

(The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality Part 1)

## **What is Our Identity?**

**'Identity' is buzzword in our culture. What is my identity? Where does my identity come from? What roles do my gender, sexual feelings and relationships play in my identity? Part 1 of 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' lays out the basics building blocks we need to work ourselves out. We find our identity is planted in solid ground. Who we are is shaped by the God who crafted us with deep purpose and who cares for us.**

Read on and discover more in Part 1 of our GiST paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' ([link](#)). The points below provide you with a taste of the biblical, cultural and pastoral explorations in Part 1 of the full paper. The full paper's purpose is to explore a theological framework for understanding and responding to some contemporary ideas on gender and sexuality. The key idea is that in every aspect of our gender and sexuality, every one of us needs to be profoundly 'reoriented' to one person – Jesus Christ.

### **Part 1 - Oriented to Our Creator: Essential Aspects of Creation**

God's design for us is thoroughly good. Its goodness stands despite the Fall and points ahead to the glorious new creation we will enjoy through our redemption in Christ.

#### **1. We belong to God and he defines our identity**

God grants our very being to us. Our true identity is defined in terms of God's design for us, the relationship he creates with us and the destiny he appoints for us. Ultimately the Bible points to Christ as the one in whom God draws us into relationship with himself through the Spirit.

#### **2. God has made us embodied, spiritual people**

God's good design for human beings is that we are both body and spirit, wrapped into one.

Because God has designed our bodies in accord with his purposes for us, we should not downgrade the importance of human bodily life, use our bodies for our own purposes or pit our desires against them. Instead, we should strive to discern God's will for us, body and spirit.

#### **3. God has made us gendered people**

While the fundamental feature of our identity is our relationship to God in Christ, our gender is a secondary but good category of our identity. From the very beginning, human beings have been created with a biological sex (male or female with different bodily characteristics) intended to align with a fitting gender identity (the recognition of being a man or a woman) and gender roles in relationships. The creation (and following) accounts provide the foundations of our understanding of gender:

Firstly, the binary nature of gender (male and female) is established with simple clarity.

Secondly, we see that God did not create a third gender or a diversity of genders.

Thirdly, we see that a person's biological sex reveals and determines both their actual or objective gender identity and potential gender roles.

Fourthly, we see that the two genders are made to be oriented to their Creator. Men and women are made both similar and different, fine-tuned to reflect the deep, loving relationality of God and fulfil his task for them in harmonised ways.

#### **4. God has designed us for two possible 'vocations' or tasks as gendered people — marriage and chaste singleness**

Sexuality is clearly a good part of God's design for human beings, but it is not at the core of human life or identity. Rather, the purposes of sex are bound to the purposes of marriage. These are, in turn, are determined wholly in relation to God, not merely our own desires. The key creation purposes and features of marriage and sexuality are:

Firstly, the marriage and sexual union is a permanent, exclusive (monogamous) commitment that reflects God's faithful, enduring commitment to us.

Secondly, the marital and sexual union are designed to be between a man and woman.

Thirdly, marriage and sexuality are introduced in the context of exercising dominion over creation before God. As the Bible story unfolds, this task develops into one of together rejoicing in the Lord as our Creator and Redeemer through Christ.

Fourthly, the marital and sexual union serves the task of begetting and nurturing children. However, childlessness in no way undermines the integrity and beauty of the marriage covenant.

Fifthly, sex helps build an intimate companionship between a married couple as they strive to serve God's purposes together.

However, it is important to see that, in the Bible, the source of our most intimate relationships and the remedy for human loneliness, both for the unmarried and married, is not marriage but close fellowship in the Lord.

The vocation of singleness is uncommon in the Old Testament but gains great significance in the New Testament.

**Having established the Creation basics of our identity, the next big question is what has gone wrong with our experiences of gender and sexuality? Read the full paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' [here \(link\)](#) to explore further.**

**You can access many articles on living faithfully for Jesus in a secular society on our website — [www.gist.org.au](http://www.gist.org.au)**

(The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality Part 2)

## **Part 2 - What Has Gone Wrong in Our Experience of Gender and Sexuality?**

It doesn't need saying that our experiences of gender and sexuality can go terribly, painfully wrong. Our sense of identity, our bodies, even our deepest desires get caught up in the mess. But if we all know that already, why spend time 'rubbing it in' by digging down into the biblical basics of our problem? Because the deeper our grasp of our common problem, the more profound our joy, confidence and hope in the One who can rescue and truly tend to us. And the more humbly we care for one another.

Read on and discover more in Part 2 of our GiST paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' ([link](#)). The points below provide you with a taste of the biblical, cultural and pastoral explorations in Part 2 of the full paper. The full paper's purpose is to explore a theological framework for understanding and responding to some contemporary ideas on gender and sexuality. The key idea is that in every aspect of our gender and sexuality, every one of us needs to be profoundly 'reoriented' to one person – Jesus Christ.

### **Part 2 - Culpably Disoriented: Essential Aspects of the Fall**

It is impossible to understand our experiences of gender and sexuality or grasp what Christ achieves for us without a deep grasp of the nature of our sin.

#### **1. The essence of the Fall is human sin against God**

At the heart of sin is rebellion against God's explicit word and his wise and ordered reign. This includes any way we push against God's design for the expression of our sexual feelings (something every one of us does in some way).

The sinful reversal of God's plans for the original creation brings brokenness, disorder, pain, loss and death. We are all both perpetrators and victims of sin and we should grieve the pain our sin brings to ourselves and others. Most of all we should grieve the offence of our sin to the Lord who lovingly crafted us.

#### **2. We all share in our first parents' guilt and sinful nature**

Our first parents' depravity and guilt has spread to every member of the human race. We are all alike born with a will to sin.

#### **3. Sin affects every part of our being**

As a result of Adam's sin, all our attitudes, tendencies and behaviours in every part of our lives are naturally oriented away from God and his law.

An important way Paul describes the sinful nature is in terms of the 'flesh'. To be ruled by the flesh means allowing the perspective of this world to shape us rather than the world to come.

Although grace and the power to do good are the prevailing principles in the hearts of believers, sin continues to powerfully indwell us, pressing into our will, emotions, desires and bodies.

### **a. Sin affects our sense of identity**

Rather than perceiving identity objectively, that is according to biblically revealed purposes or biological facts, it is now perceived more subjectively, according to who we conceive, feel or desire ourselves to be.

### **b. Sin affects our bodies**

Both our bodies and souls are affected by sin in extremely complex ways.

On the one hand, we must not confuse body and spirit. Sin cannot be attributed simply to a biological illness and biological illness cannot be straightforwardly attributed to sin.

On the other hand, we must not drive a wedge between the biological and spiritual. Corrupt desires thoroughly inhabit the physical body.

In practice, this body-spirit interplay means we must avoid simplistic declarations about causes and solutions to problems in the areas of gender and sexuality. We cannot understand each and every struggle we have in purely physical or spiritual terms. All our desires are driven by a complex, even mysterious interplay between spiritual, physical, relational, environmental and cultural factors. This also means sanctification can be a hard and complex road requiring patience, love and different kinds of help along the way. Most importantly, we must come to Jesus who tends to us body and soul. We must attend to the spiritual state of every person, as well as whatever biological forces appear to also be at play.

### **c. Sin affects our desires**

Understanding the sinfulness of desire is of enormous pastoral importance to every one of us, no matter what our struggles are.

#### **i. Even our impure desires are sinful, and we are culpable for them**

In the Bible, both impure desires *and* the actions that flow from them are considered sinful and therefore culpable. It is not merely broken, disordered or fallen to desire something God forbids but truly and properly sin which renders us liable to God's eternal wrath.

#### **ii. Impure desires are sinful even if they are unchosen**

Arguing in line with Augustine and contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Reformers emphasised that even spontaneous or unbidden desire for a sinful end arising before the conscious consent or approval of the will (concupiscence) is in itself truly sin.

We all experience troubling inward draws towards many sins that are often uninvited, incessant and prior to any conscious deliberation, despite concerted efforts to resist. Not one of us loves God and or desires to do that which glorifies him as we should, and evil does not repel us as it should. We all stand before God in a desperate condition indeed.

### **iii. We can be tempted by our own sinful desires**

The Bible speaks about temptation in two different ways:

Temptation can involve a period of trial or testing that includes an allurements to sin through suffering or deprivation. In this case, experiencing temptation is not sin in itself unless we consent and enter into the temptation.

On the other hand, temptations can well up from the evil desires in our own hearts for which we are responsible and culpable.

### **iv. But there is an important moral difference between sinful desire and act**

While it is vital to recognise the sinfulness of impure desires so we can know our need before Christ, it is also vital to recognise that experiencing sinful desires is not the same as defiantly acting upon them. We must not heap shame upon brothers and sisters (or upon ourselves) who struggle against sin. To those who grieve at both their unbidden desires and conscious falls into sin, the gospel holds out clear and solid hope.

However, God also graciously restrains the workings of human depravity so that all are able to desire and act in many ways that are in some sense 'good'.

**Having probed what has gone wrong in our experience of gender and sexuality, the next vital question is where can we find real help, relief and hope? Read the full paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' here ([link](#)) to explore further.**

**You can access many more articles on living faithfully for Jesus in a secular society on our website — [www.gist.org.au](http://www.gist.org.au)**

(The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality Part 3)

## **What Has Jesus Got to Do with Our Gender and Sexuality?**

**Does Jesus make any difference to our experience of gender and sexuality? Yes. He makes all the difference. Every one of us needs him desperately.**

Read on and discover more in Part 3 of our GiST paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' ([link](#)). The points below provide you with a taste of the biblical, cultural and pastoral explorations in Part 3 of the full paper. The full paper's purpose is to explore a theological framework for understanding and responding to some contemporary ideas on gender and sexuality. The key idea is that in every aspect of our gender and sexuality, every one of us needs to be profoundly 'reoriented' to one person – Jesus Christ.

### **Part 3 - Reoriented in Christ: Essential Aspects of Salvation**

Jesus is the new head of humanity who has broken the penetrating power of sin through his death and resurrection. His return will mark the definitive expiry date of sin, death and the devil and the joy of renewed creation in his company.

#### **1. In Christ, God gives full meaning to our gender and sexuality**

The New Testament writers draw together the threads on gender and sexuality weaving through the Bible from Genesis onwards and show their full meaning in Christ.

##### **a. In Christ, God's creation design stands**

Although sin has ravaged our experience of gender and sexuality, we follow Christ by upholding the goodness of God's original design.

##### **b. In Christ, we honour our bodies and gender**

Our bodies, as an integral part of our 'selves', have been redeemed for his glory at great cost. While not ignoring our struggles, we can start to grow into our skin through Christ's restoring power, better 'fitting together' biologically, spiritually and relationally.

As men and women together, pursuing up-building relationships with each other in marriage and in God's household, we paint a picture of Christ's eternal saving love for us.

##### **c. In Christ, marriage and sex ultimately point to the marriage of Christ to his bride**

Marriage between a man and a woman is designed to reflect the exclusive, permanent, fruitful love of Christ for his church (albeit dimly at times due to sin).

Sex serves this reflection of eternal intimacy. Nurturing children is a particularly important way marriage reflects God's 'other'-embracing hospitality to us in Christ.

#### **d. In Christ, chaste singleness ultimately points to our heavenly marriage**

A person who is unmarried, whether due to widowhood, divorce or never having been married has a vocation that equally serves gospel purposes. In the New Testament, singleness is a high calling, reminding us that marriage and sex are 'merely' pointers to the infinitely greater reality of heaven and that our more precious, permanent relationships are with those born into Christ's family.

For some, singleness brings a deep sense of grief and isolation. This challenges church communities to embrace motherly, fatherly, sisterly and brotherly relationships within God's family. However, singleness may well bring rich relational opportunities. In Christ, the single life is meaningful and valuable, not a problem to be solved or a tragedy to be lamented.

### **2. In Christ, God reorients our view of well-being and love**

Jesus makes it clear that 'blessing' or flourishing is found in God-centredness. In Christ, we gain new lives, minds, hopes, desires, acceptance, intimacies, perspectives, friendships, family and safety.

God's love precedes, grounds and shapes human love. His love for us is more intimate than that between any two people.

### **3. In Christ, God reorients our view of acceptance**

In Christ, we find an entirely new sense of acceptance and belonging based not on subjective desires but on the objective truth of the gospel. On the one hand, Jesus' acceptance of us cuts through unrighteous human barriers and exclusions. On the other hand, Jesus forthrightly names our sins and tackles these head on by bringing forgiveness and reconciliation. We are accepted on the securest possible terms in Christ. It is vital that we speak these desperately needed words of gospel hope to brothers and sisters who are struggling in the areas of gender and sexuality.

### **4. In Christ, God reorients our view of identity**

In Christ we are new creations with a new identity and orientation, not knowing ourselves according to the world's false categories or our own fleshly desires but as God's beloved adopted children. This new identity humbles our self-righteous egoism but also assures us we are infallibly secure in his justifying love.

## **5. In Christ, God reorients our hearts, minds and deeds**

When we realise the deep traction sin has within us, it can be easy to feel that any sort of change is impossible. But when God takes possession of us, his grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and effects a change which is all-pervasive.

Those to whom God has lovingly bound to himself are called to constantly draw on his nourishing resources in Christ, giving ourselves wholly to him, rejecting sinful desires and seeking a purity of heart that sings in tune to our true identity. That includes honouring our gender and striving for sexual purity.

### **a. We continually draw near to Christ through his Word and Spirit**

The first and constant help we need is God's Word and Spirit.

### **b. We own our guilt and repent from sin**

Through the Spirit, we confess our sin, longing to be rid of what grieves God. We then repent of our sin, fighting against temptation.

### **c. We put off our old selves, put on our new selves and brace for trial**

Putting off our old selves and putting on the new can be a very slow and complex process. Even as we strive against sin, we are always vulnerable to the tenacious pull of 'old self' desires which can leave us exhausted and disheartened. But we have a Father who parents us through trials and suffering, prizing us away from that which will destroy us and whetting our appetites for lasting happiness.

## **6. God helps us know, love and proclaim Christ together**

God reorients us to Christ through his Spirit not only as individuals but together as the church. We should strive to reject false labels and identities in our church communities, knowing each other as sinners who are intimately loved, forgiven and called to righteousness in Christ.

**Having discovered that Christ gives full meaning to our gender and sexuality, our sense of identity, acceptance and our ability to change, what are some ways this works out in practice? Read the full paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' [here \(link\)](#) to explore further.**

**You can access many more articles on living faithfully for Jesus in a secular society on our website — [www.gist.org.au](http://www.gist.org.au)**



(The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality Part 4)

## **What are Some Ways Jesus Changes Our Experience of Gender and Sexuality?**

**What are some specific ways that knowing Jesus shape our thinking on sexuality? Should we value sex more or less than we do? Is talking about 'sexual orientation' or 'gay Christians' helpful? How do we care for one another as we each struggle in different ways? How do we think about 'intersex' conditions or transgender experiences?**

Read on and discover more in Part 4 of our GiST paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' ([link](#)). The points below provide you with a taste of the biblical, cultural and pastoral explorations in Part 4 of the full paper. The full paper's purpose is to explore a theological framework for understanding and responding to some contemporary ideas on gender and sexuality. The key idea is that in every aspect of our gender and sexuality, every one of us needs to be profoundly 'reoriented' to one person – Jesus Christ.

## Part 4 – Sin, Salvation and Specific Gender and Sexuality Issues

### 1. Gender

#### a. Biological sex

A very small number of people are born with a Disorders of Sexual Development (DSD), commonly known as ‘intersex’ conditions.

DSDs are a straightforward biological manifestation of the Fall, not a manifestation of individual sinful desires. Those with DSD can suffer greatly emotionally and physically. They are sometimes shamed for their condition. They are also sometimes used as ‘proof’ for non-binary gender in political debates.

People with DSDs can know their bodies are God’s good gift to them no matter how the Fall has damaged them. They can know that God never abides by fallen human exclusions but accepts and loves them faithfully in Christ. In Christ they can also grasp the goodness of God’s created order, embracing their biological sex as it can be known and enjoying a gender identity, roles and relationships according to that sex.

#### b. Gender identity

##### **The Fall: gender identity can be confused**

The Fall has also introduced confusion in the relationship between biological sex and gender identity itself (transgenderism).

It is important to distinguish between the personal experiences of those with gender incongruence and the ideological beliefs of political activists. Individuals experience from generally unwanted feelings of gender incongruity within different personal circumstances and seek to understand and cope with their situation in different ways. Transgender ideology, however, presents as a current cultural authority promoting subjective feelings over objective biology.

#### ii. Transgenderism and the Fall

Transgender experience illustrates the deep, psychosomatic damage and distress wrought by the Fall. It appears these feelings are shaped by an extremely complex interplay between biological and psychological factors. It could be that these impulses arise both because of the impact of the Fall on our bodies, relationships and experiences as well as the indwelling corruption of original sin. The biblical evidence is that where our beliefs, impulses and acts push against God’s created purposes for sex and gender, we are held accountable for them. However, we must emphasise again that experiencing such non-volitional impulses does not carry the same weight as wholeheartedly adopting a transgender identity.

## **In Christ: we treasure our bodies, cling to our true identity and await the resurrection**

All people who experience gender incongruence can find true personal identity, love and hope not in self reinvention or following our desires but in Christ.

In Christ, a person with gender identity issues has the resources to treasure their bodies as those purchased by Christ and filled with his Spirit. This means seeking to live out a gender identity that accords with their biological sex.

In all this, a person struggling with transgender experiences needs the humble, listening, prayerful, faithful and gentle encouragement of Christian brothers and sisters over the long term. This means Christians need to resist all sinful impulses to marginalise or even subtly assert superiority. Appropriate psychological and medical help that is sympathetic to a Christian view of gender should be readily sought.

Medical and surgical gender re-assignment treatments are increasingly sought in our community to help alleviate the suffering of those with gender dysphoria. In medicine, however, we should strive to honour and restore God's original design for the body.

While some Christians may carefully take on the role of speaking against transgender ideology in the public square, we must be careful not to allow 'culture wars' to impact our care of individuals with gender identity struggles. For example, while emphasising the desirability of using names and pronouns that fit with biological sex, we think it best that Christians use their wisdom and discretion in difference circumstances.

## **2. Sexuality**

### **a. The Value of Sex**

#### **The Fall: we can make too little and too much of sex**

##### **i. Making too little of sex**

When sex loses its good, created purposes, it can be used for trivial purposes and become a form of selfish play. We can also make too little of sex by thinking nothing of unseen sexual sins or neglecting the challenges and importance of marital sex.

##### **ii. Making too much of sex**

A fleshly understanding of sex also involves vastly inflating its importance and centrality to human life. If we take it for granted that to be a normal, healthy, flourishing person we need to be sexually satisfied, a number of consequences follow:

Firstly, we develop an unrealistic view of the fulfilment sex is supposed to provide.

Secondly, we tend to evaluate ourselves according to our sexual desirability and performance.

Thirdly, we can resent anything that stands in the way of achieving sexual satisfaction.

## **In Christ: we embrace the true value of sex**

In Christ we reject fleshly tendencies to trivialise or inflate the importance of sex and embrace his purposes for sexuality.

On the one hand, we understand the enormous power of sex and treasure its Christ-honouring value in marriage.

On the other hand, we resist an idolatry of sex that displaces the lordship of Christ.

### **b. Sexuality and identity**

#### **The Fall: the concept of ‘sexual orientation’ can wrongly place sexual desires at the core of our identity**

One very important way in which we make too much of sex is by assigning sexual desires a core place in our identity. The language of ‘sexual orientation’ (whether straight, gay, lesbian, bi etc) can both express and perpetuate this.

These fixed, psychologically rooted ‘orientation’ categories lay a grid of meaning over our humanity that, while reflecting something of the power of sexual desire to shape our relationships and life more generally, are not worthy descriptors of our core identity. Our desires can be deceitful, changeable and highly complex (Jeremiah 17:9-10). More importantly, sexual orientation categories don’t reflect God’s purposes for sexuality and human life. Describing or ‘classifying’ ourselves as ‘straight’, ‘gay’ or ‘bi’ etc can lead to unwarranted feelings of self-assurance or guilt. It can also undermine our ability to speak truthfully about ourselves and minister the gospel to one another.

#### **In Christ: we recover our true identity**

##### **i. What is our identity in Christ?**

Without denying or ignoring our struggles with our sexual feelings, we must root our identities in authentic creation and redemption categories rather false categories and subjective feelings.

##### **ii. Speaking about our identity**

We must be careful to speak to and about each other in ways that point to our true identity in Christ. Language and labels gain a powerful hold on our hearts —the way we name reality also shapes our grasp of reality. We should not add a personal identity marker, especially one commonly associated with sin e.g. ‘gay’ to the more fundamental category of ‘Christian’. It puts people in a ‘man-made box’ that so easily limits our expectations of what God can do with our sexuality and subtly undermines our hope in the gospel. It focuses on one particular set of struggles with sin to the neglect of others while also risking the neglect or the downplaying of our remedy in Christ. It risks dividing Christians into majority and minority groups according to sexual

inclinations. However, we also think it wise not to 'police' every use of this term but rather an occasion for sensitive pastoral care.

### **3. Specific sexual desires and acts**

#### **a. Adultery**

##### **The Fall: turning away from a marriage partner and the Lord**

Adultery is the breaking of a marriage relationship. In most places in the Bible, 'adultery' refers to the act of sexual intercourse between one spouse and another person who is not their spouse. However, as Jesus also uses the term, adultery begins prior to any such act, in the corruption of heart and eye with a lustful, covetous look, a redirecting of desires, emotions and fantasies.

Many Christians may not only engage in adulterous desires and acts but fail to recognise them as such and deny that their desires and acts are sinful. Adulterous desires have, to some extent, become normalised.

When marriage is understood as conditioned upon the desires, tastes and satisfaction of each partner, adultery can be easily justified when those desires are not met.

The relational damage wrought by adultery is catastrophic. This damage is all the more profound because of the spiritual purpose of marriage in expressing the love of God.

##### **In Christ: enduring faithfulness**

Knowing the faithful, permanent love of God to us through Christ is at the heart of the very serious business of sexual purity, in and around marriages.

Adultery may legitimately lead to divorce but not necessarily. By God's grace we can put on humility and gratitude, confessing adulterous sins to God and others, finding forgiveness, putting our sins to death and nurturing faithful contentment.

#### **b. Same Sex Attraction**

##### **The Fall: false sexual identity**

Desires for sexual relations with a person of the same sex are another manifestation of sexual sin in our fallen world.

##### **In Christ: true identity and growth in Christ**

While we must teach the sinfulness of same-sex desire it cannot be emphasised enough how important it is to proceed directly to the glorious mercy of Christ. In Christ those who experience same sex attraction know themselves not according to their sexual impulses but as beloved children of God, freed from guilt and shame. They should never be singled out as though their impulses are more shameful than those of others.

Indeed, those who experience same sex attraction need encouragement through God's means of grace in the same way as every other Christian. Ideological debates should not overshadow our care for brothers and sisters in Christ. It should be a source of enormous grief to the church that some same-sex attracted people experience loneliness as well as fear of condemnation in churches.

Every part of our lives needs to be sanctified and that includes our sexuality. This transformation cannot be thought of as developing an attraction to a person of the opposite sex although this may occur. Holiness is shaped by our current vocation — either marriage to one particular person or chaste singleness.

The 'already-not yet' tension of our current age means that, on the one hand, we cannot expect that same sex attraction impulses will necessarily disappear. On the other hand, we cannot treat same-sex desire as though it is a fixed 'orientation' that can never change.

**Read the full paper, 'The Gospel, Gender and Sexuality' [here \(link\)](#) to explore further.**

**You can access many more articles on living faithfully for Jesus in a secular society on our website — [www.gist.org.au](http://www.gist.org.au)**