

What Christianity Alone Offers Transgender Persons

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A day barely passes without transgender issues hitting the news. It might be a human interest feature about someone transitioning from one sex to another, and how they've been received (or not) by their communities. It might concern the politics of rights for transgender men and women, and which restrooms should be available to them. It might have to do with complex discussions about the causes of and treatments available for transgenderism. But one thing's for sure: This issue isn't going away anytime soon, and we Christians can't afford to avoid it.

Yet many of us will want to. We know we're treading on hugely sensitive ground. We know we're dealing with areas of deeply personal pain for many men and women, and we will be wary of saying things that might add to that pain.

We might not know what we think about some of the political debates raging all around us. We might feel as though we simply don't know enough about transgenderism to say anything with confidence. Try looking up "transgender" in a concordance; you're not likely to get far.

But the gospel is always good news—for everyone. It strikes me that there are two particular insights the gospel can offer that might form the starting point of our response.

1. Unique Understanding

Gender dysphoria, the feeling of profound discomfort with the sex of one's own body, is often hugely painful. For some it's chronic, going back even to early childhood. For many the emotional toll can feel unbearable. No one can

deny this pain. And Christians can perhaps uniquely account for it.

Paul gives us a key insight into the world in which we live:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ([Rom. 8:20–21](#))

Creation isn't right. The physical world has been "subjected to futility," to frustration. It doesn't work properly. It's out of joint. It has been subjected to this frustration by God. The Bible's wider narrative explains this. God cursed the ground as a judgment on human sin ([Gen. 3:17](#)). In other words, the world isn't right as both a consequence and a demonstration of the fact that we're not right.

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What's true of creation in general is true of our bodies, too. They're part of the physical order that's been subjected to this frustration. We see this frustration in a variety of ways. Some face unremitting health issues; others contend with a whole range of body image struggles; still more experience body dysphoria—feeling as though they're trapped in the wrong kind of body. The fact is, virtually no one has an entirely straightforward relationship with their own body. It's the way of life in this world. And while it true that anyone can see this problem, Christians can uniquely account for it.

The Bible shows us that sin causes profound alienation—first and foremost from God, with other alienations ensuing. We're alienated from one another. And we're alienated from ourselves. What was meant to be whole and integrated—our mind, body, and spirit—is now deeply fractured. We don't feel aligned in ourselves.

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Knowing these things should make us compassionate. While much of the thinking around transgender issues today is flawed, the pain experienced by those with gender dysphoria is all too real. We of all people should appreciate why, for we of all people understand the true depth of what's wrong with this world. Our churches should be the places people feel most safe trying to articulate their own sense of not being right.

2. Unique Hope

But the Bible never ends with diagnosis. As well as offering a uniquely deep understanding, we can point people to a uniquely solid hope. We all experience the curse of the fall in bodily ways. But the answer to the problems in our body—along with the answer to any of our problems—is never going to be found in ourselves. Whatever we might do to our bodies to overcome perceived problems, we'll never be able to fix what truly lies beneath our self-alienation. We can alter our appearance; we can correct much of what we think to be wrong. But we will never find the real freedom we so deeply crave. Nothing we can do to our bodies will help us to feel that we're our true selves—at least not in a lasting way.

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No, the only answer to our experience of brokenness in our bodies is found in the ultimate brokenness of Christ's body. He experienced the ultimate affliction. His was the body most reviled by others. And the ultimate dysphoria ever experienced was when he "who had no sin" was "made sin

for us" ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)). Talk about being in the wrong flesh. Yet he went through all of that for us. He experienced ultimate brokenness so that we would never have to.

The issue with our bodies turns out to be the issue with every part of us. They manifest brokenness in a way that points to the brokenness within every single one of us. We've turned from God, so nothing is as it should be. The starting place for the Christian faith is recognizing this. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus told us ([Matt. 5:3](#)), not "Blessed are those who think they've got everything pretty much together."

Bodily brokenness of any kind, if we have eyes to see, can point us to the broken body of Christ—and through that brokenness, to the eventual restoration and healing that comes through him. Embracing Christ doesn't guarantee resolution in this life to the bodily brokenness we experience. But it does give us a sure and confident hope that we will have a perfect relationship with our body in the world to come.