

Terri Main

VI

EMERGENCE

Terri Main

By the Grace of God

SCRIPTURE AND TRANSGENDERISM

by Terri Main

(An answer to an inquiry by someone who was told by another that being transsexual was a sin according to the Bible.)

Before looking at the individual scriptures, I want to start with an overview. While some of these scriptures are just plain puzzling in how they can apply to transsexualism, many do apply to sexual immorality. First, I assume you are sexually pure. In other words that you are not having sex outside of marriage as per the scriptural injunction. Otherwise some of these scriptures might apply, not as regards transsexualism, but as regards sexual purity.

The second thing I would note and make very clear — **TRANSEXUALISM IS NOT HOMOSEXUALITY**. This is about gender and not about the sex act. I am celibate for instance. I have chosen to remain celibate because of the nature of this ministry. I must be completely above reproach because of the high profile I have in my local church and community. Everything listed in these verses has to do with the sex act itself. In our discussions with others we must clearly separate our gender identity issues from sexual issues. We must also be scrupulous about our sexual activity. If we are sleeping around, then how can we expect to convince others that we are living a holy life?

With that in mind let's look at the scriptures: *Romans 1:21,24,26-32, 6:12; Mark 7:20-23; 1 Corinthians 10:6-9; Galatians 5:19-21; Isaiah 59:1-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Galatians 6:7-8.*

So this should get all of you going!

ROMANS 1:21-32

Quite simply this section refers first to homosexual acts. There is a debate over whether it refers to all homosexual acts or just those by heterosexual people experimenting with homosexuality. I will not enter into that debate in this forum since it is outside the purview of what we do. Do not argue about whether or not homosexuality is a sin with someone who throws this scripture at you. Simply point out that it does not apply since you are not having gay sex (unless of course you are, then you do have to deal with this scripture). But generally this is a red herring; it simply doesn't apply. But I might direct him to verse 29 where it also mentions "maliciousness...debate...and malignancy". Some of his approach certainly seems malicious

and down in v.30 we have the proud and backbiters. I have to wonder if you were a gossip if he would be throwing this scripture at you. I would also advise continue reading the first several verses of chapter two. Remember there were no chapter breaks in the original text of the Bible. Chapter 2.1 says

THEREFORE THOU ART INEXCUSABLE O MAN WHOSOEVER THOU ART
THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER, THOU CONDEMNEST THYSELF FOR THOU THAT
JUDGEST DOES THE SAME THINGS.

In other words, I can't point my finger at a fornicator if I am proud or boast of myself. This passage is meant to build the argument that no one, no matter how much we try, can live a perfect life according to the Law. We are all under the judgement of God.

FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

This passage was not to lay out a new set of rules, but rather to point out that no matter who we are we have fallen short of God's standard and we need the free gift of salvation bought for us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 6:12

LET NOT SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL FLESH, THAT YE SHOULD OBEY THE
LUSTS THEREOF.

This only applies if one accepts that being transsexual is a sin. This is begging the question. It does not prove that transsexualism or transitioning is a sin. It only applies if one accepts that it is a sin and continues in that sin. Your brother is assuming what he is claiming to prove. Bad logic. What do they teach in these schools nowadays? Of course, if we are sinning in some other way (for instance, if we hold hatred in our hearts toward those who oppose us, say) then we are letting sin reign in our flesh. By the way, lust doesn't only apply to sexual desire. Lust in this verse is *epithumiais*. It means to covet earnestly or to long for anything other than God and His will. One could "lust" after a new car or a job or pizza. It is simply out-of-control desire for anything. Certainly, if your desire for transition is such that if God clearly spoke to your heart that it is not to be pursued by you, and you pursued it anyway, then it might become a lust, but it is not inherently one.

MARK 7:20-23

Okay, true, what proceedeth out of a man does defile him. Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees here who condemned the disciples for not following a ritual

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washing before dinner. He is making a pun, that one is not defiled by what one puts in one's mouth but by what comes out of it. Then he proceeds to expand on the idea, by pointing out that evil thoughts produce evil acts. Again, this begs the question. It does not prove transsexualism is a sin. It simply assumes it is, and, therefore, thinking about it is sinful. But this scripture does not prove the major premise, therefore the minor premise is useless, producing an invalid conclusion. It's just basic logic. What do they teach in these schools?

I CORINTHIANS 10:6-9

Again this applies to fornication (sex outside of marriage). Being transsexual does not mean that one is promiscuous. Once again, he is begging the question assuming the result. This does not apply to transsexualism at all unless you assume that transsexualism involves illicit sex, which is an invalid assumption.

GALATIANS 5:19-21

No word about changing sex here. I'm sure again he is assuming you are being sexually active or plan to be sexually active outside of marriage. The assumption of transsexualism=sexual acting out is not implicit. Actually, it's quite insulting to all of us.

ISAIAH 53:1-8

I don't think you have shed innocent blood. I'm at a loss to understand why he thinks this applies at all except for the verse that says "YOUR INIQUITIES HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM GOD." First, he would have to prove that transsexualism is an iniquity. He has to stop assuming that if he is going to present valid proof. Logic, logic, logic. Where are the critical thinking skills we are supposed to be teaching? But while I'm in Isaiah, I can't help but turn to *Isaiah 53* and read about our Savior

HE IS DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN: A MAN OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF AND WE HID AS IT WERE OUR FACES FROM HIM: HE WAS DESPISED AND WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT. SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS, YET WE DID NOT ESTEEM HIM STRICKEN, SMITTEN OF GOD AND AFFLICTED. BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS. HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES. THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM. AND BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY. WE HAVE TURNED EVERYONE TO HIS OWN WAY AND THE LORD HATH LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL.

It really doesn't apply to anything we are talking about, but I thought we needed some encouragement and that verse always encourages me.

II THESSALONIANS 2:9-12

I know what he is getting at here and there is truth. We can be deceived by the evil one if we do not know the Scripture. We must base our decisions on the Word. Given that fact, where is the Word of God relating to changing one's gender? It does not say one cannot do so. Again, he is assuming the question. But I have to say, we do have to be careful. Just because transsexualism is not sin does not mean that transsexuals cannot sin. We can and do need to watch out for temptation. Perhaps the most tempting of all being the temptation to hate those who hate us. So, we must always respond in humility of spirit and in love toward the other.

GALATIANS 6:7-8

Certainly what we sow we will reap. But again, he has to show that you are sowing to the flesh sinful desire in seeking transition in order for this Scripture to apply.

In all of these Scriptures, if he had shown conclusively from Scripture that transsexualism or transitioning or both were sinful then they would apply. Since he has not done so, one has no other logical option but to say that these Scriptures, though instructive and sobering, simply do not apply to the topic at hand.

I still wonder what they teach in these schools. This type of poor logic wouldn't even have made it past my high school English teachers.

Terri Main

By the Grace of God

ON GENDER DYSPHORIA AND THE CHURCH

by Terri Main

NOTE: Terri Main is a new woman (July 1993) who has written extensively on transsexualism and spiritual issues. Her essays on the CompuServe bulletin board system have been a great blessing to many transsexual persons, myself included. The following selections from "On Gender Dysphoria and the Church" are reprinted by permission from her CompuServe library.
—Rebecca Allison

Talking about THE CHURCH is sort of like talking about THE COMPUTER or THE TREE or THE BIRD. Each denomination is different. In fact, each local congregation is different. So, maybe I should clarify the perspective from which this essay is written. I am writing from the point of view of orthodox, fundamental Christianity. I am writing as one who believes the Bible to be the revealed Word of God, who believes that Christ was the Son of God in substance as well as spirit, who believes that Christ's death on the cross acted as an atonement for the sins of the world, who believes in a personal God, a personal salvation, and a personal relationship with God through Christ. Much of what is said in this piece would apply to any mainstream denomination, including both Protestant and Catholic.

I remember growing up in the church. I was born on Sunday and was in church Wednesday evening. I've gone ever since. My parents and grandparents were active in the church, but mine was no second-hand experience. I personally prayed and read my Bible. I personally experienced the presence of God in my life. Around our house, God was no philosophical construct: He was an objective reality like another member of the family. As a child and teenager, I had one major prayer: "Lord, please either make me a girl, or make me like other boys." The Lord in His wisdom did neither. I didn't see any conflict between being a transsexual and being a Christian. I still don't, but now I know there are others who do.

What is the source of this feeling? The answer is simple: ignorance. Ignorance of the nature of transsexualism and ignorance of Scripture combine to cause many well meaning Christian people to brand transsexualism as a sin.

Now, before condemning the actions of Christians who vociferously oppose transsexualism, remember that their motives are noble, even if their actions are not. If I believe that you are doing something that will cause eternal harm to you, I have a moral obligation to try to save you from that harm.

The best analogy is that of a person wandering out into a street and not seeing a car racing toward him. A bystander should have a moral obligation to warn that person that a car is coming. Such is the motivation of the Christian warning a person away from sin.

So the problem is not usually motivation, but rather understanding. How do people often misunderstand transsexualism?

I think the name transsexualism is what throws a lot of people off. They seem to take the “sex” part as referring to the sex act (an act many of us on hormones would find difficult to perform anyway) rather than to gender. I prefer to talk about gender dysphoria. It sounds more clinical, and it is more accurate. It usually won’t lead people to misunderstand the sexual connotations of the condition.

People who condemn transsexualism as a sin not only are ignorant of gender issues, they are also ignorant of the Bible on the subject. This area simply is not covered in scripture one way or another. It falls into the category of “working out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Two Scriptures which some point to as condemning transsexualism are *Deuteronomy 22:5* and *I Corinthians 6:9*. In the first, “wearing apparel pertaining to a woman” is condemned. I might add, in the next verse so is taking a mother bird away with her brood, building a house without parapet, and sowing vineyard with two different kinds of seeds. In understanding this scripture, we must look at the cultural setting. In many idolatrous practices, great orgies would be held in which men and women would crossdress for the purpose of sexual arousal and ritualistic indiscriminate sex. Such bacchanals often ended with some men castrating themselves and becoming eunuch priests to pagan goddesses. From the transsexual’s point of view, we are not men wearing dresses: we are women in training before SRS – in body afterward. In fact, it is most appropriate that we dress as women, since it is proper for women to wear women’s clothing! I might add that this is the only Scripture in the entire Bible dealing with crossdressing at all. It is poor hermeneutic (Scriptural analysis) to build entire doctrine from a single verse, especially a verse from Old Testament law, most of which has been superseded by the grace of the new covenant in Christ.

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The second scripture lists a series of types of sinners who are not to inherit God's kingdom. In the King James version this reads:

BE NOT DECEIVED: NEITHER FORNICATORS, NOR IDOLATERS, NOR ADULTERERS, NOR EFFEMINATE, NOR ABUSERS OF THEMSELVES WITH MANKIND, NOR THIEVES, NOR COVETOUS, NOR DRUNKARDS, NOR REVILERS, NOR EXTORTIONERS, SHALL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD. AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU: BUT YOU ARE WASHED, YOU ARE SANCTIFIED, YOU ARE JUSTIFIED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS AND BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD. (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*)

The word "effeminate" is the word which causes some people problems. However, it is a mistranslation. It is better translated "Catamite". Catamites in Greek cultures were prostitutes. But the word also applied to those who purchased their services as well as those who managed their careers. Most modern translations are more accurate.

So, if it is not specifically condemned by Scripture, how then can transsexualism be viewed? In my opinion, I believe it can be viewed in much the same manner we would view a birth defect. If there is a defect which can be cured by surgery, most Christians would applaud the medical community as an agent of healing. They would not say, "That's the way God made you, you should stay as you are" to the person with a club foot, with a cleft palate, or even with a crooked nose, big ears, or other facial features which could be corrected by surgery. Why should not the same be said to the transsexual who simply wishes to live a normal life as a woman? Not a perverted life: just a simple, and in the case of the Christian transsexual, a virtuous, life as a woman.

There is one other gauge the Christian has to judge an action. That gauge is the peace of God. At salvation, the Holy Spirit puts a type of spiritual barometer inside. It quickens the spirit when an action is considered which is wrong. From personal experience, I have the peace of God about what is happening. I don't always understand what is happening, but God gives me His assurance that He has everything under control. His presence holds me firm when the painful episodes come. Without His presence and peace, I'm not sure what I would have done a few years ago. I might not even be here writing this essay.

About nine months ago, I was crossliving part time, attending church alternately as a male and as a female (different churches). I was wondering whether I might have been mistaken, so I set forth a test for myself. I prayed and said, "Lord, I want to do what's right. So, I won't set any routine for my

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dressing. I will simply go by the unction of your spirit. As I feel, so will I dress.” I have never felt the leading of the Spirit to dress as a male ever again.

My transition so far has been amazingly smooth. I have seen literal miracles of finance, timing, and circumstances occur. In short, I have seen the hand of God in everything that has happened so far. I believe God has a purpose in this. *Romans 8:28* says

GOD WORKS ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE
HIM, AND ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.

A looser translation put it this way: “God is putting all the pieces of the puzzle together.” To me that is exciting. In the words of an old song of the church:

*I don't know about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand.
But I know who holds tomorrow. He's the one who holds my hand.*

Terri Main
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By the Grace of God

THE ENEMY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

by Terri Main

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES....FOR IF YE LOVE THEM WHICH LOVE YOU,
WHAT REWARD HAVE YE? DO NOT EVEN THE PUBLICANS THE
SAME? —*Matthew 5:44-46*

Like many transgendered folk, my ears perk up whenever a talk show features transsexuals, transvestites, or transgenderists, if for no other reason than to see how they are going to sensationalize our experience. A few weeks ago, I caught the end of one of these shows which included a self-styled minister who has an especial enmity toward transsexuals (and I suspect all gender folk). He was on the point of raving, claiming that the other guests were abominations, worthy of contracting AIDS, and at one point he called them “freaks.”

My first reaction as I watched this man pass off his hatred as the voice of God was anger. Even if transsexualism was a sin (a long stretch to prove that point Biblically), it was hardly in keeping with the character and ministry of Christ to resort to name calling and venomous attacks. It certainly wasn't the Gospel of Love he was preaching. But, something happened to change my perspective. As I stood alone telling the TV image of this man what I thought about him, God took me out of myself and showed me this man through His eyes.

What I saw was someone more to be pitied than censured. What I saw was a man so filled with anger and hatred that it was eating away at his soul. What I saw was a man who was miserable because everywhere he went he saw things which triggered his anger. Have you ever tried to be happy and angry at the same time? It doesn't work. My heart went out to him in sorrow and, yes, love.

No, I'm not a super-saint. I just saw this man through God's eyes for a few moments and I learned some important lessons. I'd like to share these with you.

1. *Don't confuse the weapon with the enemy.* I remember someone quipping, “They call them smart bombs, but if they were that smart they wouldn't destroy themselves.” Being a weapon isn't any fun, and it's not something you choose. Your enemy is not the sanctimonious person who condemns you. It's not the minister who says you're an abomination. It's not your family or friends who reject you. *Ephesians 6.12* says,

FOR WE WRESTLE NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST

PRINCIPALITIES, AGAINST POWERS, AGAINST THE RULERS OF THE DARKNESS
OF THIS WORLD, AGAINST SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS IN HIGH PLACES.

Those people are the instruments Satan uses to cause you pain. Remember, Satan is called the “Accuser of the Saints.” They are as much victims of hate as you are.

2. *Beware, lest you become the thing you hate.* If I respond to hatred with hatred, then I become like the person who hates me. This places me always on the defensive. It makes me start looking over my shoulder. It causes me to expect negativity. Like the Scripture at the start of this article says, If I only love people who love me, so what. Even sinners do that. Conversely, if I love people who hate me, I emulate Christ, who said of the people crucifying him “FATHER, FORGIVE THEM.”

3. *Win them through your life and your love.* I was talking with my pastor a couple of weeks ago about organizing and writing curriculum for our home Bible study program, which sort of dissolved after the former director moved out of town. He was in favor and indicated that he expected to see me in a number of ministry positions around the church. Then he said, “You know when you become more visible, you’ll probably hit some opposition. How do we educate those people?” My first inclination, being a teacher by profession and by vocation, was to begin a dissertation about theology and specific Scriptures and their historical context. But, much to my surprise, I said, “Well, have them talk to me. We’ll go out for coffee. We’ll talk together. Get to know each other. They can ask me any questions they need answered. We’ll pray together and read the Bible. We’ll agree to disagree, if necessary.” I might have added, “I’ll love them, and eventually they will either love me back or get out of the way.”

4. *Finally, Love is Not Optional.* No matter how hateful the others are, you cannot become hateful (i.e., full of hate). That is not an option for the Child of God. *I John 4:7-8* makes it clear.

BELOVED LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER. FOR LOVE IS OF GOD AND
EVERYONE THAT LOVETH IS BORN OF GOD AND KNOWETH GOD. HE
THAT LOVETH NOT KNOWETH NOT GOD. FOR GOD IS LOVE.

I have often quoted that Scripture as an attack against those who would attack us. Unfortunately, I’m only now learning to quote it in love.

So, beloved sisters, let us love one another. It’s not an option to do otherwise.

Terri Main

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WE ARE THE TRANSSEXUALS

by Terri L. Main

Neither Phil nor Oprah will call
We are the transsexuals who will not be seen on the talk shows
Geraldo and Ricki and Jenny and Jerry and Sally don't know our numbers
We are the transsexuals who hold down responsible jobs
Who never posed for pictures
Who never worked a street corner
We are the ones who don't own a string bikini, fishnet stockings, a bola or
a push-up bra
We are the ones who treasure family and friends
We are the ones who worship God
We are the transsexuals who bake brownies for the bake sales
Who work on committees
Who contribute to our communities
We are the transsexuals who are no longer transsexuals, but simply women
So, Phil don't call
Ophra don't ring my phone
Geraldo, Ricki, Jenny, Sally and Jerry don't send me any invitations
I have no time for you
I'm too busy living the life I fought so hard to find

Grace & Lace Letter

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LOVE: THE FINAL APOLOGETIC

by Terri Main

With Apologies to Francis Schaefer

A little more than 20 years ago I read a book which had a dramatic impact on me. It was a thin paperback, no more than 50-60 pages long, entitled *The Mark of a Christian* by Francis Schaefer. In this book Dr. Schaefer called love “The Final Apologetic.” All of our fine arguments from scripture, from philosophy, from science, from personal experience, all of our stories of miracles, even God’s performance of miracles in the presence of the unbeliever, will fail to prove the validity of the Christian claim in the absence of love by the Christian.

Jesus said it plainly enough in *John 13:35*,

“BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.”

Our love testifies of our Christianity to a lost and dying world.

Our love also testifies of our Christianity to other Christians. Those of us who struggle with gender issues often find great opposition in the church. At the crux of this opposition is the assumption that one could not be gender conflicted and also a Christian. This assumption comes from a lack of understanding of a few Scriptures, confusion of gender conflicts with sexual misconduct, fear of variance, or simple prejudice.

Too often we, myself included, hear a concern expressed by another Christian about our Christianity and we leap to the attack armed with our historical data on *Deuteronomy 22:5*, our logical arguments, our challenge to find transsexualism in the Bible, etc. These all may be good arguments, but I fear we use them prematurely. These should come after we get to know the other person and not before. Even then, they should be used only in the context of loving discussion and not in that of a battle.

The ultimate proof of our Christianity to the Christian as well as the unbeliever is our love. Love really is the final apologetic. It is hard to attack someone who will not attack back. It is hard to remain angry at someone who will not return that anger. It is hard to question the Christianity of one who says, sincerely, “You’re in my prayers.”

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What I'm talking about is "aggressive loving". It means loving those who hate me. It means doing good to those who try to do evil to me. It means taking some hits and not returning the same.

"But that's hard," you say. Yes, it is. It is so hard that you can't do it. You can't do it all by yourself, that is. But with the power of God working in you, you can do it. It still isn't easy. Nobody ever claimed living the Christian life would be. We are promised persecution as Christians. Some of it may come from our fellow believers.

So, what are some practical things we can do to aggressively love others?

1. *Don't do what you feel like doing.* A few years ago, there was a saying, "If it feels good, do it." Well, in this case, that phrase should be, "If it feels good, don't do it." Like Ezekiel's scroll it may be sweet in your mouth, but sour to your stomach. The "natural" response to an attack is to counter attack. But the "supernatural" response is to say attack me if you wish, but I will still love you.

2. *Build relationships and not arguments.* If someone comes against you, try this. Ask them out to lunch or over for coffee. Say, "Let's get together. Let me get to know you better. And give me a chance to introduce myself to you. After we get to know each other, then let's talk about this."

3. *Assume the best about the person.* We too often label someone who expresses a concern about our gender status as a bigot. This is usually not the case. Believe it or not, most of the time this person has your best interests at heart. If they sincerely believe that you are involved in sin, they are acting honorably, albeit misguidedly, in challenging you on that "sin." It is our responsibility to acknowledge that concern and express sincere appreciation for it. Then, and only then, can we gently present our case. This way, even if you continue to disagree, you preserve the relationship.

4. *Recognize their pain.* I was at church about a year ago when a woman who was visiting marched to the front of the church just as the minister was closing the service. She turned and pointed in my direction, "There is a great evil among you. In your midst in one who...." By this time, the ministers had surrounded her and were working with her. She quieted down somewhat, but kept coming up the aisle in my direction. I could have been angry, but instead, the Lord placed a great compassion in my heart for her. I could feel pain as much as hatred in her voice. Later that evening the pastor called and told me that from talking to some people who knew her, he found out

that her husband had just recently left her and begun a gay relationship with another man. Well, all that pain and anger was right there and looking for a target. I got chosen, but she was the real victim. When people called expressing concern for me I could honestly say I wasn't hurting as much as she was.

5. *Don't avoid them.* This is hard, but it really speaks to this person if you treat them as if they never questioned your faith. Shake hands with them just like you would anybody else when you meet them at church. Smile and greet them when you see them in the store. C. S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, points out that *Agape* love is not a feeling but an action, in which you treat the person as though you felt love for him or her. Then the magic starts, because the longer you do, the closer you come to feeling that love as well.

6. *Pray for them.* Jesus tells us outright to pray for our enemies. How much more should we pray for our brothers and sisters who don't understand us. Now, I don't mean just praying prayers like, "Lord, make them see the error of their ways." I mean praying for their healing when they are sick. Praying for their financial situation. Praying for their families. Praying that God will bless them in every way. In short, praying the sort of prayers you would like others to pray for you. It's amazing how your perspective on someone changes as you pray for them.

Abraham Lincoln faced major political opposition during his presidency. One day an advisor told him, "Mr. President, you really have to destroy your enemies." Lincoln smiled and said, "Is that not what I do when I make them my friends." Perhaps, it's time you and I destroy our enemies with the militancy of love.

Terri Main
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THE GREAT EXCUSE

by Terri Lynn Main

I was in church one Sunday, and during the altar time the pastor asked for congregation members to come down front and pray with people at the altar. I have done a lot of altar work in my life and there was a tugging at my heart to go down and pray with one individual in particular. Nobody was praying with her, and she seemed to need some support. In my heart I said, “I sure wish I could go and pray with her, but what would people think if they saw me, the church transsexual, ministering at the altar.” And in that still, small voice of the spirit God spoke to my heart and said, “How long are you going to keep using that excuse.”

Like always, God’s voice brings enlightenment and conviction. He was right. In the midst of all my internal posturing about how much I wanted to be used in Christian service he saw me fall for one of the lies the enemy uses to neutralize so many transgendered Christians: “You can’t work for God because of your gender issues.”

After one particularly distressing incident in a church setting, I decided I would simply arrive late, leave early, sit in the back of the church and avoid speaking or interacting with anyone. I would go to church, but I wouldn’t get involved. But God didn’t call His people to be uninvolved. He called us to community. He called us to service. And it’s time to stop playing Satan’s game and kill off this excuse.

About two years ago I decided to do just that. I decided if God impressed me to work at the altar, I would. I started a Bible study in my home for a few friends. Eventually, I went to our associate pastor and offered to work in any capacity I could. He asked me what I was interested in doing. I told him that (with much fear and trembling) I would like to help develop Bible study lessons for our home Bible study program, *Branches*. He agreed. Today, I am writing the Bible study materials for the church, I help edit the church newsletter and I prepare press releases for the church. As an instructor at a community college, I’m the faculty advisor for the Campus Christian Fellowship. I even help out occasionally with projects my sister gets involved with at another church in town.

I don’t tell all this to brag on myself. I could do none of these things without God’s help and guidance. Sometimes, when I’m writing a Bible study lesson, I look back at what I just wrote and say, “Wow, I didn’t know I could

write that well.” Of course, I’m right.

Nevertheless, even today I too often give place to the excuse that my gender issues make me unfit for ministry. This excuse carries many disguises. Let’s look at a few of them.

1. *You aren’t good enough to work for the Lord.* This one is powerful for two reasons: it piggybacks on our own shame, and it is in one sense truthful. Let’s look at those reasons. Most of us carry a load of shame around with us about our gender issues. Being told that you are a pervert or a freak directly or indirectly by so many people you can begin to believe it yourself. But look at what God says about you. He says you are a “royal priesthood, a holy nation.” He says you are a “new creation.” He says you are a “Child of God.” Those are great antidotes to shame. This excuse is also powerful in that no one, regardless of personal issues, is worthy to work for the Lord. We are made worthy by His power working within us. So, when we work for Him, it is really Him working through us, and who can call the vessel God chooses to use unworthy?

2. *What will people think?* This one is thorny because we can err by being too concerned about what people think. But we can also err by being too little concerned about others. Within the context of your service for the Lord, though, the attitudes of others need to be placed second to the call of God. Yes, some people will have problems with you serving God. But if you serve God with love and humility, they will either get in, get out, or get out of your way.

3. *The church won’t let me.* Again, there may be an element of truth to this. The church you attend may not want you serving the Lord in a visible capacity. However, you might be surprised. Have you asked? When I finally went to our pastor and offered myself to work in the church, he said, “I’ve been waiting for you to ask.” If your church is skittish about you’re participation in ministry, start small. Take brownies to the bake sale. Help clean up the church on work day. Offer to mow the lawn. Volunteer your professional services. These are all discreet and effective ways to make your willingness to be of service known. It also gives the church leadership a chance to witness your commitment. Even if your church isn’t accepting of your ministry gifts, you can still work for the Lord. You can start a home Bible study, you can witness to your family and friends, you can volunteer time at a nursing home or homeless shelter. There are innumerable opportunities to work for the Lord.

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4. *I'd do more harm than good.* Actually, an admission of our inadequacy for the task is the prerequisite for effective ministry. God isn't looking for perfect people. Just take a look at the bunch He chose during His earthly ministry. They lacked faith, acted impulsively, deserted Him at the Cross, and turned the world upside down with the Good News of Jesus Christ. If God is leading you, your ministry will be effective. If He isn't leading you, then regardless of your gender issues, your ministry will be ineffective. Remember, it isn't the vessel which refreshes, it's the living water in the vessel which quenches the thirst.

5. *Why should I serve God when He stuck me with being transgendered?*

This excuse presumes that God owes me something because He saddled me with my gender-conflicted situation. The corollary to that is that I owe Him nothing for the same reason. There are two things I'd like to say about this excuse. First, what made you believe that living the Christian life would be easy? Who told you that you would never have any problems? Why does God owe you a trouble-free life? The fact is we live in a fallen world. For some of us the problem is being transgendered. For others it's facing disease, poverty, family problems, abuse and other hardships. God didn't promise a life without difficulty. Indeed He promised that

"IN THE WORLD YOU SHALL HAVE TRIBULATION, BUT BE OF GOOD
CHEER. I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD." (*John 16:33*)

Secondly, which is more important: your problem or God's salvation? I can imagine standing before God on Judgment Day. When He asks, "What did you do for me on Earth?", what am I supposed to say? "Well, Lord, I didn't do anything. But it was really your fault. I mean, you don't know how hard it was living the Christian life and being transgendered. People didn't like me. They turned on me. I really...." And as I speak, will I see Jesus standing by the Father silence my litany of excuses when He raises a nail-scarred hand?

No, that is not the way I want to face my Father. I want to walk into that throne room surrounded by those I led to the Lord or encouraged with my counseling or enlightened by my Bible lessons. And when that fire is placed to my works, I want to see gold and silver and precious stones left over after the wood, hay and stubble have burned away. How will your excuses hold up under that flame?

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AND THINGS WHICH ARE DESPISED

by Terri Main

I was sitting in church a few weeks ago and the pastor was speaking from *I Corinthians 1:28* and I noticed something I had never noticed before. The verse reads:

AND BASE THINGS OF THE WORLD AND THINGS WHICH ARE DESPISED,
HATH GOD CHOSEN.

All of a sudden my eyes focused on the words THINGS WHICH ARE DESPISED. Something clicked, but to be sure I looked up the word in the Greek New Testament. The word is *exoutheneneo* and it means “to be made of no account, to be condemned, to be utterly despised”.

So, God specifically has chosen those who are condemned by others, who have been treated as nothing, who have been utterly despised to show forth His glory in the world. That is exactly what this verse is saying.

I don't know about you, but I have been “utterly despised” in my life. In high school I was beaten frequently, verbally assaulted daily and was even raped because I didn't quite fit in with the other guys. I have been treated as nothing. Some people I have to do business with continue to use the masculine pronoun referring to me. I have been condemned by well-intended Christians who have confused my gender dysphoria with sexual promiscuity.

So, how in the world can I expect to be used of God when I am carrying that kind of baggage around with me? Of course, the how is simple. I let go of my own self and let God work through me to do His own good will. But, that is perhaps begging the question. How is it that my being despised makes me a perfect tool for the Master's hand? I think there are three ways this works.

1. *Living a victorious life in spite of those things makes me a living testimony to the power of God. II Corinthians 4:7-10* puts it this way,

BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE [THAT IS THE LIFE OF CHRIST] IN
EARTHEN VESSELS THAT THE EXCELLENCY OF THE POWER MAY BE
OF GOD AND NOT OF OURSELVES, WE ARE TROUBLED ON EVERY
SIDE YET NOT DISTRESSED, WE ARE PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN

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DESPAIR; PERSECUTED BUT NOT FORSAKEN, CAST DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED. ALWAYS BEARING IN THE BODY THE DYING OF THE LORD JESUS, THAT THE LIFE ALSO OF JESUS MIGHT BE MADE MANIFEST IN OUR BODY.

When I tell people about some of the things I've been through in my life, they say, "How could you possibly have gone through all that?" And that is all I need to tell them, that the only way I could have made it through that time was with the help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was talking to a group of young people once. They were mostly gay, lesbian and bisexual, but there were a few transsexuals as well in the group. I told them about some of my experiences and one of them said, "With all that going on in your life, did you ever think about chucking all the religious stuff?" And it was a moment of enlightenment for me, because I said without even thinking, but almost in shock, "No, of course not, my relationship with God was the only thing that held me through those times. When I was 15 years old and lay in bed with a knife poised over my throat contemplating suicide after being raped, only the hand of God stayed my hand." About 15 minutes later I finished my sermon. But it was true. And the truth was that that particular testimony would not be available to me if I had not been despised.

2. Because of our rejection by others we can truly sympathize with others facing the same sort of thing. I have several Hispanic friends. They are often assumed to be criminals and lazy and worthless by many of the whites. They face various levels of discrimination and prejudice. Because of my own experiences, I can more fully empathize with their situations. Other people who are hurting, who have been the victims of gossip and back biting, who have had people treat them cruelly can come to me and I can honestly say, "I know what you are talking about".

Pain calls out to pain. Those of us who have experienced the pain of being despised and rejected are the perfect ones to minister to those who are facing the same thing. However, too often we set in our own pain and never reach out to others. Let me tell you a great secret: your pain will never decrease until you minister to someone else in pain. The greatest miracles for you will come when you are praying for another.

Terri Main

3. Finally, by being “despised and rejected of men,” we share in the suffering of Christ. Paul puts it this way in *Romans 8:17-18*:

IF IT SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM WE MAY ALSO BE GLORIFIED
TOGETHER. FOR I RECKON THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME
ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY WHICH SHALL BE
REVEALED IN US.

Jesus was despised, rejected, spat upon, condemned, beaten, abused in every conceivable way. If we share even for a short time in those types of suffering and remember the greater suffering that He endured for us, we in some way grow spiritually. We belong to a more exclusive club than that person who has experienced little rejection in his life. And one day, when the clouds of heaven part and a voice says “Come Home My Children,” there will be a special reward awaiting those of us who suffered, but endured and remained faithful to Him who will place a crown of life on our heads with His own nail-scarred hands.

Terri Main
Grace and Lace Letter International
Issue #1, 1997

GOD'S STANDARDS OF CARE

by Terri Main

A couple of weeks ago I received some e-mail from a former classmate of mine from college. Through one of my former professors she had heard of my gender orientation. She was pleasant and supportive, but also full of questions. In the process of discussing my journey I mentioned the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care (the treatment criteria for transsexuals concerning requirements for hormone therapy and surgery.) Without explaining fully, I said something like, "I also got acquainted with the Standards of Care. These are the rules we live by." In her reply she asked, "What are standards of care? Is it how you treat others, how you behave yourself?" I explained what the standards of care are, but her question stuck with me, troubling and challenging me.

Perhaps it's time we establish a Spiritual Standards of Care for Transsexuals. However, this would not be related to how others treat us, but to how we treat others. Here are a few ideas for such a code of conduct.

1. *"Copping an attitude" is inappropriate for the Transsexual Christian.* Many transsexual Christians cope with adversity by thumbing their noses at the world and the people in it. If you are a Christian you do not have this option. Being outrageous, flaunting one's gender change or taking an, "I-Don't-Care-What-You-Think" attitude will not help develop effective relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters. It will certainly not help our witness to those in the world.

2. *Remain in the Fellowship of the Saints.* I went to several churches as Terri before I found one that loved and accepted me. I was asked to leave a couple of the churches. Two or three openly condemned me. It would have been "easy" to just say, "Well they won't accept me. I can serve God just as well without the church." But that was not God's plan for His people. His plan is to be in fellowship. Pray for God's guidance and keep looking. There are places where you can worship God in the congregation of the saints.

3. *Concern yourselves with the feelings of others.* No, one does not live one's life predicated on what other people think. The Bible certainly does not teach that. However, it does teach that we are to act towards others in respectful ways which take into account their feelings. If you are following God's path for your life to pursue sex reassignment, you have to know that this decision will impact other people. Your family, friends, coworkers, fellow church members and others will be affected. Find ways to minimize the impact on

them. A little consideration will go a long way toward improving your relationships with them and confirm the witness of your experience with Christ.

4. *Look for ministry opportunities.* Satan will tell you you cannot minister for God. Yes, it is hard to minister for the Lord as a transsexual (or TG. *ed.*). Yes, you may face opposition. Yes, it is easier to slip in late to the service and leave early. But that doesn't change the fact that you are called to work for Him. Opportunities may present themselves in unexpected ways. You might write letters encouraging them and sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ. You might work in the church praying with people at the altar, teaching a Bible Study, cleaning the grounds, doing fund raising or a thousand other duties which need doing around the church.

Since making myself available for ministry 3 years ago in my local church, I have been writing Bible Study materials for our Wednesday night Home Bible Classes. I have helped write for and edit the church newsletter, developed our church Web page, and two weeks from the date of this writing I will be teaching a teacher's training course for our Sunday School teachers. Is this because I am so wonderful? No, it's because God opened some doors and I walked through them. Ask God and He will open doors for your ministries to flourish as well.

5. *Being transsexual does not exempt you from the duty of love.* I keep coming back to this one because it's the one God has to keep dealing with me about. If you live for Christ and attend church regularly, and get involved in the ministry of the church, mark it down, you will come under attack from others. These attacks may be vicious or subtle, but they will be painful. You must not allow bitterness to grow from them. You must love those who hate you. It's hard to do but it's necessary. It's not a divine suggestion. It's a divine command. Fortunately this loving is not always up to us. If I can't love the person myself, I can take myself out of the way and let God love them through me. And here's the payoff: if I love those who hate me, then the pain lessens because I begin to see them through the eyes of Christ. I see frightened, sometimes tormented people and compassion grows in me and the tears that come to me in prayer are not for myself, but for them. And as I pray for their pain, mine is lifted by the hands of the One who suffered more than either of us ever could.

I guess we don't need a complicated Spiritual Standards of Care. God's standard is the same as it always has been:

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

Terri Main. Grace and Lace Letter International Issue #2, 1997

SOME THROUGH THE FIRE

by Terri Main

When you've been through the fire, the sparks don't hurt so much!

One of my favorite Old Testament stories is that of the Hebrew Children and the fiery furnace. Certainly, this is a grand story of God's deliverance. Just as a review, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three Hebrews who worked in the palace of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. They were sort of civil servants.

Well, the King decided that he would impose on all his people sort of a state-ordered religious practice. He set up a huge idol (some historians believe it was of himself) to be worshiped when he had musicians play a certain tune. Our trio were the only ones who would not bow to the idol. Just as an aside, there were probably other Jews working for the king, but only Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had the courage not to bow. The king gave them a second chance saying,

“SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, DO YE NOT WORSHIP MY GODS, NOR WORSHIP THE GOLDEN IMAGE I HAVE SET UP? NOW IF YE BE READY THAT AT WHAT TIME YE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE CORNET, FLUTE, HARP, SACKBUT, PSALTERY AND DULCIMER AND ALL KINDS OF MUSICK, YE FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP THE IMAGE I HAVE MADE; WELL: BUT IF YE WORSHIP NOT, YE SHALL BE CAST THE SAME HOUR INTO THE MIDST OF A BURNING FIERY FURNACE: AND WHO IS THAT GOD THAT SHALL DELIVER YOU OUT OF MY HANDS?”

Because Nebuchadnezzar knew his gods were incapable of such a feat he assumed Jehovah to be equally incapable. The Hebrew children, though, stood their ground, saying,

“WE ARE NOT CAREFUL TO ANSWER THEE IN THIS MATTER. IF IT BE SO, OUR GOD WHOM WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US FROM THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE; BUT IF NOT, BE IT KNOWN UNTO THEE, O KING, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE THY GODS, NOR WORSHIP THE GOLDEN IMAGE WHICH THOU HAS SET UP.”

Well, we all know the story from there. The music sounds. Our boys remain standing. The king throws them into the furnace.

The only thing that is burned is their bonds. They are joined by Jesus in the fire. (There is a lesson in and of itself). The king calls them out and gives them each promotions. We never hear from them again. They go back to their jobs and live simple ordinary lives after that. And yet, such an experience could not have left them unchanged.

I like to imagine a scene about six months after this miracle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are working at the palace and Shadrach groans and throws down his quill and says, "It's impossible. We need that shipment of grain from the southern provinces by this winter, but those governors down there are trying to push the price up. The king says nothing doing. And I'm supposed to figure this whole thing out!" But I see Meshach smile and say, "Shad, remember the fire." Then all three of them have a good laugh and get back to work.

The word for salvation in the Greek means both saved and delivered. We certainly are saved out of our sins, and we are saved from Hell. But we are also constantly being delivered from our own fiery furnaces. We all face problems. Some of us face things we don't see any way out of. We face illness, family difficulties, financial problems, persecution, emotional or physical pain.

Most of us who have been saved for a significant length of time can look back and see many times that God has delivered us from problems that have crossed our paths. Some of us are fortunate enough to be able to look back and see places where we have faced extraordinary difficulties, problems which had the potential of destroying us physically, emotionally or spiritually, and where God intervened and brought us through those difficulties. Why we are fortunate is that, like our imaginary conversation in the Babylonian counting room, we can remember the fire when the ordinary challenges of living arise. When you've been through the fire, the sparks don't hurt so much!

So, when my car breaks down or I'm having trouble paying bills or I'm fighting a cold or I think somebody doesn't like me, I can just recall some of the major difficulties I've faced in the past and see the hand of God in them and realize that my God who delivered me out of those things is capable of delivering me out of what is facing me today.

Indeed, I can begin seeing the problems as opportunities to see miracles happen in my life. Off hand, I can think of no great miracle in the Bible which wasn't in response to a problem. If you want to see miracles in your life, you have to face problems. Otherwise, you will live a comfortable life devoid of the

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miraculous. As the old saying goes, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”

Each time you face a difficulty, each time Satan launches an attack, each time you turn back the assault with the help of God you become stronger. You trust more and more to God’s deliverance in times past. At times our armor takes some hits. It gets battle scarred. It gets dented and scratched. At times that shield of faith seems like it is about to crack in two. That’s the very time when Jehovah Shua – God our Salvation – rides in on a white horse and delivers us out of the situation. And those in the world see this salvation and our testimony is strengthened. Because in spite of the dents and scars and cracks, the armor holds and at the end of the battle we “stand ready for the next battle.”

Terri Main

FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO

by Terri L. Main

A group of people from the church show up on your doorstep, and when you invite them in they proceed to tell you that because you are transgendered you are going to Hell. A brother or sister in the church calls you up to share what “the Lord has shown” him or her about your situation and how you need to change your ways or else. Someone hands you a brochure from the local ex-gay ministry as you walk out of church Sunday morning.

For many of us these are all-too-common scenarios. They cause great pain and unwarranted feelings of guilt and shame. They make us avoid the fellowship of other Christians or turn our backs on church and, sadly, sometimes on God. Frequently, once the pain has subsided we experience anger and resentment toward the people involved and use words like “hatemongers” and “bigots” to describe them.

They have crucified us and we want to strike back. However, we need to remember another who was falsely accused, misunderstood, and crucified. In His dying hours He spoke words which have such a ring of truth for transsexuals as well as others when He said,

“FATHER FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.”

When we look at these hurtful situations, we often ask how can we forgive the way Jesus did. The answer lies in the words, “for they know not what they do.” These are not people who have evil intent involved. And, while that does not ease the pain, it can relieve the anger. Very often, their unkind words and actions actually flow from a misguided concern for you.

They are often truly afraid you are doing something which might endanger your soul’s salvation. They are unaware of the distinctions between gender identity and sexual acting out. They don’t want to see you lost. Therefore they often go overboard in their efforts to “reach” you.

Also, your experience is so far outside of their reality that they don’t even have a basis for understanding it. I know it may sound odd to those of us who face gender identity issues, but for most people gender is one of the few certainties of life. It’s something they think little about. They might be confused about their career choices, who they are going to marry, or their

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place in God's plan for this universe, but gender to them is a given. They can't even begin to understand how you feel, and so they often put it into the context of something they can understand. It's a very poor translation, but for many it's the only one they have.

Since they cannot understand our experience, they also cannot understand the pain we feel when they are accusing us ("warning" from their perspective) of sexual immorality or violating God's law when we know that we are living morally, and trying to fulfill His will in our lives. They can't see the turmoil and pain inside of us when people we know and love are telling us that we are going to hell for a condition none of us asked for and can't do anything about.

If this person is someone I knew as a man, there is also the problem of change. Change is always hard on a relationship. A new job, getting married, moving away, all the normal types of changes we face daily, are difficult enough to work into a growing relationship, but a change of identity as fundamental as gender places an even greater strain on that relationship.

Most of our relationships are at least in part driven by gender. What we talk about, how we relate to each other, the words we use, the activities we share often revolve around culturally-defined gender roles. A system develops in our relationships, and when something comes along to change a key factor in that system, the system reacts to resist the change.

Sometimes this resistance can take the form of anger and accusation. These are mostly reactions to frustration and uncertainty. We like predictability in our relationships and gender reorientation challenges that predictability and does indeed demand a change in how that relationship will play out in the future.

A friend or family member may fear that they are losing you and in grieving this loss (which in some ways is a real loss) anger may result. What they don't see at the time is that they may have lost a part of one relationship but they have the seeds of an even better relationship ready to grow with just a little care. In time, many do in fact see this.

They do in fact mean well. And as my mother would say, "Lord, preserve us from well-meaning people." It is frustrating. Very often, they do have closed minds. They are fearful and fear kills communication. Many will turn away entirely, and that is a loss for both of you. But some will listen and learn and over time accept you. A woman who complained about me attending a women's

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group at our church seven years ago is now the leader of the same group, and last year asked me to speak to that same group.

I can hear you saying, "It would take a miracle for that to happen." True. But then three days after Jesus said, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM," there was a disturbance in a graveyard. Forgiveness and rebirth go together. I can never escape the past as long as I hold on to the offense of the past.

And one way I can forgive is to simply understand the great truth that they "KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Terri Main
Grace & Lace Letter International
Issue #2, 1998

By the Grace of God

TRANSGENDERED BLESSING

by Terri Main

LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. —*Matthew 5:16 KJV*

There is a transgendered rights activist group called *Transsexual Menace*. They have done some good work advocating for our rights, but I have a small problem with their group. It's the name. Yes, I understand the point. People see us as a menace, but we aren't going away just because of that, therefore, the "menace" will be around for awhile. My problem from a Christian perspective with the name is that none of us is called by God to be a menace (except maybe to Satan). I would prefer that the name be *Transgendered Blessing* because that is what we are called to be, a blessing.

Now, I can see the objections forming right now. You expect ME to be a blessing to THEM. Do you know how they treated me? Do you know what they said to me? Do you know how many churches threw me out? No, I don't know. I know how they treated me. I know what they said to me. I know I had to leave seven or eight churches before finding a good church that accepted me. But, you see, none of that really matters. Because whatever they did or did not do to me is irrelevant. Jesus said:

"BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU, DO GOOD TO THEM THAT HATE YOU, AND PRAY FOR THEM WHICH DESPITEFULLY USE YOU, AND PERSECUTE YOU;" (*Matthew 5:44 KJV*)

This is not optional. We are to be a blessing. It is a command. Now, unless you have a good explanation about why you disobeyed a direct order from the *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*, we have to start finding ways to be a blessing to those around us.

Of course, there are sometimes practical challenges in fulfilling this command. Some people turn away from us and refuse any attempts from us to bless them. This is hard to take, but I would suggest that those are the very people who need God's blessings most of all. So what are some ways we can be a Transgendered Blessing in our daily lives?

1. *Let Pain Call Out to Pain.* Most of us have faced painful experiences in our lives. That means that we have a natural empathy for those who are hurting.

Many times those who oppose us most vigorously are those who are in the most pain. Look past the insult to the hurting soul. If you have been hurt, do not return the hurt; you would simply be adding pain to pain. Instead, go down on your knees before God for that person. Ask God to help heal that person's pain. And in the process of praying for their pain, you will be amazed to find that your pain fades as well.

2. *Get Involved in the Life of Your Church.* I do understand that we are all in churches representing various levels of acceptance. Some of us are open about our transsexualism. Others of us are not. So there may be some practical limits to this suggestion, but still I think there are various ways we can show forth God in our lives by our service in the local assembly. One way is by regular attendance and supporting the church financially. Another way is to be involved, even in a small way, with the normal ministries of the church. Buy a candy bar from the Sunday School kid. Bring some brownies to the bake sale. Come to mid-week services. Help clean the church. And if you have greater acceptance levels, offer to teach Sunday school and take part in the various women's (or men's) ministry activities.

3. *Be Friendly (even if they are not).* There was a woman in our church who was always pretty cool toward me. She said little to me and her look at me cut right through my soul. The Lord led me to make a special effort every Sunday to shake hands with her and smile. It took about three or four years, but one Sunday she stopped me in the parking lot and said, "I have to apologize to you. I really misjudged you." We are now on very good terms. She even asked me to speak to the church women's group once. I believe that it was due in no small part to my being obedient to God in His command for me to show myself friendly.

4. *Meet the Practical Needs of Others.* If you know someone is sick, can you take over a casserole for dinner? If someone's car breaks down, can you offer a ride to church or the market? If you have a skill which might help a brother or sister in the church can you lay that skill on the altar and use it to glorify God in meeting their needs? Jesus didn't only teach the people, he fed and healed them. He met their practical needs as well as their spiritual ones.

5. *Finally, and most important of all, Pray One for Another.* Sometimes, we toss off a phrase like, "I guess all I can do is pray" as though this were a small thing. Prayer is powerful. Prayer unleashes God's power to work in this world. And the first place He starts working is in your heart and life. For the past couple of months our church has been having daily prayer with

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our families at 7:30 p.m. Each church family at that time turns off the TV, Nintendo, radio, or computer and spends a half hour in prayer and Bible reading. I've noticed such incredible spiritual growth in my life and my ability to help others has grown exponentially. In my prayer time, God keeps giving me ideas and direction for this and other ministries. And you know there are times when I can feel the prayers of God's people going up for me, for *Emergence* or for *Inspiration On-Line*. And when that happens it's like my batteries have been recharged and I can run a little bit longer.

No, I am not a Transgendered Menace, and I may not be a total Transgendered Blessing yet, but today I'm pledging myself to God to turn away from the first and pursue the second with all my heart.

Terri Main
Grace & Lace Letter International
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BILL

by Terri Main

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He is brilliant. Kind of esoteric and very, very bright. He became a Christian while attending college.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students, but are not sure how to go about it. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. The service has already started, so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit and, when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet. (Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this church before!)

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and a three-piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor? It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing.

The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone.

Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, he says, "What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read."

By the Grace of God

A Comment By Terri Main:

You know, I've come face to face with this sort of situation recently. Not on the floor, thank God, since I would probably never get up. I mentioned here that at our Emergence Bible study locally, we had a girl saved. She has lived a rough life, so the only clothes she has are miniskirts. Also during summer in Fresno it is very hot so she wears short sleeves. She passes reasonably well, but during her Macho days she got two tattoos (pretty masculine ones), one on each arm.

In our nice old fashioned conservative Pentecostal church she stands out. Now, mind you, she is as welcome as the flowers in May by the congregation by and large. But she does come from a background that many of us have no direct experience with.

I was dismayed to feel a twinge of shame when I saw her sitting there that first Sunday. I have since repented. But I was reminded by God that it could be me in that miniskirt given different circumstances in my life. I was also reminded that our discipleship program pairs up mature Christians with new believers and that we are to invite them to sit with us and introduce them around. I couldn't very well get around this one, since I was the one who designed the discipleship program and had given the lecture on all of this.

It took just two seconds to ask her to sit with the family (my folks now live down here and I am taking them to church) and not more than another minute to be so glad I did.

Of course, this was less of a risk to me since I am very much out at church. Yet, still, I am very accepted and respected and all that. And to my shame, I felt some transphobia when I saw her enter the door. But love covers all and when God put His love into me that instant of shame vanished. So, tattoos and all, we sit together in church.

Now, for those of you who attend regular, conservative type churches, especially those of you who are not yet out, nor do you plan to be, what will you do when your "Bill" arrives in the form of a transgendered person who may not be pulling it off too well? I hope you will act more honorably than me.

It's a great story, now we all need to put it into action.

Terri Main
Grace and Lace Letter
Christmas, 1999

FINDING A CHURCH HOME

by Terri Main

Nine years ago this summer I moved to the Fresno, California area. I grew up in church. On Sunday I go to church. It's as simple as that. I've done it all my life. I can't imagine not going. So, when I moved down here, I decided to find a church home. Since I was also sure that I would be transitioning, I decided to find a church as Terri. It was not easy, but I finally found one which accepted me just as I was. The journey for both me and the church was not an easy one [Note: You can read part of the story in *The Church*]. We both had a lot of painful growing and learning to do, but God was gracious and taught us well. Finding a church home is difficult in any event, but for the transsexual it can be a monumental task. If we don't pass well, as most of us don't during the early stages of transition, then we face possible condemnation and rejection. If we do pass well, we are faced with the prospect of keeping our gender history a secret and live in fear of it being exposed. Either way, it is a stressful experience. However, as a Christian we need corporate worship on a regular basis. The Bible commands that we not forsake

THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS;
BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER: AND SO MUCH THE MORE, AS YE SEE THE
DAY APPROACHING. (*Hebrews 10:25 KJV*)

We need this type of worship experience. The benefits far outweigh the cost that we might face. Here are a few tips on finding a church home:

1. *Pray before Looking.* Whenever I am advising someone, transgendered or not, on how to find a church home, I advise they humble themselves before God in prayer and ask Him to lead them to the right church. Even if every church door were open to you, not every church is the right one for you. God can lead you to the right church if you let Him do the leading.

2. *Believe that God can Provide.* Do you think it is God's will for you to not find a church home? God is a worker of miracles. I know this for a fact. I attend a very conservative Assembly of God church. It has taken time, but I have full acceptance now. I teach Bible classes for the church, manage our Web site, help write Bible study materials, and train Sunday School teachers.

3. *Don't Lead with your Transsexualism.* I know many transsexuals who call

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the pastor first and ask if a transsexual would be welcome. Put yourself in this pastor's position for a moment. You probably have never met a transsexual in the flesh. Your only knowledge of transsexualism is what you have seen on the talk shows. Now, a person you don't know calls up and asks to come to your church. Wouldn't you be apprehensive? It is much better to just start attending like any other woman (or man). Do your best job of makeup and hair and clothes. Let people get to know you as a person first and as a transsexual later. If later, the pastor or a church member confronts you, be honest and answer any questions. If asked to leave, do so with as much grace as you can muster. If they do not confront you and you have not been read, simply continue to attend as an average woman. If you feel later that your relationship with the church requires it, you can make disclosure. If they know you as a good Christian woman first, it will be easier for them to accept you as a good Christian transsexual.

4. *Don't Expect Total Acceptance.* If you are attending a mainstream church, you can expect that some people won't accept you right at first (assuming they know your transgendered status). I'm sure there are still people at my church who don't accept me, but they are all courteous. Many who had problems with me to start now are quite pleasant and accepting. It takes time for people to get used to things they don't understand. You have to be patient with them.

5. *Persevere.* I went to eight churches and was asked to leave four before coming to Evangel. Almost the moment I walked in the door, I felt the love of God and the witness of the Spirit that I had come home. You have to keep looking. Also be willing to drive a distance to church. My church is 30 miles from where I live. I am willing to drive that distance to worship God with people who care for me. You have to hang in there, though. If Evangel hadn't worked out, I would have gone to others. If I had to arrive late and leave early and sit in the back of the church, I would have gone out of devotion to God. That's no credit to me. That's the way I was raised. The important thing is not to give up after one or two or three or four rejections. Remember, God is faithful, trust in Him to lead you to the body of believers which is right for you.

Terri Main

TRANSSEXUALISM: CURSE, GIFT OR ASSIGNMENT?

by Terri Lynn Main

There's a familiar little test of perception which involves a half glass of water. A person is asked to describe the relationship of the water to the glass. The optimist will say the glass is half full, the pessimist will say it is half empty, the scientist will say it has 2.57 liters of water, and the philosopher will say the question is irrelevant unless one first knows how the glass started out.

Being transsexual is very much like that little experiment with the glass. Many, in fact I'd say the vast majority of us, say it is a curse of nature. We make comparisons to birth defects. We point out the incredible pain which comes from having a brain of one sex with the body of the other.

And this is not to mention the discrimination, humiliation and even danger which comes from outside sources.

Another, much smaller group is emerging which views transsexualism as a gift. They point out that it is a great adventure after all to cross that most mysterious of all frontiers, the gap between male and female. They make the case that we have a greater appreciation of each gender's unique problems and possibilities. They also note that even the painful aspects bring about a quality of endurance which serves us well in all areas of our lives.

And those of us who are Christians add that often the very difficulties of being transsexual have brought us closer to God over the years as we sought solace from the only One who truly understood us. I have to admit over the past decade or so, I've vacillated between these two points of view.

Certainly, it was hard for me to see how anything so painful could in any way be part of the plan of God, so transsexualism had to be a result of the fall, like birth defects.

But at other times, I could see great benefit from my transsexualism as truly appreciating my gender of choice once I could live in it, and in the sense of wonder that transition rekindled in me. But I'm beginning to think that there is a third way of looking at GID, not as a curse to be bemoaned, not as a gift to rejoice in, but as an assignment from the Creator to be carried out.

You see, we so often think that everything is about us, about our needs, about

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our wants, about our comfort.

For those of us who are Christians, we know that everything isn't about us. It's about Him.

When we accepted Christ as our personal Savior, we enlisted in the army of God. God had a plan for us from the beginning of time. He formed us in our mother's womb, and in the process of that formation, He made some of us transsexual. Why do you think He did that? Maybe because He has a job for us to do which requires us to be transsexual.

Now, I know that is difficult to take. I would much rather see this as an accident of nature or a birth defect. In fact, if you read my older writings on the subject, that's exactly what I call it. Or if not a curse of nature, then a blessing of God to give me great joy.

But when I think about it as an assignment that lays a responsibility on me to find out what that assignment entails and then carry it out. For each of us the nature of the assignment will vary. For some it will be to live a simple Christian life with few people knowing our gender histories, but using the strength gained through transition to help other people face difficult times. For others of us it may mean sharing our testimonies with other transgendered people to bring them comfort and salvation from the Lord. Like any work assignment or school assignment, the job may be easy or hard. At times the assignment will be wonderfully enjoyable. At other times it may be a drudgery. But the completion of the assignment always brings about satisfaction and reward from the boss.

So, today, I'm going to forget about bemoaning the curse or loafing in the glories of my transsexualism and get on with the business of completing the assignment in such a way as to please the One who gave it to me in the first place, so that one day I can lay the fruits of that assignment at His feet and hear those wonderful words, *"Well done, Good and Faithful Servant enter now into the joys of the Lord."*

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THE MASTER'S HAND

by Terri Main

WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS THAT THE EXCELLENCY OF THE POWER MAY BE OF GOD AND NOT OF OURSELVES. —II Corinthians 4. 7

I just watched a music video of some singers from our church. I found myself weeping as I listened. The song was an old one and told a simple, but profound, story. It told of an auctioneer trying to sell an old dusty violin. At first, the interest is low. “One dollar, who’ll give me one dollar, who’ll give me two? Two dollars who’ll make it three. Three dollars, twice that’s a good price. Who has a bid for me?”

Then, from the back of the crowd a grey-haired man comes forward. He tightens the strings and begins to play. As he finishes, a hush falls over the crowd and the auctioneer begins again, “One thousand, who’ll give me one thousand? Who’ll give me two? Two thousand who’ll give me three. Three thousand, twice, that’s a good price. Who has a bid for me?”

The people cried out “Why the change in price? We don’t understand!”

The auctioneer stopped and he said softly, “It was the touch of the master’s hand.”

As I listened to that song, tears streamed down my face as I looked at my own life. In so many ways, I see that my life has taken certain twists and turns that to the natural man, it would seem that it would be impossible for me to be used of God. But, I hear an auctioneer explaining, “It was the touch of the master’s hand.”

Many in this life would be rejected by the world system. They are too old or too young, infirm or disabled, have an unsavory past, possess a less than attractive visage, are poor or of humble station in life. But God reaches down His mighty hand, picks them up, tunes the strings and produces beautiful music from an unlikely instrument. It reminds me of another song, “*Little becomes much when it is placed in the Master’s hand.*”

Lord, thank you for redeeming me by Your grace and setting me apart as a vessel of honor in Your house. Amen.

Terri Main

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PRAYING IN EVERY SEASON

by Terri Main

Sometimes you can read something over and over and still miss something important. Then reading it again, it's like God takes His highlighting pen and makes what you've missed so vivid that you can't ignore it. That happened to me as I was studying for this lesson.

As I re-read *Ephesians 6:18* in my Greek New Testament, I saw a phrase which is missing in the English translations that I had. The verse reads in King James,

PRAYING ALWAYS WITH ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION IN THE SPIRIT,
AND WATCHING THEREUNTO WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE AND
SUPPLICATION FOR ALL THE SAINTS.

However, the two words "praying always" are rendered in the original manuscripts

BY ALL KINDS OF PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION PRAYING IN EVERY
SEASON.

It was the phrase "*in every season*" rendered in the Greek *en panti kairw* (εν παντι καιρω) *panti* actually means "all or every kind of" and *kairw* means a specific period of time, but especially a season of the year.

As I read that, I saw a truth deeper than the simple words "Praying always" conveyed. What I saw was that prayer belongs in every season that we pass through in our lives spiritually.

Sometimes we live in the springtime. We are growing. Flowers are blooming. The skies are clear except when we receive our showers of blessing. During these times of blessing, it is easy to forget to pray. It is easy to think that the only time to pray is when we need something. Think about your own children. How would you feel if the only time your son or daughter called you was when he or she wanted something. We need to maintain communication with God whether or not we have a visible need. It is good to share the green meadows with our Father as well as the frozen tundras.

Terri Main

Sometimes we pass through summer. Things get hot. We face the fires of tribulation. We feel our soul is parched for the living water. We, like David, say,

AS THE DEER PANTETH FOR THE WATERBROOK, SO PANTETH MY SOUL
AFTER THEE O LORD.

During these times, He sends the showers of refreshment and feeds us from his table.

Sometimes autumn enters our lives. The green of spring and summer begin to color our lives with reds and oranges and browns. We begin to reap the harvest of seeds sown during the lushness of spring and the heat of summer. And as the chill of winter teases us, we fall on our knees in thanksgiving for His goodness and pray for strength to withstand the storms to come.

Wintertime can chill our souls and threaten to freeze our hearts. The storms rage and we can be tossed by the winds. But we can crawl up into the arms of our Savior and find a shelter in the time of storm. Spring or Autumn, Winter or Summer, any season is right for prayer. As the old song says:

*In Seasons of distress and grief
My Soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return sweet hour of prayer.*

Terri Main

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