies to become the objects of their attraction. Strangely, rather than being ‘a woman trapped in a man’s body’, these heterosexual men are attracted to the feminine because they are men. Unfortunately, the attraction, for whatever reason, has been turned inwards.

Among woman who have sought to transition to being men, an unusual phenomenon is occurring. A significant number of these trans-men (as they are called) still wish to give birth to their own child. In the September 12, 2016 issue of TIME magazine, Jessie Hempel shared about her ‘brother’ Evan who was born a woman. Evan wanted to have a child so s/he paused ‘his’ testosterone treatment long enough to give birth to a son. This s/he was able to do with the full cooperation and encouragement of the reproductive professionals he consulted. Evan’s sister Jessie spoke with Dr Harvey J. Makadon, a Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. She asked Dr Makadon:

¹ Dr Paul McHugh, *Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme*.
<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145/>

Just how many trans people have given birth? ...He couldn't even guess, but he said he expected to see the numbers rise based on the increasing number of trans patients coming to the clinic. Fenway currently sees more than 2,000 of them, a figure that has doubled in less than a decade. He said that, as he visits hospitals across the country, he hears a lot of stories about health providers treating pregnant trans men. "There's more of it than we know, that people aren't tracking," he told me. "There's a lot of people just doing it."²

In the eyes of these professionals and the would-be parents two things are clear:

- The desires and aspirations of the adult eclipse the needs of the child.
- To the professionals and patients alike gender plays no significant part in ideal parenting.

Compassionate or insane?

The question needs to be seriously asked, 'Are Western societies becoming more caring and inclusive, or are they going insane?' One use of the word 'insanity' is being unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. The separation of 'gender' from biological sex seems to stray into such a fantasy. Laws are being constructed in Western societies which allow for the changing of one's birth certificate to record one's 'gender identity' rather than one's biological gender at birth. In some instances, these laws allow a person to do this without undergoing any gender reassignment surgery. In similar fashion birth certificates are being produced which, instead of recording a person's actual biological 'mother' and 'father', record one biological parent as 'parent 1' plus another person who is in relationship with the parent at the time of birth as 'parent 2'. All of this suggests a trend to create a preferred, parallel world alongside the facts of the situation. Dr David van Gend in his recently published book, *Stealing from a child, the injustice of marriage equality*, argues against this dangerous unreality. He calmly reasons with us:

We must cling to sanity in these culturally surreal times and that means clinging to nature. By the standard of nature, a human being with male chromosomes and genitalia is a male no matter what other traits he exhibits...He is male if he is an effete poet or a heavy weight boxer. He is male if he wants to play with dolls rather than trucks. He is male if he is sexually attracted to men rather than women...That is where gender realists part ways with gender gnostics: we accept that we are defined by nature while affirming the vast variety of ways to be male; they do not accept that we are defined by nature and insist the identities of male or female or genderqueer or agender are fluid and free and all in our mind.

Van Gend continues:

When we sit with a gender-confused child, gender realism sounds like tough love while gender gnosticism sounds compassionate. But it is false compassion to affirm a gender-confused boy in his mistaken assumption that he is a girl; he is not, he is an effeminate boy—and we still love him. Tough love requires understanding the sources of his confusion, helping heal any emotional wounds, keeping him company as he finds his way through puberty—at which time most young people get over their confusion.

² Jessie Hempel, *My Brother's Pregnancy and the Making of a New American Family*, <http://time.com/4475634/trans-man-pregnancy-evan/>

...And it is a capitulation to craziness to buy the idea that boys and girls are “socially constructed” and therefore we should make girls play with trucks and boys play with dolls to overcome society’s gender stereotyping. We are mammals, and nobody suggests the differences between stag and doe are socially constructed. We are male and female, equal but different. The abolition of male and female is a sinister enterprise that will eventually fail, because nature says it must. But it will do grave damage to our children and our culture before it is tossed on the scrap heap of inhuman ideologies.³

Society has a duty of care to note that wherever children are taught that they can choose their gender, the incidence of gender dysphoria (the sense of being the wrong gender) increases enormously. Where human beings are offered the option of being a member of the other gender, this advertised possibility generates an aspiration in some to take up that option, and desire develops into a longing which demands to be realised. On the other hand, if human beings understand that gender is a given, that it is actually impossible to become a person of the other gender, and that any attempt to do so will only be cosmetic and imitational, the great majority choose to accept the authenticity of their given gender, rather than the difficult and illusory process of ‘gender reassignment’.

For those whose gender dysphoria is so strong that they feel compelled to live as a ‘transgender’ person, it is important that the information given to them reflects the realities and difficulties of living contrary to their given gender. Such people deserve compassionate understanding tempered with realistic information and advice. There is a danger that these unfortunate people may become pawns in a game of engineering society according to revisionist gender theory. If they choose to undergo gender reassignment surgery, they require long term follow-up that takes into account the high incidence of suicide in post transition people.

Short-term gain, long-term pain

When there is ferment for change that is away from a long-established wisdom, it is often promoted by idealising a short term ‘good’—if we do *this*, it will reduce the incidence of *that*. For example, if we introduce the Safe Schools program into our schools it will reduce the incidence of bullying of LGBTI people and help those children who are suffering from gender dysphoria.

But a perceived short term gain can often obscure much greater long term losses. The normalising of homosexual acts and relationships, the fundamental alteration of the nature of marriage, the affirmation of single gender parenting, and the deconstruction of gender are all being idealised as solutions to minority problems. It is my belief that they will create far bigger majority problems for human society. Altering the created good, and amending the commandments of God, in order to effect a perceived advantage is the sad theme of Genesis chapter 3 and following. The outcomes of this process have never been beneficial in the long run, and have opened the proverbial ‘Pandora’s box’. As Hosea warns, ‘they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind’ (Hosea 8:7).

³ Dr David van Gend, *Stealing from a Child—the injustice of marriage equality*, p.178-180

Teaching ‘gender fluidity’ to children has the perceived, short term benefit of making a very small minority of children feel better about themselves, but has the long term effect of an exponential rise in the number of children entering gender clinics and, sadly, undertaking gender reassignment therapy. Coincidental to the role-out of the Safe Schools program in Victoria, the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne has reported an increase in cases of transgender confusion in children from one case in 2003 to around 200 cases in 2015. This could be seen as a good thing—children are now getting the help they need—until you realise that, of children wanting to be a person of the other gender, over 80% grow out of these feelings after puberty. But no one in the gender clinic will tell them that, or warn them about how difficult and unsatisfactory gender reassignment is.

Let us now explore two motivations behind the gender revolution.

1. Removing ‘gender violence’

Daniel Patterson is an Australian evangelical Christian studying gender for a PhD at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He gives some helpful insights into one motivation for breaking down society’s understanding of gender. He points out that to queer theorists, ‘queer’ does not mean homosexual, or effeminate, or even weird. Rather, queer is a stance of rebellion against gender norms that are perceived as oppressive and violent.

Gender is (seen as) a harmful institution because it frames society’s social subjects according to a particular set of norms. The queer theorist’s goal, therefore, is to break down the institution of gender by undermining the norms that constitute it. It is for this reason that queer theorists target norms.

...By calling gender a constructed and an enforced myth, and exposing the violent nature of it...gender as bio-logical is slowly undermined—queered. Through queering gender, we learn that man and woman may be something other than that which we have always been *told* our bodies naturally tell us. Politically, the body loses its inherent significance, thereby relinquishing its capacity to tell society how each member of society should understand him or herself, and how each should act socially and sexually.

Patterson points out how queer theory has influenced medical views and language about gender.

The most recent revision of the Diagnostics Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which is the most prominent medical resource used by the medical profession to identify psychological disorders, renames Gender Identity Disorder as Gender Dysphoria ...The change in *language* is an attempt to distance the diagnosis from the notion of disorder, with the thought that the term “dysphoria” would better characterise the feelings of those affected, thereby reducing the attached stigma (violence). A cursory inquiry shows that the name change is not simply relabelling, but a substantial reconfiguring of how gender is conceived.

In the DSM-V, terminology has been revised to disconnect gender from biological sex. One no longer has a “sex”, but an “assigned gender” ... The issue then is not whether one’s perceived gender is congruent with one’s biological sex, but whether one’s perceived gender is congruent with the gender one was assigned at birth. The possibility enabled by the revision becomes clear: if gender is assigned, then gender can be *reassigned*. The term “assign” is a metaphor that renders

gender (boy/girl) identification at birth *provisional* pending either confirmation or replacement at a later stage.⁴

So often the Uniting Church seems to adopt automatically the world's innovations without any theological reflection. For example, when registering for the QLD Synod Meeting this year, participants were asked to indicate their Gender as one of the following: Male, Female, or Other.

Patterson concludes,

...If gender as bio-logical is a myth then the changes made to the DSM-V would seem appropriate. If, however, gender is not a socially constructed myth, then the theorisation behind the language change in the DSM-V, as well as the language found in the Safe Schools Coalition program, inaccurately and inadequately describes and treats the kinds of gender and sexuality confliction that characterises human bodies.

2. Using the deconstruction of gender as a political tool

At first sight gender may not seem to have much to do with political agendas. However, those who have aspired to control a nation with unassailable power have long known that there are two institutions which stand in their way. These are the Christian church and the biological family. Totalitarian revolutionaries and regimes have therefore sought to persecute and marginalise the church and to undermine the strength and influence of the family. From Marx and Engels writing their Communist Manifesto, to the so-called Frankfurt School coming to America from Germany in the late 1930s and fostering what they called 'the sexual revolution', to Ros Ward the Marxist in La Trobe University founding the Safe Schools Coalition. The common thread is to manipulate society by undermining its sexual and gender structure, thus breaking down marriage and the biological family, and eroding the authority and influence of parents in the lives of their children. It sounds like a fantastic conspiracy theory, but each of these movements is real and well documented.

Many in Australia are amazed at how rapidly these objectives are being realised. It starts to make sense when you realise that they are being fanned along by well planned and executed movements that have deep historical roots and sinister designs. Many advocates of same sex marriage and genderfluidity would have no idea that what they are seeking aids and expresses these political agendas.

Now let us take a change of tack, from looking at what is happening and critiquing it, to looking at the biblical view of gender. And, dare I say, let us celebrate that view.

Four things from the Bible about gender:

1. Gender is God-given.

The old saying is that 'You can't choose your relatives'. They are a given. If there's one thing the modern world doesn't like, it is a given. People say, 'No one tells me what to be. I do the choosing', and 'You can be whatever you want to be.'

⁴ Daniel Patterson, *A Brief History of Gender and its Significance*, 'Essentials' magazine Spring 2016.

Gender, however, is an ontological given, which we do not choose. As someone has quipped, God has split the Adam, creating man in his own image, male and female (Genesis 1:26), giving one expression of humanness to men and the other corresponding expression to women. While men and women can have characteristics in common with the other gender, we can't have it all in ourselves. By God's design the other half of humanness is to be experienced through personal relationship. Part of accepting the authority of God is accepting the gender He has given you. God, your Creator, has made you who you are, a man, or a woman.

Trying to buck your gender is a bit like trying to defy the law of gravity. The law of gravity is a given, and it is futile to say, 'Gravity? Oh, that's OK for other people, but it's not for me'. My uncle tried that when he was a boy. He jumped off the shed roof and tried to fly. You might say that gravity made quite an impact on him that day!

While there are a very small number of people whose gender is indefinite (one research figure is about one in 5,000)⁵ the rest of us are either male or female. There are some who feel they should be a person of the other gender and they take extra-ordinary steps to undergo 'gender reassignment'. However, each cell of their bodies retains its original chromosome make-up: XY (male) or XX (female). Such people have to be content in knowing that they have not really changed gender, but are living as a person of the other gender. This transition, as we have seen, often turns out to be more difficult and less satisfying than they expect because of the ontological given-ness of their birth gender. Even in the womb male and female chromosomes and hormones are influencing the development of the brain.

In the end we find that God-given gender assignment is authentic and good, but man-made gender reassignment is illusory and unsatisfactory.

2. Human gender is a glorious gift of God

In my opinion the most beautiful thing in this world is a woman. I'm not talking about Marilyn Monroe or Kylie Minogue. I'm talking of woman as she is within the matrix of family and humanity as a whole. In Revelation 12 we read that a great sign appeared in heaven: 'a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars'. The woman is Israel and the stars in her crown are her children. She is engaged in an intense battle with the evil one as she gives birth to the Christ-child. Every mother knows about the great battle she has with the evil one who desires to destroy her children. In the Scriptures woman is not a sex object. Nor is she a mimicker of men. Rather she is the great 'mother' and nurturer, whether of her own children or of all children. Nor does mothering exhaust her great qualities for she has so many other gifts as well.

⁵ Current research indicates that the incidence of truly intersex people is .018%, or about one in 5,000. (Leonard Sax, *Journal of Sex Research*, , 39, no3, 2002: p174-8.)

Likewise, true manhood is not expressed in personal prowess, ambition, power and sexual conquest (macho-man). In contrast to this false man, we see Jesus Christ, the true man, who dedicates his life and lays it down for his bride, the church (Ephesians 6:25-27). Man's true courage is not expressed in 'biffo' and bravado, but in his strong and steadfast defence of truth and right, and in his courageous and sacrificial protection of women and children. Just as God protected His wife Israel and her child, the Messiah, from the red dragon in Revelation 12, so man, as God's servant, finds his true vocation, as Jesus sacrificially did, in protecting the woman and her holy seed from the destroying designs of Satan. This God-given manhood can be exercised even if a man does not have a wife or children of his own.

The wonderful thing about God's gift of gender is that you don't have to try to be a man; you are one for God has made you one. And you don't have to try to be a woman, you are one for God has made you one. And there is room for diversity in gender; the delicate man is still a man, and the tomboy girl is still a girl. We are not talking here about rigidly imposed cultural stereotypes.

3. Gender is about gentilis (i.e. family)

Gentilis is the Latin word for clan or family. We get our word 'gentle' from *gentilis*, so a gentleman is a family man, not just a knock about bloke. The Gentiles are the families or tribes of the earth.

Gender, marriage and sexual intercourse do not make sense, in the creation of humanity, apart from the family and its generations. Together with St Paul, we bow our 'knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Ephesians 3:14-15). The primary desire of God, as our heavenly Father, is to have many children and to bring 'many sons (and daughters) to glory' in his eternal family (Hebrews 2:10). By God's design, then, a father brings something rich to his children's lives which is more than just being 'parent 1', and a mother brings so much more than just being 'parent 2'.

To understand yourself as a human being you have to hold two realities in tension: on the one hand, you are a discrete individual person that you know as 'me'. But, like the members of the Trinity, you are not an individual in isolation. Rather you are a person within the matrix of a family and community, and gender is about family. As a man I am part of a human family as son, brother, husband, father, and grandfather. Likewise, a woman is part of a human family as daughter, sister, and possibly wife, mother, and grandmother. In a lovely sense, every man is a brother to all women, and every woman is a sister to all men. In each of these relationships love takes a unique and appropriate form—husband-wife love is different to parent-child love which is different to brother-sister love, and so on. In the Scriptures we are exhorted to model our relationships generally on the primary family relationships.

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:1-2

Every good man is like a father to all children, and every good woman is like a mother to all children. St Paul loved his younger fellow workers as sons in the Lord, and he acknowledged that Rufus's mother had been a mother to him also (Romans 16:13).

4. Gender leads us to God's grace

So much of our sense of inadequacy arises from our perception of ourselves as a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and so much of our failure and consequent guilt comes from our family life as a son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, or as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother.

The problem for us all is that sin has messed, both biologically and socially, with our powers of manhood and womanhood. We have all been raised in a society abounding in false images of what it means to be a man or a woman, and Western culture and its media constantly bombard us with overtly sexual, and distorted gender, images. We live with accusing caricatures of men and lewd caricatures of women, and we participate in the spoken and unspoken antipathy that exists between the sexes. Manhood and womanhood are deeply floored in family relationships, scarring the gender development of children.

Consequently, although there is a divinely inspired glory about manhood and womanhood, every man and every woman has sinned and falls short of that glory (Romans 3:23). Therefore, every human being is in a similar situation:

We all have a recurring desire to do what is contrary to God's stated will.

We all experience a desire to do what feels good and seems right, but isn't.

We all have urges that are difficult or impossible to control in our own strength.

We all experience misunderstanding and judgemental attitudes from other people about our personal struggles.

And we all know condemnation within ourselves because of our failures.

In all of this we can easily assume that God is against us and condemns us.

It would be nice to report some miraculous fix that can resolve all our gender issues and struggles. While many can testify to divine healing in this area of their lives, others find that God's grace is expressed in another way. Dr Mark Yarhouse, the Chair and Professor of Psychology at Regent University in Virginia, is an experienced gender therapist and an evangelical Christian. He observes in his book, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*,

...many people who know and love Christ have besetting conditions that have simply not resolved as a result of their belief in Christ as their Saviour. Indeed, it may very well be that it is in the context of these enduring conditions that God brings about greater Christlikeness.⁶

Daniel Patterson shows us what Christian grace is, and is not, in dealing with gender struggles.

⁶ Yarhouse p. 148.

...the Adam and Eve pre-fall ideal is not to be the measure by which some “perfect” humans are able to judge others who transgress God’s intentions for human life. Rather, the Adam and Eve ideal reveals that we all fall short of God’s intention for a flourishing gendered and sexual existence revealing the universal need to encounter Jesus, to receive his mercy and grace, and to embrace the call to live as God intends.

St Paul shared with the Corinthians that he struggled over a long period with ‘a thorn’ in his flesh. The Greek word for ‘flesh’ is *sarx*, so in college we used to say that Paul had a prickle in his sarks. It is part of human life that we all have at least one prickle in our *sarx*, our flesh, which God has chosen not to remove. But God’s word to Paul is His word to us all.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

The sufficiency of God’s grace means that we can trust His power at work in us as a man or as woman.

Standing firm on gender

The person struggling with gender issues, and the church that is trying to help them, share together a common battlefield. To the right of them are the “Shape up or ship out” religious zealots, and to the left of them are political revolutionaries who wish to use gender dysphoric people in their political objectives to deconstruct marriage, family and society, and to construct a new world order; an order created by them, not by God. Waiting ahead of us on this field are professional therapists who have a quite different view of gender to the biblical one, and whose remedies are radical and irreversible.

Those who take a stand on this highly contested battlefield in the name of Christ will need to steer a grace-course of understanding and compassion, balanced with honesty that is faithful to the biological realities and to the will of God.

History has repeatedly shown that, in the end, both the religious zealots and the political revolutionaries fail to bring in the kingdom they so fervently promise and promote, and the medical interventionists create more side-effects than they advertise. Divine grace, on the other hand, is the effective interaction of God’s necessary judgements on all that is contrary to His will, and His mercy toward all who entrust themselves to His saving work. The prophet Isaiah expresses for us the good news which is the biblical word of God’s grace.

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him. Isaiah 30:18

Rod James

November 2016

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