

A Christian Understanding of Sex and Gender

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Worldview Affects Our Understanding of Sex & Gender

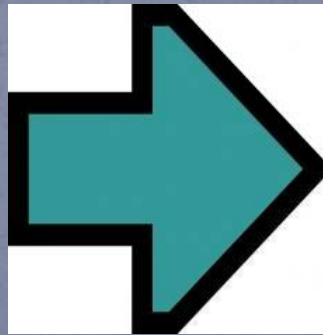
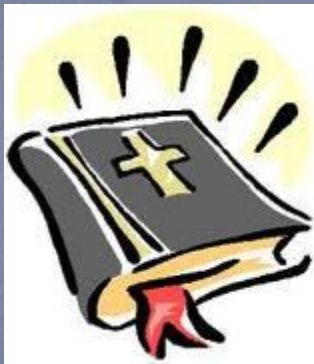


What is a worldview?

- A community's fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality, God, ethics, knowledge, values, and human beings
- Includes beliefs about normal and abnormal, maturity ideals, and values about life's greatest goods and what makes life worthwhile
- Worldview (WV) beliefs are usually implicit and cannot be proven to be true to members of other WV communities

The Recent Conversion/Revolution of the West

- During the 19th and early 20th century, many intellectual leaders in Western culture experienced a conversion from a Jewish or Christian WV to a secular humanist WV, a massive cultural shift the Christian sociologist, Christian Smith (2003), called a “secular revolution.”



What are the assumptions of the secular humanist WV?

- Reality is composed solely of natural entities and processes, so there is no God. However, humans have unique properties and rights (Vaughn & Dacey, 2003) Some of its values:
- Mature humans are *self-determining* and *autonomous* individuals (Taylor, 1991) and should be free to become whatever they desire, so long as they do not infringe on the freedom of others or endanger themselves or others
- *Authenticity* is being true to oneself, and this is one of humanity's greatest goods and virtues (Taylor, 1991), and is required for human flourishing. Being true to oneself includes being honest about one's desires and pursuing them as one wishes.
- When society has oppressed and prevented people from pursuing their legitimate desires, it has an ethical obligation to expose and punish the wrong and celebrate those who were oppressed and help them flourish (Taylor, 1991; Vaughn & Dacey, 2003)

What are the assumptions of the Christian WV?

- Humans are created by the triune God in his image and for his glory (Gen 1:26-27; Is 43:7; Edwards, 1989)
- So, the greatest human goods and virtues are to love God supremely and others as ourselves, as we seek to resemble God's character and fulfill his design plan for human life, with increasing devotion and transparency before him (Bavinck, 1956; Johnson, 2007; Kierkegaard, 1848/1980).
- However, because of sin, humans are alienated from God, other humans, and themselves, often made worse by the suffering and biopsychological damage of a fallen world (Bavinck, 2006; Johnson, 2017)
- The gospel tells us that God personally made reconciliation with him possible, through faith in Christ, which is intended to promote human authenticity and flourishing by reducing one's relational and internal conflicts now, and forever in heaven (Bavinck, 2006; Johnson, 2017)

What is the difference between sex and gender?

- Most higher organisms, including humans, are divided fundamentally into two sexes: male and female. Sex is more objective than gender, and among mammals it refers to biological and psychological characteristics that distinguish the two sexes, including sex chromosomes, male and female anatomy, and sexual arousal related to reproduction and nursing of young
- Gender is more subjective, pliable, and socially and culturally influenced and refers to the actions, roles, expectations, and expressions of the two sexes

How does a Secular Humanist Worldview Enable People to Understand Sex and Gender

- Most non-Christians in Western culture believe that same-sex attraction and transgender feelings are solely biologically caused, and its values of self-determination, autonomy, and authenticity dictate that people should be free to pursue whatever sexual and gender feelings they wish, so long as that pursuit does not violate the rights and legitimate desires of others.
- As a result, it seems cruel and tyrannical to be against people being true to their personal sexual desires or gender feelings and simply loving whoever they wish however they wish

Christianity teaches that God's design plan for human beings includes some sex and gender norms

- Being male and female is intrinsic to the image of God (Gen 1:26-28), and therefore following God's design plan in these areas is key to human flourishing



- Why does God's design plan include sex and gender norms?
 - To picture his covenant relationship with his people (Eph 5:20-31)
 - To promote families and having children
 - To build Christian virtue, when tempted to live outside God's design plan

Sex and gender disorder has two main causes: biological damage and human activity

- Some sexual and gender disorder is a result of biological *damage* (where there is no personal culpability)
 - For example, genetic and hormonal abnormalities
- Some sexual and gender disorder is a result of human *activity* (and therefore there is personal culpability)
 - For example, pursuing sexual desires outside marriage, neglect of father, or surgical alterations
- And some can be due to both biological damage and human activity
 - For example, genetic predisposition to strong sexual desires in adolescence (no personal culpability), which leads to having dozens of sexual partners in early adulthood (personal culpability)

Sex and gender disorder occurs along two dimensions: objectively and subjectively

- Sex is disordered *objectively* by chromosomal mutation, hormone processing, and malformed anatomy
 - For example, intersexed individuals have chromosomal abnormalities that lead to malformed genitalia (which is an *objective* disorder)
- Sex is disordered *subjectively* when the object of sexual arousal differs from God's design plan of a male/female pair in marriage
 - Objects of *disordered* sexual arousal include clothing, children, the pain of another, and an adult of the same sex (a disorder of one's *subjectivity*)
- *Gender* is disordered when the *subjective* sense of one's gender does not correspond to one's *objective*, biological sex

What is God's design plan for sex and gender?

- Because of our alienation from God, humans now have desires/feelings in their hearts that are in conflict with one another.
 - One set of desires/feelings comes from “the law of God written on the heart” (Ro 2:12-13), which some call “natural law”
 - Another set of desires/feelings that are disordered by human fallenness
- Humans need the guidance of the Bible to help us distinguish which is which

What is God's design plan for sex and gender?

- With the help of the Bible and natural law, God's design plan could be summarized as follows:

Humans should pursue only those desires and feelings that are consistent with the embodied *signs* of their sex, established by God (i.e., one's sex chromosomes and genitalia); and this leads to a sex and a gender norm:

- 1) the restriction of sexual arousal and activity to one person of the opposite sex within marriage; and,
- 2) the correlation of one's *objective*, biological sex and one's *subjective* sense of gender.

How does a Christian WV enable us to properly interpret sex and gender disorder?

- Tragically, deviations from God's design plan for sex and gender happen in a fallen world
 - According to the Bible, any sexual *activity* outside of marriage is sinful
 - However, just *having* same sex-attraction or transgender feelings is not an *activity*, but a *subjective state*. Many kinds of biological and social influences are disordered in this fallen world (e.g., cancer, poor parenting), and there is plenty of empirical evidence that such influences (e.g., genetics predispositions, sexual abuse, cultural advocacy) can contribute to the development of same-sex attraction and transgender feelings.

How does a Christian WV enable us to properly interpret sex and gender disorder?

- The Apostle James wrote:

“Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (Ja 1:14-15)

- According to James, simply having disordered desires is a kind of *temptation* that orients us to a specific sin. But sin occurs when we acquiesce to that desire and form an intention to act and carry through with that act.
- As a result, Christians must distinguish simply the *active pursuit* of disordered desires and simply *having* such desires
- Same-sex attraction and transgender feelings are a kind of biopsychosocial damage, like diabetes or bipolar disorder, but *not* something persons who have them are *culpable* for—*unless they actively pursue those desires/feelings*

How does a Christian WV enable us to properly interpret sex and gender disorder?

- When there is a conflict between one's *objective* sex and one's *subjective* desires and feelings, Christians believe they will flourish best when they obey their Creator and follow his creation design plan for human life, rather than their own will, even when it involves some personal suffering through self-denial (remember the book of Job)
- But all Christians have an ongoing conflict between desires to follow God's design plan and desires to depart from it (Rom 7). Whatever the nature of the conflict, it is our unique context and calling to glorify God uniquely

How does a Christian WV enable us to properly interpret sex and gender disorder?

- As a result, Christians should have tremendous compassion for those who have disordered sex desires and gender feelings, for they are forms of suffering and “weakness” (2Co 10). Such people are among the “poor in spirit” (Mt 5:4). And Christians who resist pursuing such desires ought to be viewed as heroes of the faith
- So, let us not despise those who are pursuing same-sex attraction or transgender feelings. Let us think of them as simply having chosen an ethical system that differs significantly from ours—that’s all—and see them as we see those hold a different religion: we love them as our neighbor and seek their greatest good: to get reconciled to their Creator (and his design plan) through faith in Jesus Christ

References

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