

The Ethical Issue of Transsexuality

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

A correspondent recently requested that I share some Biblical insight on the issue of transsexualism, an increasing and bizarre phenomenon of our sex-crazed and sex-confused age. Only recent medical technology has made it possible for a male to undergo surgery which will change "him" anatomically into a female (and vice versa). Does the ancient law of God help us draw any ethical evaluation of such a thing? The correspondent asked whether such surgery changes a person's standing in terms of God's commandments. (Is "he/she" free to marry? Should "he/she" be encouraged in the newly assumed sexual role?) Should a post-operative transsexual be counseled from Scripture to restore "his/her" former status? How should the church be involved?

In reply I pointed out that although my book, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Baker Book House, 1978), does not directly address the issue of transsexualism, it does offer us by implication an ethical evaluation of such a thing. Scripture clearly teaches us that it is an abomination in God's eyes to pursue or even to desire sexual relations with a person of one's own gender. Such a desire is in effect a desire to be a member of the opposite sex (who would, as such, properly qualify as a sex partner for one's own gender). Thus the condemnation of homosexuality would reasonably apply to transsexual desires and behavior as well (as they pertain, at least, to sexual conduct and interests).

But Scripture speaks more directly to the ethical issue of transsexuality as well. We can see this by first taking note of the fact that a male does not truly become a female by means of any surgical procedure now practiced.

Part of one's sexual identity as a male or female is one's biological part and function in bringing about children. "Male and female created He them.... and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (Gen. 1:27-28).

This is only part of one's sexual identity, to be sure. And sadly, for some individuals this aspect of their bodily identity does not function in a healthy or normal fashion (e.g., impotent males, barren females). Moreover, one may have the normal function and choose to keep it from coming to issue (e.g., abstinence, vasectomy, tubal ligation). Nevertheless, speaking as to the nature of the gender classification, to be a male (ideally or according to divine intention) entails the ability to impregnate, and to be a female (ideally) entails the ability to bear a child. Those who undergo sex-change operations do not fundamentally "change" their sexuality since they do not acquire impregnating or child-bearing abilities, as the case may be (this having nothing to do with a voluntary choice not to do so).

What are we to think of someone who has undergone a surgical change of anatomy, then? At best, the person who has a sex-change operation is involved in an elaborate and extreme game of "dressing up" as the other gender (acquiring bodily parts which facilitate an outward costume). Here we have a bizarre biological masquerade.

Now then, when transsexualism is seen in this perspective, the Bible all of a sudden speaks directly and obviously to it as an ethical issue. Deuteronomy 22:5 declares: "A woman shall not wear what pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whosoever does these things is an abomination unto Jehovah your God."

If true in the lesser case (items of clothing), how much more in the greater (items of biology)! The condemnation of cross-dressing covers crossing over sexually as well. A person who has undergone a sex-change operation but the later comes to Christian conversion needs to repent of this (as any other) sin and do the works appropriate to repentance. This would involve "getting back" to where they belong sexually (thus seeking a reversal operation), hating all desires to be other than what God has made them sexually, and seeking to live in a godly fashion as the male/female they were created to be. The church must counsel and support the converted transsexual in these things, as it helps all other kinds of sinners.