

Ben Best, Co-host

Welcome to *defragmenting*, a podcast of Cairn University, promoting biblical integrity and thoughtful Christianity.

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In his book, *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory*, Dr. Robert S. Smith offers a biblically grounded critique of transgender theory's central claim that there is no inherent connection between the sexed body and the gendered self. In this episode, he joins Dr. Keith Plummer to discuss how he came to be interested in this subject, some of the factors that have led to the current confusion about the relationship between biological sex and gender, and what biblical revelation reveals about the significance of embodiment for sexuality, marriage, and personal identity. Courtesy of Lexham Press, we have a copy of *The Body God Gives* to give away to one of our listeners. Details on how to enter for your chance to win are in the show notes. The giveaway closes September 15th. Let's join their conversation now.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I'm joined by Dr. Robert S. Smith, an ordained Anglican minister and a lecturer in theology, ethics, and music ministry at Sydney Missionary and Bible College in Australia. He is the author of *How Should We Think About Gender and Identity* and co-author of *The Gender Revolution: A Biblical, Biological, and Compassionate Response*. After reading his latest book, *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory*, I invited him to talk with me about it, and I'm pleased he accepted it. If after hearing about the book, you'd like to pick up a copy, our friends at Lexham Press are offering *defragmenting* listeners, an exclusive limited time discount of 30% off. If you would like to take advantage of that, you can go to [lexempres.com/defragmenting](http://lexempres.com/defragmenting) for information.

Dr. Keith Plummer

And one more thing before we get to our conversation, because we will be talking about matters of human sexuality, if you have little ones nearby, you might want to either put in your ear buds or wait until they're not around before you listen. With that housekeeping out of the way, Robert, welcome to *defragmenting*. And thank you so much for accepting the invitation.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, thank you, Keith. It's a great pleasure to be with you and to talk with you.

Dr. Keith Plummer

It's obvious from the titles that I mentioned that you have spent a lot of time thinking, reading about this issue of gender and sexuality. I'm always curious as to how such research interests arise. What was it that originally gave you the desire to explore this further? And how far back are we talking?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, it goes back to the beginning of my Christian life, really. When I was about 19–20, just in God's providence, I met with a number of Christian men, Christian friends who were struggling with same-sex attraction, and also became aware of some people struggling with gender issues as well. So just in the way things unfolded, I was having to think about these things from very early on in my Christian life. But then certainly through my years of theological study and then pastoral ministry, these issues were coming up. Again, mostly the sexuality side more than the gender side. And then about a decade ago, I was part of a working group that was producing a sizable report, a book-length report on human sexuality, particularly in the lead up to debates about same-sex marriage here in Australia. I was given the task of writing a chapter — a where are we? How did we get here? And what's coming next chapter. And that led me into reading in areas that perhaps I just wouldn't have gone to otherwise. I became increasingly aware that the transgender question was looming large and really coming down the tracks like a freight train.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

And we, in Australia, as in other parts of the world, had been so focused on trying to make sense of same-sex attraction and trying to work out how to respond to the same-sex marriage agenda that we weren't giving a lot of attention to the transgender question. And so I started to compile articles and

bibliographies and make notes and think who do I give this to? Who's this for? Who knows what to do with this? Anyway, after maybe a year of doing that or something approaching that, it started to dawn on me that Well, maybe this is something the Lord wanted me to keep exploring and understanding. And then alongside that, well, I suppose you might call it a research interest, I became aware of some people, well, I'll speak vaguely here, but people close to me and my family for whom these things were profoundly personal. And that opened up a whole range of pastoral conversations, and it just helped me to bring together, I suppose, the intellectual and the pastoral and realize you can't just talk about these things in the abstract or as if they're out there. They were very close to home for a lot of people in one way or another.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Now, all of that then finally came together for me when, having put off a PhD for about 20 years, I thought, Well, this is probably the time for me to bite that bullet. And I've been teaching for 20 years and had not been required to acquire a PhD, but I'd always had it in mind that at some point, if a topic significant enough and pressing enough came onto my lap, then I would pick it up and run with it. So there we are. So I finished the PhD in 2022. And the book we're talking about today, *The Body God Gives*, is really a development of that work. It's got some extra chapters added in and some other chapters trimmed back, but a lot of it is the PhD.

Dr. Keith Plummer

It's fascinating. So really this began out of pastoral concerns, led to academic inquiry, and what you have produced is something that I know, and having read it, that you're also concerned that it be used for pastoral concerns as well. And you bring together a number of theological disciplines, systematic theology, historical theology, biblical, exegetical, and pastoral theology. So it's not strictly an academic book, though it is scholarly.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes. Now, I should say, Lexham Press is keen for me to write a pastoral book as an accomplishment to this book. There is a sense in which this book is addressing transgender theory, not in a complete way, at least make sense of transgender experience or even the pastoral care of those who are struggling with these matters. But I'm laying the foundations for all of that. This book is a theological exercise that lays the foundations of a pastoral practice. But I do hope to write a smaller and, I guess, more broadly accessible book on pastoral care for those who are navigating these matters.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Oh, that's great. You say in the first chapter of the book that it's an exercise in theoanthropology and theoethics, and its primary purpose is to evaluate the central ontological claim of transgender theory that the sexed body does not determine the gendered self. I do want to get into some of the definitions for some who might not be familiar with them, but I want to start with theoanthropology and theoethics. What is it that you have in mind by those terms?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, the Theo is just short for theological, really, because it's theological anthropology, theological ethics. So really, well, anthropology, of course, understanding of humanity, fundamentally derived from Scripture, but perhaps not just in a proof-texty way, but in a more theologically integrative way. So a deep theological understanding of what it means to be human. That's what the book is. It's an exercise in that. And then, similarly, theological ethics has got to do with not so much who and what we are, but what we are to be and do. Again, ethics flows out of theology. What God has made tells us an enormous amount about what God has made it for. And so those things run together.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, let's talk about some of the terms that come up frequently. Obviously, this is a response, a biblical response to transgender theory. You distinguish between transgender theory and queer theory. I know that somewhat unfair to ask you to define both of those terms because there's a variation there. But in a nutshell, what are we talking about when we're speaking of transgender theory and how does it relate to contrast with queer theory?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yeah. Well, transgender theory has a number of components to it. The first is that sex and what we often today call gender are not inherently connected. So that's the first tenet of transgender theory. So the sex of your body, as I think you read in this quote there from the book, the sex of your body does not determine the gender of yourself according to transgender theory. And now that begs the question then, well, if not the body, what? What does determine the gender of your person if it's not the sex of your body? And the answer of transgender theory is your gender identity. That is how you think about yourself, how you feel, or perhaps for some, what you decide or choose to identify as. So that's your gender identity that determines your gender, not the sex of your body. But the other thing that's embedded in that second claim is that your gender identity is the truest thing about you. It's the real you. And so your body is not the real you, but your gender identity is the real you. And so if your gender identity happens to conflict with your body, or at least how you perceive your body ought to be, then at least according to one version of the theory, then you should be at liberty to change the body, modify it in whatever way you wish, or repackage it in some form.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Although there's another form of the theory that's perhaps more extreme. I think in the book, I call it hard transgender theory as opposed to soft transgender theory. The hard theory simply says, if your gender identity is, in your case or my case, female, then our bodies automatically are just now female bodies. We don't actually have to change anything. So this is why, of course, you get men identifying as women, but having no hormones or surgeries or anything, any changes at all, but claiming that therefore they should play in women's sports and go to a women's prison if they're sentenced to jail. So that's the more extreme version of the theory. Now, queer theory, I mean, ironically, transgender theory does grow out of queer theory, but queer theory would deny that you have some essential you. So one of the definitions of queer theory coined by a man named David Halpern is that another queer theory is identity without an essence. So this whole idea that your gender identity is the real you, queer theory would query that and say, well, no, actually, there is no real you. There is no essential you. You are an identity without an essence, and therefore your gender really is completely malleable or fluid. It's really something you perform, and in that sense, it's not stable, it's not immutable. Again, you're an identity without an essence.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So again, philosophically, for those who are interested in the journey of ideas, in the background to queer theory is existentialism. It even goes back into Nietzsche's idea that there is no doer behind the deed was one of Nietzsche's statements there. But certainly in French existentialism, there is no essence you receive that you then live out in your existence rather according to the existentialist, you create your essence by your existence. But queer theory comes along and says, Well, no, actually, you don't even do that. You just exist. You don't ever create an essence. You're just an identity without an essence. Now, there are some people... Trans theories now become so expansive and elastic that it covers queer theory to some extent. But again, in the acronym, as we are familiar, often it's distinguished the T and the Q. It's a little messy in there. But in the book, I've distinguished them, and I think it's right to, as well as distinguishing between, as I said, the hard and the soft versions of trans theory.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes, I found that very helpful. You have a table that compares and contrasts assess how each of those regards sex and gender. And I was not familiar with the hard trans theory to say that your gender identity even determines your sex.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes, because it reclassifies your body.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Some people call that the self-ID view or self-identification view. If you identify as a woman, you are a

woman in every sense.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes. And so in someone coming from that perspective, I would imagine there might be some conflict between those who are experiencing some form of dysmorphia and are seeking sexual transformation or biological alteration, and those who are coming from the hard transgender view and saying, Well, why would you do that?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yeah. And then you got those who have been all saying, Well, if you want to do that, you can, but if you don't want to do that, you don't have to. Yeah.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Now, we've been using these terms, sex and gender. For some, they might be accustomed to thinking of them almost synonymously, if not synonymously. But you are acknowledging that there is a distinction. And in the book, you're saying there is a distinction, but there's a connection, and there is a priority in terms of it is biological sex that precedes gender. Is that fair?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, yes, it's complex because the word gender is used in a multiplicity of different ways. And so you always have to think carefully about the context in which you discover the word gender to work out, is it being used as a synonym for sex, which it certainly can be and still is. Lots of forms, for example, will ask for your gender, and they really ask you for your sex.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

But certainly ever since the, well, let's say, 1960s, it's become increasingly common to distinguish gender from sex. And at least what second-wave feminists tended to mean by gender was, I guess, the social roles that were expected of a person of one sex or the other. And so gender, at least at that point, was a way of saying, okay, Simone de Beauvoir famously said, "One is not born but becomes a woman," which is, well, undeniably true. No female is born a woman. They're born a little girl. Now, they grow to become a woman, but they become a certain type of woman, depending on where and when and to whom they're born and all the cultural influences and social pressures that produce a particular expression of womanhood. I guess she was at least saying that we assume an inevitability there between being female and then adopting certain cultural roles and practices and positions. And of course, she and the second-wave feminists were questioning that, that biology, they want to say, is not destiny. But certainly, Simone de Beauvoir never thought for a moment that a female could become a man. That was certainly not where she was going.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So again, the second-wave feminists, I think, at least understood the importance of sex, but they were just questioning the implications of that for other domains of life. Now, that, of course, then changes as queer theory comes in, trans theory comes in, and I guess it's perhaps the influence of postmodernism that in some ways accelerates all of that.

Dr. Keith Plummer

What is it that you have in mind by gender in that context?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, I'm using the word gender in the way that it's now commonly used, but not always used, but commonly used to cover both, again, the social expression of one's sex, which you might simply call one's social sex, and then the psychological reception of one's sex, which today gets called gender identity. So what I'm saying is that the sex of your body is what ought to, well, not only tells you who and what you are, but then it should guide you in life as to how to be and to do, or to guide your understanding and your thinking about who and what you are. So in other words, sex is the

foundation. It's the ground on which, well, gender in the social sense is played out or constructed, to use the favorite term of some. And it's likewise the ground of your identity. It informs you as to who you are. So that is essentially the argument of my book, the contrary to trans theory, which says that there's no inherent connection between sex and gender. I'm saying no, there's a profound and unbreakable connection between sex and the truth about one's gender, really to pull those apart, as queer theory and trans theory have done, is to create a...disintegrate, or at least is to disrupt that which God has joined together. And this is not the way of integration, but of disintegration and to going against the grain of how God has made us. And Scripture everywhere testifies of that, not just in the Creation narratives, but even in the prohibitions it gives. Why is it that a woman should not wear a man's cloak and a man not wear a woman's garment? Why is that? Well, it's because God has made us sexed and wants our gender to reflect that rather than to contradict it and confuse others and well, whatever else it might do. So I'm using gender to cover what some would call the psychosocial as opposed to the biological. The sex, biological, physiological, anatomical. Gender I'm using to speak of the social outworking and psychological perception of one's sex.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Okay, that's helpful. So that is an expression of one's biological sex. There is some, you say social, psychological or psychosocial. There is some cultural conditioning, perhaps, but it's not a social cultural construct completely?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

No, not at all. I mean, again, some elements more so, others less so. In terms of what counts female dress or male dress, obviously, that's very culturally dependent, historically dependent. But obviously, there are some roles that are profoundly tied to our biology for a woman being able to get pregnant and to breastfeed a child. I mean, that's irreducibly, a sexually that's biologically, well, only possible because of her biology. Other roles, of course, are less directly connected to one's sex, but they may have become associated with the person's sex, perhaps for good reasons or perhaps for arbitrary reasons. And so the feminists have rightly raised questions, or why is it that it's expected that only men should be in this profession as to that profession and so on? I remember when my son was very little, we talked about one of my wife's sisters who happens to be a medical doctor, and we said, Your aunt is a doctor. And he said, No, he said, No, men are doctors. Women are nurses. Now, he wasn't being sexist. He thought doctors and nurses were the same thing, but one was the male term, one was the female term.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

But anyway, we've moved a long way away from thinking perhaps more seriously that only men should be doctors or something, only women should be nurses. But yes, we can see how some roles are inescapably biological, others more tenuously, and others perhaps not at all. I think we just need to be a little fine-grained or nuanced in our thinking out of those things. But again, sex is the foundation. The what in the book, at least I'm calling the psychosocial, the gender identity, the gender expression in society.

Dr. Keith Plummer

You have a chapter in which you do something of a thorough overview of how it is that various evangelical authors have interacted with the issues of transgender theory. You say that there's a problem of evangelical division when it comes to addressing transgenderism, and that that problem is at least partially due to evangelical confusion. Could you explain both the division that you have in mind there and the nature of the confusion?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, yes, the division fundamentally is just over what to make of transgender experience, how to understand it, in other words. Now, even when I was first beginning my work, I found myself asking this very serious question, is it actually possible for someone to be born in the wrong body? Is there, as the lingo sometimes is used out there, is there such a thing as true trans? And well, that's a serious question. Because if it were the case that some people are actually born in the wrong body, then you can understand the argument to say, well, the kindest thing we can do is to help to give them as much as possible the right body. Okay, so I think some Christians are still confused about that.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Some Christians think that maybe there really are some people who are born in the wrong body. Now, and so I've, again, made clear, certainly biblically, I just don't think that's a conceivable or thinkable thought. It's contrary to the way God has made us and to the significance of our sex for determining who and what we are. But that's one area of confusion.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

The other area of confusion is perhaps in pastoral practice. There's confusion over what you do when people want to use preferred pronouns that are contrary to their biological sex and what you do people who want to express their supposed gender in ways that, again, amount to cross-dressing. And so how did we respond pastorally to that? And so there's, again, a range of responses from very hard to very flexible. And again, I do think it probably all depends. I think Sam Aubrey said it very well at one point, where he said, "Our response should be determined by the person's proximity to Jesus." If they don't know the Lord at all, then their gender issues are not the most pressing. Their most pressing issue is to come to Christ and to find forgiveness and adoption and acceptance in him. And then we can begin to work out other things in their life. And it still may be that their gender issues are not the most pressing issue of discipleship, but they will need to be addressed. But if the person is claiming to be a believer and wanting to act in these ways, then that obviously will require a different response.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So anyway, there's just confusion there. And so the basic division is between what you might call trans-affirming responses, and I've tried to engage with many of those in my book, and then, I guess, more trans-resistant responses, which is probably a better word than resistant, but not affirming that someone really is in the wrong body and not affirming that it's appropriate to, therefore, try to present oneself as the other or another sex, or perhaps no sex. Because again, there's not just two options here, as we're all aware. There's multiplicity of gender identities being offered and suggested.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes. Concerning that question, whether or not there can be true trans, I recall someone who was theologically educated, formally, who approached me once and asked, Well, given the disruption that has come into creation because of the fall, is it not possible that there could be a disruption between the soul and the body?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I know you have a pretty thorough section where in dealing with biblical anthropology, you give some reasons as to why it is that you don't believe that that is an option. What would you say to someone who raised the question that he did?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, I might say read my book and see what you think. In some ways, that is the central, well, theological challenge, I guess, that I wanted to engage, one of many, but it certainly is a deep question. So is it not possible that there can be this body sexed one way and the soul sexed another way? Even as you put it, even as I put it that way, it begs questions: well, hang on. First of all, are souls sexed? And if so, how and when? And basically, it's even deeper questions about what is the relationship between soul and body? And is it the case that we are souls who have bodies or souls who perhaps have the wrong bodies? Or are we really embodied souls or in-soul bodies? And so that opens up all of the possibilities of how we can see the soul and body. And I think Scripture directs us to a much more integrated holistic understanding, not one that raises the difference between soul and body, because I think it's everywhere apparent in Scripture that there is a difference, that basically at

death, our bodies will die, and in some form, corrupt. Personal existence will continue, and our soul, therefore, will live on until it is reembodyed at resurrection. So there is clearly a distinction, I think, between soul and body. But the way in which God has made us and constituted us is not as two bits that get joined together at some stage in the production process, but he made us as integrated beings.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So what happens to us at death is a tragedy and travesty. It's an evil. Death is an enemy, something that God will overcome. We were not meant to be disintegrated that way, but rather to be... Well, the technical term people use is psychosomatic unities. Our *psyche*, our soul, and our *soma*, our body meant to be at one. And in that sense, I would want to say two things. One is that sex is fundamentally a bodily term. It's a physical term. It's a characteristic of bodies. And so to the extent that a soul is sexed, it simply is taking its sex from the body. So why am I, Rob, a man? It's because my body is male. So the sex of my body does determine, in that sense, the sex of my person, myself, my soul.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So again, coming back to the central claim of my book, at least, which is hopefully I can say this without boasting. Healthily captured in the title, because I didn't think of the title. Lexham Press came up with the title, and it was a great idea. The title is *The Body God Gives*, because that is the answer to the question, how do I know if I'm a man or a woman? And the answer is the body God gives. And so the sex of the body reveals in that sense the sex of my person or the gender of my person. But in another sense, it also determines it.

Dr. Keith Plummer

As I was reading the section on psychosomatic unity, it made me think, and you do appeal to some who might argue this way, it has become quite frequent in trying to make a defense for the soul to say, well, the soul is the real you, because that is what gives you continued personal identity over time, whereas your body changes. And I can see how it is if you go that road very far, it makes the idea of the true trans maybe somewhat more plausible because you're thinking of what the real me is, something that is distinct from my body.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yeah. And I guess I'm arguing that that conception is more Greek philosophical than Hebraic biblical. Yes. It's more. It's a form of strong dualism that really has, again, the real you being something other than your body. Whereas biblically, I think we want to say, no, the real you is the embodied you. So in that one way of putting it, I can't remember whose language this is exactly, but is to say, while there is more to you than your body, your body is you, and you are your body. And so there's not, in that sense, less to you than your body. Now, again, we still have to face the fact that at death, something is going to happen to our body that will obviously affect our soul, but not cause our soul to cease to exist. But that, I don't think means that somehow the body is this dispensable shell, because certainly God is determined to reembody us and reintegrate us. So I'm struck by when Jesus talks about the resurrection in Matthew 22, for example, not only does he make clear that they will be male and female. He says there won't be marriage, but he says neither will they marry or be given in marriage, which is a way of talking about men and women.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Men marry, women are given in marriage. So he's saying in the resurrection, men won't marry, women won't be given in marriage, but still be men and women. Yes. And then he goes on to talk about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who clearly remain the men they were, even while they're awaiting their resurrection bodies. And so, again, There's continuity of not just existence, but of their male existence. I find that significant. But perhaps the most significant piece of all, of course, is the Lord Jesus himself, who is raised in the... It's one of the confessions is put that the self the same body in which he was crucified, which, as Todd Wilson says, was a circumcised Jewish male body. That's the body that was raised. It's the body that ascended. That's the body that now sits at the right-hand of God, glorified. So Jesus' maleness has gone nowhere. His male body has gone — well, I was going to say not — when I say "gone nowhere," it's gone to the right-hand of God, but it's not ceased to be.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, let's pause here for a few messages, and then on the other side, I do want to go into greater depth some of the biblical material that you address, starting with Creation, but moving throughout the whole of redemptive history.

Ben Best, Co-host

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Dr. Keith Plummer

I am back with Dr. Robert S. Smith, and we are talking about his Lexham Press book, *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory*. And we were talking about what the Scriptures have to say about identity, about the significance of our body with respect to who it is that we are. And I do want to get back into that, but I wanted to also bring out something that I found very helpful, and this is a — particularly in the climate that we're in. You address the claim that when dealing with someone who is experiencing some gender dysphoria, there are those who say that to question them in any particular way is oppressive. And there was one quotation in particular that I thought was very helpful with that regard. And you're responding to a woman who had the name of Anne Travers. And you say, "Therefore, contrary to Anne Travers' charge, it's not the case that questioning the authenticity of anyone's gender self-determination is oppressive, nor should doubting the validity of a trans person's self-conception that they are in the wrong body be equated with a denial of their self-perception that they feel like they are in the wrong body. What is being challenged is the belief that subjective perceptions determine the object of reality, and what is being queried is whether a person's experience has been rightly interpreted." That I found very helpfully clarifying.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Well, I'm glad about that. And it was clarifying for me to write, because, again, as you say, the claim is that to question is to want to erase the existence of trans people or these kinds of charges are made that even holding the views that we do is somehow to commit transgenocide. That's another extreme. So I think we just need to, yes, get behind that rhetoric and not be put off by that rhetoric and say, well, no, we really do need to ask questions about whether someone is making the right sense of their experience. So I guess I would never doubt the stress that somebody is claiming, and I have certainly met with and sat with and cried with and prayed with enough people who've been in the middle of deep gender distress to know that this is very painful for them. And I never want to minimize the reality, profundity of that experience. But what does that experience mean? What is it telling us? What is it saying to them? Is it telling them that they're in the wrong body? And I'm certainly arguing, no, that isn't the way to make sense of it.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Now, that doesn't mean I know what is the way to make sense of it, because it can be many, many, many reasons why somebody has ended up in that place of distress and confusion and tension. So again, some of the research in this area we're going to miss out all the many possible contributing causes or causal factors or correlational factors. And it can be very complicated. But we need to ask the deeper question, what is the actual problem here? Or what isn't the problem? And certainly it's easy enough to answer the what isn't the problem question, because the problem isn't that the person has the wrong body, and therefore the solution isn't to start modifying that body and damaging

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes. In your evaluation of some of the evangelical work that has been done in response to



transgender theory, you say, and you don't say this harshly, but you say that "many of them often lack a detailed exploration of the meaning and implications of the key biblical texts that speak to transgender claims, as well as lacking a thorough theological analysis of the relationship between identity and embodiment," which we have, that part we have discussed a little. But concerning that first deficit in much of the work, a detailed exploration of the meaning and implications of the key biblical text, I take it that you have in mind something more than just a brief proof-texting, but a deep exegetical work, which you do, and you spend a lot of time on the first two chapters of Genesis with respect to what is it that we should take from them concerning sexuality, gender. And I know that there is so much there. But if you were to identify just some of the key things that someone paying attention to the Creation account should note with respect to human sexuality, could you tell us what some of those might be?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Sure. Well, yes, I'll give you the very brief nutshell version, which is Genesis 1. We present with two sexes and only two sexes. And so humanity, Adam, is created in the image of God in this two-fold way, as, of course, are many of the animals. Male and female is not unique to humans, of course. It's in the image of God made he him, male and female, made he them. So there are only two created sexes. Now, one of the challenges that some affirming scholars have thrown at that is to say, well, first of all, that we do know that even though we live on the other side of the fall, that there are people who have a disorder of sex development and are not clearly male or female in some respect, at least. And that is certainly true. There are 30 or so different intersex conditions to some degree may blur or confuse someone's sex determination. Now, that's a reality, but I don't think that changes Genesis 1. First of all, just even just scientifically and biologically, those with disorders of sex development are not a third sex. They're not a third type of sex.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

There's just been some, again, blurring or ambiguity in their sexual presentation. But biblically, male and female are not, as some have argued, two ends of a spectrum or two poles with lots of things in between. One of the arguments that is sometimes made is, well, Genesis presents land creatures and sea creatures, but we know, of course, there are amphibians. There's hybrid species, and it presents night and day. But of course, we know there's dawn and dusk. And so, yes, it presents male and female, but we know there are other sexes in there or in between sexes. No, male and female is not being presented like that. And certainly, as one scholar it's pointed out, even amphibians, of course, only reproduce because of male and female amphibians. So, yeah, again, it's an argument that sounds plausible on the surface, at least for a moment. But then when you start to look at it more closely, you know that that doesn't follow, it doesn't make sense. So Genesis 1, I think it lays the first foundation. And it's interesting just to reflect on the fact that almost the first thing we're told about humanity, apart from us being God's image, that we are male and female. And that tells you that's pretty basic, pretty significant. And these are, again, sex terms, they're embodied terms. So they're not even soul terms. There's no mention of a soul or anything of that nature in Genesis 1. Now, when you come to Genesis 2, we have a different creation account, a complementary account, but it is the first man and first woman being created. Now, interesting, it's the man's body that gets formed first. The Lord makes the man, the shape of a man, the form of a man from the dust of the earth, from the ground. Adam is made from the Adamah, the ground, then breathes into him the breath of life. So again, he's an ensouled body in that sense that the body is foundational to that. Now, of course, the way God subsequently makes all other humans is not in that same fashion. We're conceived in our mother's wombs, and again, we've woven together body and soul the very first moment. But I think it's actually in my book where I say the man's body was formed first, which is, again, not insignificant. And then, of course, it's from his body that the Lord God forms the woman, literally builds the woman.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

And again, she is both the same and different from him. She is, the Hebrew expression there is *kenegdo*, right? A helper fit for him. It's a typical translation, but literally the *kenegdo*, that means a like opposite. He's a helper like opposite him. That's like him in her humanity, opposite him in her sex. That, of course, comes on the tail of the animals being presented to the man. And, of course, none of them are like him because they're all of a different species. And the female animals are opposite to him in his sex. But they're not *kenegdos* because they're not like him in humanity, so he needs the

woman. That sets the agenda then for biblical sexual ethics. Put it bluntly, and perhaps even, well, not crudely, but frankly, Why is bestiality forbidden and why is it wrong? It's because animals are not like opposites. And so, again, the basis of heterosexual marriage is there, as well as a whole range of other sexual commands and much understanding. So that's what Genesis 2 brings. But the other thing that's just to say on top of that is that the male of Genesis 1 is the man of Genesis 2.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

The female of Genesis 1 is the woman of Genesis 2. And Jesus, of course, will bring this together in Matthew 19, for example, where he does a lovely mashup of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and says, "In the beginning, God made them male and female," and then boom, straight to Genesis 2:24. "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined his wife." And so there's no question then that, well, as one way of putting it would be to say that gender follows sex or that gender is determined by sex. Although, strictly speaking, man and woman are not gender terms, They're just human sex terms. I tend not to now say male or female are sex terms, man and woman, gender terms. Man and woman are just human sex terms, as opposed to, say, ram and ewe, which are sex terms for sheep.

Dr. Keith Plummer

And Genesis 2 concludes with this verse describing the unashamedness of the man and the woman. And you have some things to say about that as it relates to human sexuality as this is a set up for what is going to come with respect to the fall, what briefly is the significance of that statement? And why is it that that has any relationship to sexuality? And how do we know textually?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes, there's a lot potentially to be said here, but let me just say a couple of things. First of all, the man, the woman are naked and unashamed by that, which, of course, is not the same now, and indeed throughout Scripture, later, being shamed and being stripped naked go together. So this is telling us that in that pre-fallen state, in that Edenic situation, there is nothing wrong with bodies, and there's nothing to fear. And there's a wonderful unconsciousness to this reality of being naked, because, again, there's no threat coming from anything or anyone, whereas, again, that is not our world. So it's a beautiful statement that is also painful for us because it just tells us how far away from that we are. But perhaps the take home for this conversation is it tells us that our bodies are glorious and wonderful, and there's nothing shameful about them. There's nothing defective about them. There's nothing problematic about being a male or a female.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

I had one mother telling me that her little boy came home from school saying, I don't want to be a boy. Now, he wasn't saying, I do want to be a girl, but he was saying, I don't want to be a boy. And she said, Why don't you want to be a boy? And he said, Because boys are toxic. And so he'd pick up the message from the culture, but through the class somehow, that there was something wrong. There's something inherently evil about being a male. And Genesis 2: 25 there is telling us, No, there's nothing toxic about being a male. There's nothing inferior about being a female. These are beautiful. And even though we are not in that situation, we need to recognize the goodness of God's gifts. And personally, as I've done this work, it's actually helped me just be at peace about immediately thinking about my own body and just think, well, yes, this body is going to get a major upgrade in due course, but it is the body God has given me now, and it's inherently good. That doesn't mean I can't use it for evil, but there's nothing shameful all about my physicality or the sex God has made me. So that's an important take home, I think, from all that. But again, that verse does set up for the terrible fall that is about to follow. But go on.

Dr. Keith Plummer

And the fact that the man and the woman sew loincloths, or God gives them loincloths, or they try to cover their nakedness, which some have taken as something being inherently wrong with sexuality. But this is on account of the shame that they have for having disobeyed God.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes, that's fundamentally their sin. They've disobeyed the word of God. But they become afraid not

only of God, but of each other. And yes, immediately they want to cover their genitalia. The text is very clear. Some of our translations say vaguer things like that, made coverings for themselves. But yeah, they literally make loin cloths to cover their genitals because that which distinguishes them and was designed to be, I guess, the most profound point of what would you call it, unit of contact in terms of becoming one flesh and expressing that reality, the sexual intercourse between the man and the woman, the husband and wife. That's the most profound expression of that. Well, union in difference. And yet now that difference has become a danger and a threat. That's telling a very sad story. Not only is the fracture between humanity and God, but between man and woman and the embarrassment. And now the shame that was not there, a verse earlier, a few verses earlier, now that shame has come in. Yeah, it ought to make us weep in that sense.

Dr. Keith Plummer

You, in dealing with the fall, something came to my mind, and I don't recall if you touched on this, but we were talking about how it is that some have seen the intersex condition as perhaps being something other than the dimorphic male/female, that there's a third sex or maybe even a range. And at one point, you say, "What the fall means in practical terms is that our present experience of embodied life has been radically altered for the worse, so that its actual state is very different from that purpose for it by the creator. It's no surprise then that some people are affected by a disorder of sex development, just as others are afflicted by somatic disorders of many and various kinds." And the question that came to my mind with respect to that is we're seeing and hearing much more about disabilities theology, where in some cases people are saying, Well, maybe disabilities will continue into the eschaton. And I wondered, is there any parallel thinking when it comes to, say, the intersex situation? Have you come across that?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yes, there certainly is in the book by Megan DeFranza, whose title is *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*. She's certainly arguing along those lines as another English writer, likewise Susanne Cornell, wanting to argue that these are pre-fall differences, and that they'll be there in the Eschaton. Again, they'll draw in certain arguments like the the Ethiopian eunuch who comes to the Lord in Acts 8, but Philip doesn't try to heal him of his condition, presuming he was castrated. The question is, what is it aiming to prove? Certainly, there's no record of him being healed or having his genitalia restored. But does that mean that he will remain a eunuch in the resurrection? Well, again, there are things we don't know about exactly what God will and won't do with our bodies in the resurrection. We won't be married, and so, presumably, therefore, we won't be engaging sexually or having children. So there may well be parts of our bodies that are not required in the world to come with. But we don't know. We don't know, but that will still be men and women. That is clear.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

So again, with intersex conditions, I have had to do a lot of work in this area just to understand it, but also to see why it really, in some ways, shouldn't be brought into this discussion about transgender matters. It's a very separate condition. It is a somatic condition, not a psychological one. Now, of course, some people with intersex conditions can experience gender dysphoria, and that would make a certain degree of sense depending on the condition. So even in the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, in the entry on gender dysphoria, it distinguishes between gender dysphoria with a DSM DSD, a disorder of sex development, and gender dysphoria without a DSD, and that's important to do. But where we're talking about gender confusion without any DSD, that's where I think we have to say, Okay, the problem here is not in the body. There's nothing wrong with this person's sex. There's no disorder at that point. There's something else has gone wrong. Now, if I can come back to Genesis 3, one of the common themes is for people with gender struggles is shame, and being ashamed of parts of their body or even their whole body, the whole sex of their body.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

And again, that begs all kinds of questions as to where is that come from? Now, well, Genesis 3 tells

us fundamentally where it's come from, because in a sense, we all have some of that.

Dr. Keith Plummer  
Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

But of course, some that have it in a very profound and focused way. And that could be from, well, any number of causes. The most perhaps awful and identifiable would be sexual abuse or even just sexual shaming. I can think of one man who was just made ashamed for having male genitals and being a boy by his mother and sister and so on. So there's all kinds of things that can produce this excessive and almost self-loathing type of shame or even just bullying and other things. So simply to say, we need to, well, again, be caring and compassionate toward those who are really in great pain and in great turmoil over these matters, and understand the theological roots, but understand that there may well be also be very real circumstantial situational life roots for this person to these fears and feelings.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, what you do very well in the third part of the book is starting with Creation, show how it is that there is this norm, this creational norm of male/female, and how that persists through the stages of redemptive history, radically disrupted by the fall but not destroyed. We've talked about Creation fall even some of the Eschaton, but maybe in closing, could you say a few words about what does it mean to live faithfully with the body that God has given? You talk much about living with the grain of Creation, and particularly for someone who may be experiencing dysphoria of some kind or some shame with respect to their body. And someone who is, let's say, professing believer now, what does it mean for him or her to live faithfully with the body that God has given?

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Yeah. So I think the starting point for all of us, take Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6, glorify God with your body. Okay, so that's our task. Another way I put it in the book, I think, is that we're called to be faithful stewards of our sex. And that involves, well, not only recognizing the gift God has given, but appreciating that and learning to love that and then to serve him and others with that in all the ways his word tells us are pleasing to him and good for us. Now, again, for some of us, that's more straightforward. And it's not completely straightforward for any of us, of course, but we're beset with temptations and everything else. For some of us, that's particularly challenging, even just getting to first base, as it were, and accepting the body and recognizing it as a good gift. That can be a massive hurdle that is going to take time to overcome. But I do think that image of working with the grain of our creativeness is helpful. At least I find it helpful. Others have found it helpful that recognizing the sex of the body God has given tells you, Okay, this is the way I've been made, and the grain therefore goes in this direction, which is why Scripture warns me against trying to take it in another direction.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Even just socially in terms of clothing, but certainly sexually and perhaps even at levels of identity and so on. We need to, again, embrace the gift, work with the gift, go with the grain of Creation and will keep growing then toward increasing Christ-likeness. Now, I've had some interesting discussions with people about what does it mean to be conformed to the image of Christ and to grow in likeness to Christ, which I think has nothing to do with his sex. Our Lord is male, but it's really the transformation of our characters. And so you can be a Christ-like man or a Christ-like woman equally. And so that's, again, we just need to clarify what it means to be like Jesus. There were some crazy ideas in the early church, we'd all be male, for example. No, again, that's a misunderstanding at many levels. But now going with the grain, again, is going to be hardgoing for some, and they're going to need lots of love and care and support and prayer and encouragement and even just pastorly and personally patience. I have a dear friend who's just completing, I guess, an autobiography, really, of her own journey into transition and out of ... Or into detransition. And that's taken many years.

Dr. Keith Plummer  
Yes.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

Again, it'll take different times for different people. If you've just made some social transitions, you may be able to undo those fairly rapidly. Even though there may be some psychological untangling and things to work through. But if you've had hormonal or surgical or taken those steps, hormonal and surgical steps, then that's going to require lots of careful thought and even medical advice and supervision. You just can't rush these things. I do often say to pastors, you can't put a clock on this for people. You just got to recognize that this is going to be a journey, and it could take some years as a person works out, Okay, to what extent can I recover the sex that God has given me, particularly if I've done things to obscure it and damage it. There are some things that can be undone, but many things it can't be undone. But that is where the hope of resurrection is good news for us all.

Dr. Keith Plummer

That's right. Well, it is an impressive volume. It is one that would be very helpful for anyone who wants to understand how it is that we have gotten where we currently are. But also, I think the portion in dealing with the scriptures and really thinking in-depth about what they reveal concerning our identity, our sexuality, our gender. It is a very hope-giving book, and I'm very grateful for your efforts in putting it together. I do hope that it will be of great profit to many. The book, again, is *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory* by Robert S. Smith. Robert, thank you again for taking the time to talk with us about it tonight.

Dr. Robert S. Smith

It's been a great pleasure, Keith. Thank you.

Ben Best, Co-host

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