FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

References to conferences, resources, or other special promotions may be obsolete.

Talking to Kids about Gender Identity

Guest:	Andrew Walker
From the series:	God and the Transgender Debate (Day 3 of 3)
Air date:	March 28, 2018

Bob: In a day when new thinking, untethered from the Bible, about gender and sexuality is being celebrated in our culture, how does that affect us as parents and where we send our kids to school? We posed that question to Andrew Walker.

Andrew: There's a range of opinions on what parents should do for their kids schooling. But what I'm going to say is this: if your kid is in public school, we are fast approaching a day where the very best thing a Christian parent can hope for in a public-school setting is that a teacher will not be actively hostile to that child's view. Because it's growing increasingly unlikely that that teacher can be affirming or supporting of your child's view.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We are living in a brave new world in many ways. How do we as Christian parents raise our children to live counter culturally in this world? We'll explore that today with Andrew Walker. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. When we were raising our children, I remember the big question that parents would have is "When do you talk to your kids about the birds and the bees?" and "What do you do if your kids come home and they start asking questions about human reproduction before you're ready to have that conversation?" Well, that almost seems laughable today because the questions kids are coming home with in the second and third grade are less about the birds and the bees and more about basic gender issues.

Dennis: I want to use that as a springboard to talk about "How do you prepare your children today to face the issue of transgender in school as they grow up?"

Because they will experience this not just in high school and junior high, but at earlier and earlier years. Andrew Walker joins us again on FamilyLife Today. Andrew, thanks for coming back on a very thorny subject.

Andrew: It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

Dennis: Andrew has written a book called *God and the Transgender Debate*. I didn't ask you on the first day, but why in the world did you tackle this subject? I mean, you've

got a seven-year-old daughter and a three-year-old daughter. Why did you take this one on?

Andrew: Well, first off, because there's virtually no other resource available for lay Christians—the Christians in the pews who can grapple with the transgender issue in a clear accessible—and I would say deeply Biblical way—to handle and address the issue. I would say also as well—I'm really, really interested in these issues of—it's a big theological term called Theological Anthropology.

It's a big fancy word; but anthropology is simply the study of what does it mean to be made in God's image? It's kind of a doctrine of man. I think a lot of the challenges that we're facing in the church today are these issues around what it means to be a human. You look at issues of racism and abortion—reproductive technology issues. All of these questions are emanating back to the central question of "Who is man? "Who made man?" "Who is man accountable to?" And when you look at the transgender issue, there is no issue more foundational to the question of "What is man?" and "What is woman?" than the transgender issue, because the transgender issue is seeking to kind of subvert and overturn a biblical ethic on biological sex and where gender comes from.

Dennis: Andrew—my wife, Barbara, and I are working on a book called the *Art of Parenting*™.

One of the fundamental principles or precepts of that book is that parents have to know what they believe the Bible teaches, increasingly around these issues, as we confront the culture. Because if your going to guide your child into elementary school, into junior high, high school, and beyond to adulthood, you need to know where you stand as a follower of Christ and what you believe. That doesn't mean you have to be a theological anthropologist—[Laughter]—like you just described, but it does mean you have to have a construct—

Andrew: Yes.

Dennis: —theologically of what the Bible teaches around the major moral issues of our day.

Andrew: You are certainly right because we are fast living in a day in America where America is kind of no longer propping up a Christian ethic on many issues at all. And unless Christians—and parents especially—are attentive to these issues, the culture will do the formation and the teaching for you. It's really, really, incumbent on parents to have to do some homework on these issues.

And that's where this is particularly challenging is because I grew up—I'm 32—I grew up in a culture that still kind of affirmed a basic biblical ethic of maleness and femaleness. Parents coming of age today are going to have to go deep on these issues

because the culture is no longer affirming and supporting what they might have grown up when they were children.

Bob: Yes. In previous generations whatever case you were making was in alignment with the culture. Today the case your making is out of alignment with the culture. So, you better have your understanding pretty clear because you're taking a contrary position; not a compatible position. I want to know about the conversations you've had with your seven-year-old who said "Daddy, what's your book about? Daddy wrote a book called *God and the Transgender Debate*." Have you explained transgenderism to a seven-year-old?

Andrew: So, we have talked about the subject without me ever using the term transgender.

Dennis: Okay, let's hear how you did it, because I want to hear that conversation to a seven-year-old.

Andrew: Sure. What I think is really important right now is for my daughter who is seven—she is beginning to come into her own understanding of femininity. So, what I want to do with my seven-year-old is very, very basic things. I want to affirm her femininity, affirm feminine instincts, and have conversations with your child and say, "You know what, isn't it neat how God made you a girl?" I'm not using big convoluted terms like transgenderism with my seven-year-old. But what I'm beginning to do is just subtly work in conversations where she's beginning to understand that how God made her matters, and it's beautiful, and it's not something that we want to reject—or tamper with for that matter.

I would just encourage parents: you don't need to have a long 30 / 45-minute conversation where you sit down and work through the terms with a seven-year-old around the issue of transgenderism.

You're just beginning to build the scaffolding for what a healthy feminine, or healthy masculine identity looks like for a child at that age.

Bob: Some parents have had to deal with this a little more head on when their child came home from school one day and learned that the teacher said that "Susie—we're now going to call Susie Sammy and we need to be careful because Susie is not a girl anymore. Susie is becoming a boy." And the kids have been like "What is that?" They come home "Mom / Dad explain this to me." So, if you're that parent, what do you do in that context?

Andrew: And this is a live issue. I've had one of my closest friends text me about that very circumstance. He was basically asking "What do I do?" In that circumstance, you have to have a different mode of kind of action. That means you have to engage and correct false teaching that your child is getting at the school level. That means you're

saying to your child “I know your teacher might say this, but your teacher is actually wrong because your teacher is teaching contrary to the Bible.

Your teacher is not a bad person, but we just disagree with her right here and you need to believe what mommy and daddy say about these issues in terms of how God made us as boys and girls.” I think more importantly, especially if you’re a parent, your opinion matters just as much as any other parent. It’s appropriate for you to raise concerns with a school administration and say “Listen, I understand there are lots of different opinions on these issues. I think it would be fair—in the interest of fairness—to have different perspectives at play here and not my child’s view made to feel inferior, or bigoted, or discriminatory.”

Bob: The challenge here is that when we were raising our kids we were telling them that you respect the teacher. That the teacher knows what is best. You want to invest in the teacher this sense of authority and this sense of wisdom. Now to say, “Your teacher doesn’t always know what is right.” That sends kind of a mixed message to a child.

Andrew: Yes. Absolutely. This is where we need to have eyes wide open about kids in public schools. There’s a range of opinions about what parents should do for their kids schooling. I’m not going to weigh in on that today. But what I am going to say is this, if your kid is in public school you have got to have eyes wide open. You have got to be asking your children “What is your teacher talking to you about maleness and femaleness? Are they talking about bathroom usage at all?” You need to be having those conversations actively and attentively because chances are the direction we’re going you might have to correct what your child is learning in school.

Because, unfortunately, and with great regret, we are fast approaching a day where the very best thing a Christian parent can hope for in a public-school setting is that a teacher will not be actively hostile to that child’s view. Because it’s growing increasingly unlikely that that teacher can be affirming or supporting of your child’s view.

Dennis: I really like how you handle this subject in your book, *God and the Transgender Debate*. You have a list of several points that you make of ways to prepare your children to encounter these issues in school. You just talked about the first one: Help your child understand that people see reality in different ways. You’re helping your child to know how to love people who think differently, and believe differently, than we do as followers of Christ.

Andrew: What you just said is really important because I think it brings us back to the issue of worldview. We can begin already at very young ages tying gender and sex to this issue of worldview, and understanding that people see reality different, occasionally, if they’re not Christians.

And it means they’re going to have a different value system. What that means is we don’t want to create little Pharisees or little legalists that just want to judge people. This

is a time to talk about a doctrine of sin. That sin roots itself in all people's hearts, and that means there's disagreement about what the best way to live is, and there's disagreement about who God is and what God has revealed about Himself.

Dennis: This was kind of a funny thing that happened when we were raising our kids as they grew up into junior high and high school. We'd be going to a baseball game / a football game and some of their friends would be in the back seat. Occasionally, I'd turn to one of their friends and I'd say, "So tell me about your worldview." My kids would go "Oh Dad! Dad!" Inevitably he would say, "What do you mean worldview?" I'd say "It's how you think about the world and from what moral and spiritual basis. I'd just like to know kind of how you think about it all."

It was interesting to begin to hear kids begin to unravel what they do think about the world. So, the idea of preparing your kids to know what their worldview is and how we think from the Bible; that's a key construct in helping your kids develop a sense of morality.

Bob: With a seven-year-old—if your daughter said, "I want to get a crew cut," how would you respond to that as a parent? What would you be concerned about? How would you approach something like that?

Andrew: I think the first thing to ask is to evaluate whether what the culture believes around gender is appropriate or not. I think it's appropriate that the culture teaches that women traditionally have longer hair. So, I would say "We're not going to do the crew cut because that is something our culture assigns for boys and for men and that's not something that it associates about girls. I don't want you to send the wrong signal about who you are or who your trying to be. So, we're going to just stick with your hair as it is. That means we can maybe style it differently, but we're not going to get a short haircut."

Bob: And we've got to be careful that we don't assign some biblical quality to cultural gender norms and teach kids that if you're a boy, that means that you're going to like sports and if you're a girl, you should stay off the monkey bars.

Andrew: That's right and this is one of those instances where we want to ask is what the church has adopted as a gender norm a proper gender norm based on what the culture is saying. Has the culture kind of gone too far in what it is assigning or expecting males to be? One of the examples I'm most occasioned with here is a lot of churches do wild game dinners, and I'm in favor of wild game dinners; I'm not criticizing those.

Dennis: Good. I'm glad you're not.

[Laughter]

Andrew: That's good, but it sends the signal—

Dennis: I've contributed game to those wild game dinners.

Bob: Rarely. I'll just add it's rarely that he's contributed anything.

[Laughter]

Dennis: Animals are safe with me. They really are.

Andrew: Those dinners, if there's not some nuance to this, they can communicate that masculinity is summed up in wearing camouflage and going hunting.

Bob: Right.

Andrew: It can send the signal to a young man who might be more gentle, or maybe a little bit more effeminate than other boys, that he is not being a biblical man. I look at my own life. I don't like to hunt. I would rather sit in a coffee shop and read. I don't really enjoy watching sports. I couldn't tell you how many people belong on a football field, but I still consider myself biblically masculine.

Dennis: Are you saying my camo vest that I'm wearing in the studio today doesn't fit?

[Laughter]

Andrew: That's between you and your Lord.

[Laughter]

Bob: I want to go back, though, to the crew cut. What if your 25-year-old daughter comes home with a crew cut—what do you do then?

Andrew: If it's an older child, I mean, the most important thing that I tell people is you want to keep that relationship going. And you're not in control of what that 25-year-old is going to do. So, what that means is you *can* control one thing and that's your relationship with them.

And you're going to say to them, "Listen, we might disagree on how you're styling your hair right now, but I love you. And I want you in this house because you're my child. We can disagree, but I want you to know you're loved."

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: One of the conclusions Barbara and I came to by the time we raised six teenagers was the power of peers. What if your daughter were hanging around peers, as they move into junior high and high school, who clearly don't embrace your view of male and female; in fact, embrace what the world is teaching. How would you handle

that? Now, I know again, your daughter is seven right now, but you've immersed yourself in thinking about this in your book, *God and the Transgender Debate*. What coaching would you have for parents in handling that?

Andrew: I think, given the emotional kind of vulnerabilities at stake when someone who's in middle school, first and foremost, I would not want my child around individuals that could influence them poorly. That's not because I'm trying to be a goody two shoes Christian.

Bob: It's because bad company corrupts good morals.

Andrew: That and, also, because how a child is formed in those pivotal years of 12,13, and 14, end up having massive repercussions down the line. So, what I would say to my daughter is "Listen, I understand these are your friends. I'm glad that you love them. I'm glad that you love them even in their difference from us and from you. But because of how they can form you and the habits they could teach you, I don't feel comfortable for you hanging around with them. That doesn't mean you can't be friends with them at school. It doesn't mean you can't talk to them. But what it does mean is that we need to be extra attentive to what you're being exposed to and being formed by because again, you're at a very pivotal age where what you learn right now is going to be super transformative for the rest of your life. So, we want to be kind to your friends. We want to welcome your friends into our home that disagree with us. But as far as you being friends with them, that needs to be done in our oversight."

Dennis: We encountered challenges like this; not around the transgender issue but our son Benjamin had a friend who was rubbing off on him as he grew up through middle school and into high school. We could see it happening. And the more we found out about what he believed and who he was hanging around with, the more it spelled out that Barbara and I needed to have a pro active approach to our son spending time with the other young man. And so, we didn't have a big confrontation say, "We don't want you to spend time with him." We just slowly began to ease our son away from that relationship and make it increasingly difficult to spend time with him and set him up with other friends who were more likely to help him do what was right.

Bob: This is something that is addressed at some length in the *Art of Parenting* video series that's going to be released here in another couple of months. One of the contributors to the series, our friend, Tim Kimmel, talks about your children having asset friends and liability friends.

He says you need to look out and say some friends are asset friends and some friends are liability friends and you want to make sure that your kids are spending most of their time with their asset friends and that they know with a liability friend you can be friends with them but don't take advice from them—don't follow their path because they're not going to lead you in the right direction. You can have that kind of a differentiation even with your kids. Now you don't want them saying to their friends "You're one of my

liability friends," [Laughter] but you can help them understand there are some friends who are going to inspire you to do good and right things. There are some friends who are going to tempt you to do bad and wrong things. Who do you think you should hang out with more? Your good friends or your bad friends.

Andrew: And I think, especially, if your child has expressed faith at this age, this a good time to talk about grace and truth. "We as Christians have these as our values that we want to live by. We don't want to be judging to others or harsh toward others, but this is how we want to live because we think this is what's honoring to God and we want this for your friends as well.

We're not trying to shut you off from your friends all together, but we want you to evaluate how your involvement with your friends is impacting you."

Dennis: Bob is working on a project he referred to earlier called the *Art of Parenting*. One of the experts we interviewed, and is on this video series, is Alistair Begg. I love this one piece he does where he challenges parents to be the parent; not the buddy / not the friend. And he calls it nonsense for a parent to try to get down on the level of a child and just be one of them. Now it doesn't mean you don't go have fun with them / you don't play together. But it does mean that you as the parent take full responsibility for where that child is headed. You train them. You correct them. This is why your children were given to you as parents, so that you could make those corrections while they're at home.

And by the way, I think we also just need to talk again about Passport to Purity and Passport to Identity. As you talk about these tough subjects, I think we need to have a positive illustration of what identity looks like for a follower of Christ. And how a young person, as they move into their adolescent years, develops morality that is able to withstand the cultural winds and not cave in to their peers.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

FamilyLife's mission is to effectively develop godly families, the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. A key part of our mission includes strengthening marriages and families all around the world. We want to do whatever we can do to bring timeless truth to bare on the challenges you face as you seek to strengthen your family.

You can find out more about FamilyLife by visiting our website FamilyLifeGlobal.com. Again that's FamilyLifeGlobal.com. And while you are there click on the radio button to listen to other *FamilyLife Today* broadcasts. Again that's FamilyLifeGlobal.com.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

FamilyLife: Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

Copyright © 2018 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.