

# Transforming Homosexuality

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## What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change

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But if you consent to evil desires and haven't struggled against them, you will have to bewail your defeat; and I hope you do bewail it, or you may lose all sense of sorrow. . . What we long for, of course, is that these evil desires should not even well up from our flesh. But as long as we are living here, we are unable to bring this about.

—Augustine, *Sermon 152 on Romans 7:25–8:3*

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

—The Apostle Paul, *Romans 6:17–18 (NASB)*

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# Foreword

The modern secular consensus is that an individual's pattern of sexual attraction, whether heterosexual or homosexual, should be accepted as a given and considered normal. More than that, the secular view demands that this pattern of sexual orientation be accepted as integral to an individual's identity. According to the secular consensus, any effort to change an individual's sexual orientation is essentially wrong and harmful. The contemporary therapeutic worldview is virtually unanimous in this verdict, but nothing could be more directly at odds with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament reveals that a homosexual sexual orientation, whatever its shape or causation, falls out of line with the Creator's purpose for humanity. Every sinner who is saved by the Lord Jesus Christ knows the need for the redemption of our bodies—including our sexual selves. But those with a homosexual sexual orientation face another dimension to this reality: they also need a fundamental reordering of their sexual attraction. About this, the Bible is clear.

But the issue here is not merely undoing same-sex attraction. Christians know that heterosexuals are just as in need of sexual redemption as homosexuals. The Bible and the testimony of the gospel point us to the cross of Christ and to the sinner's fundamental need for redemption, not mere moral improvement. Further, the Bible offers us no hope for any human ability to change our sinful desires—only the power of the gospel can do that.

The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ receives the forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life, and the righteousness of Christ imputed by faith. But the redeemed Christian is also united with Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and given means of grace through, for example, the preaching of the Word of God. The Bible reveals that God conforms believers to the image of Christ, doing that work within the human heart that sinful humans cannot do themselves. The Bible reveals that believers are to grow into Christlikeness, knowing that this growth is a progressive process that ends with their eventual glorification at the end of the age. In this life, we know a process of growing more holy, more sanctified, and more obedient to Christ. In the life to come, we will know perfection as Christ glorifies his church.

This means that Christians cannot accept any argument suggesting the impossibility of fundamentally reorienting a believer's desires in such a

way that increasingly pleases God and is increasingly obedient to Christ. To the contrary, we must argue that this process is exactly what the Christian life is to demonstrate. As Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Bible is also honest about the struggle to overcome sin and sinful desires. Paul writes about this in Romans 7, but the exhortations of the entire New Testament also make this clear. Christians who experience same-sex attraction must know that these desires are sinful. Thus, faithful Christians who struggle with these desires must know that God both wants their affections and patterns of attraction reordered according to his Word. All Christians struggle with their own pattern of sinful desires, sexual and otherwise. Our responsibility as Christians is to be obedient to Christ, knowing that only he can save us from ourselves.

These are challenging theological issues and represent one of the urgent pastoral tasks of our time. This is why Denny Burk and Heath Lambert’s new book, *Transforming Homosexuality: How to Live Faithfully with Same-Sex Attraction*, is such a tremendous gift to the church. These men are scholars of the highest caliber with pastoral hearts. Further, in this book Burk and Lambert keep the hope of the gospel and Christ’s cross and resurrection at the very center of their counsel. Something as deeply entrenched as a pattern of sexual attraction is not easily changed—our doctrine of sin explains that—but we do know that with Christ all things are possible.

Christians know that believers among us struggle to submit their sexual desires to Christ. This is not something true only of those whose desires are homosexual. It is true of all Christians. Yet we know that those believers who are struggling to overcome homosexual desires have a special struggle—one that requires the full conviction and support of the body of Christ. We will see the glory of God in the growing obedience of Christ’s redeemed people. And, along with the apostle Paul and all the redeemed, we will await the glory that is yet to be revealed to us.

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

Part One

# The Ethics of Desire

## Why Do We Need This Book?

This is not a typical Christian book about homosexuality.

Most Christian books on homosexuality deal with the topic of homosexual behavior and what the Bible says about its sinfulness. These books are important. As our culture continues to become more liberal in its views on this matter, the biblical teaching has come under growing attack. For millennia, Christians have believed and taught that the Scriptures only sanction sexual activity in the context of marriage between one man and one woman for life. They have held that any sexual desire or behavior outside of marriage is sinful. This understanding has certainly been the case for homosexual behavior, which is condemned in every single passage of Scripture that addresses it. We affirm that interpretation of Scripture,<sup>1</sup> and have even written about it.<sup>2</sup> We are thankful for our brothers and sisters in Christ who continue to articulate biblical fidelity about homosexual behavior.<sup>3</sup> We pray for them, and desire to encourage them in their work. Our task here, however, is different in two ways.

Our goal is not to consider, again, the ethics of homosexual behavior, but to consider the ethics of homosexual desire, often referred to as homosexual orientation. Faithful Christians are united in their rejection of homosexual behavior. However, there is not as much clarity when it comes to issues of orientation or same-sex attraction. The goal of our work in this book is to establish from Scripture that desires for a sinful act are sinful precisely because the desired act is sinful. We will carefully define same-sex attraction and show from the Bible why it is sinful.

There is another element of our book that is different than other books treating the topic of homosexuality. Almost every Christian book on this topic focuses exclusively on ethics. Whether we are discussing desires or behavior, the matter of ethics is crucial. We must know which desires and behaviors are sinful and which ones are righteous. Ethics, however, is not the only challenge confronting the church today. Another pressing reality is ministry. People who struggle with homosexual desires and behaviors need to change. They need to experience progress in holiness. That is why this book also focuses on helping our brothers and sisters in Christ to know how to pursue this change. Biblical change means transformation into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). What the Bible commands, therefore, is not heterosexuality, but holiness (Eph. 1:4).

We write this book as men who are concerned about sexuality in general. We have each written books on the ethics of sexuality and doing ministry to those with sexual problems.<sup>4</sup> Quite frankly, sex is important. It is the source of intense joy and profound pain. We desire to help the church think more deeply about the important issues of human sexuality.

We also write this book as men with concerns about the direction of our culture concerning homosexuality in particular. Most Christians have been surprised by the velocity of cultural change on the issue of homosexuality. Just one measure of that change is the acceptance of homosexual marriage. In 2005, same-sex marriage was illegal in every state in America. In 2015, same-sex unions are legal, or are about to be legal, in a majority of states. That is a tremendous amount of change for one decade. There has never been a period of human history where the church has confronted such a challenge as this one. Our desire in these dark days is to help the church embrace the light of Christ on these crucial matters.

We also offer this book as men with concerns about the evangelical response to the important issue of homosexual orientation. Faithful Christians are resisting the cultural tide and affirming the traditional teachings of Scripture on the matter of homosexual behavior. The issue of orientation, however, has thrown a curveball. As the church confronts the novel argument about the newness of homosexual orientation, many are struggling with what faithfulness looks like concerning what the church will believe and teach. We want to try to contribute to the church's growing wisdom on this matter as we move together toward biblical fidelity on this crucial issue.

We desire for this book to bring about change. That is the reason we titled it *Transforming Homosexuality*. We want people who have struggled with homosexual desire to know the transforming power of Jesus Christ, which leads to holiness. The Bible teaches that transformed behavior grows out of transformed thinking (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col 3:10). Because this is true, we believe the best way to help people experience transformation in their experience of homosexuality is by knowing transformation in their thinking about homosexuality. We need the grace of Jesus Christ to gift us with this transformation. It is our prayer that he would use this book as one means to provide this gift.

This book is offered with the conviction that sexuality is a wonderful gift from our sovereign God that is to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. We are heartbroken by the pain and turmoil that people experience when they attempt to obtain the joys of sexuality outside the

marital bond. Our modest work here is offered with the prayer that the church's growing wisdom about how to think about and minister to these complex issues would contribute to the glory of God and to the joy of his people as we all increasingly embrace his will for the sexual dimension of our lives.

### Questions for Reflection

1. What can happen when homosexuality is viewed exclusively in light of ethics to the exclusion of ministry to individuals?
2. How can one guard against the tendency to view heterosexuality as the solution to homosexuality instead of personal holiness?
3. How has the rapid cultural acceptance of homosexuality impacted the church's perspective of this issue?
4. How does transformed behavior grow out of transformed thinking?  
(See Rom. 12:2, Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10.)