

Impact 2024: Is Same-Sex Desire Sinful? Re-exploring an old doctrine for a new debate

Introduction

Today I want to talk to you about something that I think is going to split the evangelical church. It is the differences in the answer to this question, Is same sex desire sinful? At present there are 3 views that all go under the umbrella of evangelicalism, but that is not saying much because nearly anything goes under that banner today. Two of the three views are called Side A and Side B, and the view we are presenting today is the historical biblical position we are setting over against them. Side A and Side B are said to exist to make space for those who identify as same sex attracted or who struggle with it, and who don't have a place in the mainstream church. So let us lay out these three views.

Side A: Rosaria Butterfield a one-time lesbian and now believer and pastor's wife in defining Side A writes, Side A, 'sanctions same-sex marriage and believes that homosexuality is just one of many forms of diverse sexuality that the church should welcome.'¹ Side A views have been in the headlines recently. In early May the United Methodist Church in America met, one reporter writes, 'The delegates voted to repeal a section in their Book of Discipline, or church law, that states: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

...On Thursday, delegates approved Revised Social Principles, or statements of the church's values. In addition to removing the language about homosexuality being "incompatible with Christian teaching," that revision also defined marriage as a covenant between two adults, without limiting it to heterosexual couples, as the previous version had done....

Separately, the General Conference on Friday removed language making it a chargeable offense for clergy to be a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" or perform same-sex marriages — similar to previous repeals but affecting a different part of church law.'²

Here in NZ the Anglican Church voted to allow the blessing of same sex unions in 2018. We do not feel very threatened when this takes place in the known to be Liberal denominations, but it becomes deeply troubling when the more conservative denominations start making similar moves in the same directions. And this is where Side B comes into it.

Side B: is trying to position itself as a middle position between the wrong liberal view that condones homosexual marriage and ordination; and the more traditional view that sees even the same sex desire as a sin and therefore the orientation, never mind the act or marriage or ordination of those who are practising. Defining Side B, Rosaria Butterfield writes: 'Side B teaches against homosexual sexual practice, but only for the sake of Christian tradition). While Side B seeks to uphold biblical sexual standards, because it sees sexual orientation as an accurate category of personhood (i.e., there is such a thing as a gay person—that gayness describes who someone essentially is), their theology in no way allows for an understanding of why homosexuality, even at the level of

¹ <https://theaquilareport.com/what-is-wrong-with-gay-christianity-what-is-side-a-and-side-b-anyway/>
accessed 5/8/2024

² <https://apnews.com/article/united-methodists-lgbtq-samesex-marriages-48a1adc0639da5e6c5db3371e0ce23fe> accessed 5/8/2024

desire, is sinful and needing the grace of repentance. To the Side B Christian, homosexuality is a sexuality—one of many.’ So to clarify this view believes that one can have a homosexual orientation and identify as a gay Christian. Many in the movement say the outwards actions are sinful but the disposition and desires are not. Side B was making progressive headway in the church but came to the forefront in 2018 with the Revoice conference in a PCA church in America. That is the denomination of men like R C Sproul; Tim Keller; Todd Pruitt; Bryan Chapell etc. It consisted of a former SBTs lecturer Nate Collins, and Scott Saul who worked at one time with Tim Keller decided to host a conference that would be supportive to those who identify as gay or bisexual. Here is their mission statement, listen for the particular language not of describing fallen men and women who struggle with sinful and unnatural desires but those whose identity is defined by their sin: ‘To support and encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other same-sex attracted Christians—as well as those who love them—so that all in the Church might be empowered to live in gospel unity while observing the historic Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality.’³ I think we can all agree that the church has not always done well supporting sexual sinners and those who struggle in this area in particular, but we have here an approach that gives into the assumptions of our culture on these matters and is not built upon a biblical understanding of sexuality; identity; and sin.

The Revoice conference brought together a number of very troubling ideas which show just how much ground the sexual revolution is taking in the church instead of the Bible establishing our sexual ethic. Wesely Hill a major propagator of these views advocates for a culture of ‘spiritual friendship’, a network of non-sexual partnerships within the church to support those with these struggles. Here is one summary of the movement. ‘What is “Spiritual Friendship”? While the name itself would merely suggest the classic notion of the love of friendship (*philia*) ordered towards God, in the context of “LGBT Christianity,” Spiritual Friendship now means more than that. It involves a set of ideas and assertions, all of which have some relationship to homoerotic feelings. Among these are the following: 1) That while sexual activity between persons of the same sex is indeed sinful, the complex set of desires and psychological orientations which would otherwise lead to those actions are not sinful. 2) In fact, these are potentially good, as they are, at some basic point, a longing towards a true good, [some titles for the 2018 break out sessions include, “Redeeming Queer Culture: An Adventure,” “Journey To Embrace: A Conversation On Empowering the Church To Embrace the LGBT+ Community In Fresh Ways,” and “Coming Out In the Shadow of the Cross: Queer Visibility as Redemptive Suffering.”] Because of this, 3) a “gay” identity can and should constitute something around which a “community” can be formed, so long as its members remain celibates. [Please note that those who insist on celibacy do so because the person who has this orientation cannot marry, it is their orientation. Those who insist on orientation insist on celibacy] 4) The Church should recognize and welcome these communities [this would of course mean that we have to accept their self-identifications against biblical ones and use their preferred pronouns], noting how it has actually harmed persons with same-sex attraction in the past, both by being malicious towards them but also by not properly recognizing them. 5) There is a difference between the “fulfillment” promised by romantic love and the physical sexual acts attached to it, the former of which can be approximated if not entirely realized through close friendship. Thus, one way in which these sorts of Gay Christians can avoid the loneliness which would otherwise come

³ <https://www.revoice.org/about> accessed 5/9/2024

from renouncing their erotic desires is by forming close and even vowed or covenanted friendships with other Christians of the same sex. And 6) The renunciation of the sexual act can enable the “gay” Christian to live a particularly religious celibate life analogous to the counsels of perfection, as they sublimate the sexual desire towards a more perfect form of love.’⁴ Along with these measures Side B normalizes pronoun hospitality; it capitulates to false psychological instead of biblical notions about orientation; it has allowed itself to become politicised by unbiblical ideologies as it talks about ‘sexual minorities’; but saddest of all it denies the biblical truth of the way God made us; the nature of sin in the life of a Christian, and the power of the gospel to sanctify the believer giving them progressive though not perfect victory over sin. About 15 years ago those of Side B inclinations and the more traditional and biblical types were making common cause together, but as time has gone on and society has progressed adopting transgender and queer ideology as well, those who want to be faithful to the bible have had to separate from those that are Side B, and some like Rosaria Butterfield have even publicly repented on issues where they capitulated to the influence of Side B ideas. It often happens that as the polemical context gets increasingly heated, a greater clarity around the matter of dispute begins to arise and differences between those who seemed similar become more apparent, now is such a time. As there is a clarification around these matters denominations, churches, and Christians are all going to have to choose whether they will get on board the progressive Christianity train or stay true to the teaching of the Bible.

In response to Side A and Side B views on this matter I want to take us back to the biblical convictions held by the Reformers. As a pastor I believe that the war on this matter has to be fought on two fronts. We need on the one hand to help the church come to a clear conviction on what it believes, the church needs to know what God says, what we are as men and women, what the bible says about sinful desire and our ability to fight sin as believers. And then on the other hand we need clarity on this matter because of the many broken souls who are casualties of the sexual revolution who are being destroyed by sin and lies. We need to hold out the hope forgiveness and restoration in the gospel; we need a clear message about how someone can be forgiven and make real gains in holiness against sexual sin. We care about the truth being upheld, the church being healthy in the truth and God’s holiness upheld by the church; and we care about the sinner trapped in lies and want to see them saved and walking in all the truth of the gospel. This talk will not be able to say all that needs to be said. My goal today is to play some small part in equipping the church to know the truth well that it will be better equipped to meet the epidemic of sexual sinners and confused people that we are called to minister to today.

So here is our plan. Our point that we want to establish is a very modest one: that same sex desires; attractions; and orientation are sinful. We are not here to establish whether the actions are sinful, that is a given, but the internal point at which sin begins. I have two things I want to do. We need to begin with the word of God and examine what the word of God says about God’s requirements for holiness not only inwardly but inwardly including in the area of desire. Secondly, we want to go to an earlier time in the Church’s understanding of biblical teaching and look at the doctrine of concupiscence, and we will look at how the doctrine of original sin led the Reformers to see the lusts of the flesh not only acts of the flesh as sinful. We will also take note of John Owen as he helps

⁴ <https://mereorthodoxy.com/critical-review-spiritual-friendship> accessed 5/9/2024

us think through the temptations of Christ and how they differ from our temptations.

Holiness of the heart

Let me begin with a story. When I was a young Christian freshly converted to Christ, as with every young man I would struggle immensely with lust. As a young believer with a conscience newly awakened the impact of the guilt over one sin was often a crushing weight that would create an existential crisis casting the whole of my salvation into doubt. I remember going to talk to my youth pastor about the struggle over sin in the mind. He was aware of my tender conscience and struggles and sought to give me some measure of assurance by paraphrasing something Luther said, 'You can't stop a bird from flying over your head; but you can stop it from nesting in your hair.' Some today will claim that same sex desires are like that unasked for bird flying over the head. Is that true? What we want to establish today is that there is a deeper view of our sinfulness that helps us to see that our natures are a fountain of internal temptation, that are against God's law, that cannot be seen as neutral, and must be confessed and mortified in order to fulfil God's requirements for holiness.

God tells us in His word that He is the one who tests our hearts and minds and punishes accordingly, Ps. 7:9; Jer. 20:12; Rev. 2:23.

God delights in truth in our inward being, Ps. 51:6.

God counts as blessed those whose desires are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and who are pure in heart, Matt. 5:6; 8.

Jesus who taught a positive pursuit of the law not only a negative observation; who internalized the law to apply the heart and not only outward behaviour; and who intensified the law to show that the smallest desire for a sin as well as the full grown outward act, says that desires against God's laws even small ones are sin and not neutral. Matt. 5:27-28, "'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

In Acts 8:22 Peter warned Simon Magus to seek forgiveness for the intentions of his heart.

In Romans 1 where Paul is talking about God's passive judicial hardening where He hands us over to ourselves for idolatry and this results in the most extreme forms of self-destructive sin namely same sex activity, Paul also describes the desires as 'dishonourable passions,' 1:26.

In the life of the Christian the Bible outlines how the gospel rearranges our hearts.

Rom. 6:17, 'But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.' Our obedience is from the heart.

Gal. 5:24, 'And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'

Titus 2:11-12, 'For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.' We believe that our old self was crucified with Christ in regeneration, that who we were in Adam, dead and subject to sin unable to please God; that is not us anymore, we have participated in the power of Christ's resurrection, we have died to the power of sin; we have a new heart; we have the Spirit dwelling within, and we are now able by the power of the Spirit to put these old passions to death. Even long

patterns of addiction, that are deeply engrained must give way to the greater power of the Spirit within us. We will never be perfected in this life, but we wage war from a position of victory and expect real though slow progress against our sins. Never reaching perfection but striving with all of our might against that sin in us, Phil. 3:12-14, 'Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' We still have a sinful nature, and we will still experience inward temptations according to the lusts of the flesh, but they are sin, they are to be confessed and mortified and guarded against. And sex same desires, though slightly more difficult because they are sexual desires and bound up with our sense of self, they too are subject to the power of the gospel and to be sanctified. We are not echoing the sentiments of triumphalistic ideas found in the church where we pretend that a person upon salvation is miraculously free from all temptation in that area. We will all be tempted by sin until we are dead or taken up in glory, but we can overcome those temptations, make progress in cultivating a deeper hatred for our sins, and a greater love of holiness.

What is the greatest commandment? Matt. 22:37, 'And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' True holiness is love that fulfils the law of God not only an external appearance of an absence of sin. Anything that falls short of loving God with all that we are is by definition a breaking of God's commandments. 1 John 3:4 tells us that sin is lawlessness. So simply put any desire that is not in agreement with loving God with all that we are; any desire that does not agree with God's law is technically sinful not neutral.

Compare this biblical teaching which says that we are men and women made in the image of God, but fallen, and so experience a flood of sinful desires that must be seen as sin, confessed and mortified in the life of a believer. Compare this view with what the world thinks of sexual orientation. Here is a definition from Wikipedia, 'Sexual orientation is an enduring personal pattern of romantic attraction or sexual attraction to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to both sexes or more than one gender.' Side B takes on this view of orientation, but we cannot. Jared Moore in his book, *The Lust of the Flesh: Thinking Biblically About 'Sexual Orientation,' Attraction, and Temptation*, writes, 'This definition affects a person's identity in two ways. First, it removes any moral responsibility for lusting. How exactly can someone be responsible for a "mere orientation"? Second, this definition encourages people to view themselves as victims to things "beyond their control."'⁵ As believers we cannot endorse this idea of orientation, though once many used it. It is a bastion of ideas that says that we are irresistibly born in one particular way contrary to the bible's teaching that we are fallen men and women. It gives credence to the notion that we are hardwired a certain way and that the gospel has no power to help us be the men and women God created us to be. For this reason we cannot speak of a gay Christian; nor can we speak of ourselves as being same-sex attracted. Many are suggesting that a better way to speak about this is to speak of someone who struggles with same-sex desires. Technically speaking there is

⁵ — *The Lust of the Flesh: Thinking Biblically About "Sexual Orientation," Attraction, and Temptation* by Jared Moore
<https://a.co/6y9rvTU>

no such thing as a homosexual, a lesbian, someone who is queer, or transgender. We are all men and women made by God but fallen in sin. We define our identities not by what we feel, but by what God has made us to be. Sin does not wipe out this image of God in us, and so fallen mankind is not some blank slate that we can redefine as we play a type of meat lego or identity lego. And the gospel is given to save us and reaffirm us in the image of God and to perfect a holy humanity in us as holy men and women.

Historical doctrine of sin

The very fact of these discussions show how far the evangelical church has lost connection with its roots and an earlier and more biblical understanding of sin. I will not have the time here to unfold how at the time of the Reformation all of the Reformers when they studied the bible on this matter came to the same conclusions regarding their doctrine of sin. Their understanding of original sin, and their view of concupiscence puts this matter to bed in a decisive way.

Let me begin with the doctrine of original sin and its relation to actual sin, I will be using the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith as a representative and mature expression of Reformation ideas on this matter. In chapter 6 of the 1689 the doctrine of sin is discussed. The basic biblical foundations for this doctrine are plain. God originally made mankind good and free from sin. But Adam sinned and plunged the human race into sin. The two key ways in which Adam's sin affects us is firstly legally where Adam as a federal/covenant head acted on our behalf and the legal ramifications for his actions as they fell upon him were attributed to us. This is what Paul means when he writes, Rom. 5:12, 'Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.' Every human being is imputed with the guilt of Adam's sin and is condemned for it. But there is another side to our sinfulness, not only do we inherit Adam's legal status, we also inherited the corruption of our human nature which resulted from God's wrath upon sin. Describing the impact of this original corruption in the unbeliever chapter 6 paragraph 4 says, 'From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.' We have here what we call total depravity, every part of who we are and every function is impacted by sin so that we are disabled from all good in the eyes of God. And then the last paragraph describes the believer. 'The corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and the first motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.' What does this mean? Here is a commentator explaining the significance of this paragraph, 'This section also affirms that, even in the regenerated, this corruption, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. The guilt of it is, no doubt, removed by the blood of Christ, and the power of it subdued by his Spirit and grace; but, in itself, it retains the character of sin. This is affirmed in opposition to a tenet of the Church of Rome. That universal propensity to sin, which we call the corruption of nature, Roman Catholic writers denominate concupiscence; and this, they maintain, is no part of original sin, and is not in itself sinful. As they believe that original sin is taken away by baptism, and nevertheless find that this corrupt disposition remains in the regenerated, they conclude that it is no part of original sin, but that it is the natural state in which Adam was made at first; only, that in us it is without the restraint of supernatural assistance which was given to him, and which, in consequence of his transgression, was withdrawn from him and his posterity. In answer to this, it is

argued that lust or concupiscence is, in several places of the New Testament, spoken of as sin; particularly in Rom. vii. 7, Paul declares that "he had not known sin but by the law;" he then gives an instance of this,— "he had not known lust, except the law said, Thou shalt not covet." Here he expressly asserts that lust is sin." This truth is hugely important for the Christian life. We are always simultaneously forgiven and sinners. Sometimes we are told that since we are saved we should no longer think of ourselves as sinners, but rather as saints. While it is true that we are saints, by the grace of God, we are always (as Luther said) *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and a sinner).⁶ The point of the Reformers was to stress that though we are born again and no longer enslaved to the power of sin, we still have a sinful nature. In the light of God's holiness any movement of our nature towards sin no matter how small, so to use the language of the debates at hand, attraction, desire or orientation, even without a chosen act or desire as they bubble up out of our hearts cannot be seen as holy as He is holy but sinful. Applying the sledge hammer of our doctrine of original sin to the question are our same sex desires neutral or sinful, the answer is obvious. We sin because we are sinners, we are not sinners because we sin.

This truth is not intended to deny the various levels of seriousness and distinctions between actions and desires; as well as chosen desires and unchosen desires. There would be a due recognition that there is a difference between the desire arising in the heart—unchosen desire; the desire dwelt upon—chosen desire; and the action that resulted from that desire. All are sin though not all are equally serious. For example, outward adultery does qualify as grounds for divorce, but an unfaithful thought does not. However, both are sin. When an unchosen desire arises in your heart contrary to the law of God, we don't say, oh it is ok that I have that desire because I did not choose to think upon it. No, we say, God I am sorry that my heart naturally produces such evil; evil is what I am not only what I do. We cry out, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'

I do think that we have forgotten our doctrine of sin and underestimated just how sinful we are, and as a result are foolishly discussing whether there is sin in same sex desire. We have forgotten that we are sinners and that is why we sin, not only that willed sin is sin. When establishing the guilt of man against man we hold people accountable for motive, people are not guilty for what they feel; but only what they do and why they did it. Not so when considering ourselves before the eye of God.

It is worth familiarizing ourselves with a historical discussion already mentioned, whether concupiscence is sinful? Here is one definition: 'Though concupiscence as a Latin word originally had a broader definition as simply "desire," what was in dispute in the Reformation was concupiscence as a technical theological term. As such, it refers not to desire in general but to disordered desire, thus, desire as corrupted by the Fall. Within this category of disordered desire there is especially concern for the spontaneity or unbidden nature of disordered desire. When the sin status of concupiscence was disputed, the concern was this spontaneous, pre-deliberate, experience of desire, before the will consciously assented or consented to it.' Being more specific they go on: 'Concupiscence was a sinward feeling, arousal, or attraction before any conscious consent to that feeling was

⁶ https://cdn.rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-04-01ST515-Scripture_Theology_Proper_and_Anthropology-1.pdf p36

given. Concupiscence, then, was the experience of the corruption of our nature. It was the inclination to desire in disordered ways experienced as spontaneous feelings and not the consent to or active cultivation of those feelings.’⁷ These descriptions of concupiscence agree well with what people call same sex orientation and attraction today.

Here is the context of the discussion, both Catholics and Protestants believed that the lusts of the flesh, these disordered desires that they called concupiscence, and that they still existed in the believer. The difference was not whether they existed but whether they were sinful. Particularly are these desires still sin in the baptized believer? This question was at the heart of the justification debate. The accusation of the Catholic Church against the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone through the gift of the imputed righteousness of Christ was that this created a legal fiction and made a liar of God. If God looked at a Christian and declared them righteous when they were not would be to call God a liar. We believe that we are dressed in the righteousness of Christ, but in ourselves we still have a fallen nature which spontaneously gives rise to sin. This presented a problem for Catholic theology. In the Council of Trent they set their views, here are some statements: ‘If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted, or says that the whole of that which belongs to the essence of sin is not taken away, but says that it is only canceled or not imputed, let him be anathema.’⁸ Here we see they deny that we are sinners whose sins are not imputed to us, they insist that ‘the whole of that which belongs to the essence of sin’ is removed. But what about those remaining passions of the flesh that we all still feel within us? They go on to say: ‘But this holy council perceives and confesses that in the one baptized there remains concupiscence or an inclination to sin, which, since it is left for us to wrestle with, cannot injure those who do not acquiesce but resist manfully by the grace of Jesus Christ; indeed, he who shall have striven lawfully shall be crowned. This concupiscence, which the Apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy council declares the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin in the sense that it is truly and properly sin in those born again, but in the sense that it is of sin and inclines to sin.’ They have to white wash these desires because their theology cannot agree that we are still sinful in ourselves but righteous in Christ, they need God to look at us and see us as sinless in ourselves that He can declare us righteous without being a liar. They have to say that those desires which even Paul calls sin, they do not. They needed to make these desires sinless because they believed that baptism saved and that we could produce good works that God can call righteous. William Cunningham makes this observation: ‘“Two of the most striking and dangerous tendencies or general characteristics of the theology of the Church of Rome are, first, exaggerating the efficacy and influence of external ordinances; and, secondly, providing for men meriting the favour of God and the rewards of heaven; and both these tendencies are exhibited in this single doctrine of the innocence or non-sinfulness of concupiscence.”’⁹

When sin bubbles up in our hearts, the Reformers did not say, ‘Oh that is not sin don’t worry about it.’ No, they said, that is sin, but remember we are righteous in Christ and yet still have a sinful nature. They were not driven to hopelessness

⁷ <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20.pdf> p17

⁸ Council of Trent, Session V

⁹ <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20.pdf> p21

and despair because they and a theology which could explain why they had sinful desires, we still have a sin nature; and they had a theology that showed that God accepts us in Christ not ourselves, and there is no condemnation for those desires. It also spoke about the power of the gospel and the indwelling of the Spirit to enable renewal within, to enable breaking former patterns of addictive behaviour, to produce spiritual fruit where once only vile sin was produced.

Let us draw some of our ideas into a whole. In response to the 2018 Revoice Conference, the PCA put together a committee to write a response. This committee on Human Sexuality included men such as Tim Keller; Kevin Deyoung; and Bryan Chapell, and it is an excellent report which sets out its conclusions in a number of helpful statements around the relevant topics. These will help draw together the various strands of thought we have been laying out. I want to share some of those with you now, there are 12 statements here are a few of the relevant ones:

STATEMENT 3: ORIGINAL SIN: We affirm that from the sin of our first parents we have received an inherited guilt and an inherited depravity (Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:1-3). From this original corruption—which is itself sinful and for which we are culpable—proceed all actual transgressions. All the outworkings of our corrupted nature (a corruption which remains, in part, even after regeneration) are truly and properly called sin (WCF 6.1-5). Every sin, original and actual, deserves death and renders us liable to the wrath of God (Rom. 3:23; James 2:10; WCF 6.6). We must repent of our sin in general and our particular sins, particularly (WCF 15.5). That is, we ought to grieve for our sin, hate our sin, turn from our sin unto God, and endeavor to walk with God in obedience to his commandments (WCF 15.2). Nevertheless, God does not wish for believers to live in perpetual misery for their sins, each of which are pardoned and mortified in Christ (WCF 6.5). By the Spirit of Christ, we are able to make spiritual progress and to do good works, not perfectly, but truly (WCF 16.3). Even our imperfect works are made acceptable through Christ, and God is pleased to accept and reward them as pleasing in his sight (WCF 16.6).

STATEMENT 4: DESIRE: We affirm not only that our inclination toward sin is a result of the Fall, but that our fallen desires are in themselves sinful (Rom 6:11-12; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11). The desire for an illicit end—whether in sexual desire for a person of the same sex or in sexual desire disconnected from the context of Biblical marriage—is itself an illicit desire. Therefore, the experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the attraction is an expression of original or indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death (Rom. 8:13). Nevertheless, we must celebrate that, despite the continuing presence of sinful desires (and even, at times, egregious sinful behavior), repentant, justified, and adopted believers are free from condemnation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21) and are able to please God by walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-6).

STATEMENT 5: CONCUPISCENCE: We affirm that impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin. We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will. These desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful. Nevertheless, we recognize that many persons who experience same-sex attraction describe their desires as arising in them unbidden and unwanted. We also recognize that the presence of

same-sex attraction is often owing to many factors, which always include our own sin nature and may include being sinned against in the past. As with any sinful pattern or propensity—which may include disordered desires, extramarital lust, pornographic addictions, and all abusive sexual behavior—the actions of others, though never finally determinative, can be significant and influential. This should move us to compassion and understanding. Moreover, it is true for all of us that sin can be both unchosen bondage and idolatrous rebellion at the same time. We all experience sin, at times, as a kind of voluntary servitude (Rom. 7:13-20).’

These are excellent statements and I commend the whole report to you as an excellent model of truth and compassion in these matters. It would not be enough for us to merely make the case that these desires are sin, that the language of attraction and orientation should not be used, and that these new ideas are just old errors already dealt with. There is much that needs to be said in terms of speaking to those who are struggling with these desires and to those who minister to them and support them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Firstly, this Reformed and we believe biblical teaching on original sin and how it works puts the sin of same sex desire, and other desires in a proper light. We all are sinners and are afflicted with impulses and desires that seem to rise unbidden. We have a common problem and responsibility in identifying these as sin and mortifying them, taking them captive to Christ, confessing and mourning them, and pursuing the positive means to see better desires arise from our hearts. One of the lies we must end is that only those who struggle in this area are struggling in this battle. All are fallen in sin and all need the righteousness of Christ.

Secondly, our understanding of a continuing sinful nature even in the believer is an important truth that prepares us to expect the ongoing reality of inward temptation. This understanding of the Bible’s teaching that sin continues to lust against the Spirit in those who are born again will help those who have been lied to that all their desires will suddenly go away, and they will no longer have a taste for sin. Many triumphalistic approaches ignorant of the bible’s teaching on indwelling sin have done much harm, we need a realistic and biblical view. Many have believed that in becoming a Christian these desires will go away, many have realized that the fight can even be more intense because suddenly they are more aware of their sin and their weakness to it. They meet this storm of sin within them and they think that Christianity and its teaching about dying with Christ is a lie because they did not see what Paul shows us in Romans 7, that as believers we continue to live in this body of death and one day Jesus will glorify us and we will never hanker after sin again. Until then we struggle with sufficient resources in the gospel to say no and make incremental gains.

Thirdly, and as we have stressed all along, it is not hopeless or pointless, there is the possibility of growth. True the path of sanctification is long, spiritual growth like physical growth is not necessarily observed by the watching eye but is discerned over a period of time. It is often the case when struggling against a certain sin that it can feel like two steps forward and one step back. But the gospel does have power, we can present our members as instruments of righteousness, God’s grace is sufficient, and lasting behaviour change and changes in our desire for sin are possible. Added to this we should say that God sees our efforts of holiness in Christ, He receives our good deeds in Christ; He looks at our divided hearts in their weak attempt to hate and put away sin and

sees them in Christ. It is easy to become discouraged when we know that we still love the sin we hate; that we sometimes don't sin because of a fear of consequences rather than a love for God, that sometimes we cry and get angry when we can't have our sins. We can easily think that if this is the way we are fighting sin we might as well be sinning, but this is a lie. God accepts all our good deeds in Christ. As the 1689 chap. 16: para. 6 says, 'Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprouable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.'

Fourthly, there is a difference between an unchosen desire; a chosen desire; and a desires acted upon. They are all sin; but actions do differ from unbidden desires. This is important so as not to minimize the actions. Many think to themselves, 'I have already thought it, I might as well do it.' No doubt both are sinful, but it is much more serious to action unwanted desires than to feel them. Let us not give into the lie of our sinful hearts that tries to create space for more sin by relativizing sin.

Jared Moore in his book: *The Lust of the Flesh: Thinking Biblically about sexual orientation, attraction and temptation* outlines a battle plan for those who are saved but who might have a past or are presently struggling with these desires.

1. Lean on the community of the church. Be in a church that teaches the bible faithfully on these matters. Have appropriate friendships with both the same and opposite sex. And marriage should be encouraged as the proper outlet for our God given desires. We would not see marriage as a cure all for any sin and would not encourage someone who is still in the throes of addiction and confusion to get married until there is the sufficient maturity to minister the truth to themselves and fulfil the roles and responsibilities given to them.
2. Pray without ceasing. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, pray that you may not enter into temptation. Christ modelled prayer in the face of temptation.
3. Memorize scripture. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
4. Worship. Both alone and to one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs. Worship is an emotional thing that involves the heart through beauty drawing it into the truths that it is singing about.
5. Pursue discipleship. Don't make your life about not sinning, but a positive walking in God's commandments in the various areas of your life and utilizing your spiritual gifts in service to others.
6. Be accountable. Have wise and mature believers who you can confess your sins to and who will pray with you and confront you and encourage you when needed.
7. Enjoy God's common grace gifts. Don't fall into an ascetic mindset but relish God's good gifts in creation and culture.
8. Preach the gospel to yourself everyday. See your sin, see the free gift of righteousness in Christ, see your present standing and resources to battle sin, and see the hope of future resurrection free from this battle.