

THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

Last week (17 October, 2018) *World* magazine carried this brief:

Transgender activists proclaimed Wednesday as the first [International Pronoun Day](#), dedicated to the idea that “referring to people by the pronouns they determine for themselves is a basic human dignity.” More than 300 non-profit organizations, government groups, businesses, colleges, and universities signed on to celebrate the so-called holiday.

Organizers said people should introduce themselves to others with a name and preferred pronouns—he, she, they, or something made up—and always ask others their preferred pronouns before assuming, or “mis-gendering,” them. The activists claim assuming a pronoun is on par with assuming a stranger’s name. Last year, California Gov. Jerry Brown ... signed [legislation](#) that threatened jail time to healthcare professionals who “willfully and repeatedly refuse to use a patient’s preferred pronouns.”

Sad. Very sad.

I was busy preparing a sermon from Mark 5:1–20 when I came across that article, and the timing seemed to be pointedly providential. For in the text of Scripture right before me, personal and definitive pronouns were front and centre. They gave the lie to the transgender activists who insists that

everyone has the right to self-designate their gender and hence the right to select “*pronouns they determine for themselves.*” In contrast to their stated claim, allowing for such self-designation is *not* “a basic human dignity” but rather, it is an *indignity*. Christians need to be clear about this, if we will love our neighbour as God commands.

In Mark 5 we encounter a man who was hell-bent on self-destruction. He was naked, living like a beastly madman amongst the tombs. He was constantly screaming and cutting himself with rough stones, while all

attempts at restraining him, including with chains and shackles, proved impotent. His behaviour was more akin to an animal than a human being. The text informs us that he was

so wild in his behaviour that no one could “*restrain*” him. Literally, no one could “*tame*” him. The only other time that Greek word is used is in James 3:7 where it is used with reference to animal life. The reason behind such behaviour was a “*legion*” of demons who were controlling him. And yet the Lord addressed him as a human being, even asking his name (v. 9). But it is striking how, in this passage, personal male gendered pronouns are used to speak of this person: “*he*” (v. 3); “*he,*” “*he,*” “*he,*” “*him*” (v. 4); “*he,*” “*himself*” (v. 5); “*he,*” “*he*” (v. 7); “*him*” (v. 9).

That may not strike you as significant, until you give due consideration to how everything about this man defied our definition of the “*dignity*” of being human. In



fact, this man self-identified as “*Legion*,” which, in the context, was a reference to being possessed (demonised) by numerous demons. In other words, his self-identity was more of an “it” (a supernatural spirit) than a human being; and in his case, a *male* human being. Yet it is instructive and even illuminating that Jesus referred to him as “*him*.” To Jesus, and to the biblical writer, this person was a male and therefore a “*he*.” To Jesus, and to Mark, pronouns matter; they matter a lot.

Despite how this man felt, despite how he self-identified—demonised—God would have none of it. God made this human being to be a man, and that is why God describes him with masculine pronouns. God respected this man’s dignity too much to desecrate it by calling him an “it.” God loved this man too much to give in to his confused self-identity. Love is careful about pronouns.

When the call (even the legislative call) goes forth to use feminine pronouns to refer to a person who is born male, and vice-versa, we should lovingly resist such confusion—regardless of how politically incorrect such refusal may be. Caving in to gender confusion is not loving, and neither is it respecting the dignity of a person. What God has designed is not to be toyed nor tampered with. We rob people of their dignity when we do so.

The transgender confusion of our day is not a simple matter of “he” versus “her” pronouns. Christians need to be deeply sensitive in this area. Many people, for any number of reasons, are confused about their gender. Some of these were raised by unwise parents who, from an early age, confused their children, even in some cases leading to surgical reconstruction. In other words, there are some females who truly believe they are males, and vice versa. We must be very careful how we engage on this issue. We should never be belligerent, and we should never go out of our way to make a point with our pronouns. In fact, avoiding them will often be the better part of both wisdom and love. Nevertheless, we must not merely accept one’s erroneous gender identification to the point where we affirm the confusion. For instance, Caitlyn Jenner is, by God’s design, a man. No one is helping him by pretending otherwise. But neither does his confusion need to be the main discussion point. As we will see in a moment, his need is for Christ.

Just as Jesus refused to accept that this man was merely a “legion of demons,” so we should refuse to give lip service to human dignity while treating a person like someone they clearly are not. That is called hypocrisy. It is neither helpful nor loving. Rather, it is harmful, unloving, and ultimately disrespectful, if not destructive.

If people will know God, they will also need to know themselves. Those confused about who God made them to *be*, will ultimately be confused about who *made* them. Christians must speak truth and show them the way.

As we engage those who are confused about their gender, we must be gospel-driven and gospel-centred. This means that the gender confusion is a symptom of the greater problem; namely, people are alienated from God and therefore alienated even from their “self.” We must compassionately help those who are caught up in this self-deception to see themselves, like all of us, as sinners who need the Saviour. Once this is embraced, and once *he* is embraced, the foundation has been laid to help them to put off erroneous thinking and to put on correct, biblical thinking. That is, the Christian, like the man in Mark 5, is in their right mind. And one indication (among many) is the proper use of gender specific pronouns.

I understand that there are lots of tentacles to this issue and a whole lot of attendant heartache. But by merely playing along with the ruse, we unlovingly perpetuate the problem, the confusion and the heartache. Christians should love much better than this. Christians should love people, and therefore refuse to affirm decisions that reduce their human dignity. The world may be concerned, and confused, about mis-gendering people, but Christians are more concerned about *misguiding* them. For when it comes to human dignity, pronouns matter.

