

# He Made Them Male and Female

## Sex, Gender, and the Image of God

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Is “gender” a social construct? Should male or female be a matter of personal choice? Are there more than two “genders”?

Ten years ago, these questions were unheard of apart from English and Women’s Studies departments at secular universities. But as peculiar and even sacrilegious as it may sound, many people today would say yes to all three. Maybe your kindergartener has a playmate being raised “gender neutral.” Or your coffee shop is starting to use name tags with “preferred pronouns.” Or a bit closer to home, you might have a family member who is “transitioning.”

Although the modern West has lost its boundaries and celebrates a plethora of so-called gender options, how should Christians understand and critique today’s concepts of gender in light of Scripture? We begin with understanding, and not conflating, four categories: sex, gender, norms, and callings.

### **Sex: Male and Female**

The term *sex* has a couple of definitions. It can refer to the act of sexual intercourse or the categories of male and female. For this discussion, we’re focusing on the second definition.

Sex as male or female is an objective, binary classification. In this sense, sex refers to divisions based on reproductive functions. Many today, however, claim that sex is not objective but arbitrary. For example, some assert that sex is “assigned” at birth. This is simply untrue. The sex of a newborn is observed physically by the baby’s sex organs and confirmed genetically through a DNA test.

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But what about people who are “intersex”? Does this exceptionally rare condition (by all counts, one in thousands, not hundreds) prove sex is nonbinary and on a spectrum? No. Intersexuality is a biological phenomenon where an individual may

have genital ambiguity or genetic variance. In human biology, however, anomalies do not nullify categories.

### **Gender: Self-Perceptions**

The modern notion of “gender,” on the other hand, is a quite recent invention and is more difficult to examine. Unlike sex, gender is a category that exists objectively only in the realm of linguistics. It doesn’t point to anything tangible. Instead, “gender” now is being used to refer to a psychological reality independent from biological sex. It’s the subjective *self-perception* of being male or female.

At present, this psychological concept of “gender” is essentially being enforced linguistically, with demands to use preferred pronouns and newly chosen names to match self-perception rather than objective truth. But this is how minds are changed — by first changing language.

Given that *sex* is objective and *gender* is subjective, you would think we would value conforming one’s subjective ideas to objective truth. Instead, the opposite is true: our culture now values altering the objective, physical reality of our bodies to accommodate the subjective impression of ourselves.

Most people’s self-perception is congruent with their biological sex. For a small percentage of others, it’s not. The mental distress from this dissonance is called *gender dysphoria* — a psychological consequence of the fall. Some choose to identify as transgender male-to-female or female-to-male, in essence elevating psychology over biology.

However, this new form of dualism separates mind from body and elevates self-understanding as the determiner of personhood — hence the neologism *gender identity*. The truth of the matter is that sense of self at best describes *how* we feel, not *who* we are.

### **Norms: Cultural Expectations**

But some assert that *male* and *female* are actually determined by culture. This categorical fallacy is a conflation of male and female with the separate classification of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity are

behavioral characteristics associated with being male or female. Admittedly, these social norms can sometimes be shaped by our culture and expectations.

“Being male or female cannot be changed by human hands; sex is a category of God’s handiwork, his original and enduring design.”

For example, in some parts of the United States, being masculine frequently means being rough, tough, unemotional, and inartistic. For some, the quintessential all-American man might be a rugged, loud, and bombastic football player or construction worker. Yet in many other places, these two examples would not be considered masculine, but barbaric!

Who says a man can’t be artistic? Jubal was “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” ([Genesis 4:21](#)). Moses led Israel in a song of victory over Egypt ([Exodus 15:1–18](#)). David was skilled at the harp, and wrote numerous psalms ([2 Samuel 23:1](#)). He also assigned men to be musicians in the temple ([1 Chronicles 25:1–31](#)).

Who says men cannot be emotional? Many of the prophets, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Jeremiah, were not afraid to express their emotions through public tears ([Ezra 10:1](#); [Nehemiah 1:4](#); [Lamentations 1:16](#)). Even Jesus himself wept publicly ([John 11:35](#)). Strong emotions are not reserved for women only.

King David was known for having a heart after God. He’s famous for his brave exploits — first as a shepherd boy when he fought lions and bears to protect his sheep, then as a youth who defied the giant Goliath, and later as a warrior-king. But David was known for also being sensitive and intuitive, exhibiting traits that macho culture would view as inappropriate for a “real man’s man.” Had David grown up today as a young boy playing the harp, some kids may have teased him for being a sissy.

### **Callings: Manhood and Womanhood**

Does this mean there are no distinctions between male and female? Instead of looking for cues primarily from society, we must look to Scripture. Cultural norms for male and female may be shaped by society, but God’s word communicates that men and women, while being equal in value, are also distinct in their callings. We identify this distinction of calling as biblical manhood and womanhood, a category the secular world doesn’t acknowledge.

In the creation account, God creates the woman to be the man's "helper fit for him" ([Genesis 2:18](#)). The word *helper* (Hebrew *'ezer*) does not denote a person of lesser worth or value. In fact, *'ezer* occurs 21 times in the Old Testament, and 16 of these refer to God as Israel's help.

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"Fit for him" (*kenegdo*) communicates complementarity — both similarity and dissimilarity. Adam and Eve are both alike as human beings and also not alike as male and female. God intends for the woman to complement and not duplicate the man. This difference of calling is God's design from the beginning.

The apostle Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" ([Ephesians 5:25](#)) and wives to submit to their husbands "as the church submits to Christ" ([Ephesians 5:24](#)). These distinct callings are vital in marriage, the church, and other realms as well.

### **More Than Biology**

In the first chapter of the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth, and fills the earth with living creatures. The crown of creation is *adam*, or man (humankind). And among all the various human characteristics, God highlights one in particular: male and female.

[Genesis 1:27](#) conveys an undeniable connection between "the image of God" and the ontological categories of male and female. This verse consists of three lines of poetry, with the second and third lines structured in parallel, communicating a correlation between God's image and "male and female."

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

Being created in the image of God and being male or female are essential to being human. Sex (male and female) is not simply biological or genetic, just as being human is not simply biological or genetic. *Sex is first and foremost a spiritual and ontological reality created by God.* Being male or female cannot be changed by

human hands; sex is a category of God's handiwork — his original and everlasting design.

As hard as anyone may try to alter this fact in his or her own body, the most that can be done is to artificially remove or augment body parts, or use pharmaceuticals to unnaturally suppress the biological and hormonal reality of one's essence as male or female. In other words, psychology usurps biology; *what I feel becomes who I am*. When denying this physical and genetic reality, we allow experience to supersede essence, and more importantly, the image of God.

### ***Sola Experientia***

As Christians living today in baffling times, we must recognize that the world confuses and conflates these four categories. The world will suggest that masculinity is a social construct (which it may be in part but not the whole) and then assert that male and female is also a social construct — which it emphatically is not.

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The ultimate question is: Where should Christians place their emphasis when engaging in discussions on this topic? Transgenderism is not exclusively a battle for what is male and female, but rather a battle for what is *true* and *real*. Christians cannot simply nod and smile politely in the face of damaging lies.

Postmodernism, coming out of romanticism and existentialism, tells us that “you are what you feel.” Thus, experience reigns supreme, and everything else must bow before it. *Sola experientia* (“experience alone”) has won out over *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”).

But God is saying, *You are who I created you to be*. The truth is not something we feel; it is not based on our self-perception. In fact, Scripture tells us that the fallen heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). We can't trust our own thoughts and feelings, so we need to submit them to God because we can “trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” ([Isaiah 26:4](#)).

I refuse to place my psychology over my biology, and as a Christian, I refuse to put either above Scripture. I am who God — who makes no mistakes — made me to be. So who am I? Who did God make me to be?

I am created in the image of God, and I am a redeemed Christian man. Nothing more. Nothing less.

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