

There is a wonderful and often quoted passage in Galatians chpt 3 that I wanted to flesh out a little today.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

It is important to understand what Paul is saying here and what the possible implications are for us in the 21st century – since this verse has sometimes been used in a harmful way.

In the first century that Paul was writing in, there were 3 divisions of identity (if you will) and this passage addresses them all.

- Political
- Personal
- Religious

Paul is saying that in Christ these divisions are ruptured or transcended. In the political realm, slave and free would have had very different lives. In the personal (gendered) realm, males and females would have completely different rights and obligations. Life would have looked very different. In the religious realm, Jews and Greeks were vastly different categories – especially under Roman religion regulations.

What Paul is saying is that in Christ those categories are complicated, called into question, and transgressed.

It is not that those categories ceased to be or ceased to be important. It is that they no longer were totalizing. They lost their power to be ultimately determinative. They did not completely define or confine you.

This is an amazing implication of the gospel – the good news of life in Christ. You were not the categories that you were born into and that society placed upon you. There was now something else about that transcended those external categories and transformed who you are in the world.

You might be able to say in our day: there is no republican or democrat, no gay and straight, no citizen and immigrant.

This is a very transgressive thing to say! It violates the very categories that we have set up for sorting out who is us and who is them.

Now here is the important part: those categories still exist. It is just that they don't define us, limit us, contain us, and restrain us.

Transgressive issues can be very powerful. They call into question the entire structure of the inherited system and undermine (or subvert) the very way that we categorize society.

This is why I prefer to talk about transform instead of reform. It is not enough to us and we need to transcend these limitations in divisions. The danger is that we will come in times of great tension and social upheaval, redress when we should transgress.

Those are my words for the day:

- Transform
- Transcend
- Transgress

I have been fascinated over the last several years to watch and listen to the heated debate around bathrooms and who gets to use which bathroom. As somebody who lives between two established communities having been raised Evangelical but now operating in Progressive circles, I have been astounded at the amount of attention and contention that issues of *Trans* people has received.

In the LGBTQAI+ formulation the T is only 1/8 of the signifier. It is notable that when looking at the millions of people who would identify by this series of signifiers that percentagewise trans people are a microscopic percentage. Not even one percent - a fraction of one percent. And yet, in the social imagination, their presents has drawn overwhelming amount of attention.

This is the power of the transgressive category. The presence of the 'other' calls into question the entire system, the whole configuration. It is one thing to be gay or straight, male or female— That's contentious or confusing is the debate surrounding those to be —it is another thing to call the entire concept of genderization into question.

We live in very contentious times where any issue can you become instantly aggravated an divisive. I have been amazed at the outsized amount of attention that this issues who can use which bathroom has received in both my current liberal circles and in the Evangelical circles that I get to visit. There is something very telling about the disproportionate amount of attention that this issue has drawn.

It is telling. And it is a good thing because it questions or interrogates the entire structure. And the structure needs to be examined!

I became aware of how big of a problem our gendered categories were when I moved to LA and I inadvertently picked up some new hand motions. Apparently they were a little too feminine for a large white man to be using and people would point it out to me. When someone would

say that they were not very manly, I would protest by saying, “no. I am a man who uses these hand motions—that makes them manly”.

We also categorize colors by gender. It is interesting to know that 100 years ago pink and blue were used in the exact opposite way for baby boys and girls as they are now. In fact both the yellow and purple were acceptable. It was not until the first color addition of the Sears Roebuck catalog in the early 1920s that our current pink and blue category was formalized.

I recently read a story that my friend posted on social media about being confronted by somebody because her male dog had a purple harness.

Listen, if hand motions and colors and dog harnesses can be gendered then the entire enterprise needs to be called into question. It is too overly determined in totalized.

So that brings us back to our text. It is not that there is no such thing as a male and female, Republican and Democrat, citizen and immigrant... it's that there is a category which transcends, transforms, and transgresses our understanding inherited categories.

I might say to you today that in Christ your identity it's so much bigger than any of those external signifiers that society places upon you. It doesn't mean that we are no longer males or females, that we are not Black and white and Asian And Native American, that we are neither gay nor straight—we continue to be all of those things. It's that they are not final or total in their capacities to define us and divide us.

There is something much bigger about Life in Christ (the gospel) that subverts, undermines, interrogates the ways of the world has been divided up for us in that we are called to participate in the world.