

Whole in Christ: Gender and Sexual Identity in Gospel Perspective

The pace of change in social attitudes and legal frameworks in the West concerning gender identity and sexuality has been breath-taking. Faced with the changing context and the allegation that the Church has oppressed LGBTI people simply because of who they are, how should Christians respond? This session will seek to understand fairly the ideas behind this massive cultural shift, to develop a positive, Christ-centred, biblical vision of gender and sexuality, and to suggest principles for speaking and acting with grace and truth around these issues.

Paul Coulter is a native of Lisburn, Northern Ireland, where he lives with his wife, Gar-Ling, and their two children. He has just taken up position as Head of Ministry Operations with Living Leadership, whose aim is to grow leaders who are captivated by the gospel of God's grace. Previously he has worked as a medical doctor, a cross-cultural pastor with Chinese Christians in Belfast, a youth worker and director of equipping in a large suburban church, and a lecturer in practical theology in Belfast Bible College, where he taught a range of subjects including discipleship, leadership, pastoral care, evangelism and apologetics. His academic studies have focused on multiculturalism and the Church and church planting in post-Christian Northern Ireland. He has written several articles for BeThinking.org and speaks and writes regularly on the Christian mind and contemporary culture, especially relating to ethical issues. He is a Council member for Evangelical Alliance UK and an associate of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission.

I. The theory

A. Clarifying the issues

1. Beyond binary? The 'Genderbread Person'
2. What is the evidence? A Medical Perspective
3. How did we get here? A Historical Perspective
4. Where are we going? Future prospects
5. What does it mean? Worldview and values beneath the issues

B. The good news about gender and sexuality: A Gospel Perspective

1. God rules – the goodness of humanity, sex and sexuality in creation
2. We rebelled – sins of belief and behavior
3. God rescues – forgiveness and new life in Christ
4. We respond – repentance, faith and obedience
5. God restores – help from the Spirit in the now and not yet

II. The Outworking

A. In pastoral practice

1. Find the sheep – **S**tart where people are
2. Know the sheep – **S**eek understanding beyond labels
3. Introduce the Chief Shepherd – **S**hare the whole gospel
4. Green pastures and still waters – **S**upport faithfulness in community

B. In Church organisation

1. Limits to fellowship?

a. In the congregation – consistent church discipline

b. Between congregations – oneness in truth

2. Church and State

a. Marriage

b. Charitable status

Suggested Readings:

Allberry, Sam (2013) *Is God Anti-Gay?* Good Book Company.

Coulter, Paul. 'Gender Identity' and 'Christian Sexual Ethics' available online at: www.paulcoulter.net/ethics

Harrison, Glynn (2017) *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing*. IVP

Roberts, Vaughan (2016) *Transgender*, Talking Points. Good Book Company.

Shaw, Ed (2015) *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction*. IVP