**Courage and compassion in a sexually confused world**

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Genesis 1:26-28; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 19, 73b, 176, 468, 529

**Series:** Occasional, topical

**Theme:** Gender and sexuality: created, fallen, and redeemed

**Proposition:** Christ calls us to proclaim the gospel with courage and compassion in a sexually confused world

**Introduction**

Should a ‘transgender woman’, that is person who was born a biological male, be allowed to compete against those who were born biological females? This is a topical question today in a world where ‘transitioning’ from one gender to another is increasingly normalized in western society. There are new words in the English vocabulary like ‘deadnaming’ – which means ‘*calling a transgender person by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender transition’*.

New words and changed meanings to old words like ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ can be quite bewildering and reflect the sexually diverse world in which we now live. Until the 20th century ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ referred to the biological form of individuals in a species; reflected in phrases like ‘the male sex’ and ‘the female gender’. ‘Sex’ now has a different common meaning – physical intimacy of a sexual nature. Over the past century ‘gender’ has come to have two related meanings:

1. ‘Gender identity’ refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female, or some combination of what used to be understood to be two genders.
2. ‘Gender expression’ refers to the physical and behavioural manifestations of one’s gender identity.

Gender, in the new definition of the term is a socially constructed attribute of a person. It is fluid, being determined by the individual themselves. A raft of genders are now widely recognised in society, including: male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, third gender, and all, none or a combination of these. ‘LGBTQIA+’ is an inclusive term that includes people of all genders and sexualities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies. While each letter in LGBTQIA+ stands for a specific group of people, the term encompasses the entire spectrum of gender fluidity and sexual identities.

The subject of gender and sexuality is one upon which our Reformed Confessions say little because they were not matter about which the church needed to speak 400-500 years ago. The WCF helpfully states that ‘*God…created mankind. He made them male and female*’ (4:2). The BC (Art 12) states that God ‘*has given to every creature its being, shape, and form, and to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator*’.

If we are going to make sense of the sexually diverse world in which we live, then we need to go to God’s Word. It is wise to start with the creation of mankind, then see the effects of sin in the world and finally God’s restoration. This ‘creation-fall-redemption’ framework forms our three points:

1. Created gender and sexuality
2. Fallen gender and sexuality
3. Redeemed gender and sexuality

The purpose of this sermon is not only to reveal the truth about gender and sexuality, it is also to equip us to speak into this world – giving grace to those who hear (Eph 4:29).

1. **Created gender and sexuality**

It is clear from Scripture that there were two distinct genders when God made the first two human beings. “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen 1:27). Notice that there was (and still is) no difference between male and female in:

* Their humanity (both are equally human!)
* Their image-bearing capacity
* Their purpose – to “*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth*." (Gen 1:28).
* Their favour by God who ‘blessed them’ (Gen 1:28)
* Their goodness – they were both part of the ‘very good’ creative work of God (Gen 1:31). They were both ‘*created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*’ (Eph 4:24).
* They were both created with the ability not to sin, but also the ability to sin.

In addition to having much in common, the two created genders were designed by God for different roles. The biological difference between the bodies of men and women reflect this:

* Men are generally more muscular than women and on average are stronger and can run faster than women. This is why most athletic sports competitions are divided into two groups: men and women.
* Men alone produce sperm – the seed for offspring.
* Women alone produce eggs and can grow another person inside their womb.

In marriage, the roles of husband and wife are distinct and different. A husband is the head of his wife. He is to love her and sacrifice himself for her (Eph 5:22-33). A wife is the helper to her husband (Gen 2:18). She is to willingly submit to her husband and respect him (Eph 5:22-33).

Biblically, gender is not a function of what sex a person decides they will be nor is it socially determined by culture. However, down through history gender has been expressed through culturally recognised symbols. We see this in Scripture, for example:

* Circumcision for males only (Gen 17:14)
* Distinctive clothing - "*A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever* *does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God*” (Deut 22:5).
* “*Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness- with good works*” (1 Tim 2:9-10).
* Head coverings for women in worship (1 Cor 11:4-5)

It is interesting to see the diversity of roles that men and women have had in Bible times: There were women who were cooks and seamstresses, helped rebuild cities, judged Israel, dealt in real estate, ran businesses, even killed God’s enemies (e.g., [Gen. 27:14](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%2027%3A14/); [Num. 27:1–4](https://www.esv.org/Num.%2027%3A1%E2%80%934/); [Judg. 4:4–6, 18–21](https://www.esv.org/Judg.%204%3A4%E2%80%936%2C%2018%E2%80%9321/); [Neh. 3:12](https://www.esv.org/Neh.%203%3A12/); [Prov. 31:10–31](https://www.esv.org/Prov.%2031%3A10%E2%80%9331/); [Luke 10:38-41](https://www.esv.org/Luke%2010%3A38-41/); [Acts 9:36–39](https://www.esv.org/Acts%209%3A36%E2%80%9339/)). There were men who were shepherds, farmers, metal-workers, musicians, cooks, warriors and fighters, some were gentle and sensitive men who wept and embraced (e.g., [Gen. 4:2, 20–22; 27:31; 45:14–15](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%204%3A2%2C%2020%E2%80%9322%3B%2027%3A31%3B%2045%3A14%E2%80%9315/); [Deut. 28:54](https://www.esv.org/Deut.%2028%3A54/); [1 Sam. 16:18; 17:33](https://www.esv.org/1%20Sam.%2016%3A18%3B%2017%3A33/); [1 Tim. 3:3](https://www.esv.org/1%20Tim.%203%3A3/)). This diversity does not nullify or contradict the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in marriage and in New Testament church ministry, but it does warn against rigid gender stereotypes.

The equality of men and women in their essential being as image-bearers together with their differences of roles reflects the very nature of the Triune God. The WCF (2:3) summarises what the Scriptures reveal about the nature of God: “*In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son*”.

It is highly significant that we read in Genesis 1:26 “*Then God said, ‘Let* ***us*** *make man in our own image, after our likeness, and let* ***them*** *{that is male and female} have dominion… {over the earth}*”. Just as God is One God in three distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) who are equal in their being, but different in their roles, so the male and female genders have both equality of being but also differences in their roles.

There was no confusion in the very good creation that God made. God commanded Adam and Eve, with their distinctly different genders, to ‘*be fruitful and multiply*’ (Gen 1:28). All sexual activity is to be within the confines of a marriage between one man and one woman (e.g. Heb 13:4). This is God’s ordered good design and will for both male and female human beings who are made in His image. All the difficulties and confusion we see and experience today with gender and sexuality originate from the fall into sin of our earliest ancestors Adam and Eve, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Fallen gender and sexuality**

The fall of Adam and Eve into sin brought chaos and confusion to the whole of creation (e.g. Rom 8:20). From this time forward, the world has been a place of war, sickness, sadness and death. So it is today and will be until the end of this age when Christ returns. Everything and everybody is affected, from within the very depths of our being through to our relationships with one another and the physical environment around us. All descendants of Adam are now conceived in sin (e.g. Ps 51:5) and there is now a natural hostility that human beings have towards God who ‘*by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*’ (Rom 1:18).

In the physical realm we do see the effects of sin in the created order where there are now rare conditions where a person may be born with ambiguity in their biological sex characteristics. People born with this condition are now termed ‘intersex’, having genitalia, reproductive organs and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit clearly into the binary categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’. Defining the % of people in the ‘intersex’ category is difficult and estimates vary for example between 0.018% (Dr Leonard Sax) and 1.7% (source Intersex human rights Australia – ihra.org.au).

We can certainly say that relatively very few people are born with any ambiguity in their biological gender. {Scripture uses the term ‘eunuch’ to describe castrated males (e.g. 2 Kings 9:32; 20:18; Esth. 2:3; Isa. 56:3–4; Matt. 19:12; Acts. 8:26–40) as well as those who voluntarily refrain from marriage (Matt 19:12)}. It is true that today and in times past, that some people experience incongruence (a mismatch) between their bodily sex (male or female) and their felt-gender identity. This is referred to as ‘gender dysphoria’ or transgender. I remember a period as I was growing up during adolescence where I was somewhat confused about my own sexual identity. My wife Jenny (I say this with her prior permission) felt a ‘gender dysphoria’ as she went through her adolescent stage of development. Many teenagers go through some degree of gender confusion as they change from children to adults. What used to be thought of as ‘confusion’ about gender is now viewed by many as being an interesting, colourful and multi-faceted expression of the ‘non-binary’ nature of individual sexual identity.

Pastorally, boys and girls growing up need tender, compassionate, loving care from parents and others as they navigate the challenges of growing into adulthood in a fallen world. It is so hard for young people, especially today, as they are bombarded by messages from social media, the Internet, and vocal groups in society who collectively ‘*supress the truth about gender in unrighteousness*’. I think that it is much harder now than it was when Jenny and I were teenagers – and we didn’t find it easy back then!

One of the devastating effects of the LGBTQIA+ movement is that it has sought to normalise gender dysphoria as confirming the idea that gender is not biologically based, but is determined by the thoughts and ideas a person has about themselves. I see this as somewhat parallel to the ‘assisted dying service’ which the New Zealand ministry of health has made available since 7th November 2021. At times people like us can feel so low, in so much despair and depression, that we don’t want to go on living. Scripture reveals that Elijah (1 Kings 19:2-4), Job (Job 3:1-14) and Jonah (4:8) experienced this dark depth of soul (also ref. Ps 88:18). At these times if someone comes along and says “OK. I can help you take your own life” then an irreversible change can result: death. Sadly some/many people who have ‘transitioned’ from one sex to another have later deeply regretted their decision which, in some cases, results in irreversible physical changes to their body.

Scripture does not hide the reality that living God’s way in a fallen world is hard and can be very upsetting. Paul writes of this in Romans 7:22-23 “*For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members*”.

For some people the battle is harder than for others. We are not all the same. It is clear that some people in Old Testament times struggled with gender dysphoria because the Mosaic Law states: "*A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God*” (Deut 22:5). ‘Cross-dressing’ that is ‘wearing clothing typical of the opposite sex’ breaches the creational boundaries between male and female that have come to be expressed in culturally appropriate gender norms. Today, the distinctions within these ‘culturally appropriate gender norms’ have become increasingly blurred. The many commands in Scripture regarding sexual behaviour reflect how confused and fallen this aspect of life has become and therefore how great our need is of restoration, which bring us to our third point:

1. **Redeemed gender and sexuality**

Redemption is the action of buying back what has previously been lost. God’s Word reveals that we are justified by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:24). Jesus purchased back all of God’s people by paying the price for their sins by dying in their place on the cross at Calvary.

Jesus was incarnate as a human being with a specific gender: male. His biological sex was reflected in his gendered roles as a circumcised man, son, brother, and male friend (e.g. [Matt. 12:46–50](https://www.esv.org/Matt.%2012%3A46%E2%80%9350/); [Luke 2:21, 23, 43, 48](https://www.esv.org/Luke%202%3A21%2C%2023%2C%2043%2C%2048/); [John 19:26](https://www.esv.org/John%2019%3A26/)). Jesus continues in his humanity to be a man, raised, ascended, glorified and ruling at the right hand of the Father. This does not mean that man is superior to woman. They are of equal status and value. As the second Adam ([1 Cor. 15:45](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2015%3A45/)) Christ is able to perfectly represent both men and women before God ([1 Tim. 2:4–5](https://www.esv.org/1%20Tim.%202%3A4%E2%80%935/)).

God, who is spirit (John 4:24) does not have a biology, and therefore does not have a biological gender. {As an aside: The divine and human natures of Christ must not be confused. The WCF 8:2 helpfully summarises what Scripture reveals: ‘*Two whole natures, the divine and the human, perfect and distinct, were inseparably joined together in one person without being changed, mixed or confused*’}. However, despite not having a biological gender, God clearly reveals Himself in His Word with the specific pronouns He, Him, His. He is the Heavenly Father (e.g. Mat 5:18).

It is true that God’s care and protection is represented using feminine imagery in some Scriptures e.g. ‘Like a bear robbed of her cubs’ (Hos 13:8); Like a comforting mother (Isa 66:13); Like a woman in labour (Isa 42:14). However, God always reveals His gender as masculine.

God’s work of redemption includes the restoration of His good design for distinctive gender and holy sexuality. Redemption includes not only the saving of our souls, but our bodies too. This is reflected in the reading we had earlier from 1 Cor 6:13 “*The body is not meant for sexual immorality*” and the call to ‘*flee from sexual immorality*’ (1 Cor 6:18).

We are saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone. We are justified by the sacrifice of Christ, the perfect man. His righteousness is credited to our account so that we are fully acceptable to God the Father. We are sanctified as God’s Word and Spirit work, with our cooperation, to change us to become more and more holy. We heard about this in our reading from 1 Thess 4:3-7 “*For this is the will of God, your* ***sanctification****: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God… God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness*”.

So how should we respond to all this?

* Firstly, individually to examine our own lives in the light of God’s truth.
* Secondly, come to Christ in repentance if we have sinned in this, or in other areas of our lives. “*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body*” (1 Cor 6:18).
* Thirdly, believe that Jesus died to pay for all your sins, including those related to your gender and sexuality.
* Fourthly, have courage to speak the truth about gender and sexuality into this confused world.

The Bible’s teaching about gender and sexuality is not just a set of ideas for Christians and the church, it is the Creator’s design for all human beings as His image bearers. However, when we do speak courageously about these matters, we must do so with compassion because this is how Jesus ministered to sinners like us. Remember the patient, kind way in which Christ spoke to the sexually sinful woman from Samaria at the well (John 4). Remember how Jesus behaved with the sinful woman of the city (Luke 7:38). He did not recoil from her, but let her touch Him. He did not push her away. Remember, brothers and sisters, how much Jesus suffered for your sins, as I remember how much He suffered for mine. Remember how much all people in this fallen world need to hear the gospel of grace.

Do you think that we should invite transgender athletes and others who identify as LGBTQIA+ to come to hear the gospel in this church – warmly welcoming them when they come? Do they need the gospel of grace and truth just as much as everyone else? Brothers and sisters, Christ calls us to proclaim the gospel with courage and compassion in a sexually confused world because the Lord is patient, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Jesus is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He calls us to follow Him.

AMEN.