

The Biblical Case for Spiritual Equality for Transgender People

1. Warm up: At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff reminded us of an episode on Sesame Street where Grover reaches the end of the Museum of Everything and grows despondent, until he sees a new door marked as the Museum of Everything Else. He walks through the door with joyous anticipation. Hopefully we're the kind of people who are always open to learning something new. Tell us about something new you've learned lately. It can be from any area of life. It can be serious or silly.
2. Transgenderism is a hot "issue" these days. Everybody's talking about it. Churches everywhere are wrestling with it – although that probably gives them too much credit. It might be more accurate to say that churches everywhere are "reacting" to it.
 - a. How have the churches of your past viewed transgender people? What are the primary arguments churches use against people who are transgender or nonbinary? Why do you think churches are so afraid of transgender and nonbinary people?
 - b. Blaise Pascal once said, "People never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Have you seen examples of this?
3. Jeff shared Amy Townsend's coming out story as a trans person.
 - a. When Amy was first coming out, leaving the house dressed in women's clothes was frightening. Just getting out of the car at the gas station was terrifying. Imagine yourself going out in public dressed in clothes differing from your body type. How do you think people would react to you? How do you imagine you would feel?
 - b. Jeff asked Amy what it felt like the first time she allowed herself to embrace her femininity, instead of fighting it. Amy said, "It felt like all my brain cells relaxing. It felt like a drenching rain washing over me. Within five minutes, I was finally clean." Have you ever had an experience where you finally came to peace with something about yourself or your life and found yourself feeling like Amy did? Tell us about it.
 - c. Jeff said, "Nobody has any standing to opine about transgender people until they've taken the time to get to know them, to hear their stories and know their hearts." Who's the first transgender person you ever met? What did you learn from that experience?
4. It's important that we be able to explain theologically from the Bible why we embrace and celebrate people who are transgender and nonbinary. On Sunday, we looked at a passage where the Apostle Paul teaches that the earthly bodies we inhabit are temporary dwellings for our eternal souls. It's our soul – our spirit – that will live forever. When we die, when we sluff off these temporary bodies, God will give us a brand new body. Paul draws a sharp distinction between the "physical body" we now

inhabit and the “spiritual body” God will give us when we die. Read I Corinthians 15:35-44, as printed on p. 3.

- a. In verse 40, Paul says, “There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon.” Put this verse in your own words. What does it mean?
 - b. In verse 43, Paul says, “[Our earthly body] is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.” What does this tell us about how our earthly bodies will compare to our future spiritual bodies?
 - c. In another passage, Paul says, “We know that when this earthly *tent* we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a *house* in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God Almighty and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. . . While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh. . . .” II Corinthians 5:1 (NLT). What’s the difference between a tent and a house? What does that tell us about our earthly bodies versus our spiritual bodies?
 - d. Now let’s try to apply these teachings to the subject at hand. Suppose a friend asked you to explain to them why it’s Biblical for a person to alter their body and their appearance to conform to their inner gender. In your own words, how would you explain it to them, making use of the foregoing concepts?
5. The Mosaic Law says, “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 22:5. Suppose someone asked you why this verse should not stand in the way of transgender expression. What would you say?
 6. Suppose someone says, “Since God is the one who created our temporary body the way it is, that means it’s a sin to change it.” How would you answer?
 7. Being transgender or nonbinary in our present deeply prejudiced world is a very hard life to live. Near the end of Sunday’s sermon, Jeff invited us to consider why God would give someone such a hard path to walk. Jeff suggested two possible answers.
 - a. First, great suffering almost always offers us a chance to create great beauty. When in your life have you seen great beauty arise from great suffering?
 - b. Second, the world desperately needs diverse perspectives to be whole. The unique experiences of transgender and nonbinary people have much to teach us. Think about some of the transgender and nonbinary people you’ve known. What are some of the lessons or unique perspectives we can learn from them?
 8. The Bible tells us that God created both men and women in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). That means God encompasses in one being all the characteristics we

typically associate with being male and female and, therefore, we need the full range of characteristics, perspectives, and intuitions that both men and women bring to begin to get a full picture of who God is – all of which means, God is neither one gender or the other. “In fact,” Jeff said, “it would be fair to say that God is, in a very meaningful sense, transgender, by which I mean a confluence of the characteristics, strengths, and beauty of both genders.”

- a. Does that statement feel too edgy? What buttons does it push? Do you agree with the statement? Why or why not?
- b. Jeff pointed out that the Old Testament Hebrew word for the Holy Spirit is derived from a female noun. What’s the significance of that?
- c. Jeff pointed out Moses describes God as a mother eagle who teaches her young to fly (Deuteronomy 32:11-12), and Isaiah describes God as a mother who nurses her children and bounces them on her knee (Isaiah 66:12-13). What’s the significance of that?
- d. Jeff said, “When we understand that God is gender diverse, it causes me to think that people who are themselves gender diverse may come closer to reflecting the mystery of the fullness of God than those of us who are cisgender. If that offends us, maybe it’s because of all those cultural prejudices that have been pounded into us. If it offends us, maybe it’s because we humans have a tendency to fear anything and anyone who’s different.” Are there any final thoughts you’d like to share before we close our conversation?

I Corinthians 15:35-44

³⁵ But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.