

## **Gender, Anthropology, and Sexuality in New Testament Perspective: Implications for Transgenderism**

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In April, 2017, the members of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Executive Committee voted to accept a “Statement on Transgenderism.”<sup>1</sup> Reactions reported from the floor as well as published responses underscore the controversial and personal nature of the subject.<sup>2</sup> When we talk about transgenderism we are talking about people. When a face (person) is attached to the word “transgender,” it abruptly becomes something very personal, undeniably real, and extremely complex. The intensely personal realities of human internal crisis are highlighted in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2017-04-11/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-vote-statement-on-transgender/>. As reported in the Adventist Review Online, the 1,400 word “Document acknowledges limited knowledge, seeks biblical guidance and calls to love transgender people” (“World Church Executive Committee Votes Statement on Transgenderism,” <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story4988-world-church-executive-committee-votes-statement-on-transgenderism>). The statement first defines the key terms commonly used when referring to the topic. It then reviews biblical principles relating to sexuality and the ensuing questions which transgenderism raise. It includes pastoral advice for church leaders and members relating to transgender people, whether they be visitors or church members. AR noted that the biblical principles section was based on the belief that “Scripture provides principles for guidance and counsel to transgender people and the Church, transcending human conventions and culture.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; “Responses to the Adventist Church’s Statement on Transgenderism,” <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/04/18/responses-adventist-church’s-statement-transgenderism>.

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rise of transgender issues to social and medical prominence in our changing culture.<sup>3</sup> It can be seen in both professional and popular discussion. The personal quest for wholeness has no easy answers.

While statements are limited and well-crafted words can unwittingly define,<sup>4</sup> the Adventist community has every right to reference its discussion of transgenderism from the perspective of Scripture. But the question remains, how does it do so in relation to compelling insights from the body of medical science—especially when the information, discussion and beliefs about gender are rapidly shifting? How does it do so compassionately in relation to the oft pained existential journey of individual transgender people? How do we understand and balance the intersect between the biblical ideal, the reality of the Fall, the body of medical and genome research, the transgender person’s unique crisis experience and longings, and the redeeming grace, purpose, and power of God? How do we understand the tensions which these varied perspectives create in a way that orients us toward God together with the principles and values of His Word; and at the same time avoid a secular paradigm or judgmental attitude? How do we maintain a biblically informed worldview which includes both God’s ideal and grace on the one hand, and our fallen human experience on the other?

This article does not profess to comprehensively answer these questions. Rather, it offers reflections on select New Testament passages

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<sup>3</sup> Examples include: Eliza Gray, “The Transgender Tipping Point,” *TIME* (June 9, 2014); Buzz Bissinger, “Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story,” *VANITY FAIR Magazine* (July, 2015); Anne L. Boedecker, *The Transgender Guidebook: Keys to a Successful Transition* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011); Laura Erickson-Schroth, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Susan Kuklin, *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (Candlewick, 2015); Jennifer Finney Boylan, *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (Broadway Books, 2013); “Gender Revolution,” Special Issue, *National Geographic*, January, 2017. A transgender person’s inner crisis can include ambiguity, guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, rejection, fear, and hopelessness.

<sup>4</sup> How we name something [or define it] determines how we perceive it and relate to it. How we name [or define] something can determine how we relate to the person whom we so perceive or describe. This can become very complicated in relation to balancing the experience and dignity of transgender people as persons while at the same time discussing the multiple physical, genetic, emotional and psychiatric aspects of their experience and the choices before them. This is true as well in terms of how transgenderism itself might be viewed and approached philosophically.

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with the hope of deepening our understanding of relevant biblical principles and values. Our purpose is to enlarge on the terse explanations reflected in the biblical references cited in the Church's "Statement on Transgenderism." While doing so, we will not attempt to explain or define transgenderism. Nor will we step too deeply into the contemporary "gender" and "sexuality" debate, except by way of contrast with the view of human nature which Scripture unfolds. The body of current professional and popular literature is easily attainable to orient the interested reader.

Before engaging NT passages however, we will first ask how they might speak to our concerns. At the same time, we will orient our thinking against the contrasting philosophical backdrop of contemporary transgender theory.

**Engaging New Testament Perspectives**

When it comes to the question of how might the New Testament speak to transgender issues, what questions should we ask? To what passages do we turn? What images of the nature of human being are there to observe? More specifically, how does the NT nuance and integrate the inner immaterial and spiritual qualities of the human person (character, will, choice, conscience, mind, moral capacity, spirituality, sexuality, gender, identity) in relation to the tangible corporeal aspects of humanity (body/anatomy/soul)? Then too, what is gender normality in the biblical perspective? How should we relate to and counsel those who appear to experience something different? What biblical principles, values, or norms will ultimately guide us? In the end, we want to be faithful to God and His Word. In doing so, we want also to offer a compassionate biblical frame of reference from which we can both counsel and support transgender persons in their struggle towards wholeness.

The fact is, "neither gender nor personal sexual identity as we now understand them is a major concern of the biblical world, and thus we cannot demand Scripture to address such issues directly."<sup>5</sup> For sure, there are relevant principles and values, which reflect authentic human realities of being and action with regard to sexuality and identity. They largely "go-without-saying," however. In other words, they are assumed. Indirect. Tacit. Not really at issue in the discussion. The varied nature of NT

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<sup>5</sup> Erin Dufault-Hunter, "Sex and Sexuality," *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*: 718.

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literature—its form and content, subtle allusions and rhetoric, narrative and commentary, appeal and warning—challenge our understanding of its real meanings regarding the human phenomenon. Yet it opens for the attentive reader windows into multifaceted realities of human nature and being.

Will these tacit insights and occasioned positions be enough? Is it fair to look to the NT for answers it may not precisely provide? How and on what levels will it convey its principles and values? We would need a consistent hermeneutic.

Towards answering some of these questions, we will engage relevant New Testament passages from the viewpoint of the human being in relation to his or her identity and body (anatomy) in its sexual dimensions. Both anthropological and human sexuality/gender implications will be explored alongside one another from within a given text and how that text may resonate with Scripture's larger vision of human sexuality. Some of these passages may not appear at first to materially relate to transgender issues. Most, if not all the biblical insights and values gleaned will be indirect, tacit. Nevertheless, a coherent NT anthropology and implications does emerge—offering insights, which can guide us in the discussion of transgender issues and in relating to transgender people. It will be seen that NT Scripture not only unfolds a wholistic ontological anthropology, but how its anthropology enables relevant engagement with the varied aspects of transgender discussion—especially the oft presumed body/mind divide and why the internal crisis.

In the process it must be remembered, “all our experience of sexual life is conditioned by the fall.”<sup>6</sup> As a result of the fall “the sexuality which we know from human experience does in fact bear witness to a vast rent which runs right through human nature” creating “a shame which cannot be overcome, and a longing which cannot be satisfied.”<sup>7</sup> This biblical understanding of the human predicament and its impact on human sexuality finds contemporary expression in the kind of deep emotional distress evidenced in transgender people who honestly, yet painfully, grapple with their personal gender identity—trying to find or be their true self. Unwittingly, the body of medical science and genome data yield tacit

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<sup>6</sup> S. L. Jones, “Sexuality,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*: 1108.

<sup>7</sup> Emil Brunner, *Man In Revolt* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1979), 348.

corroboration of the fall in relation to human sexuality.

From such a context of human personal struggle on some of the deepest intimate and psychological levels, there is need to remember too, that the values and perspectives found in Scripture regarding human being, gender, and sexuality, reflect divine compassion and redemptive grace towards restoring the wholeness every transgender seeks. The messiness of our human condition precludes total restoration short of the final consummation when God makes all things new (Rev 21:4, 5; 1 Cor 15:42-44). This in itself can help orient transgender people as they make concrete choices regarding their individual experience and options towards finding wholeness. The larger biblical narrative of creation, the fall, redemption, and final consummation provides our orienting backdrop both by way of understanding the issues and for compassionate response and support of those facing difficult choices.

### **Existential Alienation of Self and Body**

In order to provide an ideological/theological foundation for transgenderism, some contemporary theorists have turned to concepts which reflect the Neopagan worldview of the ancient Near East. Significant influence of pagan spirituality on modern perceptions of the self and gender are observable.<sup>8</sup> These include old Gnostic ideas of genderless spirituality which have been revamped and applied.<sup>9</sup> So also the age-old platonic dualism, which now unfolds in a new arena of gender and identity.<sup>10</sup> Other theorists reinterpret classical Christian theology within these conceptual paradigms.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 43, no. 3 (2000); Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> See Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010); Paul B. Petersen. "Unwholly" Relationships: Unity in Biblical Ontology," in "What Are Human Beings That You Remember Them?": *Proceedings of the Third International Bible Conference*, Nof Ginosar and Jerusalem June 11-21, 2012 (ed. Clinton Wahlen, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Pickstone, *The Divinity of Sex: The Search for Ecstasy in a Secular Age* (New York: St. Martins, 1997); Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*; Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your*

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Philosophically, the distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity severs gender identity from biological or anatomical sex.<sup>12</sup> This not-so-subtle alienation of one's own body (the physical self) from his or her own person (the internal self—psychological, emotional, spiritual, moral) reflects secular platonic and evolutionary psychology views of the human being.<sup>13</sup> It creates an existential alienation, which effectively pits gender (psychological identity and desire) against biology (physical identity and anatomy).<sup>14</sup> It splits human sexuality from essential self-hood and ultimately relegates gender to social construct<sup>15</sup> or peer related “horizontal identity.”<sup>16</sup> Physical appearance, anatomy, chromosomes, or masculine/feminine feelings, behaviors, and spiritual/moral qualities no longer define gender or one's self. Personhood and gender ultimately become synonymous with identity and one's existential self-designation—internally, externally, personally, and culturally. Coinciding with this gender/body fragmentation there is an increased phenomenon of people experiencing “gender dissonance” and desiring gender change. Something contemporary culture at large applauds and facilitates. There is need of a clearer, more objective anthropology.

These interpretive paradigms beg the question of what the real or perceived anthropology of transgender really might be at its core, and what

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*Sexuality.*

<sup>12</sup> Russell. D. Moore, “Conservative Christianity and the Transgender Question,” *The Washington Post* (August 15, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> See Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*, 49-66. Gender identification usually aligns with one's birth sex.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 65. This contrasts with assertions that three areas serve as the major factors of individual, personal identification: gender, race, and family. These three personal identity factors are immutable. Each carries extreme emotional consequences for individual suffering from crises in these areas. One cannot choose his or her gender, race, or family. Sexuality, on the other hand, is a generic term that describes one's ability to behave sexually—without regard to the focus of our sexual desire. See David E. James, *God's Truth About Gender: Unraveling the Lies of Modern Human Sexuality, Behavior and Identity* (Sisters, OR: VMI Publishers, 2008), 70.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Solomon, *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2012), 2-6. Solomon suggests that horizontal identities reflect recessive genes, random mutations, prenatal influences or values and preferences that one does not share with his or her progenitors, while “vertical identities” are more “normal”—gender, race, language, family, cultural norms, etc.

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a biblically informed anthropology might offer as a constructive, normative point of reference. Transgender persons themselves, may or may not reflect these perspectives in their own journey. Nevertheless, these interpretive paradigms are an influential part of the worldview in which a transgender person's journey unfolds. No doubt personhood, the body, sex, and gender sexuality are independent facets of human being, which can be examined and understood separately. However, they are intertwined variables that are not so easily separated. Once personhood and gender are separated from the body, no one can agree how to define either.<sup>17</sup>

In keeping with OT Scripture, the NT unfolds a worldview that differs profoundly from the thought world of the ancient Near East.<sup>18</sup> It assumes human beings as an indivisible unity of body and breath of life.<sup>19</sup> Its five major anthropological terms—*sōma*, *psychē*, *pneuma*, *sarx* and *kardia*—each have reference to the human being as a whole person, not just a part.<sup>20</sup> Wholeness of being is a given—it goes without saying. Human being comprises a multidimensional unity.<sup>21</sup> No part of the human self

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<sup>17</sup> Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> See John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007).

<sup>19</sup> See Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Nature of the Human Being in the New Testament," in *What Are Human Beings That You Remember Them: Proceedings of the Third International Bible Conference* Nof Ginosar and Jerusalem, June 11-21, 2012 (ed. Clinton Wahlen; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Samuel Bacchiochi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study of Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1997); Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: Epworth Press, 1964); Geoff Walters, *Why Do Christians Find It Hard to Grieve?* (Authentic Media, 1997). See also, V. Norskov Olsen, "Man's Wholeness of Being," pages 141-152 in V. Norskov Olsen, *Man, The Image of God: The Divine Design—The Human Distortion* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Mueller, "The Nature of the Human Being in the New Testament," 145-162.

<sup>21</sup> An example can be found in Revelation 18:13 where the word soul (*psyche*) is placed along side of the book's only use of the word body (*sōma*)—i.e., "and bodies and souls of men." Many translations gloss over this evocative connection altogether when either interpreting bodies as "slaves" or implying bodies are separate and distinct from the human soul. The NIV reads "and bodies and souls of men." The NLT reads "and bodies—that is, human slaves." Interestingly, Revelation uses the word corpse (*ptōma*) three times when

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exists by itself or for itself. The whole person is under the sovereignty of the Creator, Redeemer God.<sup>22</sup> The inner man's very nature demands the body.<sup>23</sup>

NT anthropology thus excludes the Greek dualism of body and soul and any notion of an immortal soul as one's inner life "imprisoned" in their body awaiting liberating death. In the New Testament, death is an enemy, not a great liberator (1 Cor 15:26). Furthermore, the body is not evil, but rather "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 9:16).

As cardinal doctrines of New Testament faith, the Incarnation of Jesus and the Resurrection "give significance to the body and in turn to the belief in the wholeness of man. The incarnation of Jesus Christ gives a forceful significance to the indivisibility of man. If some part of man had not needed redemption, or if man was not a 'whole,' God would not have needed to be incarnated. The resurrection of Christ testifies to the same."<sup>24</sup>

We repeat: "all our experience of sexual life is conditioned by the fall."<sup>25</sup> As a result, "the sexuality which we know from human experience does in fact bear witness to a vast rent which runs right through human nature" creating "a shame which cannot be overcome, and a longing which cannot be satisfied."<sup>26</sup> This biblical understanding of the human predicament and its impact on human sexuality finds contemporary

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referring to dead bodies (11:8, 9)—suggesting that in 18:13 a living body is in view and that the concepts of "bodies" and "human souls" are synonymous. In other words, as the text refers to the exploitation of "bodies," John envisions the entire person (human soul). As an obvious exegetical kai, 18:13 would better be translated "bodies—that is, human souls" (i.e., "human beings"). While the notion of "slaves" is evident from the context (or perhaps, prostitution), the anthropological implications of the phrase's construction moves the attentive reader beyond the moral dysfunction of exploitation itself to nuancing the ontological reality of human beings in their essence—an embodied being. It focuses the reality of the organic unity of body and human soul as well. When you sell the body, you sell the human soul—the person. This human soul/person includes whom she or he is in her/his desires, emotions, feelings, thinking, inner self. Thus, when one speaks of the human soul, body is assumed and vice versus. See Larry L Lichtenwalter, "Souls Under the Altar: The 'Soul' and Related Anthropological Imagery in John's Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 26, no. 1 (2015): 57-93.

<sup>22</sup> Olsen, Man, *The Image of God: The Divine Design—The Human Distortion*, 142.

<sup>23</sup> Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*, 32, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Olsen, Man, *The Image of God: The Divine Design—The Human Distortion*, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Jones, "Sexuality," 1108.

<sup>26</sup> Brunner, *Man In Revolt*, 348.



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expression in the kind of deep emotional distress evidenced in transgender people who honestly, yet painfully, grapple with their personal gender identity—trying to find or be their true self, and for many, true to God as well.

It is our opinion that the wholistic anthropology of the New Testament (and the Bible as a whole) offers a realistic understanding of these painful realities. Unfortunately, Adventist understanding of biblical anthropology has largely focused too narrowly on matters of death, the soul, resurrection, spiritualism, and hell, and has not yet explored as deeply the implications of their “wholistic anthropology” with regards to inner life and being.<sup>27</sup> Yet the very argument of Scripture’s wholistic anthropology opens the door to inform the intense internal crisis which Transgender people experience. Scripture is not naïve. Its principles encompass life’s spectrum even as the human race deteriorates more towards the end and at the same time understands more of what human beings are comprised of and what is happening deep inside.

**Male/Female—Gender/Sexuality**

In contrast to ANE, neopagan, and neo-Gnostic perceptions of human sexuality, the NT assumes sexual polarity as an essential constituent of humans. So also, that sexual complementarity was the Creator’s intention. This sexual differentiation and complementarity of the sexes is indicated by Jesus and Paul.

Sexual polarity is evidenced in the unequivocal distinction of “male and female” and “male or female”: “And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female’”(Matt 19:4); “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6); “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The words are unambiguous: *arsēn*

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<sup>27</sup> A recent example would be Clinton Wahlen, ed. “What Are Human Beings That You Remember Them?": Proceedings of the Third International Bible Conference, Nof Ginosar and Jerusalem June 11-21, 2012 (ed.; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015). Only a couple of the book’s fourteen chapters significantly touch on matters of human inner being: Petersen. “‘Unwholly’ Relationships: Unity in Biblical Ontology,”); Richard M. Davidson. “The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning,” *ibid.*; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute; Thomas R. Shepherd. “Resurrection, Rebirth, and the Human Being in 1 and 2 Peter,” *ibid.*

(male)<sup>28</sup> and *thēlu* (female).<sup>29</sup> They are used of sexual differentiation and unity in human couples.<sup>30</sup> For Gen 1:27, the LXX translates the Hebrew *zākār ûn<sup>e</sup> qēbāh* of the creation of male and female in the image of God with the phrase *arsēn kai thēly*, male and female.<sup>31</sup>

The male/female differentiation Jesus refers to is no mere social construct. Rather, it is rooted in His Father’s creation intent where “male” and “female” have essential physical, mental, emotional, moral, spiritual, and social characteristics in relation to realities of human nature created in the image of God.<sup>32</sup>

Jesus affirms that God’s design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes—male and female (*ho ktisas apo arsēn kai thēlu epoiēsen autos*, Matt 19:4)—which designate a fundamental distinction, which the Creator has embedded in the very biology of the human race (cf. *arsēn kai thēlu epoiēsen autos*, Gen 1:27 LXX).<sup>33</sup> Gender—male and

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<sup>28</sup> “Etymologically related to old Indic *ársati* (“it flows”; cf. Lat. *ros*), ἄρσιν . . . literally means that which discharges sperm and therefore male offspring, male child” Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–), 158. “*Arsēn* occurs some 54 times in the LXX canonical and uncanonical writings, chiefly for the Heb. *zākār*” C. Brown, “ἄρσιν,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 562.

<sup>29</sup> Etymologically related to “θῆλυς” which signifies ‘breast feeding’ (related to θήσθαι, from θηλή, mother’s breast . . .). It designates the female among animals, people, and gods. It is connected with ἄρσιν in Gen 1:27 (LXX) and Mark 10:6; Matt 19:4. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–), 147.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> C. Brown, “ἄρσιν,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 562.

<sup>32</sup> Differentiation is a hallmark of established creation boundaries—light from darkness (Gen 1:4), firmament from the waters below (Gen 1:6, 7), the dry land from the seas (Gen 1:9, 10), the day from night (Gen 1:14, 15), the sun from the moon (Gen 1:16, 17), male from female (Gen 1:27), etc. In particular, the “male/female” differentiation continues to be identified for both human beings and animals up through the flood narrative (Gen 1:27; 5:2; 6:19; 7:2, 3, 9, 16).

<sup>33</sup> Brownson incorrectly argues that we need to unearth the wider biblical “moral logic” that “undergirds” passages like these and then translate that logic into our own cultural practice. But his hermeneutic in doing so incorrectly determines that gender complementarity is nowhere “explicitly portrayed or discussed” in Scripture. In particular, Brownson argues that Genesis 2:24, the primary text to which the appeal to establish gender complementarity

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female—is linked to corresponding anatomy.<sup>34</sup> Within the biblical worldview, there is no discussion of gender apart from anatomy.

Furthermore, and in keeping with Genesis, Jesus' reference to the creation narrative suggests that there is an ontological gender-based sexual nature of male and female. Human physical sex distinctions together with gender converge in a full view of personhood reflecting God's image (Gen 1:26-28). NT Scripture thus maintains a high view of a distinct and observable human male/female identity and sexuality as intended. This male/female differential essentially upholds the entire human person rather than merely locating one's identity in their sexual organs or functions. One cannot separate the two—body or being, whether male or female.<sup>35</sup> This

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is directed, is not speaking primarily of the difference between male and female—and thus gender complementarity. Rather, in his opinion, it is speaking of their sameness in which male and female form a “kinship bond.” The “flesh of my flesh” idiom in Gen 2:23 thus functions the same way it functions elsewhere in the Old Testament: this is, to denote kinship, not sexual, anatomical “fit.” Adam needs one who is like him, rather than unlike him (Gen 2:18-20). Therefore God creates a woman to be such a “like” partner (Gen 2:20). In Brownson's view, the Old and New Testament rejection of same-sex erotic behavior is based not on commitment to “gender complementarity,” but rather fear of cultic prostitution (in Leviticus), idolatry (1 Cor 6), or an “excess of desire” (Rom 1). Exploitation, abuse, and lust are the watchwords here. Brownson's argument, however, disconnects procreation and children from human sexuality. It also disconnects human sexuality from materiality and actual human bodies. See James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reclaiming the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> The anatomic characteristics/differentiation of both male and female are nuanced etymologically in both Hebrew and Greek terms respectively (male—*zākār*/ female—*nēkēbā*; male—*arsēn*/female—*thēlu*), i.e., connoting the male sexual organ as circumcised and issuing semen, etc., or the female sexual organ as “pierced through” (hole). See Victor P. Hamilton, “*זָכָר* (*zākār*),” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*:1106; J. B. Bauer, “*ἄρσην*, *arsēn*,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 158; C. Brown, “*ἄρσην*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*: 562-571.

<sup>35</sup> James suggests, “Gender is a transcendent concept” that we, as created beings, reflect in our physical natures as man and woman. He does not mean to suggest that God is male or female, but rather that gender was a basis for which human beings were to bear God's likeness and in doing so reflect divine qualities of interpersonal relationship and balance within diversity. See James, *God's Truth About Gender: Unraveling the Lies of Modern Human Sexuality, Behavior and Identity*, 86.

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would affirm how gender serves as the basic identity foundation for all mankind.<sup>36</sup>

Gender is among the first elements of self-knowledge. While, together with race and family, it is one of the three major factors of individual, personal identification.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it (gender) “stands as the most important factor for personal identity.”<sup>38</sup> It governs social, ethical, and spiritual behavior patterns.<sup>39</sup> This knowledge encompasses an internal sense of self, and, often, a preference for external behaviors in keeping with one’s inner orienting gender identity.<sup>40</sup> That is why a gender identity crisis is the most severe form of identity crisis known to man.<sup>41</sup> This existential divide was never meant to be.

Paul’s distinction of “male nor female” (*arsēn kai thēlu*) maintains the clarity of the forgoing biblical creation gender realities of “male and female” while at the same time focuses on the essential new and transcending identity one finds in Jesus Christ: “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Rather, he affirms both males and females in both their worth and in their personhood (as per Gen 1:26-28). People’s gender matters. And yet, human beings are not merely sexual beings (as per Gal 3:23-29).

Later traditions under the influence of Gnosticism have been read into Paul’s statement that in Christ there is “neither male nor female.”<sup>42</sup> During the second century, the “neither male nor female” formula of Gal 3:28 was picked up in a number of Gnostic documents and became a major feature

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. James notes that “Without a clear understanding of one’s gender status, an individual will be at loss as to where he or she fits in relationship to the rest of the world. Gender identity determines one’s behaviors and interactions with other humans. This is true in regard to how one relates to individuals of his or her own gender as well as the opposite one. When one speaks of an individual personality, it is impossible to describe the person without acknowledging his or her gender,” (ibid., 70).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>40</sup> Solomon, *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity*, 607.

<sup>41</sup> James, *God’s Truth About Gender: Unraveling the Lies of Modern Human Sexuality, Behavior and Identity*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> I.e., *The Gospel of Thomas* 22, 114.

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in the teaching of this heretical movement.<sup>43</sup> The ideal for the Gnostic was to become sexless. It posited a radical refusal of sexual differentiation and a complete confusion of sexual identity in God's intended role.<sup>44</sup> The "neither male nor female" formula became a call for "eliminating gender distinctions and the unique aspects of masculine and feminine personhood derived from them."<sup>45</sup> Not only was the elimination of sexuality a prerequisite for salvation, but what circumcision was for the Judaizers of Galatia, gender reversal became for the Gnostic heretics.<sup>46</sup> "For the Gnostics, creation and the material world were inherently evil. Since sexuality was an obvious carrier of this fallenness, it had to be reversed or neutralized in order to achieve release from the constricting 'prison house of matter.'"<sup>47</sup>

But Paul does not abolish sexual differences, as is proposed in Gnostic writings. Nor does he allow for an undifferentiated unity, androgynous Adam, or androgynous mystical ideal.

While one's essential self-identity is radically altered when they come to Jesus Christ—this new identity does not negate or essentially alter either race or gender. Gender, race, and family are three immutable birth-related personal identity factors. One cannot choose, change, or alter his or her gender, race, or family.<sup>48</sup> They can choose Jesus Christ however, and in doing so receive a new identity into which other realities of their identity (race and gender) find new wholeness.<sup>49</sup> "In the new creation, men remain men, and women remain women. The categorization of the community by race, social status, and gender, leading to patriarchal hierarchies, no longer exists. The community now receives its constitutive identity from Christ."<sup>50</sup>

Paul thus affirms both males and females in their worth and personhood. His use of the words *arsēn* and *thēlu* to designate male and

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians* (vol. 30; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 290-291.

<sup>44</sup> John MacArthur, *Different by Design* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 26-27.

<sup>45</sup> George, *Galatians*, 290-291.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> James, *God's Truth About Gender: Unraveling the Lies of Modern Human Sexuality, Behavior and Identity*, 70.

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *Reading Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001), 67.

female distinction occurs only here in the context of gospel implications and then again in Romans 1:26, 27 in a creation order context. Elsewhere Paul uses generic terms of man and woman for cultural/ethical/role related issues.<sup>51</sup>

### **Reversing, Circumventing, or Aiding Nature**

According to Romans 1, reversing, circumventing, or aiding nature in matters of sexuality is like trying to put together discordant entities.<sup>52</sup> Paul links the reversal of the created order in worship with the reversal of the created order in sexuality (Rom 1:21-23, 25). The context for Rom 1:21-32 is universal in nature.<sup>53</sup> According to Paul, the existential roots of homosexuality are in the turning of the face from God.<sup>54</sup> It is unnatural within God's creation.<sup>55</sup> It is significant that Paul here again uses the creation order distinction of "male" and "female" (*arsēn* and *thēlu*) as opposed to generic terms for man and woman. In doing so he maintains the clear creation gender realities of "male and female" as found in the Genesis narrative and the teachings of Jesus.<sup>56</sup>

A key concept Paul uses is "exchange": they exchanged the glory of the immortal God (Rom 1:23); they exchanged the truth about God (Rom 1:25); they exchanged natural intercourse (Rom 1:26). Men and women exchange the natural for the unnatural. Swapping God for idols entailed a

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<sup>51</sup> 1 Cor 7:1, 2; 11:3, 7-12; 1 Tim 2:12.

<sup>52</sup> D. F. Wright, "Sexuality, Sexual Ethics," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*:872.

<sup>53</sup> In outlining the universal nature of sin and divine judgment, Paul includes Gentiles, Jews, and all of humanity through the ages (Rom chapters 1-3). All alike are dependent on God's grace as revealed in Christ's sacrifice in our behalf. See Ekkehardt Mueller, "Homosexuality in Rom. 1:26-27," (Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> This may not be so with every homosexual or lesbian, however. Paul's focus is sexual behavioral in terms of choice in relation to God's creative purpose rather than sexual orientation.

<sup>55</sup> See discussion Robert A. J. Gagnon. "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (ed. Roy E. Gane; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 153, n. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Gen 1:26-27; Matt 19:4. In view of our discussion above, it should be noted that Paul's focus on gender difference—rather than the alleged presence of "exploitation" or an "excess of desire" in homosexual unions as per Brownson—would explain his denunciation of same-sex erotic behavior in Romans 1:26-27.

denial of God's true nature.<sup>57</sup> Swapping natural intercourse for unnatural male/male or female/female intercourse entailed a fundamental denial of ones true nature and self. This in no way suggests however, that Paul's focus is merely idolatry rather than human sexuality—and homosexuality in particular.<sup>58</sup> We must not misunderstand Paul's "worldly knowledge" in terms of the confusion of human sexuality within his contemporary cultural context, which would include both abusive relationships of power or money and examples of "genuine love" between members of the same sex.<sup>59</sup> It would include also, notions of any androgynous quest—either physically or spiritually. Paul is well aware of what he is talking about. Paul uses the term *para phusin* (*against nature*) to communicate clearly that homosexual or lesbian practice is a violation of the natural order as determined by God.<sup>60</sup> The order intended by God includes the function of the sex organs themselves. The deviant exchange of those organs is seen as a use that is against nature.<sup>61</sup> This positions the use of one's body in its sexual dimensions clearly in view as an instrument of self in relation to God.

Paul further links homosexuality with humanity's turning away from the Creator to images of their fellow creatures. The actions of the sinful human being itself have an ironic element—difference is exchanged for sameness.<sup>62</sup> The key correspondence between idolatry on the one hand and

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<sup>57</sup> Miroslav M. Kiš. "Return to Innocence," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (ed. Roy E. Gane; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 179.

<sup>58</sup> Mueller, "Homosexuality in Rom 1:26-27." "The issue is hardly whether or not Paul in Rom 1:26-27 addresses homosexuality and considers it to be sin; this can be taken for granted. The issue is whether or not homosexuality in Romans 1 includes all forms of homosexuality and has a universal scope" (*ibid.*, 1).

<sup>59</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 452.

<sup>60</sup> Mueller, "Homosexuality in Rom 1:26-27," 2.

<sup>61</sup> Fitzmyer suggests "in the context of vv 19-23, 'nature' also expresses for him [Paul] the order intended by the Creator, the order that is manifest in God's creation or, specifically in this case, the order seen in the function of the sexual organs themselves, which were ordained for an expression of love between man and woman and for the procreation of children. Paul now speaks of the deviant exchange of those organs as a use *para phusin*" (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (vol. 33; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 286.)

<sup>62</sup> Simon Gathercole. "Sin in God's Economy: Agencies in Romans 1 and 7," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul* (ed. Simon J. Gathercole John M. G. Barclay; *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, T & T Clark, 2007), 162.

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homosexual behavior on the other “lies in the fact that both involve turning away from the ‘other’ to the ‘same’. . . . Humanity should be oriented toward God but turns in on itself (Rom 1.25). Woman should be oriented toward man, but turns in on itself (Rom 1.26). Man should be oriented toward woman, but turns in on itself (Rom 1.27).”<sup>63</sup> “The meta-sin of suppression or exchange then issue in a cascade of sins plural, in physical degradation general (1.24), and in female and male homosexuality (1.26-27). This then is expanded to the entire sphere of ‘doing what is not fitting’ . . . and to a whole host of different kinds of non-sexual sin which emerges in the vice list depicting the social chaos of a world in rebellion against God” (1.28-31).

While Paul’s description reflects a radically theocentric and gospel view of sin,<sup>64</sup> anthropological perspectives are not entirely absent. In the wake of this swap, God “gave them up” (Rom 1:26, 28) to the desires of their hearts/minds (Rom 1:24). Paul thus engages psychology—the inner passions linking desires to action. He touches the realm of one’s thinking, feelings, values, desires, attitudes, will and choice—not to mention essential psychological identity of self and personhood with respects to gender.<sup>65</sup> When human beings ‘exchange’ created ordered roles for homosexual intercourse, they embody the spiritual condition of those who have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie.”<sup>66</sup> For Paul, this lie includes gender and sexual orientation related matters of self-hood and identity. There would seem no allowance for one saying it is unnatural for me to be in this body. Standing behind Paul’s assertions are not only the creation order but, the Leviticus sex taboos in “breaking the ‘boundaries’ of biological design and sexual order.”<sup>67</sup> Homosexuality breaks the structural boundaries between male and female.<sup>68</sup> It reflects the larger denial of any

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<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.*, 158-172 at 163-164.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>65</sup> See discussion William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 298.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-308.

<sup>67</sup> Gagnon, “The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars,” 153, n.102.

<sup>68</sup> William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 178.



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boundaries of Godless culture with regard to human sexuality as a divinely willed characteristic of creation.<sup>69</sup>

“The reason why Paul gives an extended discussion in Romans 1:18-32 only to the vices of idolatry and same-sex intercourse is due not just to the particular gravity of these sins but also to the fact that both are classic instances of human beings suppressing the truth about God and about themselves in relation to God accessible in the material structure of Creation still intact in nature.”<sup>70</sup> Male-male intercourse treats another male as though he were not a male.<sup>71</sup> The same would be true with female-female intercourse in relation to a woman not being treated as a female. With regard to questions of homosexual relations, what a person brings to the table, sexually speaking, is their essential maleness or femaleness as reflected physically at least in their anatomy.<sup>72</sup> The implication is that what he or she lacks is essential femaleness or maleness with regard to someone of the same sex. It also blurs their sense of identity in relation to God.

Again, it is significant that, like Jesus, Paul uses the creation order distinction of “male” and “female” (*arsēn* and *thēlu*) as opposed to generic terms for man and woman. In doing so he maintains the clear creation gender realities of “male and female” as found in the Genesis narrative and the teachings of Jesus<sup>73</sup>—implying that sexual polarity is an essential constituent of humans, and sexual complementarity was God’s intention.

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<sup>69</sup> Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?*, 56-57, 71-74. The denial of boundaries is especially seen in the sexual domain. If boundaries between the realms (deity, humanity, nature), and even within them, are not permissible, then philosophically (and theologically) there are no boundaries anywhere in the cosmos. “There can be no boundaries between parent and child (hence, incest); there can be no boundaries around marriage (hence, prostitution [this would include adultery, open marriages]); there can be no barriers between members of the same sex (hence, homosexual behavior); there can be no boundaries between humans and animals (hence, bestiality),” *ibid.*, 56, 57. See my above discussion of creation boundaries in footnote no. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Kiš, “Return to Innocence,” 179.

<sup>71</sup> Gagnon, “The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars,” 97.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>73</sup> Gen 1:26-27; Matt 19:4. In view of our discussion above, it should be noted that Paul’s focus on gender difference—rather than the alleged presence of “exploitation” or an “excess of desire” in homosexual unions as per Brownson—would explain his denunciation of same-sex erotic behavior in Romans 1:26-27.

For sure, issues about transgender are not in the fore here. Nevertheless, the tacit principles and values which the NT unfold are relevant.

### **What We Do With Our Bodies**

The NT asserts that “sexual intercourse is uniquely expressive of our whole being”.<sup>74</sup> “All other sins a person commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18).

What human beings do with their bodies sexually makes a difference. This is distinctive anthropology in which the body is no mere external expression or instrument of the true person that resides in some inner sense.<sup>75</sup> A human being is a body rather than having a body. Sexual activity embodies the whole person. Human sexuality is embodied sexuality. What one does with their sexuality touches his or her entire person. The body cannot be separated from the self or the self from sexual activity.<sup>76</sup> One cannot be conceived without the other. People are not machines. They cannot surgically separate either themselves nor their emotions from what they do with their bodies. One cannot live out a worldview that does not match their true nature and not get burned.

The implications of this self/body/sex phenomenon assert that there is no essential fragmentation or alienation of one’s body and his or her inner person as appears in secular platonic and psychological views of the human being.<sup>77</sup> According to Paul, essential self-hood cannot be split from human sexuality nor are matters of sexuality mere social construct.

Since one’s body (anatomy and implied gender), sex (what one does with their body sexually), and personhood (who one is in relation to themselves and others with reference to gender) are essentially inseparable; human beings have a more stable platform for defining those realities and for making decisions in their life regarding them. How so?

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<sup>74</sup> Gagnon, “The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars,” 77.

<sup>75</sup> Wright, “Sexuality, Sexual Ethics,” 872.

<sup>76</sup> The fragmented view of sexuality doesn’t work in practice. Purely physical sexual encounters with no expectation of any personal engagement or relationship is emotionally and spiritually devastating. See Pearcey’s chapter “Sex, Lies, and Secularism” in Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*.

<sup>77</sup> See *ibid.*, 49-66.

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Their integration and unity provides a holistic understanding of the human self—in all its sexual dimensions. It affirms the body’s primary and secondary sex characteristics as undeniable gender markers to be taken serious in gender identity issues. It informs how what one does with his or her body’s sexual dimensions can have profound implications for their emotional, moral, and spiritual well-being. It points to how existential disconnect between being and doing sexually can lead to behaviors that both profoundly disappoint and hurt. It asserts there is no room for a dichotomy between the self/soul and the body with respect to sexuality. It maintains the creation distinction between sexes and challenges notions that one’s real self is uncreated and thus dependent on what one may choose to be. Last but not least, it underscores that how one thinks with regard to their gender and sex, relates directly to both behavior and interior self.

The NT vision of the human body is positive. It unfolds a theology of the body, which places the human body in the context of worship and how we can best serve and please God (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:19, 20). Corporeal action has moral significance. It is an instrument of activity in both time and space. There can be no human activity that does not involve the body. Whatever life one lives is lived out in his or her body.<sup>78</sup> We are embodied beings. Presenting the body to God as a living holy sacrifice includes everything one would do with and to and for his or her body. Our body rightly belongs to God alone. Because of that our body acquires a distinctive value. Our stewardship of the body arises from the obligatory claim of God upon our body. In simplest terms, “My body does not belong to me!” In the whole range of what pertains to the body, we encounter God’s presence and God’s claim on our very selves.<sup>79</sup>

**Sexual Desire and Centered Trust**

First Corinthians 7 affirms a positive place for sexual intercourse in marriage (1 Cor 7:1:2-5). It also appeals to the unmarried and widows to remain single—stay as you are (1 Cor 7:17-35; 7-8). Marriage is good. Singleness is also good. Sexuality is placed within marriage in the context

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<sup>78</sup> Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 65.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

of mutual pleasing rather than the suppression of desire or averting the danger of sexual immorality.

Paul's concern with *porneia* (1 Cor 7:2) and with both appropriate and inappropriate sexual relationships in 1 Corinthians 7 follows two chapters where the theme of sexual wrongdoing is nuanced: incest (1 Cor 5:1-13), adultery (1 Cor 6:9), homosexuality (1 Cor 6:9) and prostitution—where what you do with the body touches one's very interior self (1 Cor 6:12-20). Within the context of marriage however, sexual intercourse is appropriate and married people should not be sexually inactive except for periods of prayer (1 Cor 7:2-5).

While Paul here uses generic terms of man and women rather than the more specific gender related terms “male” and “female” (*arsēn* and *thēlu*),<sup>80</sup> gender perspectives and differentiation are nevertheless tacit. Human sexuality is expressed in the context of men and women, husband and wife, and to take place within, rather than outside of, marriage.<sup>81</sup> Here Paul grants unprecedented liberty to women and places important moral restriction on men.<sup>82</sup>

For those who are single (virgin or widow), Paul is emphatic, yet pastoral—stay as you are (1 Cor 7:17-35; 7-8). It is a plea for contentment, trust, and commitment to a life of service with regards to one's sexuality in the context of their current single condition.<sup>83</sup> Interestingly the passage appears to take up two of the three descriptive pairs, which appear in Galatians 3:28—Jew nor Greek (here circumcised, uncircumcised) and

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<sup>80</sup> Man (ἄνθρωπος), woman (γυναικός), husband (ἀνὴρ), wife (γυνή).

<sup>81</sup> Although Paul never cites Gen 2:24 in support of marriage, he assumes that there is a place for marriage. See Loader, “The New Testament on Sexuality,” 220.

<sup>82</sup> E. Randolph Richards, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 39. The rights of women in Paul's day were restricted in many ways—especially in childbearing. Celibacy was not an option because they were expected to marry as early as the onset of puberty and were given in marriage by their parents. Paul offers women the opportunity for a life of ministry outside the home. He commands men to limit their sex lives to their marriages.

<sup>83</sup> Some will argue that Paul's discussion of singleness is not in the context of sexuality per se, but rather in the maximizing of one's ministry focus and effectiveness. Singleness however, occurs within a larger discussion of sexuality from which its implications cannot be disassociated.

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slave nor free.<sup>84</sup> “Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised” (1 Cor 7:18); “were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor 7:21). In both cases Paul asserts, “each man must remain in that condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:20, 24; cf. 26).

The former—being circumcised or becoming uncircumcised—includes radical body modification. While the procedure (one way or another) implies physical and social identity markers, such religious markers were not directly related to the question of gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, or sex change. Nor are they ontological. The later—being a slave or where possible seeking and becoming free—reflects an essential core of the human being in terms of equality and rights and ontology. From the perspective of human being, dignity, status and rights, matters of slavery and gender overlap.<sup>85</sup> But they do not overlap with respect to sexuality per se, and especially not with matters of sexual orientation, or sex change.<sup>86</sup> Gender is a constant, enslavement not so.

For followers of Christ, circumcision was essentially a non-issue (1 Cor 7:19). Stay as you are! (1 Cor 7:20). But slavery, as a dysfunctional social-cultural phenomenon out of sync with core biblical values, was on an entirely different moral level. Because human equality and freedom were core creation values, experientially, slavery was negotiable, depending on opportunity (1 Cor 7:21). Where necessary, practical, or desired, one should stay as they are. They could also seek a change where possible. From the perspective of the Gospel there was no difference between one who is a slave and one who is free (Gal 3:28). From a person’s own personal experience and perspective however, there was a significant difference and it was all right that they would desire a change of status with the freedoms it brings.

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<sup>84</sup> Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 204-205.

<sup>85</sup> Except that for biblical writers issues of slavery, women, and homosexuality raised similar questions and problems, but not similar solutions. See Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*.

<sup>86</sup> Although one can argue that female sexuality is in view here. In the larger discussion where this text occurs Paul asserts a wife’s sexual rights as equal to those of her husband (1 Cor 7:2-5).

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Exactly why Paul does not include his third descriptive pair “male nor female” here is not entirely clear. But one could conclude that, when it came to biblical values of human sexuality at play in 1 Corinthians 5-7, matters of gender (male and female) were neither non-issues nor were they negotiable. With respect to gender and gender differentiation, Paul does not need to say, “Stay as you are” as per the non-issue of circumcision. Nor does he need to say, “Don’t worry about it, but if you are able to make a change, do so” as per the evidently negotiable status of slavery. The issue was tacit—“it goes without saying.”<sup>87</sup> Male and female gender difference and complementarity were biblical ontological realities—essentially unchangeable.

We must note that contemporary concerns regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex change are not even envisioned here—nor can they be, except from the text’s tacit context of male and female as per creation order. Again, there was no need for Paul to say with respect to “male and female,” “Stay as you are” (or change). For circumcision, yes! For slavery, yes! For the married, yes! For the one married to an unbeliever, yes! For the single person—virgin or widow, yes!<sup>88</sup> But male and female, absolutely not! Male/female gender was an unchangeable reality.

Paul’s reference to sexual desire here is informative. Outside of marriage and before marriage, men and women may experience sexual desire. This includes such strong sexual emotion that its intensity is likened to burning (1 Cor 7:9). The Greek word translated “burn” is *puroumai*, which expresses intense sexual desire. The intensity of this sexual desire can be so great as to cause one to be upset or filled with great concern and anxiety with regard to their sexual feelings, desires, and drives. This is not necessarily carnal or evil in itself.

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<sup>87</sup> See discussion of how the tacit context and assumptions operating in the cultural or understood background of the biblical text inform how we should read and interpret it, i.e., “it goes without saying” in Richards, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. That Paul would have (ἄρσεν ἢ θῆλυ) as background and tacit assumption when discussing human sexuality to the Corinthian believers is evidenced in his very explicit use of this terminology when discussing the unnatural function of male-on-male and women-on-women sexual intercourse in Romans 1:20-32. Aberrant sexuality was not in view in 1 Corinthians 7. See my discussion on Romans 1:20-32 above.

<sup>88</sup> Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 207. By virgins, Paul may be referring to both women and men.

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The text's implied angst and distress opens a window into the intense existential struggles one can experience with regard to their inner sexual desires and emotions—whatever they might be. We can only imagine what these desires might be or what the stress might actually include within a person emotionally and psychologically. The intensity depicted goes beyond mere physical sexual release (in terms of orgasm or ejaculation). It nuances profound inner realities regarding human sexuality (its fantasies, drives, feelings, orientations, identity, fears, guilt, shame, etc.), which can be very relevant in our contemporary world. Angst is evidenced because this intensity of desire may not be fully understood existentially, may not find lessening, release, or end. Or the consequences of acting on them might be devastating. There might be confusion as to what God's will might be.

While Paul never labels this experience sin, he nevertheless warns that allowing it to take control, instead of taking control of it, leads to sinful behavior.<sup>89</sup> High value is thus placed on self-control (1 Cor 7:5, 9). Yet at the same time the text affirms practical choices—marriage rather than singleness. Two explicit words provide vivid characterization of this envisioned self-control. The first is *akrasia*, a failure to control oneself. The focus of *akrasia* is on self-indulgence (1 Cor 7:5). The second is *egkrateuomai*, to exercise complete control over one's desires and actions. The focus here is on holding oneself in. It means commanding one's inner desires so they do not determine either one's being or their doing (1 Cor 7:9). They are rich words in terms of a person's moral orientation, moral agency and personal ethics.

When placed against the aforementioned intensity of sexual desire (*puroumai*)—especially in terms of its inner emotional and psychological dynamics—the moral force of self-control (*egkrateuomai*) takes on incredible existential and ethical implications. Self-control holds in check the deep and powerful realities of sexual desire and struggle, which burn within the human psyche and passionately push toward expression. Self-control chooses not to allow one's self the luxury of indulging his or her self in ways that would erode their moral self in either character or life—no matter the tumult of sexual desire or emotion.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 220.

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The implications for transgender desires and struggle are profound. They provide a vivid reminder of the difficulty, which human sexuality so oft experiences—existentially and psychologically—within the context of fallen human nature and our less than perfect world.

Elsewhere Paul asserts this self-control as a positive behavior in contrast to fornication *porneia*, impurity, and debauchery (Gal 5:16-24). In Galatians he asserts an internal rivalry—where the heart is literally at war with itself with respect to personal moral bearing and action. It is a rivalry which calls for clarity of moral purpose and choice. It is something which only the Holy Spirit can subdue (Gal 5:16, 17). Ultimately such self-control is possible only as a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work within one’s inner life (Gal 5:23).<sup>90</sup>

As with Galatians, the Holy Spirit’s role in relation to sexual desire and control is very much in view in 1 Corinthians 5-7: “Such were some of you [fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals]; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11); “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:18, 19). This earlier assertion of immorality as “sinning against one’s own body” heightens chapter 7’s focus on the internal struggle sexual desire can create. It reminds us that each person is in need of a moral power outside of him or her self when it comes to sexual matters in their life.

The foregoing sexual ethics is not merely about moral principles, values, virtues, rules and motives, or even personal moral agency. It is about centering God’s purposes and will as the ultimate referent and motive regarding one’s sexual life (internal and external, physical and emotional): “You have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your body” (1 Cor 6:20); “As the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk” (1 Cor 7:17); “each one is to remain with

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<sup>90</sup> Given the context of Galatians 5, this self-control is a positive behavior in contrast to the fornication (*porneia*), impurity, debauchery and idolatry of Gal 5:19f. *Egkrateia*, points to the possibility of fashioning one’s life in the way God desires. It is never something firmly at one’s disposal. It must always be received afresh as the gift of the Spirit in one’s commitment to the gospel.



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God in that condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:24); “One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided” (1 Cor 7:32-34).

Paul does not provide a clear “thus says the Lord” for everything aspect of sexual ethics and counsel which he unfolds in 1 Corinthians 7 (1 Cor 7:6, 10, 12, 25), but there is a clear theocentric focus throughout in which each person is invited to remember God’s ways, purposes, and calling for their own life. This centering on God includes a contentment with the state in which one finds his or her self. It asserts that pleasing God and following His way can truly be a centering motive with regards to one’s sexuality. It is the only path towards balance and peace with regards to one’s sexual desires and questions. It is remindful of the fact that one need not be alone in the practical yet so often stress-related reality of wending one’s way personally through issues of sexuality. God is on the horizon and alongside.

The transitory nature of human existence—including sex—in relation to contemporary dangerous times and in relation to the immanent eschaton provide a realistic framework for this contentment and trust. While matters of sexuality are in no way belittled or diminished, Paul nevertheless holds out a vision of service for others and an honoring of God that can outweigh one’s own personal sexual desires, needs, or challenges.<sup>91</sup> One’s sexuality can be trustfully stewarded within the already-not-yet.

**Sex, Self and Sanctification**

Thessalonian believers living in first century culture of immorality—with its confusion of human sexuality and identity—were reminded of the organic link between their sexuality and their experience of God’s gracious gift and work of holiness:

“This is—the will of God—your holiness: that you—abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you—know how—to control his (her, your) body; in holiness and honor, not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that none—transgress (exploit)—his or her brother (or sister) in this matter. . . . “The calling of God is not to impurity but to the most

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<sup>91</sup> Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 209, 221.

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thorough holiness, . . . It is not for nothing that the Spirit God gives us is called the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thess 4:3-6, 7, 8).<sup>92</sup>

The injunction to holiness concentrates on the matter of sexual morality. This is not the whole of holiness, but it is an important aspect of it.<sup>93</sup> It’s a complex passage. There are five infinitive clauses whose meanings and relationships to each other are often difficult to disentangle, but the point is clear—holiness and sexuality connect in a profound spiritual/moral dynamic and way of life which should honor God (1 Thess 4:1, 2).<sup>94</sup>

The manner in which the theme of “holiness” is developed here is intriguing. Although the concern of the entire passage is for the will of God, the specific theme of vv. 3–8 is a call to experience divine holiness (*hagiasmos*). A concern for holiness (sanctification) brackets the specific injunctions (*hagiasmos* 4:3 < sexuality > *hagion* 4:8). The literary inclusio opens with the divine will for holiness and closes with the Holy Spirit who alone enables such a calling. The repetition of the *hagios* word group throughout is evident in the Greek.

While sexual immorality (*porneia*) occurs here only once,<sup>95</sup> the *hagios* word group occurs four times. Yet the sexual overtones dominate, “and so the sanctification of one’s sexual self deserves to be highlighted.”<sup>96</sup> Various aspects of sexual activity are presented in these verses. Verse 3b presents a broad general statement linking holiness with sexual integrity. Verses 4–5 address sexuality in relation to oneself (assuming *skeuos* means “body”).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> My paraphrase.

<sup>93</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (vol. 45; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 83.

<sup>94</sup> Jacob W. Elias, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 137.

<sup>95</sup> The word “immorality” (*porneia*) was used frequently in Judeo-Christian literature where it could refer to premarital or extramarital intercourse, prostitution, incest, and any other type of sexual impropriety. See D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians* (vol. 33; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 123.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>97</sup> The exegetical problems in 4:3–6 defy a satisfactory solution. Three English translations of 4:4 illustrate just one of the problems in the text: (RSV) “that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor”; (NRSV) “that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor”; (NAB) “each of you guarding his member [genitalia] in sanctity and honor.” Is the meaning of *skeuos* wife, one’s own body, or one’s genitalia? Weighing the evidence, major exegetes and commentators usually

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This contrasts holiness and honor with “passions of lust.”<sup>98</sup> Verse 6 looks outside the self, and warns against immorality as an offense against both God and others.<sup>99</sup> Finally, verse 8 places human sexuality in all its facets and expressions in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. The Holy Spirit’s continued presence and transforming power is dependent on one’s choices and behavior with regards to their sexuality. Sexual permissiveness leads ultimately to rejecting the Holy Spirit’s voice to one’s soul. Spiritual discernment and sexual purity appear to go together.

If the human body in its sexual dimensions is indeed connoted here,<sup>100</sup> then one’s physical sexual self, i.e., gender together with one’s genitalia (anatomical sex) are included together with identity and desire. The envisioned self-control over one’s “passions of desire” is in relation to these physical sexual dimensions, compelling sexual emotion/desire, and gender identity realities (vv. 4-5). One is to act with holiness and honor with respect to both the sexual dimensions their body and his or her inner self as a sexual being.

This “holiness and honor” includes three critical points of reference: 1) one’s physical and emotional self as a sexual being (1 Thess 4:4); 2) other human beings who may be sexual partners or exploited sexual objects (1 Thess 4:6); and 3), God who has created him or her as a sexual being with entwined physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions (1 Thess 4:3, 7, 8; cf. Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4). There is no severing of body from one’s sexual self and/or his or her desires. The complete sexual self is in view in relation to what holiness and honor before God entail.

This profound organic relationship between human sexuality (with its entwined physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions) and divine holiness (*hagiasmos*) provides one of the clearest New Testament

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settle for either wife or body in its sexual dimensions. See discussion, Elias, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 139-140; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 152-153. Given the problems attached with understanding this passage as referring to a wife, it seems better to understand *skeuos* as connoting the human body in its sexual dimensions (ibid., 152; Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 83).

<sup>98</sup> The phrase “passion of desire” (*pathei epithumias*) in 4:5 reflects the deep inner reality of sexual drive and struggle for expression and mastery over the self and self honor as outlined above.

<sup>99</sup> Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*.

<sup>100</sup> See above discussion of *skeuos* as body (in its sexual dimensions) rather than wife.

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references to the breadth of which human sexuality is included in God's redemptive purpose of restoring men and women in His image. It is significant that the biblical concept of the holy first appears in relation to Creation during which God created human sexuality with all its profound dimensions when he made male and female in His image.<sup>101</sup> The sustained biblical appeal for human beings to be holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44, 47; 1 Pet 1:15, 16) repeatedly includes the phenomena and expressions of human sexuality (Lev 18:1-19:2; 1 Pet 1:14, 15; 1 Thess 4:1-8).

If biblical correctives and counsel regarding the confusion of human sexuality are ultimately placed in the context of being holy as God is holy, we can assume that contemporary transgender issues can be rightly placed there as well. In the final analysis the reference point towards wholeness in gender dissonance and the quest for gender change lies in God's original and ultimate purpose as well as our restoration to His holy image with respect to human sexuality and our core identity as a person in God's image.

If also, as our passage under discussion here seems to imply, both the anatomical and inner dimensions of the human sexuality are in view with regards to moral choice and holiness, then human beings (transgender included) do have real freedom of control over their body. They have freedom to do with their body whatever they choose in response to their experiences of strong inner sexual desire, emotion, and perception of identity (for self and the other). And yet, "holiness and honor" in relation to one's sexual self, others' sexuality, as well as God's holy image and purpose remain the truest backdrop and norm for how human beings are to

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<sup>101</sup> Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25; cf. Matt 19:4; Gen 2:1-4; cf. Ex 20:8-11. While this first reference to "holy" is in the context of the Creation Sabbath, it nevertheless appears between the narrative inclusio of the creation of human beings as male and female (Gen 1:26-28 and Gen 2:7, 18-25). See Mathilde Frey, "The Creation Sabbath: Theological Intentionality of the Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuch" (paper presented at 2008 ETS/ATS Annual Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, 2008), 1-11. Genesis places the Sabbath as the final and climactic act of God's creation on the seventh-day—"placing human beings in a vivid mutual relationship with their Holy Creator, worshiping Him." Jiri Moskala, "The Sabbath in the First Creation Account," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 55-66. It is human beings as male and female that experience such vivid mutual relationship with their Holy Creator. See also, Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 493-495.

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both view their body and what they should do with its physical gender markers. Anything else is to follow the values and norms of contemporary culture (the *ethnē*) that does not know God (1 Thess 4:5).

These insights place human sexuality and our questions of gender identification against a normative biblical moral frame of reference. It vividly reminds us, “all our experience of sexual life is conditioned by the fall.”<sup>102</sup> God’s gracious invitation to holiness is the truest pathway to sexual and gender wholeness. The texts reference to “not in passion of desire” (4:5, *mē en pathei epithumias*) need not be read as totally carnal, but can include one’s genuine human struggle with his or her sexuality—however it compels from deep within.<sup>103</sup> It can include the deep emotional distress evidenced in transgender people who honestly, yet painfully, grapple with their personal gender identity—trying to find or be their true self, and still honor God.

The holiness towards which this passage directs human sexuality, choices, and behavior is no mere philosophical or abstract concept. It is directed toward a person—God, who alone is holy and who graciously extends the very power of His holy being and nature to us in the person of the Holy Spirit and in the merits of His Son’s redemptive work.

In the beginning God assigned male and female with respective sex anatomy. Neither Adam nor Eve chose their gender and its implied roles. There was completeness, wholeness. There was equilibrium of body in its sexual dimensions together with a sense and experience of maleness or femaleness. What now when, because of our fallen condition, there is such an experience as gender dissonance? Do we change our body to match our inner sense of self? Or do we change our inner self to match our body? How do we faithfully live between the already and not yet?

The NT unfolds a theology of the human body, which places it in the context of worship and how we can best serve and please God (Rom

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<sup>102</sup> Jones, “Sexuality,” 1108.

<sup>103</sup> The word *paschō* in such contexts means to experience strong physical desires, usually of a sexual nature. The word group reflects nuances of trouble, suffering, emotion, and appetite. Such need not be shameful (as in Rom 1:26) or necessarily sinful (as per Rom 7:5). But it can reflect moral confusion because of our fallen sinful nature (Gal 5:24) as well as genuine human sexual needs and desires (1 Tim 5:11) which can in themselves bring emotional trouble and suffering deep within because of a loss of perceived or real wholeness with respect to one’s sexuality.

12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:19, 20). Corporeal action has moral significance. Our embodied selves are instruments of activity in both time and space. Presenting our body to God as a living holy sacrifice touches the holy in profound ways. In the whole range of what pertains to the body, we encounter God's holy presence and God's call to be like Him in the world—holy.<sup>104</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusions**

NT moral vision of human sexuality offers remarkable insight into the transgender experience and the complexity of issues it raises. Though largely indirect and tacit, it nevertheless fundamentally challenges contemporary transgender anthropology, which sharply severs gender identity from biological sex and offers an existentialist view of human being free to choose one's own gender identity. It underscores the reality that once personhood and gender are separated from the body, there can be little basis for define either.<sup>105</sup> It offers a biblically informed platform for discussion by outlining as normative the New Testament's wholistic human anthropology and sexuality. From this vantage point, one can view, understand, and balance the intersect between the creation ideal, the Fall, the body of medicine and genome research, a transgender person's unique crisis experience and longings, and the redeeming grace, purpose, and power of God.

The NT witness unfolds a holistic view of human sexuality where personhood, the body, sex, and gender issues are intertwined variables—independent, but never separable. It affirms the Genesis creation narrative, which unfolds an ontological gender-based sexual nature of male and female and where gender serves as the basic identity foundation for all mankind together with corresponding anatomic gender markers.<sup>106</sup> This male/female differential essentially upholds the entire human person rather than merely locating one's identity in their sexual organs or functions. One

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>105</sup> Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*, 53.

<sup>106</sup> James, *God's Truth About Gender: Unraveling the Lies of Modern Human Sexuality, Behavior and Identity*, 74.

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cannot separate the two—body or being, whether male or female.<sup>107</sup> We are embodied sexual beings. Gender is neither feeling nor relative nor matter of choice. It is a profound integrative constant in human identity. Yet, our fallen experience has profoundly blurred this reality causing much confusion, internal crisis, painful choices, and hurt.

Gender serves as the basic identity foundation for all mankind. It is among the first elements of self-knowledge. While, together with race and family, it is one of the three major factors of individual, personal identification, it nevertheless “stands as the most important factor for personal identity.”<sup>108</sup> It governs social, ethical, and spiritual behavior patterns. This knowledge encompasses an internal sense of self, and, often, a preference for external behaviors in keeping with his or her inner orienting gender identity. That is why a gender identity crisis is the most severe form of identity crisis known to humans.<sup>109</sup> It was never meant to be so. The very angst transgender people experience reflects the raw reality of our brokenness.

At the same time, the NT gives promise of a balanced and redemptive understanding of the independent, yet intertwined variables of human sexuality—personhood, the body, sex, gender issues, moral orientation, and spirituality. Surprisingly, it facilitates examination of these individual facets in ways that demonstrate both the complexity of human sexuality (as evidenced in contemporary professional research) and a sensitive, but clear grasp of the interior struggles human beings often experience with regard to gender and sex. It engages most if not all of the same contemporary issues, but it does so from an entirely different anthropological paradigm. As such there is both similarity and divergence of understanding and conclusions regarding various issues of gender and human identity in particular.

Since the NT affirms that one’s body (anatomy and implied gender), sex (what one does with their body sexually), and personhood (who one is

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<sup>107</sup> James suggests “gender is a transcendent concept” that we, as created beings, reflect in our physical natures as man and woman. He does not mean to suggest that God is male or female, but rather that gender was a basis for which human beings were to bear God’s likeness and in doing so reflect divine qualities of interpersonal relationship and balance within diversity, (ibid., 86).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 74.

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in relation to themselves and others with reference to gender) are essentially inseparable; human beings have a reliable, coherent, and normative platform for defining those realities and for making decisions in their life regarding them. This reality of their integration and unity provides a wholistic understanding of the human self—in all its sexual dimensions.

The NT's wholistic anthropology affirms the body's primary and secondary sex characteristics as undeniable gender markers as intended by God at creation and to be taken seriously in gender identity issues.

It informs us how what one either chooses or does with his or her body's sexual dimensions can have profound implications for one's emotional, moral, and spiritual well-being.

It warns against any existential disconnect between being and doing sexually, which can lead to behaviors that both profoundly disappoint and hurt emotionally and spiritually.

It asserts that there is no room for a dichotomy between the self/soul and the body with respect to sexuality.

It maintains the creation distinction between sexes and challenges notions that one's real self is uncreated and thus dependent on what one may choose to be.

It underscores that how one thinks with regard to one's gender and sex, relates directly to both behavior and interior self.

It highlights gender as among the first elements of self-knowledge and as the most important factor for personal identity: an identity that governs social, ethical, and spiritual behavior patterns. It reveals how gender serves as the basic identity foundation for all mankind. One can understand how a gender identity crisis is the most severe form of identity crisis known to man and empathize more with transgender persons in their journey.

On the other hand, the biblical witness of human sexuality allows for the phenomena of painful gender dissonance because of fallen nature. It rests on the Scriptures' overarching creation, fall, redemption, and final consummation narrative. Within this framework, gender dissonance is viewed as a result of living in a fallen world in which experiencing it seems to be a non-moral reality to be related to with compassion.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues In A Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 48-50.



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Within this creation to consummation narrative, the NT manifests a profound sensitivity towards those whose life may be filled with ambiguity, guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, fear and hopelessness, because of sex or gender related experience. It offers the hope of finding a new wholeness in Christ while living in the ambiguity of the “already-not-yet” of redemption and final consummation. It gives assurance of divine empowerment through the Holy Spirit as one relates to one’s sexuality and God’s gracious invitation to wholeness and holiness. Its vision of human sexuality is reflected in divine exhortation, compassion and redemptive purpose. Individuals are invited to reflect on God’s original plan. They are not free to do or be whatever they want with respect to their body temple (“You are not your own”—1 Cor 6:19). They are slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of their being. They are invited to wait on God while they are offered divine compassion and grace in the interim. They are invited to experience God’s call to be holy like Himself, and to experience such so through the power of the Living Christ within.

Biblical anthropology and the creation-consummation narrative—can help orient transgender people to the biblical ideal as they make difficult choices regarding their experience and options towards finding wholeness. But these two perspectives can also nurture compassionate care and understanding in the body of Christ as God’s people come along side of transgender people as a truly redemptive community.

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