

God's Good Gift of Sex and Gender

Lesson 4: Same Sex Attraction, Sexual Sin, and Temptation

Why does God care about my sex life?

Common Assumptions About Sexual Sin

1. *It doesn't harm anyone (review from last week)*

- a) Sex outside of marriage does harm marriages (power to unite, power to destroy)
- b) Pornography does harm others (abuse in sex industry)
- c) Our sex saturated culture imposes physical and psychological harm

2. *It doesn't affect me*

- We base our self-worth on our sex appeal. To be a virgin or single (not in a relationship) becomes a reflection of identity.
- Pornography changes your brain chemistry: Psychiatric research has demonstrated that our brain changes upon the type of stimulation it receives. Pornography literally changes the way our brain thinks. In other words, viewing pornography is forming you to become a different person than you are now.¹

3. *My Identity is Not a Religious Issue*

- **Deuteronomy 5:21** *"And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*
- **Colossians 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
- Does the Creator have the ability to define what it means to be human?

Same Sex Attraction and Sexual Sin

I. The Non-negotiables for those committed to scripture's authority

1. We agree that marriage is a union of one man and one woman, and that this union is the only proper context for the intimacy of a one flesh relationship.²
2. The Bible frames sex between man and woman as a good thing only when it exists within the covenant of marriage. Sexual behavior outside of marriage is sinful.³
3. Sexual sin is not limited to outward behaviors. Lust and desires for unlawful sexual activity is sinful.⁴
4. Homosexual behavior and homosexual lust are both sinful.⁵

¹ "In Bondage to Pornography: What you watch determines what you want" by Carl Trueman, *First Things* Feb. 20, 2015

² Westminster Confession of Faith 24.1; Gen. 2:24; Matthew 19:6.

³ Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138; Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:20; Dt. 22:22; Prov. 6:32; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4

⁴ Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138-139; Matt. 5:28; Mark 7:20-23; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:3, 5.

⁵ Lev. 18:22, 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Tim. 1:10.

5. The Fall has affected our whole being, so that there are no uncorrupted expressions of sexual desire or behavior. All people experience and contribute to the sexual brokenness of humanity. “Normal” sexual behavior is not a present reality.⁶

6. We agree that all of us stand in need of the gospel and that no human is beyond the saving power of Christ. This means that same-sex attracted men and women can be saved by the atoning work of Christ.⁷

Despite this consensus, there are several questions that are not as clear from scripture. These questions are debated by Christians who desire to be obedient to scripture.

Is same-sex orientation itself sinful? Does sanctification require same-sex attracted Christians to pursue heterosexual attraction? Can same-sex attracted Christians use the term “gay” in describing themselves? Is someone who acknowledges same-sex attraction ordainable?

(1) Is Same-Sex Orientation Sinful?

It is important to note that sexual orientation is a relatively new concept. Ancient writers, including the biblical authors, did not have the same concept for what we call sexual orientation.⁸ It is anachronistic to think that Paul’s condemnation of those who practice homosexuality is equivalent to what we understand as homosexual orientation.

Orientation has its origins in movements that sought to repudiate Christian categories of sin (psychiatry and philosophy, mid-19th Century). This has led some to advocate abolishing the term “sexual orientation” altogether.⁹

What does “orientation” mean?

If you equate homosexual orientation with sexual desire for members of the same sex, then there is no debate. Scripture is clear that that desire is sinful.

Scripture is explicit that sin is not limited to outward actions.¹⁰ Jesus states it plainly in Mark 7:

“[20] And he said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.’”
(Mark 7:20-23, ESV)

Jesus’ words on the Sermon on the Mount demonstrate that the Seventh Commandment includes more than the act of adultery; lust is also sinful (Matt. 5:28). Elsewhere, Paul can

⁶ WCF 6.4-5; Rom. 1:24-27; Rom. 3:10-18; Gal. 5:19-21.

⁷ 1 Cor. 6:11; John 3:16; Rom., 5:8; 1 John 1:9.

⁸ Loader, William, “Homosexuality and the Bible” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)*. Zondervan: 17-48.

⁹ Hannon, Michael W. “Against Heterosexuality.” <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/03/against-heterosexuality>

¹⁰ See note 3 above.

list evil desires among sins to be mortified. Both passages target the same noun/verb (*ἐπιθυμέω/ἐπιθυμία*) translated lust or desire. Not all uses of *ἐπιθυμέω/ἐπιθυμία* are evil, but when desiring something sinful the desire itself can be called evil. Paul uses such an adjective in Col. 3:5.

What if you didn't choose to have these desires? Is it still sin if you never asked to be gay?

I would hope that no Christian would choose the particular sin that they struggle with. To claim that you have no need to repent because you did not willingly choose the type of sinful desire misunderstands the nature of sin.

The real issue lies in our view of the nature of humanity. Those in the Augustinian tradition see humanity not in a neutral position freely choosing between good and evil but corrupt in nature and inclined to evil.¹¹

Is it biological or genetic?

In our fallen world, there are some genetic predispositions toward sinful behavior. What if it is discovered that homosexuality is a result of a biological predisposition (scientific evidence thus far points against a “gay gene”¹²)? In these cases, the disposition does not legitimize the behavior. We are still responsible for how we respond to our dispositions.

Many Christians claim they didn't ask to have these desires and would gladly give them up, if possible. Whether one has unwanted homosexual desires from nature or nurture, the church should respond sympathy and support while encouraging them to battle this sin. Heterosexual Christians should be challenged to examine and mortify some of the more “respectable sins” that often receive less attention than homosexual sin.

Does orientation come before sinful desire? What is the distinction between temptation and sinful desire?

At this point it is necessary to work with a definition of sexual orientation. The American Psychological Association definition begins like this:

“Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.”¹³

We'll get to the question of identity later. Here it is important to discuss the first sentence, particularly the idea of a pattern of attraction.

There is such a thing as temptation that does not lead to sin 1 Cor. 10:13

¹¹ WCF 6.4

¹² <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02585-6>

¹³ “What is sexual orientation?” <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation>

[13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

There are temptations that can be brought on by latent internal sinful desires, but there are external temptations from which a Christian can escape.¹⁴ It is our Christian duty to resist temptation.

Christians face these moments all the time. Seeing an attractive woman does not always and necessarily bring a heterosexual man to desire to have sex with her.

On this basis, Preston Sprinkle argues that “orientation” itself is not sinful:

“For instance, when I say that I’m heterosexual that means that I’m attracted to women. It describes my sexual orientation. Whether I’m sleeping or awake, whether I’m studying or when I’m at the beach, I never cease to be heterosexual. I’m attracted to females; that’s my orientation. This doesn’t mean that I’m slobbering around 24/7 wanting to [have sex with] every female I see. That would be lust, not attraction. Put differently: My experienced (conscious) desire to have sex with someone is a narrow part of my OSA [opposite-sex attraction], but it doesn’t constitute my OSA. And being heterosexual also doesn’t mean that I’m only opposite-sex attracted to my wife. That’s not what OSA means. My opposite-sex attraction certainly includes my wife, but isn’t limited to my wife. I’m opposite-sex attracted to the female species, though I’m in love with and (should only) sexually desire my wife.

Therefore, living in the constant state of opposite sex attraction isn’t sinful, even though it’s only okay for me to act on that attraction with one member of the female species. Likewise, living in the constant state of same-sex attraction doesn’t mean that someone is living in a 24/7 state of morally culpable sin. Again, one doesn’t cease to be SSA when they are sleeping.”¹⁵

This conclusion is debatable. It all depends on what you mean by orientation.

- If you equate homosexual orientation with sexual desire for members of the same sex, then there is no debate. Scripture is clear that that desire is sinful. A Christian must repent of having these desires. Failure to repent for these desires will compromise your Christian faith.
- If, however, orientation means a pattern of temptation that does not rise to lust, it is itself not sinful. If you resist turning these temptations into lust but still experience the temptations, are you failing? We don’t want to confuse temptation with sin.
- The major problem has to do with orientation being elevated to a position of identity formation.

¹⁴ Exegesis of Galatians 5:16f, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” would also be enlightening here, but time prohibits.

¹⁵ Sprinkle “Is Same Sex Attraction Sinful?” <https://www.prestonsprinkle.com/blog/2014/12/is-same-sex-attraction-sinful>

(2) Does Sanctification Require Same-Sex Attracted Christians to Desire Sexual Attraction to the Opposite Sex?

The now disbanded ministry *Exodus International* led many to believe that faithfulness to Christ would result in an overall change in sexual orientation. That led many to disillusionment and despair.

Christians can and should, of course, pray that God would free same-sex attracted Christians from their sinful sexual desires, never to be tempted by that sin again.

One might even pray that God would create sexual desires for members of the opposite-sex. But, sexual attraction to the opposite sex is not a goal of sanctification. Sexual desire for one's spouse of the opposite sex is a godly thing, but sexual desire is nowhere in scripture described as a path to holiness nor the destination. If same-sex attracted Christians are taught that sanctification looks like marriage and family, we are misrepresenting the call to submit our entire lives to Christ.

(3) Can same-sex attracted Christians use the term "gay" in describing themselves?

Why would someone who has given their life to Christ choose to identify as "gay"?¹⁶

First, they believe the full range of the term matches their experience. Hill writes:

"[W]e live in a constantly changing world, and many modern Westerners—especially, but not only, younger people—recognize that "being gay" today is a *cultural identity*. It's a community designation ("gay community"); it names a way of being in the world ("gay culture"); it involves a continuous narrative ("when I came out... my gay friends..."); and it can exist even before or without lust and behavior (think of how many teenagers you know came out before their first kiss). It isn't identical to "lust" or even "desire."¹⁷

Others are concerned that the term "gay" is fundamentally identity-forming and thus is incompatible with being a Christian. Rosaria Butterfield, who considers herself a "former lesbian," argues that a Christian must define his or her identity around Christ alone.¹⁸

Side A and Side B Christians

So-called "Side A Christians" are those who believe that they can follow Christ while affirming homosexual identity and practice. Side A Christianity is incompatible with the Bible's call given everything stated above.

"Side B Christians"—"*People attracted to the same sex, though remaining celibate in obedience to the Bible, still can call themselves 'gay Christians' and see their attraction as a part of their identity which should be acknowledged like one's race or nationality.*"

¹⁶ To avoid confusion, we are limiting our discussion only to those evangelical Christians who are committed to the biblical concept sex exclusively in the context of marriage between man and woman, and who otherwise practice celibacy and strive to mortify their sinful sexual desires.

¹⁷ Hill "On Disagreeing about 'Homosexuality'" A Thought Experiment

<https://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/12/17/on-disagreeing-about-homosexuality-a-thought-experiment/>

¹⁸ Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*,

Tim Keller notes, “as far as I know, **there is not one PCA court — not one session, presbytery, or agency — that has ever endorsed Side B Christianity.**”¹⁹

The PCA’s Ad-Interim Committee on Human Sexuality considered this Side B view and clearly rejected it. That report was overwhelmingly commended as “biblically faithful” at the last General Assembly and approved without objection for distribution among our churches.

(4) Can Someone Who Is Same-Sex Attracted Be Ordainable in the PCA? Two proposed amendments to our Book of Church Order failed this year. How should we understand that?

16-4. *Officers in the Presbyterian Church in America must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. Those who profess an identity (such as, but not limited to, “gay Christian,” “same sex attracted Christian,” “homosexual Christian,” or like terms) that undermines or contradicts their identity as new creations in Christ, either by denying the sinfulness of fallen desires (such as, but not limited to, same sex attraction), or by denying the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, or by failing to pursue Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions are not qualified for ordained office.*

BCO 21-4e *In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the presbytery shall give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, child sexual abuse, fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, racism, and financial mismanagement. Careful attention must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful desires. The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he must not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of the pastoral office, Presbyteries are encouraged to appoint a committee to conduct detailed examinations of these matters and to give prayerful support to candidates.*

Why did these two amendments fail? The reasons for votes against the overtures were diverse.

- Some thought it would exclude some people unfairly
- Some saw loopholes in grammar that would not achieve intended goals
- Some thought the wording confusing
- Some dislike change and saw it as unnecessary from other things stated

It is unhelpful to see this vote as a sign of our denomination’s future. Some of the no’s came from presbyteries that trend toward our most conservative ranks.

¹⁹ <https://byfaithonline.com/whats-happening-in-the-pca/>