

Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction

We begin by defining the terms we are using. The terms “gay” and “homosexuality” are umbrella terms used here to describe homoerotic worldview, lifestyle, conduct, and desires. The term “same-sex attraction” (SSA) is used in this paper to describe one’s inward desires or proclivities. Additionally, we speak of “latent propensity,” which applies to persons who know themselves to be especially vulnerable to homosexual temptations but who are repentant of all their homosexual lusts.

Biblical/ Theological Foundations

We know from the Scriptures that God made the first man, Adam, from the dust of the ground and formed the first woman, Eve, from the rib of Adam.¹ He bound them together in a marriage covenant intended to endure as long as they both lived.² From that primeval union, God has willed that all marriages would consist of one man and one woman in a lifelong commitment.³ In marriage, the two sexes were made to be mutually compatible—spiritually and physically—and also to have the potential for conceiving, bearing, and rearing children.⁴ God has explicitly forbidden sexual intimacy outside the bounds of this marriage covenant.⁵

After the fall of humankind, many perverse distortions of God’s order were conceived and practiced by men and women.⁶ Among these sinful distortions was the practice of sexual relations between persons of the same sex. The Scriptures address this phenomenon in multiple texts, all of which speak negatively of homosexual conduct.

The men of Sodom sought to have intercourse (perhaps by force) with the angels who visited Lot, and this was one demonstration of the depravity of that city.⁷ The Mosaic Law explicitly twice forbade homosexual intercourse.⁸ And in Romans, Paul mentioned homosexual acts among both men and women as shameless and contrary to nature, evidence of God’s abandoning them to their sin and a debased mind.⁹ In 1 Corinthians, Paul included those engaged in same-sex relations in a list of those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. (It should be noted, however, that this statement was not simply a word of condemnation, but rather an invitation to live in the reality of being “washed,... sanctified,... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”¹⁰) Similarly, in 1 Timothy, Paul mentioned men who practice homosexuality among those who

¹ Genesis 1:27; 2:18-22.

² Genesis 2:24.

³ Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-6; Ephesians 5:22-33.

⁴ Genesis 2:23; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Song of Songs; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 6:1-4.

⁵ Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 5:15-22; Matthew 5:27-30; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

⁶ Genesis 6:5, 6; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

⁷ Genesis 19:4-11. The text makes it clear that the men of Sodom believed the angels to be men.

⁸ Leviticus 18:22; 20:13.

⁹ Romans 1:26-32.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

are doing things which are contrary to the gospel.¹¹ Finally, Jude pointed to Sodom and Gomorrah's indulging in sexual immorality and pursuing of unnatural desires as an example to warn us of God's judgment.¹² Although Jesus is not quoted on this specific topic in the gospel accounts, He repeatedly endorsed the sexual standards as well as the law as a whole given in the Old Testament,¹³ which includes a ban on all homosexual conduct.

Contemporary Challenges

Biblical teaching on homosexual practice has come under severe attack in recent decades. It is important, therefore, for the church to be prepared to respond to these several objections.

Exegetical Challenges

The objections to historic biblical teaching which may well have the most insidious long-term effect upon the church are the so-called "revisionist interpretations" of Scripture. In seeking to justify homosexual behavior, these revisionists employ innovative exegetical methods to avoid the intended meanings of multiple biblical texts. Their methodology not only undermines the biblical sexual ethic, but also the clarity and authority of the Scriptures themselves. They suggest that Sodom was not judged for homosexual conduct but for lack of hospitality, that Levitical laws against homosexual conduct no longer apply in our New Testament age, that Jesus' lack of specific mention of homosexuality is an implied approval of it, that Paul's explicit condemnations of homosexual behavior are culturally conditioned and linguistically ambivalent. All these interpretations are contrary to a good faith reading of the texts. Those who use their intellectual prowess to deceive others through revisionist reinterpretation fall under the same severe condemnation as those who did the same during the age of the apostles.¹⁴ Integrity requires that someone who disagrees with biblical teaching simply say so rather than attempt to distort the plain meaning of Scripture.¹⁵ As Jesus warned the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, He will not condone or tolerate such behavior by His Church.¹⁶ Christian scholars have written excellent exegetical analyses of relevant Scripture texts that help guide those who are genuinely seeking the truth from God's Word.¹⁷ Pastors and elders must be proactive in countering these deceptive teachings, especially because the revisionism appeals to a view of truth based upon individual happiness that is pervasive among younger people, as well as increasingly among older believers. We must call our people back to the truth of God's Word.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

¹² Jude 7.

¹³ Matthew 5:27-32; 19:7-9.

¹⁴ Romans 16:17-19; Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 3:13; Revelation 2:20; 1 John 4:6.

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 3:8; 2 Peter 3:1b; Jude 4.

¹⁶ See Revelation 2:14-16; 20-23.

¹⁷ See especially DeYoung, Gagnon, and Via in the recommended readings.

Scientific Challenges

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a disorder, thus normalizing it among American physicians and psychologists. Arguments are often made that same-sex attraction is genetic and no different from any other fixed physical trait. The Christian's response is that regardless of what social scientists may declare as "normal," we believe that the Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Furthermore, we are all born with many innate tendencies which must be resisted or controlled—the tendency toward anger, greed, lust, and pride all can be inherited, but that does not make them acceptable. The nature/nurture debate should not alter the ethical assessment of homosexual behavior, sexual lusts, desires to sin, or the duty to flee temptation, except that by these studies we are made more deeply sympathetic toward any struggling with the temptations and sins involved. In instances where there have been childhood sexual abuse or other environmental influences, these need to be compassionately recognized and taken into account in counseling those who experience SSA. The Christian's primary concern is about their relationship to God, and their need for his grace to save them from their sexual sin, sinful lusts and behaviors, and deliverance from temptation and evil, whether these arise from their corrupted nature or the fallenness of creation. Love for and loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ compels us to flee temptation and rely upon the life of his Spirit within us.

Social Challenges

In 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriages must be allowed and recognized in all 50 states.¹⁸ This highly controversial action by the United States' highest court was the culmination of many years of growing dissent among those who believed the prohibition was discriminatory against those of the LGBTQ community, including (for example) violence and housing discrimination. The Christian response should begin with our whole-hearted endorsement of granting all legitimate civil rights equally to all citizens of our country. We should be grateful when true injustice is addressed. At the same time, we believe that sexual conduct is a moral issue for individuals, churches, and nations. Therefore the church would be unfaithful to her mission were she not to speak out clearly and boldly. We live in a strongly secularized, human-centered, morally relativistic culture, and we should, therefore, expect many challenges from our society to our belief system, our standards of conduct, and our views on healthy public policy. To those who say that the evangelical church is on the wrong side of history, we would say that our hope is in the Lord and not in human approval.

Missional Challenges

In recent years, the evangelical church has experienced a growing concern that our historic theological and ethical beliefs regarding homosexual conduct have marginalized us in our

¹⁸ Obergefell v. Hodges, 576, U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 2015.
www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14- 556 3204.pdf (accessed 12/19/2017).

1 culture and minimized our ability to reach the LGBTQ community for Christ. Many have
2 questioned whether the evangelical church will survive in our times without adapting its
3 beliefs on sexual morality. As a result, a number of former evangelicals have announced a
4 change in their views and have led some churches openly to endorse same-sex marriage
5 and to invite unrepentant, practicing homosexuals to join those churches and be eligible to
6 serve in positions of leadership. This is a rejection of the lordship of Jesus Christ which
7 requires faithful adherence to the Scriptures, no matter what it costs us, no matter whether
8 the church grows or shrinks, and no matter how the world will view us. Furthermore, we
9 must insist to those former evangelicals that the Scriptures place our sexual conduct at the
10 core of our ethical behavior as Christians.¹⁹ To believe otherwise is to put one's self outside
11 the boundaries of historic orthodox Christianity. We believe ultimately that the only ones
12 who can effectively reach this generation are those who radically and sacrificially follow
13 the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Christians who experience SSA are committed to the biblical
14 sexual ethic, while continuing to experience SSA. We stand alongside them offering support
15 as each of us seeks to die to ourselves and live to Christ. We believe rather than
16 marginalization being our missional undoing, that our very marginalization gives us a
17 prophetic stance for a faithful, biblically compassionate ministry to our LGBTQ neighbors.

Pastoral Guidance

Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)

23 Our commitment to those who experience same-sex attraction, both within the church and
24 without, is that we shall love them as God loves them, and God helping us, we promise them
25 our unequivocal loyal friendship. We want them to know that we believe that we are all
26 sinners, bruised and broken by the Fall, and in need of God's pardoning and transforming
27 grace. We have all violated the Seventh Commandment—and every other commandment.²⁰
28 None of us has the right to condemn another, but rather to encourage each other to find
29 forgiveness, healing, and guidance from the Lord Jesus Christ. But one aspect of the gospel
30 message is to remind ourselves and others that a rejection of Christ's lordship leads to
31 eternal misery.²¹

33 All of the Christian life is one of repentance, and we are called to compassionately urge all
34 our neighbors to such radical obedience. Without exception, we all must continually repent
35 of our lusts and sinful desires and turn in faith and obedience to the Lord. The human heart
36 is sinfully corrupt and gives rise to disordered desires, which are also sin. Consequently,
37 the corrupt heart, its lusts, and desires, including unbidden sinful thoughts, are to be
38 repented of, mourned, and mortified.²² Same-sex sexual lusts and desires are an example of
39 such sin. Both our corrupted hearts and our fallen world tempt us to sin: being tempted is

¹⁹ Acts 15:19-20. See also 1 Corinthians 6:9 where sexual immorality epitomizes ungodliness.

²⁰ Matthew 5:27.

²¹ Luke 19:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Revelation 21:8; 22:15.

²² See Westminster Confession of Faith 6.5 and 13.1-3, along with the EPC's Position Paper on Human Sexuality; this is the Reformed doctrine of 'concupiscence'.

1 an appeal to engage the desires of our hearts to commit sin.²³ We must not enter into
2 temptation, but rather flee all temptation to same-sex sexual desires and carefully guard
3 against any latent propensity to that temptation.²⁴ It is encouraging to remember that our
4 Lord Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses because he both suffered when tempted
5 and was tempted in every respect like us, yet without sin.²⁵ As our king, Jesus corrects us in
6 our sin and supports us in our temptations and sufferings.²⁶

7
8 As a follower of Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me — and the life
9 we now live in the body we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for
10 us. Any other identities or loyalties we have are subordinate to and must be understood
11 relative to our union with Jesus through and with whom we are now sons and daughters of
12 God. The dominion of sin has been broken and now grace reigns – we are being made new!
13 We who are redeemed must identify sin remaining in us as that which must be repented of,
14 renounced, and expunged. Our bodies, desires, temperaments, personalities, emotions are
15 all being sanctified, and though not all the miseries of sin with which we are afflicted will be
16 healed in this life, those broken conditions will eventually pass away and our union with
17 the resurrected Christ will remain.

18
19 Any experience of same-sex attraction then must be subordinated to our identity in union
20 with Christ: our besetting sin may be same-sex lust, but we need to be repenting of that and
21 seeking growth in sanctification as we turn away from it to Christ in a new obedience. A
22 persistent temptation to same-sex lust may be our on-going struggle, but we are united to
23 Christ, who has empowered us by his Spirit to mortify the flesh and he will ultimately
24 deliver us from even that misery. How we think of ourselves matters, and shapes the way
25 we go about our lives. And we must first and foremost think of ourselves as dead to sin,
26 with it having no dominion over us because we are alive in Christ Jesus our Lord.

27
28 There are some who view the experience of SSA, excluding the temptation to sexual sin, as
29 something that comes with additional blessings. We must be clear here: since SSA is a
30 result of the fall into sin, it is never inherently accompanied by any advantage to the
31 individual that is pleasing to God. Any experience or affection that is good and pleasing to
32 God (close friendships, hobbies, personalities, interests, etc.) that appears to be connected
33 to SSA or LGBTQ, is not a product of that experience, but rather is a good gift from God
34 independent of the brokenness of SSA. Any experience or affection that seems good, but
35 enables or encourages same-sex lust or temptation must be fled and mortified,
36 respectively. Same-sex friendships are good and a blessing from God; however, formalizing
37 such friendships with unique intimacy or assumption of vows (beyond those taken as

²³ Matthew 18:7; Mark 14:38; Luke 17:1; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Hebrews 4:14-15; James 1:12-15; Westminster Confession of Faith 5.5; 17.3; 18.4; Westminster Larger Catechism 78-79; 81; 195.

²⁴ Matthew 6:13; 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 11:4; 22:40, 46; Romans 6:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:12-15; Westminster Larger Catechism 167; 195.

²⁵ Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15-16; Westminster Larger Catechism 48.

²⁶ Psalm 103:13-14; Isaiah 63:9; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Romans 8:35-39; Hebrews 12:6-7; 1 Peter 4:1-2; Westminster Larger Catechism 45; 149.

1 church members) is inappropriate. We rather encourage same-sex friendships be lived in
2 the context of the church as the covenant family of God.²⁷

3
4 Yet even in our experience of SSA we must be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. In our union
5 with Christ, we have fellowship with him in his sufferings. Because of this, God uses our
6 experience of sorrow and temptation to conform us more and more into the image of Jesus.
7 That does not make the sufferings good, but what we and the world mean for evil, God can
8 use as he works all things together for the good of those who love him. God can sanctify to
9 us even our deepest distress as we cast ourselves upon the grace of our Father. The denial
10 of self and our deep-seated desires when we repent of same-sex sexual lusts and flee from
11 same-sex temptations for the sake of Christ are the sufferings of taking up our cross to
12 follow Jesus. And if we suffer with him, we have fellowship with Jesus in his life.²⁸

13
14 That means that how someone who experiences SSA describes themselves requires the
15 exercise of wisdom in light of who they are in Christ. Consider for example the language of
16 “gay Christian”. Someone who experiences SSA may want to use the term “gay Christian” in
17 order for the church and world to more readily understand their experience of a persistent,
18 latent pull towards same-sex sexual temptation, even as they make every effort by God’s
19 grace to think and act according to His will. In light of this, the church should exercise
20 patient sympathy rather than reflexive condemnation when Christians who experience SSA
21 self-describe as a “gay Christian”.

22
23 However, in our culture, the term “gay” is normally understood as affirming or engaging in
24 homosexual practice. Although the term “gay” may refer to more than sexual activities and
25 attractions to persons of the same sex, it does not communicate less than that. It is sinful to
26 intentionally approve of sin and missionally foolish to invite that misunderstanding. Our
27 identity is in Christ as his new creation, and we should not inadvertently communicate to
28 the world that Jesus approves of sin. It is inappropriate to use terminology, including “gay
29 Christian”, that welcomes confusion from the church and world.

30 31 *Our Counsel to the Body of Christ*

32
33 God has provided His church as the community in which we all must give and receive
34 affection, encouragement, and accountability. Christians who experience SSA should
35 exercise great care and wisdom when it comes to disclosing that experience publicly. They
36 are well-advised to share initially only with trusted, wise advisers including godly friends,
37 pastors, and counselors. The culturally-shaped process of “coming out” is often complicated
38 by motives such as seeking same-sex partners, relieving guilty consciences, or publicly
39 pronouncing the rejection of biblical ethics. It is not dishonest to wait and be discerning in
40 how and to whom one discloses one’s struggles. In some cases, after receiving wisdom from
41 godly counselors, it could be helpful for some Christians to make known publicly their
42 ongoing, largely fruitful struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria.

²⁷ Matthew 19:11-12, 29; 1 Corinthians 7:22-23; Westminster Confession of Faith 22.7.

²⁸ Genesis 50:20; Matthew 16:24; Romans 8:17, 28; Galatians 2:20; Westminster Confession of Faith 26.1.

One of the pressing questions of the church concerns expectations for change. What expectations of change (if any) should be presented to Christians who experience SSA, to their families, to their churches? God's design for marriage and sex in creation is good, and healing from the misery of the Fall in this life may include godly desires for biblical marriage and sex. But God promises that ultimate and true healing from the misery of the Fall is only found in the return of Christ; Jesus is the yes and amen to God's promises, and we rest our hope upon him, not in the change of our broken condition now. The absence of opposite-sex sexual desires is not evidence of lack of sanctification. God promises that in this life he will, by his Spirit, grow us in holiness in conformity to Christ. Whether we continue to experience SSA, enter into a biblical marriage, or are single all our life, God promises we will grow in grace and that Jesus will never leave nor forsake us

With this in mind, through the promised presence of the sanctifying Holy Spirit:

- 1) We can expect ongoing growth in righteousness and holiness as our fellowship with Christ deepens. Though we often stumble and fall, we can expect increased strength in resisting sin, including same-sex lusts.
- 2) We who are united to Christ and growing in grace should expect increased intensity in satanic assaults of temptation. The latent pull toward SSA may continue as a providential thorn in the flesh; but in our weakness, the Lord's grace is sufficient. The ongoing experience of temptation and weakness is not necessarily a sign of sin or lack of sanctification. Yet, we are enabled by the Spirit to flee every temptation, including the temptation to same-sex lusts, and are able to rest our weakness upon the power of Christ.
- 3) In some cases, those who experience SSA will not only grow in resisting same-sex desires, but may be open to biblical marriage and/or develop opposite-sex sexual desires. While this should not be held out as a universal expectation for all (since God does not always grant it), we should not fail to invite God to do so. We can fervently pray and seek such change but must do so in a way that helps rather than harms.

There can be a peculiar and intense loneliness that accompanies Christians who experience SSA and who have committed themselves to a life of celibacy. It can be a loneliness more intense than that of the celibate heterosexual, who may someday have opportunity and choose to marry. The Church must confidently proclaim the good news of repentance while granting special understanding and sympathy toward those who bear this burden, while at the same time confidently calling all her members to turn from sin, grow in holiness, and to sacrifice all things joyfully for the sake of Christ. We know that we shall all one day be rewarded beyond our most extravagant dreams, and that we even now experience the pleasure of His presence and favor. Like the Apostle Paul, by God's grace we can learn to be content in all circumstances *in Christ*.²⁹

²⁹ Philippians 4:10-13.

Our Counsel to Family and Friends of Those who Experience SSA

With the increasing frequency, openness, and popularity of homosexual relationships, evangelical Christians are confronted with some difficult decisions to make: how shall we relate to our sexually active homosexual family member? Shall we invite his or her partner to dinner? ...to spend the night? ...to holidays and family vacations? Shall we attend his or her wedding to a same-sex partner? Do we celebrate births and adoptions of same-sex partners and unions of friends, family members, and co-workers? In making these decisions we want to be fully faithful to the Scriptures in our words, actions, and attitudes, while at the same time expressing genuine love and acceptance to our member or friend who experiences SSA. This can be a challenge.

Perhaps the place to begin is with our mental framework. We must be rigorously gracious. We must communicate love consistently to our loved ones, letting them know that nothing they believe or do will ever quench our love for them. In fact, our love for them demands that we urge them to make Jesus Christ Savior and Lord over every aspect of their lives so that they may enjoy eternal life. We also want to continue to enjoy their company and be involved in their lives. At the same time, they will need to be fair to us and understand that our differences of belief and practice about sexual morality will mean that, at times, we will be unable to participate with them in ways that would compromise our own convictions. We should freely ask them to accept us in the same way that we strive to accept them. For those who would say that any disagreement with their view of sexuality is inherently hateful, we would beg to say that our love for the Lord and our love for others requires us to obey the Scriptures and to encourage others to do the same, while we also are committed to a common civic life in which all people who disagree are able to live peaceably with mutual respect.³⁰

What are ways that our participation in the lives of LGBTQ family and friends could compromise our commitment to Christ? In general, anything that communicates, either explicitly or implicitly, support for sexual immorality of any sort would be inappropriate for the Christian. Surely, there is room for discussion and debate on how to handle various situations pastorally, but generally speaking, we advise the following.

When people are old enough to be on their own, their parents, siblings, and friends should not presume to have the authority over their moral decisions; but neither should the ones in immoral relationships seek to manipulate the moral decisions of their parents, siblings, or friends. It is the Christian's moral obligation to respond appropriately to the sin in other people's lives, and the closer our relationship to the one sinning, the greater the obligation. If, for example, a family member chooses to date someone of the same sex, we must love both the family member and his or her partner with Christian love, but we should be sure to lovingly and appropriately communicate to our family member our disagreement with the romantic, sexual, and marital aspects of the relationship and not participate in any way that would signal our approval of it. If a family member chooses to publicly celebrate their union with someone of the same sex, once again we would love both people in the

³⁰ Romans 12:18.

1 relationship but should strongly consider excluding ourselves from participating in the
2 immoral union, including attending or participating as a guest in the wedding ceremony. In
3 no way should we officiate the service or actively give sanction to the union (The same
4 would be true of a wedding involving heterosexual individuals who were not biblically
5 suited for marriage.) We cannot endorse the union after the ceremony, for example, in
6 allowing them to share the same bed while hosting them in our home (any more than we
7 would allow an unmarried heterosexual couple to do so). Making these detailed decisions is
8 very challenging, subject to misunderstanding, and must be done within the context of
9 clearly affirming our love for all involved and so these decisions are not made lightly or
10 done thoughtlessly.

11
12 We know the pain of loved ones holding our relationships hostage, demanding affirmation of
13 their lifestyle as a condition for continued contact. We lament the effects sin has on our
14 relationships and encourage followers of Jesus to remain faithful: Do not be the one to cut off
15 contact and do not allow relational extortion to compel you to abandon your stated belief in
16 Christ's teachings. Remind your loved ones who experience SSA that you are always ready to
17 have a relationship with them. And above all, remember through the pain that our hope is in
18 Christ and his kingdom, which is good and endures forever.³¹

19
20 When minor children or youth express same-sex desires or tendencies, we should listen
21 carefully and sympathetically to their feelings and experiences. We should thank them for
22 sharing with us and reassure them that we shall always love and support them. At the
23 appropriate moments, we should also help them understand what God's Word says to all of
24 us—that we are to be chaste in all our relationships (with boys *and* girls) and remain
25 celibate unless married to a biblically suited spouse. Our children may experience transient
26 SSA as well as gender dysphoria which may be more related to developmental issues,
27 assertion of independence, peer influences, and other factors. Discerning this requires
28 patience and wisdom. But if children and/or youth are convinced of the persistence of their
29 SSA and show no interest in potential opposite sex romance, we should help them to
30 understand that they can live very faithful Christian lives as single persons. We would
31 probably also advise them to disclose their struggle only to those who would edify them
32 and to demonstrate modesty and restraint in their public lives. And we should pledge our
33 lifelong support to walk with them in their weakness just as we hope to receive from them
34 in our own.

35 36 *Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries*

37
38 It is incumbent upon the local church to minister faithfully in situations involving LGBTQ
39 issues. We advise church Sessions explicitly to endorse the EPC "Position Paper on Human
40 Sexuality" as well as this Pastoral Letter to provide a general theological, ethical, and
41 pastoral framework for its ministry. While we welcome anyone to attend our churches and
42 to participate in our various ministries, it is essential that our churches admit into their
43 membership and into positions of leadership only those who have a credible testimony of
44 repentant faith in Jesus Christ. People who knowingly and persistently adopt, practice, or

³¹ Matthew 10:35-37; Mark 10:28-30.

1 promote sexual behaviors or desires in direct contradiction to biblical teaching and show
2 no evidence of repentance do not have such a credible testimony.³² Such persons are to be
3 loved and ministered to with pastoral care, but they are not eligible for either church
4 membership or ordination.

5
6 People who struggle with temptation and may, at times, sin sexually, but who grieve those
7 failures, show ongoing repentance, and are progressing in sanctification, may be welcomed
8 as members. They are to be shepherded pastorally and held accountable as they grow in
9 holiness. When same-sex couples who are legally married become believers and desire to
10 join the local church and baptize their children, each case must be carefully assessed; but
11 we believe that those who genuinely receive Jesus Christ will want their repentance to be
12 more notable than their sin.³³ This would mean that a same-sex couple who commits
13 themselves to following Christ would come to acknowledge their union was contrary to His
14 will, would take steps to renounce all inappropriate conduct, and seek to remove even the
15 appearance of evil.³⁴ In the case of children, when the parents become believers, one of the
16 parents would assume parental custody and the other would continue to be an influence
17 for good in the children's lives. Only the parent who assumed custody of the child would
18 present the child for baptism and assume the parental vows.

19
20 In examining candidates for membership on Boards of Deacons, Sessions, and in
21 Presbyteries, we believe examining courts should exercise their authority in a spirit of
22 gentleness, compassion, and understanding. The courts of the church should always listen
23 charitably and consider carefully the testimony of those who experience SSA and are
24 seeking office in the church. We urge Sessions to consult with the Ministerial Committee of
25 their Presbytery when considering candidates to the Board of Deacons or Session who
26 experience SSA.

27
28 All courts will do well to ensure that candidates are "above reproach, sound in the faith,
29 wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things." (BoG 9-3.A-B) The Scriptures teach
30 that "an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or
31 quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good,
32 self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as
33 taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke
34 those who contradict it." (Titus 1:7-9)

35
36 Only those who conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity in their
37 descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct should be considered
38 for leadership. (WLC 138-139)³⁵ If candidates for office have disclosed that they experience
39 SSA, the examining elders must first confirm that the candidates have a long record of
40 living chaste sexual lives in their identity, behavior, desires, and attitudes. Ordination is not

³² Church Sessions are already responsible to exercise this type of discernment under G.8, including "The Session shall satisfy itself that each applicant for membership demonstrates evidence of true commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and determination to live as becomes a follower of Christ" (G.8-2C).

³³ Luke 19:1-10.

³⁴ Ephesians 5:7, 11, 12; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

³⁵ G.9-3A-B; D.1-6C.

appropriate while habitual or unresolved sexual sin persists; discernment on the part of the court should be exercised in light of repentance, fruit of sanctification, and proven character over time. Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord.

All Sessions and Presbyteries exercise judgment in how they examine candidates. After confirming the proven record of chastity for candidates who experience SSA, we believe it wise and helpful for ordaining courts to ask question of the candidates in the following areas: 1) their grasp of their identity in Christ as new creatures in communion with the Lord, 2) their ethical views concerning homosexual desires and practice, 3) their experience of God’s transforming grace in their own sexual lives and affections, along with progress they have made in their walk with Christ, 4) their manner of counseling and discipling others who struggle with sexual sin and dysfunction, 5) their rationale regarding their suitability, as those experiencing SSA, to serve as officers within the church, 6) the mistakes they have made and the lessons they have learned in the past in this area, and 7) their ability and strategy, as those who experience SSA, whether single or married, to appropriately model godly relationships. These are not the only questions that may be asked, but are recommendations we believe will help ordaining courts. Similar questions should not only be asked of candidates who experience SSA, but of all candidates for church office.

Church officers who experience SSA must continually honor their ordination vow to promise subjection to their fellow presbyters. When Sessions and Presbyteries provide wise guidance on how officers within their jurisdictions publicly describe their experience of SSA and how they shepherd others who experience SSA, those officers should have a posture of humility, seeking the peace, unity, and edification of the Church.

Recommended Reading

Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay?: and Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction*. Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015.

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