

"Our God-Given Identity"
(Matthew 19:3-12)
Pastor Peter Yi
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³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

¹⁰The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

The month of May at our church is family month and so for the next three weeks we're going to be looking at a subject that is very relevant today. We're going to be looking at the Biblical idea of gender. There is so much confusion about gender in our society and our society is redefining gender almost faster than we can keep up. It's changing so fast that we're hardly able to give a reasonable response. That'll be our subject for the month of May. Today we'll be looking at gender as a part of our God-given identity. Next week, since it's Mother's Day, we'll look at what Biblical womanhood looks like and then the week after, we'll look at Biblical manhood. This month is bookended by the men's retreat we had a few weeks ago and the woman's retreat that's coming up in a few weeks.

And it's at these retreats where these subjects are looked at even more deeply. So for those of you who attended the men's retreat, you may find that some things are repeated.

Gender, in our culture has become a controversial topic. What was once always assumed by our biology, by nature, in religion, and through our common sense, has now been radically redefined. Let me give you a few highlights of how this has been affecting our society.

- July 20, 2005, Canada became the first country outside of Europe to legalize same-sex marriage. In our nation's modern history, this was the first assault on manhood, womanhood, marriage and family. This was a key first step to the redefinition of gender that mushroomed to where we are today.
- Let's fast forward to the summer of 2016. In the United States, the huge retail chain called Target adopted transgender bathrooms. For these stores, any person was permitted to utilizing either the men's or women's washrooms (restrooms) based on your own personal gender identification. So, you could essentially have the most masculine, flannel wearing bearded 250 pound, blue jeans wearing lumberjack, who that day identified as a woman, would be permitted to use the women's restroom, no questions asked. Of course this caused a huge outcry.

Many of you are aware that this has been implemented on the university campus and at workplaces in Ontario.

- Closer to home in the same summer of 2016, the Kathleen Wynne government of Ontario implemented a new sex education curriculum for Ontario public schools. It taught that a person could be one or more of 7 different genders.
- The Fall of the same year, just a couple months later, the Wynne government decided to remove mother and father as labels and instead call us 'birth parents.'
- On June 15, 2017 Transgender Canadians were protected under the Human Rights Act. Just so we are clear, here is the definition of transgenderism. Transgenderism is when a person identifies with a different gender than that of their biological sex.
- Last year University of Toronto psychology professor Jordan Petersen came on the scene in a huge way for refusing to use transgender pronouns, and now has become an international sensation.
- Very recently in the States, the organization that we all know as the Boy Scouts, is no longer. It's now just Scouts and will allow girls to join. This is a removal of gender differences.
- Just this past week, I heard of a story from the United States. In the States there is a well-known prestigious women's college and the question they, along with other women's colleges, are wrestling with is, who may apply to their school? Before the transgender movement it was crystal clear who could apply—women. Here's the new rule. One school said that there is only one of 8 different types of people that may not apply, attend, or graduate from their school. A person who is born a male, identifies as a male, but any other kind of person is allowed.

So, this is a snapshot of what is happening in our society today. All these things are an attack on Biblical gender, manhood and womanhood. So, how are Christians to think, believe and respond to these massive cultural shifts? That's what we want to look at today.

Before we try to answer these questions, this would be a good time to look at the question of authority. I don't want to assume for a moment that everyone in this room is in agreement over this. You too shouldn't assume that the person who's sitting next to you, thinks and believes the same thing, just because we're in the same room.

So, where do we get our authority on matters like this? In other words, we are asking, "who do we believe?" None of us are experts on everything. None of us knows everything we need to know to make educated decisions and hold educated beliefs. What we do is we trust the authorities. Here are some of the sources for where we go to get our information:

1. culture/media/news
2. educational institutions
3. civil and government laws
4. tradition/family
5. science
6. self/personal experience
7. religion

This is where we tend to get our information on important matters. But what about for the Christian? For Christians our ultimate authority is God and we believe God revealed his will for humanity in a book, called the Bible. That means for Christians our worldview, our beliefs, our morals, and our values are primarily formed from the teachings found in the Bible. Already, I know what some of you are thinking. How narrow-minded! Or Rules, rules, rules! Or Restrictions! Now, don't jump to that conclusion just yet.

Here's how a Christian person thinks, and yes, if you consider yourself a Christian, this is indeed how you should think. Christians believe that humans were made by a benevolent Creator, by God. He is our designer. He is our maker. We were created in God's image. That means we alone, of all the creatures on the planet, bear God's image. That means we were created to mirror God's glory back to the Creator and to each other.

We also believe that God created us for joy, for happiness. That joy, that happiness is found in a personal, living, breathing relationship with our Creator and with one another, with other humans. Apart from a relationship with God, we cannot truly know joy, because we are living out of sync with our Creator's purpose. When we live out of sync with God's purpose, we call that sin. This happens when we choose to remove God and his instructions, and say, I choose to live without you and I choose to live according to my own instructions. That's what sin is. Sin is, as one person called it, cosmic treason. Another way sin is seen is when we refuse to accept God's identity for us. When we reject God's given identity for our lives, we are rejected God himself.

The Bible also teaches us that when God created the first humans, he created them binary. He created them male and female. We see that in the entire animal kingdom, as well. That's how reproduction happens and he did the same when he created humans. This was his original design. This design was in place before the entrance of sin into God's perfect creation. Being created male and female is a part of what it means to be created in God's image. It's a part of what it means to reflect the image of God. How so? Well, God is one God that exists in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They have always existed this way. They are one, that is he is a unity, but within that unity there is diversity, there are three persons. Humanity, in our maleness and femaleness, reflects God in that we too are united, we are a unity, especially in marriage, but we are also diverse, in being male and female.

Throughout the Bible, this binary relationship between a man and a woman, is taught and reinforced, and assumed. It is found explicitly, and it is throughout implicitly. Even in today's passage, as Jesus is speaking on the subject of marriage and divorce, he affirms the truthfulness and validity and goodness of God's original design. Listen again to his words, "Haven't you read, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?"

We cannot underestimate the importance of what Jesus is doing here. He is not appealing to new teaching—that there's been revolutionary new evidence on the subject, so the old teaching is now outdated. He doesn't say, gosh your personal struggles and deep-seated feelings are pretty strong and compelling. Let me try to see if we can adjust the teaching to accommodate what you're experiencing. Nor does he say that the thoughts and attitudes of society are changing on this difficult topic, so let's make some concessions. No, he does none of those things.

What Jesus does is he goes back to the very beginning. He goes back to the original design. He pulls out the blueprints. He asks, "When God created humans, how did he do it? "He made them male and female."

He's not the only one who does that. When Paul gives difficult teachings on different gender roles, he doesn't appeal to changing trends, or more education, he too goes straight back to Creation. Listen to these passages.

When he instructs the gender dynamics of the church in Corinth he says,

⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (**1 Corinthians 11:8–9**)

He's appealing here to Genesis 1.

As well, in (**1 Timothy 2:11–15**) Paul writes, "¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

Today is not the day to get into the exact meaning and application of these texts. They are some of the most difficult in the Bible, but isn't it interesting that Paul doesn't appeal to modern convention or culture or science or civil law. He appeals to Creation, to Genesis 1.

This seems so counter-cultural, doesn't it? Well, when has Christianity not been counter-cultural?

Here's a great summary from Pastor John Piper. He writes, "In the Bible, differentiated roles for men and women are never traced back to the fall of man and woman into sin. Rather, the foundation of this differentiation is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships. Differentiated roles were corrupted, not created, by the fall. They were created by God." (35)

When God created human beings, he created them male and female. The reason this is so important is because our gender is a huge part of our identity as God's creatures. Our maleness or femaleness is an inherent part of who we are. It permeates how we think, how we act, basically everything that we do. And every human being on the planet, in some way or another, is trying to find out who they are. If we ignore the gender component of that identity, we are practically missing the entire person. As a parent, one of our responsibilities is to raise boys to be men and to raise girls to be women. We cannot do what a one set of parents did to their newborn, when they decided they will not raise their child in accordance to the gender of their birth. They said they would allow the child to discover his/her own gender. That's not just nonsense; it's incredibly harmful to the child, creating more confusion than clarity. So, parents need to know what it means to be male or female and teach and model that to our children.

If you're single it applies to you as well. Gender is not something you need to figure out after you get married. Whether or not you get married, whether or not you become a parent, your personal, your relational, your church community flourishing is dependent on the health of your sexual identity, that was given to you at birth, and defined for you by God.

When we consider that Jesus and Paul were single, it tells us that being a man, (and for that matter, it applies to women as well), so being a man or a woman is not about having sex, it's about fully being the sex, the gender God created you to be, in your manhood or your womanhood. In the next two weeks we'll look more at those differences.

Now, let's conclude with this. What was the fall's effect on gender? What did sin do to damage manhood and womanhood. Oh goodness there are so many.

In the book of Genesis, before we reach the last chapter of the book, we see some of the effects of sin upon sex and gender. There are the sins of voyeurism, homosexuality, gang rape, incest, adultery, polygamy, prostitution, jealousy, seduction, and trafficking. In many, not all, but in many of these sins, is the exploitation of women. This is a real manifestation of the fall, this failure of men to respect, protect and provide for women, and instead exploit, abuse, and even place women in harm's way. The harmony that once existed between the sexes has been greatly damaged. Hasn't this been true in every generation? Hasn't sin, in one sense, done more damage to women than to men?

We also see from an important passage in Deuteronomy 22:5 that sin has made an impact upon gender. We see the first instance of transgenderism. Here's the verse:

A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this. (**Deuteronomy 22:5**)

Why does God detest such a thing? Because it's an assault on his original design for human flourishing. Men were created to act like men and women were created to act like women.

With that said, it is important for us to know that because of the fall, there are people who struggle with these things, in varying degrees. Men and woman can struggle not only with transgender identity issues, but they can also struggle with hyper-masculinity, or hyper-femininity. As a church community, we must continue to teach the truth with courage, but also with humility. We must not be afraid to confide in our friends about our struggles. We must be willing to walk patiently with those who are going through these things. We must offer grace, a ton of grace, without ever compromising the truth. Yes, that is very possible. In fact, it's in the church where it's most possible. We don't do what society does and accept people, no questions asked, no changes demanded. Nor do we hate on those who disagree with us and become a part of our intolerant society. No, Christians, more than anyone else, understand the effects of sin on people. We more than anyone else, know how bad, how damaging sin is, but we also know grace, more than anyone else. We know what it means to be forgiven, 70 x 7 times. We know what it's like to fall and then to get up again. We know what it's like to confess sin, and receive grace and forgiveness from each other. So, as a church, while teaching and believing God's truth on gender, we offer grace with those who are struggling with it.

Jesus Christ came so that we could once again find our identity, as men and women, living out God's purpose and reflecting his glory.

Let's pray.