

The Strange New World of Gender in the 21st Century: How Should We Respond as Christians?

This Pre-Forum Seminar will practise the art of ‘double-listening’ as we relate the Bible to the world around us. We will examine the strange new world of gender fluidity, gender self-identification and gender transition from a cultural and medical perspective, attend to the experience of gender-diverse individuals and ‘de-transitioners’, and explore a biblical perspective on gender, sex, identity and our physical bodies. This will provide the platform for exploring some practical issues such as: how to help children and young people navigate this confusing new world; how to address the claim that Christianity is ‘transphobic’; how to respond to requests to supply your own, or to use someone else’s, ‘personal pronouns’; and how to promote constructive conversations on these issues with individuals and in society.

Christopher Townsend is a retired lawyer. On retirement, he completed an MPhil in New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of Cambridge. He chairs the editorial group of Cambridge Papers, a quarterly publication with the strapline ‘Towards a Biblical Mind’, which aims to help Christians engage with a complex and changing world (www.cambridgepapers.org). He wrote ‘Gender: Where Next? Personal journeys, radical agendas and perplexing dilemmas’ (Cambridge Paper: December 2016). He is a trustee of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. He is married to Kate and they have three adult children.

Kate Townsend is a medical doctor. She works as a GP (General Practitioner) in Cambridge where many of the patients are University students. Her interest in gender dysphoria first arose in 2014 when there was a large and sudden surge in the number of ‘gender-questioning’ patients presenting at her medical practice seeking medical and/or surgical interventions to ‘transition’. She has written and led seminars on care of transgender patients for Christian Medical Fellowship. She is married to Christopher and they have three adult children.

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING OUR WORLD: THE ‘GENDER REVOLUTION’

1) Introduction

- (a) Preliminary remarks
- (b) The ‘gender revolution’
- (c) The impact of the ‘gender revolution’: who is affected?
- (d) The European experience: differences in approach and attitudes

Experience in the Room: Informal Survey, Discussion and Feedback

2) Insights from a medical perspective

- (a) Sex
- (b) Intersex

(c) Gender dysphoria: some basic medical information

- Types
- Interventions
- Uncertainties

(d) Keira Bell and the Cass Review

(e) Some observations on the relationship between a medical practitioner and her patient

Q&A

3) 'Gender identity' theory: its rise and its roots

(a) The Yogyakarta Principles

(b) Overlapping ideas with different histories come together:

- Internal experience is paramount (The psychological self)
- Gender becomes detached from sex (Feminism (some versions))
- The gender binary is dismantled (Queer theory)
- Language shapes the world (Post-modernism)

(c) Deep roots

A range of factors contribute but two deep roots:

- The rise and triumph of the modern self: expressive individualism)) The 'authentic self'
- The pursuit of freedom from authority and from nature)) The 'autonomous self'

Q&A

PART 2

THE 'GENDER REVOLUTION': A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

1) In the beginning God

2) The body matters

- (a) The making of human beings: an embodied life
(Gen. 1-2; Ps. 139:13-16)
- (b) The body as a 'gift' and a 'given'
- (c) Salvation history and the body
(Gen. 1 – 3; John 1:14; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 8:22-25; 1 Cor. 15)

3) Sex and gender

- (a) 'Male and female he made them'
(Gen. 1:26-28; Matt. 19:4-6)
- (b) Gender expression: demonstrating the male/female distinction
(Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:2-16)
- (c) What do we learn from the verses about 'eunuchs'?
(Lev. 21:16-23; 2 Kings 20:12-18; Isa. 56:1-8 (esp. 3-4); Matt. 19:11-12; Acts 8:26-40)

4) Identity

- (a) Identity in creation
(Gen. 1:26-28)
- (b) Identity in Christ
(Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4-10; John 10:14-15)
- (c) Identity in community
(1 John 3:1; Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:9-10)

5) The pathway to salvation: suffering and hope, struggle and healing

(Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Cor. 12:7-9)

Epilogue: Forming our response - some priorities and principles

PART 3

HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION NAVIGATE ISSUES OF GENDER AND IDENTITY

- **The impact of the gender revolution on under 25s**

- **Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria**
 - Meteoric rise
 - Characteristics
 - ‘Detransition’
 - Uncertainties
- **Helping every child**
 - a) Positive steps
 - Nurture personal faith in Christ
 - Raising our children
 - God and identity
 - Bodies and sex
 - Gender
 - Relationships
 - Communicating well
 - b) Protective steps
 - School
 - Smart phones, social media and internet
 - Develop critical thinking skills

Group Discussion

- **How can parents and churches respond to a child or teenager who declares him/herself to be ‘transgender’ or ‘non-binary’?**

Case Study: Discussion

PART 4

SOME PRACTICAL ISSUES FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY

Some of the following questions to be discussed in small groups, followed by feedback and interaction; we have drawn attention overleaf to some relevant biblical principles.

Mission and apologetics

- How can a church be ‘welcoming’ so that transgender people can encounter the gospel and the church community without prejudicing its distinctive character?
- How can Christians respond well to the charge that Christianity is ‘transphobic’?

Church culture and policies

- How can a church promote gender expression which respects male/female difference without promoting unhealthy gender stereotypes?
- What to do if a trans teenager wants to join the youth weekend away?
- What to do if someone whose birth sex is male, but whose legal gender is female, asks to be baptized in their chosen (female) name?

Christians and personal relationships

- How can I – as a parent, pastor, family member, or friend – build a meaningful relationship with someone who is transgender or gender-questioning?

Christian interaction with society

- If someone, male by birth, asks us to address them as ‘Simone’ and with female pronouns, or if someone asks us to supply our own preferred pronouns, what should we do and why?
- Should Christians collaborate with people – such as LGB activists - to resist steps to normalise transgender ideology and, if so, when and how?
- In what ways should Christians seek to practise and promote free speech on controversial topics such as ‘gender identity theory’ in the context of ‘cancel culture’?

A final word ...

Five ‘Fs to keep in mind if you want to talk to your friends, colleagues and neighbours:

- Familiarity: get into the habit of chatting to others about this topic!
- Friendliness: a friendly manner goes a long way!
- Facts: know the key facts!
- Freedom: exercise your right to free speech!
- Face your fears: many people silently agree with your gender-critical views!

APPENDIX

Some Biblical Principles

Church Life

Matthew 19:13-30 illustrates:

- The principle of ‘loving welcome’ (Matt. 19:13-15)
- The principle of ‘costly discipleship’ (Matt. 19:16-26)
- The principle of ‘new family’ (Matt. 19:29)

Christians and society

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no-one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all men.” (Titus 3:1 -2)

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:17 – 18)

Christians should:

- be law abiding (Rom. 13:1- 2) except where obedience to the law would result in disobedience to God (Acts 4:19)
- seek to establish a reputation for right conduct (Rom. 12:17)
- avoid unnecessary provocation (Rom. 12:18)
- not flinch from necessary provocation - speaking the truth in love (2 Cor. 4:2, 13:8; Eph. 4:15)
- decide whether to defend their own rights (Acts 16:35 - 40) or to forgo them (1 Cor. 9) as best serves the gospel
- be concerned for, and take care of, the vulnerable (Jam. 1:27)
- speak up for those who are treated unjustly (Isa. 1:17);
- seek the welfare of the city in which we are exiles (Jer. 29:7); and
- live such good lives that, though accused of wrongdoing, their good deeds may be seen (1 Pet. 2: 12, 15).

RESOURCES

Christian Books

This book list includes both evangelical and Roman Catholic authors (marked with an asterisk).

Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel is Good News for our Physical Selves* (Crossway, 2021)

Ryan Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (Encounter Books, 2018)*

Andrew Bunt, *Finding Your Best Identity: A short Christian introduction to identity, sexuality and gender* (IVP, 2021)

Andrew Bunt, *People Not Pronouns: Reflections on Transgender Experience* (Grove Books, 2021)

Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender; A Christian Theory* (Ignatius Press, 2021)*

Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* (Christian Focus, 2019)

Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (The Gospel Coalition, 2021): one chapter addresses the claim that ‘Transgender Women are Women’.

Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (The Good Book Company, 2016)

Peter Sanlon, *Plastic People: How Queer Theory is Changing Us* (Latimer Trust, 2010)

Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church & What the Bible Has to Say* (David C Cook, 2021)

Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2020)

Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2022).

Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?* (The Good Book Company, 2021)

Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (IVP, 2015). While not always the best guide when seeking to form a biblical and theological lens through which to understand gender identity and gender dysphoria, this book written by a Christian clinical psychologist is nonetheless a helpful resource offering the general reader an insight into gender dysphoria and its treatment from a scientific, medical and therapeutic perspective.

Secular Books

Helen Barnes, *Time to Think: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Tavistock's Gender Service for Children* (Swift Press, 2023)

Helen Joyce, *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality* (Oneworld Publications, 2021)

Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: Teenage Girls and the Transgender Craze* (Swift Press, 2021)

Kathleen Stock, *Material Girls: Why Reality Matters for Feminism* (Fleet, 2022)

Selected Online Resources

Christian Medical Fellowship (www.cmf.org.uk)

CMF Quick Guides on 'Gender identity & trans identification'

Quick Guide 01 – For parents, youth workers, professionals and pastors respectively.

Cambridge Papers (www.cambridgepapers.org):

'*Gender: where next? Personal journeys, radical agendas and perplexing dilemmas*'
by Christopher Townsend

'*Who am I today? The modern identity crisis*'
by Glynn Harrison

The New Atlantis

'Part Three: Gender Identity' from *Sexuality and Gender: Findings from Biological, Psychological and Social Sciences* by Dr Lawrence S. Meyer and Dr Paul R. McHugh (The New Atlantis, Report, Fall 2016) (available at <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/part-three-gender-identity-sexuality-and-gender>)

Living Out

'Transgender: An Introduction for Parents and Youth': A 90-minute video presentation by Andrew Bunt (available at <https://www.livingout.org/resources/talks/4/transgender-an-introduction-for-parents-and-youth-leaders>)

Three videos from CanaVox, a US-based organisation which promotes the historic understanding of marriage on the basis of natural law, and social science arguments, through resources and reading groups (www.canavox.com). Its website contains the following three videos:

- Helping Our Children Navigate Gender Ideology: The Elementary Years
- Helping Our Children Navigate Gender Ideology: The Middle School Years
- Helping Our Children Navigate Gender Ideology: The High School Years

Secular Websites

While resources on secular websites will need to be used with discernment, there is a wealth of helpful, or potentially helpful, material available from a number of sources:

(a) General

Genspect (www.genspect.org)

Genspect describes itself as ‘an international, non-partisan, interdisciplinary professional and educational organisation devoted to advancing a healthy approach to sex and gender. Our team and members strive to promote high-quality, evidence-based care for gender-nonconforming individuals all around the world’.

Sex Matters (www.sex-matters.org)

Sex Matters is a UK-based not-for-profit organisation which publishes research, guidance and analysis and campaigns to re-establish that biological sex matters in laws, policies, language and culture.

Transgender Trend (www.transgendertrend.com)

Transgender Trend, based in the UK, describes itself as ‘the leading organisation in the call for evidence-based healthcare for children and young people suffering gender dysphoria and for factual, science-based teaching in schools.’

(b) For parents and families:

Bayswater Support Group (www.bayswatersupport.org.uk)

Gender Dysphoria Support Network (www.genderdysphoriasupportnetwork.com). The GDSN an international group that aims to offer support to families of individuals affected by gender dysphoria. Our support network recognises the difficulties presenting the person with gender dysphoria and also recognises that friends and families can be in need of emotional understanding and support. The GDSN is not allied with any religion, sect, denomination, political entity, organisation or institution. Its website provides links to support networks in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

(c) For clinicians

Clinical Advisory Network on Sex and Gender (www.can-sg.org)

Gender Exploratory Therapy Association (www.genderexploratory.com)

Society for Evidence-based Gender Medicine (SEGM)(www.segm.org)