

Trending vs. Truth
The Gender Question (Part 1)
Selected Scriptures
July 18, 2021

*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Well as you know, I'm taking a break this summer from our verse-by-verse exposition of God's word. Lord willing, I'll start 1 John in the fall. But this summer we're looking at issues that are trending in our culture. And today, we come to one of the largest trending issues, and that is, The Gender Question.

This week I read a number of disturbing examples of our culture's concerted efforts to erase all traces of what the Bible teaches about sex and gender. For example, in 2004 the U.K. passed the "Gender Recognition Act". It says that if you live for two years as someone of the opposite sex, you can apply for a gender recognition certificate and eventually receive a new birth certificate. In 2015, here in our own country, in New York City, it became illegal to insist on calling someone by pronouns other than the ones they have chosen. And breaking this guideline comes with up to a \$250,000 fine. Going to the other coast, in 2017, the state of California passed a law that made it illegal for caregivers to use the wrong pronoun or name for those who tried to change their sex. Such caregivers could be imprisoned under this law for up to a year for the crime that's called "misgendering". In June of 2017, Bill C-16 became law in Canada in which questioning a person's claims to identify as the opposite of their birth sex is hate speech and discrimination. Even if you simply refuse to use their gender-neutral pronouns. And in February of 2018, parents in Ohio lost custody of their 17-year-old daughter because they refused to support her request for hormone therapy that would enable her to appear more like a boy. And as you can imagine, those are just a handful of multitudes of examples that I could share with you.

The question is: how did we get here? How did this happen? Well as we've learned the last three weeks, abandoning God is the ultimate cause, silencing Scripture is the instrumental cause, and as we saw last week, reimagining morality, as a result of those first two, is the formal cause. As a result of those decisions, collectively by our culture, we have landed in exactly the wrong place on the gender issue. Where have we landed? Let me put it this simply to you. Our culture has rejected the objective biblical declaration that God created humanity in His image as male and

female, and has embraced in its place, a subjective, unproven, secular philosophy called “gender theory”. This is becoming one of the biggest issues of our times. In fact, I think this may very well be the issue that ushers in real physical persecution against God’s people. So, I think it’s important that we step back and look at this at length from the scriptures. So, I thought I could do it in two weeks, but as I looked at it again this week I’m going to need to take three weeks to do this. It’s important. The last week we’ll look at the positive, all that the Bible details about how He made man in His image, male and female, and what we ought to celebrate as a result of that. But today and next week we’re going to look at the problem before us – this gender question. Now there are several crucial facts that we need to understand and unpack together. Let me first of all ask for your patience today. If you’re a part of our church, you know that normally we very quickly get into the biblical text, and we’re going to get there. But I first need to give you some crucial background this morning. That will serve as background for the entire three messages, so please be patient with me as I do that.

Let’s start with a functional definition. What does gender theory teach? I’ve read a number of excellent resources to prepare for these three messages, and much of what I’m going to share today in these first two points is adapted from one especially helpful book, entitled, *Gender Ideology*, by Sharon James. So what exactly is gender theory? This new theory that our culture has embraced in place of the biblical teaching. Gender theory teaches that every person has a gender identity that may or may not be their biological sex. Now if you’re already confused, don’t worry. There’s a reason for that. Because, to promote their brave new world, gender activists have radically redefined the vocabulary pertaining to gender. So, we need to step back first and make sure we’re talking about the same thing. Traditionally, the words sex, in the sense of male and female, and gender, have been used synonymously to identify an individual as either male or female. So, sex and gender are interchangeable. If I ask you your sex, you answer your biological sex. If I ask your gender, for many of you, you answer your biological sex as well. They’re interchangeable. But gender theorists use the word “sex” solely for a person’s biological sex, and they describe it as “assigned at birth”. They love to say that. Your biological sex is what was assigned to you at birth. It sort of implies that the doctor was there in the room and he said, “Okay, let’s call this one a male”. It’s assigned. It’s sort of almost unnecessarily, perhaps unhelpfully, in fact many would say unhelpfully. So, in gender theory then, your sex is solely

about your body. It's things like your reproductive organs, your chromosomes, your hormones. So that's the word "sex". The word "gender" in gender theory is not the same. It is reserved for what's called your "gender identity", which is unrelated to your biological sex. Your gender identity is how you subjectively feel. You may feel male. You may feel female. Or you may feel something else. But your gender is your internal sense of self – how you feel about your identity in terms of gender. Now immediately, let me just say that this claim that there is some independent gender identity is not only unsupported by the scriptures as we'll see in the next couple of weeks, but it is also unsupported by scientific data. As recently as 2011, one of the leading doctors of the Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic in the U.K.; those on the forefront of all of these issues – they're not opposed to it, but they wrote this in 2011: "The least certain diagnosis", of your gender, "is that made by the patient." The least certain. "Made as it is without any training or objectivity. This uncertainty is not lessened by the patient's frequently high degree of conviction." So here is an expert in this field saying as recently as 2011, the last thing in the world we should do is let individuals self-identify in terms of their gender.

In 2016, an article in *The New Atlantis* reported on a comprehensive survey of scientific evidence over 200 peer-reviewed studies in biology, psychology, and the social sciences, and here was the conclusion: "The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex, that a person might be a man trapped in a woman's body or a woman trapped in a man's body is not supported by scientific evidence." In spite of the fact that there is no evidence of this separate category of gender identity, it has become a driving force in our world's understanding of these things. The acronym for the main gender identities that people take to themselves started out as LGBT. Today, it is LGBTQIA+. I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, but I do want you to at least know what those mean. L stands for lesbian. G stands for gay. So, you have homosexuals, male and female. B is bisexual, sexually responsive to both sexes. T is for transgender or transsexual. It can mean in an umbrella sense anyone dissatisfied with their biological sex, but it normally is used of those who either desire to assume or actually do assume the physical characteristics and gender role of the opposite biological sex. Q stands for either queer or questioning, depending on who you ask, and either it speaks of those who are uncertain of their gender identity or those who refuse to be classified, claiming that classifying under the binary category of male or female is discriminatory. I stands

for intersex, which describes those folks who are born with some ambiguous physical sexuality in terms of their organs. Then A stands for asexual- those attracted to neither male nor female. And the plus, as you might guess, is other categories that could or may be added in the future. I don't want you to miss the main point as we look at this definition. In gender theory, biology doesn't matter. It's what you feel and only what you feel. And any disagreement with gender theory is considered to be intolerant, hateful, or, they love this word- transphobia. To be afraid of, as if to disagree, means to fear. The clear implication is that if you disagree there is only one reason and that is because you are hateful and bigoted. Now folks, we are going to talk about this next week. Our response to people who are dealing with this in their lives is to be gracious and compassionate and to bring the truth of the gospel to bear in their lives as it needs to come to bear in everybody's life. We should never be hateful or bigoted in any way. At the same time, we must disagree because the Scriptures disagree. So, there is a functional definition of gender theory.

Now let's move on secondly to another fact that we need to understand is its philosophical formation. How did it develop? How in the world did we get here? Have you ever wondered that? What happened? Well, as we've learned, ultimately gender confusion stems from the abandonment of God, the silencing of Scripture, and the reimagining of morality. Specifically, however, we can trace the progress of gender theory through three historical movements that have happened over the last 200 years. Let me detail them for you. First of all, the first movement that really laid the foundation for this is Darwinian Evolutionary Theory. This was the foundation. This was the basis. Because with Origin of Species in 1859, Darwin removed humanity from its biblical position. What is its biblical position? We are going to look at that in detail in the next couple of weeks. It is Genesis 1 and 2. It is humanity made in the image of God, male and female. Darwin removed humanity from that position and instead said humanity is just another species of surviving animals. Shortly after Darwin's book was published, many academics began to argue in light of that, there is no absolute morality and anything animals do sexually is acceptable for humans. That is how evolutionary theory gave birth to a second movement historically, and that is the sexual revolution.

Evolutionary theory laid the groundwork for the destructive philosophy of a man you've probably heard of: Frederick Nietzsche. He died in the year 1900. Nietzsche took the next step from Darwinism and argued that God is dead, and that means there is no objective truth and – he loved this - therefore there are no moral absolutes. Nietzsche demanded that Christianity, which he considered to be repressive, be replaced with total sexual freedom. He took the ethical implications of Darwinism and made them real in the life of the world. There are no moral absolutes. There needs to be total sexual freedom in every way. And Sharon James in her book lists a series of influential thinkers who followed Nietzsche and championed this foundational idea. Let me just mention several of them just to give you some background. These are people that laid the sexual revolution into the fabric of our world's history. First is Karl Ulrich. In the 1800s he was a German doctor who was favorable of and argued for homosexuality. He was the first to argue that a female soul could be trapped in a man's body. The next is certainly a name you recognize, Sigmund Freud, whose timeline slightly overlaps with Ulrich. Freud believed that the concept of God was a fairytale. It was based on a child's need for a father figure. Instead, we are simply highly developed animals and therefore, he argued, that all sexual desire and all sexual acts are normal and acceptable. Magnus Hirschfeld, who died in 1935, furthered these ideas. He was a German homosexual doctor who built on Freud's idea and actually became the architect of the sexual revolution. He personally supervised the first sex reassignment surgery. In this same time period, the first part of the 20th century, died in 1956, came a man who impacted our country in a huge way: Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey referred to himself as a sexual researcher but in reality, he was a man who was personally addicted to sexual perversion. He was educated at Harvard and he created a sex institute in Indiana. His experiments included abusing infants and children. He advocated legalizing all sexual behavior including pornography, bestiality, and even pedophilia. One of his associates was a man named Harry Benjamin. Harry Benjamin wrote the first textbook on transgenderism in 1966. He was the first to really champion the idea that if a person was convinced they were living in the wrong body, then their body should be fixed to fit their feelings. The final name I will mention is Robert Stoller. Stoller wrote in 1968 a very influential book called *Sex and Gender*, in which he argued, and you'll recognize this, that sex is biological but gender is social.

Now, you can see how evolutionary theory laid the foundation for the sexual revolution. But there is one additional catalyst behind the development of gender theory, and it was the cultural revolution through cultural Marxism. You see, at the same time the sexual revolution was unfolding, an academic theory came out of Frankfurt, Germany, called the Critical Theory or it's known by others as cultural Marxism and it added more fuel to this whole fire. Now the Critical Theory is the basis as well of the Critical Race Theory and so I'm going to wait to explain it fully until I deal with that issue in a few weeks. For now, let me just explain it to you briefly. This theory, the Critical Theory grows out of Marxism, and it argues that in every society there are the oppressors and there are the oppressed. In other words, society is all about power and you have the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressors, the ruling class, keep their power by enforcing their values and norms. Now when this theory was combined with the sexual revolution, the standard that they argued was being used to oppress the people was traditional Christian morality. One philosopher and sociologist associated with the Frankfurt School, a man by the name of Herbert Marcuse, taught that mere tolerance of different lifestyles was not really tolerance. It was pseudo-tolerance because as long as it was merely tolerated, then you still had that aura of oppression going on. For there to be real freedom, Marcuse said, all traditional views of morality and all of those who hold them have to go away. That's how you have real freedom. And so, you can understand how this fleshes out. In the Critical Theory, at the top are the privileged oppressors and at the bottom are the oppressed victims. This is what is called identity politics. When the sexual revolution joined forces with cultural Marxism they decided that those who hold traditional morality and gender distinctions are the oppressors. In fact, queer theory as they call it says "If you believe heterosexuality is normal, then you are bigoted and hateful. If you believe heterosexual marriage is crucial to a society's stability, you are oppressive".

Now do you understand how this shows up in our news? All of this means that those in the categories of LGBTQ etcetera are oppressed. They are oppressed by Christian morality and they are to be admired and celebrated for courageously living out their real identity, even in the face of the oppression of traditional Christian morality. They argue that what they call a "binary" understanding of sex and gender (the idea that there are only male and female) was created by the oppressive class of heterosexual, Christianity-influenced males in order to maintain control. Now you understand where we are and how we got there. This is a blending of philosophies that

have come together to create our current situation. The combination of evolutionary theory, the sexual revolution, and cultural Marxism have led to the demand to reject biblical morality and to marginalize and increasingly to criminalize all of those who disagree.

So, what are we to do? What are we to think? I want you to turn with me to Ephesians 4. We've looked at this text a couple of times over the last couple of weeks, but I have intentionally not walked you through it and I want to do that now. You will remember in the first three chapters, Paul lays out what God has done for us in Christ, the calling that we've received. He begins Ephesians 4:1 with this, "Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Walk worthy of the calling into Christ that you have received. How do you do that? Well beginning in verse 2 and down into verse 16, we do that by walking in unity in the church. That's the first way we walk worthy. But when you come to verse 17, you come to a new paragraph and a new way to walk worthy and that is to walk in personal holiness. He begins not with what we should be but with what we were. Let's read it together, Ephesians 4:17-19:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

This passage says stop thinking like and living like the pagans you used to be and the pagans that are around you now. In these verses, we learn that there are several defining characteristics of how pagans live, how we used to live, and how we should not live any longer. First of all, notice pagans are marked by worthless worldviews. I won't spend much time here because we have already looked at this. But the end of the verse 17 says "They walk in the futility of their mind." Their worldviews, their mindsets, their ways of thinking, the grids through which unbelievers see the world are all futile. That is, they lack meaning and purpose. But why? Why do they hold worthless worldviews like gender theory? It is because of a darkened mind, number two. We

have already looked at this one as well. Verse 18 begins “being darkened in their understanding”. The mind itself, the thinking process, and the resulting thoughts of pagans are all completely void of light. They are pitch black. There is not a hint of real God-honoring truth in them. They have a constant inability to think and to reason rationally. They have lost all touch with spiritual reality. And that’s because, number three, they have a lifeless soul. Verse 18 goes on to say that they are excluded from the life of God. The word “excluded” comes from a Greek word meaning “to belong to another, to be alien to, even to be hostile to”. Literally, the text says “having been excluded or alienated”. It speaks of a past event with continuing results, probably referring to The Fall. From The Fall, in Genesis 3, all unbelievers without exception have a soul in which there is no spiritual life. They are physically alive. Their hearts beat. Their brains function. They have jobs. They have families. They have careers. They even have religions. They sleep, they eat, they play, but without Christ, they are the walking dead. That’s why in the gospel God offers life, eternal life. Not just life that lasts forever, but the life of God. A different kind of life, spiritual life. Unbelievers are strangers to the life that comes from God because of number four, a willful ignorance. Verse 18 says, “because of the ignorance that is in them”. This kind of ignorance is something you’ve known and understood but you have pushed out of your mind. There are different kinds of ignorance, right? There is the kind of ignorance that says “I never heard that. I didn’t know that. I didn’t understand that”. This isn’t that kind of ignorance. Tragically, unregenerate men are ignorant of God and His ways but it is not accidental. It is willful. Romans 1, having willfully chosen to shut God out of their minds, to shut his revelation and creation, and his word away from themselves, they live in a self-imposed state of ignorance about God and His will. And where does this self-imposed ignorance come from? Number five – a hard heart. Because of the hardness of their hearts. Here is the core problem. It’s not a lack of information. Unbelievers are willfully ignorant of God. They suppress the truth because they have hard hearts. The Greek word translated “hardness” here is “poras”. It’s a word used in secular Greek to describe the consistency of a stone, like marble. In other words, we could say they have a heart of stone. In biblical terms, to be hard hearted is primarily a description of the human will. It’s not something that just happens to you; it’s something you’re culpable for. If you look back over the things we’ve covered so far, a hard heart stands at the foundation of those things. A hard heart is the cause of all of the rest of those things. But a hard heart is also the cause of what comes next. Number six – a final defining characteristic of how pagans walk, is a

sinful lifestyle. Verse 19, “And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness”. Verse 19 says that eventually, a hard heart becomes a callous heart. The word callous means “to cease to feel pain”. Here, it’s talking about moral pain. It’s to lose all moral sensitivity and feeling. To be insensitive to the truth. To feel no real guilt. No sense of shame. When a hard heart becomes a callous heart, something terrible happens. Look at verse 19, “they have given themselves over”. At this point, they stop even trying to resist. They stop fighting their corruption in any way. Literally the text says, “having abandoned themselves”. Now what do they abandon themselves to pursue without restraint? Sensuality. That is unrestrained, outrageous conduct. A lifestyle unrestrained by law or general morality. It means to go beyond the proper bounds or limits. Harold Hoehner, in his commentary on Ephesians, says, “It’s the practice of sin without concern as to what God or people think”. Boy, are we there. Sensuality then, is unrestrained indulgence in sensual pleasure. It is the pleasure that comes from satisfying the senses or the physical desires of the body. Verse 19 says, and this unrestrained attitude and behavior, “is for the practice of every kind of impurity”. Impurity is literally, “refuse”. It describes what’s dirty. Every kind of moral act that renders the soul dirty before God, that’s what they pursue. Verse 19, they pursue it with “greediness”. This describes the intensity with which pagans pursue every kind of behavior that makes them dirty before God. They do it with greediness. With an insatiable appetite for more. Barkley describes this as being so much at the mercy of your desires, that you don’t care whose life is injured, or whose innocence is destroyed, as long as your own desires are satisfied. Folks, look again at verses 17-19. That perfectly explains what’s happening in our culture. Verse 19 – there’s the sexual revolution. There’s why we are where we are. It’s this passage.

But what about us? Look at verse 20. “But you did not learn Christ in this way”. It’s an interesting expression, “learn the Messiah”. It has the idea of, you didn’t become His disciple, you didn’t sign up to follow Him, you didn’t become a part of His school, thinking you were going to act like this. Thinking you were going to learn this kind of behavior. Then he goes on to define that a little more, what it means to learn Christ. He breaks it into two parts in verse 21, “If indeed you have heard Him”. That’s probably a reference to hearing and responding to the Gospel. In other words, this is talking about salvation. This is a fascinating expression. It didn’t say you heard about Him. It says at the moment of salvation you heard Him. The Ephesians had

never met Jesus Christ. They lived a long way away in Asia Minor. They heard Him through the gospel. You and I, at the moment of salvation, we heard Him and the Father drew us as well to Himself through the gospel that we heard. You're radically different. You've been changed. You heard Him. You're becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. And then he adds, "and you have been taught in Him". That's probably a reference to the ongoing instruction in the school of Christ about how you're to live. So, the first expression has to do with salvation. This has to do with sanctification. He says, listen, when you became a follower of Jesus Christ, it wasn't this. So, don't embrace the thinking of pagans about these things. And for goodness sake, don't live like them. Don't give in to these patterns. This is not how you learned Christ. So, in the next couple of weeks as we study this more together, don't forget. This is how pagans think. This is how they live. Because that's natural to them. "But you have not learned Christ in this way".

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for these remarkable words that give us such profound insight into our times. Lord, we are deeply troubled by what's going on around us, and we thank you that you have so clearly laid it out for us. But Father, we thank you that while we can be men and women of the times and understand them, that we are not men and women of our times in the sense that we don't embrace their values, their philosophies, and we don't follow their practices. Thank you for the change you have brought, that you saved us, that in the gospel we heard Christ, and you gave us faith and repentance to believe, and you've continued to teach us in Him through His word so that we are gradually being sanctified and conformed to His image. Father, I pray for those who may be here this morning who are not in Christ, who have seen themselves in these texts. Father, help them to see their only hope, and it's a huge hope, it is a real hope, is to throw themselves on your mercy in Christ, and that you will change them. Lord, may they do so even today. Now, Lord, as we turn our thoughts to the Lord's Table, we thank you that that radical change that Paul describes here, that you brought about in our lives, is what we celebrate in the Lord's Table – we thank you for that. And yet Lord, we want to come with clean hands and pure hearts and so each of us now individually confess our sins to you. Lord, we confess our sins of omission, those things that we should have done but did not, and we confess sins of commission, those things that we have done that were forbidden, that we should not have done. We confess sins of thought, lust, pride, selfishness, and many others. We confess sins of attitude. We confess words that were intended to hurt, words that didn't build up. Lord, we

confess actions that we have taken that are contrary to the nature of Jesus Christ our Lord. Lord, forgive us, cleanse us, not because we deserve it, but because Christ purchased it. Thank you that you have forgiven us once for all in justification. The gavel has come down and we are forever righteous before you in Christ. And yet Father, now we come to you now as your children seeking the forgiveness of children of a father, because we have offended the family name in these things. Forgive us God, cleanse us, and let us take of this wonderful reminder of our Lord as an act of pure worship. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.