

IS GOD HOMOPHOBIC? A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUALITY AND SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

I want to address those of you who experience same sex attraction. You may call yourself gay or you may not be comfortable with that term. Whether you keep it to yourself - and just live with it - or whether you have sought a same-sex relationship or sexual encounter. Whether you are Christian - and have a high regard for God's Word - or even if you don't. I am speaking to you - everyone else here - you can just listen in.

I will be honest with you: this message terrifies me. I know that some will be offended - and some will even be hurt - and I hate to hurt other people even more than I hate to be hurt myself. There are three things I want to say that may soften your response to me:

1) I cannot imagine - and I have tried - what it is like to experience same-sex attraction - and all the confusion and pain and rejection and misunderstanding you may have gone through in coming to terms with it. So, no matter how sensitive I try to be - I just can't perfectly understand.

2) I love gay people - I have family members and friends who are wonderful, inspiring people - and who are gay. Really. I love them and enjoy them and love their humour. And have them and their partners round for supper.

3) My life has been profoundly touched by homosexuality. My parents divorced when I was five - because my dad had a homosexual affair - my mom instantly divorced him. Then my dad went out with several men as the years passed. But from ages 13-16 my brother and I lived with my Dad and Warren - they were together for over five years - and I had the most amazing life. But no one knew what I had figured out - Warren was not just my dad's friend - but my dad's partner - my dad never spoke to me of it - and it ate me up inside - and then sadly they died within a year of each other - being the first 100 in our country to die of AIDS.

Six things to quickly clear up ...

1) I am not going to refer to 'gay people', or 'homosexual people', but rather people with same-sex attraction.

2) Same-sex attraction is extremely common. Up to one in twenty people experience it, and more than one in ten have consented to some kind of homosexual sexual encounter in their lives.

3) There are degrees of same-sex orientation. Some people have zero romantic or sexual attraction to the opposite sex - never have had. Others have 70% homosexual orientation, and 30% heterosexual orientation. We

need to realise that. And some people once had same-sex attraction but no longer.

4) There is a difference between same-sex attraction and homosexual behaviour (which is the romantic and / or sexual pursuit of someone). Many people in our church have same-sex attractions but do not pursue same-sex relationships or sexual encounters.

5) People never chose to be attracted to the same-sex, anymore than others chose to be attracted to the opposite-sex. Same-sex attraction is not a choice. Its a reality for some people.

6) God has not called us as a church to go out there, and tell gay people they must turn straight. Absurd. He has called us to take Jesus to all people out there - and, if people believe our message about Jesus and put their life in Jesus' hands - he will work in their lives. So our message to the our culture is not ultimately 'this is wrong', 'that is wrong' - no, our message is 'God is good. You can trust him. Jesus is Saviour. You can trust him. The Spirit of God wants to release God's life in you. You can trust him. We started to trust him, and look at the difference in my life.' Said another way, Jesus did not come to make immoral people moral. Not at all. Jesus came to make dead people live. That's our churches approach to this culture.

So let me start...

We have come to see what the Bible says about homosexuality.

The Bible has a message.

This message is the best news ever. It has helped us make sense of all of life. Without this message this world just doesn't make sense. Without this message we are blown around with the winds of the latest ideas. Without this message, we have no real faith, we have no real hope, and no real love.

We love this book. We love its message. It is our compass for navigating through life's complexities. It becomes the lens through which we make sense of the world we live in.

We respect your choice not to accept this message, but if you do accept this message, then you need to work out its impact on and implications in our lives.

I want to look at four aspects of this message of the Bible - and how it helps us to think about the issue of homosexuality.

First part of the Bible's message: God created us wonderfully and intelligently.

We are not the product of time and chance. We are not accidents. We find the meaning of our lives in him. He created us with artistic brilliance and with thoughtful purpose.

How this part of the message impacts our approach to homosexuality ...

1) God created us male and female.

'God created them in his image, male and female he created them' says Genesis 1:27. Our maleness and femaleness is an intricate part of what it means to be made in God's image. But it is interesting how he creates the first female. First God creates Adam - who is a kind of undifferentiated person - and out of Adam he creates Eve - he literally takes some of Adam and makes her Eve. So that when Adam first sees her he says, 'Wow - bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.' He is basically saying - 'you are a reflection of me - you are the completion of me'.

Here's an analogy: Hold your knuckles together and say, 'God made Adam undifferentiated.' Pull knuckles apart and say, 'God then made Eve out of Adam - so that he saw in her a reflection of himself and a completion of himself.'

This is important: The Scriptures emphasize that our maleness would be complemented by and completed by femaleness. And vice versa.

2) God has revealed the intended context for sexual intimacy.

Genesis 2:24 then tells us of the first marriage: 'They will leave their mother and father. They will cleave to each other (this speaks of a permanent covenant). And the two will become one flesh'.

This is the fourth mention of the word 'flesh' in Genesis 2 - and what becomes evident is that this sexual union is not just a union, it's a kind of re-union. Back to the analogy: put knuckles together again: and that is one of the mysteries of marriage: two people are united as male and female living in covenant, and expressing this oneness in their sexual intercourse. The fitting together of genitals is the outward picture of a far deeper mystery of union: the union of a male and a female. Or should we say, the re-union of male and female.

That is God's picture of sexual intercourse and romantic relationship: A man and a woman bound in the covenant of marriage, where they become one in soul and body. And their union is really a kind of re-union, a completion of our humanity. This is what is called God's creation pattern. This is the basis for determining the acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices throughout the Bible.

3) Jesus lived and taught this same ethic.

It is often said that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. But Jesus also never mentioned bestiality nor paedophilia nor rape. What he did do was to teach again the creation pattern. In Matthew 19 he said, 'A man will leave his parents, and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. And God will be involved in this union of two persons - this union of marriage.' The moment Jesus embraced this he was saying that every other use of sexual union is out of place.

We find Jesus telling his disciples in Mt. 19 that they have only two legitimate options: 1) marital fidelity (with marriage being defined as a relationship between one man and one woman joined together by God which leads to a one flesh union), or 2) being a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom. The term 'eunuch' here whether taken literally (as in a castrated person who is incapable of normal sexual intercourse), or simply morally (as in a person who doesn't engage in sexual intercourse, remaining celibate in singleness, though he or she is capable of such an act), makes very evident that for single persons, any single persons, celibacy in singleness is the standard Jesus holds up for the unmarried.

Jesus is not silent on such matters at all-- fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness are his standards, and indeed they are standards by which Jesus himself lived when we are thinking about the celibacy in singleness issue. He is likely talking about himself when he speaks of persons who have chosen to be eunuchs for the Kingdom.

Listen to the 'Sex in the City Series' talk on 'Designer Sex' for more on this.

Jesus said that the truth will set us free! When is a train most free - when it is on its tracks? Or when it is free to go wherever it likes - without tracks? In the same way, Jesus affirmed that although the truth may seem narrow it is really the way of freedom, whereas the path that seems free (and without restrictions of any kind) - not based on the truth - is really the way of bondage and destruction. The freeing restriction that Christ gives to the expression of romance and sex is clear: in the marriage between a man and a woman. All other expressions of sexual intercourse are 'off the tracks'. That is why, amongst many other practices, homosexual sex is off bounds in the ethic of Jesus.

**Second part of the Bible's message: But we, all of us,
are sinful people living in a fallen, broken world.**

How this part of the message impacts our approach to homosexuality ...

This causes us to find our identity and affirmation in sources other than God.

God created us to live for him and to live on him. We were created to find our identity in him, our strength in him, our wisdom in him and affirmation in him. What a joy to live like this - the Garden of Eden describes Adam taking walks with God in the garden - loving him, living for him, and living on him.

But the Bible tells us that all of humanity, including you and me, have fallen from God. Romans 1 describes it like this: 'For although they were made to know God, they neither glorified God nor gave thanks to him - but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They claimed to be wise, but really they became fools. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator - who so obviously deserved their deepest love and praise' (excerpts from Romans 1:21-25).

Everyone of us has looked to created things to find our identity and affirmation - money, intelligence, love, adventurism, sex, religion, achievements, family, the heterosexual community, the homosexual community - the list is infinite! We have our sophisticated reasons for doing this - but ultimately we all have failed to live for God and to live on God. In a million different ways.

This causes our lives and relationships to disintegrate, and it often leads to all kinds of enslavement.

This section in Romans 1 carries on. It tells us that when we fail to find our identity and affirmation in God, but look elsewhere - our lives begin to disintegrate - our hearts and our relationships go into a serious dysfunctionality. And we begin to be controlled by these things. They enslave us. So although we may think we are free - we are not really.

And then Paul lists some ways this disintegrations surfaces in our lives and relationships in different ways (for different people)...

- Some of us dishonour our parents.
- Some of us feel envy for each other.
- Some of us gossip and slander and hate.
- Some of us feel superior to other people.
- Some of us find new ways of doing the wrong thing, and we develop sophisticated ways of justifying it.
- Some of us begin to desire to have sexual contact with people of the same sex.

- Some of us dissatisfied with God's plan for sex - ie in marriage - and we pursue our longings for intimacy outside of marriage, and with people of the same sex.

When we say that we are fallen, we mean that every part of our lives has been corrupted in some way. There is no person who has not in some way, perhaps in even a thought entertained, been free from some sexual deviance. We are all sinners!

Sinfulness finds the grooves of brokenness in their lives...

In every person with same-sex attraction there are a different combination of factors contributing to their homosexuality: for some it is biological, for others psychosocial, and for others combinations of both. Every person is different. Most psychologists will agree with this paragraph. But let me enhance this understanding by drawing on insights that flow out seeing things through a biblical lens...

1) The primary (but not exclusive) cause of same-sex desires in every person is neither biological nor psychosocial, but spiritual: the root of sinfulness in all of our lives. We see this in the flow of Romans 1.

2) We are all unique sinners. Our sinfulness seems to flow along the lines of our brokenness. We all sin differently, because our sin finds different grooves of brokenness in our lives to flow through.

3) If someone were born predisposed to being gay, we, with a Bible view of the world, would describe that as a kind of biological brokenness. Some of us are born broken. For example, if someone is born blind, or with both male and female genitals, we understand that this person never did anything wrong but that their brokenness ultimately stems from being born in a broken, fallen world that has been devastated by humanity's fall from God.

4) If someone through their upbringing were to experience wounds or deficits that cause them to be predisposed to same-sex attraction, we, with a Bible world-view, would call that a kind of psychosocial brokenness. And all of us know what it is to carry wounds that can negatively affect our lives.

Let me explore these two kinds of brokenness...

1) Some gay people are homosexually orientated because of biological predisposition.

One of the most commonly pointed to evidences for the biological basis of homosexuality is Simon Levay's study, published in the journal, 'Science' in 1993. He studied the brain structure of many dead gay and straight people, comparing the results. He found some differences that would more often exist in gay people than in straight people. And wallah! The media and gay lobby grabbed it and publicised it as proof that people are born gay.

But they overlooked something LeVay said of his own work, "It's important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain. ... Since I look at adult brains, we don't know if the differences I found were there at birth or if they appeared later."

Scientists are divided. Dr Trevor Hunter concludes, 'At the present time there is no definitive evidence to establish a biological cause for homosexuality. No gay gene has been discovered, and there are no posited biological pathways to explain how such a gene would work even if it did exist.'

Francis Collins, who headed up the human genome project, studied the research of the scientists who claimed to find a biological basis for homosexuality. He said a few things:

- In every case, the media misrepresented the studies, and wildly overstated the conclusions. Especially of the book, 'Discovering the Gay gene.' But he acknowledged one study when he said, 'Based on Kirk and Bailey's twin studies, we see that in some males sexual orientation is genetically influenced but not hardwired by DNA.'
- He explained what he meant by 'influenced but not hardwired': 'whatever genes are involved represent predispositions, not predeterminations. We have all been dealt a particular set of cards, and the cards will eventually be revealed. But how we play the hand is up to us.'
- Another way of saying this is, 'Our DNA is what we are, but not who we are. Our DNA never changes, but who we are is changing all the time.' In other words even if we are predisposed with a same-sex attraction it may or may not fully develop, and we are still free to choose our own values. Your genes should not choose for you.

See <http://www.narth.com/docs/nothardwired.html> for more on Collin's comments on the studies.

2) Most people are homosexually orientated because of psychosocial wounding as they were growing up.

The Gay Lobby will usually insist that their homosexuality is how they were born. They will underplay the possibility that it is a result of some kind of psychosocial problems while growing up, for the simple reason that society is far more likely to encourage homosexual expression as something normal, if they see it as natural and not as a result of brokenness.

Yet, even if there could be a biophysical component so many homosexuals have similar experiences growing up that you can't help believing that it has a strong psychosocial element.

I found this website www.peoplecanchange.com that did a survey with 205 men who battle with homosexual attraction, asking them what factors they felt had caused their homosexual attraction. Here is what the top three results were...

1) Father-son relationship problems: 97 % said this.

It seems very rare for a man who struggles with homosexuality to feel that he was sufficiently loved, affirmed and mentored by his father growing up, or that he identified with his father as a male role model. Oftentimes the father-son relationship is marked by either actual or perceived abandonment, extended absence, hostility or disinterest (a form of abandonment).

It is a common experience for many of us to have felt a deep longing to be held, to be loved by a father figure, to be mentored into the world of men and to have our masculine natures affirmed by other men.

2) Conflict with male peers while young: 97 % said this.

Somehow, even as boys or young teenagers, we felt like we were never "man enough." We felt like we didn't live up to the masculine ideal. We saw ourselves as too fat or too skinny, too short or too awkward, not athletic enough or tough or strong or good-looking enough - or whatever other qualities we admired in other males but judged to be lacking in ourselves. It was more than low self-esteem, it was low gender esteem -- a deficiency in our core sense of gender upon which our whole self image is built. Other males just seemed naturally masculine, but masculinity never came naturally to us. We aspired to it but were mystified by how to achieve it. Among other males, we felt different, lonely and inadequate.

At the same time that we idolized certain male traits or maleness generally, many of us came to fear other boys and men. Born with unusually sensitive and gentle personalities, we found it was easy for many of us to feel different from and rejected by our more rough-and-tumble peers growing up. We came to fear their taunts and felt like we could never belong. Many of us feared the sports field and felt like we could never compete.

So where did this leave us, as males ourselves? It left us in a Neverland of gender confusion, not fully masculine but not really feminine either. We had disassociated not just from individual men we feared would hurt us, but from the entire heterosexual male world. Some of us even detached from our very masculinity as something shameful and inferior.

3. Mother-son relationships (and the "smothering mother" syndrome): 90% said this.

Even as we perceived our fathers as abandoning, ignoring or being hostile toward us, it was a common experience for us to over-identify with or become overly dependent on our mothers. Oftentimes, we never fully cut

the "apron strings" that attached our identity to hers. Mom often became our confidant and mentor instead of Dad. But Mom could never show us how to act and think like a man. So it was common for us to view maleness from a woman's perspective instead of a man's. We inadvertently adopted a woman's view of the world. The gulf between us and the world of men was widened and reinforced.

Interestingly, 48% of gay men were sexually molested, and of these 97% say they felt it contributed greatly to the formation of their same-sex attraction.

See www.peoplecanchange.com/Root_Problems.htm for more the results of the survey.

- LeeAnne Payne writes of helping men overcome homosexual attraction in her book, 'The broken image'. She uses an analogy to help us understand same-sex attraction in some men...

One of the first persons she introduces is a young man named Matthew. She presents Matthew's homosexual compulsion by quoting his own words about his affection for another man. Matthew says "In my fantasies I want to embrace him, to kiss him on the mouth. I want to come together with him. And in my dreams, that is what I do".

According to Payne, this statement is the statement by a man under irrational, powerful, and immoral compulsion".

After this statement by Matthew, Leanne Payne asked him about cannibals. "Do you know anything at all about the habits of cannibals?" she asked him. "Do you know why they eat people?" He answers:

"No, I've no idea why they eat other people". And Leanne Payne continues by explaining her theory about the similarity of cannibalism and male homosexuality. "Cannibals eat only those they admire, and they eat them to get their traits". For example, a physically weak cannibal only eats the flesh of a physically strong person. And he does this in order to get hold of that person's strength.

The situation for the homosexual man is similar. According to Payne homosexual men lack masculinity and that is why they want to have sex with other men. They want to consume the flesh of other males in order to get hold of their masculine traits. Just as a weak cannibal tastes the flesh of a strong person in order to obtain his strength, the homosexual man tastes the flesh of a man in order to obtain the masculinity he lacks for himself.

But what about lesbianism? I read a summary of Anne Paulk (who is an ex-lesbian married to an ex-gay man) book about Lesbianism called, 'Restoring our sexual identity' in which she releases the results of an intense survey of 256 lesbian woman. This is what she found...

Childhood trauma, poor self-image, anger at men, poor relationships with either or both parents, and pro-homosexual media propaganda are several key elements in women developing an attraction to other women. Same-sex attraction is seldom really driven by sexual needs; it is driven by an unconscious desire to be loved and to trust another person. It is also frequently driven by a desire to reconnect with the feminine but in the wrong way.

See www.narth.com/docs/newbook2.html for a summary of her book.

- The exotic-erotic theory is a theory that explains both male and female same-sex attraction in some people...

Daryl Bem, a social psychologist at Cornell University, has theorized that the influence of biological factors on sexual orientation may be mediated by experiences in childhood. A child's temperament predisposes the child to prefer certain activities over others. Because of their temperament, which is influenced by biological variables such as genetic factors, some children will be attracted to activities that are commonly enjoyed by other children of the same gender. Others will prefer activities that are typical of the other gender. This will make a gender-conforming child feel different from opposite-gender children, while gender-nonconforming children will feel different from children of their own gender. According to Bem, this feeling of difference will evoke physiological arousal when the child is near members of the gender which it considers as being 'different'. Bem theorizes that this physiological arousal will later be transformed into sexual arousal: children will become sexually attracted to the gender which they see as different ("exotic"). This theory is known as Exotic Becomes Erotic (EBE) theory.

The theory is based in part on the frequent finding that a majority of gay men and lesbians report being gender-nonconforming during their childhood years. A meta-analysis of 48 studies showed childhood gender nonconformity to be the strongest predictor of a homosexual orientation for both men and women. For example, in a study by the Kinsey Institute of approximately 1000 gay men and lesbians (and a control group of 500 heterosexual men and women), 63% of both gay men and lesbians reported that they were gender nonconforming in childhood (i.e., did not like activities typical of their sex), compared with only 10-15% of heterosexual men and women.

Source: 'sexual orientation and biology' on www.wikipedia.org

Conclusion: what makes some people gay?

- The Scripture highlights that the main cause for same-sex attraction is our sinfulness - we have failed to find our identity and affirmation in God, and this sinfulness surfaces in our lives and relationships in all kinds of moral disintegration, which also leads to enslavement. Homosexual

attraction is the way some people evidence this moral disintegration in their life.

- But we are all unique sinners - and our sinfulness finds the grooves of 'brokenness' unique to our lives - after all we are born into a broken, fallen world. For some people with same sex attraction the primary 'brokenness' is that they have been biologically predisposed to homosexual attraction. But for most people with same sex attraction their 'brokenness' is that they have been psychosocially inclined toward homosexual attraction.

**Third part of the Bible's message: Jesus, the Son of God,
was and is full of grace and truth.**

Jesus lived the most interesting life. He was sent here from heaven as the Son of God. He came to show us what God is like, and came to show us the kind of people we need to be. One verse summarizes what Jesus was like. He was 'full of grace and truth' - John 1.

How this part of the message impacts our approach to homosexuality ...

1) Jesus was called 'the friend of sinners'.

Jesus separated a person's sin from the person. He loved and even liked people whose morality was contradictory to his own. He used to socialize with wealthy men who slept around and with prostitutes even. The religious community kept on attacking him around this. They suggested, 'If you hang out with people like that, it is a sign that you endorse their immorality.'

Jesus clearly didn't endorse their moral decisions, but he still loved them and liked them. And he made an effort to let them know that they were within reach of God's grace, even though he disagreed with their lifestyles. Amazingly, they seem to like him even though he was not like them!

That is why it is sad of Christians are homophobic - and don't build friendships with gay people. Jesus clearly wouldn't be homophobic - and neither should we.

2) Jesus confronted graceless, self-righteous people.

Notice how he attacked self-righteousness in religious people in Luke 18:9-14...

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Judging people breaks God's heart. He judges those who judge others. Christians, we need to be so careful that we don't look down on people who we think we are better than. We are not better than anyone! The cross is the levelling ground of all humanity. We are all sinners. We have all fallen in different ways. If anything, the sin of pride could be even worse than the sin of sexual compromise. After all, pride was Satan's main sin.

It's so sad but so many people in our world think that Christians are anti-homosexual people, all because of the way some Christians have come across when speaking out against homosexuality. But not us. You may have heard of a church in the USA that keeps on holding up signs saying, 'God hates fags.' I can't be sure of this, but I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus would punch their lights out if he were still here.

3) Jesus tenderly but firmly told people to stop looking for love in the wrong places.

In the last many decades the Gay Christian Movement and the liberal Christian movement has risen up saying that homosexual promiscuity is obviously wrong, but if two gay people love each other - and then make a long-term commitment to be with each other, then it is fine.

They say, 'Yes the Bible may speak about homosexual behaviour - but it does not speak about the possibility of love-based homosexual partnerships.' We have seen in the media how this has divided the church. It has been sad to see. Let me say two things about this 'gay Christian movement'

1) Love is not enough to legitimize any sexual relationship. Jesus taught that just because two people love each other does not justify doing wrong - and stepping outside of God's will for their lives. We have already seen in Matthew 19 that Jesus repeated that the only appropriate context for sex between two people is in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. For example, on two occasions he encountered women who were in an adulterous relationship. And obviously they loved their men - why else would they do something that crazy in their culture. And in both situations (John 4 and John 8:1-11) he is incredibly gracious, and kind - and yet tells them to stop looking for love in illegitimate places - that they should turn from their sin. 'Go and sin no more,' says Jesus (John 8:11).

2) Let us not twist the truth to suit the culture. In 2006, a self-proclaimed gay journalist 'Matthew Paris', wrote an article for the London Times. It was in response to the way the church was changing it's doctrines to include practicing homosexual priests and same-sex marriage ...

'It is wrong for people to modify their faith and moral beliefs from a fear of becoming isolated. It is time that convinced Christians stop trying to reconcile their spiritual beliefs with the modern age and understand that if one thing comes across clearly through every account we have of Jesus' teaching it is that his followers are not urged to accommodate themselves to their age, but rather to align their mind to God. Christianity is not supposed to feel comfortable, or feel natural, or inclusive, or moderate or even sensible. Christianity is itching itself up a philosophical cul-de-sac. The church stands for revealed truth and divine inspiration or it stands for nothing.'

It is sad that someone outside the church would clarify the issue for us. Something interesting is happening in those churches that are changing their doctrines: on the whole, they are shrinking in size. One reason is this: when a church fails to stand for revealed truth and divine inspiration it loses its power to make a difference in people's lives.

For more on what the Bible actually says, directly and indirectly about homosexuality, a good summary is found in John Stott's 'New Issues facing Christians today.' He brilliantly counters the incorrect interpretations of the gay Christian movement regarding homosexuality.

For a brief summary of the texts that speak directly about homosexuality see www.apostolic.net/biblicalstudies/homosexualbible.htm. Homosexual sex is clearly and consistently condemned.

There are many theologians who argue for homosexual partnerships. They classically use the same angle: 'The Bible promoted slavery, but now all Christians now that slavery is wrong. Similarly the Bible may speak against homosexual promiscuity, but we now know that homosexual partnerships, based on love, are acceptable.' For a brilliant response to this argument read 'Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis' by William Webb.

**Fourth part of the Bible's message: Jesus, the Saviour,
died and rose again to forgive and change us.**

How this part of the message impacts our approach to homosexuality ...

Jesus is ready to forgive us.

Christ, the sinless Saviour died on the cross to take our sins on himself. He took all the sins we have committed in thought, and word and deed - and for the heart sin underneath them all - the sin of turning to created things rather than to the Creator for our identity and affirmation.

Christ has made it possible for sinful, broken people like ourselves to have the guilt of our sin removed, and to be accepted into a relationship with a Holy God, now and forever.

This surely is the best news we could ever have. And this community is full of people who once were far from God, but now, having had their sins forgiven and having received the gift of eternal, new life, are learning to live for God and to live on God. We are learning to find our identity and affirmation in our relationship to him - and this is the most profound thing that has ever happened in our lives. We are touched by a grace we certainly haven't deserved.

For those here who have given in to same-sex temptations either in your thoughts or in your deeds - there is great news. Jesus can and will forgive you if you put your trust in him. Really, the bigger your sin - the bigger his forgiveness! 'Where sin increases, God's grace increases all the more.' (Romans 5).

But if you refuse Christ and his forgiveness, then you carry your guilt. The Bible says that you stand before God at Judgment Day, and if you have not had your sins removed, then you will face the Judgment of God, and be banished from God's holy presence forever. Only a crazy person would refuse his blood-bought forgiveness.

And its more than a removal of guilt, its also a removal of shame. All sexual sins bring shame into our lives. Yet Jesus promises to 'wash away' that shame, replacing it with a renewed sense of innocence and cleansedness. What a good Saviour he is. No one else, but Jesus, is able to do this in our lives.

Jesus is ready to change us.

Christ's grace not only 'washes away our sins' but helps us to overcome those sins. He comes and inhabits our lives, and releases a flow of new life and spiritual power in us.

If we refuse Christ's grace to forgive us and to help us change, even though change comes slowly, we are warned that we forfeit life in God's kingdom.

Hectic. In the long run, the pain of trusting in and obeying to Christ is tiny compared to the pain of not trusting and not obeying Christ.

We must realize that everyone is welcome to come to Christ and come into the church as they are without pre-conditions. But no one is welcome to stay as they are - no one. They all must change, repent of their sins as needed, and strive to live in newness of life whether or not they deal with same-sex attraction.

Christ loves you so much he takes you - and me - just as we are, but then his loves goes to work in your life and my life - and begins to deal with that which is contrary to his character and which damages your and my relationship with him. He jealously refuses to share us with sin. He wants all of us. And the sooner we surrender to his consuming love, the more joyful and truly free we will be.

One of the earliest churches consisted of some people who, clearly having same-sex desire, had given themselves to same-sex sexual intercourse...

1 Cor 6: 9 Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes (malakoi = soft and effeminate) nor practicing homosexuals (arsekanoi = homosexual pursuers) 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

A church full of people, some of whom were male prostitutes and some who were practicing homosexuals - and then they heard about Jesus - and had their sins washed away, experienced the freedom of belonging to God, and the life of the Spirit in them - and no longer pursued homosexual relationships or sex.

I experienced something of this in the church where I became a Christian. I became a Christian at Cape Town Baptist church, where several men and women had come out of a homosexual background. Some were single, some were even married - in particular one who had been a practicing homosexual for 20 years had committed his life to Christ, and got married, had children and was leading the church for some time. A ministry called 'Total Transformation' was birthed out of these stories of people whose lives had been transformed.

Friends First, let us not look down on anyone. Let us make space for all kinds of broken and sinful people. Let Christ's grace flow through you in the most tender and strong and enduring ways. Let people know that they are safe here.

But is deep change really possible?

The gay lobby are quick to say it is impossible. And many people who describe themselves as 'ex-ex-gays' say they tried to get rid of their same-sex attraction but it never worked. www.gaysouthafrica.com says, 'The only choice gay or lesbian people have is whether or not to live their lives honestly, or according to societies unrealistic expectations.' Is that true? Just be honest about your same-sex attraction and then just live it out. Act on your attractions. Is that all that is available to you? Or to pretend and try hide it away and suffer in silence - while you try be what you are not? Does Jesus offer another option? Yes he does.

If Jesus promises to change us what can we expect? Here are six ways he changes you - and there are more...

1) The biggest change that can happen in anyone is that they can begin to live for God and live on God. We can begin to find our security, our identity and our affirmation from him. This is possible through Christ's grace.

2) If there is any pain deep in your life that feeds same-sex attraction, Christ goes to work at bringing freedom there. He is called 'the Wonderful Counsellor' for a reason.

3) Same-sex behaviour can be eliminated immediately and totally (and God's grace is ready to help us). If you are in a same-sex sexual relationship and you want to grow in your faith in Christ, then you must choose to end it.

4) Sexual addiction (which is very common among many male's who pursued homosexual sex) is totally break-able. Christ's Spirit is amazingly helpful in the overcoming of deep entanglements in sexual sin.

5) But same-sex desire, which are experienced as 'unwanted same-sex temptations' don't always go quickly, or even totally. Some people, over time, are restored to a place of opposite-sex attraction - and they often get married - while others do not arrive there - and yet achieve a joyful life as a single.

But, despite the gay (and ex ex gay) lobby insistence that change is impossible, there is lots of statistical evidence that positive change is very possible...

a) NARTH (National Association for the Research and Treatment of Homosexuality) - see their website (www.narth.com) - did a survey of 860 people through 200 psychologists who did not want their same-sex attraction and sought change. Here are the results:

Before treatment 68% of them perceived themselves as exclusively or almost entirely homosexual. After two years, only 13% perceived themselves like that. 63% said their same-sex attractions were frequent and intense, but after two years, only 3%. Before 42% delved into homosexual porn, and 2%

afterwards. 82% of the therapists said they believed that therapy had changed their client's orientation. They believed that on average they had helped one third to a half of their client's adopt a primarily heterosexual orientation. (I drew these results from the book, 'What some of you were' by Christopher Keene, published by Matthias Media.)

b) In the www.peoplecanchange.com survey previously mentioned of 205 men who sought change 84% reported that they had already experienced significant decrease in the degree or intensity of their same sex feelings or interests over time, while 68% reported that they had already experienced some increase in the degree or intensity of their sexual attractions to women over time.

c) Anne Paulk's survey of 256 women who sought change was as follows...

The survey provides quantitative support for the encouraging themes of the book. Among the revelations of data from Paulk's eight-page questionnaire were that "Most of the women (85%) were able to transition from a lesbian or bisexual identity to a heterosexual or ex-lesbian identity (81%) in an average of two and a half years and commonly with the assistance of an ex-gay ministry and/or professional therapy". By far the factor that helped them overcome same-sex attraction most was the grace of God. "After all, the top reason to pursue change almost unanimously cited was 'relationship with God.'" (Restoring Sexual Identity, p.256).

These findings undoubtedly resonated with Paulk's own experience. In telling her story she related how God was at work in her life long before she acknowledged the need to change. "I was pursuing the homosexual life as best I could, seeing that as the answer for the deep need for love in my life, the void that was there. And then, it was like a light came down from heaven and whispered in my ear, 'Um, homosexuality is not the answer. It will not fill that need in your heart.'" And I was angry but I knew it was true," she says. Anne Paulk said, 'Leaving homosexuality was the hardest thing I ever had to do'. Anne Paulk said, 'Leaving homosexuality was the hardest thing I ever had to do, but the pathway of holiness, though it hurts, will never hurt us as much as the pathway of sinfulness ultimately will.'

Conclusion. Yes, deep change is possible! We can receive a new identity and affirmation in God. And we can begin to experience the freedom of living for God and living on God. We can be healed of emotional pains that feed same-sex attraction. Guilt and shame can be removed. Same-sex sexual relationships and encounters can come to an end. Sexual addictions can be broken. And same-sex desires can be greatly reduced in their intensity and frequency, and sometimes even completely eliminated.

Some advice for dealing with unwanted same-sex temptations:

1) Open up to a trusted Christian friend who is mature. If you can find the courage, speak to your small group leader or one of the eldership team. They will start to pray for you. And when things are tough you can let them know, and they can intensify their prayer for you. A life of holiness is impossible outside of community. When we isolate from community we will experience our worst spiritual defeats. But in community there is a grace to deal with the temptations. James 5:16 says that as we confess our sins and struggles to each other, healing grace comes upon us. So much of our sinfulness is powered by secrecy, but when we tell the right person / people it helps so much.

2) Do not be too quick to tell too many people about your struggle. Rather tell just a few people who you know have got your best interests at heart.

3) Visit www.exodus.to and just read and read. Read stories of people who have overcome. Read advice about what works and about what doesn't work. Subscribe to them. If you are a guy read Mike Ensley's story of overcoming on www.grace4gays.com. And read www.peoplecanchange.com for more real stories and great advice from people who have overcome.

4) Speak to one of the pastors in your church about going for extra help. Most people who have real freedom from same-sex attraction say this helps. We will recommend you to a Christian Counsellor or maybe a short-term course with a Christian ministry that deals with same-sex attraction in our city, such as Total Transformation, or Trailblazers, or Living Waters.

5) Learn to cope with and overcome the unwanted same-sex attractions. I recommend the reading of two helpful articles on the subject of how a Christian person can cope with and deal with these unwanted same-sex temptations. Go to www.exodus.to/content/blogcategory/18/55/ and look for the two articles giving pastoral advice for dealing with same-sex attraction. You may feel alone in your temptation until you remember that every Christian deals with temptations at times - strong urges to fantasize about or do what is wrong. Remember that 'No temptation has seized you that should isolate you from other people - they are also being tempted. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. He will provide a way out, so that you can stand up under it.' (1 Cor 10:13). All Christians battle with 'the desires of the sinful nature' - and all Christians, including ones with same-sex attraction, can learn to overcome them, so that our lives are not full of agony and torment, but full of joy and peace. Also remember the difference between temptation (ie the desire to do something) and sin (feeding that desire or acting on the desire). Martin Luther said, 'We can't stop a bird flying over our heads, but we can stop it from nesting on our heads.' That is the difference between temptation (which even sinless Jesus experienced) and sin.

6) Don't ever stop clinging to God's grace. The life God offers you is within your reach. And there will never be a day so good that you are beyond the

need of God's grace - and there will never be a day so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. It will come at the cost of a fight - but the fight is worth it, when you consider what is at stake. Paul speaks about the unwanted thorn in his flesh, that God hasn't taken away, but that is used by Satan to discourage and tempt him. But then Paul realises that this weakness, this struggle against the temptation and weakness is exactly what God is putting in his life to make him grow spiritually, and grow in spiritual power, and intimacy with Christ, and deep joy. See 2 Corinthians 12:9-12 for this story. If you want an inspiring story of someone who never fully overcome same-sex attraction, but whom God used powerfully and deeply his whole life through, then read anything Henry Nouwen wrote. Henry is one of the most influential Christians of the last century.

7) Rejoice in the promise of heaven. Right now all creation groans in a sense of pain and incompleteness (Romans 8:22). We all have weaknesses and temptations that cause us to groan too. But the promise - o what a glorious promise - for those who put their faith in Christ, is that our present trials cannot compare with the glory that will be ours in heaven (Romans 8:18). It will be a glory free from brokenness and free from sinfulness. I can hardly wait. And to think this will be ours forever! Until then, we let the power and the joy of heaven splash into our lives with the ministry of the Holy Spirit - as we give ourselves to doing the will of God in the depth of our being, and in every detail of our lives.