FORTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
AD INTERIM COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

May 2020

To the 48th General Assembly,

The following Ad Interim Committee Report has been prepared for the 48th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America originally scheduled for June 2020.

As a consequence of the postponing of that Assembly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Report will now not be officially presented to the General Assembly until its next scheduled meeting in 2021.

Nevertheless, the Committee wants to make this Report available to the church at this originally scheduled time because we were commissioned to engage in this study due to pressing needs in our church and society. Our prayer is that the Scriptural solidarity and relational unity we experienced as a Committee will be reflected in what we have written, and may also prove helpful for the unity, witness, and mission of our church and her people.

TE Dr. Bryan Chapell Northern Illinois Presbytery (Chair)
TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung Central Carolina Presbytery
TE Dr. Tim Keller Metropolitan New York Presbytery
TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar Pittsburgh Presbytery
RE Dr. Derek Halvorson Tennessee Valley Presbytery
RE Mr. Kyle Keating Missouri Presbytery
RE Mr. Jim Pocta North Texas Presbytery
REPORT OF THE AD INTERIM COMMITTEE
ON HUMAN SEXUALITY
TO THE FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
(2019-2020)

In June 2019, the 47th PCA General Assembly in Dallas adopted a recommendation from its Overtures Committee answering Chicago Metro Presbytery’s Overture 42 in the affirmative, as amended by the OC. The GA directed Moderator Donahoe to “appoint the seven voting members who shall be either PCA teaching or ruling elders, and the Committee shall include at least three teaching and three ruling elders.” The GA’s assignment to the Committee is shown in Attachment A. Below is a list of members, with brief biographies in Attachment B.

TE Dr. Bryan Chapell  Northern Illinois (Chair)  RE Dr. Derek Halvorson  Tennessee Valley
TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung  Central Carolina  RE Mr. Kyle Keating  Missouri
TE Dr. Tim Keller  Metropolitan New York  RE Mr. Jim Pocta  North Texas
TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar  Pittsburgh

The Committee had eight meetings: Aug. 30, Sept. 9, Oct. 10, Nov. 15, Dec. 13, Feb. 10, Mar. 4, and Apr. 3. Below is a summary of the matters the GA assigned to the Committee, according to the subdivisions of the Overture (see Attachment A).

1.a; 2 annotated bibliography;
1.b.1 nature of temptation, sin, repentance, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformed views of concupiscence as regards same-sex attraction;
1.b.2 propriety of using terms like “gay Christian” when referring to a believer struggling with same-sex attraction;
1.b.3 status of “orientation” as a valid anthropological category;
1.b.4 practice of “spiritual friendship” among same-sex attracted Christians;
1.c analysis of WLC 138 & 139 regarding same-sex attraction, with careful attention given to the compatibility of the 7th commandment and same-sex attraction and the pursuit of celibacy by those attracted to the same sex;
1.d exegesis of the terms “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” (1 Cor. 6:9);
1.e suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.

The Report is arranged in six sections (with pertinent Overture subdivisions shown in parentheses).

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Herein the Committee has sought to address the issues and questions assigned to it for study by the 47th General Assembly. Although we are not making any formal recommendations, we hope and pray that this Report will be unifying, edifying, and Biblically useful for our denomination.

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1 M47GA, 701 (original version of Overture 42); 104 (Overture 42 as amended by GA Overtures Committee).
PREAMBLE

This Committee has been tasked by the 2019 General Assembly to “study the topic of human sexuality with particular attention to the issues of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism and prepare a report” (Overture 42 from Chicago Metro Presbytery, as amended [M47GA, 104]). Our task was not to address the whole of human sexuality, but limited to specific concerns raised in our denomination.

The Assembly’s adopted overture lists a number of issues that it wants the Report to address, including: (1) the nature of sexual sin, temptation, and mortification, (2) the propriety (or not) of a Christian referring to himself or herself as a “gay Christian,” (3) the propriety (or not) of speaking of a homosexual “orientation,” and (4) recent practices of incorporating Christians into Christian community who have been attracted to the same sex—all while giving special attention to parts of the Scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6) and the Standards (e.g., WLC 138 & 139) that are relevant to these topics.

Our list of assigned topics is long, and we have sought to address them most directly in this Preamble and the immediately following Twelve Statements that we pray are of a length to be most helpful for ease of distribution and common use in the church. This Preamble and Twelve Statements are a summary of our discussions and convictions, and provide a theological and pastoral framework for all the other parts of this Report. Our Committee engaged in its most lengthy and precise discussions on these two documents, as we carefully weighed the most critical issues to provide Biblical and Confessional arguments that we hope will bring clarity and unity on these sensitive subjects for our churches, families, and friends.

Our Committee also gathered explanatory essays from our members that discuss issues assigned to us by the Assembly. We have included these essays in subsequent sections of this Report because, without endorsing how every thought is expressed, we all believe they will be helpful in explaining key understandings behind our Twelve Statements. Finally, we compiled a Select Annotated Bibliography that lists materials we believe will be helpful to the various constituencies of our church who wish to become more informed about these issues. In this bibliography, we have provided materials for a variety of audiences (pastors, scholars, parents, children, etc.). Our goal is not to present an exhaustive list of all available materials (that would unbalance the elements and efficacy of this Report), but to aid the church by presenting some of the most useful materials for different constituencies and different purposes. We cannot affirm our agreement with every word or thought in such a wide variety of materials (indeed, sometimes we must make informed readers aware of resources they should be prepared to counter or receive with caution). Our goal is for our annotations to guide our readers with the Biblical discernment needed to hold to what is good and rightly sift what is unbiblical or less certain.

Amidst all these statements and essays we discern two overarching concerns—concerns which may be expressed as two important tasks for the Church in our time and two competing sets of fears.
The two tasks could be called the “pastoral task” and the “apologetic task.” On the one hand, Overture 42 asks that the Report “help pastors and sessions shepherd congregants who are dealing with same-sex attraction” (M47GA, 104). On the other hand it asks for “suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding” (M47GA, 105).

There is no reason why these two tasks need to be pitted against each other, although they often seem to be. One reason they seem at loggerheads is that attached to each undertaking is a set of fears.

One set of fears is that we will be harsh and unfeeling toward people who have been wounded and deeply hurt—and often by the Church. A hard-sounding stance toward them at this moment may only make it easier to discredit the Church in people’s minds. As a consequence, many are afraid that the Church will speak in ways that only support the powerful cultural narrative that orthodox Christian belief is toxic for hurting and struggling people.

Another set of fears, however, is that we will compromise at the very place where the world is attacking the Church in our culture. We see many professing Christians and whole denominations surrendering to the sexual revolution. We do not want to be one of them, nor even now in subtle ways to sow the seeds for some future capitulation. As the natural family is a fundamental unit of human society and is the normal means of care and nurture, all sins which threaten, undermine, or marginalize it are both spiritually dangerous and detrimental to human flourishing.

Part of the problem with regard to addressing these issues is that many of us are far more gripped with one set of fears than the other. But because both of these tasks—the pastoral and the apologetic—are required, we should give each of them strong attention.

Sinclair Ferguson, in his book The Whole Christ, reminds us that the two main ways that the gospel is compromised are through legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other. He then says that it is common to fall into “the mistake of prescribing a dose of antinomianism to heal legalism, and vice-versa, rather than the gospel antidote of our grace-union with Christ.” He goes on to argue that the Church must present to the world the whole Christ, “clothed in his gospel.” Jesus is both the Holy One and the merciful one. He cleanses the temple yet eats with sinners. He gives Martha teaching on truth (John 11:25-26) yet he gives Mary only tears (John 11:35) even though they had both said the same thing to him about their grief (John 11:21, 32). He gives each of them what they most need at the moment. On the cross Jesus fulfills both the unyielding demands of the Law yet also the most wonderful purposes of God’s love.

And so we must present “the whole Christ” when we both pastor individuals and speak to the world about sexuality and gender today. Jesus is full of grace and truth. In pastoral care we

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3 Ibid., 46.
must not apply the truth so harshly as to be callously alienating or so indirectly that the truth is never clearly grasped.

The very form of the following Twelve Statements seeks to capture this “grace and truth” wholeness as we address the issues. Each statement is dual, an associating of one truth with a concomitant truth or teaching. The aim is not to achieve some kind of abstract intellectual balance or “third way,” but rather to show the path of theologically rich pastoring. The paired truths help the pastor avoid the opposite errors of either speaking the truth without love or trying to love someone without speaking the truth.

The “grace and truth” path to which we point the church in this Report is not an easy one. Speaking the truth yet doing it in love is nearly always harder than separating these needed aspects of the whole gospel into two alternatives. Speaking with grace and truth, in the process of our work together this year, we on your Ad-Interim Committee have been delighted to find a greater spirit and degree of oneness amongst ourselves than we would have expected. Our prayer is that our entire church may increasingly find that same “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).
TEN STATEMENTS

STATEMENT 1: MARRIAGE

We affirm that marriage is to be between one man and one woman (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:4-6; WCF 24.1). Sexual intimacy is a gift from God to be cherished and is reserved for the marriage relationship between one man and one woman (Prov. 5:18-19). Marriage was instituted by God for the mutual help and blessing of husband and wife, for procreation and the raising together of godly children, and to prevent sexual immorality (Gen. 1:28; 2:18; Mal. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 7:2, 9; WCF 24.2). Marriage is also a God-ordained picture of the differentiated relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:6-10). All other forms of sexual intimacy, including all forms of lust and same-sex sexual activity of any kind, are sinful (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Jude 7; WLC 139).

Nevertheless, we do not believe that sexual intimacy in marriage automatically eliminates unwanted sexual desires, nor that all sex within marriage is sinless (WCF 6.5). We all stand in need of God’s grace for sexual sin and temptation, whether married or not. Moreover, sexual immorality is not an unpardonable sin. There is no sin so small it does not deserve damnation, and no sin so big it cannot be forgiven (WCF 15.4). There is hope and forgiveness for all who repent of their sin and put their trust in Christ (Matt. 11:28-30; John 6:35, 37; Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31).

STATEMENT 2: IMAGE OF GOD

We affirm that God created human beings in his image as male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). Likewise, we recognize the goodness of the human body (Gen. 1:31; John 1:14) and the call to glorify God with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:12-20). As a God of order and design, God opposes the confusion of man as woman and woman as man (1 Cor. 11:14-15). While situations involving such confusion can be heartbreaking and complex, men and women should be helped to live in accordance with their biological sex.

Nevertheless, we ought to minister compassionately to those who are sincerely confused and disturbed by their internal sense of gender identity (Gal. 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). We recognize

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4 Paul coined the term arsenokoitai (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10) from the use of two related terms in the Septuagint version of Leviticus 18 and 20. The basic meaning is “man-bedders” or men who have sex with other men. The word malakoi can mean “soft” as in soft clothing (Matt. 11:8; Luke 7:25), or when used pejoratively of men it can mean “effeminate.” In the ancient Roman world, “The ‘soft’ man lack[ed] masculine posture, courage, authority, and self-restraint; he is like a woman.” Fredrik Ivarrson, “Vice Lists and Deviant Masculinity,” in Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses, eds. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 180. Sexual passivity or penetrability is not the definition of malakos, but it is one possible connotation. Ivarrson, “Vice Lists,” 180-81. The combination of arsenokoitai and malakoi, uniquely used in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 6:9, likely refers most directly—as per the ESV footnote—to the active and passive partners in consensual homosexual activity. For more extended discussion, see Chapter 5 in Kevin DeYoung, What Does the Bible Really Say About Homosexuality? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).
that the effects of the Fall extend to the corruption of our whole nature (WSC 18), which may include how we think of our own gender and sexuality. Moreover, some persons, in rare instances, may possess an objective medical condition in which their anatomical development may be ambiguous or does not match their genetic chromosomal sex. Such persons are also made in the image of God and should live out their biological sex, insofar as it can be known.

**STATEMENT 3: ORIGINAL SIN**

We affirm that from the sin of our first parents we have received an inherited guilt and an inherited depravity (Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:1-3). From this original corruption—which is itself sinful and for which we are culpable—proceed all actual transgressions. All the outworkings of our corrupted nature (a corruption which remains, in part, even after regeneration) are truly and properly called sin (WCF 6.1-5). Every sin, original and actual, deserves death and renders us liable to the wrath of God (Rom. 3:23; James 2:10; WCF 6.6). We must repent of our sin in general and our particular sins, particularly (WCF 15.5). That is, we ought to grieve for our sin, hate our sin, turn from our sin unto God, and endeavor to walk with God in obedience to his commandments (WCF 15.2).

Nevertheless, God does not wish for believers to live in perpetual misery for their sins, each of which are pardoned and mortified in Christ (WCF 6.5). By the Spirit of Christ, we are able to make spiritual progress and to do good works, not perfectly, but truly (WCF 16.3). Even our imperfect works are made acceptable through Christ, and God is pleased to accept and reward them as pleasing in his sight (WCF 16.6).

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5 A.A. Hodge comments on WCF 6.5 that “innate moral corruption remains in the regenerate as long as they live” and that “all the feelings and actions” prompted by this remaining corruption “are truly of the nature of sin.” A.A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 115.

6 In theological language, actual sin is distinguished from the original sin we inherited from Adam. “Actual” should be understood in a comprehensive sense of the word “act.” The term “does not merely denote those external actions which are accomplished by means of the body, but all those conscious thoughts and volitions which spring from original sin.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 251.


8 Francis Turretin writes: “We must distinguish between truly good and perfectly good. We have proved before that the latter cannot be ascribed to the works of the saints on account of the imperfection of sanctification and the remains of sin. But the former is rightly predicated of them because although they are not as yet perfectly renewed, still they are truly and unfeignedly renewed.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 17.4.9.
Statement 4: Desire

We affirm not only that our inclination toward sin is a result of the Fall, but that our fallen desires are in themselves sinful (Rom 6:11-12; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11). The desire for an illicit end—whether in sexual desire for a person of the same sex or in sexual desire disconnected from the context of Biblical marriage—is itself an illicit desire. Therefore, the experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the attraction is an expression of original or indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death (Rom. 8:13).

Nevertheless, we must celebrate that, despite the continuing presence of sinful desires (and even, at times, egregious sinful behavior), repentant, justified, and adopted believers are free from condemnation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21) and are able to please God by walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-6).

Statement 5: Concupiscence

We affirm that impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin. We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will. These desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful.

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9 James 1:14-15 should not be misunderstood as suggesting that fallen desire is something other than sin. Calvin explains: “It seems, however, improper, and not according to the usage of Scripture, to restrict the word sin to outward works, as though indeed lust itself were not a sin, and as though corrupt desires, remaining closed up within and suppressed, were not so many sins. But as the use of a word is various, there is nothing unreasonable if it be taken here, as in many other places, for actual sin. And the Papists ignorantly lay hold on this passage, and seek to prove from it that vicious, yea, filthy, wicked, and the most abominable lusts are not sins, provided there is no assent; for James does not shew when sin begins to be born, so as to be sin, and so accounted by God, but when it breaks forth.” John Calvin, Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 290.

10 After describing the Roman Catholic doctrine of concupiscence (i.e. that “the guilt and pollution of original sin was totally removed by baptism” and that concupiscence “does not injure those who do not consent to it”), Herman Bavinck argues: “The Reformation spoke out against that position, asserting that also the impure thoughts and desires that arose in us prior to and apart from our will are sin.” Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:143.

11 “Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, or metaphorically, ‘the tinder for sin’ (fomes peccati); since concupiscence ‘is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ’” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1264; see also 1426). Concupiscence is later defined as “the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of the human reason...Concupiscence stems from the disobedience of the first sin. It unsettles man’s moral faculties and, without being in itself an offense, inclines man to commit sins’” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2515).

12 Calvin articulates the Reformed position well: “But between Augustine and us we can see that there is this difference of opinion: while he concedes that believers, as long as they dwell in mortal bodies, are so bound by inordinate desires (concupiscentiis) that they are unable not to desire inordinately, yet he dare not call this disease ‘sin.’ Content to designate it with the term ‘weakness,’ he teaches that it becomes sin only when either act or consent follows the conceiving or apprehension of it, that is, when the will yields to the first strong inclination. We, on the other hand, deem it sin when a man is tickled by any desire at all against the law of God. Indeed, we
Nevertheless, we recognize that many persons who experience same-sex attraction describe their desires as arising in them unbidden and unwanted. We also recognize that the presence of same-sex attraction is often owing to many factors, which always include our own sin nature and may include being sinned against in the past. As with any sinful pattern or propensity—which may include disordered desires, extramarital lust, pornographic addictions, and all abusive sexual behavior—the actions of others, though never finally determinative, can be significant and influential. This should move us to compassion and understanding. Moreover, it is true for all of us that sin can be both unchosen bondage and idolatrous rebellion at the same time. We all experience sin, at times, as a kind of voluntary servitude (Rom. 7:13-20).  

**STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION**

We affirm that Scripture speaks of temptation in different ways. There are some temptations God gives us in the form of morally neutral trials, and other temptations God never gives us because they arise from within as morally illicit desires (James 1:2, 13-14). When temptations come from without, the temptation itself is not sin, unless we enter into the temptation. But when the temptation arises from within, it is our own act and is rightly called sin.  

Nevertheless, there is an important degree of moral difference between temptation to sin and giving in to sin, even when the temptation is itself an expressing of indwelling sin. While label ‘sin’ that very depravity which begets in us desires of this sort.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.10. Likewise, Bavinck argues that sin is found not in the excess of passions, but “in the manner [and] direction of those passions.” Later he writes, “This means, on the one hand, that the objects/images that spirit and body deposit in the soul as the seat of the feelings are impure, sinful, and corrupt; and, on the other hand, that the feelings themselves are corrupt, reflect impurity, are blurred and muddled.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: 2019), 90-91.  

13 “‘In some base and strange way,’” Calvin writes, quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, “‘the will itself, changed for the worse by sin, makes a necessity for itself. Hence, neither does necessity, although it is of the will, avail to excuse the will, nor does the will, although it is led astray, avail to exclude necessity. For this necessity is as it were voluntary.’ Afterward he says that we are oppressed by no other yoke than that of a kind of voluntary servitude.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5.  

14 The word for “tempts” (*peirazei*) and “tempted” (*peirazetai*) in verses 13 and 14 is the same word (in noun form) translated as “trials” (*peirasmoi*) in verse 2.  

15 John Owen explains: “Now, what is it to be tempted? It is to have that proposed to man’s consideration which, if he close, it is evil, it is sin unto him. This is sin’s trade: epithumei—it lusts.” It is raising up in the heart, and proposing unto the mind and affections, that which is evil; trying, as it were, whether the soul will close with its suggestions, or how far it will carry them on, though it does not wholly prevail. Now, when such a temptation comes from without, it is unto the soul an indifferent thing, neither good nor evil, unless it be consented unto; but the very proposal from within, it being the soul’s own act, it is sin.” “Indwelling Sin,” in John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 276.  

16 According to Owen, James 1:14-15 describes a five-step process of sin: (1) the mind being drawn away, (2) the affections being entangled, (3) the will consenting to actual sin, (4) the conversation wherein sin is brought forth into view, and (5) the stubborn course that finishes sin and ends in death (297-98). Each step of the process is worse than the next. We are to be “watchful against all enticements unto the conception of sin,” but in particular we must carefully “attend unto all particular actions” agreeable to God’s will (299). Speaking more broadly, the *Larger Catechism* teaches that while every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God (*WLC* 152), some sins are
our goal is the weakening and lessening of internal temptations to sin, Christians should feel
their greatest responsibility not for the fact that such temptations occur but for thoroughly and
immediately fleeing and resisting the temptations when they arise. We can avoid “entering
into” temptation by refusing to internally ponder and entertain the proposal and desire to actual
sin. Without some distinction between (1) the illicit temptations that arise in us due to original
sin and (2) the willful giving over to actual sin, Christians will be too discouraged to “make
every effort” at growth in godliness and will feel like failures in their necessary efforts to be
holy as God is holy (2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Peter 1:14-16). God is pleased with our sincere obedience,
even though it may be accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections (WCF 16.6).

STATEMENT 7: SANCTIFICATION

We affirm that Christians should flee immoral behavior and not yield to temptation. By the
power of the Holy Spirit working through the ordinary means of grace, Christians should seek
to wither, weaken, and put to death the underlying idolatries and sinful desires that lead to
sinful behavior. The goal is not just consistent fleeing from, and regular resistance to,
temptation, but the diminishment and even the end of the occurrences of sinful desires through
the reordering of the loves of one’s heart toward Christ. Through the virtue of Christ’s death
and resurrection, we can make substantial progress in the practice of true holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord (Rom. 6:14-19; Heb. 12:14; 1 John 4:4; WCF 13.1).

Nevertheless, this process of sanctification—even when the Christian is diligent and fervent
in the application of the means of grace—will always be accompanied by many weaknesses
and imperfections (WCF 16.5, 6), with the Spirit and the flesh warring against one another
until final glorification (WCF 13.2). The believer who struggles with same-sex attraction
should expect to see the regenerate nature increasingly overcome the remaining corruption of
the flesh, but this progress will often be slow and uneven. Moreover, the process of
mortification and vivification involves the whole person, not simply unwanted sexual desires.
The aim of sanctification in one’s sexual life cannot be reduced to attraction to persons of the
opposite sex (though some persons may experience movement in this direction), but rather
involves growing in grace and perfecting holiness in the fear of God (WCF 13.3).

STATEMENT 8: IMPECCABILITY

We affirm the impeccability of Christ. The incarnate Son of God neither sinned (in thought,
word, deed, or desire) nor had the possibility of sinning. Christ experienced temptation
passively, in the form of trials and the devil’s entreaties, not actively, in the form of disordered
desires. Christ had only the suffering part of temptation, where we also have the sinning part.

more heinous than others, depending on the persons offending, the parties offended, the nature of the offense,
and the circumstances of the offense (WLC 151).

17 “We ascribe to Christ not only natural, but also moral, integrity or moral perfection, that is sinlessness. This
means not merely that Christ could avoid sinning (potuit non peccare), and did actually avoid it, but also that it
was impossible for Him to sin (non potuit peccare) because of the essential bond between the human and divine
natures” (Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 318).

18 This phrasing comes from Owen, who goes on to say, “So that though in one effect of temptations, namely
trials and disquietness, we are made like to Christ, and so are to rejoice as far as by any means that is produced;
Christ had no inward disposition or inclination unto the least evil, being perfect in all graces and all their operations at all times.19

Nevertheless, Christ endured, from without, real soul-wrenching temptations which qualified him to be our sympathetic high priest (Heb. 2:18; 4:15). Christ assumed a human nature that was susceptible to suffering and death.20 He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3).

**STATEMENT 9: IDENTITY**

We affirm that the believer’s most important identity is found in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:4, 7). Christians ought to understand themselves, define themselves, and describe themselves in light of their union with Christ and their identity as regenerate, justified, holy children of God (Rom. 6:5-11; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; Eph. 2:1-10). To juxtapose identities rooted in sinful desires alongside the term “Christian” is inconsistent with Biblical language and undermines the spiritual reality that we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Nevertheless, being honest about our sin struggles is important. While Christians should not identify with their sin so as to embrace it or seek to base their identity on it, Christians ought to acknowledge their sin in an effort to overcome it. There is a difference between speaking about a phenomenological facet of a person’s sin-stained reality and employing the language of sinful desires as a personal identity marker. That is, we name our sins, but are not named by them. Moreover, we recognize that there are some secondary identities, when not rooted in sinful desires or struggles against the flesh, that can be legitimately affirmed along with our primary identity as Christians. For example, the distinctions between male and female, or between various nationalities and people groups, are not eradicated in becoming Christians, but serve to magnify the glory of God in his plan of salvation (Gen. 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7; Rev. 5:9; 7:9-10).

yet by another we are made unlike to him—which is our being defiled and entangled: and are therefore to seek by all means to avoid them. We never come off like Christ. Who of us ‘enter into temptation’ and is not defiled?” “Of Temptation,” in John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006) 183.

19 This way of stating the matter comes from Owen: “[Christ] was also like unto us in temptations...But herein also some difference may be observed between him and us; for the most of our temptations arise from within us, from our own unbelief and lusts...But from these things he was absolutely free; for as he had no inward dispositions or inclination unto the least evil, being perfect in all graces and all their operations at all times, so when the prince of this world came unto him, he had no part in him,—nothing to close with his suggestions or to entertain his terrors.” John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 3:468.

20 Bavinck makes this point in arguing that although Christ’s human nature was not fallen, he did assume a weak human nature that in some respects differed from Adam’s before the Fall (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:311). The impeccability of Christ does not mitigate against genuine struggle in the life of Christ. “For although real temptation could not come to Jesus from within but only from without, be nevertheless possessed a human nature, which dreaded suffering and death. Thus, throughout his life, he was tempted in all sorts of ways—by Satan, his enemies, and even by his disciples (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-13; Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:22; Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33). And in those temptations he was bound, fighting as he went, to remain faithful; the inability to sin (non posse peccare) was not a matter of coercion but ethical in nature and therefore had to be manifested in an ethical manner.” Ibid., 3:315.
STATEMENT 10: LANGUAGE

We affirm that those in our churches would be wise to avoid the term “gay Christian.” Although the term “gay” may refer to more than being attracted to persons of the same sex, the term does not communicate less than that. For many people in our culture, to self-identify as “gay” suggests that one is engaged in homosexual practice. At the very least, the term normally communicates the presence and approval of same-sex sexual attraction as morally neutral or morally praiseworthy. Even if “gay,” for some Christians, simply means “same-sex attraction,” it is still inappropriate to juxtapose this sinful desire, or any other sinful desire, as an identity marker alongside our identity as new creations in Christ.

Nevertheless, we recognize that some Christians may use the term “gay” in an effort to be more readily understood by non-Christians. The word “gay” is common in our culture, and we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term. Our burden is that we do not justify our sin struggles by affixing them to our identity as Christians. Churches should be gentle, patient, and intentional with believers who call themselves “gay Christians,” encouraging them, as part of the process of sanctification, to leave behind identification language rooted in sinful desires, to live chaste lives, to refrain from entering into temptation, and to mortify their sinful desires.

STATEMENT 11: FRIENDSHIP

We affirm that our contemporary ecclesiastical culture has an underdeveloped understanding of friendship and often does not honor singleness as it should. The church must work to see that all members, including believers who struggle with same-sex attraction, are valued members of the body of Christ and engaged in meaningful relationships through the blessings of the family of God. Likewise we affirm the value of Christians who share common struggles gathering together for mutual accountability, exhortation, and encouragement.

Nevertheless, we do not support the formation of exclusive, contractual marriage-like friendships, nor do we support same-sex romantic behavior or the assumption that certain sensibilities and interests are necessarily aspects of a gay identity. We do not consider same-sex attraction a gift in itself, nor do we think this sin struggle, or any sin struggle, should be celebrated in the church.

STATEMENT 12: REPENTANCE AND HOPE

We affirm that the entire life of the believer is one of repentance. Where we have mistreated those who struggle with same-sex attraction, or with any other sinful desires, we call ourselves to repentance. Where we have nurtured or made peace with sinful thoughts, desires, words, or deeds, we call ourselves to repentance. Where we have heaped upon others misplaced shame or have not dealt well with necessary God-given shame, we call ourselves to repentance.

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Nevertheless, as we call ourselves to the evangelical grace of repentance (WCF 15.1), we see many reasons for rejoicing (Phil. 4:1). We give thanks for penitent believers who, though they continue to struggle with same-sex attraction, are living lives of chastity and obedience. These brothers and sisters can serve as courageous examples of faith and faithfulness, as they pursue Christ with a long obedience in gospel dependence. We also give thanks for ministries and churches within our denomination that minister to sexual strugglers (of all kinds) with Biblical truth and grace. Most importantly, we give thanks for the gospel that can save and transform the worst of sinners—older brothers and younger brothers, tax collectors and Pharisees, insiders and outsiders. We rejoice in ten thousand spiritual blessings that are ours when we turn from sin by the power of the Spirit, trust in the promises of God, and rest upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life (WCF 14.2).
CONFESSIONAL FOUNDATIONS
REGARDING THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION, SIN, AND REPENTANCE

GA Assignment: 1.b.1 [Prepare a report which shall address... the nature of temptation, sin, repentance, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformed views of concupiscence as regards same-sex attraction;]

Some of the issues being discussed in our churches today have to do with understandings of sin and gospel expectations. Accordingly, the first item assigned to this committee was to address “the nature of temptation, sin, repentance, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformed views of concupiscence as regards same-sex attraction” (1.b.1). These are doctrinal categories reflected in our Confessional tradition which are both broadly applicable as well as instructive for many of the specific questions before us. Therefore, before considering issues regarding sexuality, we need to briefly review and describe the system of doctrine concerning sin and the Christian life to which we subscribe in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). In view of the issues before us, we want to focus especially on the human experience of sin and the application of redemption. What do we believe the Bible teaches us about our condition as fallen human beings? What does it mean to be saved from this state? How does regeneration affect our experience of fallenness? How we answer these questions will determine how we answer the more specific questions about our experience of sexuality.

I. CONFESSIONAL FOUNDATIONS

I.A. Corruption

First, the Confession describes the current state of humanity apart from redemption in terms of comprehensive corruption. The Fall of our first parents is described, and the result that they “became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body” (WCF 6.2). This emphasizes the integrated and wholistic nature of our humanity. The corruption of sin strikes at the core of our nature, such that its effects are felt throughout. Further, this corrupted nature is said to be “conveyed to all their posterity” (WCF 6.3). In other words, what was true of our first parents is true of us who are born into their corrupted nature.

As the Confession describes this, it introduces the distinction between the corruption itself and the active fruit of that corruption: “From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions” (WCF 6.4). This is the distinction between “original” and “actual” sin. As a technical theological term, “actual” sin refers not to the reality or non-reality of sin,

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22 Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1-3; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Titus 1:15; Rom. 3:10-19.
23 Ps. 51:5; John 3:6; Gen. 5:3; Job 15:14.
24 Rom. 7:18; 8:7; Col. 1:21; Matt. 15:19; James 1:14-15; Eph. 2:2-3.
but to its being an act of the soul as opposed to a disposition or inclination only. While it is significant that a distinction is made between original and actual sin, the emphasis at this point in the Confession is that original sin, as a disposition or inclination, is truly sin: “This corruption of nature…itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin” (WCF 6.5).

What is behind Article VI of the Confession, and especially section 5 of the article, is the historical dispute over concupiscence. Though concupiscence as a Latin word originally had a broader definition as simply “desire,” what was in dispute in the Reformation was concupiscence as a technical theological term. As such, it refers not to desire in general but to disordered desire, thus, desire as corrupted by the Fall. Within this category of disordered desire there is especially concern for the spontaneity or unbidden nature of disordered desire. When the sin status of concupiscence was disputed, the concern was this spontaneous, pre-deliberate, experience of desire, before the will consciously assented or consented to it.

Consent, as described in the Medieval discussions of concupiscence, began at any conscious approval of the feeling, even letting it linger so as to enjoy the feeling itself. Concupiscence was a sinward feeling, arousal, or attraction before any conscious consent to that feeling was given. Concupiscence, then, was the experience of the corruption of our nature. It was the inclination to desire in disordered ways experienced as spontaneous feelings and not the consent to or active cultivation of those feelings. Thus, concupiscence in this technical theological sense is associated more closely with original, not actual sin. It is “This corruption of nature…itself, and all the motions thereof,” and is “truly and properly sin” (WCF 6.5).

I.B. Corruption and the Regenerate

WCF 6.5 begins, “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated.” This statement is the lead point under which several other things are said about the Christian life—a life that is fundamentally renewed and yet continues to experience the

25 It is important to note act can be internal or external. “The term ‘actual sins’ does not merely denote those external actions which are accomplished by means of the body, but all those conscious thoughts and volitions which spring from original sin.” Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 251.

26 The answer to Question 151 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, in listing factors that mark any sin as “more heinous” than others, mentions if it is “not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions.” Whether this describes the transition from original to actual sin or just the development of actual sin from inward intent to outward deed, the clear implication is that there is an increase in the “heinousness” of sin as it progresses toward active fulfillment.

27 Rom. 7:7-8; Gal. 5:17.

28 Concupiscence as used in this historical-theological context is a very specific category of desire. This usage stems from Augustine’s discussion of the experience of desire rising up in him prior to any conscious consent on his part and even contrary to his reason—sexual desire being a common example (see, for example, Augustine, De Civitate Dei, Book XIV). As such, the theological discussions of concupiscence do not have in mind desire as a broader category.

29 This disorder could be understood in many ways—to desire what ought not be desirable, or to desire what should be desirable to too little or too great an extent, or to desire in the wrong context or with the wrong purpose or in the wrong way, etc. The point is that it is a moral disorder; the “order” by which it is defined as disordered is the Law of God.

30 Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 7:14, 17-18, 21-23; 1 John 1:8, 10.
effects of the Fall. This section, though it mentions that “through Christ” this corruption is “pardoned and mortified,” emphasizes both that it remains in the Christian and that it is sin.

What then, are we to make of this corruption being “pardoned and mortified?” That it is pardoned refers to the doctrine of justification. The Reformation’s teaching on justification is clarified as opposed to the Roman view by how God is said to deal with the remaining sinful corruption. Chapter 11 makes the point that when God justifies corrupted humans, he does it “not by infusing righteousness into them, …but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them” (WCF 11.1). The fact that the corruption remains highlights that justification is imputed, not infused.

But is there any real change in the life of the believer? Is the believer only forgiven, but doomed to continue in this life in the exact condition of sinful corruption and slavery to it? No, there is change—change that is both real and imperfect. The Confession describes real change in its article on Free Will: “When God converts a sinner and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good” (WCF 9.4). Our doctrine clearly affirms that the Christian wills and does spiritually good things. But immediately the Confession adds, “yet so as that, by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.” We will and do things that are truly good, but not perfectly or exclusively so.

Chapter 13 on Sanctification further describes the reality of change in the Christian life. There the Confession states, “They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally…the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness…” (WCF 13.1). This section of the Confession describes the real change and progress we have in Christ by the Spirit, even against the lusts of the body, and toward “true holiness.” In fact, section 2 begins by saying that “this sanctification is throughout, in the whole man,” language which clearly echoes the description of the extent of the corruption. Yet, this change that is “throughout, in the whole man” is “yet imperfect in this life: there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (WCF 13.2).

The Confession here describes an experience in which we have new life and old corruption existing at the same time, at war with each other. And, the Confession acknowledges that we do not always feel like we are winning battles: “In which war, …the remaining corruption, for

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31 Rom. 4:5-8; 3:22-28; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Titus 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:7; Jer. 23:6.
32 Col. 1:13; John 8:34, 36; Rom. 6:6-7, 14, 17-19, 22; Phil. 2:13.
33 Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:14-25.
34 Ezek. 36:22-28; Rom. 6:6, 14; 8:13-14; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 3:16-19; Col. 1:10-11; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 2:13-14.
35 Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17.
a time, may much prevail…” *(WCF 13.3).*36 At any given time in our life some aspect of that corruption may be “much prevailing,” meaning that it may seem that we are not making progress but are stuck or even regressing. But this conflict is ultimately not symmetrical; it is not a tug of war that ends in a tie. Though corruption prevail for a time, the upper hand is given to growth in grace: “In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so the saints grow in grace…” *(WCF 13.3).*37 We are to be encouraged that the “corruption prevailing” phase is not the whole story, and by faith the regenerate cling to the promise that the Spirit’s work in them cannot ultimately fail.

### I.C. Corruption and the Goodness of Our Works

There is one more aspect of the *Confession’s* picture of the Christian life that answers an important question regarding this true spiritual good that we do, which is nonetheless always imperfect and marred by remaining corruption. How is it that our good works can be considered truly good, if they are mixed with corruption and imperfect? Do not good works that are not completely good still fall short by definition? Indeed, Calvin says it this way: “If the true standard of righteousness is to love God with the whole heart, and mind, and strength, it is clear that the heart cannot incline otherwise without declining from righteousness…The law, I say, requires perfect love: we do not yield it. Our duty was to run, and we go on slowly limping.”38

The *Confession* agrees concerning our works, that “as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment” *(WCF 16.5).*39 Is this a contradiction in the *Confession’s* description of the Christian life? No. The answer brings us back again to justification and our union with Christ: “Yet notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him, not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God’s sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weakness and imperfections” *(WCF 16.6).*40 As an extension of God’s justifying grace to us in Christ, he is truly pleased with our sincere, though mixed, efforts at good.

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36 Rom. 7:23-24; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14.
37 Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 5:4.
38 The context for Calvin’s comment here is his response to the Council of Trent’s statement that concupiscence in believers is not sin. Calvin’s point is that the very fact that our remaining concupiscence causes our good works to be incomplete and “mixed” entails our sinning at least by omission in that we do not fulfill the entire demand of the law. “Antidote to the Council of Trent,” in John Calvin, *Tracts*, 3 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 3:88.
39 Luke 10:27; Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 7:15, 18; Gal. 5:17.
40 Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 6:10; 11:4; 13:20-21; 1 Cor. 3:14; 2 Cor. 8:12; Matt. 25:21, 23.
II. APPLICATION TO CURRENT ISSUES

At the heart of much of our current concern is how to understand homosexual attraction in relation to the gospel and the Christian life. The doctrine we have described in the Westminster Confession of Faith shows the way forward on this question, enabling us to make several applications to the issue of same-sex attraction. To begin with, consider the question of concupiscence. The experience of homosexual attraction is an example of concupiscence. As with all other disordered desires, this attraction is contained in what is referred to in the Confession as our “corruption of nature…and all the motions thereof,” and is “truly and properly sin” (WCF 6.5). But that is just the beginning of what should be said. For the Confession says much more about the corruption of our nature than that it is sin. It relates it in a balanced and careful way to the reality of the Christian life. There are several implications of the Confession’s teaching that bear on the issue before us. But first, more must be said about concupiscence.

II.A. Importance of Concupiscence

Let’s start with asking the significance of the affirmation that concupiscence (i.e., our “corruption of nature…and all the motions thereof”) is “truly and properly sin.” Why is this important? The broadest answer to this question can be found by asking the historical question, “Why was it important to the Reformers?” How did the Protestant view differ from the Roman view and why? The Roman view is summarized in the Council of Trent’s decree on original sin:

But this holy synod confesses and is sensible, that in the baptized there remains concupiscence, or an incentive [to sin]; which, since it is left for us to strive against, cannot injure those who consent not, but resist manfully by the grace of Jesus Christ; yea, he who shall have striven lawfully shall be crowned. This concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is of sin, and inclines to sin. And if any one is of a contrary opinion, let him be anathema.41

As this has often been summed up, the Council says that concupiscence is a result of sin and inclines to sin, but is not itself sin. The anathema is aimed at the Reformers. What was so important to the Reformers that they would be willing to make a sticking point of this doctrine and be anathematized by the Council?

The quotation from Trent above reveals one of the Reformers’ concerns. Trent declared, “This concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes calls sin,…the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again,…” Here the decree refers to Paul’s language in Romans 5-8 from which the Church gets the language of

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indwelling sin and which all parties at the time associated with concupiscence. When the Reformers heard this part of the decree, they heard something like, “The Bible calls it sin, but we as the Church never have.” This touches on issues of authority and tradition that were key to the Reformation. Beyond the issue of authority itself, it was important to the Reformers that sin be defined by Scripture and by God’s Law, not by human experience, expedience, or tradition. If a motion or feeling arises in us that is in a direction contrary to the righteousness described in God’s Law, it is sin, the extent to which we think we consciously deliberated or decided upon it notwithstanding.\textsuperscript{42} The Reformers placed a high importance on the issue of Biblical authority and the defining of sin as any lack of conformity to God’s Law.\textsuperscript{43}

But on this issue the concern went beyond sin to the gospel, beyond hamartiology to soteriology. Nineteenth-century Free Church of Scotland theologian and historian William Cunningham put it this way: “Scriptural views of the effects of the fall, and of the actual condition of men as fallen, firmly held and fully applied, are fitted to exert a most wholesome influence upon men’s whole conceptions of the way of salvation, and their whole impressions of divine things, and, indeed, are indispensable as a means to this end.” The Reformers were convinced that this was true regarding the question of concupiscence, and that the Roman view corresponded to serious errors in understanding the gospel. “Two of the most striking and dangerous tendencies or general characteristics of the theology of the Church of Rome are, first, exaggerating the efficacy and influence of external ordinances; and, secondly, providing for men meriting the favour of God and the rewards of heaven; and both these tendencies are exhibited in this single doctrine of the innocence or non-sinfulness of concupiscence.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} So Calvin’s response to Trent is straightforward: “If they would better their case, they must first of all show that there is such a conversion in the nature of things that what is the same becomes unlike itself. It cannot be denied without effrontery, that repugnance to the law of God is truly sin. But the Apostle affirms this of a disease remaining in the regenerate. It follows, therefore, that of its own nature it is sin, although it is not imputed, and the guilt is abolished by the grace of Christ.” Calvin, \textit{Tracts}, 3:87.

\textsuperscript{43} Consider William Cunningham’s expression of this: “But one thing is very manifest, that it should require evidence of no ordinary strength and clearness to warrant men in maintaining that \textit{that} is not truly and properly sin, which the apostle so frequently calls by that name, without giving any intimation that he understood it in an improper or metaphorical sense; and that if there be any subject with respect to which men ought to be more particularly scrupulous in departing, without full warrant, from the literal ordinary meaning of scriptural statements, it is when the deviation would represent \textit{that} as innocent which God’s word calls sinful, — a tendency which men’s darkened understandings and sinful hearts are but too apt to encourage.” William Cunningham, \textit{Historical Theology}, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 1:536.

\textsuperscript{44} Cunningham, \textit{Historical Theology}, 1:534. That Calvin also noticed this tendency is clear in that he pointed out that in effect the Roman view of concupiscence ended up doing the same thing with original sin in the regenerate as the Pelagians did with original sin in everyone: “If it were only a verbal question, still they ought no more to be listened to than those who affirm that infants cannot properly be said to be born with sin. Both interpret sin in the same way. There is this difference, that the latter speak thus of original sin generally, whereas these venerable Fathers maintain that after baptism a thing is no longer the same thing it was, though it remains the same.” Calvin, \textit{Tracts}, 3:87. Explaining the effect of the Pelagian heresy on the understanding of the gospel was rhetorically unnecessary; it was enough then to assert that the Roman view of concupiscence was the same error.
Cunningham’s perception of these tendencies in this doctrine is especially connected to the language of the Council of Trent that immediately precedes the direct mention of concupiscence:

If any one denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that all that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away, but says that it is only erased, or not imputed,—let him be anathema. For, in those who are born again, God hates nothing, because, There is no condemnation to those who are truly buried together with Christ by baptism into death; who walk not according to the flesh, but, putting off the old man, and putting on the new one, who is created according to God, are made innocent, immaculate, pure, harmless, and beloved of God, heirs indeed of God, but joint heirs with Christ; so that there is nothing whatever to retard them from entrance into heaven.\textsuperscript{45}

The significance of this quotation is Trent’s description of what is done to “all that which has the true and proper nature of sin.” The Council opposed those who would deny that it is taken away, but only say that it is erased and not imputed. The Reformers saw in this a gospel-destroying shift from the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to a confidence in our own. Though reference is made to Romans 8:1, the righteousness that Trent describes as belonging to the Christian is not imputed and alien, but infused and inherent. To the Reformers this struck at the heart of the gospel. The Christian would be encouraged to rest in a righteousness within himself. The paragraph on concupiscence follows immediately, so as to say that though the experience of the pull of concupiscence was still there, the Christian was to believe that all sin was ontologically removed from him (therefore concupiscence must not be sin). The Reformers, however, stressed the importance of recognizing the ongoing presence of sinful concupiscence in the Christian precisely because it highlighted that the righteousness given is only and completely an imputation of that which is Christ’s.

Cunningham mentioned as a second tendency, “exaggerating the efficacy and influence of external ordinances.” This was not only in the fact that this “removal” of sin is accomplished by the sacrament of baptism, but also in the way the sacramental system of the church would then relate to the Christian life. Since “all that pertains to the true essence of sin” is removed, the Christian is in an innocent, pure state—the corruption from original sin is no longer sin. The only sin that remains possible is actual sin, which would then be dealt with through the sacrament of penance: “Men may still, indeed, incur guilt by actual transgressions of God’s law, but the church of Rome has provided for their comfort the sacrament of penance, another external ordinance by which this guilt is taken away.”\textsuperscript{46} In summary, the Reformers saw two dangers in the Roman view of concupiscence, a view of the Christian life which was heavily weighted towards reliance on church authority and rites, combined with a view of self and everyday Christian experience that would be more confident than it ought to be in maintaining a pure avoidance of sin. In other words, the daily Christian life would be characterized by a

\textsuperscript{45} Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, 23.  
\textsuperscript{46} Cunningham, Historical Theology, 540.
weakened awareness of one’s constant need for the grace and righteousness of Christ (as opposed to the grace administered through the sacramental system of the church).

These concerns are certainly not irrelevant to today’s issues. The Reformation doctrine in this area highlights that there are implications of the discussion of homosexuality that extend far beyond the issue itself. The issues pertain to our understanding of the gospel, to justification, to the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. There is and should be concern for how the church’s teaching affects those among us who experience homosexual attraction. But the church’s teaching on these things affects everyone, for it affects the gospel. Keeping in mind how these questions connect to the Christian faith and experience of everyone in the church, we are in a better position to consider some of the implications specific to the issue of homosexuality.

II.B. Applications to Same-Sex Attraction

II.B.1. The Common Dynamic of Concupiscence

First, the dynamic of spontaneous sinful desire or attraction is not unique to those who experience homosexual desire. All people experience it. It is an essential point in the Confession that all of us who are descended from Adam and Eve experience their corrupted nature and the complex of disordered affections, desires, and attractions that come with that corruption. The danger of this question arising in the context of the discussion of homosexuality is that some might be tempted to think of that particular example of disordered desire as qualitatively different from their own. Or worse, some may be willing to assert the sinfulness of one category of spontaneous desire but minimize or remain largely ignorant of the sinful concupiscence that is common to all.

The truth is that if we think humbly and carefully about our own spontaneous thoughts, feelings, and desires, we would recognize that we are all much more alike than different. Who has been a Christian for some length of time who is not aware of at least one particular area of struggle with sin in which whatever success is had in curbing behavior is nonetheless accompanied by a troubling inward draw towards the sin, like a stubborn memory of sinful pleasure that interrupts incessantly and uninvited? Who does not feel the passion of sinful anger rising up without conscious deliberation or decision, even in contradiction to a prior deliberate decision to “deal with” our anger problem? Even our lack of feeling is often concupiscent: that which is most good and would glorify God does not delight us as it should; that which is evil does not repel us as it should. Luther put it this way, “For it is like a sick man whose mortal illness is not only the loss of health of one of his members, but it is, in addition to the lack of health in all his members, the weakness of all of his senses and powers, culminating even in his disdain for those things which are healthful and in his desire for those things which make him sick.”

Good Reformed teaching on sin places us all on equal footing in our need of Christ’s imputed righteousness.

II.B.2. Continued Corruption

Second, according to the system of the Westminster Confession of Faith, we should not be surprised, but rather expect that concupiscence in general, and specific instances like homosexual attraction, would continue in the life of a believer. The Confession is clear; corruption remains “in every part” (13.2). We would never say to a new believer who has a history of destructive anger, “Now that you are a Christian, you will never again feel a rush of anger rise up within you at the wrong time, for a selfish reason, out of proportion to the situation, or in any other way that contradicts God’s law.” Neither should we communicate to a believer with a history of homosexual attraction the expectation that this will simply disappear.48

Why is this important? First, it has not been uncommon for those with homosexual attractions to be made, intentionally or unintentionally, to feel as though they cannot be real Christians unless they experience in this life a reversal or eradication of their attractions. If this experience is presented in the form of a promise, as in some expressions of what has been called “reparative therapy,” it is not a promise based on a full understanding of the gospel. If the reversal or eradication is presented in the form of a demand, in the exhortations or discipline of the church, then that demand is an anti-gospel that only crushes and condemns—especially if the admonitions are applied selectively to this form of concupiscence but not to other common varieties, both sexual and other. This acknowledgement of the remnants of corruption in believers does not negate the call to fight against that corruption; our endeavor to oppose and put to death what is earthly in us (Col.3:5) demands a commitment to fight all of our sin. However, to teach that our sinful corruption must be entirely removed from any part of us in order to be considered truly repentant is a spiritually treacherous perversion of the doctrine of repentance.

II.B.3. Real Change

Third, according to the doctrinal system of the Westminster Confession of Faith, we should not rule out, but rather expect that concupiscence in general, and specific instances like homosexual attraction, would be areas in which the believer would see some progress toward truly righteous feelings and actions. Our previous point had to do with the danger of creating the expectation that our experience of corruption will entirely disappear in this life if we are regenerate. This point addresses what might be considered an error on the other end of the spectrum, the error of asserting that change is not possible or not to be sought. But just as the Confession is clear that corruption remains in every part, it is also clear that the sanctifying work of the Spirit is felt in the “whole man.” Someone with homosexual attraction ought not close himself or herself off to the pursuit of, and hope of, real change in those attractions, even if that change is incomplete and mixed.

48 It is important to note that we do not ground this point on the reasoning that homosexual attraction is an indelible part of the person, as the world around us would. Rather, we ground it in the Scripture’s picture of the Christian’s life of faith as a battle between the flesh and the Spirit.
II.B.4. Celebrating Sincere Efforts

Fourth, according to the system of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the remaining experience of homosexual attractions notwithstanding, God is truly pleased with one’s sincere efforts to follow Christ in holiness because he looks on even those imperfect deeds as being “in Christ,” and covered by the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness (*WCF* 16.6). This point assumes the *Confession’s* assertion that gospel change in an individual’s life is always incomplete and mixed with corruption, but then puts that assertion in the form of a positive encouragement. In Christ, every bit of progress, every moment of victory over temptation, even victory over the temptation that comes from the sinful corruption remaining inside of us, is to be celebrated as a gift of the new life of Christ with confidence that it pleases God as such.

II.B.5. Moral Difference

Finally, we can discern a very practical value to the distinction between the sin that is constituted by our “corruption of nature…and all the motions thereof” and the “actual transgressions” that proceed from it. Even where original sin is manifested in the form of sinfully disordered desires or feelings, including homosexual attraction, there is significant moral difference between that initial “motion” of corruption and the decision to cultivate or act on it. To feel a sinfully disordered sexual attraction (of any kind) is properly to be called sin—and all sin, “both original and actual” earns God’s wrath (*WCF* 6.6)—but it is significantly less heinous (using the language of the *WLC* 151) than any level of acting upon it in thought or deed. The point here is not to encourage those with homosexual attraction to become comfortable with or accepting of it. Rather, it is to counter the undue heaping of shame upon them as if the presence of homosexual attraction itself makes them the most heinous of sinners. On the contrary, their experience is representative of the present life of all Christians. John Owen has said, “…yet sin doth so remain, so act and work in the best of believers, whilst they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days incumbent upon them.”49 Our brothers and sisters who resist and repent of enduring feelings of same-sex attraction are powerful examples to us all of what this “daily mortification” looks like in “the best of believers.” We should be encouraged and challenged by their example and eager to join in fellowship with them for the mutual strengthening of our faith, hope, and love.

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49 The full sentence places this daily mortification in the context of other senses of mortification: “This, then, is the first general principle of our ensuing discourse: Notwithstanding the meritorious mortification, if I may so speak, of all and every sin in the cross of Christ; notwithstanding the real foundation of universal mortification laid in our first conversion, by conviction of sin, humiliation for sin, and the implantation of a new principle opposite to it and destructive of it;—yet sin doth so remain, so act and work in the best of believers, whilst they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days incumbent upon them.” *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers; the Necessity, Nature, and Means of it*, in *Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner or Truth, 1967), 6:14.
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR PASTORAL CARE—
DISCIPLESHIP, IDENTITY, AND TERMINOLOGY

GA Assignments 1.b.2 propriety of using terms like “gay Christian” when referring to a believer struggling with same-sex attraction;
1.b.3 status of “orientation” as a valid anthropological category;
1.b.4 practice of “spiritual friendship” among same-sex attracted Christians;
1.c analysis of WLC 138 & 139 regarding same-sex attraction, with careful attention given to the compatibility of the 7th commandment and same-sex attraction and the pursuit of celibacy by those attracted to the same sex

There is a very important sense in which pastoral care for Christians experiencing attraction to the same sex is, at an essential level, the same as for any other believer who is struggling with sin in our fallen world. All believers regardless of their struggles are made in the image of God and created by him to worship him (Gen. 1:27, 1 Cor. 6:20). All believers have repented and believed upon the Lord Jesus for salvation (Mark 1:15, Rom. 10:9). All believers must mortify their sins, pursue holiness, and strive to live in light of their union with Christ (Rom. 8:13). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that our particular cultural moment—with our culture’s embrace of the sexual revolution and discarding of the Biblical sexual ethic, as well as the failure of some churches to speak with theological clarity and compassion—the pastoral care of same-sex attracted people requires special consideration. In this section of our Report, we seek to address some of the primary issues surrounding the pastoral care of those who experience same-sex attraction in the church, particularly focusing on areas that the General Assembly has asked us to address. Here we will only address them briefly in summary, trusting that our shepherds will further study the Scriptures, our Confessional standards, and some of the recommended writings in the Report’s bibliography for further guidance.

DISCIPLESHIP FOR BELIEVERS EXPERIENCING SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

It is crucially important that our churches communicate to same-sex attracted believers experiencing same-sex attraction⁵⁰ that faithfulness to God’s call to discipleship upon their lives is possible. An unclear understanding of the Reformed position that sinful temptations themselves, as well as sins of the will, are to be repented of might reasonably lead some to believe that faithfulness is impossible and pursuing holiness is an exercise in futility. We should be clear that while every Christian’s obedience remains imperfect and tainted by sin in this life, there is still a very real and important sense in which through Christ all Christians have been equipped for real and progressive obedience to God that brings him honor and is worthy of rejoicing in (WCF 16.6). This remains true even if their attraction to the same sex does not go away.

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⁵⁰ As we will note in our later discussion of terminology, the committee recognizes the difficulty of identifying phrasing that is theologically clear and accurate, pastorally helpful, and semantically practical. Here we have opted for a more descriptive, if also more verbose, approach—recognizing that it has its own drawbacks.
Sanctification—The Already-Not-Yet Tension

The call to discipleship for all believers means that none of us can be content to remain unchanged. Indeed, in and through Christ we are in the process of being changed, conformed to the image of Christ. But what does that change look like? What kind of change is normative for believers who experience same-sex attraction? These questions have generated much debate. There are two common errors we might encounter in our attempts to answer such questions, one which reflects an over-realized eschatology and one which reflects an under-realized eschatology.

The error of some Christian approaches to same-sex sexual desire has been to tie faithfulness to the elimination of homosexual temptation (or even the development of heterosexual desire) as though if Christians really did enough therapy, had enough faith, or repented sufficiently, God would deliver them in some final and complete way, changing their orientation. This perspective reflects a sort of over-realized eschatology—a view that what we will be finally and fully in the new creation will be realized in that way in the present life. Against such a view, our Confession reminds us that even in the regenerate, the corruption of sin remains in this life (WCF 6.5). The task for believers is to pursue faithfulness and obedience in this life, holding in view our new creation selves into which we are progressively, though often with many fits and starts, being conformed.

The error of other Christian approaches to same-sex sexual desire is to treat it as a sort of fixed reality that has no malleability or capacity for change whatsoever. In its most extreme forms, this reflects our broader culture’s notions of one’s sexual orientation being a completely fixed reality—contending that there is no sense in which sexual desires can meaningfully change over time. The problem with this under-realized eschatology is that in its attempts to push back against views of change that overstate the Christian’s sense of having “arrived,” it suggests that there is no journey to take at all and no progress to be expected. However, the Biblical perspective is that the Holy Spirit uses repentance with the ordinary means of grace to advance Christian understanding, godly desires, and Biblical obedience. If a believer struggles with habitual sexual sin, we should expect to see real meaningful change in their behaviors as they repent and mortify their sin, and pursue holiness in aggressive, practical ways. If believers are routinely tempted along similar lines over the course of life, they should expect that the less they give in to that temptation and establish deep habits of holiness, over time the pull of their hearts toward that sin should lessen, or even be drowned out by the expulsive power of a greater affection for Christ.51

Therefore, it is critically important that pastors and leaders in our churches communicate clearly about the already-not-yet tension of our experience of sanctification in this life. We ought not over-promise or tie God’s character to promises of complete deliverance in this life that he does not make. However, we also ought not treat same-sex sexual desire as a completely static reality that will involve no significant effort on the part of the believer to war against, regardless of whether such warring produces heterosexual desire. Simply put, the

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telos of sanctification is Christlikeness, not heterosexuality. As the apostle says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

The Christian’s Identity

Biblical Identity

Any Christian understanding of our selves—who we believe we are—must first and foremost reflect the basic building blocks of reality as described in Scripture. Particularly, if we are going to think about identity in a distinctively Christian way, the redemptive-historical narrative (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) of the Bible offers us a helpful path. Scripture begins with the affirmation that humans are created in the image of God, male and female (Gen. 1:27-28; WCF 4.2). This affirmation is the foundational reality of all human identity. It tells us who we are inherently and ontologically—in our very essence. We are made by God and therefore all of our self-understanding is dependent upon the God who made us and sustains our lives. We are made male and female and therefore these categories are not merely cultural constructions or fluid components of our self-understanding—they are identities that are imprinted upon us in our creation by God.

However, a Biblical understanding of identity must also take into account the reality that we are fallen and corrupted, possessing original and indwelling sin, as well as the miseries of the Fall (WCF 6, 9.4, 13.2; WSC 17-19). It tells us who we are phenomenologically—as we experience our sinful selves and our sinful world. As fallen, sinful human beings we can and should be honest about the ways in which the sin and misery of the Fall are a part of us—even as such a confession is rightly a source of guilt as well as godly grief toward our own sin, the sins of others against us, and the miseries of living in a sin-cursed world.

The third and most critical foundational reality pertains to those who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We who are made in his image, yet defiled by sin, are redeemed and restored into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) through our union with him. This foundational reality identifies who we are teleologically—our end destination, that is, who we are and are becoming in Christ. Thus, the most central claim about any Christian’s identity is that his or her identity is found in Christ. While a thorough explanation of what it means to find our identity “in Christ” is beyond the scope of this Report, we note a few critical observations. First, we are justified and made righteous “in Christ” by virtue of his righteousness and not

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52 Oliver O’Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 87. “The narrative of creation and redemption has accompanied and disciplined Christian attempts to think about the moral dilemmas thrown up by every age...In each dilemma, they have asked, what gifts of the Creator are to be rejoiced in here? What evils are to be repented of and lamented? What transformations are yet to be hoped for?”

53 See Ryan S. Peterson, “Created and Constructed Identities in Theological Anthropology,” in *The Christian Doctrine of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 124-143. Peterson notes that we have both created identities which are indelible, central, and come from God, and constructed identities, which are our more malleable attempts to interpret our particular experiences and relationships in the world.
our own (WCF 11). Second, we are sanctified and progressively conformed to the image of Christ as new creations, with the abiding presence and power of Christ as the first fruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 2 Cor. 5:17; WCF 13). Finally, the ultimate perseverance and glorification of every Christian is secured by their union with Christ.

Sexual Identity

How then are Christians to think about sexual identity (how a person thinks about his or her sexuality) in relation to these three Biblical-theological realities? To what extent should Christians allow their experience of sexuality to shape who they are? And more specifically, how should Christians attracted to the same sex think about how their experience of their sexual attractions shapes who they are?

First, with respect to creation, all people by virtue of their creation are image bearers regardless of how they conceive of their sexual identity. Thus, all people, including those in what contemporary society identifies as the LGBT community, are worthy of dignity and respect as image bearers and should never be the target of self-righteous condescension, violence, or hatred. Within the church there is no place for a sort of second-class citizenship of believers who have particular struggles, trials, or temptations.

Additionally, the doctrine of creation means that any sexual or gender identity that relativizes the reality of the male/female binary as the ideal of creation necessarily undermines the Biblical understanding of sex and gender. While there are cases of ambiguity or uncertainty in identifying biological sex as seen in the experience of intersex persons, these circumstances are a product of the fallenness of creation and do not negate God’s original binary design for sex and gender. While it is beyond the scope of this Report to address the particularly complex pastoral issues surrounding intersex persons, we believe the best counsel is rooted in encouraging such persons to live out their biological sex insofar as it can be known.

As we consider human sin and corruption, it is clear that sexual attractions that have their telos or end in something that God has forbidden are themselves sinful desires—a part of indwelling sin that exists in all people and remains even in those who are believers. Any time Christians experience sexual attraction whose fulfillment would be sin, they should recognize such attraction as something to be rejected and mortified. This is true for all believers, regardless of whether those attractions are to the same sex or the opposite sex.

However, we must also acknowledge the ways in which our sexual identities are shaped by the sins of others against us as well as the ways in which the Fall has shaped our biological and social development. Some experiences of sexual desire may come unbidden as a result of

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54 Sinclair Ferguson describes this element of union with Christ well in Donald L Alexander, ed., Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 88: “It is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him. Rather than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first of all sets them in the macrocosm of God’s activity in redemptive history. It is seeing oneself in this context that enables the individual Christian to grow in true holiness.”
sins committed against a person, and while sinful, should be treated with great pastoral care for the person who has been victimized and sinned against. The origins and development of sexual desire remain complex and, in many ways, mysterious. It is possible to conceive of the experience of same-sex attraction as simultaneously a part of the remaining corruption of original sin as well as the misery of living in a fallen world, one of the ways our bodies themselves groan for redemption (Rom. 8:22-23; WCF 6.6; WLC 17-19). For many of these Christians, the burden of shame is already great and what is especially needed from pastors and mature believers is our preaching and living out of the grace of the gospel that frees us all from guilt and shame.

With respect to our redemption and union with Christ, it is clear that those who are united to Christ must submit their sexual identity to the greater allegiance of being “in Christ.” Such submission has several implications. First, it means that the most important part of our personhood is not found in our sexual desires but rather in being justified, sanctified, and glorified in Christ. Second, it means that our union with Christ should shape our attitude and approach to our sexual desires. Desires that are inconsistent with God’s design are to be resisted and mortified, not celebrated or accommodated. Third, it means that as new creations we are truly being conformed into his image and can rightly expect some measure of growth in this life, even as we await the fullness of our new-creation personhood in the new heavens and new earth. We are best served in our sanctification by looking forward to our new creation selves, which will be fully purified from sinful desire, rather than by looking backwards to our Adamic, fallen selves.

However, our identity as those united to Christ does not eliminate our experiences of living as sinful people in a sinful world. It remains important for believers to live in the tension of the already and not-yet. Just because our identity is in Christ doesn’t mean that we won’t continue to experience trials and temptations in this life. Christians are well-served when they can be honest about both their present fallen realities and their hope for sanctification. It should not surprise us that regenerate Christians who experience same-sex attraction might continue experiencing those attractions in this life (WCF 16.5-6). Rather, our churches ought to be places where believers can find refuge and strength for the long obedience of discipleship to Christ.

This discussion of the Scriptural, theological, and pastoral basis for thinking about sexual identity provides the basis for considering the question of terminology to which we next turn.

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55 In his Systematic Theology, Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof offers a helpful tripartite definition of sin: “Sin may be defined as lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state.” Berkhof: Systematic Theology, 233. The Reformed perspective recognizes that all three—act, disposition, and state—are sin, yet each will require a distinct response on the part of the person. For example, practically and pastorally speaking, repentance or mortification will look different for high-handed rebellion compared to unbidden attractions due in part to sins committed against a person. Our Confession recognizes that we are sinners, those sinned-against, and those living in a fallen world.
Terminology

In light of the theological foundations for human identity as it relates to sexuality, what can we say about the various issues around terminology that have taken up so much time and space in current debates which the General Assembly has asked us to address?

On Language

We begin by noting four principles regarding language. First, the language we choose to describe reality matters. Our language and terminology should seek to faithfully and helpfully articulate the truths of our doctrine which are rooted in Scripture. We should choose our language carefully with the goal that it expresses the truth and communicates clearly and winsomely in our particular context. Second, language itself is a secondary issue relative to the doctrine it expresses. Sometimes there are disagreements about language even when the underlying doctrinal commitments seem to be the same. Thus, while doctrinal truth is rightly understood as obligating our affirmation, issues around terminology are more properly understood as issues of wisdom, necessitating careful Scriptural and pastoral guidance. Third, we must recognize that the meanings of terms change over time and that definitions may not be shared across different groups of people. This is especially true in the area of sexuality, where terminology seems to be developing with increasing rapidity and where there may be few shared definitions across communities. Finally, issues surrounding sexual identity, and identity more generally, cannot be reduced to language alone. There is a way to make being gay central to personhood, while still using circumspect or “acceptable” language. Similarly, there is a way to make being gay far less central to one’s ethos and identity, even while using potentially less helpful language. For these reasons, how persons express themselves is not finally determinative of their identity.

Gay and Gay Christian

Take for instance the word gay, which has undergone a massive lexical transformation in the past seventy-five years. Today it most commonly refers to a sense of self in relation to ongoing sexual attraction to the same sex. However, different communities define that sense of self with different nuances. Some Christians might describe themselves as gay merely as a way of articulating that they experience prominent and persistent attractions to the same sex, using terminology our culture is familiar with. Others find the term gay to be an important part of being honest about the reality of their sexual attractions, especially given that other terms like same-sex attraction are perceived by some to be associated with “ex-gay” or orientation-change approaches. Other Christians might describe themselves as gay in order to identify

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56 This is a basic principle of lexical semantics. See for example, Moises Silva, Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 139: “…Linguists assign a determinative function to context; that is, context does not merely help us understand meaning—it virtually makes meaning.”

57 See for instance Greg Coles, Single, Gay, Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books), 61, 63, where he says, “By talking in terms of attraction instead of sexual orientation, ex-gay advocates were better equipped to treat homosexuality as a passing phase…Because of this linguistic history, I couldn’t help cringing when people referred to my sexual orientation as ‘same-sex attraction.’”
with the LGBT community as a group of people with a shared story, culture, and experience. Generally, when the term gay is used in our culture, it denotes all of the above, along with the assumption that this experience is a natural and good part of diverse human experience that is to be celebrated and can be acted upon as a person sees fit. Thus, the word gay can denote a number of things which may vary from a factual observation about one’s experiences, to a deeply unbiblical understanding about one’s identity and desires. Despite the dynamic and diverse uses of the term, the word gay is not a neutral word in our cultural discourse, and Christians should be mindful of these dynamics when considering use of the term.

Given the potential issues with the term gay, we can see how the term gay Christian might be open to an even greater degree of misunderstanding. Some use the term in a simple adjectival manner, suggesting that the adjective gay is merely meant to describe which particular Christians one is referring to (namely those experience attractions to the same sex) with no intentions to make a definitive statement about identity. Others use it to articulate how their “in Christ” has shaped their approach to their gayness or same-sex attraction (see for instance those who use the term celibate gay Christian). Because of these dynamics, it is apparent that the term gay Christian is not adequately clear or theologically precise in expressing the type of Reformed Biblical self-understanding we described earlier. The term can be made more unhelpful by the fact that there are many who use it to describe a view of their sexual identity that is “affirming”—that believes that same-sex sexual desires and relationships are blessed by God. There is an understandable desire among some celibate Christians who identify as gay to utilize the common parlance of our culture as a missional or apologetic tool, hoping to redefine for our culture a way of being gay that in fact submits those desires to the lordship of Christ. However, there is a substantial corresponding risk of syncretism in such an approach. This potential danger toward syncretism can manifest as an over-identification with the LGBT community (over and against a primary identification with the church) or even the formation of an LGBT subculture within the church. In view of the twin dangers of misunderstanding and syncretism, we believe it is generally unwise to use the language of gay Christian.

Given this conclusion, how should we respond to fellow believers in our churches who may use such language? First, we ought not start from the assumption that they are being unfaithful or living in active rebellion to God. Rather, in the context of established relationships, pastors and leaders in the church ought to ask questions and seek to understand each individual’s story. Why do they use that language? Have they thought through the relative benefits and dangers? Noting the range of possible meanings of terms like gay and gay Christian, we would do well to seek understanding before imparting advice. In practical and plain terms, the issue of terminology is more likely a matter for shepherding in wisdom, and not in and of itself grounds for discipline.

Orientation

How then should we think of the language of sexual orientation? Insofar as the term orientation is used descriptively to articulate a particular set of experiences, namely the persistent and predominant sexual attractions of an individual, it can remain useful as a way
of classifying those experiences in contrast to the experiences of the majority of other people. However, insofar as the term orientation carries with it a set of assumptions about the nature of that experience that is unbiblical (e.g., overemphasized rigidity, its normativity, etc.), then the terminology may require qualification or even rejection in some circumstances.\textsuperscript{58}

**Singleness, Friendship, and Community**

It is a sad reality that some Christians in our churches who experience same-sex attraction have found limited support and encouragement in their desire to follow Christ. While the reasons for this reality vary, one of the most critical components to faithful discipleship is a deep-rooted connection in a local body of believers who can provide challenge, encouragement, and a strong sense of belonging. We ought to grieve any time a person who experiences attraction toward the same sex finds a greater welcome and belonging in the secular LGBT community instead of the church.\textsuperscript{59}

Having noted the potential dangers of expressions or emphases that could establish one's primary identity or community on the basis of one's sexuality, one of the most important questions that believers experiencing same-sex attraction have asked in recent years is: where am I to find community, companionship, and belonging in this journey of discipleship? All too often, Christians have been very clear on the “no” of same-sex sexual relationships, without then offering a plausible pathway to deep and meaningful community for which we were made (Gen. 2:18, Gal. 6:2, Heb. 10:24-25). Believers who experience same-sex attraction often struggle with a deep-seated and crushing loneliness—a fear of never belonging to another human being. Churches must be committed to being communities of welcome for all sinners. For those repentant believers who know the struggle of same-sex attraction, our churches may welcome them not merely as broken people to be ministered to, but also as active and important participants and contributors in our communities. Like all yet-to-be-glorified Christians, those who struggle with same-sex attraction are commanded to walk with the Lord in faith and repentance. Insofar as such persons display the requisite Christian maturity, we do not consider this sin struggle automatically to disqualify someone for leadership in the church (1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

Our churches should seek to cultivate rich, Biblical friendships among people of the same sex. Regardless of whether a person struggles with same-sex attraction, strong friendships with the same sex are important components of a healthy Christian community. Far too often we act as though, if a person is married, she or he no longer needs the same type of deep friendships

\textsuperscript{58} There have been a number of productive online discussions about the origins, value, and place of sexual orientation as a category in our current culture. For example, see Michael Hannon’s 2014 *First Things* essay “Against Heterosexuality” (https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/03/against-heterosexuality), as well as responses from Steven Wedgeworth (https://calvinistinternational.com/2014/02/26/think-heterosexuality) and Matthew Lee Anderson (https://mereorthodoxy.com/meaning-of-heterosexuality).

\textsuperscript{59} As Rosaria Butterfield notes, “If you want to share the gospel with the LGBTQ community or anyone who will lose family and homes, the gospel must come with a house key. This hundredfold blessing promised here in these verses [Mark 10:28-31] is not going to fall from the sky. It is going to come from the church. It is going to come from the people of God acting like the family of God.” See “Why the Gospel Comes with a House-Key.” https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/why-the-gospel-comes-with-a-house-key (accessed 04/26/2020).
that were needed before marriage or that single people need. Friendship is the proper category for thinking of the type of close, intimate, same-sex relationships that Scripture upholds. David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, Paul and Timothy—each relationship was framed by an understanding of deep, committed, abiding friendship.

Recently some Christians who experience same-sex attraction have proposed celibate partnerships as a way of adhering to the traditional sexual ethic while retaining certain romantic elements of exclusive relationships. However, we find such practices to be unwise and inconsistent with the depictions of deep same-sex relationships in Scripture, which are instead cast in the context of familial or philial relations. Scripture frames our relationships with fellow believers as familial (Mark 10:29-30, Titus 2; WCF 25.2)—the church is “a place to love and be loved, a family in which to grow.” While friendships can be deep and abiding, they are not by nature romantic or exclusive. The attempt to retain aspects of the marital relationship in the context of celibate partnerships is fundamentally a category mistake: it seeks to have aspects of romance or marriage without its fullness, instead of rightly rooting this type of deeply caring, same-sex relationship in its proper relational category of family or friendship. The attempt to bring aspects of the marital relationship into a non-marital relationship is itself a violation of the seventh commandment. While it is beyond the scope of this Report to seek to sort out the specific lines between expressions of marriage, family, and friendship, at its core these questions are issues of the heart and motivation—mature believers should seek honest self-examination and the wisdom of others as they seek to remain faithful to the commandment.

Our churches must be places where single people (who are called to a vocation of singleness or who are simply currently single) can find deep and meaningful community if they are to be places where those who are persistently attracted to the same sex can find belonging. Singleness should not be treated merely as a problem to be solved. For some it is a vocation from the Lord whose expression in the service of the church provides resources that our churches desperately need (1 Cor. 7:32, 38; WLC 138). The church ought to be a place which proves to be a spiritual family for single people—part of the cure for the loneliness of the single life.

The Confession rightly cautions against entangling vows of the single life (WLC 139). Nonetheless, Christians with same-sex attraction who are pursuing chastity and yet do not experience attractions to the opposite sex may properly be considered continent (WLC 138) and may very well have an indefinite or life-long call to singleness. The perspective that the only Biblical resolution to same-sex attraction is marriage is not a consensus perspective that can be proven from our Standards nor does it seem to give proper regard to the rights and dignity of both parties in the marriage relationship (Eph. 5:31; 1 Peter 3:7). While marriage is

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60 For an argument that believers struggling with same-sex attraction should find relational closeness primarily in the family of the church, see Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next* (Epsom, Surrey: Good Book Company, 2020).

61 For two recent treatments on being single as a Christian see: Sam Allberry, *Seven Myths about Singleness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019) and Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).
one remedy “for preventing of uncleanness” (WCF 24.2), pastoral wisdom dictates that we are sensitive to the fact that single persons often remain unmarried for a variety of understandable reasons. When the single person embraces the gospel advantages of being single, this is a charisma given by the Spirit for the edification of the body (1 Cor. 7:7, 32-35; 12:7). Regardless of whether the singleness of our people is temporary or persistent in this life, an eschatological understanding of our sexuality recognizes that in the new heavens and new earth, marriage will give way to a union of even greater intimacy with God and the communion of saints (Matt. 22:30). Thus, single people in our churches can also help model this eschatological reality for us in their daily faithfulness to God and service to his people in the body of Christ.

Scripture and our Confession provide the core and essential resources for the pastoral care of those who experience same-sex attraction. They give us unchanging theological principles from which we must care for those in our churches for whom this is a struggle. In many ways, the discourse around the various applications of these principles in our particular cultural moment remains ongoing. Thus, we encourage our churches to hold firmly to the vision of Christian discipleship put forth in the Scriptures and in our Confession while offering compassionate pastoral care to those whom we are called to shepherd in our particular contexts.

Finally, we rejoice with our brothers and sisters who, while experiencing ongoing attraction to the same sex and living in a culture which would encourage them to embrace and act on those attractions, instead pursue lives of faithfulness through chastity and obedience to Christ by daily echoing Jesus’s words of “not my will, but yours, be done” with respect to their sexuality (Luke 22:42). In this, they model for us all what it means to heed Jesus’ teaching: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). May it be that thanks to the finished work of Christ, and at the end of our sometimes faltering and imperfect obedience, we each hear the divine accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”
APologetic Approaches for Speaking to the World

GA Assignment: 1.e [Prepare a report which shall address...] suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.

The 47th General Assembly requested that our committee report “…include suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.” There is, then, a need for a “sexuality apologetic”—a project of offering and defending the Christian understanding of sex to a secular culture in ways that are as unmistakably clear but also as persuasive as possible without any compromise.

What follows here is not written directly to a skeptic. It is an essay addressed to believers that lays out the issues we will have to address and the questions to which we will have to provide compelling answers.

THE CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE OF SEXUALITY

In our culture sexuality is spoken of like this:

1. The oppression of the past. In the past, ancient cultures surrounded sex with all sorts of taboos. In general, sex outside of marriage was forbidden in order to control women, to help men protect their daughters and wives as their property.

2. The need for authentic expression. In modern times, however, we have come to believe in the freedom and rights of individuals, including the right to love whomever we choose in a consensual relationship. Science has shown us that sex is a healthy thing and a crucial part of one’s identity. It is also a human right, and therefore we will only thrive and flourish as human beings if that right to choose is equally available to all people.

3. The fight to love whom we want to love. Over the past century a number of brave individuals—usually women, gay, and transgender persons—have heroically stood up to the oppressive culture and said, ‘This is who I am! Don’t let anyone tell you who you can or cannot love!’ Many of the early heroes of this movement were marginalized and many died for their willingness to challenge the cultural elites.

4. The hard-won rights of today. But today we have a culture that affirms the right to have sex outside of marriage, to conduct same-sex relationships and include them in the legal institution of marriage, and to allow people to choose their own genders. In all these changes we are forging the first human society in history which is sex-positive and in which all persons can live as equal sexual beings.

5. The continual danger. Despite these great accomplishments, most places in the world, and many places in our own society, still resist this healthy culture of sexual freedom and justice. Indeed, there are those who would try to turn back the clock and roll back these
rights. Under no circumstances must we allow regressive forces—the foremost of which is religion—to take this away from us again.

This modern moral story about sexuality creates a plot-line of a struggle between courageous heroes and bigoted, oppressive villains—all toward a happy ending. This particular moral story, however, is based on several beliefs that are not proven—only assumed. They are the modern understandings of freedom and identity, and as we will see, of history. Christians cannot speak to the world about sex in a compelling way if we merely answer the story with a list of moral imperatives, however Biblical. We must put the Christian sex ethic into a counter-narrative, one based on the Bible’s great story of redemption. And in order to do that, we must face three challenges.

THREE CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

Challenge 1: Addressing the modern identity narrative—unseen, deep background beliefs about identity and freedom/power.

The narrative of modern sexual liberation feels compelling to so many because it is based on background beliefs of identity and freedom which have been deeply instilled in us through cultural institutions for nearly three generations.

Identity. The Christian prohibitions about marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism make no sense to most people because of their belief that sexuality is crucial for the expression of identity. And behind that belief is the very concept of the modern self.

In our culture sex is no longer seen as a way to honor God and to create and nurture new human life. Most believe something like this: “If you want to use sex for the development of new human life, that’s an option and your choice, but it’s not the primary reason people have sex. Rather, sex is for individual fulfillment and self-realization.” This modern view of identity is often called “expressive individualism”—the idea that deep within are feelings and desires that must be discovered and unlocked and expressed to become a true self. Identity is now found in one’s desires, while in the past it was found in one’s duties and relationships with God, family, and community.62 Determining—and acting on—your sexual desires is considered a key part of that process of becoming an authentic person.

Today, this view of identity is not conveyed with arguments but rather is presented as a simple given, not to be questioned. Slogans such as “be true to yourself” and “live your own truth” are repeated in countless ways verbal and non-verbal and sink deep into people’s hearts. Any other view is seen as psychologically repressive and therefore unhealthy.

But the modern self is extremely fragile. Because it is based on nothing but inward feelings, it is constantly changing from year to year or even month to month. Modern identity requires searching through ever shifting and often contradictory emotions and desires to determine a

core “self.” And once you decide who you want to be, it is completely up to you to achieve it, no matter whether your family and community are supportive or not. So the modern self is highly performance-oriented and can be a crushing burden. An additional problem is that this view of identity requires a “soft relativism.” Our society teaches us to say, “Only I can determine right and wrong for myself,” even though, in the next moment our modern culture imposes a very definite set of moral norms on people. This is deeply contradictory, dictating moral absolutes while insisting that we are now liberated from all such truths. In all these ways the modern self and view of identity are unstable and problematic, however dominant they seem.

Freedom/power. To this individualist view of identity—which arguably has been growing in cultural influence since at least the early 19th century period of “romanticism”—has been added the post-modern view of freedom and power. It holds that power in culture is exercised through “dominant discourses”—namely, language and truth-claims—produced by those elites who inhabit the high places of status in culture. Everything we believe as good, true, right, and beautiful has been constructed by a particular culture’s “discursive systems.” We can only be free to create ourselves by “destabilizing dominant discourses.” For example, if we wish to include transgender people in society, it is believed, the way forward is not just to show compassion to individuals. Rather, we must deconstruct the very idea of a gender binary. Only then will transgender people have an equal place in society.

The problems with this post-modern view of freedom and power are as significant as the modern view of identity. It brings a self-contradictory “hard relativism.” If all social systems are chains of power forged through discourse—so that all truth claims and moral judgments are really just ways of exerting power—then why would one particular set of power-brokers be “wrong” or “unjust”? How could you determine which sets of socially-structured power relationships are unjust (and which are not) unless you had a non-culturally constructed, objective moral norm by which to judge between them? And where would such a transcendent moral absolute come from, if there is no God?

These contemporary views of identity and freedom are in many ways at odds with each other. (The view of identity is individualist and Freudian; the view of power is Marxist and Nietzschean.) Yet over the last 20 years they have been merged and become dominant and pervasive, particularly in our popular media. Romantic comedies, situation comedies, children’s cartoons, Disney’s and others’ movies for children—all lift these beliefs up and forge them into the heroic narrative of our time (the one spelled out at the beginning of this essay). The meaning of life is to determine who you are and to throw off the shackles of an oppressive society that refuses to accept and include you. It is this story that is to be our guiding light in making life decisions and is to serve as the shared value of a free society.

Arguably, Christians cannot make a plausible case for the Biblical sex ethic because in many ways we have adapted too much to—or even adopted—the contemporary views of identity and freedom in the way we preach and do ministry. Some have pointed out that the ethos of evangelical youth ministry has been highly emotivist for years. The emphasis has not been on Biblical theology and doctrine but almost exclusively on how Christ builds up our self-esteem.
and meets our emotional needs. The prosperity gospel, churches and ministries without
membership and discipline, consumer-oriented mega-churches—all adapt heavily to the
culture of expressive individualism rather than challenging it.

**Conclusion.** As long as people in our culture hold these views of identity and freedom, they
cannot find the Christian view of sexuality plausible. And so no Christian sexuality apologetic
can have any real impact unless it spends time and effort to reveal the deeply problematic
nature of these background beliefs. In short, our sexuality apologetic cannot talk only about
sex. Only in a compelling, Biblical framework of identity, of being in Christ, and of
discipleship, of losing oneself in the love and service of God in order to find one’s true self
(Matthew 10:39) will all of the Christian teaching about the meaning of sex make sense.

**Challenge 2: Addressing the historical narrative—ignorance of the first (Christian)
“sexual revolution.”**

As we saw above, the main cultural story about sexuality is to a great degree a historical
narrative—one that provides a “history of sex” that is now widely believed. It serves as
another layer of assumptions that frame modern people’s responses to Christian views of
sexuality. Those who believe this account of our sexual history will not be able to find
Christian views plausible. We have been given a great deal of help, however, toward
exploding the popular history-of-sex myths in the ground-breaking scholarship by Kyle
Harper, *From Shame to Sin.*

**History or Myths?**

Popular history says: (a) The Roman world was a time and place of “polymorphous sexual
freedom” and “sexual diversity”; but Christianity came in with its highly restrictive sex
ethic, which it imposed through legislation. But Harper writes: “Over the last generation, as
the history of sexuality became one of the great scholarly enterprises, the popular story in
which Christianity put an end to pagan freedom with the body was exposed as a caricature, at
best.” How so?

In the Greco-Roman world it was understood that while respectable women had to be virgins
at marriage and could have sex with no one but their spouses, husbands—and all males—were
expected to have sex with servants and slaves, prostitutes, poor women, and boys. Men could
essentially force themselves on anyone below them in the social order; they could have sex
with anyone but the wife of another man of status. This was, for men at least, a permissive sex
ethic. Why then, long before the Caesars became professing Christians, did the Church grow

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63 Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). See also Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women,


65 *Shame to Sin*, 2.
rapidly as millions of people voluntarily adopted our faith’s more restrictive standards for sexual behavior? How could such a restrictive code have won out culturally?

The short answer is this: that while the pagan behavioral code was more permissive, at least for men, the underlying logic or vision for sex propounded by Christians was vastly more positive and humane than the pagan one.\textsuperscript{66} And the practical outcome was far more protective of the interests of both women and children. How so?

Every culture has a sexual morality, and that morality is grounded in beliefs about what sex is for. A sex act is allowed if it meets that culture’s \textit{telos} (i.e., purpose) for sex and disallowed if it does not. In Rome sexual morality was determined by the social status of the parties and, therefore, by \textit{power}. Sex was for the personal pleasure and enhancement of people with social rank. The rightness or wrongness of sexual acts depended on whether or not they kept persons in a right relationship with the \textit{polis}, the social order and hierarchy. Those with more power and social honor (men over women, high social status over lower social status) had more sexual freedom than those with less.

\textit{The First (Christian) Sexual Revolution}

Christianity, however, brought in the first sexual revolution in the West. Christianity changed the “foundational logic” of sex so that “the cosmos replaced the city as the framework of morality.”\textsuperscript{67} Sex acts were judged as to whether or not they kept persons in a right relationship with the \textit{cosmos}, God’s created and redemptive order. Christians’ sexual behavior had to be patterned after God’s saving love for us. As God gave himself to us in Jesus Christ and we give ourselves exclusively to him, so sex is to be practiced only within a life-long covenant of marriage. As union with Christ bridges the gap and unites God and humanity, so sex is to be practiced in a marriage uniting two different genders. (See below under Challenge #3.) In a revolutionary break with the culture, then, Christians insisted that the rightness or wrongness of sexual acts be determined not by social status and power but by \textit{covenantal love and gender difference}.

There was an immediate concrete result that all could see. By breaking the connection of sex with the social order, Christianity guarded the vulnerable from exploitation. No man could demand sex of a woman without giving up his independence and committing his whole life to her. No man could demand sex from his servants. The vulnerable—women, slaves, and children—were protected by the insistence that sex occur only within the safety of the covenantal union of marriage. But beyond these practical results, the “underlying logic” of Christianity regarding sex went much further and higher. It re-imagined sex as no longer a mere appetite that we could barely control but rather as a joyous, even sacred, expression that reflects the way God is saving the world.

\textsuperscript{66} Harper writes that what happened as Christianity grew in the West was “a transformation in the deep logic of sexual morality.” Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 8.
### The Second (Modern) Sexual Revolution

How does the Christian sexual revolution relate to the second, modern “sexual revolution”? First, it is important to recognize that the very humanitarian values of our culture—including its affirmation of sex and consent—come from Christianity. The modern emphasis on the goodness of the physical body and of sex, as well as on consent and mutuality (1 Corinthians 7:1–4) without a double standard for men and women, were Christian gifts to the modern world. Indeed, Paul’s statement that “the husband’s body does not belong to himself but to his wife,” just as the wife’s belongs to the husband, was a radical, unprecedented declaration in that patriarchal culture. Harper writes: “The social assumptions of pre-Christian sexual morality, such as the casual exploitation of the bodies of [powerless] non-persons, seem incomprehensible [to us today] precisely because the Christian revolution so completely swept away that old order….”

Harper here is referring to a growing body of scholarship demonstrating that the modern secular person believing fiercely in the equal rights and dignity of every individual is really borrowing a belief about human nature that originally developed from the Bible and grew out of Christian societies.

Second, we should realize that the modern movement of sexual liberation is in many ways retrograde, a turning back the clock to the underlying logic of Rome. Modern culture has broken the link between sex and God and re-attached sex to the social order. So sex is again detached from the requirement of life-long commitment in marriage. Sex again becomes about self-fulfillment instead of self-giving. As Harper notes, the modern sexual revolution retains some of Christianity’s gifts to the world, the concepts of consent and of the goodness of sex. So while not as brutal as it was in the older pagan culture (due to the remaining Christian elements), sexual culture today is still depersonalizing and objectifying. There are numerous studies and anecdotal evidence that people are far lonelier, with sex detached not only from marriage but even from personal relationship through the massive and elaborate empire of pornography. In ancient Rome there was usually one party—the party with power—using the other party as an object to satisfy his physical needs. Today often the parties are both using one another, treating the other party as an object to meet needs, to be related to only as long as those needs are being met.

Modern culture’s desire to retain some parts of the Christian sex ethic but not the others has created huge tension. The idea of consent goes best with covenant, not hook-ups. Women in

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particular can feel used as objects. Early Christians faced the same charge that we do—that
our sex ethic is stifling, kill-joy, negative, repressive, and unrealistic. They also knew that,
while in the short run sexual self-control is hard, in the long run, the Christian sex ethic is
more fulfilling and less dehumanizing. In our day we must also find ways to talk confidently
about the revolutionary Christian good news about sex.

Challenge #3: Rooting the church’s teaching about sexuality in its full theology, rather
than simply declaring its ethic.

The Christian sex ethic can be stated with great economy and simplicity. “There should be no
sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman.” Today most younger people will ask
the question: “Why? Why is sex outside of marriage (or with someone of the same sex) wrong?”

Christian theology answers that sex is part of the image of God—it must image God and in
particular his redeeming love. Sex is not about enhancing one’s power but about mutually
giving up power to one another in love, as Christ did for us. The Christian answer to the
question, “Why must sex be within heterosexual marriage?” gets us into the very heart of the
gospel. We should not, then, present the sex ethic without rooting it in the Bible’s doctrines
of God, of creation, and of redemption. Certainly Paul argues in this way. After reminding us
that we are united with Christ by the Spirit (“He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit
with him” 1 Corinthians 6:17), he immediately says in verse 18: “Flee from sexual immorality
(porneia).” Why is sex outside of marriage wrong?71 We note that Paul does not merely say,
“It is wrong because the Word of God says so” although he certainly could have done that.
Rather, he writes “or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit…?”
(1 Cor. 6:18, 19)72 He is saying that sexual immorality is wrong because of our union with
Christ, which must serve as the pattern for sexual union.

So what is sex for? It is a signpost pointing to God’s design of saving love, and it is a means
for experiencing something of that same pattern of love at the horizontal level between two
human beings that we know at the vertical level in Christ. Spelling this out—

GROUNDING THE PURPOSES OF SEX IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

A. As union with Christ is a relationship of exclusive, covenantal, self-giving love, so
sexual intimacy is only to be experienced within the covenant of marriage.

There is no intimacy with God without entering into covenant with him, and so there must be
no sexual intimacy without entering into an exclusive, permanent, covenant relationship with
your spouse. Modern culture turns all sexual relationships into consumerist, transactional

71 The particular case of extra-marital sex Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 6 is sex with a prostitute (“Shall
I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” 1 Cor. 6:15). As we have
seen, prostitution was extremely common in the Roman world and any new male convert would need pastoral

72 As one commentator puts it: “In fornicating…a [Christian] removes his body (which is a temple of the
Spirit)…from union with Christ and makes it a member of her body…” Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the
Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1987), 262.
relationships. A consumer connection is about mutual self-fulfillment; the individual’s needs are the non-negotiables and are more important than the relationship, which is provisional and easily terminated. A covenant, however, is based on mutual self-giving and putting the needs of the other party and the good of the relationship before your own. In marriage, spouses give up their independence for interdependence. They give their entire selves to each other—emotionally, physically, legally, economically. We must not “split the self” as modernity does, so sexual partners give their bodies to one another but not the rest of themselves.73 The rule “no sex outside marriage” sounds “sex-negative” to modern people, but the opposite is the case. It elevates sex from a mere consumer good into a way to create the deepest community between two human beings—as well as a way to honor and resemble the One who gave himself wholly for us so we can be liberated to give ourselves exclusively to him.

B. As union with Christ is a relationship between deeply different beings (God and humanity), so sexual intimacy is only to be experienced in a union across the deep difference of gender.

Ephesians 5:31-32 interprets Genesis 2:24 Christologically. Paul says that when God created the marital union he was doing so to give us a mysterion—a sign pointing to Christ’s love and union with us. The male-female bond can only serve as an analogy to the Christ-Church union if the parties are significantly different. The wonder of our union in Christ is that humanity and deity—alienated by sin—are now united, first in the person of Christ himself, and then in our union with him through the Holy Spirit. And one of the great accomplishments of marriage is that the genders—also alienated by sin (Genesis 3:16-17)—are brought together in a loving union. The rule “marriage only between a man and a woman” sounds narrow to modern ears, but the opposite is the case. Homosexuality does not honor the need for this rich diversity of perspective and gendered humanity in sexual relationships. In one of the great ironies of late modern times, in which we celebrate diversity in so many other cultural sectors, we have devalued the ultimate unity-in-diversity—inter-gendered marriage. Male and female each have excellencies and glories, perspectives and powers, that the other gender does not have and cannot reproduce. As you could not have an entirely male or female society or church without impoverishment, neither can you have such a marriage.

C. As union with Christ brings new life into the world, so God has bestowed only on male-female marriage both the ability to create new human life and the best resources to nourish that life.

In Genesis 1 it is to human beings as male and female (v. 27) that God says “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth” (v. 28 NIV). It is only on this male-female union that God bestows the ability to produce new human life. In marriage, male and female form a deep

73 For a fascinating article by a non-Christian writer, who intuits parts of the Christian view of sexuality (the sacredness of sex and the unnaturalness of giving one’s body without the rest of one’s life) see Courtney Sender, “He Asked Permission to Touch, but Not to Ghost.” The New York Times, September 7, 2018. See also Stephen Sondheim’s song “Marry Me a Little,” in which a deeply conflicted singer wants to keep individual freedom but still longs for the commitment and security of marriage. https://genius.com/Stephen-sondheim-marry-me-a-little-lyrics.
unity with life-giving power. And if a marriage brings new lives into the world, the presence of both a father and a mother gives children deep, long-term relationships with and access to both of the gendered halves of humanity and therefore to the full range of human strengths and abilities. Again, this fits the pattern of our union with Christ. Just as the union of male and female produces the “fruit of the womb—a reward” (Psalm 127:3)—so the union of Christ with his people produces the fruit of new life in Christ, through conversion (John 15:16; Rom 1:13; Col 1:6,10) and growth into Christ-likeness (Gal 5:22-23).

Summary. To recap: sex is (A) for self-giving, which is only complete if there is a life-long covenant, (B) for the bridging of difference across the barrier between male and female, and (C) for the creation and nurture of life. These theological purposes explain the ethic—why sexual intimacy is only to be experienced within marriage between a man and a woman.

TOWARD A CHRISTIAN SEXUAL APOLOGETIC

The Rationale for the Christian View of Marriage

How shall we proceed, then, with a sexual apologetic? First, while grounding the three purposes of sex in our Biblical theology, we should also connect them to existing cultural narratives, so as to both critique them and yet build on them.74 So we can say to the world that Christianity understands sexual intimacy to be:

A. Super-consensual. Christians believe sexual intimacy is not for those who merely give temporary consent for one sexual encounter but for those who give permanent, whole-life consent to each other through marriage. And even inside marriage, sex must be mutually consensual (1 Cor. 7: 1-4). We believe this reflects how we know God—only through a covenant of exclusive love.

B. Gender diverse. Christians believe God distributed unique abilities, perspectives, and other gifts across the two genders. We do not believe that men can reproduce all the gifts women have nor that women can reproduce what men have. We believe a marriage between persons of the same gender fails to practice the gender diversity that we wish to see in other areas of life. We believe that the union of male and female in marriage reflects the union of God and humanity through Christ.

C. Capable of life. Christians understand as God’s will the biological reality that the sexual union of male and female can produce new human life. This is why we believe it is right to bestow the institution of marriage only on a male-female relationship. Not only is this relationship the one that produces new human life, it also then exposes growing children to the full range of our gendered humanity through the presence of both a mother and a father.

74 This approach is a form of presuppositional apologetics, also called “contradictive or subversive fulfillment,” based on the apologetic approach of J.H. Bavinck. See Daniel Strange, Plugged In: Connecting Your Faith with What You Watch, Read, and Play (Epsom, Surrey: Good Book Company, 2019).
The Christian Counter-Narrative of Sexuality

1. The brutality of sex in the old world. Greco-Roman society was the historic forerunner of all western culture. In the ancient world sexual standards were very permissive. Sex was seen merely as a way to enhance personal pleasure and fulfillment of those in power, and so any sex was permitted if it did not upset the social order of the time—men over women, owners over slaves, rich over poor. While wives could not have sex with others, their husbands could have sex with most anyone they desired. This led to much brutality.

2. A new personal identity. Christianity came into the world with a message of grace, namely, that it was possible to have personal communion with God in a relationship of love as a free gift through the work of Jesus the Son of God who died and rose again for us. This message of salvation by grace rather than good works, morality, respectability, or pedigree had a social-levelling effect. Christians who had social status in society stood in exactly the same place as sinners in need of grace as did the social outsiders and moral failures (cf. John 3 and John 4).

3. A new social ethic. This new personal identity was unique. Christians’ self-regard was not based on performance or on how one was regarded by family or society. Culture’s ability to define believers’ personhood was broken. It also meant Christians were all equal in Christ—equally sinners in need of grace, and equally loved, justified, and adopted as God’s beloved children. This new identity had many practical effects. The Christian community was the first multi-ethnic religious community, which brought wealthy and poor together in unprecedented ways. Relationships within the Christian community were to be based on self-giving, sacrificial love, rather than on class and status.

4. A new vision for sexuality. But one of the most striking applications of this new identity and social ethic was in the area of sexual relationships. Christians called for sex to be based not (as in the Roman society) on power but on love, to be captive not to the culture but to Christ who gave himself for us and brought us into an exclusive, covenantal relationship with him. Sexual love had to reflect God’s saving love and this meant that sex was shaped by two principles. First, the principle of self-giving. Just as salvation and intimacy with God is only available inside an exclusive, life-long covenant relationship with God, so sexual intimacy is only to be experienced within marriage. Second, the principle of gender diversity. Just as salvation creates a union between God and humanity—a unity across deep difference—so marriage brings together the different—male and female. Just as each gender has some glories and abilities that the other gender cannot reproduce, so practicing gender-diversity in marriage combines the full range of human excellencies and abilities.

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76 See the New Testament books of James and Philemon. See also the descriptions of hospitality and wealth-sharing in the accounts of the earliest church in Acts 2 and Acts 4.
5. **The failures of western society.** When laws enforcing Christian sexual standards across a whole country were disconnected from the animating high vision of Christ’s love and grace, a kind of “sex-negativity” indeed did grow, so that in many places all sex was seen as shameful. Also, when Christian sexual mores are held by a largely nominal Christian populace—without a keen sense of being sinners saved by sheer grace—those mores were more often than not enforced very harshly, so that pregnant teenage girls or homosexual youths were treated with cruelty. And often society’s leaders not only violated their professed morality, but used their power to coerce sex in the Roman way. Those without power felt excluded and oppressed.

6. **The modern sexual revolution.** The modern sexual revolution was to some degree a reaction to this harsh regime. However, there is great evidence that the revolution is failing in many ways. While contemporary people have maintained the idea of mutual consent (an idea that came from Christianity), they have severed sex from whole-life commitment. That means we have “turned back the clock” to the ancient world, where sex was for self-fulfillment rather than for loving self-giving. Sex becomes transactional, a consumer good in which two parties exchange favors only as long as they are getting their needs met. The results have been great numbers of people who are having sex but feeling used (and, consequently, abandoning sexual intimacy for digital stimulation or other forms of societally-approved satisfaction and distraction), of people who feel no need to marry and have children, of people who feel lonely and detached as the numbers of people living in families plummet. These trends are especially devastating to the poorest communities and so, arguably, the modern sex ethic is hardest on those with the least power and societal protections.

7. **The Christian sexual counter-culture.** Christians still believe that sex must be rooted in the larger story of God’s saving love. Our culture tells us we must discover our deepest desires and then express them in order to become our authentic selves. But the reality is that we have contradictory impulses in our heart. We need some standard to help us determine which of our desires and instincts should be cultivated and which ones should not. Ancient people and modern people alike let their cultures set the standards. Christianity says: don’t let tribe or culture control you and give you your valuation. Let God’s Word give you the moral grid to understand your heart. And let God’s love and grace, through Jesus Christ, give you your deepest validation and identity. We believe that this link between God’s love and sexuality, that is lived out through the Biblical model of marriage, is the best way for human beings to live and thrive.
SELECT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography is arranged in three sections:

Books for Pastors and Sessions (12 citations)
Resolutions Adopted by PCA General Assemblies and Other Church Reports (15 citations)
Books and Articles for Further Study (16 citations)

We have included, first of all, books, reports, and statements that we believe can, as stated by the 47th General Assembly’s Overture 42 from Chicago Metro Presbytery (as amended), “help pastors and sessions shepherd congregants who are dealing with same-sex attraction” and gender dysphoria. We have also included, in a separate section, “Books and Articles for Further Study” that are germane to the topic at hand or have played an important role in the debate within our fellowship surrounding questions of sexuality. Some authors found in this third section of the bibliography come from outside of our tradition and, as a consequence, hold some views that would not align with those presented in this Committee’s Report. We have listed some of these works either because they include helpful insights or because they are relevant for pastors and sessions who wish to understand the nature of current debate within Christian communities that remain committed to clear Biblical directives regarding sexual behavior and human identity.

Recommendation of a work in this bibliography does not constitute endorsement of a given author’s entire corpus, nor necessarily of the subsequent views of a given author. Likewise, the exclusion of a work from this bibliography does not constitute repudiation of an author’s works or views. People’s views change over time, and in some cases, we include one book by an author while excluding other books by that same author because we believe the views in the book recommended are helpful while the views in the books excluded are not as helpful.

Every book or article included in this bibliography should be read charitably and critically in light of the truths of Scripture, our Confessional standards, the pronouncements of the church, and other literature on the subjects addressed.

BOOKS FOR PASTORS AND SESSIONS


The author is honest and transparent about his own journey of sexual brokenness. He proceeds to the topic less like a teacher and more like a friend. He treats the pertinent Biblical passages, and a hearty dose of the gospel makes them understandable and relational.

In this short, hope-filled book, Allberry affirms the goodness of marriage as a picture of the gospel, while arguing that singleness demonstrates the sufficiency of the gospel—especially in our cultural moment that places so much emphasis on romance as the source of satisfaction. He argues against the myths that the single life is too hard, that it means no intimacy or family, and that it wastes one's sexuality, instead offering a picture of single life as a good gift from a good God.


Black deals in concise and summary fashion with the major “revisionist” arguments regarding the Bible’s view of homosexuality. A helpful introduction.


A helpful popularization of some of the more scholarly work on the exegetical basis for the traditional interpretation of Scripture. Begins with Creation, explaining the importance of a God-defined sexuality and the picture it presents before setting up the contrast that homosexuality presents. An excellent resource for those who need to be convinced of the Biblical support for historic Christian understandings of sexuality.


Geiger explains the categories associated with the LGBTQ+ acronym with an understanding of common sin patterns. In doing so, he gives wisdom to help parents prepare their children to extend the love of Christ in this world, particularly to those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender identity.


Gilson demonstrates clear conviction regarding God’s love and trustworthiness in this reflection on her move out of the gay community and gay relationships toward Christ. She movingly tells of her embrace of a Biblical model for relationships, which involved the risk of loving others in healthy friendships, in the church, and eventually—for her—marriage to a man. She is laudably vulnerable in sharing her story of redemption, encouraging all of us to follow Jesus and trust Him with our own sexual brokenness.

Grant exposes key cultural practices that shape our sexual and relational lives, unveiling assumptions regarding human sexuality that many Christians have unknowingly adopted from the broader culture. He addresses how to train our sexual impulses within God’s will. Grant reveals how healthy relationships provide a solid foundation on which we can launch legitimate and healthy sexual relationships. His understanding of history and literary theory provides a rich backdrop for the picture he paints of faithful discipleship in the realm of sexuality.


Perry shares not so much advice but her own story. She shares deeply from her heart and her own struggle to be faithful while experiencing same-sex attraction. This is not a “how-to” guide but a worshipful narrative that leads us, same-sex attracted or not, to find our identity and subsequent freedom in Christ and His gospel work.


Cooper uses the Harvest USA model of gospel heart-change to help parents and youth leaders understand and help, with sensitivity and wisdom, young men and women who are struggling with same-sex attraction.


In this very short book, Roberts lays out the foundational principles for a Christian view of gender identity and a Christian response to transgenderism.


Shaw’s book seeks to provide a balanced treatment of same-sex attraction. Shaw emphasizes the need for churches to create plausible pathways to faithfulness for believers who experience same-sex attraction. Very pastoral and helpful for discipleship. Shaw is strong on friendship and on suffering, both of which are relevant for faithful Christians struggling with same-sex attraction.


This short book deals with the controversial subject of change. White avoids errors common to this topic by grounding the idea of change in the gospel.
RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY PCA GENERAL ASSEMBLIES
AND OTHER CHURCH REPORTS
(Chronological Order)


https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/


“Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality.” 38th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, June 2018.


BOOKS AND ARTICLES FOR FURTHER STUDY


In this accessible and short book, Allberry treats sexuality in general, and in so doing provides helpful guidance for all members of the church. That guidance is rooted in a Biblical anthropology and Biblical sexual ethics, with human sexuality pointing ultimately toward the design and love of the Creator.


Written by two pastors, one of whom (Citlau) used to be active in the gay lifestyle, this book focuses on practical application. Whether everyone agrees with all their
practical advice, the tone is warm and winsome, while still clear on Biblical principles.


This is a good overview of a big subject—more of an introduction than a comprehensive analysis. Given Burk’s active presence online and his leadership behind the Nashville Statement, some will be predisposed to appreciate Burk’s writing while others will be less sanguine, but his views are anchored in a high view of the Bible and are accessible to a lay audience.


Butterfield offers a compelling account of God’s grace at work in the life of a former lesbian professor of gender studies. She gives credit where credit is due—to Jesus Christ, who drew her to Himself using an obedient pastor and his wife, who loved her for years before she came to faith. Gets to the heart of the need of all sinners for redemption and then reveals the Redeemer in the person of Jesus (not in heterosexuality).


In this unique treatment of singleness, Danylak seeks to demonstrate that the entire story of Scripture affirms that the single life is a demonstrably good life. Less a book about the experience of singleness or a how-to manual for the single life, instead Danylak seeks to unpack a Biblical theology of singleness, wrestling directly with the tensions across the Biblical narrative between the importance of family life alongside affirmations of the goodness of the single life.


Fortson and Grams provide a survey of the faithful witness of the Church over the centuries on homosexuality as well a thorough treatment of Biblical passages addressing homosexuality. A helpful scholarly resource.


Gagnon’s work is the most comprehensive treatment of the exegesis of individual texts on the subject of homosexuality. His scholarship is solid, though his tone is at times less than pastoral.

Harper provides scholarly, historical background on the introduction of the countercultural Christian sexual ethic into the ancient Roman world. For those wanting to explore how Christianity overturned pagan sexual dynamics and protected weaker parties—and hence was a religion of freedom, not oppression—this is an invaluable resource.


Hays is unequivocal in his presentation of Biblical prohibitions against homosexual practice and provides good, introductory treatment of the key Biblical passages. Perhaps because it was first published over 20 years ago, this chapter does not take into account changes in terminology that have become the focus of significant debate in the PCA, and Hays’s recommendations on public policy questions are clearly rooted in the Wesleyan tradition out of which he operates. Nevertheless, this is a helpful short introduction to the clear ethical positions presented in the Biblical text.


Part memoir, part biography, part theology, Hill’s writing is that of a Christian who struggles with his own sexuality. Hill provides a nuanced treatment of the topic which may prove helpful for those who are attracted to the same sex or want a picture of what the cost of discipleship looks like for those with that experience. Hill offers a different perspective on terminology than the authors of this Report have adopted, and Reformed readers may have other objections to his approach, but Hill preaches Christ and declares that his celibacy depends on him, while asking good questions of the Church.


Pearcey is strong on the sexuality debate as it interfaces with cultural and social issues. She offers important insights on the spiritual nature of our bodies, helping to distinguish Biblical from cultural perspectives.


Sprinkle takes a dynamic and thoughtful approach to dealing with the problems of the same-sex attracted, writing from a pastor’s heart. He is objective and careful in his approach to all sides. He is aware of the tensions surrounding
debates on these questions—perhaps to a fault. But his careful linguistic and historic approach to Biblical teaching on the topic is valuable, and he affirms the historic Christian ethic on marriage.


Originally published in pamphlet form in the mid-1980s, Stott’s essay provides a helpful introduction to key texts and issues. Because it was first published over 30 years ago, it does not treat questions that have arisen in recent years—e.g., around terminology. Nevertheless, it is solid on the central issue of Biblical commands with regard to sexuality.


An insightful book on how to respond to sexual acting-out through pornography and adultery. Offers an alternative to the typical pressured and constrictive approach most Christian “purity” books have to offer. Celebrates healthy, Biblical sexuality and encourages us to enter into stories of sexual shame for insight to healing. Stringer, a minister and therapist, offers remedies to shame-inducing behaviors, bringing the gospel to bear on deep wounds. Stringer’s broad manner of dealing with sexual sin is applicable to all the sexually broken in the church.


Primarily directed toward counseling adolescents who experience same-sex attraction. Presents in layman’s terms a sexual identity therapy (SIT) framework, employing secular psychological categories. Yarhouse’s strength, as a social scientist, lies in his observation of empirical phenomena. This book contains helpful insights when approached with appropriate Biblical discernment.


Beginning with the garden, Yuan anchors our identity in the *imago Dei*. He argues that the Biblical-theological framework of sin is better than a sexual-orientation framework, which he sees as leading believers to being either “ex-gay” or “gay Christians.” Yuan offers a compelling picture of the Christian church as the central community for those who experience same-sex attraction, even if more could be done to expound a robust doctrine of gospel-shaped repentance. His approach to sexuality brings theological clarity, but some may find it simplistic or reductionistic at points.
CONCLUSION

We conclude this Report, as we began, with the prayer that the Scriptural solidarity and relational unity we experienced as a Committee will be reflected in how the Presbyterian Church in America receives what we have written. With the prayer that these materials may prove helpful for the unity, witness, and mission of our church and her people, we also offer a confession—

We confess that we began our work with the obvious understanding that members of this Committee were chosen to represent varying perspectives in our church. While we shared mutual respect, the polarities in our church and the expectations of various constituencies we represented created a certain wariness in our initial discussions. Two important commitments helped us advance beyond wariness of churchmen to the work of the church in a way that we believe honors the Lord: 1) the commitment of leaders to deal with one another honestly and honorably; and, 2) the commitment of each person on the Committee to be a learner, as well as a leader.

Each of us had things to learn: details, history, and implications of our Confessional standards; the pastoral challenges of those whose sacrificial ministries regularly involve ministering to those whose sexual sins our culture approves; the ways to get a hearing for the gospel from friends and neighbors who have adopted the pervasive cultural mindset; resources that equip us with additional knowledge and perspective to address one another and our culture with wise application of God’s Word; and means to extend grace and truth to those with whom we disagree—even those in the church. These differing perspectives and pastoral obligations are reflected in the various sections of our Report that we pray will serve the varying concerns of ministry leaders across our church. The Lord blessed us by providing Committee members who could teach each of us, and by providing leaders who would listen without letting wariness become deafness to fathers and brothers serving the Lord in different capacities and contexts.

Just as we were clear-eyed about the differences among Committee members, we recognized that there are those outside our Committee who might presume that some sort of “group-think” became responsible for the unity of our Report. So, we also sent our key documents to trusted leaders, representing diverse perspectives across our denomination for commentary and critique. All provided honest and detailed responses that allowed us to discern some blind spots, address some issues with greater sensitivity or directness, and refine some language. No response was disrespectful. No response was disregarded. All responses proved helpful and were addressed in the final Report.

We received literally hundreds of suggestions for items to include in our Report from PCA constituencies. These included everything from reminders of important verses in the Bible to dense scholarly articles advocating perspectives on how to parse the language of those verses. Clearly there has been significant interest in the work of our Committee and significant concern that we be true to our Biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral obligations. The temptation under such scrutiny has been to write voluminously. We have tried—with marginal
success—to avoid that temptation. Our intention has been to serve the wider church with a Report that we hope will be brief enough in its different sections to be useful for the differing ministry tasks that must be undertaken by churches, sessions, pastors, and parishioners. We still had to be comprehensive enough to address the many issues given to us by the General Assembly, but we also tried to be succinct in our Preamble and Twelve Statements to give readers an accessible view of the framework for our Biblical, theological, and pastoral discussions.

For those who want to go into the theology of why unbidden desires remain sinful before God, there is a theologically and Confessionally rich essay to engage your minds with those ideas. For those who want to know how to pastor those who are struggling with same-sex attraction and related issues, there is also an important section on how the church shepherds such persons. And, for those who want to know how to speak to family and friends about how the Bible’s plan for loving relationships is not bigotry but beauty, there is an essay for how to address modern culture.

Knowing that some have anticipated that our Report will divide and polarize our church with recommendations that will try to press certain perspectives on others, we have made no recommendations. The PCA asked the members of this Committee to study these issues, and to express our understanding, and we have. Because of the consequences of a world-wide pandemic, we have not yet formally presented this material to the General Assembly. Still, we believe that our best service to the church will not be given by trying to leverage actions with recommendations, but asking that our church’s leaders experience what we have on this Committee by listening with respect to what the Lord may intend to teach from those who have sought to honor his Word and each other in this Report. There are and will be many situations to which the principles and perspectives of this Report apply. We trust that the godly leaders of local churches and presbyteries determined to declare the truth of Scripture and share the grace of Jesus Christ are those best equipped to make such application.
ATTACHMENT A

47th General Assembly’s Assignment
to the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

and

Summary of the 2019 Actions of the 47th GA on Overture 42

On June 27, 2019, in Dallas, the PCA’s 47th GA adopted a recommendation from its 126-member Overtures Committee answering Chicago Metro Presbytery’s Overture 42 in the affirmative, as amended (see below), and therein directed the Moderator to appoint the seven-man Ad Interim Study Committee.

Please Note:
- For the purposes of this Report and for ease of reference, the bulleted format of the Overture 42 resolution found in the GA Minutes has been altered to a numbered and lettered outline form.
- Any items in brackets below, and the footnote, are added for clarification and are not part of the 47th GA Minutes, p. 104.

Overture 42

1. Therefore, be it resolved that the 47th General Assembly create an Ad Interim Committee (AIC) to study the topic of human sexuality with particular attention to the issues of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism, and prepare a report which:

   a. Shall include an annotated bibliography of resources on sexuality, which the Committee endorses, to help pastors and sessions shepherd congregants who are dealing with same-sex attraction;

   b. Shall address:

      (1) the nature of temptation, sin, repentance, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformed views of concupiscence as regards same-sex attraction;
      (2) the propriety of using terms like “gay Christian” when referring to a believer struggling with same-sex attraction;
      (3) the status of “orientation” as a valid anthropological category;
      (4) the practice of “spiritual friendship” among same-sex attracted Christians; and

   c. Shall include an analysis of WLC 138 and 139 regarding same-sex attraction, with careful attention given to the compatibility of the 7th commandment and same-sex attraction and the pursuit of celibacy by those who are attracted to the same sex; and

   d. Shall include exegesis of the terms “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” (1 Cor. 6:9); and
Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

e. Shall include suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding; and

f. Should the Committee conclude it prudent, may, as one of its recommendations, propose a statement on the topic; and

2. Be it further resolved, that, in its examination of Scripture and the PCA [sic] of Faith and Catechisms, the Committee consider studies and statements of other bodies outside and within the PCA, including, but not limited to:

   o the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood’s “Nashville Statement“ [2017]
   o the RPCNA’s “Contemporary Confession [sic] Perspectives on Sexual Orientation: A Theological and Pastoral Analysis” [2011 Synod; 43 pages]
   o the RPCES’s “Pastoral Care for the Repentant Homosexual” [1980]
   o Missouri Presbytery's “Homosexuality and the Gospel of Grace: Faithfulness to the Lord's Calling in an Age of Sexual Autonomy” [2017 report; 53 pages]
   o Central Carolina Presbytery 2019 Study Committee Report on 2018 Revoice Conference [16 pp.]
   o the 2019 Missouri Presbytery Report on the Revoice Conference [143 pages]
   o the statements on homosexuality issued by the 5th, 24th, and 27th General Assemblies of the PCA and the January 14, 2015 Report of the [Cooperative Ministries Committee] CMC Subcommittee on Homosexuality [M34GA, Chattanooga, 2015, pp. 331-33]

   and resources recommended in those documents; and

3. Be it further resolved, that the Moderator of the 47th General Assembly appoint the seven voting members who shall be either PCA teaching or ruling elders, and the Committee shall include at least three teaching and three ruling elders; and

4. Be it further resolved that the Committee be permitted to recruit others to serve the Committee as advisors within the confines of its budget, with particular concern to secure advisors with experience in counseling those dealing with same-sex attraction and transgenderism; and

5. Be it further resolved that the budget for the study committee be set at $25,000/year and that funds be derived from gifts to the AC [Administrative Committee] designated for that purpose; [see Summary of 2019 GA Actions, p. 57 below] and

6. Be it further resolved that the committee shall present its report to the 48th General Assembly, including any recommendations it may present.
Summary of the 2019 Actions of the 47th GA on Overture 42

The 47th GA’s Overtures Committee (OC) voted 72-54 to recommend the appointment of the Ad Interim Committee on Sexuality proposed by Overture 42, and by a voice vote, the GA adopted the OC recommendation. It was one of four Overtures proposing an ad interim committee on this subject, and the other three were answered by reference to the Assembly's action on Overture 42.

Prior to the GA discussion on Overture 42, several other overtures related to sexuality had already received lengthy debate (including some OC Minority Reports). This included 81 minutes devoted to the OC's recommendation to answer Calvary Presbytery's Overture 4 in the affirmative, which asked the GA to “declare the Nashville Statement to be a biblically faithful statement.” See the GA archive titled “Thursday PM Program #2,” 77 where discussion on the OC recommendation on Overture 4 begins at timestamp 00:28:15 and ends at 1:49:00. This included a Minority Report to recommit, which failed by a vote of 572-792. The OC recommendation on Overture 42 was adopted by a vote of 803-541 (60-40%) (M47GA, 76, 89, 112, 589).

The subsequent GA floor discussion and action on Overture 42 took nine minutes. After OC chairman TE Sean Lucas presented the OC's recommendation (at about 11 pm Thursday), and, after a three-minute floor speech in favor, a motion was made to “call the question.” The Assembly adopted that cloture motion, thus ending debate by a vote of 1216-85 (a 93% majority). The OC's recommendation on Overture 42 was then adopted by a voice vote. For the brief discussion on Overture 42, see same archive titled “Thursday PM Program #2,” beginning at 1:53:00 and ending at 2:02:30 (M47GA, 77, 104-07, 701).

Funding - A question arose about whether the AIC budget should be recorded as $15,000 instead of $25,000, because $15,000 was the original amount in Overture 42, and it was the amount in the recommendation from the OC. However, the Assembly had already adopted Recommendation 6 from the AC Committee of Commissioners which read: “That, in the event the Assembly, upon recommendation of the Overtures Committee, answers Overtures 30, 42 and 44 in the affirmative, approving the establishment of an ad interim committee on the Study of Same-Sex Attraction, the budget of such committee be $25,000, to be provided solely by designated gifts to the AC” (M47GA 70,77, 184, and timestamp 3:39:00 in archived “Thursday PM Program”). Prior to the vote on the OC recommendation, the Moderator clarified that amounts contributed over and above any specific budget amount would still be useable by this Ad Interim Committee and that there was “technically no cap, per se” (Timestamp 1:54:50 in archived “Thursday PM Program #2”).

77 https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/8720909/videos/193106462
Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

ATTACHMENT B

Members of the 47th General Assembly
Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality (2019-2020)

Alphabetically

TE Dr. Bryan Chapell Pastor, Grace PCA, Peoria, IL, 
*Northern Illinois Presbytery* (Chairman)

TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung Pastor, Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, NC, 
*Central Carolina Presbytery*

RE Dr. Derek Halvorson President, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, TN 
*Tennessee Valley Presbytery*

RE Mr. Kyle Keating Teacher and Dean, Providence Classical Christian Academy, St. Louis, MO 
*Missouri Presbytery*

TE Dr. Tim Keller Pastor Emeritus, Redeemer NYC & Redeemer City-to-City 
*Metro NY Presbytery*

RE Mr. Jim Pocta Licensed Professional Counselor, Dallas, TX 
*North Texas Presbytery*

TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar Harvest USA & Assistant Pastor, First Reformed PCA, 
Pittsburgh, PA 
*Pittsburgh Presbytery*

TE Bryan Chapell, Northern Illinois Presbytery. *BSJ, Northwestern University; MDiv, Covenant Theological Seminary; PhD, Southern Illinois University.* TE Chapell began pastoral ministry at Woodburn Presbyterian Church in Woodburn, IL, in 1976 and subsequently pastored Bethel Reformed Presbyterian Church in Sparta, IL, 1978-1985. He became a professor of preaching at Covenant Theological Seminary in 1985, where he also served as Dean of Faculty (1987-1994), President (1994-2012), and Chancellor (2012-2013). On Easter, 2013, he became Senior Pastor of the historic Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois. Chapell was a founding member of the Gospel Coalition. He was the founder and is currently chairman of Unlimited Grace Media, a radio and online Bible-teaching ministry. His books include *Christ-Centered Preaching, Christ-Centered Worship, Holiness by Grace, Praying Backwards, Each for the Other,* and a children’s book, *I’ll Love You Anyway and Always.* Chapell was Moderator of the 2014 PCA General Assembly in Houston and is currently a member of the PCA’s Standing Judicial Commission, Class of 2022. He and Kathy have four adult children and a growing number of grandchildren.
**TE Kevin DeYoung**, Central Carolina Presbytery. BA, Hope College; MDiv, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; PhD, University of Leicester. TE DeYoung has been Senior Pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, NC, since 2017 as well as Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. Prior to moving to Charlotte, he was Senior Pastor at University Reformed Church, East Lansing, MI. His Ph.D focused on the theology of John Witherspoon, a Scottish-American Presbyterian theologian and a Founding Father of the United States. Regularly blogging on thegospelcoalition.org, DeYoung also has been invited as a keynote speaker to numerous conferences and lectures including Together For the Gospel, The Gospel Coalition, Ligonier, and many more. He has published more than a dozen books for adults and children, including *Just Do Something, The Hole in Our Holiness,* and *The Biggest Story.* His book, *Crazy Busy: A Mercifully Short Book About a Big Problem,* was named the 2014 Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Book of the Year. In addition, *Christianity Today* awarded Book of the Year honors to three of his books in 2009, 2010, and 2013. *World Magazine* named *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* one of its 2015 Books of the Year. He is a member of the General Assembly’s Committee on Administration, Class of 2022, and Chairman of the Board for the Gospel Coalition. He and his wife Trisha have three daughters and five sons.

**RE Derek Halvorson**, Tennessee Valley Presbytery. BA, Covenant College; MA, University of Arizona; PhD, Loyola University Chicago. RE Halvorson is Covenant College’s sixth president. After graduating from Covenant in 1993, Halvorson spent time trading foreign currencies in Charlotte and Chicago. He returned to academia, earning advanced degrees in history. From 2003 to 2009, Halvorson served at Covenant as Director of Constituent Relations and then as Regional Director of Development. In 2009, he became President of Providence Christian College, where he served until 2012, when he was appointed President of Covenant College. Halvorson serves on the boards of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. He and his wife Wendy have a son and a daughter. They are members of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church.

**RE Kyle Keating**, Missouri Presbytery. BA, Univ. of Illinois Champaign-Urbana; MDiv, Covenant Theological Seminary. Keating serves as a ruling elder in the Missouri Presbytery. After attending Covenant Seminary, he began teaching upper school history and theology at Providence Classical Christian Academy, where he now serves as Dean. Keating regularly speaks at churches and campuses on the plausibility of the biblical sexual ethic in the modern age. He served as one of three REs on the eight-member Missouri Presbytery committee that reported on Revoice and Memorial Presbyterian Church in 2019. Additionally, he served on the Missouri Presbytery committee that issued the 2017 report titled “Homosexuality and Gospel of Grace.” He and his wife and fellow-teacher, Christy, live in St. Louis and have a daughter.

**TE Tim Keller**, Metro New York Presbytery. BA, Bucknell University; MDiv, Gordon-Conwell Seminary; DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary. TE Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three young sons. For 28 years he led a diverse congregation of young professionals that grew to a weekly attendance of over 5,000. He is also the Chairman & Co-Founder of
Redeemer City to City (CTC), which starts new churches in New York and other global cities, and publishes books and resources for ministry in an urban environment. In 2017 Keller transitioned to CTC full time to teach and mentor church planters and seminary students through a joint venture with Reformed Theological Seminary's City Ministry Program. He also works with CTC's global affiliates to launch church planting movements. Keller’s books, including the *New York Times* bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages. Keller previously served as the pastor of West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Hopewell, Virginia, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and Director of Mercy Ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America.

RE Jim Pocta, North Texas Presbytery. *BA, University of Texas at Dallas; MA Counseling, Amberton University*. RE Pocta has been a licensed professional counselor for 12 years and has practiced biblical counseling for over thirty years. He has his own biblical counseling private practice specializing in depression, anxiety, sexual trauma, and abuse, as well as helping those with same-sex attraction and being transgendered. A ruling elder at New St. Peters Presbyterian Church in North Dallas, Pocta has been married to Linda (a recently retired RN) for 40 years, and they have three sons and three grandchildren.

TE Jim Weidenaar, Pittsburgh Presbytery. *MTS, Calvin Theological Seminary; PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary*. TE Weidenaar joined the Harvest USA staff in June 2012 as Director for the Greater Pittsburgh Region. His 2011 PhD. dissertation is titled: “*Totum Hominem Non Aliud...Quam Concupiscentiam: A Study of Calvin's Doctrine of Concupiscence with Special Reference to its Place in His Soteriology.*” He lives in the eastern suburbs of Pittsburgh with his wife and daughter.