

Same-Sex Attractions and Gender Dysphoria

Part 1: A Christian Response

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Over the last several decades, we have witnessed significant changes in the way our culture views human sexuality. Christians commonly express dismay at the rapidity of changing views on sexuality. But the shifts toward approval of same-sex relationships and redefinitions of gender, though appearing to be sudden changes, are but recent dominos to fall in a long line of ideological shifts. And they are not likely to be the last.

Once ideas become entrenched in a culture's way of thinking and living, they permeate the atmosphere so pervasively we scarcely notice them. It's just the way things seem to be. But many ideas we see as normal today would have been strange to people of other eras, which means that many young people growing up in our current cultural setting will see a same-sex relationship or a transgender person as representing an alternative sexuality more than something wrong or strange.

Where have we come from?

Tracing ideological shifts through centuries always carries the risk of oversimplification. Furthermore, people have different evaluations of cultural shifts. What Christians lament as moral slide is hailed by others as cultural advancement. And yet, even as we recognize limitations in our perspectives, we are called to discern the times, to be alert to new forms of old lies, and to test what is highly esteemed in the world by God's unchanging truth.

Let's consider five contributors to the current ideas on human sexuality.

1. The Enlightenment and the shift toward human reason

Much of the mindset in western thought has its roots in the Enlightenment with its emphasis on reason and logic, and away from trust in divine revelation. With reason enthroned, human understanding began shifting in many arenas—for example, away from rule by monarchy toward rule by the people, away from revelation as an accepted way of knowing truth toward empirical or evidence-based knowledge, and away from religious control toward freedom of religion and on to freedom from religion.

Reason certainly has its place. Christians do not reject reason or logic. But when severed from faith in God, human reason easily leads to heady trust in our own understanding, succumbing to Satan's lies, and rejecting God's directions.

2. Naturalism and the denial of God

The nineteenth century shift away from a theistic worldview toward naturalism (denying everything supernatural) was a seismic shift.¹ If there is no God, other explanations are needed for nature, for morality, and for human consciousness and purpose. Charles Darwin provided a naturalistic explanation for life forms in his *Origin of the Species* to replace the Christian understanding of Creation by God's command.

For some philosophers, like Nietzsche, the logical conclusion of denying everything supernatural was nihilism—a denial of ultimate meaning and purpose. If humans are no more than atoms

1 For a historical overview that traces the shifting worldviews from theism to deism to naturalism and onward, see James Sire. *The Universe Next Door*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

and tissue, electrical impulses and chemical interactions (nature), what is thought or reason or human purpose? Do we even think? Is everything simply an illusion? The very attempt to explain the denial of meaning is self-defeating and contradictory. Nihilism leads to an intellectual and spiritual dead-end with no way out.

3. Existentialism and the emphasis on the present

By the mid-twentieth century, existentialism was becoming a popular worldview, attempting to retain the basic tenets of naturalism but avoid the despair of nihilism. While existentialists denied ultimate meaning and purpose, they believed individuals could create meaning by living and acting authentically in the present. The only real existence we have, they said, is now. We don't have the past, and we don't have the future. All we have is the present. We exist only as we act on what is now. Existentialists de-emphasized empirical, scientific knowledge and instead emphasized experiential understanding.

A focus on defining the meaning of life by one's personal experience encourages experimentation, self-indulgence, promiscuity, and subjective viewpoints. The most well-known and influential existentialist, Jean Paul Sartre, lived in an open relationship with Simone de Beauvoir, a radical feminist, and together they committed never to marry each other and meanwhile seduced gullible female admirers into sexual relationships with both of them.

With the denial of God, the denial of objective morality, and the emphasis on meaning and purpose only in the present and according to one's own experience, existentialism became the underlying worldview of the hippie movement. Free love and anti-establishment protests became the new norms.

4. Humanist psychology and the enthronement of the self

At the same time existentialism was turning young people loose on drugs and sex and a new kind of music, humanist psychology was becoming popular in the universities. Carl Rogers promoted person-centered counseling in which the "counselor" was advised not to counsel. He or she should act only as a mirror to help a person discover his or her own answers to life's problems. Fellow humanist Abraham Maslow taught that human fulfillment was need-driven and that the ultimate human need was self-actualization, achieving one's full potential. These ideas enthroned the self, making "my dreams" and "my development" and even "my truth" the guiding principles of life.

5. Postmodernism and the era of subjective truth

With God dethroned and every self enthroned, there is no objective standard for either truth or morality. Whatever a person believes is true, is true for that person, and whatever a person believes is right, is right for that person. And supposedly there is tolerance for all, which regarding sexuality, has been not only tolerance for but promotion of sexual exploration and diversity. Yet, there is strong intolerance for anyone claiming there is objective truth and morality established by God to which all are called to submit.

Furthermore, the enthronement of self, coupled with denial of the supernatural, rejects all sense of humans bearing God's image. This gives "freedom" to mar or alter the body according to personal desire or design.

Where are we now?

Philip Reiff, a philosopher from the mid-20th century, traced the shifting perceptions of what it means to be human from ancient times to the present, ending with what he called the "psychological man."² Drawing from Sigmund Freud and the ensuing lineup of psychologists who analyzed the human psyche and eventually legitimized and then idolized the self, Reiff says the psychological man:

- Believes life is about becoming all that I can be, and only I know what that is.
- Believes reality rests strongly on feelings; consequently, authenticity is about being true to my feelings.
- Assumes that others owe it to me to help me become my true self.
- Asserts that anyone who questions my perceptions of myself is being hurtful and hateful.
- Believes that being true to myself is a sacred right and needs legal protection.³

How has this shaped the current understanding of sexuality?

As we noted, Sartre and his mistress led the way for many people in popularizing uninhibited sexual expression, but the movement was fed by celebrities and other influences including popular music icons like Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and the many musical groups and stars that followed, each attempting to outdo the other in smashing moral boundaries. Television and then movies contributed their part, constantly shifting the criteria for what was considered permissible for public viewing. For today's audience, sex appeal is a given for movies to have any hope of audience interest. The advent of the internet opened another floodgate toward the sexualization of culture, with graphic pornography surpassing every other internet usage and source of revenue. Even advertisers hawk their products on sex appeal.

All these contributors have fed the perception that sexuality is core to human identity.

And because authenticity is judged by feelings, what any person feels himself or herself or themselves to be, that he is, or she is, or they are. Pronouns become rights. Dating sites no longer list only male or female as options for the gender of participants. Some list as many as fifty options. A recent post on HealthLine was titled, "68 Terms That Describe Gender Identity and Expression."⁴

2 For an overview of Reiff's views, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020, especially Chapter 1: "Reimagining the Self."

3 This list summarizes and conflates Reiff's descriptions and Trueman's analysis.

4 Mere Abrams and Sian Ferguson. "68 Terms That Describe Gender Identity and Expression." Healthline, February 9, 2022. <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders>.

Terms have taken on new meanings, and new terms are constantly being added. Sex and gender, for example, “used to be synonymous... but ever since the late 1960s, the terms sex and gender have been used to describe different aspects of our male and female experience.”⁵ In today’s terminology, “sex” refers to a person’s biology, whereas one’s “gender” is the inner sense one has about being male or female or both or neither or other. With identity resting on one’s inner feelings, a person may, for example, be a biological male but identify as a female with same-sex attractions. Rachel Dolezal is a white person who identified as black until she was outed by her parents and largely rejected by the black community.⁶ A person might even identify as an animal.⁷ When one’s perceptions of oneself are not only legitimized, but given legal rights and considered sacred, the possibilities seem limitless.⁸

How should Christians respond?

Before looking at positive responses, we ought to note that Christians have not always responded well. Calling people derogatory names, belittling them, making jokes, and shouting condemnation are examples of responses that not only show disrespect, but also reveal self-righteousness and bring dishonor to Jesus and His true followers.

Taking an opposite response, many churches and church leaders are shifting with the cultural movements, not only permitting active homosexual relationships, but celebrating them in the name of Christian love.

In an article as brief as this, it is impossible to cover all these issues in depth, but we would like to offer five biblical responses:

1. Christians should affirm and teach God’s guidelines for our sexuality.

Given our cultural shift toward the idolization of the self, one of our greatest challenges today is affirming that life and meaning and purpose are anchored in God, not in ourselves. The good life is not about fulfilling our dreams or being our “true selves,” but about joining God’s grand story and bringing all that we are into oneness with His good intentions for us. To follow Jesus, we are called to deny ourselves, to lay down everything, even our lives, for Him (see Luke 9:23-26).

5 Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2021, p. 40.

6 Rachel Dolezal was a prominent activist for the black community, but when she was discovered to be white, she was forced to resign as president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Chris McGreal, “Rachel Dolezal: ‘I Wasn’t Identifying as Black to Upset People. I Was Being Me.’” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/13/rachel-dolezal-i-wasnt-identifying-as-black-to-upset-people-i-was-being-me>.

7 Kat Lyons, for example, wears ears and a tail and identifies as a cat. Faima Bakar, “Woman, 31, Who Identifies as a Cat Says Her Boyfriend, 52, Enjoys It.” *The Metro*, October 31, 2019. <https://metro.co.uk/2019/10/31/woman-who-identifies-as-cat-says-its-brought-her-closer-to-boyfriend-whos-21-years-older-11016112/>.

8 The “+” in LGBTQ+ recognizes the proliferation of sexual identities. For some time, there was significant tension between the lesbian/gay community and the trans community. But they eventually united in the pursuit of equal rights, and the acronym LGBT took hold. Q was added to include queer, and then + was added to be inclusive of all sexual identities and expressions.

Christopher Yuan, a man who identified as a gay for years and turned to the Lord through his mother's love and prayers, says God's guidelines for our sexuality can be stated simply as "chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage"⁹ (marriage being a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman). Any sexual expression outside of those guidelines is sinful, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether in action or in the imagination, whether private or with partners, whether consensual or not.

God's guidelines are not intended to limit our joy or fulfillment, but to preserve them. The increasing sexual permissiveness of the last half century has not made people better or happier. It has been a "freedom" into broken families, divorce, heartache, confusion, children who don't know their parents, parents who don't want their children, abortion, fighting, and neglect.

Today we can find theologians and preachers who reinterpret the biblical passages to allow for same-sex relationships and other deviations from God's guidelines. But although same-sex relationships were practiced in the surrounding cultures of God's people in both testaments, there are no positive or affirming references to homosexuality in the Bible. Same-sex relationships are outside of God's guidelines along with adultery, incest, lust, prostitution, and sex with animals.¹⁰

The Scriptures do not directly address transitioning from male to female or vice versa, but they clearly teach male and female distinctiveness as God's design (Genesis 1, 2). As believers, our whole being belongs to the Lord, and our bodies specifically. "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Our highest calling with our body is not to align with our feelings or to be true to ourselves but to glorify God and to dedicate even the body's "members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13).

The changing cultural attitudes toward deviations from God's guidelines call us to careful study of God's Word and faithful teaching to anchor our hearts in truth.

2. Christians should be willing to interact with people who have same-sex attractions or who adopt non-traditional gender identities.

For many people with same-sex attractions, especially for those having grown up in Christian homes, these attractions are typically unwanted, and there is significant shame and fear associated with the attractions. These people find it immensely helpful to have someone who will be confidential and caring to talk to about their same-sex attractions. Every person's setting and background is unique, and when a person can confide in an understanding Christian from his or her own background, it can be significant in bringing healing and growth.

For others, especially those exposed to the social pressures promoting deviant sexual expression, dabbling in same-sex relationships can be a way to find acceptance, assert

9 Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018, p. 47.

10 For a list of pertinent Scriptures, see "Resources."

independence, or establish identity. But even if a person has deliberately chosen deviant sexual attractions or behaviors, we should view the person as Jesus would and be willing to engage with that person in truth and love (see Matthew 9:10-13).

Although attitudes in our culture have become more accepting of sexual deviations, people with same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria¹¹ often face teasing, bullying, rejection, and disrespect. As followers of Jesus, we should be especially sensitive to those who are marginalized. Many of those with deviant sexual desires and behaviors expect condemnation from Christians precisely because we hold to God's guidelines for our sexuality. But we can show kindness and respect for people and treat them with dignity even when we disapprove of their behaviors.

Specifically, we can engage them in conversation (as Jesus did with the woman at the well in John 4). We can ask them questions, take interest in problems they are facing, listen to their story, show compassion for their distress, and engage them in the deeper questions of life's meaning and purpose. The underlying problem for all people is alienation from God because of our inclination to go our own way. In this sense, people with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria are no different from anyone else. This doesn't mean that all sin is equal or has equal consequences, but that all sin has the same source.

3. Christians should exercise awareness and Christ-like sensitivity in the way they talk about and engage with LGBTQ+ issues.

Christians should be aware of terms that have taken on new meanings and should avoid being offensive unnecessarily. Sometimes the truth is offensive. But there is surely a difference between saying homosexual behaviors are contrary to God's design and using terms we know to be derogatory.

Still, this can be a thorny issue, and not all Christians come to the same conclusions about how much we should accommodate the language preferences or appearance preferences in the LGBTQ+ communities. Words, clothing, and gestures are often laden with meaning and ideology. Same-sex and trans communities have highlighted terms that are offensive and have manipulated language to make their lifestyle more appealing (adopting the term "gay," for example).

Trans people want to be referred to according to pronouns of their chosen gender—or sometimes using the plural "we, us, they, them," etc., rather than either gender. Here Christians are divided, some making a strong case that the use of "he" for a transman is participating in a lie.¹² Others

11 The term "gender dysphoria" refers to the condition of having stress or tension due to feeling different from or desiring to be different from one's biological sex.

12 See, for example, John Piper, *He or She? How Should I Refer to Transgender Friends?* Ask Pastor John, 2015. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/he-or-she-how-should-i-refer-to-transgender-friends>. See also the "Nashville Statement," Coalition for Biblical Sexuality. <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>.

suggest that accommodating a trans person's pronoun preference does not mean agreement with or affirmation of that person's gender expressions.¹³

Good reasons can be offered on both sides. When we have multiple biblical principles that bear upon the same issue, we need discernment to apply them according to what is best in each situation. In some cases, it may be better not to accommodate a person's preference, and in other situations, it may be wiser to overlook this issue while more important or more pressing matters are addressed.

Even more problematic is the issue of transgender interactions. Should a transman be permitted to use the men's restroom, or should an adolescent trans girl be allowed to participate in games or classes for adolescent girls? With increasing acceptance of transitioning in our culture, we will certainly face these questions in our schools, churches, Bible studies, camps, and clubs.

While it is right to be respectful and courteous as we engage those with gender dysphoria, we believe it is also right to call them to align their behaviors and interactions with their biological sex when it is in our place to do so. We should recognize that this alignment may be difficult, and we should not minimize the struggle. But to accommodate the assumption that gender is whatever one feels himself or herself to be undermines the binary reality of our created sexuality and contributes to gender confusion.

Of particular concern is the effect of the trans movement on children and adolescents. This includes:

- The presentation of transitioning as normal or attractive in children's books, social media, movies, music, and education.¹⁴
- The increase of transitioning among adolescents who have little history of wanting to identify as a different gender (often referred to as Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, ROGD). A recent analysis in the U.S., for example, stated, "The number of young people who identify as transgender has nearly doubled in recent years."¹⁵ Another study revealed that 27% of youths in California, ages 12–17, are "gender nonconforming."¹⁶
- The push to allow adolescents to transition without parental consent. Currently, in Oregon 15-year-olds can transition without parental consent.
- The disillusionment and pain of those who need to detransition after adolescent transition. Charlie Evans, founder of the Detransition Advocacy Network, wrote, "There are few studies behind detransition rates, but I can tell you there are thousands of us—

13 See Preston Sprinkle's extended discussion of this question in *Embodied*, Chapter 12, "Pronouns, Bathrooms, and Sleeping Spaces." Although Sprinkle leans toward "pronoun hospitality," he recognizes and warns against the power of ideologies behind language usage.

14 For example, the children's book *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings (New York: Dial Books, 2014), tells the story of a young boy who felt like a girl and transitioned as a child to the cheers of his parents, friends, and teacher.

15 Azeen Ghorayshi, "Report Reveals Sharp Rise in Transgender Young People in the U.S." *The New York Times*, June 10, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/10/science/transgender-teenagers-national-survey.html>.

16 Bianca D. M. Wilson et al., "Characteristics and Mental Health of Gender Nonconforming Adolescents in California." UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, December 2017. <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/search/pages/detail.aspx?PubID=1706>.

our voices are hidden because we are seen by the queer community as an inconvenient consequence of their movement. We are just collateral damage for the ‘greater good’. . . This generation are guinea pigs, and the fact that scientists and doctors are staying quiet about this is criminal.”¹⁷

It is common for adolescents who want to transition to begin to withdraw from family and anyone who might question their desire, and instead connect with online groups that offer advice and support.¹⁸ This obviously increases the challenge of engaging with them, but it also highlights the underlying hunger for connection and a meaningful sense of identity and purpose.

4. Christians need to cultivate a level of openness in our congregations that encourages people to be honest about their sexual struggles.

While many conservative churches remain somewhat sheltered from the current cultural trends, the reality is that church members also struggle with sexual desires contrary to God’s design. Even with a heterosexual orientation, we are not naturally content to follow God’s guidelines. The cultural climate constantly pushes us to think that sexual pleasure is the height of fulfillment, that whatever feels natural is good, and that deviating from God’s ways is all right as long as no one is being hurt.

We have unprecedented avenues to feeding sexual fantasies and sexual deviations via the internet, and consequently, we need to cultivate strong relationships that enable us to draw strength and encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Jesus. Children and adolescents need moral guidance and healthy examples of manhood and womanhood. We will not be able to safeguard our children against every temptation or from every exposure to sin, but we certainly can set boundaries to protect them from defiling media. And we can build safe and open communication that enables discussion and offers help when there is unhealthy exposure. Furthermore, as adults we can demonstrate openness about our own struggles and stand by one another in accountability, prayer, and fervent love for Jesus.

Discretion is always a necessary balancing principle in our openness about sin and temptation. Not everything should be confessed or discussed openly in mixed settings. But where there are deviations from God’s ways or strong temptations to deviate, there is likewise need, as James says, to “confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another” (5:16). We can do this in settings appropriate for accountability, discussion, support, and prayer.

Safe settings cannot exist where there are such things as evil speaking, gossip, harsh judgments, scorn, disdain, prejudice, pride, and fear. Safe settings are cultivated by people who are sincerely devoted to Jesus—they love Him passionately and seek to follow Him together. In safe settings, truth is important—truth about God, truth about His ways, truth about forgiveness, and truth about sin. People who love Jesus come to the light (John 3:19-21) because they know that sin thrives under cover. Safe settings are cultivated by showing compassion rather than

¹⁷ Quoted by Sprinkle, *Embodied*, p. 173.

¹⁸ See Lisa Littman’s study: “Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria.” *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 8 (August 16, 2018): e0202330. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>.

condemnation toward those who fail, but likewise by calling them, as Jesus did, to “sin no more” (John 8:11). In safe settings, fellow believers affirm God’s ways to be right and good. They pray for each other and encourage and stand by each other. In safe settings, believers do not reject people whose sins seem strange or different. They know that all sin comes from the same source and needs the same remedy.

Honest confession of sin is seldom easy, and some sins carry more shame and more consequences than other sins. But just as Jesus welcomed sinners and just as those who came to Him in penitence found refuge, so it should be with His people. The church needs to be a safe place for people to be honest about their sexual struggles.

5. Christians need to offer practical and life-giving support for individuals who struggle with deviations from God’s guidelines but who are committed to obedience.

As we discuss ways of showing support, we need to keep in mind that every person is unique. No story is the same. This means that to truly help, we need to take the time to know and understand people as individuals. Some people who struggle with same-sex attractions also have gender identity issues. Some people struggle more intensely than others. What is a temptation to one person may be a turn-off to another. Some of the suggestions offered here apply to any sexual struggles, and some are unique to specific struggles.

We need to listen well. We all function better when people understand us. Those with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria are easily misunderstood, and they can feel left out when the problems talked about do not describe their struggles. Those growing up in Christian settings often speak of a strong sense of shame, significant loneliness, anxiety, and identity confusion. These inner tensions are not easily expressed or resolved. Listening can be a significant ministry.

Listening is also important for discernment. Struggles with sinful behaviors can be linked to deeper issues where people have reacted to painful situations or built walls or made unwise resolves. Furthermore, there is a difference between having unwanted same-sex attractions and choosing those attractions, as there is a difference between temptation to do wrong and actually doing wrong. Discerning listening can help a person sort through these things.

We need to build life-giving relationships. Some people with same-sex attractions have gone on to marry someone of the opposite sex. Others have not been able to bring themselves to do that and have chosen to remain single instead. In Jesus’ words, these are “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matthew 19:12). Singles (like Paul) have greater freedom to care “for the things of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32), but they also live with unmet desires and with strong temptations to fulfill those desires in wrong ways. They need solid, life-giving relationships where they can both give and receive from fellow believers. In some congregations, families “adopt” singles to be part of their extended family unit. This provides a tangible sense of belonging and identity.

Acquainting ourselves with the particular struggles of those with sexual deviations can enhance our ability to listen and engage well. Numerous Christians have chronicled their journey

with same-sex attractions. Others have written books on the subjects of homosexuality and gender dysphoria. Obviously, not every person who claims to be Christian has come to the same conclusions, and not all books will be helpful. (See the “Resources” section below for suggestions.)

We need to focus on what the Scriptures teach regarding sexuality. In relating to those who struggle with sexual deviations, we may be tempted to focus on what Christians ought not to do and be. But in whatever way our thoughts, desires, and feelings deviate from God’s design, we need to marinate our hearts in the good ways of God. Chastity in singleness paves the way for faithfulness in marriage, which means that unchastity in singleness makes faithfulness in marriage more difficult.

When God made male and female, He declared that was good. It is good for a man to be a man and for a woman to be a woman. When God said it was not good for the man to be alone, He made a woman to fill that need. When we are inclined to deviate from God’s design, we must fill our minds with the goodness and rightness of God’s guidelines.

The particular symbols of masculinity and femininity and the typical activities and interests of each gender certainly vary from culture to culture. And while it is wrong to try to blur the genders, we should not be so rigid about cultural norms for gender activities that men and women cannot pursue individual interests. It is culturally common in conservative Anabaptist families, for example, for women to cook the meals. But there is nothing wrong with a man enjoying cooking. Indeed, turning cultural norms for gender activities into moral issues may increase a person’s struggles with gender conformity. What is not good is for a man to resent being a man and attempting to act like, talk like, and look like a woman, or vice versa. For a woman to enjoy doing a job that men typically do is quite different from the yearning to identify as a man.

When we affirm God’s ways as good, we don’t mean they are always pleasing to us. The modern mindset often measures good and bad by personal happiness—whatever makes me happy is good, and whatever doesn’t make me happy is bad. Choosing singleness because one is same-sex attracted means accepting times of loneliness and even misery, but this is what Christians have often chosen for the good of God’s Kingdom—for example, in taking the Gospel to foreign lands or choosing to follow Jesus in hostile environments. Helping people to make choices because of the larger good calls us to explore the rightness of God’s ways as well as the consequences, both personal and societal, of going against God’s directives.

Unbelievers will not understand this. Why wouldn’t we choose to fulfill our own desires? Christians have been misunderstood on this from the beginning. As Peter put it, “They think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4). Because God’s good ways go so contrary to the world’s ways of thinking, as believers we must constantly be renewing our minds, resisting the constant normalization of sin.

We need to offer practical guidance for navigating relationships. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, those with deviant sexual desires often face teasing, mockery, bullying, expressions of disgust, and other unkind words and actions even from professing Christians. In addition, they

may contribute to the interpersonal tensions by their own reactive behaviors. They may blame their unhappy relationships on other people, reading offenses into benign words or actions.

Jesus and the New Testament writers offer clear guidance for how to be gracious toward others, for how to respond to injustice, for how to address offenses in the church, and for the necessity of kindness, forbearance, and living for the good of others. Learning to practice God's kind of love is a growth process for all believers, but it can have unique challenges for those with deviant sexual desires.

Conclusion

Living in a time of cultural change presents many challenges for God's people. But it is also a time of opportunity. As believers, we are not called to try to change society by legislation, by protests, or by force. Instead, we are called to love God above all else, love others as ourselves, share the Good News of Jesus, live righteously, and call others into God's family. When people deviate from God's ways, we are called to share the truth in love. We are called to help people of all ethnicities and backgrounds to follow Jesus however difficult it may be (Matthew 28:19, 20). And we are called to do all of this in love, following the example of Jesus.

Our churches need to be places where those who wish to follow Jesus and honor God's ways can find support, and specifically, where those with deviant sexual inclinations can be nurtured and strengthened to walk in God's ways.

Note: In a follow-up article, we will address frequently asked questions, including:

1. Are same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria conditions that develop through life experiences and choices, or are people born this way?
2. Can a person with same-sex attractions change his or her sexual orientation, and should Christians attempt to help a person change?
3. How should we go about understanding and relating to a transgender person?
4. How should a church respond to a transman or transwoman wanting to attend our services?
5. Should a Christian in business follow nondiscrimination policies that accommodate transgender or same-sex rights and preferences?
6. How should we answer the charge that affirming the biblical positions on homosexuality or transgenderism is employing hate language?
7. How do we answer common arguments in support of same-sex relationships?

Resources

Scriptures

Genesis 1, 2. God made male and female and pronounced His creation good. He also spoke of marriage as between a man and a woman.

Leviticus 18. Sex is limited to marriage between a man and a woman. Forbidden are all the following: sex before marriage, sex with near relatives, sex with someone else's spouse, same-sex relations, and sex with animals.

Genesis 19. God judged the homosexuals of Sodom, and the city was destroyed (though this was not the only sin in Sodom).

Judges 19. The sexual sins of the Benjamites in Gibeah (both heterosexual and homosexual) resulted in that tribe being nearly wiped out.

Mark 10:1–12. Marriage is between one man and one woman for life.

Romans 1:18–32. Paul includes homosexual behaviors as one of the marks of a culture that departs from God and refers to homosexual behaviors as “vile passions,” as “against nature,” as “shameful,” as the result of a “debased mind” (or “reprobate,” KJV), and as “not fitting.”

1 Corinthians 6. In a list of sins that disqualify people for God's kingdom, Paul includes “homosexuals and sodomites.” The *ESV Study Bible* comments: “The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts” (note 2, 1 Corinthians 6:9 in the *ESV Study Bible*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

1 Corinthians 11. Paul calls for visual distinction between men and woman in worship, particularly noting long hair for woman, covered with a veil, and short hair for men, uncovered. (See also Deuteronomy 22:5, where crossdressing is forbidden.)

Stories

The following stories and resources may not always fully represent conservative Anabaptist stances, but they do help to acquaint us with the issues.

Hill, Wesley, and Kathryn Greene-McCreight and Eve Tushnet. ***Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality***. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. Hill tells his story of struggling with same-sex attractions and coming to the decision to honor God's ways by living as a single man. This is a helpful exposure to the internal tension between the desire for companionship and commitment to follow God.

Longacre, David (ed.). ***Gay... Such Were Some of Us: Stories of Transformation and Change***. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011.

A production of Harvest USA, this book is a collection of fifteen stories of people who forsook homosexuality.

Perry, Jackie Hill. ***Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been.*** Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018.

Perry left a lesbian lifestyle and chose to marry a Christian man more as an act of obedience to God's ways than because she felt her sexual preferences had changed. Perry also offers her perspectives on her blogs and interviews.

Shick, Denise, and Jerry Gramckow. ***My Daddy's Secret.*** Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2008.

Shick tells the story of her father's transgender journey from the standpoint of the devastation, confusion, and heartache of a daughter.

Yuan, Christopher, Angela Yuan, and Kay Warren. ***Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope.*** Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2011.

A mother and son alternate chapter by chapter, telling how God worked in their lives to bring them both to God after Christopher came out as gay. Their story offers hope and encouragement not only for those struggling with same-sex attractions but also for those who love them.

Other resources

Allberry, Sam. ***Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction.*** Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013.

Allberry addresses the common questions about and arguments for homosexuality, and carefully examines the Scriptural teachings.

Hubbard, Peter. ***Love Into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church.***

Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013.

Hubbard offers a compelling case for how our love for those with deviant sexual inclinations must be anchored in truth.

James, Sharon. ***Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?***

Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2019.

James presents a succinct and compelling exposé of the fallacies and dangers of gender theory.

Sprinkle, Preston. ***Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say.***

Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2021.

Sprinkle has spent years interacting with people with same-sex attractions as well as those with gender dysphoria. This work focuses specifically on the transgender issue. The value of the book is that Sprinkle has spent considerable time listening to trans people, and he helps us to understand their struggles.

Yuan, Christopher. ***Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story.*** Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2018.

As a former practicing homosexual, Yuan presents a biblically based case for chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.

This paper was prepared by ViewPoint: Anabaptists working together on current issues.

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ViewPoint builds on the Anabaptist value of community wisdom. A team comprised primarily of older, ordained men forms the core executive group. Subcommittees are then formed to address particular issues, drawing in people experienced in the subject.

ViewPoint was formed in response to repeated calls for help in addressing issues facing conservative Anabaptist leaders. A number of church leaders asked Faith Builders (Guys Mills) to facilitate the effort. The ViewPoint executive committee includes Steven Brubaker (PA), Merle Burkholder (ON), John Coblentz (PA), Matt Landis (PA), Gary Miller (ID), and David Yoder (KS).

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Same-Sex Attractions and Gender Dysphoria

Part 2: Frequently Asked Questions

This is Part 2 of an article on Christians and gender issues. For a copy of Part 1, which offers principles for interacting with cultural trends in gender and sexuality, visit anabaptistviewpoint.org or contact us using the methods listed at the end of this article.

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1. Are same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria conditions that develop through life experiences and choices, or are people born this way?

This question has been hotly debated, and the short answer is that there is no definitive evidence proving either position. Certainly, same-sex attractions were not God's design in creation. People in the same-sex and trans communities, however, strongly assert they were born this way, and they use this argument to legitimize their lifestyle choices. On the opposing side, Sigmund Freud theorized that same-sex attractions were formed through unresolved conflicts with parents. In between these opposing views, of course, there are many variations. Although many of Freud's theories have been discarded by professionals today, echoes of his ideas (mostly involving dominant mothers and passive fathers) are still commonly assumed by many people, including some Christians. For Christian parents, this can lead to anguished and overwhelming introspection.

Writing to the Romans, Paul describes cultural conditions that contribute to an increase in homosexual behaviors. These include rejecting and denying God, pride in human wisdom, and unrestrained lust and sexual expression. We live in a fallen world, and it makes sense that both cultural sinfulness and familial dysfunction could contribute to distorting our sexual desires.

At the same time, people growing up in both Christian and non-Christian settings talk about having same-sex attractions from as long as they can remember. And those who grow up in Christian homes typically say their early realization of same-sex attractions caused intense anxiety and shame. They did not consciously desire or choose them. This lends some credibility to the position that same-sex attractions are no different from other distorted desires we may have simply as the result of our fallenness. Having same-sex desires doesn't mean that they are God's will for us. Many things, even in heterosexual relationships, might seem more "natural" to us than doing what God says.

So while there may be various factors at work, both external and internal, as contributors to same-sex desires, the question of why some people have these desires is not as significant as how God wants them to respond to those desires. Focusing too much on the cause has led some people to try to justify these desires and other people to blame parents or bad experiences or even God for having these desires. God has a good design for our sexual expression, and all our urges to live contrary to God's design must be brought into alignment with Him.

Those people who identify as the opposite gender likewise often speak of their cross-gender thoughts and feelings as being with them as long as they can remember. As with same-sex

attractions, there is no biological explanation for trans inclinations.¹ These feelings vary from mild “tomboy” feelings to intense gender dysphoria.

More questionable are the feelings and motivations of those who want to transition as adolescents with no prior signs of gender dysphoria (referred to as Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria, or ROGD). Huge increases in adolescents choosing to transition have caused some people to see it as a trend (or even an outbreak) that is based primarily on social influences and pressures. Contributing to the concern, a large percentage of those who transition as adolescents have had a diagnosis of one or more psychiatric disorders prior to their transition.² This raises the question of whether they are in a good position to make life-altering decisions on their own.

As noted above, the idea that some people are born with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria is often presented as a significant argument for legitimizing these conditions. If a boy identifies as a girl as long as he can remember, he must have been born as “a girl in a boy’s body” (common language for transgender inclinations). And if he was born this way, how can it be wrong for him to live accordingly? Why would God allow a person to be born with desires he or she cannot legitimately fulfill?

But as already noted, we all deal with wrong desires because of our inherent sinfulness. We “naturally” desire at times to have what belongs to someone else. We may desire harm to people we don’t like. We might desire any number of illegitimate sexual pleasures, such as sex with animals or sex with children. Following the “what-is-natural” argument, some people are openly arguing that monogamy is unnatural, and having more than one partner (even at the same time) should be considered normal.³

To sum up, even if it could be determined that a person was born inclined toward same-sex attractions or toward living as the opposite gender, it would not legitimize following those inclinations, any more than we could legitimize other desires we have to go against God’s directives.

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- 1 Pro-trans arguments commonly use the condition of intersex in some people to support transitioning. Since some people are born with confused genitalia, they argue, sex is not clearly binary. In response, Preston Sprinkle writes, “It’s been estimated that as many as 99 percent of people who have intersex condition are unambiguously male or female.” He quotes an intersex activist, Claire Graham, as representative of many intersex people, “Stop using me as a weapon in your pursuit of a political, not scientific, ideology. You are not helping the intersex community. You do us more harm than good.” Sprinkle, Preston. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2021, pp. 116–117, 120.
 - 2 Lisa Littman, “Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria.” *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 8 (August 16, 2018): e0202330. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>.
 - 3 Meghan Laslocky, “Face It: Monogamy Is Unnatural.” CNN (blog), June 21, 2013. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/21/opinion/laslocky-monogamy-marriage/index.html>.

2. Can a person with same-sex attractions change his or her sexual orientation, and should Christians attempt to help a person change?

These overlapping questions, like the former, generate strong opinions and arguments. Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a disorder. That same year, Love in Action was formed as the first Christian help organization for people choosing to change. They promoted change of orientation based on prayer and discipleship. But since then, both professional and societal views have been shifting. In 2001, the U.S. surgeon general formally stated that there is no evidence that sexual orientation can be changed. In 2014, after much controversy, Love in Action dissolved (though it continues as a worldwide discipleship ministry). In 2013, Exodus International, the largest ex-gay organization in the U.S., likewise disbanded (though many of its member ministries continued either in reorganized coalitions or independently).

Currently, twenty states in the U. S. and many countries around the world, including Canada, have passed laws banning “conversion therapy.” In February of 2022, the state of Victoria in Australia banned religious practices including prayer aimed at “changing or suppressing the sexual orientation,”⁴ and this even if a person requests such prayer.

As Christians, our primary authority is God’s Word, so we do not form our positions from societal pressures or even from civil laws, though we certainly want to obey laws where we can. Still, part of the shift away from attempting to change same-sex desires has come because many people desiring to change were frustrated that their same-sex desires did not change, even with prayer and intense discipleship. Some who experienced conversion therapy describe tactics of pressure and discipline that seemed more detrimental than helpful.

There are, of course, many testimonies of people who have left their same-sex lifestyles, focusing not so much on eliminating their desires as on saying no to the temptations to follow them and choosing instead to obey God.⁵

Still, the general movement has been away from conversion therapy. As Maria Baer wrote in *Christianity Today*, “While ministries including Exodus International and Focus on the Family used to preach that homosexual desire should be eliminated, most evangelical churches, pastors, and mental health professionals today emphasize chastity amid desires that might last a lifetime. ‘Conversion’ is no longer the goal—faithfulness is.”⁶

4 Maria Baer, “‘Pray Away the Gay’ Has Gone Away. Why Are Governments Trying to Stop It?” *Christianity Today*. July/August 2021. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/july-august/conversion-therapy-bans-ex-gay-global-lgbt-laws.html>.

5 See, for example, David Longacre, *Gay... Such Were Some of Us: Stories of Transformation and Change*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011.). A production of Harvest USA, this book is a collection of fifteen stories of people who forsook homosexuality. For a more extended story of choosing to obey God’s guidelines rather than her own desires, see Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been*. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018.

6 Maria Baer, “‘Pray Away the Gay’ Has Gone Away...”

Pressuring people who have same-sex attractions to no longer have those desires is unhelpful. Encouraging them to follow God and to seek God's grace in resisting all temptations to behave contrary to God's ways is both biblical and right.

Because God's commands are right and intended for human flourishing, we believe that honoring them, even when they are difficult for us personally, will prove to be for our best.

3. How should we go about understanding and relating to a transgender person?

The first thing to consider here is the uniqueness of every person. Mark Yarhouse has often been quoted as saying, "When you've met one transgender person, you've met. . . one transgender person." The trans community is especially diverse because gender, being separated from one's biological sex, is commonly being defined by one's feelings (which are as diverse as humanity). Furthermore, because sex is constantly idolized in movies, in music, and on social platforms, many people have bought into the notion that sex is fundamental to identity—so whatever sexual desires a person has defines what kind of person he or she is.

Consequently, "transgender" is a general term for a host of variations. Perhaps the most common is the male who identifies as a female and vice versa. Some people attempt to fully transition—having male bodies but changing them so they can look like, act like, and live as a female. Many of these use hormonal treatments and some have reassignment surgery to enhance the transition. Others may cross dress in private or only on occasion, and some might simply fixate on a certain type of clothing or activity. Some who transition may have partners of the same biological sex and others prefer partners of the opposite sex. And some refuse to conform to any binary identity and refer to themselves as bisexual or pangender or genderfluid or genderqueer or queer.⁷ And there are those males for whom their attraction is mostly a psychological reality—they enjoy imagining themselves as women (though they never transition). This is known as "autogynephilia," defined as "the love of oneself as a woman."⁸

It doesn't help that within the trans community there is considerable disagreement and even criticism of one another's claims and the use of these terms. But this all highlights the caution of not assuming to "understand" even a self-proclaimed label. Every trans person is a human being, and when God brings trans people into our lives, we should prioritize learning to know them as persons, not trying to figure out what category they fit.

We do not have the advantage Jesus had who "knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25). We learn to know people by asking questions, by taking interest in their lives, by working alongside them, by helping them with their needs, and by engaging with them in deep conversations.

7 The term "queer" has been intentionally chosen to emphasize nonconformity to any gender category or sexual preference, setting them in opposition at times even to the other groups in the LGBT acronym exactly because those groups form identity along the binary lines.

8 Sprinkle, *Embodied*, p. 54.

For example, a transman or transwoman who has had a breakup in a relationship might be bitter or discouraged or lonely or might not know how he or she is going to pay incoming bills. Instead of immediately addressing their behaviors or pointing to these troubles as consequences of wrong living, we might seek to hear their story. Bitterness, discouragement, loneliness, and financial woes are problems common to humanity, and by listening attentively and taking active interest in their sorrows, we may be able to build a level of trust where they not only listen to us talk about Jesus but experience Him through our lives.

4. How should the church respond to a transman or transwoman wanting to attend services?

As noted earlier, the variation among transgenders is considerable, even dizzying. In addition, situations vary considerably. Did the person grow up in a Christian setting or non-Christian? How old is the person? What are the person's motives for wanting to attend? What is the person's history, including mental health?⁹ For these reasons, it is difficult to set policies that will apply to every situation. Trans people are people who need other people and specifically people who are filled with the living presence of Jesus.

Jesus was able to see deeper than a person's behaviors and to interact with each person's basic human needs. He saw past Zacchaeus's love of money, the promiscuous woman's "inappropriate" action of wiping His feet with her loosened hair, Mary Magdalene's ties to demons, and the Samaritan woman's serial marriages, to name a few. His informed and compassionate interaction with people whose behaviors were strange and sinful is a good model for us.

Rather than immediately trying to make a decision about pronoun preference, for example, we, too, should see every person as a human being, every person as having an underlying yearning to be known and loved, and every person as needing to be restored to loving relationship with God. Jesus' example calls us to curb our tendency to judge people simply by their behaviors in the pattern of Simon the Pharisee (see Luke 7:36, ff.). It calls for listening. It calls for interaction. It calls for healthy relationship. And it calls us to talk to them about Jesus and show them His claims on their lives.

Balancing our willingness to interact with trans people is the need for discretion. People who deviate from God's design for their sexuality (whether transgender or homosexual or heterosexual) may not be suitable for unsupervised interaction with our children, for example. Jesus valued the protection of the young and innocent, and so should we. This doesn't automatically mean no interaction, but rather, that we use wisdom, on the one hand not erecting unnecessary barriers, but on the other, recognizing where a person may have a weakness and helping them (even requiring them) to observe healthy boundaries.

9 Lisa Littman's study of 256 adolescent and young adults (AYAs) who transitioned ("Parent Reports... Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria", cited above) found that "many (62.5%) of the AYAs had reportedly been diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder or neurodevelopmental disability prior to the onset of their gender dysphoria."

5. Should a Christian in business follow nondiscrimination policies that accommodate transgender or same-sex rights and preferences?

As we have emphasized, followers of Jesus should show kindness and respect to each person as a human being. Those who have been marginalized by society and those who may seem furthest from the Christian faith, either in beliefs or behaviors, are often those who most need to experience God's love through His people. Christians should not withhold basic services to unbelievers because of their sins.

There is a difference, however, between showing kindness and affirming, approving, or enabling sinful behaviors. Befriending a same-sex-attracted young man, hiring him in your business, or inviting him into your home and hearing his story is not the same as attending his wedding if he chooses to marry another man. Serving a same-sex couple in a restaurant is not the same as catering a same-sex wedding.

Even so, the lines are not always clear, and situations can vary. Where there are questions, we are wise to seek the counsel of our local congregations to find a faithful and consistent way forward.

This question, of course, has been tested in a number of court cases in the US, and it likely will be a continuing legal issue.¹⁰ To this point Christian schools and churches in the U. S. may have guidelines for the behavior of their staff and church members, and may accept or expel members accordingly. The time may come (and is already here in some countries) when discriminating against those who practice same-sex or trans behaviors will result in fines or worse. Currently, it is helpful to have a position statement regarding eligibility for such things as membership and staff positions as well as criteria for dismissal or expulsion.¹¹

6. How should we answer the charge that affirming the biblical positions on homosexuality or transgenderism is employing hate language?

In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman traces the various strands that have shaped the way people think about hate language today. By separating gender from biological sexuality and making gender whatever a person understands himself or herself or themselves to be, is to create a spectrum of identities that essentially deconstructs the categories. Trueman refers to this as “expressive individualism.”¹²

10 In 2012, for example, Jack Phillips of Masterpiece Cakes declined to bake a cake for a homosexual couple's wedding reception. In 2018, the Supreme Court overruled Colorado's state courts, which had found that Phillips' refusal violated the state's public accommodation law banning discrimination by companies offering services to the public. See Pete Williams “In Narrow Ruling, Supreme Court Gives Victory to Baker Who Refused to Make Cake for Gay Wedding.” NBC News. June 4, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/narrow-ruling-supreme-court-gives-victory-baker-who-refused-make-n872946>.

11 Examples of statements can be found online in a number of places:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/>
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/12-statements-on-human-sexuality/>

12 Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020, p. 150.

Because each individual is seen as the basic determiner of identity and reality, to counter or in any way question that reality or identity is viewed as doing psychological damage. Affirmation and celebration are the only acceptable responses to a person's self-declarations; anything else is termed hateful and harmful.

Ironically, some of the most acrimonious language used in the discussions of sexuality has been among the various communities speaking to each other. LGBTQ+ has not been a historically happy family. For years, tensions were high, for example, between radical feminist lesbians and gays because the feminists did not want their relationships to be thought of as a counterpart to male homosexuality. The trans community was even more problematic to lesbians and gays because it denied the importance of the biological binary by which lesbians and gays operated. The trans community (even more, the queer community) in Trueman's words "denies such a biologically shaped approach in favor of a much more psychological and free-floating notion of gender."¹³

What brought the various warring communities together was seeing and portraying themselves as oppressed minorities. Their alliance was "a political coalition forged on the basis of a common enemy—a socially and politically enforced heterosexual normativity."¹⁴ The image of being an oppressed minority heightens the peril of other people voicing any counter perspectives.

For believers, speaking hatefully is contrary to the fundamental ethic of love. We are called to show kindness and respect even to those who are unkind or hateful toward us, whether by words or actions. This forbids using derogatory names, belittling, mocking, misrepresenting, expressing disdain, or using any other kind of abusive language.

Believers are likewise ethically bound to speak the truth. Love—our commitment to the good of others—compels us to speak truth tactfully and with goodwill because we care about others. We can tell those with same-sex attractions that living by those attractions is contrary to God's design for our sexuality because that is the truth. We can call those who wish to transition to a gender contrary to their biology that their bodies belong to God, and we are not free to tamper with them as we please, because that's the truth. We can speak the truth to anyone who is choosing to disregard God's guidelines for our sexual activities, whether they are committing adultery, engaging in incest, selling their bodies in prostitution, having sex with animals, filling their minds with pornography, or engaging in same-sex relations. But all our truth speaking must be in love, not spoken hatefully or intentionally hurtfully.

Just as we expect a doctor to be kind, considerate, and respectful when speaking the truth to us about a physical ailment, so we are called to be kind, considerate, and respectful when speaking the truth about sinful behaviors. We must not speak the truth hatefully, but neither are we to lie about sinful behaviors or affirm or celebrate what is wrong. That is not truly loving others.

13 Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, p. 353.

14 Ibid.

7. How do we answer common arguments in support of same-sex relationships?

The drastically changed stances on human sexuality in our culture have had their impact on churches as well. Many denominations have changed their position, not only welcoming gay and lesbian couples as members but also ordaining practicing homosexuals as church leaders. This has led to major splits in numerous denominations, including mainline Mennonites. It has also produced pro-homosexual arguments coming from church leaders and theologians, attempting to base their arguments on Scripture.¹⁵ Following are some of the most common arguments.

Argument #1: The biblical passages addressing homosexual behaviors need to be understood in their contexts, which were quite different from today's setting.

In the stories of homosexual behaviors in Sodom (Genesis 19), for example, and later in Gibeah with the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) the problems were violence and exploitation rather than homosexuality itself, they argue. Furthermore, the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are given in the context of a culture "anxious about their health, continuing family lineages, and retaining the distinctiveness of Israel as a nation."¹⁶ Our setting is different, they say. The passages in the New Testament, naming homosexuality as sin, likely were intended to address the practice in Roman culture of men exploiting young boys. And Paul's arguments in Romans 1 were about selfish lust and idolatry—neither mentioning nor prohibiting committed, loving same-sex relationships.

While it is true that there was violence in the Old Testament stories and exploitation in both Testaments, this argument rests on silence and supposition. To assume that since the biblical writers do not specifically talk about "loving and committed" same-sex relationships, they were not forbidding them is not a fair use of Scripture. We do not use these arguments from silence to justify other sexual transgressions. For example, we don't say live-in relationships are fine if the parties are loving and committed. Paul addressed the man who had "his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1) as being in a sinful relationship. He does not say that if the relationship had been loving and committed, it would have been all right. Nor did Jesus give the caveat that divorcing a spouse and marrying another is acceptable if the second relationship is loving and committed. Some relationships are wrong, based on who the partners are, regardless of the love the partners profess or experience. Arguing from silence to sanction certain kinds of homosexual relationships would give people freedom to practice many other sexual sins.

In writing to the Corinthians (a city where all manner of sexual sins were common), Paul writes, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And

15 It should be noted that some theologians simply deny or shamelessly reject scriptural teaching, assuming we know more than the biblical writers did, but many today are attempting to use Scripture to affirm homosexual behaviors.

16 Miles Markham et al. "What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?" Human Rights Campaign. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality>. Most of the arguments mentioned in this section come from this article.

such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The two Greek words translated “homosexuals” and “sodomites” in the NKJV refer to the passive and active partners in homosexual intercourse.¹⁷ It seems clear that Paul is not limiting this to pederasty (men exploiting boys) but addressing adult church members who had formerly engaged in these sins, had repented, and had discontinued them.

Argument #2: Homosexual relationships can be loving, self-giving, committed, and enduring, reflecting God’s love for us as well as exemplifying all the elements of love in a committed marriage.

This is probably the kingpin argument in favor of Christians being permitted to practice same-sex relationships.

Two things we need to consider here. First, basing the ethics of an action on the virtues of the people involved does not take into account the whole picture. We do not justify gang crimes, for example, based on gang members demonstrating such virtues as loyalty, commitment, and self-sacrifice (even giving their lives for each other). Nor, as noted above, did Jesus or the Apostles, sanction taking another person’s spouse if the new relationship were sure to be loving and committed. When the relationship (or the activity) is forbidden, the virtues of the parties does not make it right.

The second consideration is that this argument rests entirely on the human relationship and ignores our responsibility to obey God. God designed human bodies, male and female. His intentions for limiting sex to the lifelong marriage of a man and a woman are larger than our personal considerations of happiness or fulfillment or purpose. We do not even need to know all of God’s intentions for the commands and restrictions He gives us. We are called to trust His wisdom and honor His directives.

It might be easier and might result in more happiness or sense of fulfillment in some situations for a man to divorce his wife and marry another woman. It might seem more fulfilling for a man (or woman) to give his best energies and time to his job to the neglect of his wife and children. But we are called to obey God, to follow His directives even when it means experiencing loneliness, encountering difficulty, or performing mundane responsibilities. Above all personal considerations, our lives are intended to glorify God through loving and worshipful obedience.

Argument #3: Homosexuals have been marginalized and oppressed, contrary to the biblical values of justice and human flourishing.

Forbidding homosexual relationships, in other words, has been detrimental and destructive to those with these desires.

The roots of this argument are deep, running back through the radical feminists, Nietzsche, and Marx.¹⁸ The assumption is that limiting legitimate sexual relations to marriage between a man and a woman creates an “enforced heterosexual normativity” (as noted earlier). That is, because

17 See the marginal notes in both NKJV and ESV.

18 See Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, especially Chapters 5-7, for a more detailed history.

heterosexuals are the norm, they become the “oppressors” of everyone not conforming to that norm. Not only are civil laws that forbid same-sex relations harmful, but so are Christians who teach God’s guidelines and Christian organizations that require God’s guidelines. By saying certain behaviors are wrong, Christians are accused of injustice and injury, of hindering human flourishing.

It is true that often homosexuals have not been treated kindly or justly in society and have not always been treated kindly or respectfully by Christians. But this argument again rests on wrong assumptions. The first assumption is that because homosexuals have been mistreated and marginalized, justice calls Christians to affirm their behaviors. This is a leap in logic we do not take for other marginalized or mistreated people, such as prostitutes or thieves or addicts. There is a difference between respecting people and affirming their behaviors. We do not approve prostitution or drug addiction just because the people have been marginalized or mistreated.

A further assumption seems to be that sex is a universal right and is required for healthy living. These are common assumptions in a society obsessed with sex, but believers know better. Or ought to. Neither sex nor marriage are requirements for a happy, fulfilled life, as both Jesus and Paul could attest. Married people as well as singles, people with heterosexual desires or same-sex desires need something larger than their desires and larger than their marital status to live for. We were intended to find our greatest fulfillment in eternal relationship with God, and in Him to find the grace to live well with whatever is lacking in our human relationships.

Argument #4: For people who have same-sex desires the only way to live authentically is to follow those desires; to live otherwise is living a lie.

(The same argument is used for those who wish to identify as a different gender.)

A few years ago, popular Christian blogger Glennon Doyle Melton announced that not only was she divorcing her husband Craig, but she was dating a well-known female soccer player, Abby Wambach. She described this as bravely living “her truth.” Commenting on this in an article in *Christianity Today*, Jen Pollock Michel wrote, “From the public announcements both of her divorce and her new dating relationship, she wants us to understand this: The greatest gift any of us gives to the world is our true self. . . . While the self-fulfillment narrative isn’t new, here’s what is: how easily and insidiously it gets baptized as a Christian story. Melton hasn’t simply said: *I should be happy*. She has emphatically said: *God should be equally and unequivocally committed to my happiness as I am.*”¹⁹

For Christians, our understanding of integrity is not aligning our behaviors with our personal feelings or desires but aligning them with our commitment to honor God and do His will. We do not always feel like following God or doing what He says, but we do it anyway. That is integrity. We do not always feel like loving our marriage partners or being faithful to our marriage vows, but we do it anyway because that is integrity.

19 Jen Pollock Michel, “Glennon Doyle Melton’s Gospel of Self-Fulfillment.” *Christianity Today*, November 20, 2016. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/november-web-only/glennon-doyle-meltons-gospel-of-self-fulfillment.html> (emphasis in original).

Being “true” to our desires, our feelings, and our dreams is the poisonous mindset driving our narcissistic, self-serving, and relationally fragmented society. Michel described this mindset in these words: “Happiness is our only duty today, self-betrayal our only sin. It’s not simply that the lines of morality have blurred in modern times, making truth relative. It’s not even that religious belief has waned. Rather, the good life has been radically redefined according to the benefit of the individual while the former measures of flourishing—God’s glory, society’s health, the family’s well-being—have been displaced. We’re all on the throne now.”²⁰

Coming to God calls us to relinquish our own ways and our own interests and desires, and to choose His ways. In Jesus’ words, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)?

We are most true, most real, and most authentic when we are restored to relationship with God and when we require all our desires and feelings to submit to His will. When we offer our bodies as “living sacrifices to God” and refuse to conform to the thinking of this world, our minds can be transformed, and we will prove that God’s will is “good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1,2).

20 Jen Pollock Michel, “Glennon Doyle Melton’s Gospel of Self-Fulfillment”

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