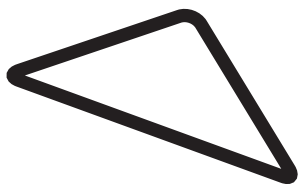


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A TALKING POINTS BOOK BY
VAUGHAN ROBERTS



TRANSGENDER

Transgender

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INTRODUCTION

TALKING POINTS

The world is changing. Fast.

And not just politics, technology and communication, but our whole culture, morality and attitudes. Christians living in Western culture have enjoyed the benefit of being in a world which largely shared our assumptions about what is fundamentally right and wrong. We can no longer assume that this is the case.

In two short generations we have moved to a widespread adoption of liberal values, many of which are in conflict with the teaching of the Bible. Increasingly, believers are finding themselves to be the misunderstood minority, and feeling at odds with where the world seems to be heading.

Let's not deny it: some of this has been good. Christians have often failed to discern the difference between our own cultural values, and those that are

demanding by Scripture. We are as prone to bigotry as others. We have much to repent of in our attitudes towards the freedom and role of women in society, and in our lack of compassion and understanding towards, for example, those who have wrestled with same-sex attraction.

But now, again, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory and ill-equipped to deal with it. Sometimes it's easier to protest and rage against the tide of history than to go back to our Bibles and think carefully about what God is saying—holding up society's views, and our own, to the truth-revealing mirror that is God's word.

At our best, we Christians have been in the forefront of social reform. Think of the great nineteenth-century reformers of the slave trade, prisons and poverty: William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry and Lord Shaftesbury. But now we find ourselves on the back foot, unable to articulate a clear response to a pressing question of our day. And even when we have understood God's mind on a particular issue, we have struggled to apply it compassionately in our speech and in our relationships.

This short series of books is an attempt to help ordinary Christians start to think constructively about a range of issues—moral, ethical and cultural—that run against the grain for those who name Christ as Lord. They are an attempt to

stimulate believers to start talking with each other as we search the Scriptures together. Their aim is to help us think biblically, constructively and compassionately, and not to feel intimidated when we are challenged or questioned, or, perhaps worse, remain silent.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT...

In such a short book, we cannot hope to answer all the questions you may have about how to think on this issue. Nor can we address the many practical challenges you may be facing with family or friends, or personally.

Nor does it present a thorough treatment of all the Bible has to say on these questions. If that is what you are hungry for, there will be other, longer, and perhaps more technical books that will help you dig deeper.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS...

Rather, our aim is to give you an accessible introduction to the many questions that surround the transgender issue, as we hold our questions up to the big story of the Bible: the story of creation, fall, redemption and eternity.

But we also hope that it takes us all beyond the issue—to a genuine compassion and love for those

who are caught up in some way with these questions. They may be questions that are deeply personal to you. They may be questions that are thrown at you in a proud, assertive and hostile way. Or they may be questions that are real because they affect a close family member or friend. Whatever your situation, we hope this book will be a first step towards understanding the landscape, and an encouragement to know and share the love and hope we have in Christ.

Tim Thornborough

Series Editor

August 2016

transgender

[trans-**jen**-der, tranz-]

adjective, also, **transgendered**

1. noting or relating to a person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person's biological sex assigned at birth.
2. noting or relating to a person who does not conform to societal gender norms or roles.

noun

a person who is **transgender**.

[Source: dictionary.com]

There's a gender in your brain and a gender in your body. For 99% of people, those things are in alignment. For transgender people, they're mismatched. That's all it is. It's not complicated, it's not a neurosis. It's a mix-up. It's a birth defect, like a cleft palate.

Chaz Bono,

Transgender activist and entertainer

34% of trans people attempt suicide. 64% are bullied. 73% of trans people are harassed in public. 21% of trans people avoid going out in public due to fear.

Transgender Remembrance Day poster

"Some men are born in their bodies, others have to fight for it."

Transgender slogan

We're human beings, and this is a human life. This is reality for us, and all we ask for is acceptance and validation for what we say that we are. It's a basic human right.

Andreja Pejic, Transgender model

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

Genesis 1 v 27

TRANSGENDER

CHAPTER ONE

There's been huge cultural change in the last few decades. Same-sex marriage would have been unthinkable 20 or 30 years ago. Now it's almost universally accepted in the Western world. And then suddenly the transgender issue is the next big social, ethical and cultural question that has come to dominate the headlines.

Hardly a week goes by, it seems, without there being some kind of transgender story in the news—and the stories will keep on coming. There has been the transitioning of Bruce, now Caitlin, Jenner, the former decathlon world-record holder. Then we've had the debates over the rights and wrongs of which public bathrooms (restrooms) to use, which prison transgender people should be sent to, whether transgender people can serve in the military, and

what to put on passports. There have been a number of television documentaries, including one by Louis Theroux on transgender children. And on the big screen *The Danish Girl* is a dramatised account of the artist Lili Elbe—one of the first people known to have undergone sex-change surgery.

How should Christians respond to all this—not just in the media and wider culture but, closer to home, in our communities, families and churches? How should we relate to someone who is transitioning gender or has already transitioned? And what if the sense of not fitting with the sex of one's birth is a deeply personal one for us? How should we respond?

We need to begin by remembering that we are not simply talking about “issues” here, but people: precious individuals, each created and loved by God. Most of them don't have a strong political agenda or any desire to fight in a “culture war”; they are simply trying to cope with feelings that may well cause them great distress. Too often they are being damaged in the crossfire of what can become a very heated debate. As will become clear later, I do think Christians should contribute to that public discussion, but it's vitally important that we do so with great sensitivity and compassion. Let's never forget those who are most deeply affected by this subject and let's ensure that we try to understand what they are experiencing.

WHAT IS TRANSGENDER?

When a child is born, it's likely that the first thing anyone will say is, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl". Assigning someone's sex has traditionally been based on biology—their chromosomes and anatomy. But for some people, their sense of gender—their inner feelings of being male, female, or both—doesn't always match that sex.

Many people have assumptions about what it means to be transgender but, fundamentally, it isn't about surgery or how someone dresses. It's about how they feel inside. It's not the same as sexuality or sexual orientation. People often confuse transgender and homosexuality, perhaps because the two are included together in the LGBT grouping (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender). But those who identify as transgender may consider themselves heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual (or, perhaps, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual), just as the rest of the population might.

And transgender is not the same as intersex (the I in LGBTI). Intersex is a physical condition affecting a very small percentage of people whose chromosomes, genitals or gonads do not allow them to be distinctively identified as male or female at birth. The great majority of them do not identify as transgender, but rather as male or female. By contrast, transgender is to do with how people think or feel. They are born

either male or female, but their feelings about their gender don't fit with their sex.

MANY PEOPLE: MANY EXPRESSIONS

Transgender is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of experiences. Each person's story is unique and their journey intensely personal. Some say they are the opposite gender to what they were assigned at birth. Some feel they are both male and female. Still others don't identify as either gender.

There will be differences in the nature and intensity of the feelings people have. So, for some, their questions may be just in the background and then come more to the foreground at certain times, or at a particular point in life.

For others, there may be significant confusion during childhood which then disappears. In fact the majority of children who experience these strong feelings find that they disappear completely during adolescence.¹

But for others, there is a prolonged sense of disharmony within them that causes great distress. Profes-

1 When children who reported transgender feelings were tracked without medical or surgical treatment at both Vanderbilt University and London's Portman Clinic, 70%-80% of them spontaneously lost those feelings. Dr Paul McHugh, *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014

sionals call this “gender dysphoria”. These individuals frequently speak about feeling they are trapped in the wrong body, and will often testify that these thoughts go right back to very early childhood, maybe the age of 5 or 6. Many also describe a sense of profound isolation in the following years and of difficulty sharing how they feel with others because of fear they will be misunderstood or rejected.

There are differences in experience, and there are also differences in how these feelings are expressed and whether or not they are acted on outwardly. Some live within the norms of their birth sex. Others cross-dress occasionally—whether in private only or also in public. Some ask people to change the pronouns they use to identify them. (They may choose “he”, “she”, “they”, or even “ze”). Some undergo hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery.

Gender dysphoria is defined as a “marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months’ duration”,² which causes significant distress. Studies suggest that between 1 in 10,000 and 1 in 13,000 males and between 1 in 20,000 and 1 in 34,000

2 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013) p. 452

females have this condition.³ Many more people report some sense of incongruence, but not to the extent that they are diagnosed as having gender dysphoria—perhaps between 1 in 215 and 1 in 300 people.⁴

There is no agreement on what causes gender dysphoria. Some argue that nature makes the most significant contribution. They promote, for example, the brain-sex theory, according to which transgender people have a male-type brain in a female body, or vice versa. The evidence for this view is far from conclusive.⁵ Others believe that nurture—psychological environment in childhood—is the dominant factor. After a thorough survey of the arguments on both sides, one author honestly admits: “We don’t know what causes gender dysphoria”.⁶ Given the breadth of the transgender experience, it seems likely that the

3 Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (Downers Grove IL: IVP 2015), p. 92

4 Yarhouse, p. 92

5 After a thorough survey of the evidence Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh comment: “All interpretations, usually in popular outlets, claiming or suggesting that a statistically significant difference between the brains of people who are transgender and those who are not is the cause of being transgender or not ... are unwarranted.” Lawrence H. Mayer, Paul R. McHugh, *Sexuality and Gender*, The New Atlantis, Number 50, Fall 2016.

6 Yarhouse, p. 79

contributing factors vary from person to person and may include elements of both nature and nurture. In all the uncertainty, however, one thing is clear: those who experience gender dysphoria certainly do not simply choose to do so.

OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

There are two common responses to this issue: an unquestioning “Yuk!” and an unquestioning “Yes!” In previous years, those who decided to cross-dress in public would have been received by most people with a “Yuk!” response.

“Yuk, it’s disgusting!” Not thought through—just an emotional response.

But now the response of many, especially younger people, would just be of unquestioning affirmation.

“That’s good—it’s great to be yourself!” Not thought through—just an emotional response.

Christians should avoid both these reactions. Rather than turning away from people in disgust with a “Yuk!”, we need to remember that they are made in God’s image and deeply loved by him. We should share his compassion for them in their pain and confusion.

Most of us can only begin to imagine the distress that might be associated with gender dysphoria. Certainly no one ends up in an operating theatre for

a radically invasive surgical procedure having taken the decision lightly. We have to recognise that there must be a huge amount of prolonged distress and struggle behind that decision. So it's vital that we Christians take care never to think or talk of those who struggle in this way with any kind of disrespect. We must speak with compassion and affirm the dignity of every human being. We are all made in the image of God.

One important way we can do this is to understand more clearly what it is that they are going through. It is also important not to speak in a manner that they find hurtful or degrading. For that reason I have chosen to use the definitions from the Stonewall website for the glossary of terms on pages 21-24. Stonewall is an LGBT rights organisation.

As Christians, we shouldn't let our responses be governed by our gut reactions, whether positive or negative, but by God's word. Chapters 3 to 5 will help us understand what the Bible has to say on our subject. It certainly demands that we respond to all human suffering with compassion, but it also gives us convictions which sometimes clash with the way many people think today, so that we can't just say "Yes!" to all that the world affirms.

But before we look at what the Bible says, in our next chapter we will think a bit more about our culture, which has been changing so rapidly. How

is it that an unquestioning “Yuk!” has been replaced, for very many people at least, with an unquestioning “Yes!”? We will see that this is just one symptom of a much broader cultural shift.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDER LANGUAGE

These definitions come from the Stonewall website. I have retained the language they use, although I am uncomfortable with references to “sex assigned at birth”. Our sex is not simply “assigned”, but is given to us by God.

Cisgender or Cis. Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. “Non-trans” is also used by some people.

Gender dysphoria. Used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mis-match between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn’t feel comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender identity. A person's internal sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see "non-binary" below).

Gender reassignment. Another way of describing a person's transition. To undergo gender reassignment usually means to undergo some sort of medical intervention, but it can also mean changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in their self-identified gender. Gender reassignment is a characteristic that is protected by the Equality Act 2010.

Intersex. A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people can identify as male, female, or non-binary.

Non-binary. An umbrella term for a person who does not identify as male or female.

Queer. In the past a derogatory term for LGBT individuals. The term has now been

reclaimed by LGBT young people in particular who don't identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation but is still viewed as derogatory by some.

Trans/Transgender. An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, cross-dresser, non-binary, genderqueer (GQ).

Transgender man. A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

Transgender woman. A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

Transitioning. The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Transexual. This was used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to homosexual) to refer to someone who transitioned to live in the "opposite" gender to the one assigned at birth. This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or transgender.

[Source: www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms]