

Commentary: The gospel for every body, including intersex and transgender

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Questions of gender and identity are front and center these days. For many Christians, it's a time of cultural tension. Rather than responding with silence or self-righteousness, what if the church led with compassion?

For those who are transgender or born intersex, the church too often has offered judgment instead of understanding. Yet, the gospel calls us to walk with those who are hurting, offering truth without abandoning love.

I invite the church to consider how we can support those navigating gender and embodiment with biblical conviction and Christlike compassion.

Understanding the terms

According to Mark Yarhouse, a Christian psychologist, transgender is an “umbrella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present and express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex.”¹

Transgender refers to individuals whose gender identity does not align with their biological sex.

Intersex describes people born with physical sex characteristics—chromosomes, gonads or genitalia—that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. This includes more than one hundred medical

conditions where a person is born with one or more atypical features in their sexual anatomy.²

Intersex traits, according to a review in the [American Journal of Human Biology](#), are estimated to occur in about 1.7 percent of the population, roughly as common as red hair.³

These aren't hypothetical debates. They are lived experiences.

People ask hard questions: "Who am I?" "What's wrong with me?" "Where do I belong?"

Sadly, too many hear only rejection. But what if the church responded not with blame, but with empathy rooted in biblical understanding?

Creation: The gift of embodied life

Scripture begins with God's good design. Genesis 1:27 declares, "So God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them."

Our sexed embodiment—male or female—is not incidental. As Preston Sprinkle writes in *Embodied*: "Our sex is not arbitrary. It's part of how we reflect God's image in the world."⁴

However, we cannot understand fully this design without considering what comes next.

Fall: The distortion of the good

Romans 8 tells us creation was "subjected to futility" and now "groans" for redemption (vv. 20, 22).

The Fall fractured not just relationships and morality, but our bodies and

identities. This brokenness can manifest as chromosomal differences, hormonal imbalances or deep psychological distress, which some experience as gender dysphoria.

Yarhouse proposes three lenses to understand gender dysphoria. The integrity lens emphasizes the male/female moral order. The disability lens views dysphoria as a result of the Fall. The diversity lens stresses identity and community.⁵

The disability lens may be the most pastorally useful. It allows us to say, “This isn’t how it should be”—without condemning the person suffering.

Andrew Bunt expresses a similar sentiment when he says: “In terms of theological explanation, those born intersex [or trans] are no different to those born blind or with a limb which is missing or not fully formed. These things are all biological experiences of the brokenness of creation.”⁶

We need to remember we live in a fallen world where even our bodies, including our brains, are not the way they’re supposed to be. In other words, feeling out of sync with one’s body is not always rebellion, as some might believe. It’s often a cry for help in a broken world.

This brokenness includes intersex conditions and struggles with gender dysphoria. These are not sins but signs of a fallen creation.

And while the Bible doesn’t use the term “intersex,” Jesus acknowledges those who were “born eunuchs” (Matthew 19:12)—a category many scholars believe includes what we now would call intersex individuals. Jesus doesn’t exclude them. He recognizes them and gives them dignity.

Sandra Glahn points out, “We need to stop saying every human is clearly either one or the other, male or female, because Jesus is the Truth, and to say so is not to tell the truth.”⁷ It’s a potent reminder to all of us that not

every body tells a straightforward story—but each is deeply known and loved by God.

Redemption: Hope for the whole self

In Jesus, God took on a human body. The incarnation affirms the goodness of the body, even one marked by weakness and suffering. Those living with dysphoria or intersex conditions can find comfort in a Savior who understands bodily pain.

Yet, redemption in Christ does not mean every confusion is resolved in this life. Colossians 3:3 says, “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Our primary identity is not in our gender, our struggles or even our clarity, but in belonging to Christ. As followers of Christ, we are called to live in that tension, not to resolve every question, but to follow Jesus in the midst of it.

Restoration: The hope of the resurrection

Our ultimate hope is not found in transitioning or in perfect self-understanding. It is in resurrection. Philippians 3:21 promises Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”

One day, our embodied experience will reflect fully who we are in Christ, without distortion, without shame.

To those who live with these complexities, hear this: Your story is not unwanted. Your body is not a theological problem to be solved, but a life to be embraced in light of Christ’s redemption.

A new approach for the church

The church must move beyond suspicion and silence. We must hold conviction and compassion together. Here's how:

- **Affirm complexity.** Not every experience fits neatly into binary boxes. Let people tell their story.
- **Hold truth and tenderness.** Uphold God's design for male and female, but acknowledge the pain the Fall brings to some people's experience of that design.
- **Center identity in Christ.** Neither biology nor feelings alone define us. Christ does.
- **Create safe places for struggle.** People wrestling with identity need community, not condemnation.

The church must be a place that holds out hope, not just rules. A people who witness to Christ by how we carry one another's pain, not by how quickly we solve it.

As Sprinkle notes: "Christ followers shouldn't mock the swelling number of people identifying as trans [or intersex]. If that number keeps rising, then so should the number of trans [or intersex] people gathering in our homes and around our tables."⁸

A word to the intersex and transgender community

To those reading this who are transgender or intersex: I'm sorry for the ways the church has failed you. Your story matters. You are not an

afterthought to God.

Psalm 139 declares you are fearfully and wonderfully made. That doesn't mean your journey is easy or not affected by sin's distortion of God's good creation. But it does mean God knows every part of you, even those that confuse or ache, and still calls you beloved.

And one day, your body—your whole self—will be everything God intended it to be, radiant and restored. Until then, your identity is not in the categories you fit into or don't fit into, but in the Savior who calls you by name.

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Footnotes

1. Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 20-21.
2. Glahn, Sandra. 2016. "What Is Intersex and What Does the Bible Say about It?" Bible.org Blogs. 2016. <https://blogs.bible.org/what-is-intersex-and-what-does-the-bible-say-about-it/>.
3. Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes, Revisited," *The Sciences* 40, no. 4 (2000): 18-23.
4. Sprinkle, Preston, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church &*

What the Bible Has to Say. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2021), 184.

5. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 122.
6. Andrew Bunt, "The Binary and Intersex," *Think Theology*, February 15, 2019, https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the_binary_and_intersex.
7. Glahn, "What Is Intersex and What Does the Bible Say about It?"
8. Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 223.