

FIFTY SHADES OF GENDER - HUMAN IDENTITY AND THE RIGHTS OF OUR CREATOR GOD

Teaching #1816 - Sunday, July 5th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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Romans 1:18-28 - “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”

We will wrap up today’s teaching with a careful examination of Paul’s logic and argument in this great text. There is a kind of reasoning that is easily missed if all we notice is Paul’s blunt, universal, **creational** condemnation of homosexuality. It *is* that, to be sure. But it is also much more. And it’s crucial the church gets the gist of Paul’s divinely inspired thinking.

But something else needs to be said first. There needs to be an explanation for taking time on a Sunday morning like this to deal with a moral issue that seems, at least on the surface, reserved for tabloid headlines and television talk shows. Why do we in the **church** need to give attention to this?

Here’s why. What will we say and do when someone walks into a Christian Education class or a Bible Study or a children’s church session who is a boy but wears dresses like a girl, insisting, along with his parent’s approval, he really *is* a girl? Or what if he’s an adult who has undergone surgical procedures in an attempt to give outer reality to his conviction that he’s really been a woman on the inside from birth? And what if these procedures took place years ago and now this person comes to Christ? What are the implications of that conversion? What shape will genuine repentance have to take in that individual?

Mark my words. All of these issues are right on the doorstep of Cedarview Community Church - along with every other church in North America. How prepared will we be to deal with these situations? How will our youth deal with these situations with **both** Biblical conviction and Christ-like compassion? And bring both to the table without sacrificing either one?

Society is in a huge rush to celebrate the breaking down of creational genders. Our opening text will explain why that is so in just a little while. Only God’s Word can shed light on our culture’s present feeding frenzy on flexible gender categories.

Bruce Jenner can’t be praised by the celebrity culture enough for his recent transition from Bruce to Caitlyn,

featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. Jenner says he was nine years old when he first tried on his sister's dress because he always felt like he wanted to be a girl. In 1976 he won Olympic gold for the decathlon. And one of the things propelling him was his inner conflicted self trying to prove he really was a man.

To confuse the categories even more, Bruce/Caitlyn says he's still sexually attracted to women. What are we to make of that? Is this the heterosexual attraction of a man toward a woman? Or has Bruce/Caitlyn suddenly become a lesbian woman, with absolutely no change in the object of his sexual attraction from when he was a heterosexual man? In other words, he moves from being a **heterosexual** to a **lesbian** with absolutely no change whatsoever in his sexual desires of orientation. Aside from the morality, the logic starts to defy explanation.

As soon as the *Vanity Fair* Cover hit news stands the celebrity world sang its praise. "Courageous," "Honest," "Brave," and "Liberating," were the adjectives describing his new surgical status. The world's applause - as is always the case in our fallen culture of conformity - is deafening.

But there is something else going on. In steady and silent erosion, the church is having a very hard time **not** lining up with the gospel of **tolerance** dogmatically preached by the bright celebrity lights of our culture's image makers. Hollywood's stars and the industry's musicians almost dare anyone to speak out against this newly-found transgendered happiness.

You see, the church has gotten used to playing up to the acceptance of our culture. That's where the cool churches live. We don't like feeling the sting of our culture's distaste or hearing their accusations of **intolerance** or **irrelevance**. And we have long lost a willingness to be **"against"** anything. We've actually started to believe what they say about us - that moral absolutes are rude and true doctrines are arrogant and red-necked. Surely Jesus can't honestly expect His followers to be at odds with the philosophic life view of Miley Cyrus or Taylor Swift.

Then along came **June 9th** and the cover story of **Time Magazine**, featuring the account of transgendered actor **Laverne Cox**, born a boy, but now one of the stars on the **Netflix** drama, **"Orange is the New Black."** Yes. I said the **cover story**. In a speech called, **"Ain't I A Woman?"** Cox explains, **"I'm happy that I am myself and I couldn't imagine my life if I were still in denial or lying, pretending to be a boy. That seems ridiculous to me...."**

And if you don't think it's hard for the church to love **Netflix** without loving the morality of its stars you haven't been listening to a whole upcoming generation in the body of Christ. In spite of what we sing in church Jesus usually takes a back seat to the idols of the entertainment industry.

Fast forward again. I'm flying home from a week's holidays just over a month ago. It's always particularly relaxing to read a newspaper on a plane. No calls. No texts. No emails. No appointments. Then, there it is - an article in the *National Post* - **"Tribunal Mulls Striking Gender From Birth Certificates."**

It was one of those reading experiences I'm sure you've all had, where you read something that seems like plain English but have to go over it again because you're sure you must have misunderstood what the words seemed to say. I quote:

"After successfully lobbying provincial and federal governments to make it easier to amend sex designations on key identity documents, transgender Canadians are now pushing for another change: to abolish gender

references altogether from birth certificates.”

“The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal has agreed to review complaints filed by the Trans Alliance Society and a handful of transgender and intersex individuals, who argue that doctors should stop assigning the sex of a baby based on a quick inspection of the baby’s genitals at birth when there’s a possibility they may identify under a different gender, or no gender, years later.”

“Birth certificates may give false information about people and characterize them in a way that is actually wrong, that assumes to be right, and causes people....actual harm,’ said Morgane Oger, a transgender woman in Vancouver and chair of the society. ‘It’s considered true and infallible when it isn’t.”

“...Earlier this year, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced that it, too, would no longer require proof of sex reassignment surgery in order to change the designation on a citizenship certificate. It now will accept an amended birth certificate.”

“But advocates say the changes do not go far enough because governments are still certifying as true information recorded at birth which they know may be wrong in some cases.... ‘The current regime falsely presumes there are two genders, that genders never change and that you can tell a child’s gender at birth,’ said Vancouver human rights lawyer barbara findlay, who is representing the complainants and spells her name in all lowercase. ‘That means that children are raised ‘as’ the birth-assigned gender, which is a crazy-making experience. Instead of living in a social reality that recognizes that gender develops and does not exist at birth, those children have nothing to work with except something that feels profoundly wrong....”

I know we’ve covered a lot of ground in this teaching. But now I want to introduce something that might seem a tad abnormal. And it ties in directly with all I’ve been quoting by the transgendered community:

On *June 3rd, 2015* the *National Post* carried an essay entitled, *“Becoming Disabled By Choice: ‘Transabled’ People Feel Like Imposters In Their Fully Working Bodies.”* Here are some portions of that article:

“When he cut off his right arm with a ‘very sharp power tool,’ a man who now calls himself One Hand Jason let everyone believe it was an accident. But he had for months tried different means of cutting and crushing the limb that never quite felt like his own, training himself on first aid so he wouldn’t bleed to death, even practicing on animal parts sourced from a butcher.”

“My goal was to get the job done with no hope of reconstruction or re-attachment, and I wanted some method that I could actually bring myself to do,” he told the body modification website....His goal was to become disabled.”

“People like Jason have been classified as ‘transabled’ - feeling like imposters in their bodies, their arms and legs in full working order.

‘We define transability as the desire or the need for a person identified as able-bodied by other people to transform his or her body to obtain a physical impairment,’ says Alexandre Baril, a Quebec born academic who will present on ‘transability’ at this week’s Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Ottawa.”

“Researchers in Canada are trying to better understand how transabled people think and feel. Clive Baldwin, a Canada Research Chair in Narrative Studies who teaches social work at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, N.B., has interviewed 37 people worldwide who identify as transabled.”

“Most of them are men. About half are in Germany and Switzerland, but he knows of a few in Canada. Most crave an amputation or paralysis....Many people, like One Hand Jason, arrange ‘accidents’ to help achieve the goal. One dropped an incredibly heavy concrete block on his legs - an attempt to injure himself so bad an amputation would be necessary. But doctors saved the leg. He limps, but it's not the disability he wanted.”

“Some of his study participants....draw parallels to the experience many transgender people express of not feeling like they're in the right body.”

“As the public begins to embrace people who identify as transgender, the trans people within the disability movement are also seeking their due....But this has been met with great resistance in both the disability activist community and in transgender circles, argues Baril, a visiting scholar of feminist, gender and sexuality studies at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.”

“They tend to see transabled people as dishonest people, people who try to steal resources from the community....” Baril - who is himself disabled and transgender - believes the transgender community distances itself because it has worked very hard to de-pathologize what's known as ‘gender dysphoria,’ and sought its removal from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.”

Christian worldview aside, notice what’s happening through the twists and turns of this article. Suddenly the transgendered movement is groping to play the ***moral absolute card***. In their condemnation of the ***“transability”*** movement they are doing exactly what they’re accusing the Christian community of doing to ***transgenders***. Suddenly transgenders are making judgments about the free choice of other people for the decisions they make about their own bodies and their own self-fulfillment.

Where does this right of the transgender community to judge suddenly come from? After all, whatever else you might say about these ***“transabled”*** people, they aren’t hurting anyone else. And certainly, removing any consideration of God from the equation, their bodies are their own to do with as they please. And what they’re doing is, by their own declaration, fulfilling and completing who they feel they are as persons on the inside. Where would the transgender community, holding high the universal banner of tolerance and acceptance, find the moral high ground to forbid these actions in the transability community?

Obviously, we’re in desperate need of light and truth. And that’s where we are going in closing:

Romans 1:18-28 - ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the***

creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] **For this reason** God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are **contrary to nature**; [27] and the men likewise **gave up natural relations with women** and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”

Paul deals with ***two creature defining issues*** in this text. He deals with the ***creature’s knowledge of God*** and then he deals with the ***creature’s sexual identity and activity***. And the most important point of all is the way Paul says these two issues are ***inseparably attached***.

1) **THE CREATED WORLD REVEALS VISIBLY THE NATURE OF THE INVISIBLE CREATOR**

Romans 1:20 - “For his **invisible attributes**, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, **in the things that have been made**. So they are without excuse.”

It would be almost impossible for those without a Bible to know anything about an invisible God. You can’t ***see*** Him. Not ever. To try to ***see*** God is like trying to ***see*** wind.

So how will the human creature come to know anything about God’s ***“eternal power,”*** or ***“divine nature”*** (20)? There’s only one way. We look at the things God has made. And what we can see in the visible created world teaches all of us what our invisible God is like.

2) **WE LEARN ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY THE SAME WAY WE LEARN ABOUT THE INVISIBLE GOD**

Romans 1:21, 24-28 - “For **although they knew God**, (How did they know about God? By looking at the way things are made in God’s creation) **they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.....[24]....Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God** (What truth? The truth they could see from the way things are designed and made) **for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason** (What reason? The reason spelled out in 1:10. The things they could know about God and themselves by the way God made everything) **God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”**

The argument here is straightforward. Our physical bodies are part of the stuff God has made - **Romans 1:20** - “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

In other words, our visible bodies are part of the way we learn about the ways of our invisible God. When people reject ***what God has made*** human sexuality is the victim. We see what ***God*** is like in

what He has made and we see what **human sexuality** is to be in the way **our bodies are made**.

This is why Paul can talk so freely about people **“exchanging the truth about God,”**(25) **in the same way** people **“exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature”**(26). **Cosmology** and **biology** both spring from the hand of the Creator. Both reveal His divine nature and intention. As John Piper says, **“Whom we should worship is not left to our preferences, and who we are sexually is not left to our preferences. Both are dictated by God’s revelation in nature.”**

Yes, there is forgiveness and grace for all sinners. Even sinners like I. But none of that cancels out our Creator’s revealed will for our **worship** or our **sexuality**. Let the church continue to be the one place holding for the compassion of grace and the light of Biblical truth. Escape the dark grave of this world’s lies.

And everyone said.....