

Gender Identity and the Image of God

I'm sad. Not angry, not frightened, just sad. I'm sad for all that's lost when we use something as restricting as gender to define who we are. It brings tears to my eyes.

Gender identity is such a limiting concept, for identity goes far deeper than gender. I can say "I'm a woman" – but I'm so much *more* than a woman. Do two X-chromosomes fill every cell of my body? Yes. Do I "feel" feminine? Yes. Do I like "being" a woman? Yes, I do. But does my gender define who I am? No, it doesn't. Gender is something I *have*, but it's not who I *am*. I am so much more than my gender.

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I could tell you "I'm a pastor," and so I "am" – but I'm so much more than a pastor. And I'm more than a mother and more than a wife and more than a friend and more than a writer and more than the possessor of a college degree. These labels may be useful for social media or résumés, but none of them describe who I am at the core; they just describe my "surface." My identity goes far deeper than my role or accomplishments or relationships. I am so much more than any of these things.

None of us should settle for defining ourselves – or others – so shallowly. It's not only inaccurate, it's hurtful. Focusing on surface characteristics (and I include gender identity as a one of these characteristics) lets us feel justified in judging others, if only because their "surface" is different than our own. It also robs us of a deep sense of our own worth and blinds us to the worth of others. I'm not saying that what people do or think isn't important, and I'm not saying that we have to agree with everything another person does or thinks. But I am making the point that deeds and thoughts and beliefs don't define who we are. God defines who we are.

So how ought we define ourselves? The way God defines us. God doesn't define us by our activities or attitudes, nor does God define us by our gender. The words "gender identity" never came from God's mouth. Male, female, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, straight – none of these terms represent our true self, nor (contrary to popular belief) do any of them represent God's true self. All such designations miss the point: we are made in the image of a God who has no gender and who never uses gender to describe who we are. God's image is not a gender-image. Not at all. God gender-less, and, at the depths of our being, so are we.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image..."

John 4:24 God is spirit...

We are made in the image of a God who has no gender.

Behind our accomplishments, deeds, or preferences – and, yes, behind our gender – lies a self made in the image of a gender-less God. If you've been identifying others or yourself with more surface traits, I encourage you to reconsider. Your deepest self, your true self, resembles God. Identity doesn't get any better than that.

*Lord, train us to see beneath the surface of each person we meet. Make us aware of their deep worth.
Keep at the forefront of our mind the truth that both of us bear Your image*