

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Transgenderism and Public Bathrooms: The New Civil Right

As a result of the Supreme Court ruling last June legalizing same-sex marriage, the social battleground has shifted to transgenderism. Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox have added a pop-culture dimension to transgender issues, and President Obama has made it an issue of rights protected by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Michael Scherer of *Time* magazine writes that “with the power of federal purse strings, the Obama Administration has declared that all students must be treated equally regardless of gender identity, defining innate feelings of male and female identity as legally protected rights.” US Attorney General Loretta Lynch declared on 5 May that “We see you, we stand with you, and we will do everything we can to protect you going forward.” The Obama Administration used terms such as “dignity and safety” to argue their case, as do the critics of this decision. From both sides of the cultural divide, the “dignity and safety” of our children are at stake.

But the “battle over bathrooms” is about much more than the use of public bathrooms. It is about “gender roles, social change, federalism, physical danger, political polarization and, most strikingly, a breakdown in the ability of anyone in this country to speak across our divides, or appeal to common humanity.” We are talking about, according to one study cited in *Time*, three-tenths of 1% of adults who struggle with transgender issues. But, because it is now framed as a civil rights issue, the size of this population is irrelevant, or at least to most it is. But, as mentioned above, once the Supreme Court settled the same-sex marriage issue, transgenderism became the next rights’ issue. In early 2016, it was exacerbated by lawmakers in 17 states who proposed laws that would restrict transgender people’s access to public washrooms. LGBT-rights groups then mobilized statewide campaigns and the NAACP joined the effort. The transgender bathroom issue in North Carolina has become the epicenter of this struggle, for its legislature passed a law restricting access, and the NBA, Bruce Springsteen and several major corporations (e.g., PayPal) launched a boycott of North Carolina. In addition, the US Department of Justice has filed a civil rights lawsuit against the state. But the speed of cultural accommodation to transgenderism as a civil right in need of protection by the US government is astonishing. Where it took years for same-sex marriage to be accepted as law, it has taken months for transgenderism! Last year at this time, we were discussing same-sex marriage. Today, the Obama Administration has used its considerable power to force this issue on places of public accommodation.

How should we think biblically about this complicated issue? Because the transgender issue focuses on real people who have real struggles, this is a sensitive and very personal issue. However, I believe what follows accurately summarizes what the Bible teaches:

1. Maleness and femaleness are God's choice, determined at conception ("male and female He created them," Genesis 1:27). But growing into one's masculinity or femininity and embracing it can be thwarted by cultural and family developments.
2. It is certainly true that God desires for every male to grow to masculinity and every female to femininity. When that does not occur, the culture has developed labels such as transgendered and transsexual. Regardless of the labels, God sees each individual as of worth and value because they bear His image, but as broken individuals. As with every human being, the salvation offered in Jesus Christ heals the brokenness.
3. As with every individual human being, our fundamental identity is in Jesus Christ. Much of the postmodern world has focused on sex or gender as the primary aspect of personal identity. But the Bible calls on us to identify with Jesus—He is our core identity, regardless of whether we are male, female, transgender, etc. Identity in Christ is a profound, transformative concept that results from placing our faith in Christ.
4. It is certainly true that God intends for males to manifest masculine characteristics and females to manifest female characteristics. The fact that some people are born with evidence of mutations in sex-determining genes does not impact their value and worth to God. But the Bible is clear that men are to appear as men and women as women—see Deuteronomy 22:5.
5. Focus on the Family has published a helpful position paper of the Transgender movement. I quote several points from that paper:
 - We must remember that those who struggle with their gender identity have lived lives of great pain, confusion and rejection . . . We must humbly share [God's] love embodied in the Gospel, to lift them up in prayer and to allow the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction, healing and transformation.
 - We affirm the Christian view that to be human is to be holistically united as body and spirit. Often, transgender advocates hold to the pagan view that the body is a container that the spirit is poured into. As such, they erroneously conclude that God has mistakenly put an opposite-gendered spirit into the wrong body or that the body is not the real person—that only the spirit is real.
 - We call upon parents to take a positive role in their children's development by providing them with a strong, Christian example of what it means to be male and female.
 - We believe we are called to proclaim the truth and beauty of God's design and the redemption from sexual brokenness in our lives and culture can only come through Jesus Christ. Like everyone else, "transgendered" individuals are desperately in need of God's truth and deserve to know the love and compassion of Christ as shown through His people.

May God, in His grace, empower the church to see transgendered people as they are to see every human being: a broken sinner desperately in need of the salvation that Jesus offers. As with all human beings, only in Christ is there healing, wholeness and the promise of a resurrected body after which the struggle with brokenness and sin will end. In eternity there will be no struggle with identity or life's meaning. Both will be fulfilled in Christ.

See Michael Scherer, "Battle of the Bathroom," *Time* (30 May 2016), pp. 30-37; Focus on the Family Position Paper on Transgenderism at www.focusonthefamily.com; "What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People" at www.probe.org.