

PODCAST START:

Brian: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

Fr. Shay: Where each episode, we take a queer look at the week's lectionary readings. We're the cofounders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns —

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

FS: Welcome back! Today, we are taking a break from the lectionary to answer some of the questions that have come in as we talk about transgender issues and faith this month. So, we've gotten a *ton* of questions. We're going to answer a couple of them today; the rest we're going to answer on the webinar which is coming out really shortly. We'll tell you more about that later. First, let's just dive into these questions. The first one is — someone wrote in and asked, "How can we fully prove, without a doubt, that being transgender in all of the multiple ways is not a sin, isn't against what God set us out to be, and is our true, full self." So Brian, I'd love for you to talk about what you think about this question.

B: Oh, boy. There's a lot here! Before we even get into the 'how do you know it's okay to be trans' question that is at the heart of this question, I think that there's something important about the context of this question that we have to address, and that is how it begins. "How do we fully prove, without a doubt?" That part of the question just resonates with me so much. I'm not trans, I'm cisgender, but when I was trying to figure out if it was okay quote-unquote to be gay, or bi, I was just so fixated on this, like, I have to know, fully proven, without a doubt. Perhaps it's my math-science brain that's like, two plus two equals four? Or it doesn't equal four... what is the right answer? That set me out on this journey of like, searching down every single article that I could find, and looking to see what we all the arguments for and against, and the arguments against the for arguments and the arguments against the against arguments... I just ended up on this hamster wheel. I was just running in place and not getting anywhere. There was always a counterargument to the counterargument to the counterargument. When we talk about things like faith, there's an element of *faith* in there, right? You're never going to fully prove without a doubt anything about faith. Sometimes we can disprove things about faith. You know, we talk a lot about maybe what didn't happen, but we can never know for sure for sure anything. I think that letting go of this idea that there's just one correct answer, and if I just find the perfect argument then I will believe it, or if I just find the perfect argument then my parents will accept me, or if I just find the perfect argument my pastor will baptize me or call me by the correct name... there isn't a perfect argument for or

against being trans, or being queer, or being celibate, or being sexual, or *most* things when it comes to faith. We have to read and study and pray and meditate and be in community with people, and listen to our minds and the callings of the spirit, and do our best to make a faithful decision. This idea that there's, like, a correct answer just hidden, waiting to be uncovered – it's not helpful, and it will get in the way of wholeness and will get in the way of a deep, meaningful faith. What about you, Shay? How do you know that it's okay to be trans?

FS: Yeah, I mean, I agree with everything that you just said. I think that the other kind of danger of this idea that there's one correct answer is that, like, if you know yourself to be trans, and you find this one correct answer, and it says it's *not* okay, then like – what do you do with that? Right? Does that mean that God has created you to be miserable forever? That God has created you to not transition? I just think that's a really dangerous place to be in for the mental health and wellbeing of transgender people. I just don't believe that God is that capricious with our selves. I think that, for me – I know that I'm trans, and I know that God is loving, therefore God must be okay with me being trans. That's kind of the bottom line for me. I believe that God desires my wholeness and health, I believe that God desires me to be fully who I am. I believe that when Jesus says, "I've come that you may have abundant life," that this is what he was talking about. Health and wholeness and a full embodiment of everything – that, to me, is what I know of God, what I've experienced of God. That has freed me up from this idea that, like, I need to know what the Bible says. Cause, like, what we've talked about when we talked about sex – the Bible says a lot of things, and they sometimes contradict one another. So how do you choose? I think you go with your gut. You go with who you know God to be. And you do your best. I think that's enough, and that's beautiful. And that's part of what it means to be someone who is trying to follow Jesus. We don't always get it one hundred percent, but we do walk in faith, trusting in the goodness of God. I think that that's enough.

B: Yeah, absolutely. You sort of already touched on this, but another question that we got is, "Can you talk about ways in which you have leaned into an acceptance of your gender identity outside of the intellectual part of it, or ways that you think can be helpful?"

FS: Yeah, this was really big for me, especially when I was just – when I was in therapy, and I was deciding if I was going to do a medical transition. I really wanted to, like, come up with an intellectual understanding of gender. I wanted to make sure that I was *really* trans and that this was *really* the right call for me, and I remember that there was this moment when I realized that the things that were holding me back were fears that were external to myself. Right? I was worried

that I wasn't going to be ordained. I was worried that I would never find a job. I was worried that my partner at the time would leave me. I was worried that my family would disown me. And there was this moment where I realized that, you know, even if all of those things happened, I was still trans, and I still needed to do this for my own sense of wellbeing. And when I had that realization, it was like – Oh! Absolutely this is the right choice, and this is the path I need to be on, and I'm going to go do it. I think that that was a moment where, it was kind of intellectual but it was also realizing – where are the fears coming from? Are they coming from inside you or are they really external? And if they're external, then I think you have to figure out how to kind of break away from those external fears. But I also think that there's a lot of work to be done on integrating your identity with who you are. My first piece of advice is to be patient with yourself. It takes time. Doubts will come up. And I think that that's natural! When you live in a society that constantly tells you that it's not okay to be who you are, of course you're going to internalize some of that. Part of the work of healing is to learn how to not listen to that. I think, too, that you just have to learn to replace the voices that are really negative with voices that are positive. I wrote an article a couple weeks ago, and we posted it on our website, that has three steps to really doing this work of embracing your identity and learning to love yourself. We'll post a link to that article in the show notes, because I think that those steps are really helpful.

B: Yeah, as someone who has sort of been on my own journey figuring out how to be in right relationship with trans folks, there can also be a temptation for people who love trans folks or want to be allies, or don't necessarily want to be allies but think they need to love trans people by fixing them – it can feel like we have to have an intellectual argument all figured out first, before we can start to love people. Or, quote-unquote approve of it, or whatever that means. Just like it's important for trans people to do the work to unlearn all of the negative messages about what it means to be trans, of course it's important for *cis* people to also do the intellectual work of understanding as best we can what it means to be trans, and the reality of gender, but there's also an element of – you know, I love that passage in Matthew about judging a tree by its fruits. At some point you just have to start judging trees by their fruit, and really sort of leaning into the command to love your neighbor as yourself. For me, there was this point where my best friend, who's trans, needed to go buy some stuff from the store, and didn't want to have to deal with the clerk being weird about it, and was trying to change his name, and it was a really big hassle in New York to change your name – and I was like, "This is just shitty for my friend. He shouldn't have to go through this." And to be a good friend means to support him in all the ways he needs to be supported – whether that means buying something for him so he doesn't have to, or going with him to the court house, or just being a safe space

that he can vent to. So, like, yes – it's important for cis folks to understand as best we can the trans experience. It's also important for us to sometimes set aside that need to intellectually understand everything and just trust trans people when they say, "This is what I need." To just do that. And you don't have to understand it. [laughs] Sometimes you might not necessarily even agree with it – like, "Well, I don't think that's the most helpful thing!" But if a trans person is like, "This is actually what I need!" You just have to let go of the intellectual for a second, and lean into love, and be there to support them in the ways that they need support.

[outro music plays]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at QueerTheology.com, which provides resources, community and inspiration for LGBTQ Christians and straight cisgender supporters.

FS: To dive into more of the action, visit us at QueerTheology.com. You can also connect with us online on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker