

QYA – Does God Make Gender Mistakes?

The question

"What does the Bible say about transgender, i.e., did God make a mistake? Even if one male out of 100,000 has more female hormones than male, is this person ok to be a female?"

The problem

What do we mean by "transgender"?

Many well-meaning Christians don't understand this very well. And our misunderstanding can lead to insensitive and unhelpful responses to people who need our compassion and support. In the LGBT movement (define) broadly speaking, there is consensus that transgender is about preferring to identify or express a gender other than the one you are born with. It's not necessarily about having sex-reassignment surgery or hormone therapy. Transsexual people choose to transition their gender identity from that of their birth to the one want. And they choose this, because their "psychological and emotional sense of themselves as a female, for instance, does not match or align with their birth sex as a male, or vice versa"--a very difficult experience for anyone, usually called "gender dysphoria".ⁱ But for many transgender people, it's not about changing who they are, but about being accepted for how they want to be accepted. A transgender person might not want to actually transition from male to female or vice-versa. They might just prefer to express themselves and be accepted by another gender type.

Some definitions are too narrow to be fair

Trevor Macdonald is a woman living in Manitoba who identifies herself as a man. But she did not have reassignment surgery, which made it possible for her to get pregnant, deliver her baby, and even nurse the baby. To quote from a story about her in the Guardian,

MacDonald points to the often trotted out narrative of a transgender person as someone who was born in the wrong body. "Our stories are so much more diverse than that one phrase," the 31-year-old says... "When someone who has only seen that narrative hears about a trans person becoming pregnant, they think, well that doesn't make any sense. If it's the wrong body, why are you doing this with your body? But it's so much more nuanced than that."ⁱⁱ

Transgender issues are as diverse as transgender people. A spokesperson like MacDonald would tell us that it's not fair to limit who a person is to the gender of their birth--or even to the gender of their choice. In a sense, I think it's fair to say that the transgender movement is about moving beyond the either/or distinctions of male and female, not letting anyone or anything other than your own free choice tell you who you are or how you should live. Not the State, not the courts, and not even God.

What determines sex? Can people change their sex?

Every cell in the human body normally contains 23 pairs of chromosomes (i.e., 46 chromosomes)--every cell. 22 of those pairs are the same in males and in females. The 23rd one is what determines your sex. Males inherit one x chromosome from their fathers, and one y from their mothers--so their 23rd chromosome in every cell is xy. Females inherit an x chromosome from both parents, so theirs is xx. The question I was asked assumed that sex is determined by the ratio of male to female hormones. This isn't the case. It's genetic. Hormone levels affect the development of sex organs and gender traits, yes. But no matter what the hormone levels are, the genetic sex of a person cannot be changed. (A study

published in the Journal of Sex Research found that cases where a person is neither female or male according to their chromosomes is about 1/5,555 people. 0.018% of the population.)ⁱⁱⁱ

Sometimes babies are born with congenital conditions resulting in anatomy that is harder to define as either male or female. In most of those cases, the chromosomes are clearly female or male, and some kind of surgery is recommended at an appropriate time to match the body to the genetics. But many adults born with ambiguous sex characteristics like that, do not identify as LGBT, and are not "transgender". So it's a red herring in many cases to confuse the discussion about the Bible and transgender with examples of people born as what experts call "intersex" (sometimes offensively called "hermaphrodite").

A paper by one physician, who has treated transgender patients, said "Gender reassignment surgery does not change a person's sex, as sex is determined by X and Y chromosomes contained in every cell in the body. Male to female sex change surgery is a cosmetic change only."^{iv} What does this mean? Medically speaking, scientifically, people are born male or female and that fact cannot be changed by hormone treatment or surgery. The actual medical cases where gender is a complicated question at birth are not what we call "transgender". Many of these "intersex" people live healthy lives as male or female. Transgender people are individuals who are born male or female but experience, as one Dr. said, "a significant feeling of incongruence with one's gender, to the point of distress, accompanied by the strong desire to be of the other sex".^v

None of the transgender rights literature I read claimed that transgender feelings have biological causes. And there is a lot of misunderstanding out there: one of my sons heard a girl this week say that she used to be "so transgender" because she wanted to learn to skateboard. Many people feel confused about their gender because of cultural stereotypes—they don't relate to what's typical for one gender. Like skateboarding vs. playing with dolls. That might seem trivial, but for many who struggle with not fitting the typical mold, these feelings can become a nightmare so that they are unable to continue living as the sex their biology says they are. Gender dysphoria, like this, might be psychological instead of physical. But just because it is a psychological trauma, does not mean it isn't real. It is a real struggle for many, and we Christians owe them a thoughtful response if asked, in addition to our love and compassion.

What does the Bible say?

Jesus once quoted from Genesis and said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt. 19:4 ESV) What the Bible says about God creating people male and female could not be more clear. And of course, the Bible is full of descriptions of God's perfect wisdom, in doing all things well and for the best possible outcome, and that He never makes mistakes. So does God make gender mistakes? Who is more likely to make a gender mistake? The perfect, all-knowing Creator, or the imperfect, hurting, confused, creature deceived by the fog of sin? But the really important question, for us as Christians, is not what the Bible says about God's creation of humans as male or female, but about whether God now approves of males shifting their gender to live as females, or females shifting their gender to live as males. And secondly, what should Christians say to transgender people?

Does God approve of changing genders?

The answer is, "no", but the question is too narrow. If God created people to be male and female as Jesus said, then to undo what God has done, or to express our sexuality in a way other than God designed it to be used, is sin.^{vi} But that's not only true of our sexuality. All sin is either ignoring what God

has done or using what God created without paying attention to God's design for His creation. So a more precise question is, "does God approve of it when we ignore Him and His design for Creation?" [read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10] Does God approve? Most people in the world, especially people who don't yet trust in Jesus, and who haven't yet committed themselves to obeying God, really couldn't care less about whether or not God approves of their behaviour. In fact, in the previous chapter, Paul specifically instructs all Christians that it's not our job to pass judgement on unbelievers about their morals, values, or choices. [read 1 Cor 5:9-10, 12]. It's literally not our business unless they ask us what God thinks, or what the Bible says.

But to warn unbelievers that their sin, including their rebellious attitudes toward God and His creation, is not going to end well, Paul is clear in these verses that in the next life, in "the Kingdom of God", there will be no unrighteous rebels. The specific kind of sinful rebellion that relates to our transgender question is **in verse 9: "nor men who practice homosexuality"**. If you have a KJV or NASB you might notice that there are two kinds of homosexual act listed here: the Greek refers to the two partners in a homosexual relationship. The one who initiates the sex act with another man, and, according to the Greek, the "passive" or "effeminate" partner.

In his review of Mark Yarhouse's book, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Sam Ferguson pointed out that because of these two Greek words for homosexual partners, *malakos* and *arsenokoites*,^{vii} (a passive, effeminate man and another man who sleeps with men) "...we cannot miss that one reason the Bible prohibited homosexuality (and the surrounding culture frowned on it) was because it was, in fact, gender-shifting. One of the parties in the homosexual act was acting female while being male." So God doesn't prohibit same sex relationships for some arbitrary religious reason, but because it is taking what He created and using it for another purpose—an act of personal rebellion against the Creator's design and rights over His creation of gender roles. Ferguson concludes, "If a reason homosexuality was immoral related to the shifting of one's gender, then perhaps we may draw the inference that other cases of gender shifting would also be immoral, such as cross-dressing and reassignment surgery."^{viii} And other passages like Deut 22:5 certainly teach just that.

What should Christians say to transgender people?

The LGBTQ movement, as a whole, seems to insist that if we won't give our full approval to their sexual values and choices, then we are being intolerant. And while we cannot love the Bible, or submit ourselves to God's authority and design for the world He made, and give approval to any sin, we must not discriminate against transgender people: we must be fair and loving, but truthful, in how we treat all kinds of sinners. Paul lists in these verses (1 Cor 6:9-10) four kinds of sexual sin, plus five other kinds of non-sexual sin. The same warning applies to all: unrighteous people whose lives are ruled by these sins, will not inherit God's Kingdom. They aren't "going to Heaven". But Paul says, "and such were some of you"! [read v11]

There isn't a day that goes by that I don't struggle against how God wants us to enjoy His Creation! All of us are sinners, and before we found forgiveness and acceptance through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we were all rebellious sinners! But all the kinds of sin in these two verses describe people who have given themselves over to their sin so that it defined them. All of us dabble in all kinds of sin: some of us were slaves in the control of specific sins. Every day, I have to decide, am I going to follow God's design for my life? Or am I going to use the world God made for my own selfish pleasure?

Am I going to love the wife God blessed me with? Or am I going to be a jerk and treat her like she exists to serve me? Am I going to use my money to be a blessing to my family and to others? Or am I going to abuse it to satisfy my greed? So what should Christians say to sinners like me? And what should Christians say to sinners who want to be free from the controlling chains of their sin? (I take it for granted that we must never try to force this, but should always be ready to help if asked.)

[**read v11b**] **You can be washed.** No matter what you have done, or what still controls you, you can be made spiritually new, clean in your spirit from the stain of sin. If you put your confidence in Jesus, that when He died on the cross, He accepted the guilty punishment that you earned, and when He rose again from the dead, it showed that God accepted that payment on your account, then you can from now on, always be clean in God's sight. **You can be sanctified.** By continuing to be assured that God has forgiven you, that Jesus sacrifice was enough to finish the job, that God has *made you* clean in your identity, He will also make your life, your choices, your heart's desires more and more clean for the rest of your life. **You can be justified.** All of this wonderful change, spiritually, and practically; in who you really are, and in the things you do, is because God is ready to "justify" you—that is, to declare you legally "not guilty", and more than that, by transferring Jesus' record to your account, God will declare you "perfectly righteous", according to His Law, once and for all.

While I was learning about this for this sermon, I read a number of stories of transgendered people^{ix} who eventually believed the Gospel and gave their lives to Jesus. Each one of them told how difficult it was to transition back to the gender they were born with. But none of them did it because they wanted to fit into some old-fashioned religious stereotype about men and women. They did it because they realized that human beings cannot be defined, or satisfied, by how they choose to express their sexuality. We need God. We need to be reconciled to our Creator through the person and work of Jesus. God designed each of us, ultimately, and most importantly, for a relationship with Jesus.

ⁱ Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, by Mark Yarhouse [From <<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-understanding-gender-dysphoria-transgender-mark-yarhouse>>]

ⁱⁱ [From <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jun/20/transgender-dad-breastfeeding-pregnancy-trevor-macdonald>>]

ⁱⁱⁱ Sax, Leonard (2002). "How common is intersex? a response to Anne Fausto-Sterling." *Journal of Sex Research* 39 (3):174–178. doi:10.1080/00224490209552139. PMID 12476264. From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersex>

^{iv} From <http://creation.com/male-and-female-he-made-them>

^v From <http://creation.com/male-and-female-he-made-them>

^{vi} Matthew 19:1-11. Jesus says this and then acknowledges that some are born intersex ("eunuchs from birth") but are called to live as eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven. C.f. <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2016/06/16/gender-and-intersex-andrew-wilson-on-how-should-the-church-interact-in-love/>

^{vii} Gingrich Lexicon, #4082 and #931 respectively.

^{viii} Sam Ferguson, reviewing *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, by Mark Yarhouse [From <<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-understanding-gender-dysphoria-transgender-mark-yarhouse>>]

^{ix} E.g., David Oconnor, <http://ausdisciples.com.au/blog/my-testimony/>; Walt Heyer, <https://sites.google.com/site/tradingmysorrowsbook/the-book>;