

TERMINOLOGY, DEFINITIONS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

1) TERMS AND DEFINITIONS - HOW THE WORDS WE USE CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE -

With the introduction of the term **homosexuality** the emphasis shifted from the **act** of sodomy to the **orientation** of the inner sexual person. Homosexuality's key dogma was people were sexually **wired** for same-sex attraction. And the fruit of this shifted the issue to the **intolerance** of those who were prejudiced against those who were just being what they were by **nature** or by **divine creation**.

This is now the **natural direction** for the debate. Gay author **Chandler Burr** in his book, "**Homosexuality in the Church**," shows some advocates of the sexual orientation debate liken it to the example of **left-handedness**. It is simply the way some are born. Most people are born **right-handed** (roughly nine out of ten people). And we can quickly note the kind of prejudice that exists in the way we often refer to those who don't fit the majority - like the way a clumsy person is still said to have "**two left feet**." We never say he has "**two right feet**."

So just to bring this point home, the terms have changed the debate. Editor **Michael Lefebvre** sums it up well in "**The Gospel and Sexual Orientation**" - "**Words like 'sodomy,' 'sodomite,' 'sexual perversion,' and so forth, reflect the traditional presupposition that same-sex activity is a perversion of a person's natural gender role. The term 'homosexual' (along with its counterpart 'heterosexual') was coined to convey the new idea that some people are same sex oriented by nature and ought not be prejudiced against simply because it is a minority orientation.**"

Certainly it is usually acknowledged by everyone that **some** may engage in same-sex activity for factors **other than** inner orientation. All admit that **circumstances** can play a role in some cases. But the word "**homosexuality**" is by far most commonly used as the classic definition of the **GLBTQ** (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer) **Encyclopedia**: "**Homosexuality and heterosexuality emerged as concepts in late nineteenth-century European medical and juridical discourse. Their introduction and popularization occasioned a revolution in the way sexual behavior was understood by linking that behavior inextricably to social identity, hastening cultural changes in the organization of sexuality already underway in urban areas of Europe and North America**"

2) HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH RESPOND TO THE WAY SAME-SEX ISSUES ARE ANALYZED SCIENTIFICALLY? Certainly it is fair and accurate to say **we** have changed in terms of the social acceptability of same-sex relationships. The old fashioned term **sodomy** came from the Biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the same-sex demands of the men of Sodom against Lot's guests were judged by a literal outpouring of hellish fire. This is very different from contemporary terms **homosexuality, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer**. There is nothing in these terms to pin them in any way to something frowned upon by a creating God.

In the first part of the last century **psychiatry** led the way in searching for **social influences** that may have paved the way for same-sex attraction. In fact, it is easily overlooked that until 1973 homosexuality was actually listed in the **American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders"** as a psychiatric condition. I'm not saying it **should** have been so listed. My point is only to illustrate the varied, and frequently contradictory paths science has taken, and continues to take, in mapping the **cause** of same-sex orientation - Christianity aside.

All of this confusion is illustrated by homosexual author **Chandler Burr** in his book, "**Homosexuality and Biology**" - "**Psychiatry has succeeded in defining what homosexuality is not - not in explaining what it is.**" **Biology** has taken the lead from **psychiatry** in the last few decades looking for the "**gay gene**" or perhaps actual **brain structures** associated with same-sex desires. Few definitive conclusions have been reached. In fact, in 2009, in a pamphlet on the subject from the **American Psychological Association**, the scientific community was summarized like this: "**Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles....**"

My own view is this research should be welcomed by the church as background for **pastoral care** for those coming to the church for help. Anything that is discovered that is **true** is helpful for the Christian cause. But it **shouldn't** change the **Biblical conviction** as to the sinfulness of homosexuality. Anything that enables us to **respond helpfully** to the pastoral obligation to those seeking repentance and grace must be welcomed. Anything that erases the Biblical pronouncement of homosexuality as a sin displeasing to God must be rejected.

3) CAN A LOVING GOD HOLD US ACCOUNTABLE FOR ACTIONS THAT SEEM TO FLOW NATURALLY FROM OUR INWARD DISPOSITION AND CHARACTER? - What I want to start unpacking tonight is this idea: The reason many in the church find themselves incapable of seeing clearly through the issue of same-sex orientation **as sin** is we have long ago lost the Biblically robust theology of the effects of **original sin** on the human race. We have, for so long, been preaching and teaching stories, self-help, and motivational moralisms we have made our light conceptions of the core of our faith unable to deal with our deeply flawed inner selves and the deep issues this brings to our thinking.

The proof of this is everywhere. **Chandler Burr** echoes the response of many in the church today in the way he poses the question: **If sexual orientation is found to be biologically determined, "How can one justify discriminating against people on the basis of such a characteristic?...God made gay people this way....and like it or not...., there are majority and minority expressions of sexuality...."**

Or, consider this statement of **Dan O. Via**, professor emeritus of New Testament at Duke University Divinity School, in his book, "**The Bible, The Church, and Homosexuality**": "**We do not know for certain whether homosexual orientation is essential (biological and genetic) or constructed (psychological and social) or both; but whatever is the case, even some who hold very strongly to the traditional view agree that at least some part of the gay population is immutably so....Should then homosexual orientation not be considered a different sexual order of creation, the actualization of which in practice would be natural?"**

Please notice the way both these writers link up sexual orientation with the **creative work of God**. In other words, those with sexual orientation are oriented the way they are because that's the way **God** oriented them. But this isn't a conclusion reached by any text of Scripture. There aren't any such texts. This conclusion is a piece of deduction. It's a conclusion reached by this logic: If people are **oriented** toward same-sex intercourse then they didn't **choose** this for themselves. And because they didn't **consciously choose their orientation, it must have come from God**.

But there's something very important missing here. They are assuming an **unbroken link** between the **way God initially created this world** and **the way this world presently exists**. And that's a huge omission of necessary Biblical data. A huge part of the story is purposely omitted. And sadly - tragically - many Christians don't even consider it.

Just as a reminder, consider this quote from chapter six of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: ***"By Adam's sin, our first parents fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation."***

The important point for our study is **our sexual identity is included in the "all parts and faculties of soul and body"** which have been disordered by the effects of sin. This is the kind of truth the whole church **used** to know like you'd know your own phone number. But, of course, it's not considered polite, trendy, or seeker sensitive to talk too much about sin anymore. And even if we **do** talk about it we limit our discussion only to **outward actions** rather than **universally deformed inward character**. And the only outward actions considered seriously sinful are those deemed relationally **hurtful to others**. That **God** is the one ultimately wronged is not brought much into the picture.

But this is miles from where the whole church used to live. Consider, just as an example, these words written by Jonathan Edwards in his *"Treatise On Religious Affections"* in 1776: ***"Allowances, indeed, must be made for the natural temper, which conversion does not entirely eradicate; those sins which a man by his natural constitution was most inclined to before his conversion, he may be most apt to fall into still....Yes, true repentance, in some respects especially, turns a man against his own iniquity; that wherein he has been most guilty, and has chiefly dishonored God. He that forsakes other sins, but preserves the iniquity to which he is most chiefly inclined is like Saul, who, when sent against God's enemies, the Amalikites, with a strict charge to save none of them alive, but utterly destroy them, small and great, slew the people, but saved the king."***

My only point from that quote is the church was once rooted soundly in the idea that every one of us continues to be deeply effected by the Fall of mankind and original sin - in Edward's words, ***"the sins to which we are most inclined."*** The present condition of the human race - the **entire** human race - is **disordered** from its proper design. We are not all effected in the same way. But that we are all effected is beyond doubt. In fact, it is beyond our **understanding** - **Jeremiah 17:9** - ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"***

This is Paul's great burden as well - **Romans 7:22-25** - ***"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, [23] but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. [24] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."*** This is the way the Apostle Paul contemplates his own inward self. He's pulled - **oriented** - in ways he both loves and hates. He finds his heart drawing him into things he knows God's Word disallows. This is **always** the way the Church has understood sin.

I close with this. Throughout life **every person** will struggle with sexual temptations, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Some will battle pornography more than others. Some will live with a frigid or perhaps sickly spouse and must learn a forced celibacy in honoring God. Some will remain single and be drawn into a love for Christ that must drown out the absence of spouse and children. Homosexual men and women are not the only ones called to honor God's design in the face of extreme difficulty.

True enough, not all struggles are distributed fairly. But the point of this teaching still stands. Proving a genuine cause of same-sex orientation in no way changes God's heterosexual creative intent. And the church must constantly walk the difficult line of showing compassion for **all** forms of inward fallenness.