

Wishing Away God's Design

Introduction. "When you wish upon a star, Makes no difference who you are; Anything your heart desires will come to you." In the film *Pinocchio*, Jiminy Cricket sang those famous lyrics to a woeful little wooden boy who wanted to become something different. The tale is touching, but in our day people no longer apply such inspirational messages in traditional ways. "Anything your heart desires" has been hijacked.

For those of us old enough to remember, Bruce Jenner won the gold medal in the decathlon at the 1976 Summer Olympics. He was even briefly Erik Estrada's replacement on the TV series *CHiPs*. He exemplified all that was America. Today, Bruce Jenner is supposedly a hero for a completely different reason, and, I fear, exemplifies all that is America now. In June 2015, Jenner revealed his new name, Caitlyn, and the change to using feminine pronouns, even appearing on the July cover of *Vanity Fair*. The magazine cover, which will be on newsstands for a month, serves as a walk-up to promote Caitlyn's reality show, "I Am Cait," premiering July 26 the E! network.

In ways that Walt Disney could not imagine, Jiminy Cricket's slogan now inspires people to surgically remake themselves. In 2015, the spread of "transgender" identity, in which men seek to become women and women seek to become men, is no unusual occurrence. It is an increasing trend and a major worldview challenge to the Lord's church; therefore, we need to spend time examining it in the light of God's word.

I. How Should Christians View Their Bodies?

- A. As the West has lost its biblical constraints and its traditional vision of manhood and womanhood, we have embraced a radical individualism. This mindset has created a major culture shift.
 1. Radical individualism casts off all moral restraints in order to achieve maximum personal happiness. "I can do whatever I want," many people think, "and God exists to make all my dreams come true."
 2. This perspective has influenced how many people view their body. They believe the body is not made by God for His glory. It is a blank slate on which we may draw any identity, any self-expression, we choose. Use it, abuse it, do whatever you want with it.
- B. The Bible teaches a very different perspective. Our manhood or womanhood is not incidental; it has been bestowed on us by God. We inhabit our God-created bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Men and women are one "kind" (1 Corinthians 15:39), but we are not the same. Adam named his wife "woman" because she was distinct from him (Genesis 2:23).
 1. As scripture indicates and common sense shows, men and women are considerably different physically and emotionally.
 2. God is the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9), but not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Jesus highlighted human inability to "make one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:36). If we cannot even alter hair color (without temporary, artificial means), surely we cannot change something as fundamental as the gender with which we were born.
- C. However, we also complement one another. This owes to God's original design too. He created Adam, but there was not a "helper" fit for him (Genesis 2:18). So

the Lord in His wisdom made Eve. She instantly delighted Adam when brought to him. Her womanhood did not escape Adam; it captivated him (Genesis 2:23).

- D. Satan has always tried to usurp the created order.
 - 1. He took the form of a serpent to entice Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7). Adam was the head of his wife, but he relinquished his headship when he allowed Satan to tempt his wife, and when he let his wife lead him to eat of the tree.
 - 2. While she was duped about the consequences of her rebellion, she knowingly led her husband into this sin of disobedience (1 Timothy 2:12-15).
 - 3. The Lord indicted Adam for his failure to lead Eve by asking him, "Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9), indicating that Adam had responsibility to spiritually protect his wife. He failed in this task, paving the way for Eve to disobey God.
- E. The curse He pronounced on their humanity had spiritual and physical consequences. Both of them lost eternal life and brought the judgment of eternal death on the human race. Their bodies, given to them to glorify the Lord, would now bear the curse of Genesis 3:16-19 in gender-specific ways:
 - 1. Adam's work of provision was cursed, as the ground would now fight him as he worked it.
 - 2. Eve's childbearing was cursed, as what was meant to be a beautiful process became a painful, even life-threatening, one.
- F. When we listen to Satan, pain and brokenness follow, and the gender roles laid out for us in scripture are undermined and attacked. God created man and woman and gives them specific roles to play for His glory; Satan targets man and woman and induces them to upend God's design. God brings life; Satan destroys it. These tragic patterns are as old as the Earth.

II. How Does Our Culture Now Think Of The Body?

- A. Over the last 50 years, American Christians have watched as our society has fashioned a brave new order for itself. This has occurred in three phases:
 - 1. Phase one of the transformation of men and women was feminism and the sexual revolution transforming the American home. Many men have lost any sense of responsibility for their family. They are tuned out, passive, and self-focused. Many women feel great tension between their career and home. They are told by secular lifestyle magazines to pursue perfect "work-life" balance, but it is hard to find. Increasingly, the sexes are in competition.
 - 2. Phase two is the spread of the homosexual movement. Led by celebrities in the 1980s, the homosexual movement built off of the momentum of the feminist push and the sexual revolution. Men and women, it assumed, were not different in any meaningful way so romantic love was not subject to any shape or design. It was just a feeling. As such, it had no duties, no covenantal dimensions, and no enduring commitment. In phase one, gender roles were recast. In phase two, romantic love was recast.
 - 3. Now, in phase three, the body itself is recast. Transgender ideology is grounded in the idea that the body is not an essential part of our being (a viewpoint known as essentialism). Our gender identity is fluid, a social construct that can change. Our identity does not necessarily match our body.

- a) In such instances, many “transgender” people opt for reconstructive surgery so their identity fits with their body.
 - b) But no person is just a surgery away from becoming the opposite gender. Whatever surgeons may do will never change a person’s DNA. Nor is genetic makeup changed by taking hormones (Jeremiah 13:23). On being taken captive, Daniel may have been made a eunuch (Daniel 1:7), but if so, he was still a man. The Ethiopian officer baptized by Philip in Acts 8 was a eunuch, but he was still a man. Gender is more than anatomy and hormones, and surgically altering anatomy does not change gender.
- B. This trend is building momentum today.
- 1. “Transparent” has received prominent placement on Amazon Prime, with a lead character embracing a transgender identity. ABC Family is set to debut a new unscripted drama series entitled “Becoming Us,” based on a teenage boy who is learning to live with his father becoming a woman. TLC’s “I Am Jazz,” also slated to air in July. It will document transgender teen Jazz Jennings’ experiences starting a new school. Discovery Life’s “New Girls on the Block” is a show about a community of transgender women in Missouri.
 - 2. The fashion industry also is starting to embrace transgender models. Dozens of them now work in the industry, and last week, IMG, the world’s leading agency, signed its second transgender model, Hari Nef.
 - 3. Minnesota high schools took action at the end of 2014 to allow transgender children to play on either boys’ or girls’ sports teams — whichever they choose. Celebrities promote this viewpoint in their own homes, with leading film stars Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie publicly encouraging their daughter Shiloh to call herself “John” and dress up in boy’s clothes.
 - 4. In Maine and California, students identifying as transgender can use whichever restroom they desire. In 2014, the mayor of Houston supported an ordinance that allows transgendered men to use women’s bathrooms.
- C. The new way to approach the body is to see it as a means of self-expression rather than as the creation of the divine mind and a means of glorifying God. It should be clear to Christians that this latest phase of our culture’s shift away from the biblical worldview is a major one. We are witnessing the undoing of the most basic realities of God’s created order. In such a climate, what should we do? Let me suggest four responses for Christians.

III. What Christians Can Do Today

- A. We should recognize that we are sadly witnessing moral anarchy.
 - 1. There is nothing more essential to our lives than our manhood or womanhood. Our culture is embracing transgender identity and is thus uprooting the very structure of our bodily existence. To reject this reality is to embrace chaos. Untold numbers of boys and girls will be harmed by doing so. Most significantly, God is not honored or obeyed.
 - 2. The rates of suicide among transgender people show the brokenness of this choice. Paul McHugh, former Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist in chief, has noted in the *Wall Street Journal* that the suicide rate among transgender individuals is 20 times higher than in the normal population. Embracing

transgender identity at the cultural level does not produce happiness and wholeness, it produces confusion and disorder (Proverbs 13:15).

- B. We should celebrate the beauty of God's creative design.
 - 1. The church and the godly family should be a festival of happiness. We should rejoice that God's great wisdom has opened our eyes to see that He has made us according to His perfect design (Philippians 4:4). Manhood and womanhood are not Plan B. We are the pinnacle of God's creation.
 - 2. God's creative work is undermined across the board today. Even in religious groups, it is increasingly acceptable to teach that humanity is not really that special. Adam and Eve were not literally the first man and woman, but merely selected from a group of hominids to represent humanity. God and His word dignify the body, showing us that our bodies were made not only for utility, but for worship. Christians celebrate the beauty of the body, and of manhood and womanhood, for we see in it divine design (Genesis 1:27-28).
- C. We should recommit ourselves to training our children.
 - 1. The bodily differences between men and women are real, and we must teach these differences to our children. They must see that being a boy or a girl is a matter of God's glory. There should be no shame in boys liking boyish behaviors or in girls adopting girlish behaviors. Many parents will find that their children enjoy being a boy or a girl, a future man or a future woman.
 - 2. We should regularly remind our children that it was God who made them as they are, and they should embrace and assume manhood or womanhood. We have to teach them that the Bible identifies all sexual activity outside the relationship of a married man and woman as immoral (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:2).
 - 3. Confusion about gender identity and homosexuality is real.
 - a) We know man is born upright (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 58:3; Isaiah 7:15-16; Jeremiah 3:25; Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 19:14; Romans 3:12), so what causes homosexuality and gender confusion? Various reasons include:
 - (1) An intense desire for acceptance or attention/notoriety.
 - (2) An effort to stake out their own personal, and to them, special identity.
 - (3) A declaration that emanates from a sincerely confused self-image and self-expectation.
 - (4) A form of rebellion in order to gain some measure of control over his or her own person.
 - (5) Parental abuse and neglect to teach, demonstrate, and require proper roles and responsibilities within the family structure.
 - b) Transgender surgeries fix nothing; they only mask and exacerbate deeper psychological problems. Personal stories that tell of the regret, unhappiness, and suicide experienced by those who undergo such surgery will only increase as time passes.
 - 4. If we do not teach our kids about gender and sexuality, we can be assured that our unbiblical culture will be eager to indoctrinate them. Fathers and mothers must recommit themselves to training their children in the scriptural worldview so that children do not embrace the cultural one (Proverbs 22:6).

- D. We should reach out in compassion and call for repentance.
1. Jesus stated about the sexes, “he which made them at the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4). He did not say that God made them male, female, transgendered, confused, or undecided. Veering from scripture is never the path to spiritual prosperity (Romans 1:28).
 2. We must reach out to those cursed by Adam’s sin. Transgender individuals will be increasingly common in our neighborhoods, schools, and communities. We have a choice: we can sinfully avoid them, or we can reach out to them in kindness and conviction, and evangelize them (Mark 6:34; Matthew 9:10-13).
 3. Conversion for transgender individuals will not be neat and clean. It will involve the recognition that sin has corrupted every fiber of our being (Isaiah 64:6). But the gospel is stronger than sin (1 John 4:4). Christ’s death washes us clean, and Christ’s resurrection gives us life.
 4. Obeying Christ will have profound implications for the body. For people who have embraced a transgender identity, repentance will mean embracing their God-given gender and rejecting whatever sinful identity they have chosen.

Conclusion. Bruce Jenner and other transgender people are not heroes. A hero is someone who has done something brave or noble, who has sacrificed for others. Bruce Jenner is a man who has posed in women’s clothing on the cover of a magazine, garnering excessive media attention. Moreover, he has waited to do so until the ideal moment when he was most sure to receive praise and acceptance. Heroes risk much and gain little. Bruce Jenner has risked little and gained much.

The talking animals of Walt Disney films and pop culture have charmed many of us. But a Disneyfied concept of narcissistic self-determination has not done us any favors. The culture has offered us a false gospel, one that approves of all we do, leaving us to pursue anything we desire.

The scriptural gospel is far better. It makes sense of our humanity. It restores our dignity. It calls us to be men and women who see our body as a gift, a vessel by which we may give glory to our Maker and Redeemer.