

Discerning Issues: Faith, Sexuality & Gender

Introduction

The relationship of homosexuality to Christianity is without doubt one of the hot topics of cultural conversation today. New York City pastor and writer Timothy Keller has suggested that “it is nearly impossible to talk about your faith without this subject being raised.”¹ Toronto pastor Bruxy Cavey agreed saying, “As a Christ-follower and spiritual leader I am asked about this issue more than almost any other.”² Although this topic is not central to the gospel message at the heart of the Christian faith, our cultural moment requires us to be prepared to address this issue in our life and witness as Christ’s ambassadors wherever we live, work and play.

As Vaughn Roberts in his helpful little book Transgender points out, **SLIDE**

“There’s been huge cultural change in the last few decades. Same-sex marriage would have been unthinkable 20 or 30 years ago. Now it’s almost universally accepted in the Western world. And then suddenly the transgender issue is the next big social, ethical and cultural question that has come to dominate the headlines. How should Christians respond to all this—not just in the media and wider culture but, closer to home, in our communities, families and churches?”

How should we relate to people who experience same-sex attraction, or the gay couple who live across the street, or the person at work who is transitioning gender or has already transitioned? And what if same-sex attraction or the sense of not fitting with the sex of one’s birth is a deeply personal one for us? How should we respond? To quote Vaughn Roberts again,

“We need to begin by remembering that we are not simply talking about “issues” here, but people: precious individuals, each created and loved by God. Most of them don’t have a strong political agenda or any desire to fight in a “culture war”; they are simply trying to cope with feelings that may well cause them great distress. Too often they are being damaged in the crossfire of what can become a very heated debate...Let’s never forget those who are most deeply affected by this subject and let’s ensure that we try to understand what they are experiencing.” **CBC Clip**

Round Table Discussion #1 – How has this issue(s) touched you? SLIDE

Background

As an Elder Board, we have spent months exploring and studying: (a) a variety of LGBTQ related issues (there are many)³, (b) a wholistic biblical understanding of healthy sexuality, and (c) various Christian responses to numerous practical questions and issues. For many of us this process has been a steep learning curve, including learning a whole new vocabulary that often is condensed under the large umbrella acronym **LGBTQ** (which, in case you’re wondering, stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer⁴ or Questioning). Learning the basic language and vocabulary people currently use for sexual orientation and gender identity is important if we are going to engage in hospitable and meaningful conversations with sexual minorities, especially since some terms have

¹ https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/christianity_and_homosexuality_a_review_of_books

² http://www.themeetinghouse.com/resources/tmh/teaching_resources/Same_Sex_Marriage_Statement.pdf

³ LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning.

⁴ Originally used as a pejorative slur, queer has now become an umbrella term to describe the myriad ways people reject binary categories of gender and sexual orientation to express who they are. People who identify as queer embrace identities and sexual orientations outside of mainstream heterosexual and gender norms.

been used derogatorily and ought to be avoided (e.g. homosexual vs. gay). If someone uses terms you don't understand, just ask them (e.g. many groups of people have their own vocabulary or acronyms).

Basic Terminology

Some of the most basic terms that are important for our conversation include *sex* and *gender* **SLIDE** since they are commonly differentiated, with sex referring to **biological** components of maleness and femaleness and gender referring to **psychological** and **cultural** components (e.g. gender roles & gender stereotypes).

- Sexual orientation is one's persistent emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.
- Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, "the sex they were assigned at birth". (explain...)
 - "When a child is born, it's likely that the first thing anyone will say is, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl". Assigning someone's sex has traditionally been based on biology—their chromosomes and anatomy. But for some people, their sense of gender—their inner feelings of being male, female, or both—doesn't always match that sex." (Vaughn Roberts, Transgender, p. 15)

People often confuse transgender and homosexuality, perhaps because the two are included together in the LGBT grouping (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender). But those who identify as transgender may consider themselves heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual (or, perhaps, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual), just as the rest of the population might.

- Intersex is a physical condition affecting a very small percentage of people whose chromosomes, genitals or gonads do not allow them to be distinctively identified as male or female at birth. The great majority of them do not identify as transgender, but rather as male or female. By contrast, transgender is to do with how people think or feel. They are born either male or female, but their feelings about their gender don't fit with their sex.

Discussion #2 – What are some terms that you've come across that were new or unfamiliar to you?

Discerning Voices

Society's views on sexual orientation and gender identity have undergone major shifts, and there are many voices petitioning the church to follow suit. How can and should we respond? Historically, Christians have sought answers to questions of faith and practice by means of a conversation involving three "voices". As Stan Grenz notes, A proper method of theological and ethical reflection "involves a dialogue **SLIDE** consisting of the interplay among the biblical message, the heritage of reflection found within the historical life of the church, and the contemporary culture in which God has called us to live and minister."¹¹

The Voice of Church Tradition

SLIDE Naturally questions were raised regarding what voices or range of perspectives we would be listening to. While we have tried to listen to a wide bandwidth of Christian perspectives, we also affirmed our commitment to work within the boundaries of our MB Confession of Faith. Our aim through these sessions is to bring greater clarity to what we as a denomination and congregation believe, as well as how these beliefs ought to inform and direct how we live as followers of Christ.

As an MB denomination "We believe that the entire Bible was inspired by God through the Holy Spirit" and "we accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice."⁵ We believe that the Bible teaches that: **SLIDE**

⁵ From "Revelation of God", Article 2 in our *Confession of Faith*.

“Marriage is a covenant relationship intended to unite a man and a woman for life. At creation, God designed marriage for companionship, sexual union, and the birth and nurture of children. Sexual intimacy rightfully takes place only within marriage.” (Article 11)

As a member of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC), we have had the opportunity to participate in two national study conferences on healthy sexuality.⁶ Both study conferences worked within the boundaries of our MB Confession of faith. At our 2015 study conference our national Board of Faith and Life called: **SLIDE**

*“Canadian MB churches to continue to live according to biblical teachings by combining MB convictions about human sexuality (as in the MB Confession of Faith) with a loving, hospitable response to the people experiencing sexual brokenness and sexual sin. The Scripture invite believers to embrace the gift of sexuality and the joy of sexual intimacy within the parameters ordained by God.”**

The Voice of Scripture

We are well aware that biblically literate Christians have differing opinions on what the Bible teaches about same-sex attraction and sexual expression. It is important for us to be familiar with the range of biblical interpretations and positions—and where we as a denomination and congregation are on it. According to the Bible, What does God think about homosexuality? **SLIDE**

“The Bible hardly ever discusses homosexual behavior...perhaps half a dozen references...In terms of emphasis, it is a minor concern—in contrast, for example, to economic injustice.”⁷ Even though homosexuality is not a major theme in the Bible, certain biblical passages do in fact speak of some type(s) of same-sex acts. The central texts are the following: **SLIDE**

1. The Sin(s) of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19⁴⁻¹¹; cf. Isa 3⁹; Ezek 16⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰; 2 Pet 2⁶; Jude 7)
2. The Prohibitions in the Holiness Code (Lev. 18²²; 20¹³)
3. Paul’s Critique of Pagan Society (Rom. 1²⁶⁻²⁷)
4. Paul’s Rejection of Same-Sex Acts (1 Cor. 6⁹⁻¹¹; 1 Tim. 1¹⁰; cf. Acts 15²⁸⁻²⁹)
5. Silent Texts: David & Jonathan (1 Sam. 16²¹; 18^{1,3}; 2 Sam. 1²⁶), Jesus (Mk 7²¹; Mt. 19¹¹⁻¹²; Mk. 10¹¹⁻¹²; Mt. 19⁴⁻⁹)

Traditionally, Christian ethicists have found in these texts a clear rejection of all genital homosexual behaviour. However, in recent years a growing chorus of interpreters have voiced their disagreement with this conclusion, arguing that the church has misread and misused these texts (e.g. as “clobber texts”). Many of these scholars in their re-reading of these text have suggested that: **SLIDE**

1. The sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but inhospitality, attempted rape, or the desire to have sex with angels.^{Grenz,36-40}
2. The prohibitions in the Holiness Code refer to idolatrous sexual relations.⁸ Some “affirming” interpreters also suggest that many OT laws, including these, are no longer applicable to NT believers.⁹

⁶ In 2013, Mennonite Brethren and others from across Canada met in Edmonton for a study conference titled “Honouring God with the Body: A Study on Human Sexuality.” In 2015 congregational representatives across Canada met in Winnipeg for a study conference titled “God, Sex & Church: A Theology of Healthy Sexuality”.

⁷ Richard Hays, “Homosexuality”, (p. 2 in paper version).

⁸ i.e. Since “an abomination” (ESV) is often used to describe idolatry, some suggest these verses are not prohibiting homosexuality in general, but only the cultic prostitution associated with pagan temples. Allberry,p29.

⁹ In response, see Richard Hays’ helpful summary in his chapter on [Homosexuality](#), p. 3. See also Timothy Keller, “[OT Law and the Charge of Inconsistency](#)”.

3. Paul’s prohibitions speak about sexually exploitive practices known in Roman culture (e.g. masters having sex with their male slaves, pederasty, homosexual prostitution, victims of war raped by their conquerors).
4. Paul did not know of, or speak to, the kind of committed consensual same-sex relationship known today.
5. Certain biblical heroes (e.g. David & Jonathan), might have been homosexual lovers. A number of scholars also make the point that Jesus was silent on homosexual relationships.¹⁰

The fundamental question often being debated is whether our contemporary culture has given us such important new insights into the reality of homosexuality that our traditional reading of scripture is woefully inadequate and therefore in dire need of revision? **SLIDE** These “affirming” interpreters believe this is the case and conclude that in none of these texts do we find reference to homosexuality as a natural sexual orientation for some people nor condemnation of its behavioral expression within the context of committed same-sex relationships. **SLIDE**

How does the Bible speak to *contemporary* understanding & expressions of homosexuality?

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(range of responses)

The Bible is silent e.g. Gen.19 = inhospitality	partial silence silent on mutual same-sex relationships	biblical writers mistaken legalistic and/or prejudiced	Bible is normative addresses it & is authoritative
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Evaluating the Revisionist Interpretations **SLIDE**

1. The Sin(s) of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19⁴⁻¹¹; cf. Isa 3⁹; Ezek 16⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰; 2 Pet 2⁶; Jude 7)
 - Sin of inhospitality yes (very grave sin in the ancient world), and attempted rape.
 - Jude 7 makes the point that they were condemned because they “gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion”. “They were guilty of twisting God’s good intention for human sexuality into a vehicle for unjust treatment of visitors to their city.”^{Grenz,40}
 - Yet, “there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse.”^{Hays}
2. The Prohibitions in the Holiness Code (Lev. 18²²; 20¹³)
 - Not just concerned with ceremonial or ritual purity but moral & ethical.
 - This prohibition is categorical & grounded both in the connection to idolatry *and* the creational design and intent.^{Grenz,45} (N.B. These laws were to apply also to “the foreigners residing among you”—Lev. 18²⁶)
 - “all the laws about sexual immorality are carried over into the NT.”^{Sprinkle,2} (e.g. 1 Cor. 6⁹; 1 Tim. 1¹⁰)^{Hays,3}
3. Paul’s Critique of Pagan Society (Rom. 1²⁶⁻²⁷)
 - Rom 1²⁶⁻²⁷ includes exploitative, abusive and idolatrous same-sex acts, *but* it is not limited to these.
 - “The idea that NT writers were *only* prohibiting exploitative same-sex relations is neither biblically nor historically accurate.”¹¹
4. Paul’s Rejection of Same-Sex Acts (1 Cor. 6⁹⁻¹¹; 1 Tim. 1¹⁰; cf. Acts 15²⁸⁻²⁹)
 - Given the context of Romans 1 and how “contrary to nature” is used by other writers in Paul’s day, it’s unlikely that Paul is talking about people simply deviating from their own sexual orientation.”^{Sprinkle,7-8}
 - “the verse does not speak of natural and unnatural *feelings*, but natural and unnatural *function*.”^{Grenz,49}
 - Paul is giving a global account of the fall of humanity, a fall displayed in the various ungodly behaviors listed in verses 23-31. Paul singles out same-sex intercourse for special attention (not because it is the worst of all sins) because it demonstrates the way human fallenness distorts God’s created order.”^{Hays,8}

¹⁰ See Preston Sprinkle’s response, “Why Didn’t Jesus Mention Homosexuality?” <https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources>

¹¹ Sprinkle, “15 Reasons...And 15 Responses”, p. 7. See Sprinkle, “Romans 1 and Homosexuality” (*Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24.4 (2014) pp. 515-528) for ancient quotations from Aristotle, Soranus, Philo, Pliny, Phaedrus, etc. and ancient examples of same-sex couples like Agathon, Parmenides, Nero, Hadrian, etc.

5. Silent Texts: David & Jonathan (1 Sam. 16²¹; 18^{1,3}; 2 Sam. 1²⁶), Jesus (Mk 7²¹; Mt. 19¹¹⁻¹²; Mk. 10¹¹⁻¹²; Mt. 19⁴⁻⁹)
- **D & J** – “Whatever feelings David & Jonathan had for each other, both were definitely heterosexual in behavior, for both were married and fathered children.”^{Grenz,60}
 - **JESUS** – It would make much more historical and cultural sense to conclude that Jesus stood within the rest of Judaism on the question of same-sex relations. (four points)
 - a) Jesus was a Jew and held to a Jewish sexual ethic (Jews agreed on this ethic). (b) In sexual matters that were debated within Judaism, Jesus consistently defends a stricter stance, not a more lenient one.¹² (c) Jesus taught that marriage is between one man and one woman (Mt. 19; Mk.10). (d) Jesus uses the umbrella term for “sexual immorality” (*porneia*) to condemn sexual sins (Mt. 15¹⁹; Mk. 7²¹).

The Big Picture: Sexuality and the Bible

In exploring what the Bible says about homosexuality, we do need to go beyond a short list of passages that treat the matter explicitly.¹³ We must also look at how the Bible deals with sexuality as a whole: “How is human sexuality portrayed in the canon as a whole, and how are the few explicit texts treating homosexuality to be read in relation to this larger canonical framework?”¹⁴ This is done by looking at the four stages of redemptive history: creation, the fall, redemption, and glorification. Each stage teaches us something unique about what God had in mind for our sexuality.¹⁵ **SLIDE**

Divide up into four groups. Read the text(s) and answer the following questions:

- Q¹ – What indications are there in the text(s) of God’s creative intentions for human sexuality?
 Q² – What indications are there in the text(s) of sin’s impact/effect(s) on human sexuality?
 Q³ – What indications are there in the text(s) of God’s restorative intent for human sexuality?
 Q⁴ – What is(are) the main point(s) being made in this passage?

- a) **God’s Creative Intention** (Gen. 1-2; Mark 10²⁻⁹; 1 Thess. 4³⁻⁸; 1 Cor. 7¹⁻⁹; Eph. 5²¹⁻³³; Heb. 13⁴)
- From Gen. 1 onward, Scripture affirms repeatedly God’s intention for human sexuality (male and female) and heterosexual marriage (Mk 10²⁻⁹; 1 Thess 4³⁻⁸; 1 Cor 7¹⁻⁹; Eph 5²¹⁻³³; Heb 13⁴; cf. Song of Solomon). The Bible’s few emphatic negations of homosexuality are sketched against the larger positive picture of marriage.
- b) **The Fallen Human Condition** (Gen. 3; Jer. 17⁹; Rom. 1^{18ff.}; 6¹⁷; etc.)
- The world is “not the way it’s supposed to be.”^{Yarhouse,21} The fallout from the fall includes distorted and disordered desires and behaviors of all kinds.
 - We tend to have an inflated opinion of ourselves and our ability to know and do what is right. The biblical analysis of the human predicament makes it clear that human beings are prisoners of sin.
 - “We are in bondage to sin but still accountable to God’s righteous judgment of our actions.”^{Hays,10}
 - We are also all prone to put something in the place that God alone deserves in our lives. The Bible undercuts our cultural obsession with sexual fulfillment and with individualism. “The NT never considers sexual conduct a matter of purely private concerns between consenting adults.”^{Hays,11}
- c) **Redemption** (Lev. 18²⁴⁻²⁶; Mt. 19^{3-12,16} 1 Cor. 5¹⁻¹³; 6¹²⁻²⁰; 7; Romans 8²²⁻²⁵; cf. Mt. 12⁴⁶⁻⁵⁰)
- The Fall is not the last word, the cross is. “No one in Christ is locked into the past or into a psychological or biological determinism...the judgment of Romans 1 against homosexual practice should never be read apart from the rest of the letter, with its message of grace and hope through the cross of Christ.”^{Hays,12-13}

¹² See Preston Sprinkle, “Why Didn’t Jesus Mention Homosexuality?”, pp.2-3 <https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources>

¹³ “The issue of homosexuality differs significantly from matters such as slavery or the subordination of women, on which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterposed witnesses....against homosexual practices [it] is univocal.” Hays, 9.

¹⁴ Richard Hays, “Homosexuality”, pp. 9-10 (paper version).

¹⁵ See Mark Yarhouse, Homosexuality and the Christian, p.19ff and Richard Hays, “Homosexuality”, pp. 9ff. James Brownson speaks about “the moral logic” of the commands regarding sexuality.

¹⁶ See the helpful interpretation by Christopher Yuan, Holy Sexuality and the Gospel, pp. 105-108.

- We also live in the time of tension between “already” and “not yet.” The “redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8²³) remains a future hope yet God also promises to provide help and hope in the present (1 Cor. 10¹³; 2 Cor. 12⁹⁻¹⁰; Gal. 6¹⁻⁵).

d) **Glorification / New Creation** (Mt. 22²³⁻³⁰//Lk 20²⁷⁻³⁶; 2 Cor. 11²; Eph. 5³²; Rev. 19⁶⁻⁹)

- Marrying and getting married are not a part of our future existence.¹⁷ The only marriage in the new creation will exist between the church and Christ, the fulfillment of all desires.
- Our sexuality points to something deeper...what we ultimately want is a relationship with God...our sexuality is one of the ways God speaks to us that we’re not meant to be alone (humanly & heavenly).
- Building our identity on anything other than our identity in Christ is a reduction of who God designed us to be. **David Bennett Clip** “In our society...we’ve made romantic love so absolute (e.g. songs, films, shows)...the most important thing for you flourishing as a human being. Jesus actually sets [us] free from making romantic love the thing that completes [us]...Because it never did.”¹⁸

Q & A

The Voice of Contemporary Culture

1) **Homosexuality in Contemporary Perspective** (Stan Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming, ch. 1)

“Homosexuality is no new phenomenon...present among a wide range of human societies (e.g. OT, Roman Empire)...[But] prior to the modern era homosexuality was understood almost exclusively in connection with certain *activities*. The contemporary outlook, in contrast, looks at homosexuality primarily as a sexual *orientation*—as a fixed, lifelong pattern—and only secondarily as behavior. What marked this shift in understanding? Many scholars look to the rise of medical science, beginning in the nineteenth century, for the answer.” (Italics added)

Activity
vs
Identity

a) **Homosexuality and Psychology:** the disease model (Freud...from the moral realm to the therapeutic)

- Homosexuality as: arrested development? dysfunctional parent-child relationship?
- Homosexuality as a Learned Behavior or Preference: shaped by sexual experience? Socialization? Combination of psychological and sociological?

Nurture
vs
Nature

“It seems that there is not enough evidence to prove the psychoanalytic hypothesis, but there is too much evidence to dismiss it at this time.”^{p.21}

b) **Homosexuality and Medicine:** searching for a biological cause

“The quest for a biological foundation for homosexuality has looked in three general directions: genetic makeup, prenatal (or postnatal) hormonal levels, and the anatomy of the brain.”

- “A growing consensus within the scientific community [is] that homosexuality is likely the product of both inheritance and environment...’we have begun to realize that biology and psychology cannot be so neatly separated but are inseparably linked.”^{p.24}

c) **Homosexuality and Change in Sexual Orientation**

- Helping Homosexual Persons Change: a brief history
- Sexual Orientation: Static or Dynamic?
- Should Homosexual Persons Change?

d) **The Bottom Line** – speaks to the limits of scientific research—whether psychological, biological, or sociological—to provide definitive answers.

¹⁷ See Christopher Yuan, Holy Sexuality and the Gospel, p. 109. “Rather than think of singleness as a temporary state before marriage, think of marriage as a temporary state before eternity.” (p. 110)

¹⁸ David Bennett interview available at: <https://voice.dts.edu/tablepodcast/same-sex-attracted-christian/> at 23:06

2) **Why is sexual identity at the heart of the matter?** (Yarhouse, Homosexuality and the Christian, ch. 2

- a) What is sexual identity?
- “Sexual identity is how you label yourself by your sexual preferences.”^{p.38}
 - “Think about what might contribute to how you would label yourself publicly and privately (e.g. attractions, biology, beliefs, pressures, expectations, social norms).”^{p.39}
- b) A Three-Tier Distinction
- Same-sex *attraction* – “the most descriptive way people talk about their feelings”
 - Homosexual *orientation* – a same-sex attraction that is strong, durable, persistent.
 - Gay *identity* – Talking about a gay *identity* is part of a contemporary movement.^{p.42}
- c) When and how does sexual identity occur?
- “same-sex sexual identity in women usually happens when a girl realizes she is attracted to a female friend, whereas same-sex identity in men often happens following purely sexual encounters.”^{p.44}
 - “sexual identity doesn’t just turn on or off—it emerges through a developmental process that begins typically with attraction, then it leads to a behavior of some kind.”
 - “researchers agree that young people who experience same-sex attraction go through 3 stages: *identity dilemma*, *identity development*, *identity synthesis*”
- d) The gay script
- “Scripts” reflect the expectations of our culture in terms of how we are supposed to live and how we should relate and behave. And young people who experience same-sex attraction (SSA) similarly look for a script to read from...much of the gay community is ready to hand Chris a “gay” script. Here’s what I think this script looks like:
 1. SSA signals a naturally occurring distinction (i.e. *categorically* different from heterosexuality)
 2. SSA is the way you know who you “really are” as a person (emphasis on *discovery*).
 3. SSA is at the core of who you are as a person.
 4. Same-sex behavior (SSB) is an extension of that core.
 5. Self-actualization of your sexual identity is crucial for your fulfillment.
- e) Another script for Christians: identity “in Christ”
- Many Christians have chosen not to let their attractions determine their identity. An “identity in Christ” script (vs. the “gay” script) has these basic points:
 1. SSA does not signal a categorical distinction among types of person, but is one of many human experiences that are “not the way it’s supposed to be.”
 2. SSAs may be part of your experience, but they are not the defining element of your identity.
 3. You can choose to integrate your experiences of attraction to the same sex into a gay identity.
 4. On the other hand, you can choose to center your identity around other aspects of your experience, including your biological sex, gender identity, and so on.
 5. The most compelling aspect of personhood for the Christian is one’s identity in Christ, a central and defining aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
 - This script relies on the metaphor of *integration* rather than *discovery*. (choices to be made^{p.78})

- f) Final thoughts on sexual identity
 - “Same-sex attraction may be...an unchosen characteristic that can contribute in some way to identity, but there are also [other] aspects of identity...people have choices to make regarding what they believe about sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual behavior. These choices will lead them to different communities that, in turn, confirm and consolidate a sense of this sexual identity into who they are.”^{p.53}

3) What causes homosexuality? (Yarhouse, ch. 3)

- a) Questions That Matter to Families Today
 - The question “What causes homosexuality?” is one of those areas where recognizing what we know and don’t know is likely to be the best we can do right now.^{p.59}
- b) An Awkward Question for the Church
 - “Although I disagree with those in the gay community who advance the conclusion that nature is the sole cause of homosexuality, I also disagree with Christians who take the position that it is all nurture. Both groups are most likely wrong.”^{p.60} “There are multiple pathways to a particular person experiencing ssa or a homosexual orientation.”^{p.62}
- c) What Could Contribute to Homosexuality?
 1. Biology (areas of the brain, twin studies, fraternal birth order, animal models, genetic studies)
 2. Childhood Experiences (psychoanalytic theory, childhood sexual experiences)
 3. Environmental Influences
 4. Adult Experiences
- d) Conclusion
 - “There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation....Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”^{p.79}

Take-Home Points

- Although some people do experience a change in sexual orientation, most experience modest gains, and many share that they continue to have same-sex attractions at times.
- It does not appear to be intrinsically harmful to try to change sexual orientation, especially if a person has realistic expectations.
- Where people may struggle the most is with unrealistic expectations or messages that they are not trying hard enough or do not have enough faith.

4) Can someone change sexual orientation? (Yarhouse, ch. 3)

- “The American Psychological Association’s recently reviewed and published a background document from a taskforce that reviewed many of these studies. They concluded that there was ‘insufficient evidence’ to support claims of change in sexual orientation.”^{p.82}
- a) Early Studies of Change (1960s & 1970s) – “different ways to define success & change”^{p.84}
- b) More Recent Studies
 - “What can we conclude about attempts to change sexual orientation? I think those who argue that there is “insufficient evidence”...are often thinking of categorical and complete change.^{p.89} I think it may be helpful to everyone involved to recognize that 180-degree change or categorical change is less likely.”^{p.90}
- c) Is It Harmful to Try to Change?
 - In part it depends on one’s expectations and the focus of the counseling (e.g. changing *identity* vs. changing *orientation* or *attractions*). Hoping for a categorical shift, when “categorical shifts are rare” means there will be “greater potential disappointment” that

“can be accompanied by feelings of guilt (for not feeling that he’s tried hard enough or had enough faith), shame (for feeling that there is something wrong with him), anger, and so on.”

d) Conclusion

- it appears that most people will not change their orientation, if by that we mean moving
- from “completely gay” to “completely straight.” But change can occur along a continuum.

Next Session

Honest Answers to Questions Facing Families

- What if my child or teen announces a gay identity?
- My adult child announced a gay identity: what now?
- What if my spouse announces a gay identity?

Questions for the Church

- Whose people are we talking about?
- What is the church’s response to enduring conditions?

Additional Questions?

- Should I attend a same-sex wedding ceremony?
- What pronouns should we use for transgender people?
- How should Christians respond to sex reassignment surgery and hormone therapy?