

From Homosexuality to Holiness

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ABSTRACT

Churches are increasingly challenged with how they will respond to homosexuality. The challenges can be cultural, political, hermeneutic and pastoral. Often church leaders find they need to respond when people who have grown up in the church, or when those who come into a church, disclose that they are same-sex attracted or have engaged in LGBT activities. This issue can lead to church leaders re-examining what the Bible does or does not say about homosexuality and there are two overall theological positions that all churches may come to. The first is that the church has misunderstood homosexuality and has misinterpreted God's view. From this position, it is suggested that he does not condemn homosexual people or homosexual behaviour. The second is that scripture remains clear as traditionally understood that homosexual behaviour is condemned by God. Most churches hold this second view and would agree that while God does not condemn the human person, he does condemn any sexuality expressed outside of marriage defined as being between a man and a woman. However, this view can cause tension because not all who experience same-sex attraction will be able to develop feelings for the opposite sex.

If, despite social and political acceptance of same-sex marriage in countries such as Australia, a church holds that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, the person who is same-sex attracted and who agrees with the second theological position must face two possible options for their lives. They may hope to find change in their sexual feelings, or at least an ability to marry someone of the opposite sex and manage any same-sex desires that may continue. Or they may hope to find fulfilment as single, celibate believers.

Some churches that are non-affirming of same-sex behaviour, have discarded any attempt to support people hoping for transformation. Others seek ways for the person to resolve or diminish their same-sex feelings, while other churches simply ignore the issue seeing it as God's responsibility to deal with the same-sex believer as he sees fit. For same-sex attracted believers as well as opposite-sex attracted believers, the key goal must be obedience to God and a life of holiness as an end goal and this is the alternative explored in this article.

Introduction

Churches are increasingly faced with how they will respond to people who have homosexual feelings or who identify as LGBT. This is not just from a cultural or political perspective, but also because church leaders always wrestle with how to help people to live full and godly lives. Challenges are presented when people who experience same-sex attraction attend churches or when those who, having grown up in the church, become aware they are attracted to the same sex. There are two positions that all churches must choose between. The first is that the church has misunderstood homosexuality and has misinterpreted God's view. From this viewpoint, God does not condemn homosexual people or homosexual behaviour (Brownson 2013, p.166 & p.251; Loader 2014, p.11 & 17; McLaren 2016, p.40). The second position is that scripture remains clear that homosexual behaviour is condemned by God (Gagnon 2001, p.351; Hays 1996, p.394). Although most holding this view would agree that God does not condemn the human person, they contend that he does condemn any sexuality expressed outside of marriage, defined as being between a man and a woman. However, many critics such as Walter Wink, argue that this condemns many same-sex attracted people, requiring them to live chaste single lives and denying them expression in sexuality and intimate relationship (2002, p.32-34).

If, despite current social and political acceptance of same-sex marriage, a church holds that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, the person who is same-sex attracted and who agrees with that view must face two possible options for their lives. Either they find it is possible to experience change in their sexual feelings and that may mean an ability to marry and manage any same-sex feelings that may continue, or they will need to find fulfilment as single, celibate believers.

Some churches that are non-affirming of same-sex behaviour, have discarded any attempt to support people hoping for change toward minimising or managing same-sex feelings. Others seek to find realistic goals such as providing emotional support for what may be a lifetime issue, while some churches simply ignore the issue, seeing it as God's responsibility to help same-sex attracted Christians. These responses were found in a research project examining how same-sex attracted people and their families experienced help in non-affirming churches. Church leaders related their views on goals they might set and how they may offer pastoral help (Baskett 2017, p.55 & p.153). The key goal argued for in this article is for same-sex attracted believers to pursue the freedom and benefits that come from a life of obedience and holiness.

Churches leaders who become fully affirming of homosexual activity may find relief from no longer being obligated to impose what looks to be an often difficult and unjust choice for same-sex attracted people. If they are persuaded that the Bible does not condemn loving, committed same-sex relationships, there can be a full welcome to LGBT people whether sexually active or not. It removes any conflict from holding to beliefs that can seem to be unrealistic to some and can be viewed as unloving and even harmful to others.

But there may be some hidden assumptions lying behind this approach.

Understanding on Homosexuality

The term 'homosexual' was first introduced to try to bring acceptance for gay men by Károly Mária Kertbeny in 1869 (Rosario 1997, p.30). However, by the early 1900's the term was used by psychologists to define what they thought was a medical disorder (Fetner 2008, p.11; Smith, et. al. 2018, p.339). The term itself, because of it being aligned with ideas of disorder, is spurned by most homosexuals today, who would prefer to identify as 'gay' or 'lesbian' or by other definitions (Isay 2009, loc.184; "Glaad - Terms to Avoid" n.d.).

Homosexuality has been around since earliest history and has been recognised in most civilisations. The argument in more recent years on how homosexuality may occur has concentrated on biology or nurture or a combination of both. The current statement by the American Psychological Association says:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. 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; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation ("Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality", n.d.).

Are homosexuals a "third gender?"

In ancient Greece, Plato at his symposium proposed a satirical idea through the mouth of his fictional character Aristophanes. He introduced the myth that 'humans once existed as male, female, or androgynous.' Zeus in response to human 'insolence' split the androgynous human in two who then became male and female and had to seek the opposite sex to be complete. The male and female humans, now also being split sought for wholeness in someone of the same sex (Groneberg 2005, p.41). The idea, although designed to be humorous, was an attempt to explain opposite and same-sex attraction. It is an early speculation that heterosexually inclined people are of one kind of human type and that homosexually inclined people are a different type of human.

Writing and thinking on homosexuality has increased since psychology, science and sociology have made it a more recent focus. The researcher, Alfred Kinsey saw a scale of same-sex experience but spurned the idea of a kind of select third type of human who was primarily fixed in their sexuality, even disliking the idea of sexuality becoming defined identities:

Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual...

Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects (Kinsey, et al. 1998, p.617 & p.639).

French philosopher Michel Foucault observed the shift from homosexuality being defined as a disorder to an acceptable identity (1990, p.101). Foucault wrote, 'Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul.

The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (1990, p.45).

Many believe as Richard Isay does, that a person's sexuality is an inborn, predetermined identity that becomes evident as a child matures into adulthood (2009, loc.72). Some accept that there may be people who experience same-sex attractions that could be fluid and changeable or people who identify as bi-sexual. However, some differentiate these people from those they believe are intrinsically 'born gay', who are of a different type of human kind. The premise that states that people may be born gay has convinced some, that at least for certain individuals, they may be created as a separate type of person. For those thus persuaded, it is a reason to argue that same-sex behaviour needs to be accepted (Barr & Citlau, 2014, p.101). Those who hold to this view this may say that gayness is akin to being left-handed and that for those oriented from birth same-sex feelings are the only possibility (Myers 2013, p.428).

Jack Rogers is someone who has come to this conclusion and he explains to his Presbyterian denomination how he shifted his beliefs:

My experiences have convinced me that there are some people who, through whatever complex set of relationships in their biological makeup, are sexually attracted to persons of their own sex. I am convinced that those I know did not choose their sexual orientation any more than I chose mine. They cannot change it any more than I can. When they have accepted it, they have become more whole as persons (Rogers 2003, n.p.).

Views Resulting from Assumptions

Churches that are affirming of LGBT active relationships, may argue that to deny what might be natural is a sad or cruel expectation (Colon & Field 2009, loc.104-105; Wink 2002). Where they might condemn heterosexual sin for Christian believers, allowances may be made for people who identify as LGBT because such churches hold the belief that homosexuality is an orientation that is inborn. If it is innate, then it is a valid expression of God's creation and God would not be opposed to same-sex behaviour if he has created people who have such identities; Spong 1990, p.154). Therefore, scripture is interpreted based on this premise of homosexual identity. Some, of course, would limit this permissible activity to a monogamous, committed same-sex relationship (Mohler Jr. 2014, loc. 455).

Churches encounter two general streams of thought that influence what goals pastors and leaders may hold. These are formed according to their understanding of how God thinks about human sexuality in the context of ministering to same-sex attracted people. One view suggests that our culture can decide our morality. Scripture may be reinterpreted to say that God does not condemn loving committed, homosexual relationships. A whole new area of theology has grown to support this belief and new books have been written to suggest that God affirms gay relationships. Two such examples would be *Torn* by Justin Lee (2012) and *God and the Gay Christian* by Matthew Vines (2014).

According to Joe Dallas' survey of the origins of pro-gay theology, the earliest pro-gay theological writing came from Derrick Bailey, an Anglican theologian who, in 1955, suggested that the 'destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19 came about not because of

homosexual acts, but because of inhospitality' (2007, p.64). Dallas asserts that the revisionist with the most influence initially was a history professor at Yale University, John Boswell author of, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1981). His revised theology is the base of all pro-gay theology that is written today (Dallas 2007, p.84).

The arguments in favour of reinterpreting scripture to soften or change its apparent stance on homosexuality, started with writers such as Boswell and more recently, many follow his thoughts pointing out that the Bible did not recognise homosexuality as it is understood today (1980, p.109). At first there were only a small number of writers saying this but today there are a growing number adopting these views and expanding on them, including Matthew Vines (2012) Daryl Cornett (2015) and Wendy VanderWal-Gritter (2014).

A “non-affirming” biblical response

However, churches that are non-affirming of LGBT behaviour find that they are unable to change their views of scripture citing God’s creational intent to be a man and woman in marriage from Genesis 2:18-24 (Baskett, 2017, p.237). They state that creation defines God’s design for sexuality through the forming of one man, Adam and one woman, Eve. They support this from the New Testament by noting that Jesus referred to this design in Matthew 19:4 by speaking of a man leaving his parents to join with his wife. An example of this position is revealed in a document written for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. It contends that ‘there is nothing in scripture that speaks of homosexuality in a positive light’ (Eriksson, & Wainwright 2007, p.3).

Most churches that hold to a non-affirming view also reason that there is no evidence in scripture to reject a person because of their feelings. However, they also argue, as Michael Brown does, that there is a strain of evidence that runs through both the Old and New Testament pointing to an ideal of sexual purity both outside of and inside of marriage for all people (2014, p.132). This paper is not concerned with the arguments surrounding the science of this debate, even though these arguments may decide individual Christian opinions. Debate from research is an ongoing discussion. Church leaders who investigate the arguments presented by numerous sociological or scientific studies may either be persuaded or unconvinced by research. However, some approach the question of whether homosexuality is innate and fixed, or fluid and therefore able to be altered, solely on what the Bible has to say (O’Donovan 2008, p.66; Shaw 2015, loc 598-607). These leaders are not interested in the findings of science or sociology as they decide their responses according to their understanding of the Bible.

For churches that hold to a non-affirming position regarding same-sex behaviour it may not matter how biology, or any life influences may have been involved in forming a person’s sexual orientation. It only matters to them that a sexual relationship in marriage between one man and one woman is the pattern of God’s original intent (Shaw 2015, loc.1582). To some in these churches arguing about causes of homosexuality can be unhelpful, as it clouds the theological issue of obedience to God’s standards that need to be faced by all humans. It does not matter who they are romantically or erotically attracted to. This includes those who identify as heterosexual as well, if their sexual inclinations include aberrations such as desiring someone else’s spouse or desiring someone in a close familial relationship. Obedience to Christ is recognised as obedience to the restriction of sexual expression to a marriage between a man and a woman.

Concluding from science that homosexuality is innate can lead to a belief that people are born with either of two defined, predetermined sexualities. But to view homosexuals as another form of human identity is not a biblical concept. There is no recognition in the Bible of humankind being born in any other form than a man or a woman, created for relationship with each other. The Bible acknowledges the existence of same-sex behaviour, with no positive statements about active sexuality between people of the same sex. However, the idea of a homosexual identity is found nowhere in scripture. Indeed, the word 'homosexual' is not found in scripture at all and was constructed in more recent times.

Hence to add a third type of sexuality does not fit the description of God's creation of man and woman. The Bible recognises there can be aberrations of sexual behaviour practiced by men or women and that men and women may have sexual relationships with their same gender. However, a man, having sexual relations with another man, is biblically still a man though his feelings are at odds with God's original intent. A woman desiring another woman has diverged from God's original design. However, she remains defined as a woman (Rom 1:18-26). There is nowhere in scripture that describes a third variety of human or separate form of our species who is naturally and inherently attracted to the same sex.

The biblical debate about holiness

Some theologians narrow their investigation of the topic of same-sex attraction making it a specific subject separated from the wider content in the Bible that involves all kinds of human sexual behaviour. This can mean that some theologians on both sides of the argument select the seven passages¹ in Scripture that specifically refer to same-sex behaviour and form positions of belief about homosexuality from these. However, there is a large volume of scriptural passages regarding sexuality and biblical sanctions which could be applied to anyone, whether people are opposite-sex or same-sex attracted, such as Ephesians 5:3 that speaks of both greed and any sexual immorality as unfitting for Christian believers. We could also draw from Romans 12:1 which suggests that submitting to the pursuit of purity in human relating, which includes the actions of the body, is a form of sacrificial devotion. These teachings apply to all Christians whether married or single. A same-sex attracted person who chooses to remain single and celibate or a same-sex attracted person who chooses to remain in an opposite sex marriage, despite strong desire toward others of their same sex, may be encouraged by Romans 12:1 to see their decision as an admirable act of consecration.

Some who support an affirming position towards homosexual behaviour, such as Clark Whitten, take a different line of argument at this point. Whitten asks the church to embrace an emphasis on grace that does not call for any amendment of any type of behaviour (2012, p.19). Whitten's perception of grace is that since Jesus has fulfilled any punitive requirement, there is no longer any need to stop any behaviour that is prohibited in scripture. It ignores such scriptures as Phil 2:12 'Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,' an exhortation to respect God's

¹ Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 9:10, Jude 1:7

requirements or Col 3:5-10 which is a strong instruction to avoid God's wrath. It also overlooks the teaching of Jesus when he compared the importance of cutting off wrong actions, to cutting out an eye (Mark 9:43-48).

Kevin DeYoung argues against this view of grace saying it is an extreme reaction to the opposite extreme of legalism. For some, he suggests, this aversion to legalism leads to wanting to avoid any acknowledgement that God does have standards that are to be obeyed. He contends that this extreme could be perceived as a fear of the law. 'The world may think we are homophobic, but nomophobia (fear of the law) may be our bigger problem (DeYoung 2012, p.55). He explains:

Let's not be afraid to land on law—never as the means of meriting justification, but as the proper expression of having received it. It's not wrong for a sermon to conclude with something we have to do. It's not inappropriate that our counselling exhort one another to obedience. Legalism is a problem in the church, but so is antinomianism. Granted, I don't hear anyone saying "let's continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1). That's the worst form of antinomianism. But strictly speaking, antinomianism simply means no-law, and some Christians have very little place for the law in their pursuit of holiness (DeYoung 2012, p.54-55).

An alternative view open to pastors and leaders agrees with DeYoung that God does require human sexuality to submit to scriptural guidelines and that these are clear. Hence, although none could claim to be pure in every aspect of their lives, this is the standard and the goal set before those who claim to be disciples. So, although few, if any, could claim to have reached perfection, Christians are called to pursue purity in sexuality, according to the pattern instigated from the beginning, with God creating one man and one woman for each other as described in Genesis 2. Robert Gagnon is one of the strongest proponents of this stance (2001; Via & Gagnon 2003).

Pastoral help for same sex attracted people: is heterosexual marriage the goal?

If most churches do believe that God's original and ongoing intent for sexual behaviour is confined within heterosexual marriage, then it could be argued that churches have some obligation to help same-sex attracted people who desire to enjoy such a marriage to experience the kind of change that may make this possible. What, if any, help do same-sex attracted people find within their churches to move closer toward God's design for sexual expression? Marriage is strongly upheld in churches and can sometimes be upheld as the only aim for all single believers. From research into the help offered by churches, the message that came through clearly for many who are same-sex attracted in churches, is that marriage is the ultimate aim of the Christian and is the only way to have happiness or satisfactory close human companionship (Baskett 2017, p.231 & p.234). Yet this same research found that while same-sex attracted believers are often encouraged or sometimes instructed to find an opposite sex marriage partner, no help was provided to attain a change toward opposite sex marriage. There are many books debating theology regarding homosexuality however, there are few books to help or strategies for pastoral care (p.220 -221 & p.234)

To achieve an opposite-sex marriage the same-sex attracted person will face many hurdles. Unless such a person has accomplished a change of feelings and has resolved their

same-sex issues, marriage can be a disastrous and troubled union. Some do successfully enter opposite sex marriages but many who are same-sex attracted remain single for a lifetime (Citlau 2017, p.81 & p.82). Both those who have same-sex attraction and who marry, and those who remain single, look for help from the church with what may be atypical issues within these two options. A small number of churches may honour celibate single lives, but for those who choose this path, it can feel like it is seen as a lesser ideal.

However, there are many programs, marriage enrichment weekends, seminars and books to help those who are in Christian heterosexual marriages to focus on biblical and healthy sexuality within Christian marriages (Colon & Field 2009, p.130; Chapman 2014; Keller 2011). This adds significance to the idea that marriage between a man and a woman is fraught with complex issues even for those who feel they are happily heterosexual. It may therefore be valuable for churches to recognise that for many people whether opposite or same-sex attracted, singleness may be a viable option. Whether married or single, the aim for Christians is to live pursuing holiness and this includes how they live with their sexuality (Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

In the early days of ex-gay ministries such as Exodus, without the benefit of experience, many mistakes were made and often the goal of non-affirming churches and ministries was expecting people to have significant shifts in their sexual feelings and to eventually marry. However, over time it was recognised that for some, this was never going to be a reachable goal. Ministries and church leaders began to see that the Bible did not call for marriage as the paramount expression of a Christian's purpose. Some who were same-sex attracted and who did marry discovered that marriage was never going to cure their unwanted feelings. Only a new focus could lead to a flourishing and spiritually fulfilled life. The aim could never be to change from homosexual feelings to heterosexual feelings as this would set up many for disheartenment. While a significant number of people may experience this kind of change, another significant number, despite all efforts and help, do not (Jones & Yarhouse 2007, p.369; Shaw 2015, loc.261).

The first ex-gay ministry began in 1976 (Worthen 2010, p.189) Then sometime in the 1980's an unknown person came up with the term 'The opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, but holiness.' This resonated with many people as the pressure to conform to heterosexual marriage or opposite sex feelings need no longer be the aim for those who experienced same-sex attraction.

Some same-sex attracted people rush into marriage, believing this is the right Christian thing to do or perhaps because of a desire to have and raise a family, or believing it will cure their same-sex desires. Some do this with a sense of obedience, aware of the difficulties but hoping to prove the claim for holy sexuality by beginning or remaining in an opposite-sex marriage, despite their ongoing feelings. This was usually based on their conviction that this is the only biblical place for expression of their sexuality, or a decision that love for their families is more important than yielding to the desire for same-sex relationships. There are some who do find their same-sex feelings diminish and in rare cases, their same-sex feelings disappear (Jones & Yarhouse 2000, loc.1212 & 1229). While a number of those who have experienced same-sex attraction do successfully marry someone of the opposite sex, for others this decision can be disastrous, dragging two people and maybe children into doomed family experiences (Whitehead 2015, loc 4374).

'Mixed marriages' is a term starting to be used for marriages where one person in the relationship experiences same-sex attraction. This is dubious term to use because unlike the parallel case of race, it has not yet been established that homosexuality is innate (Jones & Yarhouse 2000, loc.842; Satinover 1996, p.172). 'Mixed marriage' tends to imply that the gay or lesbian partner is bound to a marriage with someone who is of some different kind of humanity, as in Plato's idea of three different types of humans. Certainly, there are different challenges and different ways these marriages may be expressed. Many marriages face tests and often these tests are the catalyst to learning a deeper way of love and companionship and a path to understanding that sexual satisfaction is not the aim of marriage but rather holiness and faithfulness to a vow.

A marriage which is the union of someone who is same-sex attracted and someone who is entirely opposite-sex attracted could be compared to a marriage where one partner is strongly attracted to their opposite sex spouse while the other discovers that they have no sexual attraction to either men or women. This marriage would be equally challenged and for a Christian would require a commitment to holiness and sacrificial love. There are many examples that could be added such as marriages where one partner has become an invalid and no longer can be sexually active. This brings into the discussion the idea of celibacy which for some people can be an unwanted actuality within marriage.

Holiness and celibacy

Heterosexual single people may be challenged with celibacy; however, the argument is presented that they are able to retain a hope to find a marriage partner unless they have chosen celibacy. Today it can seem like a cruel call for those who have same-sex attraction not to express this attraction, whether they marry someone of the opposite sex and battle their same-sex feelings, or they remain single and chaste. The idea of someone choosing self-denial and the pursuit of holiness as their pathway is a mystery within a postmodern world-view where being satisfied sexually has become the new social goal. As Marva Dawn writes in her book, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy*:

A woman exclaimed, 'Why should certain groups of people be denied the possibility for sexual expression? That's not fair!' The implication in the ensuing discussion was that persons who were denied sexual expression would be less than human. I thought of my quadriplegic friend Linden's remark that he is still sexual and human, even if he is not capable of feeling genital sexual pleasure. What constitutes our humanity? Is physical, sensual pleasure essential for quality of life? Is genital sexual expression the most important element of our existence? (1999, loc.202-205).

Many same-sex attracted people find solace in singleness and a vocation allowing their intimacy to be fulfilled by God, which can include a stronger more intimate relationship with God himself, or an enriched life finding close relationships within Christian community. One writer who defends this view is Wesley Hill (2015). This life choice can be an honourable one. It may also be a more biblical objective than the pursuit of marriage and children. Jesus was single, Paul was single and singleness in the teaching of Paul is honourable. Paul suggests marriage may be more of a concession than the epitome of success that Christians need to aim for (1 Cor 7:9). Success, as encouraged by New Testament writers is to remain on the path of holiness (2 Cor 7:1, Heb 12:14, 1 Pet 1:15-16, 2, Tim 1:9, Rom 12:1, Rom 6:22).

To pursue holiness, a person needs to lay aside any identity that includes self-entitlement. Within sexuality, this may mean shunning identities that lock in expectations of fulfilment through some other human person. To proclaim an identity, such as gay or lesbian, or straight, may suggest the hope of finding satisfaction through someone within that identity. God describes a strong description of his character as love and makes clear in scripture that his desire is to relate to his human creation. This expression was through the act of Jesus and those who follow him can find a new identity and satisfaction and fullness of life within this love. The new identity for all believers is that of being 'in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:17). The hope for the same-sex believer for fulfilment in life becomes a pursuit of finding fulfilment 'in Christ.' However, God also proclaims he is holy (Lev 11:44-45, 1 Pet 1:16). 'God is not only love, but also light, or holiness' (Preece 2012, n.p.).

Using the word holiness in some places can cause a collective groan. Holiness has become a bad word even in some churches and any suggestion of effort to change any kind of human behaviour can sometimes be reviled. After all, it is said, grace covers all and if we simply focus on knowing Christ there is no other requirement for a believer. Same-sex attracted people attending churches, that may be non-affirming but that are unwilling to provide any specific guidance, are encouraged to 'know Christ' or to 'know God' and that along with trusting the Holy Spirit to lead that will be enough (Baskett 2017, p.91-p.93).

Holiness to some is equated with an undesirable heaviness. However, if God has proclaimed that holiness is something that is part of his identity and that to seek to be holy in our lives is a path to knowing him and having intimacy with him, then surely holiness is the lightest and most freeing state a person may seek to attain. Holiness then is not a striving for human perfection but rather actively pursuing a relationship with God and complying with his loving guidance. So, the exhortation from pastors and leaders for the same-sex attracted person to simply 'know God', can be fruitful. However, any relationship needs to begin with the two parties being introduced and then growing as each learns more of the other. This introduction and unfolding of the character of God is part of a pastor's responsibility and sexuality is a component of understanding God's intent for human wellbeing.

Conclusion

The pastoral role cannot be completely passive in helping same-sex attracted believers. If God is to be pursued through pursuing holiness, then an understanding of holiness is important. The responsibility of a leader is not to help people to conform to an approved identity regarding our sexuality. Rather, the pursuit of holiness will lead to God's view from the perspective of his design. The first step is to let his life and identity define a believer, rather than a humanly labelled sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual. A person who lives knowing they are same-sex attracted but also that their highest desire is to know and obey and love this holy God, can be a living testimony to demonstrate to others that there may not be a third sex, but there certainly is a third way into fullness of joy for all.

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