

Theology Matters

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Homosexuality and the Church: Moving Through and Beyond the Debate

By W. P. Campbell

The topic of homosexuality is impacting our congregations and our denomination perhaps more than any other social concern. It is the centerpiece of our debates and a motivating force behind major issues that have been handed to us for vote from the 2010 General Assembly. By understanding this subject matter better, we will be more prepared for upcoming discussions and debates, and we can improve our ministries.

I. Background

Our Biggest Failure

I was next in line to testify at the 2010 General Assembly's Committee on Civil Unions and Christian Marriage. The woman who was speaking in front of the packed committee room was putting the finishing touches on her emotionally-charged appeal to be more loving toward gays and lesbians, to welcome them into our churches, and to support gay marriage.

As I walked toward the podium, I mentally trashed my preplanned talking points. This woman had accentuated the weakness in logic often found in Evangelical arguments against homosexuality. For more than three decades we have stated and restated the Scriptural call

to holiness. But we have not as clearly articulated the rest of the Gospel, the love of a Savior who leaves ninety-nine sheep behind to pursue the one. We have failed to adequately explain how we will show God's love to gays and lesbians without bending our beliefs. Might it even be said that until we learn how to show at least as much grace and understanding as has been shown by liberals to this sector of our society that our words will continue to ring hollow for those who engage us in the debate?

Stepping close to the microphone, I looked at people on both sides of the ideological spectrum and spoke from my heart: "I love you—all of you." The crowd became silent. "Let me remind you," I continued, "that love, real love, encourages standards for healthy living. If you are a parent, and you really love your child, you provide guidelines for his or her behavior." I then attempted to explain in the simplest terms what I believe is a Christlike response to homosexuality for the church. Time didn't allow me to bring clarity to my message as I hope to do in the following pages. We truly can show compassion without compromise. This article is my attempt to put feet on this concept for our ministries and words to this concept for upcoming debates.

Why This Issue Won't Go Away

A life-long Presbyterian recently said, "The normal process for decision-making and policy setting in our denomination has been to vote on an issue, consider it settled, and to move on to the next issue. When it comes to homosexuality, however, we vote on an issue, consider it settled, and then are forced to vote on it again and again and again."

It has been more than three decades since the General Assembly offered what seemed to be, at the time, the final word on this subject through its 1978 Authoritative Interpretation. Then nearly fifteen years ago, the General Assembly attempted to settle the issue once again by adding an amendment to our *Book of Order* affirming the church's historical stand on the subject (G-6.0106b). Still, the topic of homosexuality became part of our votes as efforts to soften and then strip G-6.0106b from the *Book of Order* were defeated soundly in 1997 and 2001 by votes in the presbyteries yielding 65.9% and 72.7% majorities, respectively.

Those who thought the issue would lie down and die were not aware of the growing national momentum that has been driving the gay-rights movement. A relentless push by gay-rights activists for acceptance and recognition since the days of the 1969 Stonewall Riots has successfully influenced nearly every sector of our society and has long been seeking major inroads into the church.¹ Relentless and determined, it has managed to fling the door wide open in many mainline denominations.

The gay-rights movement has given rise to the "gay-Christian" movement and "gay-Christian theology." What has amazed me most about this "new" theology is that no matter how clearly and soundly it has been refuted by orthodox theologians through the years, it continues to be promoted as though not a word of reasoned response has been given. With each new crop of incoming pastors, pro-gay theologians rehash the same old arguments and fewer and fewer people know that answers have already been given and more and more people suppose there really is no solid refutation of these new ways of interpreting the Bible. Defenders of historic approaches to biblical interpretation become weary and turn their efforts to more fruitful venues of study while the "gay-Christian" movement gains a wider hearing and more adherents.

One of the primary motivational forces behind the "gay-Christian" movement is the gay and lesbian's pursuit of love and acceptance. Some homosexuals grew up in a traditional Christian church, experienced rejection, and established churches of their own. The Metropolitan Community Church, for example, is now a denomination

with churches in 40 countries on six continents.² Many who call themselves gay-Christians, however, wish to remain a part of the established denominations in which they grew up.

Their pain and their wish to be loved has been heard and felt by liberal Christians who champion their cause with arguments based on justice and kindness, all bolstered by heart-rending stories of the rejection of gays and lesbians by the traditional church. Conservative believers have offered counter points more from the head than from the heart, more from doctrine than from experience. Over the years, liberals and conservatives have talked around each other and talked about each other more easily than they have talked to each other about possible resolution.

What Conservative and Liberal Christians Both Need To Understand

The great divide between theologically conservative and liberal Christians can be closed through the person of Jesus Christ. The liberal cause of love and the conservative focus on truth are united in our God, who is by nature love and truth embodied (1 John 4:8, John 14:6). Our Lord extended a hand of love to the outcasts in his society. I believe that if Jesus walked the earth today, he would minister to gays and lesbians. And of course he is alive today, in us, wanting us to have the humility to follow him as he shows us how to put both spectrums of the Christian faith together.

Great awakenings throughout history have been marked by a coming together of biblical preaching and social concern. Great division and decline, however, mark a church that becomes polarized by debating factions. Most of us today are tired of the battle. The question is, how much more disagreement and decline must we experience before we will come together in a manner that God will honor? We must lay hold of God's untarnished truth and unbridled love with a holy tenacity.

Both sides of the debate over homosexuality have their weak points. We conservatives have supported our biblical proof texts while doing little to lighten the burden for people who experience unwanted sexual attractions. I know. I have been arguing the points for twenty years. Over the same period of time, I have also counseled people who experience same-sex attractions. But until recently, I have done little to help my own church members understand that gays and lesbians need to be loved if they are to be healed. They need to know we care about them before they will let us guide them. Truth devoid of compassion can be sharp and damaging.

Liberals have done a better job than we have at listening to gays and lesbians and seeking to heal their pain. But

they have too often jettisoned the plain teachings of Scripture in favor of cultural norms. Love devoid of biblical standards can be soft and deceptive.

Together, liberals and conservatives have tried to force solutions through votes and polity. Such an approach tends to foster splits on both ends of the theological spectrum, leaving many behind in the broad middle where truth easily loses its sharpness and love often becomes lifeless. If moving the masses toward a compromised center is the right solution, would not the moderates in our denomination have led us out of the desert and into Canaan's rest years ago? The compromise of our convictions is not a way to true peace. Our Lord never approved of a lukewarm church (Revelation 4:15-16). He calls us to step out of our comfort zones and to establish his kingdom. When it comes to homosexuality, for example, his radical love and his unbending truth will call us together into ministries that can change lives.

When Christ Reigns In Our Churches

In the process of researching and writing *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry*, I surveyed numerous churches in America and in other countries. It was an amazing journey. The two realizations that most impacted me were:

1. How incredibly few churches have established a ministry for people who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions. It would be safe to say that only a fraction of one percent of churches have done so. We can imagine many reasons for this phenomenon, not the least of which are the controversy and confusion that surround this topic.
2. Churches that have actually established such ministry, however, are typically quite healthy and effective in ministries of all kinds. The idea that "we can't engage in ministry for homosexuals or it will divide and damage our church" is simply not true. It is our fears that tell us so, but not the Scriptures, nor the Spirit of God.

II. Ministry

The Ministry We Overlook

We provide ministry to address nearly every area of human need, from clothing the homeless to Christian aerobics. We find the Gospel relevant for nearly every area of life, from how to raise kids to how to raise money. Many of our churches have support groups for those in recovery from alcoholism. How many Christians are aware of Homosexuals Anonymous, however, even though it is also an international organization? We

develop grief and divorce recovery groups, but how many of our churches have recovery groups for deeper issues of sexual brokenness? Some churches have finally recognized the need to develop ministry for the rampant problem of sexual addiction among heterosexuals. Few, however, offer ministry for those who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions. When it comes to training our people about sexual brokenness, we back away.

What many Christians don't realize is that people who experience same-sex attractions are all around us. One survey found that 60% to 70% of Christians have an acquaintance with someone who experiences homosexual attractions.³ Perhaps half of those who wrestle with this issue are married to someone of the opposite sex, but still, they struggle.⁴ Singles and teens experiencing same-sex attractions are looking for guidance. Many of these people would call their same-sex attractions "unwanted." They do not wish to be labeled by their sexuality. They search for a safe, supportive environment in which they can open their hearts and share their stories with friends who are willing to walk beside them and support them on the journey of growth and obedience to God's standards for sexuality.

Recognizing The Need

Perhaps we avoid and overlook ministry to homosexuals because this issue stands on the frontlines of a raging cultural battle over values and worldviews. We have seen the looks of pain, angst, and confusion in our church members' eyes, and we don't want to push them to draw battle lines and to take sides. By our silence on this issue, we make the statement that there is no need for such a ministry.

A more reasonable and proper approach for addressing issues of sexuality in our churches is to remind our members that we are each called to live in holiness, and that sexual brokenness of all kinds can no longer be ignored. We must offer ministry to help all kinds of people find guidance and healing. Such ministry begins through listening and learning. We need to listen to people on a deeper level and to learn more broadly and deeply by doing appropriate study and research.

The Barriers We Must Overcome

Our own lack of understanding about homosexuality is one of the largest barriers we must overcome before offering ministry to people who experience unwanted same-sex attractions. For example:

1. We must be careful, when thinking and talking about the moral implications of homosexuality, to separate a

person's attractions from his or her actions. In the Greek, we find pronouncements about those who *embrace* their sinful thoughts and who *engage* in homosexual behavior.

2. We wrongly think that all homosexuals are the same. We see the loudest and most brazen gay activists on our television sets and fear they might soon be marching down the aisles of our churches if we address the subject openly. Yet the majority of gays and lesbians are quiet members of our society. Some attend our churches, often keeping their struggles to themselves. And there are thousands of former gays and lesbians around the country who can testify that it was through a compassionate presentation of the truth and through the support of good counselors and mentors that they found freedom from their past lives.

3. We mistakenly assume that even bringing up the word "homosexuality" will bring division within our congregations. After all, is this not an emotional topic that connects to wounds within ourselves and others? If Sally Green's husband left her for a gay partner, will not Sally naturally have a strong negative reaction when the topic of homosexuality is broached from the pulpit or in the classroom? The answer to such questions depends on how we address the topic. Not to address it at all, however, is an admission of defeat in the war of values that rages around us. Is it not the call of the church to heal wounds and to minister grace? Yes, this is when the church is truly acting like the church.

4. Misunderstandings abound regarding the causes of same-sex attractions. Many of our problems would diminish if we would simply cease to oversimplify this topic and acknowledge it to be as complex as it really is. Homosexuality is caused by a multiplicity of factors. Even the American Psychiatric Association recognizes this truth. A person may have a predisposition toward homosexuality from birth. Predisposition, however, does not dictate a lifestyle. When such predisposition is coupled with influences in life, such as possible abuse, or detachment from parents, or a host of other possibilities, that person may find that his or her sexual attractions develop toward the same sex. In most cases, the environmental factors go back to pre-puberty years and hence the only sexual attractions many gay people have ever known are homosexual, causing such persons to honestly believe they were born that way. A study of human sexual development does not render such a clear and simple verdict, however.

When we allow for the complexity of cause to surface, no longer can the extreme arguments be embraced from either the right or the left around this topic. Arguments that all homosexuals were simply born that way and the notion that same-sex attraction is always a conscious

choice a person makes must both be recognized as poor depictions of reality.

Clarity and Complexity About "Change"

Perhaps the most significant spiritual and psychological factor beneath the surface of debates about homosexuality is that of "change." Is it possible for a homosexual to become a heterosexual, for example? Many of us, noting that even scientists and psychologists don't agree on this issue, wonder, "If the professionals can't seem to come to agreement about this issue, how can we hope to do so?" We can at least move in this direction by thinking more clearly, logically, and biblically about "change." Note that:

1. We need to recognize that there are different levels of "change." When alcoholics stop drinking, get into support groups, and pull their lives together, we say they have changed. In the same way, if a person who once lived a gay lifestyle turns away from that way of living and chooses to live in holiness for the Lord, is that not change? Even those who have bought into the argument that gays and lesbians cannot shed their same-sex affinities must admit that a switch from active homosexual behavior to one of abstinence is in itself a significant change.

2. We may have convoluted perspectives about how change might occur for a person experiencing sexual brokenness. We conservative Christians seem to suggest that change will happen best if we simply point out what is sinful. But we forget that if we only focus on behavior and not the deeper issues of the heart, we create an environment in which the person attempting to overcome unwanted same-sex attractions feels trapped, overwhelmed, shamed, and rejected. It is the Spirit of God, combined with the love of God, that draws a person to a place where the deep work of change can occur. And such change takes time.

3. Much misunderstanding has arisen based on people's limited exposure to those who experience same-sex attractions. Some of us may have only been close to gays or lesbians who have sought but not found change. Others personally know former gays who are living in holiness and who do not find their identity in their sexuality. Many of these post-gay persons can, in fact, testify that their homosexual attractions have not only diminished, but have been replaced by heterosexual attractions. Which of these stories have you heard? If your experiences are lopsided, your perspectives about the complicated issue of change may be as well.

4. Perhaps the most significant misunderstanding related to the potential change of sexual orientation is the notion

held by some that if we only have enough faith, change on even the deepest level will come quickly, completely, and easily for the repentant person. Yet it has been my experience that deep internal change for people experiencing homosexual attractions may take years. Many who have overcome such attractions first lived in holiness before God for up to a decade before they were suddenly surprised to find their predominate attractions to be heterosexual. Is it any wonder that the Metropolitan Community Church has many gays and lesbians who grew up in traditional congregations but who eventually drifted away? Testimonies fill the halls of these gay-affirming churches about their experiences in more traditional congregations where they were told they simply needed to “repent,” and their homosexual attractions would surely disappear.

5. Some Christians have abandoned their sense of moral discernment around this topic. In a youth group, if some declare themselves to be homosexual, or bisexual, for example, the mentality may be, “just let them live it out—they are different from us.” But why then not encourage all of the youth to live out their sexual fantasies and desires? Christians have no right to ignore the clarion call to holiness for our sexuality that dominates the pages of Scripture.

How then do we discuss and debate this topic in a manner that honors God and can help people who are looking for the truth?

III. The Defense and Debate

1. Our Tone:

Think about Jesus as he is described in the Gospels. How did he treat the outcasts and the rejected people of his society? People who experience sexual brokenness are often rejected by today’s society. When speaking about homosexuality, our tone should be loving, and our words articulate and reasonable. We have Scripture and logic on our side—let us use them well and not engage in the escalation of emotions that can easily dominate debates over such difficult issues.

2. Our Perspective:

God is in the business of establishing his kingdom and no matter how things fall out politically during this season of denominational voting, God’s purposes will be advanced. Remember that when Christ returns he will be “ashamed” of any of us who were ashamed of him and his words, and therefore not willing to stand for the truth (Mark 8:38). There will be eternal rewards for people like Jeremiah who spoke God’s Word and refused to compromise their integrity even when the crowd was

against them. It is always right and rewarding to stand for the truth in love.

3. Defending Truth In Love:

The mandate Paul gave Jude to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 1:3) is just as relevant today. When challenging and correcting others, however, let us remember to speak with humility and gentleness (Galatians 3:1, 6:1). We are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), for love alone will cover our corporate shortcomings and sins (1 Peter 4:8).

The following points of defense center around *Using Logic, Upholding Marriage, and Defending Scripture*. Consider in each category how we can speak truthfully while demonstrating the kind of love that will help our words to be heard.

A. Using Logic

1. Argument Made: The church is filled with broken and sinful people. How can we elevate one sin above all others?

Response: We should not highlight any one form of sexual brokenness as being worse than others. The truth is that many heterosexuals are engaged in adultery, promiscuity, or the viewing of pornography. These problems are not only found in society, but in our churches. How could it be otherwise, if we are making Christlike efforts to minister to people at their point of need? But the solution is not to give blessing to every form of sexual sin, but rather to show love toward those trapped in sin and to help them follow the standards given to us by our Lord.

The primary reason that this one issue, homosexuality, has been debated over and over and apparently “singled out” from other sins is that the progressive elements in our denomination keep pushing it forward for debate and vote. And it is the one area of sexual sin that some are seeking to redefine as acceptable in the sight of God.

Love Covers: We agree that we must be careful to help people who experience sexual brokenness of any kind to know that we do not see ourselves as better than they. Rather, we are all together in this struggle to honor God. We each have our areas of weakness. We are all sinners without hope except in God’s sovereign mercy.

2. Argument Made: The real problem for people who are against homosexuality is prejudice. People need to get over their fears and to let go of their bigotry.

Response: It is true that there are people inside and outside of the church who are uncomfortable when around homosexuals. When such insecurity is turned to meanness and bullying, that is wrong. Our first concern as Christians should be to please God, however, and not to bend to the pressures of society to endorse lifestyles that the Bible calls sinful. Those who truly respect God will obey His Word, even when it seems “politically incorrect” to do so (Isaiah 66:2).

Love Covers: Nevertheless, if any of us is uncomfortable when around gays or lesbians to the extent that our inhibitions block an expression of genuine love for them, we need to repent. We are called to love all people and to reach out to everyone with the Gospel of Christ.

3. Argument Made: But I believe gays and lesbians are “made that way” by God. Homosexuality is genetic. Why would God make people one way, and tell them to behave in another way?

Response: Science has at best shown only a possible weak linkage between genetics and homosexuality. Even if such a linkage were one day to be proven, such a linkage would only *influence* a person’s sexual inclinations. Genetics do not dictate behavior. Studies demonstrate that other potential influences on a person’s sexual behavior may be dysfunction in one’s family of origin, abuse, and other factors that do not involve genetics. We believe therefore that genes do not inhibit either homosexuals or heterosexuals from obeying God and from living according to biblical standards. We are all born with desires and inclinations that, if followed, may violate God’s standards for holiness. We do not have the “right” to do what feels natural when our feelings or attractions lead us into sin.

Love Covers: We acknowledge that the challenges faced by Christians experiencing same-sex attractions can be very difficult. Furthermore, we have a great deal of sympathy for people who are influenced by genetic or prenatal conditions leading to sexual anomalies such as sexually ambiguous organs. These are not the cases about which we are debating, however.

4. Argument Made: How can you deny fulfillment to people who are different than you? It is unfair.

Response: It is no more unfair that the Scriptures require Christians who experience same-sex attractions to refrain from acting on their attractions than it is unfair that the same Bible requires Christian heterosexual singles to refrain from sexual activity. There are far more

heterosexual singles in the country than the total number of gays and lesbians, and each group must exercise restraint. Many singles may never find a mate, and some Christians who experience same-sex attractions may never overcome their inner proclivities. Both groups have Christ’s example and the aid of the Spirit of God. With God’s help and the support of the Christian community, we can each be faithful to God’s standards for sexuality.

Love Covers: Untold numbers of people in our society and even in our churches experience sexual brokenness. True Christian communities should provide a safe place for the hurting and rejected to find acceptance and healing. We need each other.

B. Upholding Marriage

1. Argument Made: Marriage is a right that must not be denied to anyone.

Response: When we begin to redefine marriage based on majority opinion and people’s demands for rights, will not groups other than homosexuals be provided a platform for gaining their “rights” as well? Consider the growing demand for polyamorous marriage, for example. The July 2009 issue of *Newsweek* claims there are half a million households in the United States today comprised of “ethical nonmonogamous” adults, who are each engaged in intimate relationships with more than one person, with the mutual consent of everyone involved.⁵ In 2006, over fifteen hundred gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual activists, authors, attorneys, actors, film-makers, educators, and community leaders, called for the rights of multiple sex partners.⁶

Love Covers: Marriage is first and foremost a sacred covenant, established by God and blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ. The church which is the Body of Christ must uphold God’s standards.

2. Argument Made: Whether or not we accept gay marriage as a right, our churches will be required to support gay marriage as more and more states approve it.

Response: There are many things the world *allows* that Christians are commanded by God to *avoid*. Many pastors, for example, have chosen not to perform a wedding uniting a Christian with a non-Christian.

Love Covers: Our hope is that through prayerful consideration about such difficult issues, our denomination will become a positive influence, taking a constructive leadership role for our country rather than

being led down the road of compromise by each new set of cultural mores.

3. Argument Made: By sanctioning marriage for gay couples, we can help them to engage in faithful, lifelong, monogamous relationships to promote their wellbeing and safety.

Response: If two people have a problem with lying or stealing, does putting them together in a life-long relationship in which they support each other's habits suddenly make them faithful? We must define faithfulness by the standards of Scripture, not those of our culture.

And regarding wellbeing and safety, anyone who takes time to read unbiased sites and articles on the internet about the medical consequences of homoerotic sex will quickly learn that such sex, even in monogamous relationships, can be very harmful to the body (even if we ignore AIDS as a concern). These concerns are greatest for males, and approximately two-thirds of homosexuals are men. God designed males and females both physically and emotionally as complementary pairs to make a whole.

Love Covers: It is sad that our denomination has been so long embroiled in a debate about issues of sexual brokenness on a surface level that we have not engaged in serious conversation about the long-term and deeper consequences that may be experienced if we decide to follow the pathway of our culture. Love does not sidestep truth. Honest conversation is one of the first steps we must take to position ourselves to help those who experience sexual brokenness of all types, that we might help them to find healing.

C: Defending Scripture:

1. Argument Made: The biblical argument against gays and lesbians is based on only six or seven passages. The whole of Scripture, however, overrides those texts with a call to love those who are different from us.

Response: The whole of the Bible affirms God's plan that sex is to be preserved for marriage between a man and a woman for life. This affirmation is woven like a golden thread throughout Scripture, from the creation account, which was affirmed by Christ, to the imagery of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church. The several passages that specifically prohibit homosexual behavior are an interwoven thread in the fabric of God's clear and unchanging revelation.

Love Covers: Thus the whole of the Bible not only affirms God's love, but also God's truth. Where we have failed on either side of the equation, we must repent.

2. Argument Made: Christ said nothing about homosexuality—why should we?

Response: The idea that our Lord's silence about any particular sexual sin is an endorsement of such sin is illogical. Christ didn't speak against incest, but we agree that incest is wrong. By his affirmation of marriage (Matthew 19:4), our Lord made public statement against not only incest, but against adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and every form of sexual activity that deviates from God's clearly stated plan in Scripture.

Love Covers: It is time to agree that we will follow Scripture's clear teachings about sexuality.

3. Argument Made: The Old Testament prohibitions against homosexuality are antiquated, and have lost their relevance for today much as have ancient dietary and ceremonial laws from the Old Testament.

Response: Not every law or practice in the Old Testament was destined by God to be carried forth into the era of modern Christianity. Timeless principles, like those contained in the Ten Commandments, on the other hand, are binding on every generation. They reflect the unchanging nature of God. The laws in Leviticus 18 to 20, where homosexuality is specifically prohibited, contain a mixture of timeless and temporal principles. Some of the sins listed in the Levitical holiness code were labeled "abominations" and the prescription for violations of them was death. Most of the sins listed in this category are still considered egregious today, ranging from incest to adultery and homosexuality. Guidelines in the same Levitical texts for how to dress and how to sow one's field and other lesser matters, however, were not called "abominations." Nor was the punishment for violating their guidelines as severe.

Thus the Levitical texts on sexuality reflect the clear moral standards of the New Testament. Jesus and the rest of the NT clearly state that the ceremonial laws are fulfilled in Christ and therefore no longer practiced by the church. The moral law, including sexual behavior, is reiterated in the New Testament by Jesus and Paul.

Love Covers: We confess that some Christians have used the Levitical word "abomination" in an inappropriate manner. It was used in Leviticus to speak against all types of sexual brokenness, not just against one type. Furthermore, the word itself, in the Hebrew,

gives a sense of God's desire for sinners to turn back to righteousness. May this compassionate heart of God always undergird our words as we discuss this difficult topic.

4. Argument Made: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 was precipitated by a violation of ancient hospitality customs and had nothing to do with homosexuality.

Response: A plain reading of the Genesis 19 account and biblical references to it make clear that regardless of what hospitality customs may have been violated in Sodom, God judged that city also for sexual perversions (Jeremiah 23:14, Isaiah 3:9, Ezekiel 16:48–50, Luke 17:28–29, 2 Peter 2:6–7, 10, and Jude 1:7). Thus Genesis 19 is a declaration of God's coming judgment, not only for homosexuality, but for all kinds of sin.

Love Covers: Thankfully, the Sodom account is also a story of the grace and salvation of our God for Lot and his family, and for all who turn to the Lord in repentance. We praise God that his mercy, grace, forgiveness, and life-changing power is available for every person—for those engaged in adultery, fornication, or homoerotic sex, as well as for the greedy and for those who cannot control their anger. His grace reaches out to each of us (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

5. Argument Made: The Romans 1 text describes something very different from the monogamous and faithful relationships experienced between consenting gay adults in our society. There are at least three possibilities for what Paul was actually describing:

a. Paul may have been condemning pederasty, the well-known custom in which Roman soldiers took young men as their partners for a time, until the young men were ready to marry women.

b. Romans 1 may be describing male prostitution, which was part of the cultic temple worship of the day and therefore idolatrous.

c. The text may actually be about people who were not really gay by nature, but rather those who were only experimenting with homosexuality. For them, such sexual behavior was “unnatural” and therefore wrong (Romans 1:26–27).

Response: The above-mentioned efforts (and others like them) to reinterpret the Romans 1 text do not fall in line with mainstream scholarship and standard Reformed principles for biblical interpretation. We must allow the

Bible to interpret itself, and we should not ignore the plain and obvious meanings of a text. Consider the three arguments given:

a. Pederasty was between males. But in Romans 1, Paul condemns not only male-to-male sex, but also female-to-female sex (Romans 1:27), which is in itself sufficient evidence that Paul was not limiting his prohibition of homosexual activity to pederasty.

b. If Paul was only condemning homosexual practice when it was tied to idolatry and to temple prostitution, how should we view his prohibitions in the same passage of more than twenty other sins of the flesh and heart (vs. 29–32)? Consistency of argument would suggest that each of these listed destructive patterns of behavior (greed, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, etc.) may be acceptable by God as long as they are not linked to idolatry and temple worship—an argument no Christian would dare to make.

c. The notion that in Romans 1 Paul was contrasting “true” homosexuals from those who were not “by nature” truly gay, cannot be supported by the context nor by the Greek words used. Paul's reference to the created order and his choice of Greek words (*arsenes* and *theleias*, which emphasized maleness and femaleness) make clear that the “unnatural” behavior here condemned was sexual activity between any two people of the same gender.

Love Covers: Paul's warning about idolatry is a warning for each of us. It is easy to worship tangible things rather than to keep our hearts set on undistracted worship of the invisible, Almighty God. Such worship should impact the whole of our lives and each of our churches. One of the idols in our society today is sexual fulfillment, and we must guard our hearts from idolatry as we humbly obey the Lord through Scripture and God's Spirit.

6. Argument Made: The words used for homosexuals in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in 1 Timothy 1:10 referred to homosexual prostitution and had no connection with the committed same-sex partnerships or unions found among some gays today.

Response: A careful study of the Greek words used along with the scriptural, cultural, and historical context of both passages demonstrates otherwise. The primary word that is contested, *arsenokoites*, is said by pro-gay theologians to be a new term coined by Paul that refers exclusively to male prostitutes. It seems obvious, however, that Paul here combined two Greek words (*arsen* and *koites*) from the Greek translation of

Levitical texts which prohibit homosexual activity (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), thus creating this compound word, *arsenokoites* to make his point. This follows Paul's pattern of drawing support for his arguments from Scripture, a pattern which all Christian theologians should follow.

Love Covers: It is important to note that in these texts, along with every place that Paul speaks about the sin of homosexual activity, he also lists other kinds of sins. Each of the passages we've studied, then, is a stark reminder that we all need a Savior and that we must offer God's message of salvation to all people.

The following chapter from W. P. Campbell's book, Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike Response to Homosexuality, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) has been reprinted with permission.

The Head Who Your Church Follows

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.—1 Timothy 4:7–8

Leadership is critical to the life of God's church. Positions of church authority are the long-sought-after prize for the Christian gay rights movement. For many traditional Christians, leadership posts are the last bastion, the final defense, which, if breached, will signal the demise of orthodox Christianity. Leadership standards are the dividing line where currents from the culture wars collide with riptide fury.

A few months ago I was in a presbytery debate that swirled around the topic of church leadership. An elder in favor of the ordination of gays and lesbians concluded her appeal, saying, "I have homosexual friends who say, 'We will not be part of your church. Why should we get involved in a church that will baptize us but won't allow us to become church officers?'"

Even as I type these words, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has just finished its fourth vote in twelve years about whether to allow practicing homosexuals to become elders and pastors. The vote was close, but once again the historic standards prevailed. Already appeals are being made by gay-affirming congregations for a fifth vote on the same issue. Other denominations are in the thick of battle about ordination standards too.

Why Leadership Matters

Early in my marriage, before I began pastoral ministry, I had the wonderful opportunity of attending churches just to learn, worship, and participate as a regular member. My wife and I settled into a large interdenominational church and enjoyed the worship and the preaching. We came to love and trust the pastor and delighted in his sermons.

Then came the announcement—in the mail. My pastor had left his wife for his secretary. The church had set up a council to work with him in an attempt to restore his marriage, but he refused to leave the new woman. The letter announced the pastor's dismissal and the creation of a support team for the pastor's family.

I was devastated. How could this seemingly godly man veer from the commandments of God to fulfill his own personal desires? If his problems were deep and interpersonal, why did he not seek counseling and recommit to his marriage and family? Similar disappointment and pain must have filled the hearts of nearly every other church member. Like me, they each probably understood the need for him to step down. To allow him to continue in his unrepentant state would be to affirm his misdeeds and to suggest that promiscuity and adultery are acceptable and inconsequential in the lives of Christians.

A leader's life casts a large shadow over the people he or she serves. J. Oswald Sanders, in his book *Spiritual Leadership*, puts it simply: "Leadership is influence."⁷ When church members fall into immorality, immediate friends and family grieve. When a leader of the church fails morally, the whole congregation suffers.

Influencing Our Youth

The awesome responsibility of parents and the church related to their youth is summarized in the book of Proverbs: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). The Hebrew word for *train* carries with it the sense of creating an environment for growth. In home life and in the church, we must do all in our power to create an environment for the healthy growth of our youth. Parents and church leaders carry the responsibility of creating such an environment, and their examples shape that environment.

Steven DeVore grew up with polio. He learned to overcome his disability by watching others walk and then mentally replaying the image in his mind. When he was nineteen, he used the same modeling concept to learn the Finnish language. Later, in college, he watched professional bowlers on television until their movements

and styles were imprinted in his mind. He then attempted to copy their techniques and bowled nine strikes in a row, claiming a score of 278 (his highest previous score had been 163). Sharing his bowling experience with a professor of psychology, DeVore was told that observation and learning through role models are the primary ways in which humans learn behavior. DeVore engaged a neuropsychologist at Stanford University to help him with research and applied the concept of learning behavior through role models to develop a multimillion-dollar company that markets instructional videos on everything from golf to weight control. He made a mint on a simple concept: we develop our behavior based on the behavior of others.

Leaders are role models for our youth. Think of the people who have most influenced your life. What influence did leaders have on your ambitions and actions as a youth? It is no wonder that whole denominations are splitting over decisions about whether unrepentant gays or lesbians should be allowed to be pastors and church leaders. For those who believe homosexual behavior is immoral, such a step is tantamount to sanctioning nonrepentant adulterers into positions of power. Those who believe same-sex attraction is an inborn gift of God, however, find it offensive and discriminatory not to allow gays and lesbians into leadership posts.

The Modern Dilemma

In 2003, when the American Anglican Church voted to appoint openly gay Rev. Canon Gene Robinson as a bishop, an ecclesiastical earthquake erupted, causing church splits, court battles, and significant membership flight. No doubt, there were already many homosexuals within the ranks of the Episcopal Church, but most were quietly worshipping or serving. For the denomination to appoint a bishop who publicly endorsed homosexuality by his words and his lifestyle, however, was to proclaim to all people that homosexuality is acceptable in the eyes of God.

The leaders we need are not those who give in to their weaknesses, but those who humbly trust God for the strength to be obedient. Jesus told us we would need to deny ourselves and take up our crosses if we are to be his disciples (Matthew 16:24). In the realm of sexuality, leaders in the church must model faithfulness to God's creative norm, despite struggles they may face as singles who never find mates or as persons in marriages that for physiological or psychological reasons preclude sexual expression. Jesus Christ, who was never sexually active, enables us to find deep intimacy and fulfillment in relationships even when sexual expression must be curtailed. The Bible showcases singleness, along with marriage, as a holy calling from God (Matthew 19:10–

12, 27–30; 1 Corinthians 7).

Our Manual

Leroy Eims, in his book *Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be*, writes, "We need to look at leadership from the standpoint of the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments are alive with eternal truths that bear on this subject."⁸ But there are differing perspectives on how to interpret the Bible. Bishop Robinson found his way into a respected leadership post because there were many who believed his self-proclaimed gay lifestyle was acceptable in the eyes of God, and they believed they could support their position scripturally.

The two primary New Testament writings about leadership are found in 1 and 2 Timothy. Each chapter in these two letters describes the qualifications for pastors, and a whole section is devoted to the high standards for church officers (see 1 Timothy 3:1–13, which has a parallel passage in Titus 1:5–9). The clarion call in Paul's letters to Timothy, his frontline pastor and church planter, is for *godliness*. Not giftedness, not prominence, not persuasiveness, and not majority vote, but godliness. Every chapter in these two books upholds godliness as a standard for leadership, as does the whole tenor of the Bible.

The Greek word for *godliness* is a compound of two words, *eu*, meaning "well," and *sebomai*, meaning "devotion" or "worship." Put together, godliness is "well worship," or "true devotion." A godly person lives in a way that honors God, based on a true knowledge of God's Word and will for our lives. The Bible cautions us about religious leaders who cloak themselves in an outward form of godliness but who deny the life-changing power of our Lord. There is a vast difference between *godlikeness* and *godliness*. Godliness encompasses not only appearances but the reality of an inner life that is touched by God's truth and grace right down to the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (2 Timothy 3:5).

The Two Rival Factions

In Christ's day, two major perspectives on godliness were peddled by the two types of religious power brokers—the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were the well-to-do priesthood, the religious aristocracy, the leaders of the mainline church. They were experts at finding caveats and compromises related to the plain teaching of Scripture to make life for the God-follower easier and to make Scripture more accessible for people who struggled with their faith. When they found it necessary or convenient, they denied the existence of angels, the afterlife, and the judgment of

God. Looking good in their external show of religious finery, they subtly denied major scriptural truths in exchange for political gain (Mark 12:24). The images of godliness and religious power were nearly synonymous for them.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, held to a strict and literal interpretation of Scripture. Tenaciously, they embraced their faith in God, in the supernatural, in the afterlife, in angels, and in all things sacred. In fact, so great was their devotion to Scripture that they created thousands of their own rules to ensure that even the finest points and interpretations of God's Word were kept with exacting detail. To the Pharisee, godliness was measured not by one's power but by perfection. Their lists of regulations became so laborious that the common person had no hope of keeping them, and even the Pharisees themselves couldn't keep up with them all. Dwelling on the minutiae of God's will, they missed the main point. "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24). They tithed their kitchen spices but neglected justice and mercy for the poor and needy.

The Sadducees failed to honor God's truth, and the Pharisees neglected God's grace. Neither lived in a manner that pleased the Lord. Jesus cut to the heart of the issue when he showed love to the outcasts, the poor, the sinners, and the downtrodden. Speaking the truth in love, he taught people everywhere that the life he offered could change their lives. Challenging the Pharisees for their rigid standards (Matthew 23:13–36) and rebuking the Sadducees for their lack of faith (Mark 12:18–27), Jesus' teaching and life confronted ungodliness with all of its religious trappings.

How are we doing today? Do we really embrace Scripture without compromise? If so, are we following the Bible by embracing the priorities given to us by God by caring for the needy, the poor, and the outcasts of society? Throughout history, the coming together of truth and love and the avoidance of the extremes of the Sadducees and Pharisees have always been an indication of life, health, and renewal in the church. When conflicting extremes create a polarized church, however, the need for spiritual renewal becomes glaring.

What Drives The Extremes?

It is typically not wrong values that create heresy and hypocrisy in the church but right values that are out of balance. Heresy is biblical grace twisted on one end, and hypocrisy is biblical truth twisted on the other. Justice, for example, is a value that fuels the progressive theological movement. The call for justice is found throughout the Bible. It is a godly aim, an indisputable passion in the heart of God. With a slight twist, however,

it can bend love into immorality and truth into error. On the other extreme, the value of biblical accuracy powers the theologically conservative sectors of the church. When the Bible is taught but not lived out, the church becomes an empty shell, devoid of life and purpose as it motivates church members more by guilt than by the grace of God. Let's briefly consider how both extremes have manifested themselves in the church.

Justice With A Twist

The issue of justice permeates the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, God's people are commanded to reach out to and care for the poor, the alien, and the downtrodden (Zechariah 7:8–10). Jesus set the standard for the church when he did just that (Matthew 9:35–36). His followers are commanded to follow in his steps. Latching on to this mandate, the progressive movement within the church works vigorously to open the gate for practicing homosexuals to serve as ordained pastors. Jack Rogers, in his book *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, says that those who hinder such ordinations need only to look back at the history of other injustices to see how wrong it would be to prevent gays and lesbians from serving as church leaders. Likening the issue to slavery and women's rights, Rogers writes:

How could most Christians for more than two hundred years accept slavery and the subordination of women with not a hint that there was any other view in the Bible? Why did good, intelligent, devout Christian people not see what we now recognize as mitigating factors in the biblical record? Why did we change our minds? How does a church change its course? Potentially, at least, we can learn something relevant to our discussion of homosexuality by discovering the answers to these questions.⁹

Later in the book, Rogers uses similar logic about the church's gradual acceptance of women and then divorced people into leadership. This is a classic example of truth with a twist. The logic of Rogers's argument seems to work on the surface, but with a more careful look, one can find the turning of facts and logic, causing his argument to come apart at the seams. The comparison with slavery is *illogical*, the comparison with the subordination of women is *debatable*, and the comparison with divorce is *irrelevant*. Consider first the slavery issue.

Why Slavery Does Not Fit

Equating race with sexual preference is incongruous. Genes determine skin color and may influence our *preferences*, but they do not dictate our *behavior*. The argument behind this logic goes like this: But homosexuals did not choose to be attracted to the same

sex. That statement is true. We do not choose our temptations. But we can choose how to act on them. Overweight people do not choose to be drawn to the dessert menu, but they do make choices about whether to overeat. Joe Smith does not choose to be aroused by his neighbor's wife as he unintentionally sees her undressing through his window. But he can decide to look away and not dwell on his thoughts and feelings or convert them into action.

The very thought of equating slavery with homosexual rights is offensive to many African Americans. In Jack Rogers's defense, one might say his main point of symmetry between slavery and homosexuality is on how leaders have changed their viewpoints around the interpretation of Scripture. But even that comparison is illogical. While slavery is allowed in the Bible, it is nowhere supported. It is tolerated under a general rubric of respect and love for one's fellow humans (Lev. 19:17–18; 25:39). Homosexual acts, however, are nowhere tolerated in the Bible. Despite the modern gay rights movement's effort to reinterpret Scripture, mainstream scholarship has for two thousand years understood the Bible to stand against homosexual behavior.

Paul stood against inequities in a society that incorporated slavery into its very fabric. It is believed that as many as 40 percent of the populace in Rome was under the bondage of slavery. Many indentured servants, however, were treated fairly and justly, somewhat like employees today. Sadly, many others were abused and mistreated. If Paul had started a campaign to end all slavery, he would have been mocked, imprisoned, and rendered ineffective. Instead, he did something much more powerful. He promoted the godly values of love and justice (Colossians 4:1). With a heart made radical by the love of Christ, Paul called Christian slaves his brothers and sisters (see the book of Philemon). He set the stage for the abolition movement centuries later.

William Wilberforce, one of the best known of the British abolitionists, was a member of the Clapham Sect, an evangelical segment of the Anglican Church. His challenge to the upper class to regain true Christian values, largely based on Paul's writings, was critical to his political success. If the New Testament values that Paul sought to apply to slavery were applied to employee-employer relationships today, the outcome might actually improve relationships in most corporations. It would not be slavery.

What About Women In Leadership?

Questions about women in leadership, biblically, go back to the creation and yet are influenced by culture. Some "conservative" Christians believe that the acceptance of

women in leadership posts in the church has opened the door for the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Likewise, some "liberal" Christians argue that just as the church finally came around to accepting women in leadership posts, it is time they do the same for practicing homosexuals. This is Jack Rogers's stance. Both perspectives are flawed.

The issue of whether women should hold leadership posts in the church has been debated from the earliest days of the church, even in some of the most conservative branches of Christendom. Likewise today, some of the more conservative evangelical Christians support women in leadership, and some do not. When we find an issue like this that has been debated by Bible-believing Christians through the ages, we should approach those who differ with us with grace and respect.

The question of whether practicing homosexuals should be allowed into positions of church leadership has not been debated or even considered an option through two thousand years of church history. The first significant challenge to the clear teaching of the Bible on this topic came through Anglican theologian Dr. Derrick S. Bailey in the 1950s in his *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*.¹⁰

Not one verse in the Bible affirms homosexual leadership. Dozens of texts, however, describe women in leadership.¹¹ Questions of gender in leadership and questions about morality are not on the same plane.

The Divorce Question

A third correlation, upheld by the theological left, between the church's historic stance on practicing homosexuals' leadership options and injustice is divorce and remarriage. After describing the changing standards about divorce in the mainline Presbyterian Church, Jack Rogers writes:

How is this relevant to granting equality to gay and lesbian members of our churches? Jesus' words that divorce is equivalent to adultery are among the clearest statements on a moral issue in Scripture.... If we were to take Jesus' teaching on divorce literally, we would still not be accepting divorced and remarried people as office bearers in the church. Yet church law now asks that we take literally less clear statements regarding homosexual behavior. It is a double standard: current church law permits a pastoral approach concerning marriage and divorce for people who are heterosexual and mandates a legalistic approach toward people who are homosexual.¹²

On the surface, this argument seems to make sense.

Recently I had lunch with a man who said, “I’ve been divorced and remarried three times, and I am in church leadership. I can’t see why we don’t allow homosexuals to lead in the church if we allow for divorce and remarriage.” It took from the time the food was ordered to just before the bill was paid to answer my friend. There is not a simple one-sentence response to this complex issue, and whole books have been written to bring clarity on biblical guidelines for remarriage and divorce. And that is just the point. On matters that are not made clear in the Bible, denominations need to set clear policy guidelines so that their membership is treated fairly and consistently. Same-sex activity is clearly prohibited in the Bible. The conditions on which one is free to remarry, however, can be complex.

The Bible shows clearly that God hates divorce but that he allows for it where the marital bond has been broken by sexual infidelity (Matthew 19:9). Paul offers his personal convictions about other potential exceptions (1 Corinthians 7). Less clarity is found with regard to remarriage, and each pastor and church must develop their own perspectives on this matter and practice them consistently to avoid hurt and confusion among church members. I remember one time when I told a couple that I could not marry them on biblical grounds, based on the particulars of a previous marriage and the situation of a previous spouse. They walked down the street and found a pastor in another denomination who agreed to marry them.

Fortunately, many denominations have written clear position statements about divorce and remarriage. Nearly every statement I have seen emphasizes the importance of repentance for the person getting remarried if the divorce occurred for nonbiblical reasons. The Scriptures tell us to repent for our past sins so that we don’t set a bad example for others. Christians can debate whether a divorced person can take a leadership post in a church, but none should debate the importance of purity and permanency in marriage and of repentance for those who divorced for the wrong reasons.

The proper question about homosexuality, when making a comparison with divorced persons being remarried, ought to be, “Should we allow *repentant* homosexuals to be in a position of leadership in the church?” The logical answer ought to be, “Of course,” especially for churches that allow *repentant* divorcees to be in leadership. Throughout this book I seek to differentiate between a person who may struggle with same-sex inclinations but who is committed to living in a way that honors God in contrast to the person who promotes same-sex activity by his or her words and life. Other requirements for church leadership should include a life of godliness, spiritual maturity, and God’s calling and gifting for the job.

The Other Extreme: Empty Truth

If grace devoid of standards leads to spiritual harm, then a pharisaic approach to Christianity is equally detrimental. Some believers add line upon line of tradition and requirement around God’s truth until the original intent of the Scripture is entangled by human-made regulations. The Pharisees drew 613 laws from the Old Testament and loaded them on the backs of their followers. Jesus said, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matthew 23:4). Jesus called them “hypocrites” seven times in Matt. 23 alone. The biblical Greek word for *hypocrite* means “actor”; one commentator has “actor on the stage of life.”¹³ These were religious leaders who put on a good show but inside were uncaring and unloving. They were no godlier than the prostitutes and tax gatherers they rejected. Extremely careful about how they dressed, how they tithed, and how they kept the traditions of their congregations, they overlooked the more important matters of “justice, mercy and faithfulness” (v. 23).

In searching for modern-day examples of hypocrites, I need not look far. I preach weekly to a large congregation just a block from housing projects and a shelter for the homeless. I live on a decent American income, while poverty ravages most of the world. I pray for people to come to Christ and don’t share my faith as often as I should. Thus, I often struggle and pray daily that the Lord will help me not to be just another actor on the Christian stage, devoid of heart, passion, and Christian action.

Karen Booth is a woman who has devoted her life to helping Methodist churches develop ministries for those conflicted sexually. I once asked her what she has found to be the biggest barrier to developing ministry for homosexuals in local congregations. Expecting to hear that it was gay rights protestors, or perhaps denominational politics, her answer caught me off guard. She didn’t think twice before answering, “The church itself is the barrier.” She went on to detail example after example of how reluctant and resistant the average church is to help the sexually conflicted. Prejudice, fear, and legalism abound. There is so little understanding, so little love and compassion. Evangelicals and fundamentalists shake their fingers as they denounce the liberal congregations that affirm homosexuality. But what will it take for those who carry the torch of the truth to themselves be ignited with a love for the people Jesus wants them to reach?

The Heart Of The Matter

Debate among Christians about homosexuality is but the fruit of differing perspectives. The way we view

Scripture is the *root* problem. We must avoid the extremes of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

There are more than a dozen biblical texts that either directly or indirectly deal with homosexuality, half of them carrying the greatest significance.¹⁴ These texts can be linked into natural pairs that demonstrate how the Old Testament stories, images, and laws are the alphabet with which the language of the New Testament is written. Each pairing reflects a central aspect of God’s person.

Who God Is	Old Testament Reference	New Testament Reference
God as Creator	Gen. 2:21–25	Rom. 1:18–32
God as King	Lev. 18:22; 20:13	1 Tim. 1:8–11
God as Redeemer	Gen. 19	1 Cor. 6:9–11

Based on the three central roles of the Almighty, we find three practical questions that relate not only to those who struggle with issues of sexuality but also to the challenges every one of us faces on the journey of spiritual transformation:

1. God as Creator

Question addressed: Did God create me this way?

2. God as King

Question addressed: Is the Old Testament law relevant for today?

3. God as Redeemer

Question addressed: Can God change me?

Creating A Biblical Reality

In his book *Leadership Is An Art*, Max De Pree writes, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”¹⁵ The desperate need of our day is for leaders who will define biblical reality. Avoiding the extremes of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, we need leaders who will proclaim truth with such love and acceptance that they become like Christ to the hurting world. We cannot endorse leaders who embrace a lifestyle of adultery, greed, sensuality, or gossip, however. Nor should we immediately reject leaders who have once fallen but show evidence of transformed lives. It is often those who are overcome by the grace of God who can best help

others to overcome.

Regarding ministry to homosexuals, some of the most effective leaders, counselors, and advisers to churches are those who were once trapped in the grip of sexual sin. In fact, I have found that one of the most significant factors held in common by churches that have developed ministry to the sexually conflicted is that they have partnered with one or more persons who have been sexually broken, who have found healing and strength in Christ, and who have dedicated their lives to helping others.

Paul commended post-homosexuals in the church at Corinth for overcoming their sinful ways, saying, “Such were some of you” (1 Corinthians 6:11 NASB). He acknowledged their faith and faithfulness (1:4–9), confirming that their past need not hold them back from living for God’s glory today (6:9). Many modern Christians do not share Paul’s confidence that lives can be changed and thus are indifferent and even hostile toward post-homosexuals, as though they are a category of untouchables, an especially bad class of sinners.

I have the highest respect for those who are leaders in the post-homosexual movement. Many of them are model Christians by biblical standards. They face great challenges as they seek to help others while being rebuffed, not only by the world, but by Christians on both sides of the theological fence. Those who have come out of homosexuality and now take a stand for Jesus and for holiness may be considered a persecuted silent minority in our country. Many of them labor tirelessly, snatching others from the pit of despair and darkness and offering the brightness of hope. They are to be commended and supported for their work. They become a lifeline for gay and lesbian persons who are crying out to God and looking for a church to call home. These heroes of the faith are also some of the best instructors to help equip the church to develop relevant ministries to homosexuals.

Why do some heterosexuals feel awkward or even defensive toward post-homosexuals? Perhaps we have forgotten that God can use our failings to make us stronger, and our sins to teach us grace. Think about it:

- Paul was a persecutor of Christians before he repented and became the great apostle and the author of most of the New Testament.
- Moses committed murder and ran as a fugitive before he repented and led a million Jews to the Land of Promise.
- Rahab was a prostitute who protected God’s people and had her name etched in the genealogical line that leads to the Messiah (Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31).
- Abraham and Isaac each had a problem with lying

(Genesis 20:9–13; 26:6–9), Jacob could be downright deceptive (Genesis 27:33–36), David fell into sexual sin (2 Samuel 11), and Solomon supported idolatry (1 Kings 11:4–10). James and John were once judgmental (Luke 9:51–56), and Peter outright disowned his Lord (John 18:25–27).

There is not a leader in the world who has never sinned or who will not face temptation in the process of leading others. The desperate need of our day is for godly leaders who will allow their past failures to become channels of grace through which others experience the touch of God's love and redeeming grace. When church leaders are transparent about their weaknesses, those they lead are more likely to come out of their protective shells and ask for help.

The Making Of A Leader

Patrick Payton was recently out of seminary. His new church in Midland, Texas—Stonegate Fellowship—was thriving. His success in part came through teaching his members to be open to all kinds of people because the grace of God can change anyone. Then came the challenge—through Mike and Stephanie Goeke, a couple whose troubled marriage had been wonderfully restored. They confessed in the quiet of the pastor's office that their marital problems had been related to Mike's lifelong struggle with same-sex attractions. Patrick listened as Mike described his struggles through childhood, high school, and college, along with the loneliness and the fear of alienation he felt even at Stonegate Church. Patrick left work that day with the realization that Mike and Stephanie's testimony needed to be shared openly with the congregation. In his words:

“Following several weeks of very intense and sometimes personal attack and struggle about the importance of sharing this real-life story in the body of Christ, I had this precious couple speak in front of our entire church family. It was a day I will never forget.

“The auditorium was packed with Stonegate members and with Mike and Stephanie's friends from the community. Our church was filled with people who thought they were there to hear a normal story about how Jesus had saved a marriage. No one knew they were about to experience a *marker day* for Stonegate Fellowship. From that Sunday morning on, everyone would know we were serious when we said, ‘We believe Jesus changes lives, and we want you, and all your baggage, so we can journey with you in the new life in Christ.’ But not only was Stonegate Fellowship changed; a pastor was changed as well.

“To say the least, I was amazed at what happened that Sunday morning. After the service, people would not

leave. So many people stayed to talk with Mike and Stephanie about family members struggling with homosexuality and asked what they could do. Men whom I knew to be very upset about what the Goekes were going to share were in tears, asking for forgiveness from Mike and Stephanie. And the hope I saw on the faces of so many was astounding. I saw in the eyes of people something of a new hope that said, ‘If Jesus could do this in Mike and Stephanie's life, then surely he can change my life.’ But things were changing in my heart as well.

“I knew from the beginning that my characterization of homosexuality had been wrong. My ideas about homosexuality were formed from the harsh rhetoric of evangelical speakers and the images of mainstream media. I never once thought about white-collar professionals like Mike Goeke who had been suffering with this issue for decades and were drowning in a sea of anonymity right under the nose of the church. Men—and women—living two lives, desperate for help but finding none anywhere they looked. After all, homosexuality was the *worst* sin and surely of a different sort than *normal* sins, such as taking one too many drinks, cheating on taxes, lusting after women, breaking the speed limit, or failing to tithe! I had bought into a way of thinking that set homosexuality apart as the leprosy of the twenty-first century rather than another destructive sin used by Satan to steal away full and meaningful life from those who would follow Jesus. From this moment on, at least for this pastor, homosexuality would not be the serious sin of the worst sinners but rather another sin destroying the lives of everyday people of all social classes.

“I also learned that my words were killing those who most needed the healing touch of the Savior. On another Sunday, not long after the Goekes shared, I was waxing eloquent about an especially popular couple at the time who were openly proud lesbians. I boldly referred to them as perverts and continued on without skipping a beat. Within days, Mike stopped by my office to let me know that when I used words like *pervert* and *queer*, I further alienated those so desperately desiring help from the local church. As much as I wanted to defend myself, I could not. I was damning the very ones Jesus died for by my churchy, harsh words. The more I thought about it, the more I realized Jesus never called anyone names either, except the religious elite of his day. He certainly never called the woman we read about in Luke 7 a whore! He just let her wash his holy feet and taught a humiliating lesson to Simon the Pharisee. As much as I hated to do it, I stood in the pulpit the very next Sunday and issued an apology to our congregation for labeling sinners rather than just labeling sin. I vowed to never make that mistake again.

“I was learning some new things about confession and

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community as well. Jesus changes a life in an instant, but it takes a lifetime of walking in the new, crucified life in a community of Christ-followers called the local church to truly experience the transformed life Jesus came to offer. But for so many like me, we have grown accustomed to acting like transformed people should act, while deep down inside we are dying a slow death because we are afraid to talk about our struggles. We fear we will be perceived as spiritual losers. After Mike and Stephanie shared the rest of their story, the gauntlet was thrown down in my life and in the life of our church. That gauntlet simply represented the fact that Stonegate would be no place for fakers. We would lean heavily on each other with our deepest struggles so that, as a community of Christ-followers, we could share the life of Christ with each other.”

1. For more understanding of the growth of the gay-rights movement, I recommend, Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1996).
2. From the website of Metropolitan Community Churches, <http://ufmcc.com/im-new-to-mcc> (November 2010).
3. SBC Gender Issues Office, “Stetzer Lifeway General Survey,” sbctheawayout.com/survey.html (April 10–12, 2008).
4. Neil Whitehead and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It!* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1999), 39.
5. Jessica Bennet, “Only You. And You. And You.” <http://www.newsweek.com/id/209164> (July 29, 2009).
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8. Leroy Eims, *Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1975), 7.

9. Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville: Westminster, 2006), 18.
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13. Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 15.
14. Scriptural texts related to the topic of homosexuality include Genesis 2:21–25; 9:20–27; 19:1–29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17–18; Judges 19:22–5; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Ezekiel 16:50; Romans 1:18–32; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 1 Timothy 1:8–11; 2 Peter 2:6–10; Jude 7; Revelation 21:8; 22:15.
15. Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 11.

Rev. William P. Campbell is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, NC. W. P. Campbell's book, *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike Response to Homosexuality has recently been published by Zondervan. Resources for church ministry to supplement the book can be found at ChurchReflections.com.*

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