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Gender Confusion, Human Sexuality, & Orthodox Christianity

Bp. Joshua Beecham

PART ONE

The Issue Introduced

Consider this story from Nehemiah Ministries Newsletter, December 2014 Issue:

"My wife was pregnant with our second son when I laid a bombshell in her lap. 'There's no easy way to say this: I'm gay. I've shoved this down and denied it for years and I just can't any longer. I thought it would go away when we got married. It hasn't. I've prayed God would deliver and heal me. He hasn't.'

Then I detonated the bomb: 'I met a guy on one of my business trips. We've met numerous times. I think I'm in love with him. He told me he loves me and wants us to be together. I love you and I want to be with you, but I want to be with him too. Maybe I should move out until I can figure this all out.'

I will never forget the look on her face. It is etched in my memory. My confession could not have shocked her more than it did. She had not suspected my struggle. I had kept it hidden and never spoken to anyone about it. Disbelief, pain, confusion, panic, anger, and fear were all present.

(After some initial reactionary comments and questions, my wife regained a little composure and said:) 'I want to ask you a couple important questions, and then make a request. Do you truly love me, Joshua (our son), and our son in my womb? Do you love the Lord and want to be secure in your relationship with Him?'

Even in the thick of my confusion and internal rationalizations, I could not deny my love for my wife, my sons, and Jesus. (I responded) 'Yes, I love you, love my sons, and love the Lord.'"

This story presents to us one of the most difficult issues of our day. It's not just confusion regarding same-gender attractions but regarding sexuality in general and what it means to be a human being. As you can see, it's not just a cultural issue but a Church issue as well. That young man and his wife were Christians.

There is much confusion over the same-gender issue: Is it normal/not normal? Are people born that way? Is "gay" a genetic identity or a distortion? Can one be gay and Christian? What is healthy sexuality from a Christian perspective?

In this booklet we'll consider those things, but we will focus on the topic primarily as it impacts the Church, since we really can't do much about what goes on outside the Church. However, even within Christendom there is plenty of confusion and debate – even in the Orthodox Church.

In these talks I will try to give you my understanding of how those who believe in the gospel from an orthodox perspective understand/have understood this issue, drawing heavily from materials by Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory, a priest and theologian within the Orthodox tradition, and Kent Paris, founder of Nehemiah Ministries, which provides counseling and support to people struggling with gender confusion.

Life in This Fallen World Is Messy

We have to understand that throughout Church history such issues as these are always messy. In orthodox Christianity there is no magisterium, no pope; we must grapple with matters and let the Holy Spirit bring the consensus of orthodoxy. This topic is no different.

We must come to a common mind & struggle to understand these issues in terms of the whole scope of the biblical story and the entirety of the Church's life and witness. We must struggle in grace. But it will still be messy. Life in this fallen world is just messy.

STORY: In a Ukrainian village people were brutally fighting about some liturgical practices and wanted to know what is the true orthodox way – so they went to the pastor and asked him but he didn't want to get involved and said he was busy and took off. Then they went to a monastery to ask the abbot. He saw them coming from a distance and said to his assistant, "Tell them I'm sick." So finally, they remembered a holy man up in the mountain living in a cave, who prayed all the time, shone with uncreated light, seemed to pray 5 feet off the ground, etc. So, they went and said to him – "We don't know what to do. We are having great difficulty and can't agree, so please tell us what to do, what is the true orthodox way – we keep fighting and it's brutal and very unpleasant, very difficult. What is the orthodox way"? He responded to them, "My dears, that is the orthodox way."

It's been that way since Moses and Aaron, Abraham and Lot, Peter and Paul, early church fathers. Some didn't even speak to each other. We're fooling ourselves if we think it will be different with us. So, we must be humble, careful what we say, patient; human lives are involved. It's messy but these are precious lives. We must be respectful, look at each other's faces and talk and listen, especially with those struggling with this cross.

The Foundation for Understanding

We must have a vision, a foundational vision of God and humanity. That's what we'll look at today – the foundation. Then later we will look more specifically at same-gender confusion, and healthy sexuality. But first we must start with a foundation, a vision of the kingdom as it relates to this issue.

STORY from Fr. Thomas Hopko – There was a man who was interested in orthodoxy and came to one of Fr. Tom's talks and brought his same-sex partner, who hated Fr. Tom. However, the partner slowly became interested in Orthodoxy and asked to talk to Fr. T., so he met with him. The man said, "At first I didn't like what I heard but now I do, and maybe I even want to join the Orthodox Church; but I want to tell you right now from the beginning, I'm gay and there's nothing wrong with it and you have to know that from the beginning." Fr. Tom calmly responded: "Ok, thanks for telling me that, but tell me more about yourself, your background, family, etc."

He responded, "I couldn't read until I was 26. I was raised on the streets of NYC, got money from cops for doing sexual acts for them, and was homeless for a good while. I hated my mother and have an aversion to the female body. I was drafted in the Vietnam war, shot up twice and was still sent back. I killed a huge number of people, handled it by getting stoned, and I'm now a drug addict and alcoholic. And, I've been in all kinds of churches."

Fr. Tom responded, "That's quite a story. What do you know about the faith?" "Oh, I know about it," he responded, "I know quite a bit. I've slept with several episcopal priests. I think I know about the faith."

Fr. Tom said, "Well, we need to find out what you know." The whole time they were having this conversation the man kept interrupting him, "You're not listening to me! I'm gay and there's nothing wrong with that and you have to answer me on that issue!" Each time Fr. Tom would say, "Ok, we'll get to that," and then would follow with a question like, "Have you read the NT?" After about 45 minutes, Fr. Tom suggested to the man that he go and read the gospels then come back and they'd talk some more.

With obvious emotion and conflict on his face, the man said again, "You're not answering my question, you're not responding to what I told you." Fr. Tom replied, "We'll get to that. I don't even know you or what you believe. I've only talked to you this one time."

The man got up to leave and started crying. Fr. Tom went over and put his arm around him. "Did I offend you in some way." The man responded, "I want to tell you something. I've been in jail, in the army; I know every warden, chaplain, priest, and rabbi, but you're first one who didn't say one of 2 things: 1) 'Get the hell out of here until you straighten yourself out; we don't have fags in our church,' or 2) 'Oh it's ok that your gay. That's no problem.' You're the first one who didn't say one of those 2 things."

It's very important to understand that We can't expect people to change themselves on their own – that's what the grace of Christ is for. They have to have a foundation for making different choices and a safe environment for being transformed. It takes time, it's not easy, and we have to deal with all kinds of stuff: their family of origin, their story, their feelings – the stuff of humanity. Then we have to help them understand what the gospel is, lead them to the cross, and lead them to a healthy relationship with Christ. It takes time.

One thing you can be sure of, when dealing with troubled people on sexual issues: you're dealing with generations of people and generational sin. We all are stained by that in some way. Homosexuality, regardless of the fact of being an alteration of God's initial design, is, simply put, a form of sexuality, and it didn't come out of a vacuum.

We have to look at what a person is attracted to and why, what are his fears, his wants, how she's been raised, what she's been through in her life. It's different for every person.

Christianity is about personal relationships with real persons and with the real Christ. We need to get down to the reality of who the person is and then present, as best we can, the real Christ who comes to transform our humanity. This takes face to face time and can't be accomplished by throwing a few Scriptural proof-texts at the person and telling them to change.

So one of the first things we must be convinced of is the complexity and difficulty of this topic.

In the last 50-60 years a cultural mutation has taken place; human reality in western world has radically changed. The best description of what happened is in C. S. Lewis' book *Abolition of Man*. Lewis decried what was being taught in English schools at that time. He said that every human culture always believed humans had a faculty of intuiting what is good and beautiful and right and normal, and schools taught how to use that faculty. It was understood that you had brain, mind, emotions, body, feelings, sexual drives, etc., but the key was that you had that inner intuitive faculty, the quality of inner 'seeing' and the ability to discern good and evil. Lewis' claim was that modern education is destroying that faculty, and then humans are no longer human; they are just mind and matter, brain and body, computer and consumer, calculator and copulator.

What he described then has happened in our country. People function as mind and matter, more as animals rather than humans. Morality goes out the window because if we don't have this faculty of seeing, of discernment you can't talk about true/false,

right/wrong, normal/abnormal, etc., because everyone's reconstructing it all the time according to their own whims.

This is what we are up against, and it does no good to make blanket statements about homosexuality being wrong and people burning in hell. There needs to be face to face encounter. It takes time to get to know a person's story. Then the first task is the gospel, the Christian understanding of reality – how we understand the Christian faith and normal humanity. Then we can deal with particular issues.

So, what is the gospel, the reality? First, we have to be convinced that there is a reality, and it all has to do with God, the true God who is the father of the crucified Christ. **The center of our worldview is the cross.** We die with Christ and we live by resurrection, by grace of the Holy Spirit, and it's a struggle and not magic.

Fr. Paul Lazor says, "The Trinity is not the magician, the mechanic, and the fairy godmother, who say, 'Light 3 candles and have a prayer service and talk to a wise elder and your problems go away.'" No, we believe in the real Trinity, the reality of human freedom, sin, and struggling against temptation till your last breath. And it's bloody - it involves Christ's blood that forgives and cleanses, and our blood, our constant willingness to be crucified with Christ – that's the Christian view. Some say that's crazy, but that's always been so.

Everything has to do with the cross as the revelation of God on earth. The cross doesn't conceal God, it reveals Him – reveals what true love is, what true life is, what's really worth living for, what it's all about. Only after we get that straight can find how sexuality fits into that. **Is that our reality?**

STORY: An Orthodox couple whose son came home from college and announced he was gay met with Fr. Tom. They were confused and distraught: "He was raised in the church, loved to sing in the choir and eventually led the choir. We just can't figure out what went wrong." Fr. Tom questioned them and discovered that their whole approach to God was all about externals and not about the cross, not about the gospel.

Why is this so important? – because the world as we experience it is not the way God made it. God created the world knowing there would be rebellion, apostasy, madness, that we would not glorify Him, that we would follow our own mind, blame each other, set up our own reality. He was not surprised by this or caught unaware, but that doesn't mean the distortions that happed are His will.

Was it the will of God that a person would be same-sex attracted? - Fundamentally no. God did not design us to be same-gender sexually attracted, or for that matter to be heterosexual porn addicts, or to be ruled by our sexual passions in any fashion. He didn't create us for that. He created us for much better things, but we fell away from the very beginning. God's image was marred, so that by Genesis 5, Seth behaved more in the

image and likeness of Adam than of God. We are born in the image/likeness of our parents and their parents and their parents, etc. We are born into generations of sin.

So, you can say providentially, yes, some folks have to deal with same-gender struggles, with this kind of affliction, and some with other kinds of struggles. We're all in this together, responsible for each other - responsible for every gay person on earth. All of humanity is messed up, and we are all part of the mess, - but hopefully also part of the solution.

We all have to deal with this, and some have to deal with the reality that they are attracted erotically to their own sex. It is very hard to explain why definitively. There are many theories but it's still somewhat of a mystery. Even if we know the why, we still have to deal with it.

We are created in God's image for everlasting life. We are created to be by grace what God is by nature, but now we can only enter that reality through sin, suffering, disease, temptation, and death.

And you only become a real human being when you die together with Christ and are raised with him in the final kingdom. Before that it's warfare for all of us to the end. "*Through much tribulation we enter kingdom.*" (Acts 14:21-22)

So, the fundamental question we have to ask is: is same sex attraction a gift from God, as some Christians are claiming, or is it a cross that must be borne, be carried? Are you going to see this as a natural gift and say it's normal, that's how God made me, or are you going to

say this is not what God created and take up your cross and be crucified with Christ, war with your passions and live by the vision of what is normal, natural, real?

To be attracted to the opposite sex is not a sinful action; it's a product of the disease of sin and death that affects all of mankind. How one responds to it is where personal sin and guilt are determined.

In any case we are in a corrupt and fallen world, but that world has been redeemed and saved by the Son of God incarnate, dead, buried and raised who gives us the ability to know the truth, to see it clearly, and to struggle to live by it; but that struggle is messy to the end and nobody's exempt from it.

So, when we look at it this way, we can say that we are created in the image and likeness of God, who is love; we are created to be lovers, which begs the question: what is love? This is a huge question in the sexual realm. The bifurcation between sex and love is one of the great tragedies. Sex is for irrational animals; love is for humans.

If it's a case of loving, & expressing the love appropriately, what is the appropriate expression of love? What is love that is filled with peace and according to how God wants us to love, and what is not love at all but simply some kind of human invention of erotic acts? That's not the way we were constructed to love.

In fact, you don't need to have genital sex to express love and to be a healthy human being.

People say "you gotta have sex, it's like eating breakfast, it's part of human life; you gotta have sex, if you're not having sex you're not human, and it has to be good sex."

But the point we need to make is that if that is true then we have to remove $\frac{3}{4}$ of the icons placed in Orthodox churches, for they are images of celibates. Jesus didn't have sex, nor did many of the saints. In this sense love doesn't need an erotic expression, and should not have it under certain conditions such as same-gender friendships. You can have affection, even the eros of communion with another person and yet that does not have to be expressed sexually.

These are our kingdom visions of reality for human beings, but they are now being repudiated even in the church. These are the kinds of things we must deal with if we are to deal practically with all of this.

By the way, St. Paul in Romans 1, explains what went wrong, and he doesn't say that the worse sin of mankind is homosexuality. His teaching is this: humans were made to glorify and give thanks to God, (to be doxological/Eucharistic beings). The refusal to do that is the greatest sin, which leads to all kinds of problems.

We were made to give God glory, honor, and worship, and to say, "You are God, I'm not, I'm not constructing my world, I worship you, You tell me how I should live, what I should do with my body, my mind, my mouth, my sexual organs, You are the one who is leading me and I'm going to obey and trust You that I will have

peace and understanding and the joy no one can take away and be transformed by Your grace."

When we refuse that, God gives us up in the lust of our hearts, to impurity, to dishonor our bodies, etc., reprobate mind. Our sinful life is the product of ceasing to give glory and honor to God with our mouth and life. When we refuse that, God says ok, do it your way. He gives us over to our will and the gods we have made. All sin, not just homosexuality, flows from this.

So, the first task is to get straight what is our understanding of reality regarding the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom He sent into the world to be crucified. That's our God, and if that's not straight we are wasting our time talking about anything else. There is no way this issue or any other will be solved unless there is first a vision of reality according to the gospel. But when that reality is embraced, all things are possible

The guy in the story I began with – He went on to embrace the healing grace of Christ. He may for many years ahead still have same-gender temptations, but he has learned to take them to the cross and receive the grace of God.

We need to deal with every issue through the spectacles of the crucified Christ, by whose death and our sharing in His death, we have true and everlasting life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it best: “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*” That’s where life is found, regardless of who the person is or what they struggle with. Life begins at the cross of self-denial. That’s the Christian understanding of reality.

PART TWO

Review and Introduction

Kent Paris, a counselor specializing in same-gender issues, begins many of his conference talks by telling the story of a man who was, as a young boy, sexually abused by multiple family members. Then at age 12 he was sexually violated by his pediatrician during an exam, and also a month later by a summer youth music camp teacher. 3 years later he was assaulted at age 15 by his favorite teacher in the school locker room. Having grown up with an absent dad and an extremely co-dependent relationship with his mother, he was already compromised in his ability to relate in a healthy manner with other males. That fact together with these events of male sexual assault had the cumulative effect of eventually causing him to struggle with his gender orientation. A gay high school psychologist helped to tip him over the edge convincing him that he was in fact gay. As a result of all of this he became deeply depressed, began self-mutilating behaviors, started using drugs and alcohol on a daily basis, and eventually began acting out in homosexual relationships.

What Kent doesn't tell you, what you don't know until later in his talk, is that the person whose story he has been sharing is in fact him. That's Kent's story. Fortunately, it doesn't end there. Eventually Kent found himself in the office of a godly Christian counselor who helped him to learn that "homosexual" isn't an identity. You may have same-gender attractions and you may even have engaged in homosexual behavior, but that

isn't your essential identity. Sexuality is a dimension of our humanity, but certainly not the sum total of it. That and other such matters are what I want us to look at today. What is homosexuality and how does it develop? What are some common misunderstandings and some common mistakes that are made in responding to same-gender attractions when they first show up? More importantly, what behavior, if any, truly qualifies one to be labeled a homosexual, and can one's sexual orientation be changed? These are some of the things we will consider today.

The material covered in Part One was a necessary and important foundation for what will be covered today. It's important to keep in mind that we all struggle with passions of one sort or another. We are singling out this particular struggle and talking about it, not necessarily because it is more sinful than other passions, but because our society has singled it out and there is a lot of confusion over how it is treated both in society and in the Church. May the Lord lead us in His wisdom and guide us in His compassionate love and truth.

Historical Overview

Homosexuality is far from new. As far back as records of fallen humanity go, homosexual practices seem to show up in civilizations around the globe. Ancient societies were rampant with homosexual activities. In fact, prior to the Torah (the Hebrew Scriptures), sexuality in general had no real prohibitions and was not even thought of in terms of heterosexual and homosexual, normal or abnormal, right or wrong.

Judaism uniquely introduced those categories. Prior to the revelation given in the Torah, sexuality was primarily about male power and domination, whether that imposed itself on women or on younger men or boys. It often reflected an animalistic mix of self-serving lust and an abuse of power without regard for human dignity, boundaries or any sense of sacred union.

Even in the New Testament times, ancient Greek and Roman worlds were also rampant with all forms of sexual immorality, including same-gender sexual practices, which were accepted without question. Into that setting the teachings of Christianity were even more radical than those of the Torah. Jesus clearly affirmed the sanctity of marriage as between one man and one woman, and he taught not only against adultery but even lust. Paul singles out homosexual practices as sin on at least two occasions. In the post-apostolic era, Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, in order to defend the superiority of Christian morality, told the story of a young man who appealed to a surgeon to make him a eunuch. Though the request was denied, he chose to remain unmarried and accountable to fellow believers. Christianity, definitely had moral ramifications.

Such beliefs must have seemed crazy to the tribes and nations surrounding Israel and the early Christians. But then, it has begun to sound crazy to many in our own culture as well. Sometimes that is simply a reaction to the truth, and other times it is a reaction to the senseless and heartless way the truth gets modeled or presented, especially when those doing so oversimplify the matter and forget that they are dealing with people who are

precious and loved by God. Nevertheless, there is no way to get around the fact that any opinion regarding sexual practices, or anything else for that matter, that smells at all restrictive is not going to be very welcome in any society that worships the freedom of people to do whatever they want, whatever feels good to them – “as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else,” as the saying goes. However, the reality is that there is often much more hurt than meets the eye when it comes to sexual immorality.

Now, it’s important to remember that in our society, prior to the last 60 or so years, Judeo-Christian morality was the standard. In that setting homosexuality was considered an aberration. It was listed by the American Psychological Association as a mental disorder, and was only removed in 1972 under pressure and threats, not because of any change in research. I won’t take time to get into that whole story, but it’s well documented and fascinating reading, how wealthy gay militants for three years in a row funded an assault on the APA, storming into the annual conventions and bullying the members until they finally removed homosexuality from their list of disorders.

That was just part of the agenda of the radical gay movement that had begun a few years before that. Led by a gay advocate from France, Michael Foucault, a well thought out, systematic agenda had been put in place with the goal of transforming public opinion and gaining acceptance for homosexuality. Foucault’s primary philosophy was, ***If you want to transform a society, you must gain the seats of power and influence.***

That is what they set out to do, and that is what they have successfully accomplished over the past 50 years, so that today if you look at education, government, and the media, it is obvious that popular sentiment has been dramatically changed.

Now, before the more militant among us get all riled up, let me caution you about something. By the teachings of Christ, who taught us to turn the other cheek rather than seek vengeance, our first response ought not to be a counter militant attack. And believe me - I definitely can tend to be a militant. However, we need to ask ourselves instead whether such desperation as has been shown by the gay movement doesn't reveal a deep seated hurt and sense of shame and rejection because this issue was so poorly understood and even more poorly responded to 60 years ago and since then by both society and the Church.

Do you remember the story I shared last week of the man whom Fr. Tom counseled? Do you remember the 2 primary ways he had usually been responded to? 1) '*Get the hell out of here until you straighten yourself out; we don't have fags in our church,*' or 2) '*Oh it's ok that you're gay. That's no problem.*' Fr. Tom was the first one who didn't say one of those 2 things to him," but I would suggest to you that most churches tend to fall into one of those 2 camps. We need to take a different approach. I am not recommending that there isn't darkness and satanically driven aspects to this movement. There are. However, there is much more to it than that.

Therefore, it is imperative that we are informed and seek to understand this same-gender struggle to the best of our ability, and to respond to it with a balance of both clarity and compassion.

The Clarity of Scripture and Tradition

Let us consider the clarity that Scripture and Tradition bring to us.

There are three passages of Scripture that, unless they are twisted to mean something that they don't, are very clear in regards to homosexuality. They are:

1. (*Leviticus 20:13*) - *If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.*
2. (*Romans 1:26-27*) – *For this reason (i.e. their refusal to acknowledge, thank, and glorify God) God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*
3. (*1 Corinthians 6:911*) - *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice*

homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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.

In this last passage, there are actually two separate prohibitions that are listed, two distinct Greek words, but they are sometimes translated into one phrase. The first is *malakos*, which means effeminate, or soft, and in the historical context refers to boys used like women for sex by men. The other word is *arsenokoitēs*, which literally means male to male intercourse.

These Scriptures are in no way ambiguous. Homosexuality, like fornication and adultery, is sin, and those who persist in such without repentance will not inherit the kingdom of God. By the way, the fact that the passage, which includes homosexuality, ends with the phrase, “and such were some of you...,” clearly implies that one who practices homosexuality can be changed.

The Church Fathers are also very clear on this matter. In the interest of time, I will only cite four. Incidentally, a couple of them refer to the term “sodomites,” which refers back to the passage in Genesis 19 when the men of Sodom came to Lot’s house and tried to force themselves on his two male guests (who were actually angels) in order to have homosexual sex with them.

1. (The Didache) - "*You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty (men using boys for sex), you shall not commit fornication...*"
2. (Clement of Alexandria) - "*The fate of the Sodomites was judgment to those who had done wrong, instruction to those who hear. The Sodomites having, through much luxury, fallen into uncleanness, practicing adultery shamelessly, and burning with insane love for those of the same sex...*"
3. (John Chrysostom) - "*All of these affections [in Rom. 1:26–27] . . . were vile, but chiefly the mad lust after males..." (Homilies on Romans 4 [A.D. 391]). "[The men] have done an insult to nature itself. And a yet more disgraceful thing than these is it, when even the women seek after these intercourses, who ought to have more shame than men" (ibid.).*
4. (Augustine of Hippo) - "*[T]hose shameful acts against nature, such as were committed in Sodom, ought everywhere and always to be detested and punished. If all nations were to do such things, they would be held guilty of the same crime by the law of God, which has not made men so that they should use one another in this way" (Confessions 3:8:15 [A.D. 400]).*

Again, the sentiment of tradition is clear in regard to all kinds of distortions to healthy sexuality, including same-gender sexual activity: it is contrary to the design of God and has no place in His kingdom.

St. John Chrysostom even hints a little at homosexual practices being chief in the list of vile affections. And personally, while I think both distorted heterosexual as well as homosexual practices will be judged the same, there does seem to be at least a little indication in Romans 1, by the sheer amount of description that is given, that same-gender sex has something in it that sets it apart from other sexual deviations, probably because it is not only a sexual sin, but also because it is so contrary to nature.

We must keep in mind, however, that these passages are referring to unrepentant same-gender sexual practices, not to same-gender attractions which sometimes cause confusion and lead to the misguided and desperate grasping for same-gender affection through homosexual encounters. We must be clear about the sinfulness of the symptoms but seek to understand the underlying disease.

Compassion that Comes from Understanding

"So, are they born that way?" Actually, neither a simple "yes" nor a simple "no" is adequate. On the one hand it must be unequivocally argued that there has never been any scientific research that has turned up a specific genetic predisposition to same-gender identity or attraction, contrary to the claims of some. The claim that people are born gay just as people are born white or with red hair has no scientifically proven foundation.

There is, however, some research which suggests that abnormal hormonal development of the brain during pregnancy could have some influence, but it's not conclusive. Even if it does prove to be true, or even if some day a genetic predisposition is clearly found, that has to be understood as being part of the marred humanity that we each inherit, not the design of God. And just like people with a hereditary susceptibility toward various health problems like heart disease or obesity or high cholesterol, that doesn't mean you can't adopt a different lifestyle. However, since there is some possibility that there may be a hereditary factor, even if it is simply due to a flawed human nature, that is cause for compassion.

And yet, all that being said, when it comes to the presence of same-gender sexual attraction, the factor that seems to have by far the greatest influence is the environment into which one is born and raised. Hundreds of counselors who have counseled people with same-gender confusion for many years have all testified to a consistent pattern that they witness in their clients' lives. In their client's formative years one of two things has typically happened, or maybe a combination of them, that bends a young person toward same-gender confusion.

1. Their same gender parent is either absent or abusive, and their lives are predominantly spent around the opposite gender. Also, often times the parent of the opposite gender has an excessive co-dependent relationship with them in some way.

For instance, as in Kent's life, his dad was absent, and a number of the males that he did know sexually abused him. At the same time his mother in her own void left by an absent husband, turned to Kent and developed a very unhealthy, co-dependent relationship with him. In addition to that, most of the other people Kent was around were female. His developing same-gender attractions and eventual activities were attempts to fill a deep void. The sexual actions were actually despised means to that end. Homosexuality is not first and foremost a sexual issue; it is a developmental issue.

2. A child experiences alternating and temporary periods during which they are attracted by something about others of the same sex. This is very normal. Almost every adolescent has these kinds of experiences. They are seldom ever erotic. If they do result in some form of mutual sexual experimentation, this can significantly complicate things, but the underlying attraction is not necessarily anything all that unusual. Most adolescents have alternating opposite-gender, same-gender attractions of one sort or another that are completely innocent.

The problem comes in how such things are responded to, primarily by others. If others begin to label them or make suggestions to them that they are gay, this can have confusing and disastrous effects. Labels are extremely powerful. Over time those being labeled begin to form a self-identity based on that label. Then they are no longer simply an adolescent who

occasionally has completely innocent interest in someone of the same gender, or even a young person who has a deep deficit and a longing to connect with others of the same sex; no, now this has left the realm of something they have experienced and has become something they have been convinced that they are.

You would be surprised at the alarming rate at which this latter pattern is happening today. Because gay identity-friendly propaganda and behavior has become so prominent, young people having normal questions or even experiencing some same-gender confusion are given an early label of being gay and are encouraged to accept it, whereas in previous time periods such people would have eventually passed that stage of life, gone on to be married and have families and never question their sexual identity.

The main point here is that labels are powerful, for bad and for good. Even if a consistent pattern of behavior understandably produces a corresponding label, such labels are not essentially who we are and certainly do not dictate what we must remain. Especially for one who comes to Christ, dies with Him and is buried with Him in baptism; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come – he or she is a new person in Christ. Her identity is as a washed, cleansed, redeemed, justified, sanctified and secure child of God; one whose true life and identity is hidden with God in Christ. “And such were some of you...” implies the past no longer has to define you.

Conclusion

A person may for some time, even for the rest of his (or her) life have to struggle against same-gender temptations and attractions, but in Christ, by His grace, the power and appeal of those temptations will continually weaken, as long as the person is sincere and doesn't play games with them, and he trusts completely in God's ability to transform him. Such people understand that they are called by God to take up their cross and struggle against their homosexual tendencies, just as all people are called to struggle against the sinful passions which they find within themselves, while they work to heal the causes of their disorientation and disease. They look to their fellow Christians, especially their Church leaders, for support and assistance in their spiritual struggle. Their struggle is not made any easier by the mindless, truly demonic hatred of those who despise and ridicule. Few people get up one day and say, "I think I want to be gay." Most are influenced over many years by a number of factors; therefore, we must be respectful and compassionate. However, the equally demonic affirmation of homosexual activity by its misguided advocates and enablers also does nothing to promote healing.

Neither ridiculing and condemning nor flattering and condoning brings the healing that God desires. May God help us to have a different heart in the matter, His heart, bringing both clarity and compassion in a balance of grace that fosters transformation and wholeness through a whole new identity in Christ.

