

On Ministering to Those Temped by Homosexual Sins

I. Addressing the General Social Pressures toward Adolescent homosexuality:

It is, simply put, cool to be homosexual these days. I have 7 children, 4 of which are in college (1 at the University of Florida in Gainesville, 3 at Iowa State), 3 are in high school. At every level of their public education they were told by their guidance counselors and teachers that homosexuality was normal and that heterosexuals who complained about homosexuality were bigoted traditionalists. My kids have been scolded in school for even using the word “gay” because it was homophobic, never mind that it is the accept term homosexuals use for themselves.

When I was in high school, which had approx. 600 students, there was one student rumored to be gay, but he denied it. In my kid’s high school of 200 there are a dozen or more kids of both sexes who are openly gay. Every school dance my kids have to see lesbians dancing together and making out on the dance floor. Every prom gay couples are paraded in front of the student body during the promenade. At the last homecoming pep rally, when students could give skits or do tricks that were supposed to entertain the other students, two 8th grade girls used the opportunity to come out of the closet. They held hands and sang a song together about being gay. When my youngest son booed quietly to his friend next to him he was hit on the back of the head and told be quiet by a teacher sitting behind him.

Claiming to be homosexual is trendy. The kid’s favorite celebrities are doing it. Main characters in their favorite TV shows are gay. Popular musicians write songs about being gay. Sports figures who come out get phone calls from the president congratulating them. Everything around the kids today tells them that homosexuality is not just acceptable, but is cutting edge cool. It has become part and parcel of teenage rebellion against the moral institutions of previous generations.

A big part of what makes it cool is the claim to be something new. It represents “progress” and “change.” And those who stand in the way of it represent old traditions and repressive “conservativism.”

It needs to be pointed out to our kids, that the movement to the complete social acceptance of homosexuality is not new. It is an ancient moral position older than the New Testament. Today’s culture is going backwards, not forward. Christian morality is and always has been the radical countercultural position. It is not a morality born in the middle of a culture of sexual repression or heterosexual exclusivity, but in a culture that saw no problem what-so-ever with homosexuality.

St. Paul, who is the author of those texts in the New Testament that directly address the issue of homosexuality, ministered in the Roman Empire. He was a Roman citizen himself. The churches he founded were all in cities with roots sunk deep into Roman culture.

The people he was addressing grew up under the influence of Roman morality. And that culture was so accepting of homosexual behavior that it was literally the social norm. Men who had never been with other men sexually were the rare exception.

The driving ideal of Roman society was of the strong male who dominated all around him. The Roman male took what he wanted on the battlefield and in the bedroom. Even within the Roman institution of marriage it was understood that the husband would take what he wanted sexually from others beside his wife, and that those others would in all likelihood include men or adolescent boys. Pederasty, or sexual relations between men and adolescent boys, was a normal part of Roman society that went back over 800 years into Greek culture before it. There are piles of manuscripts from this period detailing man/boy “love.” It is depicted on pottery and in frescoes.

It is not an over exaggeration to say that the Roman culture of St. Paul’s day (and that of the Greeks before it) saw the “love” between men and boys as superior to that between men and women.

Eva Cantarella, author of Bisexuality in the Ancient World, quotes Callicratidas the Athenian (4th century AD) as an example of one who saw the love of boys as superior to that of women.

“Loving women, basically, is primitive and violent, like everything else that is linked to the necessities of life. Loving boys, on the other hand . . . inspired a temperate form of love which made it possible to combine pleasure and virtue. . . If you see a woman who has just woken up, he says, you would think that she is uglier than one of those animals which it is bad luck to name during the morning time. That is why they stay shut up in their houses, do not allow men to see them, and spend their time putting on make-up, perfume, and expensive clothes and jewelry. In contrast, boys are truly beautiful and spend their time in noble pursuits cultivating their bodies and their minds. Consequently, the love which they inspire conforms to divine laws.”

[Eva Cantarella, Bisexuality in the Ancient World, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002), p 76]

Unlike perceptions of sexuality in our day, in the Roman world there was no hetero, homo, or bi – sexual orientation. There was only the act of sex itself as an expression of the individual will. On whom or with whom didn’t matter. Male or female or both didn’t matter. Bisexuality was the social norm in Roman culture.

This is also true of Greek culture before it. The Greeks saw sexual love as the pursuit of beauty. They seem in many cases to favor the beauty of boys over that of women.

Plutarch (late 1st to early 2nd century AD) give expression to this ideal:

"The noble lover of beauty engages in love wherever he sees excellence and splendid natural endowment without regard for any difference in physiological detail." –
Plutarch *Dialogue on Love*, 146.

My point with all of this is to emphasize that the New Testament passages dealing with homosexuality were not set in some pristine moral culture where people by nature knew that homosexuality was wrong. Just the opposite, St. Paul knew that the words God inspired him to write would be completely countercultural and would set the Christians against the world around them. Paul was prescribing a morality for Christians in the Roman Empire that would have called 1,000 years of sexual practice into question. He knew what he said would be hated and ill received by pagans who valued their sexual freedom.

I have no doubt that St. Paul's moral injunctions contributed in large part to his rejection and ultimate murder at the hands of Nero. Nero is one of two Caesars who was officially married to another man in a public ceremony. He actually was married to two other men, one who was a castrated transvestite whom he called his queen, and the other who played the husband and dominate him.

Now Nero called Sporus "Sabina" not merely because, owing to his resemblance to her he had been made a eunuch, but because the boy, like the mistress, had been solemnly married to him (Nero) in Greece, Tigellinus (a friend) giving the bride away, as the law ordained. All the Greeks held a celebration in honour of their marriage, uttering all the customary good wishes, even to the extent of praying that legitimate children might be born to them. After that Nero had two bedfellows at once, Pythagoras to play the role of husband to him, and Sporus that of wife. The latter, in addition to other forms of address, was termed "lady," "queen," and "mistress."

Cassius Dio, Roman History, LXII, 13.

Around 200 AD another Caesar, Elagabalus was also married to man. Elagabalus however assumed the role of wife in the relationship. He went so far in his homosexual practices that he consulted with royal physicians to surgically create another opening in his body which would act like a vagina. Homosexual marriage is not a new phenomenon.

The perception today is that the Scriptural prohibitions against homosexuality were given in a culture that was outraged by such behavior. So Paul was merely repeating the common sentiments of society. In other words he was a conservative whose interests rested in preserving the status quo.

Nothing could be further from the truth. What St. Paul said was radical and against culture. His were fighting words that called on Christians to be different than the world around them, to not conform to the pattern of sexuality in vogue, but to establish a new concept of sexuality. That is the way he is to be heard now in today's culture that is running backward toward the kind of open sexuality that was the Roman way.

II. “Such were some of you”

It seems a given in our culture that sexuality is a matter of orientation. One **is** heterosexual or one **is** homosexual, or bisexual. Orientation is an essential element of one’s personal identity. It is a matter of being or ontology. This mindset is actually legally codified in Iowa.

In 2009 the Iowa Supreme Court stated that sexuality is to be considered as an immutable trait and therefore a matter to be protected under law.

A human trait that defines a group is “immutable” when the trait exists “solely by the accident of birth,” *Frontiero v. Richardson*, 411 U.S. 677, 686, 93 S. Ct. 1764, 1770, 36 L. Ed. 2d 583, 591 (1973) (Brennan, J., plurality opinion), or when the person with the trait has no ability to change it, *Regents of Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 360, 98 S. Ct. 2733, 2784, 57 L. Ed. 2d 750, 815 (1978). [pg. 42]

Accordingly, because sexual orientation is central to personal identity and “ ‘may be altered [if at all] only at the expense of significant damage to the individual’s sense of self,’ ” classifications based on sexual orientation “are no less entitled to consideration as a suspect or quasi-suspect class than any other group that has been deemed to exhibit an immutable characteristic.” [pg. 44]

Someone who is tempted by homosexual sins is conditioned to see themselves as oriented toward homosexuality and therefore also as immutable in their sexuality. They see it as a matter of **being** homosexual, not merely of having homosexual desire.

One can see how much personhood and being is identified to one’s sexual orientation in the way that so many people who consider themselves homosexual introduce themselves as “gay.” They do this in a way that heterosexuals do not. In their minds their homosexuality is an intrinsic element of their being and must therefore be included in one’s initial perception of them as a person.

I think we need to challenge, even reject, the notion of sexual orientation. Simply because one is tempted by a particular sin does not ontologically make one immutable in that sin. In 1 Cor. 6, as St. Paul lists the heinous cultural sins that the Corinthian Christians had in their closet, he, in way, undoes their ontology. He talks of sins that were, Not as mere acts, but as matter of being in their past.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators (πόρνοι), nor idolaters, nor adulterers (μοιχοὶ), nor homosexuals (μαλακοὶ), nor sodomites (ἀρσενοκοῖται),¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you (καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε). But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Cor 6:9-11 (NKJV)

People were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals etc. They didn't just commit these sin, they were them. But note that in Christ this is not an immutable ontology. **“Such were some of you.”** The Gospel creates a new ontology that nullifies the past. No longer are these people identified by their sin, now they are identified by the baptisms, “You were washed,” and by the stamp of the Holy Spirit, “you were sanctified,” and by Christ’s redemption, “You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. . .” God created a new state of being proving their old ways were not immutable to their personhood. Their change did was not result in “significant damage to their sense of self” (as the Iowa Supreme Court opined).

We need to notice how thoroughly St. Paul speaks to sexual sins here in 1 Cor. He speaks first to heterosexual sin; “pornei” – was a word that originally had to do with prostitution. By St. Paul’s day the meaning had broadened to include any sexual activity outside of marriage. It can mean “harlots,” “those engaged in extra-marital intercourse,” “those who commit incest,” or even “sodomites.” Contextually here it seems to be a broad condemnation against sexual expression outside marriage.

“Adulterers” (μοιχοι) Kittle defines the basic sense of this word in the Greek and Roman world as *“secret sexual intercourse with a free woman without the consent of her lord.”* [Kittle, Vol. 4, pg. 732]. It is primarily a heterosexual sin of a married person. As previously stated, in Paul’s day it was socially accepted that a husband would have adulterous relationships with others beside his wife. It was the norm. The woman on the other hand was prosecuted for any sexual relations away from her husband. Heterosexual sins are addressed first and they bracket idolatry, which in itself says something.

Homosexuals (μαλακοι) are addressed next. The word literally means “soft.” In can be understood in light of the Roman ideal. The Romans spoke about “hardness” as a male ideal. A man was to be hard in his mind, his emotions, his business dealings, and musculature. Softness was seen as tantamount to “female.” It was an insult to call a man “soft.” I think that when used as a terms of sexuality, it speaks to the male who plays the female in intercourse, the one who allows himself to be sodomized.

Sodomites (αρσενικοιται) – A compound word that lit. means, “man-sex.” Addresses the other side of homosexual intercourse – the one who is doing the sodomizing.

Both heterosexual and homosexual sins are equally addressed. Heterosexual sins are even addressed first and are tied closely to idolatry. [Although to be fair in Romans 1, homosexuality is tied directly to idolatry.]

It goes without saying, but maybe needs to be said, that these sins that Paul lists will not suddenly cease to be temptations for the people of Corinth. As human beings they would have continued to have improper urges and desires. But as baptized Christians these did not define them. They were not immutable. Christ erased who they were and saw them as new creations.

Temptations of all kinds are regular parts of a fallen human nature. Some are quite gross. Facing temptation does not annul being new creations. Being able to resist temptation confirms Christ’s work. Consider Luther’s Large Catechism.

- Luther, Large Catechism *Tappert*, pg. 434f
- ¹⁰⁷ To feel temptation, therefore, is quite a different thing from consenting and yielding to it. We must all feel it, though not all to the same degree; some have more frequent and severe temptations than others. Youths, for example, are tempted chiefly by the flesh; older people are tempted by the world. Others, who are concerned with spiritual matters (that is, strong Christians) are tempted by the devil. ¹⁰⁸ But we cannot be harmed by the mere feeling of temptation as long as it is contrary to our will and we would prefer to be rid of it. If we did not feel it, it could not be called a temptation. But to consent to it is to give it free rein and neither resist it nor pray for help against it.
- ¹⁰⁹ Accordingly we Christians must be armed and prepared for incessant attacks. Then we shall not go about securely and heedlessly as if the devil were far from us but shall at all times expect his blows and parry them. Even if at present I am chaste, patient, kind, and firm in faith, the devil is likely in this very hour to send such a shaft into my heart that I can scarcely stand, for he is an enemy who never stops or becomes weary; when one attack ceases, new ones always arise.
- ¹¹⁰ At such times your only help or comfort is to take refuge in the Lord's Prayer and to appeal to God from your heart, "Dear Father, Thou hast commanded me to pray; let me not fall because of temptation." ¹¹¹ Then you will see the temptation cease and eventually admit defeat. Otherwise, if you attempt to help yourself by your own thoughts and counsels, you will only make the matter worse and give the devil a better opening. For he has a serpent's head; if it finds an opening into which it can slip, the whole body will irresistibly follow. But prayer can resist him and drive him back.

Back to the way the world defines sexuality as an orientation . . .

The language of orientation creates the idea that sexuality is unchangeable. St. Paul takes the opposite position, "such were some of you."

The whole thing is more amazing in light of the culture in which he said it. Paul is talking to Corinthians who have 900 years history in that place. Corinth was settled by the Dorians in 800 BC – the Dorians are often credited with the promulgation homosexuality throughout the Greek world.

Corinth was known for its legendary temple to Aphrodite and the thousand plus temple prostitutes who worked there (the number of which is debated). Supposedly, the word Aristophanes used for fornication was *korinthiazomai*, to be like a Corinthian.

Paul's context makes it all the more radical and counter-cultural. Paul, obviously knew this would earn the hatred of the culture in which he lived. He knew he was putting these new converts into a war there and that there would be fallout. The language of "orientation" avoids conflict by removing personal responsibility. It is a fundamental denial of the power of grace to change people.

III. On Eunuchs in Christ

⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." ¹⁰ His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*."

Matt 19:9-12 (NKJV)

This is a very interesting passage that I don't think has received enough attention in the sexuality debate. In answering the disciples statement about it being better not to marry than to divorce, Jesus speaks of celibacy.

The word He uses is "εὐνοῦχοι" – BAG 1. Of physically castrated men (19:12b), 2. Those naturally incapable of marrying and begetting children (19:12a), 3. Those who abstain from marriage without being impotent (19:12c).

Going in reverse order. It seems fairly clear that the last category of eunuchs are those, like St. Paul, who simply choose to devote themselves wholly to the ministry and service to God, and not be encumbered by marriage. Jesus is not claiming such celibacy represents a higher or a better ethic than marriage. He simply seems to be recognizing that there are those who choose not to marry so they can devote themselves fully to the Lord's work. Kittle argues that Christ is not talking about those who, like Origen, physically castrate themselves – such self-mutilation is inconsistent with Holy Scripture.

The second category – those who have been made eunuchs by men, seems clearly enough to be a reference to those physically castrated. Such practice was not uncommon among slaves, especially in the Roman empire when men sought to arrest the physical development of their slave boys for sexual purposes. Outside of this castration was an Asian practice used for those who would guard the royal harem or certain pagan priests.

The first category though is the one that I think deserves more attention; Those eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb. It is unlikely Jesus could be talking about mere infertility since the point of being a eunuch has more to do with having intercourse than bearing children. It is possible he is talking about impotency. But the issue of being born impotent seems so rare and remote as to be an unlikely reading. It seems much more likely to me that Jesus is talking about those who are not born with the same desire for sex as most – those who just don't have a lot of interest in the opposite sex. They don't pursue marriage and family because it isn't something they are driven toward.

Why I believe this is important is because the way our culture interprets a person's sex drive, is that if one doesn't have a strong "alpha" sexual attraction for the opposite sex then he or she

must be gay or bisexual. Our culture creates gayness where the real issue is a simple lack of desire for the opposite sex from birth.

Jesus acknowledges that one born without a strong sexual attraction for the other gender is not somehow sinful. While not common, it happens, and when it does, it's not in any way contrary to God's will. One can still be faithful to God and a faithful servant of Christ without an Alpha male sex drive – maybe more faithful.

Kids that either haven't developed a strong desire for the opposite sex or who are born without the Alpha sex drive, are told they must be gay. I suspect many believe it and start questioning themselves. This might be the thing that drives them into depression and spiritual chaos. As Christians they know that homosexuality is wrong and they don't want to sin. Yet they also know that they don't really desire the opposite sex and they can't make themselves have strong heterosexual desires. They might start to believe they are gay because that's what everyone tells them, so they find themselves helplessly at odds with God.

If they could be comforted with the assurance that it's OK that they don't have strong heterosexual desires and Jesus Himself recognizes that there are those born that way, then maybe they would not fall into depression or spiritual conflict and would accept themselves as Christians.

IV. Answering the claim of “born that way”

An argument that gets a lot of traction with kids and adults alike is the “Born that way” argument. It effectively removes personal responsibility from one's sexuality and blames God for homosexuality.

As discussed above there is a biblical sense of being born without a strong heterosexual desire for others, but that is not the same as being born with a natural homosexual “orientation.” We are all born with original sin. We are not born destined to any particular actual sin.

I have heard the argument advanced that homosexuality is sinful only inasmuch as it is a result of original sin, but that kidney stones are also result of original sin – so homosexuality is no more sinful than a kidney stone. Such a statement fails to recognize the difference between original and actual sin. To further the argument, this gentleman said that it is only the homosexual act that is sinful and not homosexual orientation. I pointed out that Christ says lust starts in the heart not the act. Homosexual desire is sin. The same as heterosexual desire for others who are not the person's husband or wife is sin. There is only one godly expression of sexual desire that is within marriage for his or her spouse.

At any rate this argument exemplifies the kind of theological problems that result from conceding that a person can be born homosexual. When one concedes the claim that a person can be born homosexual, then one either has to believe homosexuality is not sinful in and of itself, or one has to make God the author of sin.

Over the next few minutes I would like to address some of the claims used to justify the born that way argument.

Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling, a biologist at Brown University and lesbian activist, was asked about the argument that homosexuals are born that way. She said:

It provides a legal argument that is, at the moment actually having some sway in the court. For me, it's a very shaky place. It's bad science and bad politics. It seems to me that the way we consider homosexuality in our culture is an ethical and a moral question.

Dreifus, C., *New York Times*, Science Section, "Exploring what makes us male or female"
Jan. 2, 2001.

Among the evidence given to sustain the "born that way" argument is a famous study by Simon LeVay, who examined a brain structure known as INAH3 in cadavers. The study was done in 1991. LeVay was himself gay, and began his study in an attempt to find a physiological reason for his own homosexuality. This in and of itself makes his research suspect since he was not an unbiased researcher. He had an agenda.

In studying the area of the brain around the hypothalamus LeVay claimed that he found heterosexual men exhibited a larger INAH3 region than both heterosexual women and homosexual men. That is essentially the only difference in the brain he claimed to find.

This has been interpreted by many as proof of physiological difference and therefore a phenomenon that establishes gayness. Their brains are different, they can't help it, they were born different.

What is often ignored is LeVay's own interpretation of his research:

"It's important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.

(Quoted by D Nimmons, "Sexual Brain", *Discover*, 1994, pg. 64)

It should also be pointed out that LeVay's study was extremely limited in scope involving only 35 male cadavers and 6 female. Sixteen of the cadavers were identified as heterosexual, of those, six died of AIDS – which is a much larger percent than the general heterosexual population. This suggests that some of those he classified as heterosexual may have been homosexual. The entire study, while highly touted, was also highly flawed.

There was the Bailey Pillar study of identical twins that claimed a ratio of 52% where identical twins were both homosexual. They took their findings as confirmation of a genetic cause for homosexuality.

In 2002 a study published in the American Journal of Sociology, using a much larger sample base found only a 6.7% homosexuality rate among identical twins. If the cause of homosexual orientation was truly genetic then identical twins should nearly always have identical sexual orientation.

In 1993 the Hamer study examined possible genetic reasons for homosexuality and claimed to have found a gene at location Xq28 that contributes to homosexual orientation. Later studies which tried to confirm his findings failed. Hamer himself admitted there was need to identify environmental and cultural factors that affect the development of homosexuality.

Though scientific arguments cannot fix problems of faith, nonetheless, kids who are told constantly that people are born that way should be exposed to the true science behind the claim. They may be benefited from seeing that the case presented by secular arguments is not really as strong as they have been led to believe.

I believe that in the end, the only real genuinely helpful thing for those tempted by homosexuality is to treat it as one would any other sin. They should be directed to Confession and Absolution, the Sacrament, and the mutual consolation of the saints as sources where they can be strengthened to resist temptation. Their temptation is not worse than a heterosexual's temptation toward adultery. All sexual sins fall within the range of God's grace in Christ. All are forgivable and all are "resistible." In Christ all sins are reconciled to God.