

# SAME-SEX ATTRACTION & THE GOSPEL

*A Clarifying Statement from the Session of Grace Presbyterian Church*

SEPTEMBER 1, 2018



IN JULY OF 2018, a conference called Revoice was hosted by Memorial Presbyterian Church (PCA) in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of the conference centered on “supporting, encouraging, and empowering gay, lesbian, same-sex-attracted, and other LGBT Christians so they can flourish while observing the historic, Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality.”<sup>1</sup> Predictably, Revoice has created a firestorm of cyber-talk and debate, particularly within PCA circles, highlighting sharp differences of viewpoint regarding both the nature of same-sex attraction (SSA) and the implications of the gospel for those struggling with SSA.

Revoice has come on the scene during a time of particularly volatile moral upheaval in the church regarding sexual identity and orientation. Many denominations and high-profile Christian leaders have publicly taken a posture of acceptance and even approval of various sexual sins. Others have contributed very little by way of gospel help to those struggling with sins of sexual perversion. In our estimation an unqualified acceptance of sexual sin is an unbiblical response, and an unqualified condemnation of a struggling sinner is an incomplete response.

The purpose of this statement, then, is twofold: first, we desire to clarify biblical truth as it relates to the crisis of sexual identity and practice in our culture; and secondly, we desire to offer the hope of the gospel to those who find themselves at odds with what the Bible says about sexual purity.

## Points of Confusion

### *The Definition of Homosexuality*

Our purpose here is not to debate the sinfulness of homosexuality with those who deny its sinfulness; the Bible’s position<sup>2</sup> has been clearly articulated and aptly defended already by others.<sup>3</sup> The point of confusion today among those who claim submission to the authority of the biblical text often centers not so much on the sinfulness of homosexuality as it does on the definition of homosexuality.

At what point is sin committed? At the point where I think about it? At the point where I begin to desire it? At the point where temptation to a specific act begins? At the point where I act on those desires? James 1:14-15 describes the process of moving from desire to temptation to sin by saying, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps some might think this means the desire for sin is not itself sinful, but only acting on the desire is sinful. I may want to overeat, for example, but until I actually take a bite I have not begun to sin—so one might think. According to this view, the mere desire for gluttony is not itself gluttony.

This logic has been applied to the arena of SSA, claiming that the line of demarcation where SSA becomes sinful is the act of engaging in homosexual

intercourse. Greg Johnson, who is the pastor at the host church for Revoice, said, “[S]ame sex temptations...are not necessarily ‘a sin’ unless and until the human will is engaged.”<sup>5</sup>

The problem with defining homosexuality exclusively in terms of overt, volitional action is that it overlooks what the Bible says about the nature of sinful desires. Repeatedly in His Sermon on the Mount, Christ drew the line of demarcation not at the point of overt action or engagement of the will to act but at the point of desire—“Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable... everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:21-30). The Ten Commandments do not limit God’s moral law to merely overt actions but include prohibitions against such sins of the heart and mind as idolatry and covetousness.

When James says temptation begins when our desires entice us away from purity, it does not refer to sinful desires. It refers to pure, natural, and even God-given desires. There is nothing sinful with those. So, for example, the desire to enjoy good food is not sinful. But the desire to over-indulge in good food is sinful—whether or not I take a bite. James is not saying that sin is only sin when the will chooses to act externally. He is saying that sin becomes sin at the point where a good desire is perverted into something that draws my heart away from God and away from holiness.

Applied to the arena of sexual desire, heterosexual attraction is not sinful. That desire is God-given and God-sanctioned. But the moment that natural desire becomes lust (i.e., inordinate desire for that which is forbidden), it has become sinful—whether or not one acts on a lustful impulse. The desire itself has become perverted and sinful.

The problem with SSA is that—unlike heterosexual attraction—it is a perverted, sinful desire to begin with. There is not a point at which SSA is innocent and pure and can thus be tolerated or coddled. It is sinful from the start and so must be mortified from the start.

It is unbiblical to say that homosexuality is a sin but then limit its definition to exclude the internal desires that lead to external action. In regard to any sin, both the external actions and the internal desires that lead to those external actions are sinful.

The unbreakable bond between these internal and external aspects of sin becomes more obvious if we substitute racism, for example, for SSA. In our current cultural milieu, it would be unthinkable to suggest that holding racist attitudes is perfectly virtuous so long as one does not act on those prejudiced impulses. Both the racist attitude as well as any volitional acting out of those attitudes are to be rejected. So it is with SSA—the desire as well as the action is to be rejected. Lot’s wife, after all, was turned to a pillar of salt not because she went back to

Sodom but because she merely looked back.<sup>6</sup> Even the desire for sin makes us culpable.

### *The Nature of Original Sin*

Another point of widespread confusion centers on the nature of original sin. In a recent interview, one of the Revoice speakers expressed incredulity over the fact that some Christians believe the fallen condition itself is something to be repented of.<sup>7</sup> Any view of sin that limits itself only to volitional actions to the exclusion of one's internal inclination towards sin is deficient. The doctrine of original sin asserts that man is guilty before God not only because of his sins but also because of his sinfulness. In other words, the sins we actually choose to commit spring from a heart that is by its very nature predisposed to sin.

Scripture is abundantly clear on this. Take, for example, Romans 5:12, which says, “[S]in came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden his sinfulness infected the whole human race. This is why David said, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). Moral culpability before God does not begin when I commit my first sin. It begins at the moment I become a human being. It is inbred in my very nature. Long before I am capable of a volitional, moral act I am predisposed toward breaking God's law. And that predisposition—that sinful nature—is itself worthy of condemnation.

And if that predisposition is worthy of condemnation, it demands repentance. So then, Adam's race repents not only of actual sins committed but of the inherent sinfulness that defiles our very nature. The implication of the doctrine of original sin on SSA, then, is clear: the need for repentance must extend beyond the mere act of homosexual intercourse to include even the attraction to homosexual intercourse. It does not matter that I was born with an orientation to SSA anymore than it matters that I was born with an orientation toward gluttony or racism or any sin for that matter. Both the sinful act and the heart from which that act springs warrant repentance and mortification—“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming” (Col 3:5-6; cf. Gal 5:24).

## **A New Identity in Christ**

### *From Confusion to Confession*

Certainly, many who struggle with SSA, particularly those who find themselves immersed in a culture that affirms traditional, biblical ethics, are ashamed not merely of their sinful actions but even of their sinful inclinations—those internal desires that, apparently unlike the inclinations of the glutton or the racist, cannot be spoken of out loud without an embarrassing stigma being attached

to them. It is difficult enough for a heterosexual man to confess to his Christian friends his struggle with lust. Imagine the fear of a man struggling with SSA who must confess that struggle to his Christian friends. And so, the temptation to redefine sin so as to remove the stigma is strong.

Nevertheless, confession and repentance are necessary steps if freedom is to be found. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Confession simply means to say the same thing that God says about our sin. Instead we have become a culture that bends over backwards to avoid saying the same thing as God about our sin. We have become preoccupied with removing the shame and stigma of original sin in its various manifestations and as a result are burning the very bridge that alone can get us over the chasm to forgiveness and freedom. The only path to blamelessness is by admitting how blameworthy we really are.

The beauty of the gospel is that, as we agree with God about the nature of our darkest and most secret desires, He forgives and cleanses. He wipes the slate clean from all past offenses and replaces those offenses with unblemished purity.

Sometimes the way out of a predicament is by doing the thing we fear the most. Until we hate the sin more than we fear the stigma, we will not know the sweet relief Charles Wesley described when he said, “My chains fell off; my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

### *From Revoicing to Re-creating*

The term revoice refers to what a technician does to an instrument that has been long neglected and is, consequently, unable to sound and perform at its best. Revoicing an instrument involves repairing broken parts, adjusting unregulated mechanisms, and restoring delicate materials that have become hardened and distorted from years of abuse and neglect.

This is an interesting analogy that, undoubtedly, was carefully chosen by the Revoice conference hosts and sponsors. But the analogy does not go far enough. What Christ does for broken sinners goes far beyond merely restoring us to the best ‘us’ we can be. He actually remakes us into something we never were before. He recreates us into something entirely new. He gives us a new identity, so much so that Paul described it thus: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).

No sinner will experience this re-creation fully until the last day when Christ will right all wrongs and usher in the New Heavens and the New Earth. But in the meantime, we are to think and live as if that re-creating has already been accomplished. It is a done deal! The biblical term for this new mindset is *logizomai* (to reckon, count, or consider). The Apostle Paul says that we “must consider [our]selves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). In other words, I am to take on the mindset that what God says is true, really is true—

whether I feel like it or not, whether I can prove it or not, whether the visible evidence confirms it or not. Like the blind man who cannot enjoy the sunset but knows it must be awe-inspiring or the deaf man who is not emotionally stirred at a symphony's climax but knows it must be beautiful, sinners saved by grace are commanded by God to know what they cannot prove, to believe what they cannot see, to make choices based on what they cannot feel. Christians are called to reckon themselves to be what God says they are becoming.

The Christian struggling with SSA is to reckon himself as already freed from enslavement to sexual perversion and enslaved now to a new Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. He has been given a new identity and is no longer defined by the particular kind of sin he finds appealing but rather by the Master to whom he now belongs. At the very least, this reality should make us want to distance ourselves from the labels our culture uses to normalize categories of sexual orientation—gay, homosexual, queer, transgender, etc. Terms like these unavoidably link one's identity to sinful desires and behavior and, thereby, make it all the more difficult for Christian men and women to reckon themselves dead to that which once enslaved them.

The temptation to diffuse sin's shame in order to make confession and repentance more palatable is strong, but it is that very shame that God uses to drive us to desperation for a real Savior. Paul could not say, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" until he had come to realize, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24-25). The fact is, we do not need revoicing so that we can do better; we need re-creating so that we can be something we weren't before. The salvation Christ offers is wide enough to include sinners of all stripes (1 Cor 6:9-11), and it is deep enough to change not only our overt, willful acts of rebellion but even our innermost, secret proclivities and inclinations. That is why we place our full confidence in the immutability of God's love, the efficacy of Christ's atonement, and the sufficiency of the Spirit's power to free us from sin's shame and liberate us to be joyful slaves to righteousness.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Cited from <http://revoice.us/> on August 9, 2018.
2. Cf., Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10.
3. See, for example, Robert Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press). Also, Kevin DeYoung's *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* (Crossway).
4. Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
5. Cited from [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T1r7dZ4\\_PR1BbYWGVgYBoncy7gE9\\_BrHn/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T1r7dZ4_PR1BbYWGVgYBoncy7gE9_BrHn/view) on August 27, 2018.
6. This point was well-made by Toby Sumpter in an episode of Crosspolitic, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb5yk2IdGpc&t=800s>.
7. "I am flabbergasted that somebody would actually say that the fallen condition itself is a sin" (Greg Johnson, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb5yk2IdGpc&t=800s>).

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