

Unashamed Part 4 – Kyle Chase

Good morning, Church! How are you doing this morning? Man, it is a gift to be with you each one of you. Each one of you is a precious gift made in the image of God and it matters that you are here this morning.

This is it, this is part 4 - the conclusion of our Unashamed Series. Ok, it is today. And it's been quite a journey already, right? Talking about sexuality, sexual orientation, singleness and marriage and today we talk about gender - with masculinity and femininity - man that seems almost more like holy ground to me for some reason. If we believe these things come from God, and I do, then they are embedded in all of reality. Where do we start when we are talking about all of reality? OK, so what I'm NOT going to offer you today is a detailed exposition on, let's say, gender roles per say or exactly what a man is or exactly what a woman is. We are going to be more zoomed out than that but what I hope is that I won't be completely impractical either. I did ask my 10 & 8 year-old for input, I have two boys and I asked them "If you had three words to describe mom and dad, what words would you use?" And my oldest said "Well they'd have to be different words because you are complete opposites." So that is insightful. And the youngest was like "Dad, I think you are rough, wild and riskful." Wild and riskful! "And mom, mom you're warm, nice and not crazy," which I think was just a knock on me. So, some of you, that's what you were hoping for today and probably most of you know you want more.

So we are going to humbly, and with awe and wonder, explain the creation event where God creates human beings in his image as male and female and we are going to wonder about what that means and what it means that, if masculinity in its truest form and femininity in its truest form, comes from God, then those things aren't just social constructs, they are actually signposts pointing beyond us to our brilliant creator, God.

Now, these are mysterious topics. I did invite a number of women to come up here and help me talk about femininity. Alas, either due to unavailability in some cases and the vulnerability with talking about these things from the stage, my plans were not feasible. However, a number of women spoke into the things that I am sharing with you today and have deeply impacted my life as well. I also want to recognize the unique experience of any of you who may be living with gender dysphoria or might identify as transgender or trans. Today is for you too and each of us, each of us, is a work in progress who, by the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, patiently by his Spirit, are being transformed into the people we are created to be.

So I am not up here today with all the answers but I do have so many questions. And I know that you have questions too and this is a place where we can bring our honest questions to God and to one another as we search,

authentically, after God together. That is a beautiful thing. So today we are going to wonder. We are going to wonder, What is a man? What is a woman? What does it mean that God made my body this way and what does that mean about my life? What is masculinity and femininity and how is that similar to our biological sex and how is it different? What does scripture say about all of these things and really, we are going to wonder about the root of these things which is a question of identity - Who am I really?... Who am I really?

If we want to know who we are we should start at the beginning with the one who's image we are made. But first, let's pray:

God of the Universe, I pray this morning that you would draw us up into the wonder of who you are and who we are in your eyes. I know you are here today, would you speak to every one of us and to us as a community in Jesus' name. Amen.

Genesis 1:1. First book, first chapter, first verse, first words in the bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures this is how it begins: "In the beginning God...In the beginning God." God is the beginner, God is the initiator, the first. The story that is about to unfold is about God. Verse 1 is "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He created the heavens and the earth; I'm not even sure how to say this because it isn't as if even space existed yet nothing existed except God and then God filled the space. He cast out the nothingness with the everythingness that He created. He put something where nothing was. That is verse 1. Verse 2 "The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In Hebrew, "without form and void" is *tohu wa-bohu* = emptiness, chaos, formlessness. I imagine a vast dark ocean a non-ocean really of shapeless potential. More than nothing but, somehow, less than something. The everything is there but it is not yet what it could be. And then the Spirit of God, the *ruwach 'elohiyim* was hovering over the face of the waters.

This word *hovering* is the same word used of an eagle or a mother hen brooding/hovering over her chicks. Or let's say maybe even the eggs they are waiting to hatch, there is a tenderness, a gentleness, a warmth. Closely watching and waiting for life to hatch under her protective presence. Can you feel the anticipation? Something new and beautiful is about to happen.

Genesis 1:3: - "And God said..." What did God say does anyone know?

"Let there be light," right?! That's what our English says, "Let there be light" and in Hebrew it's *'elohiyim 'amar 'owr*. And God *'elohiyim 'amar 'owr*. Light! One word, a single word, and the universe explodes with light. Now, I want us to look at the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures - these first five verses -

and I want to look at the next two. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to his disciple John. Many years later.

So Genesis 1:1-5 (ESV) - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form or void; there is darkness; the Spirit of God is hovering; God says let there be light and there was light and God saw the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness and God called the light *day* and the darkness *night*. There was evening and morning, the first day.

Now let's look at John 1:1-5 (NIV). It says "In the beginning," sounds familiar, yeah? "In the beginning was the *Word*" - that's John's special name for Jesus - " ...and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

Do you see how John is looking back on the Genesis 1 creation account and he is equating Jesus with the Word of God that went out and created the universe so that when God said, He spoke, when He spoke a word, He spoke and all things were created and ordered. John is saying that "Word" was Jesus. And through the eyes of John we begin to see our triune God in the first three verses of Scripture. The Father entering into the mysterious void to create something out of nothing. The Spirit hovering over the potential like a mother hen over her chicks. And the Divine Word, the Son, going out and creating goodness, to order the chaos into a magnificent paradise teeming with life. And there is more...

At the absolute climactic moment of this marvelous cosmic event, God said "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So Genesis 1:27, "God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female He created them."

So up to this point, whenever God creates, Scripture says He saw that it was good. But before the close of this 6th day of creation, just beyond this climactic moment, Scriptures tells us "God saw everything that He had made and behold, it was *very good*."

Do you know that God made you very good?

Do you know that God made you very good?

Genesis 1 and chapter 2 - they both present the creation event. And chapter 2, it is a story, it is a narrative that he is taking us through. But Genesis 1 -

what we are reading from is like a song rising with harmonies played through different notes; it is filled with dichotomies that are ordered in a harmonious way. Heaven and earth together yet distinct. Light and darkness together yet distinct. Day and night together yet distinct. Evening and morning together yet distinct. Water and land together yet distinct. All of this is dichotomy and harmony - two distinct things that go together.

And then at the apex of God's creative movement, after the incubation of all other life, God created human beings in his image, as what? As male *and* female. A dichotomy meant to live in harmony together yet distinct. These two kinds of humans are more alike than different but their difference is so important and must not be lost. And when we read "male" and "female" in scripture we can confidently assert that it is at least referring to our bodies.

Have you ever noticed that male bodies and female bodies are different? I'm serious. They are designed to fit together.

When God blesses man and woman and tells them to "be fruitful and multiply" He is at least blessing procreation because if God is "pro" anything he is certainly procreation

Now, okay. Come back. I'm not saying that that means we all have to procreate with our bodies. The same God that said "be fruitful and multiply" also said "Go and make disciples of all nations." We all have different journeys as single people and married couples and with whether or not we have to have biological children, but we are ALL called to multiply disciples of Jesus - to be mothers and fathers in the faith.

But for the sake of understanding what our bodies can tell us about who God is, I do want us to consider for a moment what it is that actually happens between a man and woman when they procreate. Are you ready to feel uncomfortable?

Well, a man is designed to erectly enter into a mysterious void. To take up space and to initiate and to offer the beginnings of life. And a woman is designed to receive him and to call forth those seeds of life and to take what is then formless and unshaped potential and, for 9 months, to brood or hover over it until it grows within her to become something beautiful. Something beautiful, with a name, that goes out in creative goodness to help order the world.

Do you see already the profound signpost, that is our sexuality, pointing beyond us to the triune God who creates and orders the universe? How wonderful!

And so I invite you to consider, if you have never considered this before, what if God is trying to tell us about *masculinity* and *femininity* by how he designed our bodies as *male* and female? What if?

Scripture says that God is Spirit. But we have bodies and are made in God's image. So our male bodies and our female bodies are, in some sense, incarnations of something that is true about God. That means we look at our bodies and learn something about who God is and we gain something of an insight into cosmic or divine masculinity and femininity!

So, in the course of this sermon, when you hear me say male and female, I'm talking about our bodies - our physical, biological sex - and when you hear me talk about masculinity and femininity I'm expressing disembodied categories that are, let's say, philosophical or theological or abstract in some sense because they exist in God, who is Spirit. But that does not mean these categories are completely subjective or have no grounding in reality. See, our understanding of masculinity and femininity should be grounded in *who* God is, and *how* he decided to fashion our bodies as male and female. Masculinity and femininity are grounded in God and God's decision to make us male and female. That is the special revelation of Scripture which tells us who God is and the general revelation of creation, or our bodies, which are made male and female by a good creator.

But since I am rooting these things not just in *who* God is but also *how* our bodies are made, I have to ask... Do you like your body?

Do you like it? Does it feel like a profound gift from God, like an integral part of who you are? Or is it more of a burden, a frustrating or contemptible thing to you? Imagine with me, for a moment, that every day you wake up and the first awareness you have is that of deep sadness. You open your eyes and look at your body and you feel disgust, sometimes to the point of becoming physically sick. The shape of it, the feel of it, the way it moves, everything about your body feels alien to you like you are somewhere voiceless and hopelessly trapped inside somewhere no one can see. And you look in the mirror and don't recognize the person staring back at you and you hate how ugly they are and describe with contempt what's wrong with them. And the way others look at your body tells you that they don't quite see you either. They don't understand who you really are and maybe they are mean about it but, more often, they are just judging a book by its cover and they don't know what they don't know - that you are so much more than what meets the eye. But covering up your appearance or trying to change things about it doesn't divert stares, it increases them and you know that beneath the cloth and skin you are still trapped and you wonder whether you will ever feel right, like you belong here at all, like you are valuable, like you are you.

And the question returns and it haunts you daily... Who am I really?

Who am I really?

This is about identity. And I believe many of us can relate to this feeling of deeply felt dissonance with our identity. And specifically with our bodies which are an essential part of what Scripture calls our *nephesh*. It's often translated as "soul" but it's really the whole life of the person, their physical body intertwined with the Spirit and consciousness and all of this together is our *nephesh*, our whole living being.

But if you've ever hated your body or felt confused about who you are or despair over that gap between who you perceive yourself to be and how others perceive you, then maybe you can just begin to understand what it's like to live with gender dysphoria. To feel a clinically significant amount of pain and suffering, wondering how you can be a man just because you have a male body or how you can be a woman just because you have a female body. And it doesn't stop there because beyond our bodies the surrounding world is giving us thousands of false and confusing messages about what it even means to be a man or a woman. And if we don't check all the boxes for one does that mean we are actually the other? Always the other, always being "*othered*."

According to a study by the Center for Suicide Prevention, transgender people are twice as likely as lesbian, gay or bi-sexual people to attempt suicide in their life time. And that amount for lesbian, gay, and bi-sexuals is already up from the general population. And over 66% of trans youth report having self-harmed, harming their bodies in the most recent year of their life. 66%! If you are here and are living with gender dysphoria, you are not alone. The pain that you are experiencing is not a sin. It's not a sin to experience that pain, that dysphoric pain. We live together in this broken world that is not what it was created to be. It makes sense that we experience deep disappointment and longing for so much more because we are made for so much more. And one day, creation will be done groaning and we will be satisfied, fully, with new bodies that never feel wrong for us and never get sick and never wear out. Please, please don't search for answers online. Please don't do that. Gender and sexuality are such vulnerable and confusing things and there is so much harmful guidance on the internet. Find hope and direction, not just in Scripture and time with the Lord, but in community with people who know your story and love you and who are willing to walk with you. We want to be up front and let you know our bent as a church, not just for you but all of us together we want to walk slowly and with patience and grace come to embrace the body God has given us as a sacred gift and the very temple of the Holy Spirit, worthy of care and of compassion.

But church, can we be a people who sit with a brother or sister who is suffering a profound dissonance with their gender and hear them and listen and lead with kindness and compassion? Can we, as a show of respect when

we meet someone new, use a person's preferred name and pronouns at a pace that is helpful for them? Can we, all of us - wherever we are at - offer each other grace and patience in the slow work of coming to understand who we are in Christ - the slow work of coming to accept our male and female bodies, not as a mistake, but as a profound gift from a very good God? So I want you to hear clearly today what I believe the message that God has laid on my heart for all of you is this:

"I made you very good. You are not a mistake. I made you very good. You are not a mistake."

God made you very good. I was talking to one of my boys before bed one night and he was down on himself for some reason or the other and he said "Dad, I am bad, I am a bad boy." And I listened for a moment and said something like "Hey buddy, you may do a bad thing from time to time but you are not a bad boy, that is not who you are. God made you very good. You are a good boy." And he just said, "no" persistently "I'm a bad boy, I'm bad." And it was heartbreaking and I started to get fired up because my wife and I have had to apologize to our kids a million different times for a million different things but never once have we said "You're bad, you're a bad kid" or "You are bad boys." Satan tells my kids that! And it's infuriating. And so as my son persisted, I said "Hey, I have done bad things in my life too, son, and I still make mistakes and I still do bad things and sometimes I just feel like I'm not good enough or that I am not good at all, like I am bad, but that is a bunch of crap! It is not true of me; it is not true of you. We may feel that way sometimes but however we feel does not define who we are and what other people feel about us does not define who we are. God is the only one with the authority to tell us who we are because he made us. He made us. He gets to name us; do you understand?"

He said "Dad, you said crap!"

Making a difference at the Chase house.

There are so many lies that threaten the very core of our identity as God's kids. Statistically, most of us are not struggling with gender dysphoria but many of us know what it is to be gender non-conforming to some degree or another. We know, right, what it is to be put into a box as a man or woman that does not quite fit who we are. And that can be painful and confusing too. The truth is that most gender constraints we feel come from culture and not from Scripture. Most of the constraints come from culture and not from scripture. We've got to break free of that as the Church. From a young age we learn that boys like trucks and climbing trees and are good at math and like the color blue. And girls like dolls, playing house and are good at reading and like the color pink. So if I'm a boy that likes playing pretend with dolls the world tells me that I'm probably a girl, instead of telling me about Fred Rogers, Mr. Rogers, who played pretend with dolls for decades for the sake of

moving the Kingdom of God forward in front of generations of kids and their parents giving them kind and honest words to discuss life and death and politics and tragedy and love. What an incredible man!

And if I'm a girl who likes climbing trees the world tells me I'm probably really a boy instead of telling me about Malena Moe or "Malla", as she was called - a missionary woman who, at age 65, *built* a special house on wheels called the Gospel Wagon so she could get to more remote people groups of the jungle yet unreached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She served until age 90 still driven by her conviction that, "if only I can get to people and help them see that there is a God in heaven who loves them, they will soon turn to him because nothing is as powerful as love." What an incredible woman!

Church, in Scripture we see men going to war and building cities but we also see them overwhelmed with emotion and dancing and singing and weeping together. I think of David who wrote the intense poetry of the Psalms and Johnathan, David's closest friend, who showered him with tears and affection when his life was at stake. Or Jesus who, in Matthew 23, weeps openly, longing to gather Jerusalem like a mother hen gathers her chicks. Or the apostle Paul whose tearful prayers were filled with overwhelming love for the Church whom he reminded in 1 Thessalonians 2, "We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children." These are men.

And in scripture we see women making clothes and cooking for their families and guests. But we also see them driving tent spikes through the heads of Canaanite Warlords and leading armies into battle. Consider the entrepreneurial leadership of the Proverbs 31 Woman or Lydia and the other leading women of Acts 16 and 17 or Shiphah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives of Exodus 1 who defied the Egyptian Pharaoh to save children from infanticide or Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 who saves her household from ruin or the wise woman of the city of Abel in 2 Samuel 20 who, by her wisdom, rescued her city from certain destruction.

Now this is a vibrant picture of what a man and a woman might be. Men and women are much more alike than we are different. But we are different. And that matters. Also, men are different from other men. And women are different from other women. And that matters. And more importantly, masculinity and femininity are different qualities that are both derived from God, and that matters. So though masculinity is emphasized in men and femininity is emphasized in women, a healthy Godly man or a healthy Godly woman will have a harmony of both masculine and feminine characteristics within their being. I absolutely believe that this is true about Jesus and so it should be true of us too. Do you see, then, how a man who has only masculine characteristics is not really a good man as man was intended to be? And a woman who only has feminine characteristics is not really a good

woman as a woman is intended to be? Because we are to be like Jesus, who has a harmony of these things.

Returning to John 1. Remember we see John emulating the creation song and he is talking about Jesus, the Word, and in verse 14 he says "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth." Grace and Truth. John says this twice here in verse 14 and then again in 17 that *grace* and *truth* come from Jesus. Now, I am not saying that Genesis 1 and John 1 are exactly the same. They are written at different times in different languages, by different authors to a different audience. And John is Jewish and he is drawing from this Hebrew creation song which, remember, is filled with dichotomies that are meant to be in harmonies and I don't think by accident he says in Jesus we see the fullness of what is grace and truth - another dichotomy meant to be in harmony and is that specifically and perfectly in the person of Jesus. And if they both exist together in Jesus they should exist together in us, Amen?

Think about it, consider what grace says. Grace says "I welcome you, wherever you've been, I welcome you with open arms as worthy of love. I welcome you. I receive you with open arms as worthy of love." And what does truth say? Truth says "There is a way things work and I will show you the way. There is a way things work and I will show you the way." Can you hear masculinity and femininity in these ideals? Maybe not, I can. I do and I see how grace without truth is coddling. And truth without grace is cruel. But in Jesus, in Jesus we see grace *and* truth together in harmony. And I remember from week 1 the story of a woman caught in adultery and what does Jesus say to her? "Does no one condemn you? Well neither do I." That's grace. "Now go and sin no more." That's truth. You see how grace and truth, in Jesus Christ, mother and father us, they always welcome us back no matter how far away we've gone. They always welcome us back and then the truth says "Hey, this is the way, walk in it." In fact, in Jesus it says "I am the way, the truth and the life; follow me." But we struggle and we need grace to bring us back. We need truth to lead us forward.

This makes sense that God could mother and father us because in John 1, again, verse 12 we hear "Anyone who has received Jesus and has believed in his name, God has given the right to become children of God." And so if we are wondering who we are really, this is the answer. We are God's kids. We are God's kids. And it is time for God's kids to rise up and take their place, unashamed in the light and dignity and the glory of God.

So I want to invite the band to come up, I want to invite the prayer ministers to find their places and I want to invite everyone in this room to rise if you are able and stand. And I want to bless you this morning. Would you stand please?

I want you to hear this: Men and women of New Life Church, it was not God's will to create a world with only men in it. It was not God's will to create a world with only women in it. He made us to be co-heirs with Christ and co-laborers with one another as Kings and Queens over His very good creation. And so now the Lord bless you today to receive your body as a sacred gift and a temple of that same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and may that Spirit give life to our mortal bodies here and now in this place and bring us one day to full resurrection glory. And may your whole being be filled with that wonderful harmony of masculine and feminine qualities of the Divine which so uniquely image our God to the world through your life. And may we grow into men and women who lead and who love and who serve and who enter in with strength and to the mysterious void and offer life in the chaotic places but also people who nurture and protect and preserve life when it is vulnerable. And may we all, whether single or married, whether we have biological children or not, become mothers and fathers of the faith, raising up the next generation of men and women to not be afraid of their masculinity and femininity, but to wield it courageously to a world that is dark and longing desperately for answers and need to see Jesus. And in that darkness we shine a light and that darkness will not overcome it.

Lord, we praise you this morning. We worship you today. God, we are in the midst of a thousand inconsistencies, a thousand paradoxes and mysteries and confusing places in our being and we need you to walk with us. We need the Church to be more fully what the Church was created to be. We need you to guide us to be our grace and our truth, to welcome us and to shepherd us. Would you speak into the darkness, would you hover over the chaos of our lives and begin to order, create beauty and Shalom and wholeness out of all that chaos and make us more fully like you, Jesus? We pray in your name, Amen.

If you would, please stay standing and we are going to enter into a time of worshipping the Lord through song and communion. We remember that on the night Jesus was betrayed he took bread and broke it and said "This is my body given for you." And he took the wine after supper and he said "This is the cup of the new covenant and my blood poured out to take away your sins. Drink all of it, do this in remembrance of me."

So in this time of worship, feel free to come to the table, please, down here in front or in the back of the balcony and receive the body and the blood and remember that Jesus died for you and to give you new life. And if you need prayer please come to a prayer minister. You should have teams, other than me you will have teams of men and women around so if you would like to pray with just a woman or just a man or both together that is fine. So let's worship him together this morning.

