

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

4  
5  
6       May 2020  
7

8                   **To the 48<sup>th</sup> General Assembly,**  
9

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

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

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

24          TE Dr. Bryan Chapell	<i>Northern Illinois Presbytery</i> (Chair)
25          TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung	<i>Central Carolina Presbytery</i>
26          TE Dr. Tim Keller	<i>Metropolitan New York Presbytery</i>
27          TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar	<i>Pittsburgh Presbytery</i>
28          RE Dr. Derek Halvorson	<i>Tennessee Valley Presbytery</i>
29          RE Mr. Kyle Keating	<i>Missouri Presbytery</i>
30          RE Mr. Jim Pocta	<i>North Texas Presbytery</i>

Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

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**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.<sup>1</sup> 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	<i>Northern Illinois</i> (Chair)	RE Dr. Derek Halvorson	<i>Tennessee Valley</i>
TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung	<i>Central Carolina</i>	RE Mr. Kyle Keating	<i>Missouri</i>
TE Dr. Tim Keller	<i>Metropolitan New York</i>	RE Mr. Jim Pocta	<i>North Texas</i>
TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar	<i>Pittsburgh</i>		

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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Confessional Foundations Regarding the Nature of Temptation, Sin, & Repentance (1.b.1).....	14
Biblical Perspectives for Pastoral Care - Discipleship, Identity, & Terminology (1.b.2-4, 1.c).....	24
Apologetic Approaches for Speaking to the World (1.e).....	34
Select Annotated Bibliography (1.a and 2) .....	45
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Herein the Committee has sought to address the issues and questions assigned to it for study by the 47<sup>th</sup> 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.

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

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## 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.

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1 The two tasks could be called the “pastoral task” and the “apologetic task.” On the one hand,  
2 Overture 42 asks that the Report *“help pastors and sessions shepherd congregants who are*  
3 *dealing with same-sex attraction”* (*M47GA*, 104). On the other hand it asks for “*suggested*  
4 *ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction,*  
5 *and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding”* (*M47GA*, 105).

6  
7 There is no reason why these two tasks need to be pitted against each other, although they  
8 often seem to be. One reason they seem at loggerheads is that attached to each undertaking is  
9 a set of fears.

10  
11 One set of fears is that we will be harsh and unfeeling toward people who have been wounded  
12 and deeply hurt—and often by the Church. A hard-sounding stance toward them at this  
13 moment may only make it easier to discredit the Church in people’s minds. As a consequence,  
14 many are afraid that the Church will speak in ways that only support the powerful cultural  
15 narrative that orthodox Christian belief is toxic for hurting and struggling people.

16  
17 Another set of fears, however, is that we will compromise at the very place where the world  
18 is attacking the Church in our culture. We see many professing Christians and whole  
19 denominations surrendering to the sexual revolution. We do not want to be one of them, nor  
20 even now in subtle ways to sow the seeds for some future capitulation. As the natural family  
21 is a fundamental unit of human society and is the normal means of care and nurture, all sins  
22 which threaten, undermine, or marginalize it are both spiritually dangerous and detrimental to  
23 human flourishing.

24  
25 Part of the problem with regard to addressing these issues is that many of us are far more  
26 gripped with one set of fears than the other. But because both of these tasks—the pastoral and  
27 the apologetic—are required, we should give each of them strong attention.

28  
29 Sinclair Ferguson, in his book *The Whole Christ*, reminds us that the two main ways that the  
30 gospel is compromised are through legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other.  
31 He then says that it is common to fall into “the mistake of prescribing a dose of antinomianism  
32 to heal legalism, and vice-versa, rather than the gospel antidote of our grace-union with  
33 Christ.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to argue that the Church must present to the world the *whole Christ*,  
34 “clothed in his gospel.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus is both the Holy One and the merciful one. He cleanses the  
35 temple yet eats with sinners. He gives Martha teaching on truth (John 11:25-26) yet he gives  
36 Mary only tears (John 11:35) even though they had both said the same thing to him about their  
37 grief (John 11:21, 32). He gives each of them what they most need at the moment. On the  
38 cross Jesus fulfills both the unyielding demands of the Law yet also the most wonderful  
39 purposes of God’s love.

40  
41 And so we must present “the whole Christ” when we both pastor individuals and speak to the  
42 world about sexuality and gender today. Jesus is full of grace *and* truth. In pastoral care we

---

<sup>2</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

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1 must not apply the truth so harshly as to be callously alienating *or* so indirectly that the truth  
2 is never clearly grasped.  
3  
4 The very form of the following Twelve Statements seeks to capture this “grace and truth”  
5 wholeness as we address the issues. Each statement is dual, an associating of one truth with a  
6 concomitant truth or teaching. The aim is not to achieve some kind of abstract intellectual  
7 balance or “third way,” but rather to show the path of theologically rich pastoring. The paired  
8 truths help the pastor avoid the opposite errors of either speaking the truth without love or  
9 trying to love someone without speaking the truth.  
10  
11 The “grace and truth” path to which we point the church in this Report is not an easy one.  
12 Speaking the truth yet doing it in love is nearly always harder than separating these needed  
13 aspects of the whole gospel into two alternatives. Speaking with grace and truth, in the process  
14 of our work together this year, we on your Ad-Interim Committee have been delighted to find  
15 a greater spirit and degree of oneness amongst ourselves than we would have expected. Our  
16 prayer is that our entire church may increasingly find that same “unity of the Spirit in the bond  
17 of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

## TWELVE 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).<sup>4</sup>

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 heartbreakingly 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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<sup>4</sup> 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).

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1 that the effects of the Fall extend to the corruption of our whole nature (WSC 18), which may  
2 include how we think of our own gender and sexuality. Moreover, some persons, in rare  
3 instances, may possess an objective medical condition in which their anatomical development  
4 may be ambiguous or does not match their genetic chromosomal sex. Such persons are also  
5 made in the image of God and should live out their biological sex, insofar as it can be known.  
6

### 7 **STATEMENT 3: ORIGINAL SIN**

8 We affirm that from the sin of our first parents we have received an inherited guilt and an  
9 inherited depravity (Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:1-3). From this original corruption—which is itself  
10 sinful and for which we are culpable—proceed all actual transgressions. All the outworkings  
11 of our corrupted nature (a corruption which remains, in part, even after regeneration) are truly  
12 and properly called sin (*WCF* 6.1-5).<sup>5</sup> Every sin, original and actual, deserves death and  
13 renders us liable to the wrath of God (Rom. 3:23; James 2:10; *WCF* 6.6).<sup>6</sup> We must repent of  
14 our sin in general and our particular sins, particularly (*WCF* 15.5). That is, we ought to grieve  
15 for our sin, hate our sin, turn from our sin unto God, and endeavor to walk with God in  
16 obedience to his commandments (*WCF* 15.2).<sup>7</sup>  
17

18 Nevertheless, God does not wish for believers to live in perpetual misery for their sins, each  
19 of which are pardoned and mortified in Christ (*WCF* 6.5). By the Spirit of Christ, we are able  
20 to make spiritual progress and to do good works, not perfectly, but truly (*WCF* 16.3).<sup>8</sup> Even  
21 our imperfect works are made acceptable through Christ, and God is pleased to accept and  
22 reward them as pleasing in his sight (*WCF* 16.6).

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin defines repentance as “the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.3.5 [cited by Book, Chapter, and Section].

<sup>8</sup> 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.

1    **STATEMENT 4: DESIRE**

2  
3    We affirm not only that our inclination toward sin is a result of the Fall, but that our fallen  
4    desires are in themselves sinful (Rom 6:11-12; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11).<sup>9</sup> The desire for an illicit  
5    end—whether in sexual desire for a person of the same sex or in sexual desire disconnected  
6    from the context of Biblical marriage—is itself an illicit desire. Therefore, the experience of  
7    same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the attraction is an expression of original or  
8    indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death (Rom. 8:13).

9  
10   Nevertheless, we must celebrate that, despite the continuing presence of sinful desires (and  
11   even, at times, egregious sinful behavior), repentant, justified, and adopted believers are free  
12   from condemnation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21) and  
13   are able to please God by walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-6).

14   **STATEMENT 5: CONCUPISCIENCE**

15  
16   We affirm that impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious  
17   act of the will are still sin.<sup>10</sup> We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence  
18   whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a  
19   consenting act of the will.<sup>11</sup> These desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations  
20   to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> “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).

<sup>12</sup> 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

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1 Nevertheless, we recognize that many persons who experience same-sex attraction describe  
2 their desires as arising in them unbidden and unwanted. We also recognize that the presence  
3 of same-sex attraction is often owing to many factors, which always include our own sin  
4 nature and may include being sinned against in the past. As with any sinful pattern or  
5 propensity—which may include disordered desires, extramarital lust, pornographic  
6 addictions, and all abusive sexual behavior—the actions of others, though never finally  
7 determinative, can be significant and influential. This should move us to compassion and  
8 understanding. Moreover, it is true for all of us that sin can be both unchosen bondage and  
9 idolatrous rebellion at the same time. We all experience sin, at times, as a kind of voluntary  
10 servitude (Rom. 7:13-20).<sup>13</sup>

11

### **STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION**

13

14 We affirm that Scripture speaks of temptation in different ways. There are some temptations  
15 God gives us in the form of morally neutral trials, and other temptations God never gives us  
16 because they arise from within as morally illicit desires (James 1:2, 13-14).<sup>14</sup> When  
17 temptations come from without, the temptation itself is not sin, unless we enter into the  
18 temptation. But when the temptation arises from within, it is our own act and is rightly called  
19 sin.<sup>15</sup>

20

21 Nevertheless, there is an important degree of moral difference between temptation to sin and  
22 giving in to sin, even when the temptation is itself an expressing of indwelling sin.<sup>16</sup> While

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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.

<sup>13</sup> “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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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

1 our goal is the weakening and lessening of internal temptations to sin, Christians should feel  
2 their greatest responsibility not for the fact that such temptations occur but for thoroughly and  
3 immediately fleeing and resisting the temptations when they arise. We can avoid “entering  
4 into” temptation by refusing to internally ponder and entertain the proposal and desire to actual  
5 sin. Without some distinction between (1) the illicit temptations that arise in us due to original  
6 sin and (2) the willful giving over to actual sin, Christians will be too discouraged to “make  
7 every effort” at growth in godliness and will feel like failures in their necessary efforts to be  
8 holy as God is holy (2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Peter 1:14-16). God is pleased with our sincere obedience,  
9 even though it may be accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections (*WCF* 16.6).

10

### **STATEMENT 7: SANCTIFICATION**

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

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

29

### **STATEMENT 8: IMPECCABILITY**

30 We affirm the impeccability of Christ. The incarnate Son of God neither sinned (in thought,  
31 word, deed, or desire) nor had the possibility of sinning.<sup>17</sup> Christ experienced temptation  
32 passively, in the form of trials and the devil’s entreaties, not actively, in the form of disordered  
33 desires. Christ had only the suffering part of temptation, where we also have the sinning part.<sup>18</sup>

---

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

<sup>17</sup> “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).

<sup>18</sup> 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;

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1 Christ had no inward disposition or inclination unto the least evil, being perfect in all graces  
2 and all their operations at all times.<sup>19</sup>

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

### **STATEMENT 9: IDENTITY**

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

17  
18 Nevertheless, being honest about our sin struggles is important. While Christians should not  
19 identify with their sin so as to embrace it or seek to base their identity on it, Christians ought  
20 to acknowledge their sin in an effort to overcome it. There is a difference between speaking  
21 about a phenomenological facet of a person's sin-stained reality and employing the language  
22 of sinful desires as a personal identity marker. That is, we name our sins, but are not named  
23 by them. Moreover, we recognize that there are some secondary identities, when not rooted  
24 in sinful desires or struggles against the flesh, that can be legitimately affirmed along with our  
25 primary identity as Christians. For example, the distinctions between male and female, or  
26 between various nationalities and people groups, are not eradicated in becoming Christians,  
27 but serve to magnify the glory of God in his plan of salvation (Gen. 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7;  
28 Rev. 5:9; 7:9-10).

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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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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, he 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.

1    **STATEMENT 10: LANGUAGE**

2  
3    We affirm that those in our churches would be wise to avoid the term “gay Christian.”  
4    Although the term “gay” may refer to more than being attracted to persons of the same sex,  
5    the term does not communicate less than that. For many people in our culture, to self-identify  
6    as “gay” suggests that one is engaged in homosexual practice. At the very least, the term  
7    normally communicates the presence and approval of same-sex sexual attraction as morally  
8    neutral or morally praiseworthy. Even if “gay,” for some Christians, simply means “same-sex  
9    attraction,” it is still inappropriate to juxtapose this sinful desire, or any other sinful desire, as  
10   an identity marker alongside our identity as new creations in Christ.

11  
12   Nevertheless, we recognize that some Christians may use the term “gay” in an effort to be  
13   more readily understood by non-Christians. The word “gay” is common in our culture, and  
14   we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term. Our burden is that we do  
15   not justify our sin struggles by affixing them to our identity as Christians. Churches should be  
16   gentle, patient, and intentional with believers who call themselves “gay Christians,”  
17   encouraging them, as part of the process of sanctification, to leave behind identification  
18   language rooted in sinful desires, to live chaste lives, to refrain from entering into temptation,  
19   and to mortify their sinful desires.

20  
21   **STATEMENT 11: FRIENDSHIP**

22  
23   We affirm that our contemporary ecclesiastical culture has an underdeveloped understanding  
24   of friendship and often does not honor singleness as it should. The church must work to see  
25   that all members, including believers who struggle with same-sex attraction, are valued  
26   members of the body of Christ and engaged in meaningful relationships through the blessings  
27   of the family of God. Likewise we affirm the value of Christians who share common struggles  
28   gathering together for mutual accountability, exhortation, and encouragement.

29  
30   Nevertheless, we do not support the formation of exclusive, contractual marriage-like  
31   friendships, nor do we support same-sex romantic behavior or the assumption that certain  
32   sensibilities and interests are necessarily aspects of a gay identity. We do not consider same-  
33   sex attraction a gift in itself, nor do we think this sin struggle, or any sin struggle, should be  
34   celebrated in the church.

35   **STATEMENT 12: REPENTANCE AND HOPE**

36  
37   We affirm that the entire life of the believer is one of repentance.<sup>21</sup> Where we have mistreated  
38   those who struggle with same-sex attraction, or with any other sinful desires, we call ourselves  
39   to repentance. Where we have nurtured or made peace with sinful thoughts, desires, words, or  
40   deeds, we call ourselves to repentance. Where we have heaped upon others misplaced shame  
41   or have not dealt well with necessary God-given shame, we call ourselves to repentance.

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, “Ninety-five Theses,” in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 490.

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

## CONFESSITIONAL 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. CONFESSITIONAL 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).<sup>22</sup> 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).<sup>23</sup> 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).<sup>24</sup> 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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<sup>22</sup> Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1-3; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Titus 1:15; Rom. 3:10-19.

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 51:5; John 3:6; Gen. 5:3; Job 15:14.

<sup>24</sup> Rom. 7:18; 8:7; Col. 1:21; Matt. 15:19; James 1:14-15; Eph. 2:2-3.

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1 but to its being an *act*<sup>25</sup> of the soul as opposed to a *disposition* or *inclination* only. While it is  
2 significant that a distinction is made between original and actual sin,<sup>26</sup> the emphasis at this  
3 point in the *Confession* is that original sin, as a disposition or inclination, is truly sin: “This  
4 corruption of nature...itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin” (WCF  
5 6.5).<sup>27</sup>

6  
7 What is behind Article VI of the *Confession*, and especially section 5 of the article, is the  
8 historical dispute over concupiscence. Though *concupiscence* as a Latin word originally had  
9 a broader definition as simply “desire,” what was in dispute in the Reformation was  
10 *concupiscence* as a technical theological term. As such, it refers not to desire in general but to  
11 disordered desire, thus, desire as corrupted by the Fall. Within this category of disordered  
12 desire there is especially concern for the spontaneity or unbidden nature of disordered desire.<sup>28</sup>  
13 When the sin status of concupiscence was disputed, the concern was this spontaneous, pre-  
14 deliberate, experience of desire, before the will consciously assented or consented to it.

15  
16 Consent, as described in the Medieval discussions of concupiscence, began at any conscious  
17 approval of the feeling, even letting it linger so as to enjoy the feeling itself. Concupiscence  
18 was a sinward feeling, arousal, or attraction *before* any conscious consent to that feeling was  
19 given. Concupiscence, then, was the experience of the corruption of our nature. It was the  
20 inclination to desire in disordered ways<sup>29</sup> experienced as spontaneous feelings and not the  
21 consent to or active cultivation of those feelings. Thus, concupiscence in this technical  
22 theological sense is associated more closely with original, not actual sin. It is “This corruption  
23 of nature...itself, and all the motions thereof,” and is “truly and properly sin” (WCF 6.5).

### I.B. Corruption and the Regenerate

25  
26  
27 WCF 6.5 begins, “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are  
28 regenerated.”<sup>30</sup> This statement is the lead point under which several other things are said about  
29 the Christian life—a life that is fundamentally renewed and yet continues to experience the

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<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Rom. 7:7-8; Gal. 5:17.

<sup>28</sup> *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.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 7:14, 17-18, 21-23; 1 John 1:8, 10.

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1 effects of the Fall. This section, though it mentions that “through Christ” this corruption is  
2 “pardoned and mortified,” emphasizes both that it remains in the Christian and that it is sin.

3  
4 What then, are we to make of this corruption being “pardoned and mortified?” That it is  
5 pardoned refers to the doctrine of justification. The Reformation’s teaching on justification is  
6 clarified as opposed to the Roman view by how God is said to deal with the remaining sinful  
7 corruption. Chapter 11 makes the point that when God justifies corrupted humans, he does it  
8 “not by infusing righteousness into them, …but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of  
9 Christ unto them” (*WCF* 11.1).<sup>31</sup> The fact that the corruption remains highlights that  
10 justification is *imputed*, not *infused*.

11  
12 But is there any real change in the life of the believer? Is the believer only forgiven, but  
13 doomed to continue in this life in the exact condition of sinful corruption and slavery to it?  
14 No, there is change—change that is both *real* and *imperfect*. The *Confession* describes real  
15 change in its article on Free Will: “When God converts a sinner and translates him into the  
16 state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and, by his grace alone,  
17 enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good” (*WCF* 9.4).<sup>32</sup> Our doctrine  
18 clearly affirms that the Christian wills and does spiritually good things. But immediately the  
19 *Confession* adds, “yet so as that, by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly,  
20 nor only will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.”<sup>33</sup> We will and do things  
21 that are truly good, but not perfectly or exclusively so.

22  
23 Chapter 13 on Sanctification further describes the reality of change in the Christian life. There  
24 the *Confession* states, “They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new  
25 heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally…the  
26 dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and  
27 more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all  
28 saving graces, to the practice of true holiness…” (*WCF* 13.1).<sup>34</sup> This section of the *Confession*  
29 describes the real change and progress we have in Christ by the Spirit, even against the lusts  
30 of the body, and toward “true holiness.” In fact, section 2 begins by saying that “this  
31 sanctification is throughout, in the whole man,” language which clearly echoes the description  
32 of the extent of the corruption. Yet, this change that is “throughout, in the whole man” is “yet  
33 imperfect in this life: there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence  
34 ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit  
35 against the flesh” (*WCF* 13.2).<sup>35</sup>

36  
37 The *Confession* here describes an experience in which we have new life and old corruption  
38 existing at the same time, at war with each other. And, the *Confession* acknowledges that we  
39 do not always feel like we are winning battles: “In which war, …the remaining corruption, for

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<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> Col. 1:13; John 8:34, 36; Rom. 6:6-7, 14, 17-19, 22; Phil. 2:13.

<sup>33</sup> Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:14-25.

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17.

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1 a time, may much prevail..." (*WCF* 13.3).<sup>36</sup> At any given time in our life some aspect of that  
2 corruption may be "much prevailing," meaning that it may seem that we are not making  
3 progress but are stuck or even regressing. But this conflict is ultimately not symmetrical; it is  
4 not a tug of war that ends in a tie. Though corruption prevail for a time, the upper hand is  
5 given to growth in grace: "In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may  
6 much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of  
7 Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so the saints grow in grace,..." (*WCF* 13.3).<sup>37</sup>  
8 We are to be encouraged that the "corruption prevailing" phase is not the whole story, and by  
9 faith the regenerate cling to the promise that the Spirit's work in them cannot ultimately fail.  
10

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

12 There is one more aspect of the *Confession*'s picture of the Christian life that answers an  
13 important question regarding this true spiritual good that we do, which is nonetheless always  
14 imperfect and marred by remaining corruption. How is it that our good works can be  
15 considered truly good, if they are mixed with corruption and imperfect? Do not good works  
16 that are not completely good still fall short by definition? Indeed, Calvin says it this way: "If  
17 the true standard of righteousness is to love God with the whole heart, and mind, and strength,  
18 it is clear that the heart cannot incline otherwise without declining from righteousness...The  
19 law, I say, requires perfect love: we do not yield it. Our duty was to run, and we go on slowly  
20 limping."<sup>38</sup>  
21

22 The *Confession* agrees concerning our works, that "as they are good, they proceed from his  
23 Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and  
24 imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment" (*WCF* 16.5).<sup>39</sup> Is this a  
25 contradiction in the *Confession*'s description of the Christian life? No. The answer brings us  
26 back again to justification and our union with Christ: "Yet notwithstanding, the persons of  
27 believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him, not as  
28 though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God's sight; but that he,  
29 looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although  
30 accompanied with many weakness and imperfections" (*WCF* 16.6).<sup>40</sup> As an extension of  
31 God's justifying grace to us in Christ, he is truly pleased with our sincere, though mixed,  
32 efforts at good.  
33

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<sup>36</sup> Rom. 7:23-24; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14.

<sup>37</sup> Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 5:4.

<sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> Luke 10:27; Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 7:15, 18; Gal. 5:17.

<sup>40</sup> 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.

1      **II. APPLICATION TO CURRENT ISSUES**

2

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

15

16      **II.A. Importance of Concupiscence**

17

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

24

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

33

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

38

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

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<sup>41</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Buckley (London: George Routledge and Co., 1851), 23-24. See Fifth article of the First Decree of Session 5. Italics in this translation indicate Scripture quotations.

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

10  
11 But on this issue the concern went beyond sin to the gospel, beyond hamartiology to  
12 soteriology. Nineteenth-century Free Church of Scotland theologian and historian William  
13 Cunningham put it this way: “Scriptural views of the effects of the fall, and of the actual  
14 condition of men as fallen, firmly held and fully applied, are fitted to exert a most wholesome  
15 influence upon men’s whole conceptions of the way of salvation, and their whole impressions  
16 of divine things, and, indeed, are indispensable as a means to this end.” The Reformers were  
17 convinced that this was true regarding the question of concupiscence, and that the Roman  
18 view corresponded to serious errors in understanding the gospel. “Two of the most striking  
19 and dangerous tendencies or general characteristics of the theology of the Church of Rome  
20 are, first, exaggerating the efficacy and influence of external ordinances; and, secondly,  
21 providing for men meriting the favour of God and the rewards of heaven; and both these  
22 tendencies are exhibited in this single doctrine of the innocence or non-sinfulness of  
23 concupiscence.”<sup>44</sup>

24

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<sup>42</sup> 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, *Tracts*, 3:87.

<sup>43</sup> 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 *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 *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, *Historical Theology*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 1:536.

<sup>44</sup> Cunningham, *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, *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.

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1 Cunningham's perception of these tendencies in this doctrine is especially connected to the  
2 language of the Council of Trent that immediately precedes the direct mention of  
3 concupiscence:

4  
5       If any one denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is  
6       conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that  
7       all that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away, but says  
8       that it is only erased, or not imputed,—let him be anathema. For, in those who  
9       are *born again*, God hates nothing, because, *There is no condemnation to*  
10      *those who are truly buried together with Christ by baptism into death; who*  
11      *walk not according to the flesh, but, putting off the old man, and putting on*  
12      *the new one, who is created according to God*, are made innocent,  
13      immaculate, pure, harmless, and beloved of God, *heirs indeed of God, but*  
14      *joint heirs with Christ*; so that there is nothing whatever to retard them from  
15      entrance into heaven.<sup>45</sup>

16  
17     The significance of this quotation is Trent's description of what is done to "all that which has  
18     the true and proper nature of sin." The Council opposed those who would deny that it is *taken*  
19     *away*, but only say that it is *erased* and *not imputed*. The Reformers saw in this a gospel-  
20     destroying shift from the imputation of Christ's righteousness to a confidence in our own.  
21     Though reference is made to Romans 8:1, the righteousness that Trent describes as belonging  
22     to the Christian is not imputed and alien, but infused and inherent. To the Reformers this  
23     struck at the heart of the gospel. The Christian would be encouraged to rest in a righteousness  
24     within himself. The paragraph on concupiscence follows immediately, so as to say that  
25     though the experience of the pull of concupiscence was still there, the Christian was to  
26     believe that all sin was ontologically removed from him (therefore concupiscence must not  
27     be sin). The Reformers, however, stressed the importance of recognizing the ongoing  
28     presence of *sinful* concupiscence in the Christian precisely because it highlighted that the  
29     righteousness given is only and completely an *imputation* of that which is Christ's.

30  
31     Cunningham mentioned as a second tendency, "exaggerating the efficacy and influence of  
32     external ordinances." This was not only in the fact that this "removal" of sin is accomplished  
33     by the sacrament of baptism, but also in the way the sacramental system of the church would  
34     then relate to the Christian life. Since "all that pertains to the true essence of sin" is removed,  
35     the Christian is in an innocent, pure state—the corruption from original sin is no longer sin.  
36     The only sin that remains possible is actual sin, which would then be dealt with through the  
37     sacrament of penance: "Men may still, indeed, incur guilt by actual transgressions of God's  
38     law, but the church of Rome has provided for their comfort the sacrament of penance, another  
39     external ordinance by which this guilt is taken away."<sup>46</sup> In summary, the Reformers saw two  
40     dangers in the Roman view of concupiscence, a view of the Christian life which was heavily  
41     weighted towards reliance on church authority and rites, combined with a view of self and  
42     everyday Christian experience that would be more confident than it ought to be in maintaining  
43     a pure avoidance of sin. In other words, the daily Christian life would be characterized by a

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<sup>45</sup> *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 540.

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1       weakened awareness of one's constant need for the grace and righteousness of Christ (as  
2       opposed to the grace administered through the sacramental system of the church).

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

### 12      **II.B. Applications to Same-Sex Attraction**

#### 13      **II.B.I. The Common Dynamic of Concupiscence**

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

23      The truth is that if we think humbly and carefully about our own spontaneous thoughts,  
24      feelings, and desires, we would recognize that we are all much more alike than different. Who  
25      has been a Christian for some length of time who is not aware of at least one particular area  
26      of struggle with sin in which whatever success is had in curbing behavior is nonetheless  
27      accompanied by a troubling inward draw towards the sin, like a stubborn memory of sinful  
28      pleasure that interrupts incessantly and uninvited? Who does not feel the passion of sinful  
29      anger rising up without conscious deliberation or decision, even in contradiction to a prior  
30      deliberate decision to "deal with" our anger problem? Even our lack of feeling is often  
31      concupiscent: that which is most good and would glorify God does not delight us as it should;  
32      that which is evil does not repel us as it should. Luther put it this way, "For it is like a sick  
33      man whose mortal illness is not only the loss of health of one of his members, but it is, in  
34      addition to the lack of health in all his members, the weakness of all of his senses and powers,  
35      culminating even in his disdain for those things which are healthful and in his desire for those  
36      things which make him sick."<sup>47</sup> Good Reformed teaching on sin places us all on equal footing  
37      in our need of Christ's imputed righteousness.

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Walter G. Tillmanns and Jacob A. O. Preus, vol. 25 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), 300.

1      **II.B.2. *Continued Corruption***

2  
3      Second, according to the system of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, we should not be  
4      surprised, but rather expect that concupiscence in general, and specific instances like  
5      homosexual attraction, would continue in the life of a believer. The *Confession* is clear;  
6      corruption remains “in every part” (13.2). We would never say to a new believer who has a  
7      history of destructive anger, “Now that you are a Christian, you will never again feel a rush  
8      of anger rise up within you at the wrong time, for a selfish reason, out of proportion to the  
9      situation, or in any other way that contradicts God’s law.” Neither should we communicate to  
10     a believer with a history of homosexual attraction the expectation that this will simply  
11     disappear.<sup>48</sup>

12  
13     Why is this important? First, it has not been uncommon for those with homosexual attractions  
14     to be made, intentionally or unintentionally, to feel as though they cannot be real Christians  
15     unless they experience in this life a reversal or eradication of their attractions. If this  
16     experience is presented in the form of a promise, as in some expressions of what has been  
17     called “reparative therapy,” it is not a promise based on a full understanding of the gospel. If  
18     the reversal or eradication is presented in the form of a demand, in the exhortations or  
19     discipline of the church, then that demand is an anti-gospel that only crushes and condemns—  
20     especially if the admonitions are applied selectively to this form of concupiscence but not to  
21     other common varieties, both sexual and other. This acknowledgement of the remnants of  
22     corruption in believers does not negate the call to fight against that corruption; our endeavor  
23     to oppose and put to death what is earthly in us (Col.3:5) demands a commitment to fight all  
24     of our sin. However, to teach that our sinful corruption must be entirely removed from any  
25     part of us in order to be considered truly repentant is a spiritually treacherous perversion of  
26     the doctrine of repentance.

27  
28      **II.B.3. *Real Change***

29  
30      Third, according to the doctrinal system of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, we should  
31      not rule out, but rather expect that concupiscence in general, and specific instances like  
32      homosexual attraction, would be areas in which the believer would see some progress toward  
33      truly righteous feelings and actions. Our previous point had to do with the danger of creating  
34      the expectation that our experience of corruption will entirely disappear in this life if we are  
35      regenerate. This point addresses what might be considered an error on the other end of the  
36      spectrum, the error of asserting that change is not possible or not to be sought. But just as the  
37      *Confession* is clear that corruption remains in every part, it is also clear that the sanctifying  
38      work of the Spirit is felt in the “whole man.” Someone with homosexual attraction ought not  
39      close himself or herself off to the pursuit of, and hope of, real change in those attractions, even  
40      if that change is incomplete and mixed.

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41  
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.

1   **II.B.4. Celebrating Sincere Efforts**

2  
3   Fourth, according to the system of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the remaining  
4   experience of homosexual attractions notwithstanding, God is truly pleased with one's sincere  
5   efforts to follow Christ in holiness because he looks on even those imperfect deeds as being  
6   “in Christ,” and covered by the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness (*WCF* 16.6). This  
7   point assumes the *Confession’s* assertion that gospel change in an individual’s life is always  
8   incomplete and mixed with corruption, but then puts that assertion in the form of a positive  
9   encouragement. In Christ, every bit of progress, every moment of victory over temptation,  
10   even victory over the temptation that comes from the sinful corruption remaining inside of us,  
11   is to be celebrated as a gift of the new life of Christ with confidence that it pleases God as  
12   such.

13

14   **II.B.5. Moral Difference**

15

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

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<sup>49</sup> 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 of 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 attraction<sup>50</sup> 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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<sup>50</sup> 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.

1   **Sanctification—The Already-Not-Yet Tension**

2  
3   The call to discipleship for all believers means that none of us can be content to remain  
4   unchanged. Indeed, in and through Christ we are in the process of being changed, conformed  
5   to the image of Christ. But what does that change look like? What kind of change is normative  
6   for believers who experience same-sex attraction? These questions have generated much  
7   debate. There are two common errors we might encounter in our attempts to answer such  
8   questions, one which reflects an over-realized eschatology and one which reflects an under-  
9   realized eschatology.

10  
11   The error of some Christian approaches to same-sex sexual desire has been to tie faithfulness  
12   to the elimination of homosexual temptation (or even the development of heterosexual desire)  
13   as though if Christians really did enough therapy, had enough faith, or repented sufficiently,  
14   God would deliver them in some final and complete way, changing their orientation. This  
15   perspective reflects a sort of over-realized eschatology—a view that what we will be finally  
16   and fully in the new creation will be realized in that way in the present life. Against such a  
17   view, our *Confession* reminds us that even in the regenerate, the corruption of sin remains in  
18   this life (WCF 6.5). The task for believers is to pursue faithfulness and obedience in this life,  
19   holding in view our new creation selves into which we are progressively, though often with  
20   many fits and starts, being conformed.

21  
22   The error of other Christian approaches to same-sex sexual desire is to treat it as a sort of fixed  
23   reality that has no malleability or capacity for change whatsoever. In its most extreme forms,  
24   this reflects our broader culture's notions of one's sexual orientation being a completely fixed  
25   reality—contending that there is no sense in which sexual desires can meaningfully change  
26   over time. The problem with this under-realized eschatology is that in its attempts to push  
27   back against views of change that overstate the Christian's sense of having "arrived," it  
28   suggests that there is no journey to take at all and no progress to be expected. However, the  
29   Biblical perspective is that the Holy Spirit uses repentance with the ordinary means of grace  
30   to advance Christian understanding, godly desires, and Biblical obedience. If a believer  
31   struggles with habitual sexual sin, we should expect to see real meaningful change in their  
32   behaviors as they repent and mortify their sin, and pursue holiness in aggressive, practical  
33   ways. If believers are routinely tempted along similar lines over the course of life, they should  
34   expect that the less they give in to that temptation and establish deep habits of holiness, over  
35   time the pull of their hearts toward that sin should lessen, or even be drowned out by the  
36   expulsive power of a greater affection for Christ.<sup>51</sup>

37  
38   Therefore, it is critically important that pastors and leaders in our churches communicate  
39   clearly about the already-not-yet tension of our experience of sanctification in this life. We  
40   ought not over-promise or tie God's character to promises of complete deliverance in this life  
41   that he does not make. However, we also ought not treat same-sex sexual desire as a  
42   completely static reality that will involve no significant effort on the part of the believer to  
43   war against, regardless of whether such warring produces heterosexual desire. Simply put, the

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<sup>51</sup> See Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," in *Sermons and Discourses*, 2 vols. (New York: Carter, 1846), 2:271.

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

5

## 6 The Christian’s Identity

7

8 **Biblical Identity**

9

10 Any Christian understanding of our selves—who we believe we are—must first and foremost  
11 reflect the basic building blocks of reality as described in Scripture. Particularly, if we are  
12 going to think about identity in a distinctively Christian way, the redemptive-historical  
13 narrative (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) of the Bible offers us a helpful path.<sup>52</sup>  
14 Scripture begins with the affirmation that humans are created in the image of God, male and  
15 female (Gen. 1:27-28; WCF 4.2). This affirmation is the foundational reality of all human  
16 identity. It tells us who we are inherently and *ontologically*—in our very essence. We are  
17 made by God and therefore all of our self-understanding is dependent upon the God who made  
18 us and sustains our lives. We are made male and female and therefore these categories are not  
19 merely cultural constructions or fluid components of our self-understanding—they are  
20 identities that are imprinted upon us in our creation by God.<sup>53</sup>

21

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

29

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

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<sup>52</sup> 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?”

<sup>53</sup> 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.

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1 our own (*WCF* 11). Second, we are sanctified and progressively conformed to the image of  
2 Christ as new creations, with the abiding presence and power of Christ as the first fruits  
3 (1 Cor. 15:20, 2 Cor. 5:17; *WCF* 13).<sup>54</sup> Finally, the ultimate perseverance and glorification of  
4 every Christian is secured by their union with Christ.

### 5 ***Sexual Identity***

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>54</sup> 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."

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1 sins committed against a person, and while sinful, should be treated with great pastoral care  
2 for the person who has been victimized and sinned against. The origins and development of  
3 sexual desire remain complex and, in many ways, mysterious. It is possible to conceive of the  
4 experience of same-sex attraction as simultaneously a part of the remaining corruption of  
5 original sin as well as the misery of living in a fallen world, one of the ways our bodies  
6 themselves groan for redemption (Rom. 8:22-23; WCF 6.6; WLC 17-19).<sup>55</sup> For many of these  
7 Christians, the burden of shame is already great and what is especially needed from pastors  
8 and mature believers is our preaching and living out of the grace of the gospel that frees us all  
9 from guilt and shame.

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

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

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

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<sup>55</sup> 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.

1   **Terminology**

2  
3   In light of the theological foundations for human identity as it relates to sexuality, what can  
4   we say about the various issues around terminology that have taken up so much time and space  
5   in current debates which the General Assembly has asked us to address?

6  
7   ***On Language***

8  
9   We begin by noting four principles regarding language. First, the language we choose to  
10   describe reality matters. Our language and terminology should seek to faithfully and helpfully  
11   articulate the truths of our doctrine which are rooted in Scripture. We should choose our  
12   language carefully with the goal that it expresses the truth and communicates clearly and  
13   winsomely in our particular context. Second, language itself is a secondary issue relative to  
14   the doctrine it expresses. Sometimes there are disagreements about language even when the  
15   underlying doctrinal commitments seem to be the same. Thus, while doctrinal truth is rightly  
16   understood as obligating our affirmation, issues around terminology are more properly  
17   understood as issues of wisdom, necessitating careful Scriptural and pastoral guidance. Third,  
18   we must recognize that the meanings of terms change over time and that definitions may not  
19   be shared across different groups of people.<sup>56</sup> This is especially true in the area of sexuality,  
20   where terminology seems to be developing with increasing rapidity and where there may be  
21   few shared definitions across communities. Finally, issues surrounding sexual identity, and  
22   identity more generally, cannot be reduced to language alone. There is a way to make being  
23   gay central to personhood, while still using circumspect or “acceptable” language. Similarly,  
24   there is a way to make being gay far less central to one’s ethos and identity, even while using  
25   potentially less helpful language. For these reasons, how persons express themselves is not  
26   finally determinative of their identity.

27  
28   ***Gay and Gay Christian***

29  
30   Take for instance the word *gay*, which has undergone a massive lexical transformation in the  
31   past seventy-five years. Today it most commonly refers to a sense of self in relation to ongoing  
32   sexual attraction to the same sex. However, different communities define that sense of self  
33   with different nuances. Some Christians might describe themselves as gay merely as a way of  
34   articulating that they experience prominent and persistent attractions to the same sex, using  
35   terminology our culture is familiar with. Others find the term *gay* to be an important part of  
36   being honest about the reality of their sexual attractions, especially given that other terms like  
37   same-sex attraction are perceived by some to be associated with “ex-gay” or orientation-  
38   change approaches.<sup>57</sup> Other Christians might describe themselves as gay in order to identify

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<sup>56</sup> 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*.”

<sup>57</sup> 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.’”

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1 with the LGBT community as a group of people with a shared story, culture, and experience.  
2 Generally, when the term *gay* is used in our culture, it denotes all of the above, along with the  
3 assumption that this experience is a natural and good part of diverse human experience that is  
4 to be celebrated and can be acted upon as a person sees fit. Thus, the word *gay* can denote a  
5 number of things which may vary from a factual observation about one's experiences, to a  
6 deeply unbiblical understanding about one's identity and desires. Despite the dynamic and  
7 diverse uses of the term, the word *gay* is not a neutral word in our cultural discourse, and  
8 Christians should be mindful of these dynamics when considering use of the term.

9  
10 Given the potential issues with the term *gay*, we can see how the term *gay Christian* might be  
11 open to an even greater degree of misunderstanding. Some use the term in a simple adjectival  
12 manner, suggesting that the adjective *gay* is merely meant to describe which particular  
13 Christians one is referring to (namely those experience attractions to the same sex) with no  
14 intentions to make a definitive statement about identity. Others use it to articulate how their  
15 being “in Christ” has shaped their approach to their gayness or same-sex attraction (see for  
16 instance those who use the term *celibate gay Christian*). Because of these dynamics, it is  
17 apparent that the term *gay Christian* is not adequately clear or theologically precise in  
18 expressing the type of Reformed Biblical self-understanding we described earlier. The term  
19 can be made more unhelpful by the fact that there are many who use it to describe a view of  
20 their sexual identity that is “affirming”—that believes that same-sex sexual desires and  
21 relationships are blessed by God. There is an understandable desire among some celibate  
22 Christians who identify as gay to utilize the common parlance of our culture as a missional or  
23 apologetic tool, hoping to redefine for our culture a way of being gay that in fact submits those  
24 desires to the lordship of Christ. However, there is a substantial corresponding risk of  
25 syncretism in such an approach. This potential danger toward syncretism can manifest as an  
26 over-identification with the LGBT community (over and against a primary identification with  
27 the church) or even the formation of an LGBT subculture within the church. In view of the  
28 twin dangers of misunderstanding and syncretism, we believe it is generally unwise to use the  
29 language of *gay Christian*.

30  
31 Given this conclusion, how should we respond to fellow believers in our churches who may  
32 use such language? First, we ought not start from the assumption that they are being unfaithful  
33 or living in active rebellion to God. Rather, in the context of established relationships, pastors  
34 and leaders in the church ought to ask questions and seek to understand each individual's  
35 story. Why do they use that language? Have they thought through the relative benefits and  
36 dangers? Noting the range of possible meanings of terms like *gay* and *gay Christian*, we would  
37 do well to seek understanding before imparting advice. In practical and plain terms, the issue  
38 of terminology is more likely a matter for shepherding in wisdom, and not in and of itself  
39 grounds for discipline.

### 40 ***Orientation***

41  
42 How then should we think of the language of sexual orientation? Insofar as the term  
43 *orientation* is used descriptively to articulate a particular set of experiences, namely the  
44 persistent and predominant sexual attractions of an individual, it can remain useful as a way

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1 of classifying those experiences in contrast to the experiences of the majority of other people.  
2 However, insofar as the term *orientation* carries with it a set of assumptions about the nature  
3 of that experience that is unbiblical (e.g., overemphasized rigidity, its normativity, etc.), then  
4 the terminology may require qualification or even rejection in some circumstances.<sup>58</sup>

### 5 **Singleness, Friendship, and Community**

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

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

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

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<sup>58</sup> 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>).

<sup>59</sup> 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).

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1 that were needed before marriage or that single people need. Friendship is the proper category  
2 for thinking of the type of close, intimate, same-sex relationships that Scripture upholds.  
3 David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, Paul and Timothy—each relationship was framed by an  
4 understanding of deep, committed, abiding friendship.

5  
6 Recently some Christians who experience same-sex attraction have proposed celibate  
7 partnerships as a way of adhering to the traditional sexual ethic while retaining certain  
8 romantic elements of exclusive relationships. However, we find such practices to be unwise  
9 and inconsistent with the depictions of deep same-sex relationships in Scripture, which are  
10 instead cast in the context of familial or filial relations. Scripture frames our relationships  
11 with fellow believers as familial (Mark 10:29-30, Titus 2; WCF 25.2)—the church is “a place  
12 to love and be loved, a family in which to grow.”<sup>60</sup> While friendships can be deep and abiding,  
13 they are not by nature romantic or exclusive. The attempt to retain aspects of the marital  
14 relationship in the context of celibate partnerships is fundamentally a category mistake: it  
15 seeks to have aspects of romance or marriage without its fullness, instead of rightly rooting  
16 this type of deeply caring, same-sex relationship in its proper relational category of family or  
17 friendship. The attempt to bring aspects of the marital relationship into a non-marital  
18 relationship is itself a violation of the seventh commandment. While it is beyond the scope of  
19 this Report to seek to sort out the specific lines between expressions of marriage, family, and  
20 friendship, at its core these questions are issues of the heart and motivation—mature believers  
21 should seek honest self-examination and the wisdom of others as they seek to remain faithful  
22 to the commandment.

23  
24 Our churches must be places where single people (who are called to a vocation of singleness  
25 or who are simply currently single) can find deep and meaningful community if they are to be  
26 places where those who are persistently attracted to the same sex can find belonging.<sup>61</sup>  
27 Singleness should not be treated merely as a problem to be solved. For some it is a vocation  
28 from the Lord whose expression in the service of the church provides resources that our  
29 churches desperately need (1 Cor. 7:32, 38; WLC 138). The church ought to be a place which  
30 proves to be a spiritual family for single people—part of the cure for the loneliness of the  
31 single life.

32  
33 The Confession rightly cautions against entangling vows of the single life (WLC 139).  
34 Nonetheless, Christians with same-sex attraction who are pursuing chastity and yet do not  
35 experience attractions to the opposite sex may properly be considered continent (WLC 138)  
36 and may very well have an indefinite or life-long call to singleness. The perspective that the  
37 *only* Biblical resolution to same-sex attraction is marriage is not a consensus perspective that  
38 can be proven from our Standards nor does it seem to give proper regard to the rights and  
39 dignity of both parties in the marriage relationship (Eph. 5:31; 1 Peter 3:7). While marriage is

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<sup>60</sup> 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).

<sup>61</sup> 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).

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1 one remedy “for preventing of uncleanness” (*WCF* 24.2), pastoral wisdom dictates that we  
2 are sensitive to the fact that single persons often remain unmarried for a variety of  
3 understandable reasons. When the single person embraces the gospel advantages of being  
4 single, this is a *charisma* given by the Spirit for the edification of the body (1 Cor. 7:7, 32-35;  
5 12:7). Regardless of whether the singleness of our people is temporary or persistent in this  
6 life, an eschatological understanding of our sexuality recognizes that in the new heavens and  
7 new earth, marriage will give way to a union of even greater intimacy with God and the  
8 communion of saints (Matt. 22:30). Thus, single people in our churches can also help model  
9 this eschatological reality for us in their daily faithfulness to God and service to his people in  
10 the body of Christ.

11  
12 Scripture and our *Confession* provide the core and essential resources for the pastoral care of  
13 those who experience same-sex attraction. They give us unchanging theological principles  
14 from which we must care for those in our churches for whom this is a struggle. In many ways,  
15 the discourse around the various applications of these principles in our particular cultural  
16 moment remains ongoing. Thus, we encourage our churches to hold firmly to the vision of  
17 Christian discipleship put forth in the Scriptures and in our *Confession* while offering  
18 compassionate pastoral care to those whom we are called to shepherd in our particular  
19 contexts.

20  
21 Finally, we rejoice with our brothers and sisters who, while experiencing ongoing attraction  
22 to the same sex and living in a culture which would encourage them to embrace and act on  
23 those attractions, instead pursue lives of faithfulness through chastity and obedience to Christ  
24 by daily echoing Jesus’s words of “not my will, but yours, be done” with respect to their  
25 sexuality (Luke 22:42). In this, they model for us all what it means to heed Jesus’ teaching:  
26 “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”  
27 (Mark 8:34). May it be that thanks to the finished work of Christ, and at the end of our  
28 sometimes faltering and imperfect obedience, we each hear the divine accolade: “Well done,  
29 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

1 rights. Under no circumstances must we allow regressive forces—the foremost of which  
2 is religion—to take this away from us again.

3  
4 This modern moral story about sexuality creates a plot-line of a struggle between courageous  
5 heroes and bigoted, oppressive villains—all toward a happy ending. This particular moral  
6 story, however, is based on several beliefs that are not proven—only assumed. They are the  
7 modern understandings of freedom and identity, and as we will see, of history. Christians  
8 cannot speak to the world about sex in a compelling way if we merely answer the story with  
9 a list of moral imperatives, however Biblical. We must put the Christian sex ethic into a  
10 counter-narrative, one based on the Bible’s great story of redemption. And in order to do that,  
11 we must face three challenges.

12  
13 **THREE CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY**

14  
15 **Challenge 1: Addressing the modern identity narrative—unseen, deep background**  
16 **beliefs about identity and freedom/power.**

17  
18 The narrative of modern sexual liberation feels compelling to so many because it is based on  
19 background beliefs of identity and freedom which have been deeply instilled in us through  
20 cultural institutions for nearly three generations.

21  
22 **Identity.** The Christian prohibitions about marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism make  
23 no sense to most people because of their belief that sexuality is crucial for the expression of  
24 identity. And behind that belief is the very concept of the modern self.

25  
26 In our culture sex is no longer seen as a way to honor God and to create and nurture new  
27 human life. Most believe something like this: “If you want to use sex for the development of  
28 new human life, that’s an option and your choice, but it’s not the primary reason people have  
29 sex. Rather, sex is for individual fulfillment and self-realization.” This modern view of  
30 identity is often called “expressive individualism”—the idea that deep within are feelings and  
31 desires that must be discovered and unlocked and expressed to become a true self. Identity is  
32 now found in one’s desires, while in the past it was found in one’s duties and relationships  
33 with God, family, and community.<sup>62</sup> Determining—and acting on—your sexual desires is  
34 considered a key part of that process of becoming an authentic person.

35  
36 Today, this view of identity is not conveyed with arguments but rather is presented as a simple  
37 given, not to be questioned. Slogans such as “be true to yourself” and “live your own truth”  
38 are repeated in countless ways verbal and non-verbal and sink deep into people’s hearts. Any  
39 other view is seen as psychologically repressive and therefore unhealthy.

40  
41 But the modern self is extremely fragile. Because it is based on nothing but inward feelings,  
42 it is constantly changing from year to year or even month to month. Modern identity requires  
43 searching through ever shifting and often contradictory emotions and desires to determine a

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<sup>62</sup> See Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, With a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

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

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

20  
21 The problems with this post-modern view of freedom and power are as significant as the  
22 modern view of identity. It brings a self-contradictory “hard relativism.” If all social systems  
23 are chains of power forged through discourse—so that all truth claims and moral judgments  
24 are really just ways of exerting power—then why would one particular set of power-brokers  
25 be “wrong” or “unjust”? How could you determine which sets of socially-structured power  
26 relationships are unjust (and which are not) unless you had a non-culturally constructed,  
27 objective moral norm by which to judge between them? And where would such a transcendent  
28 moral absolute come from, if there is no God?

29  
30 These contemporary views of identity and freedom are in many ways at odds with each other.  
31 (The view of identity is individualist and Freudian; the view of power is Marxist and  
32 Nietzschean.) Yet over the last 20 years they have been merged and become dominant and  
33 pervasive, particularly in our popular media. Romantic comedies, situation comedies,  
34 children’s cartoons, Disney’s and others’ movies for children—all lift these beliefs up and  
35 forge them into *the* heroic narrative of our time (the one spelled out at the beginning of this  
36 essay). The meaning of life is to determine who you are and to throw off the shackles of an  
37 oppressive society that refuses to accept and include you. It is this story that is to be our  
38 guiding light in making life decisions and is to serve as the shared value of a free society.

39  
40 Arguably, Christians cannot make a plausible case for the Biblical sex ethic because in many  
41 ways we have adapted too much to—or even adopted—the contemporary views of identity  
42 and freedom in the way we preach and do ministry. Some have pointed out that the ethos of  
43 evangelical youth ministry has been highly emotivist for years. The emphasis has not been on  
44 Biblical theology and doctrine but almost exclusively on how Christ builds up our self-esteem

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1 and meets our emotional needs. The prosperity gospel, churches and ministries without  
2 membership and discipline, consumer-oriented mega-churches—all adapt heavily to the  
3 culture of expressive individualism rather than challenging it.

4  
5 **Conclusion.** As long as people in our culture hold these views of identity and freedom, they  
6 cannot find the Christian view of sexuality plausible. And so no Christian sexuality apologetic  
7 can have any real impact unless it spends time and effort to reveal the deeply problematic  
8 nature of these background beliefs. In short, our sexuality apologetic cannot talk only about  
9 sex. Only in a compelling, Biblical framework of identity, of being in Christ, and of  
10 discipleship, of losing oneself in the love and service of God in order to find one's true self  
11 (Matthew 10:39) will all of the Christian teaching about the meaning of sex make sense.

12  
13 **Challenge 2: Addressing the historical narrative—ignorance of the first (Christian)**  
14 **“sexual revolution.”**

15  
16 As we saw above, the main cultural story about sexuality is to a great degree a historical  
17 narrative—one that provides a “history of sex” that is now widely believed. It serves as  
18 another layer of assumptions that frame modern people’s responses to Christian views of  
19 sexuality. Those who believe this account of our sexual history will not be able to find  
20 Christian views plausible. We have been given a great deal of help, however, toward  
21 exploding the popular history-of-sex myths in the ground-breaking scholarship by Kyle  
22 Harper, *From Shame to Sin*.<sup>63</sup>

23  
24 **History or Myths?**

25  
26 Popular history says: (a) The Roman world was a time and place of “polymorphous sexual  
27 freedom” and “sexual diversity”;<sup>64</sup> (b) but Christianity came in with its highly restrictive sex  
28 ethic, which it imposed through legislation. But Harper writes: “Over the last generation, as  
29 the history of sexuality became one of the great scholarly enterprises, the popular story in  
30 which Christianity put an end to pagan freedom with the body was exposed as a caricature, at  
31 best.”<sup>65</sup> How so?

32  
33 In the Greco-Roman world it was understood that while respectable women had to be virgins  
34 at marriage and could have sex with no one but their spouses, husbands—and all males—were  
35 expected to have sex with servants and slaves, prostitutes, poor women, and boys. Men could  
36 essentially force themselves on anyone below them in the social order; they could have sex  
37 with anyone but the wife of another man of status. This was, for men at least, a permissive sex  
38 ethic. Why then, long before the Caesars became professing Christians, did the Church grow

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<sup>63</sup> 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, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Hillel Halkin, “The Persistence of the Oldest Hatred,” Review of *How to Fight Anti-Semitism* by Bari Weiss. *The New York Times*, September 10, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> *Shame to Sin*, 2.

1 rapidly as millions of people voluntarily adopted our faith's more restrictive standards for  
2 sexual behavior? How could such a restrictive code have won out culturally?

3  
4 The short answer is this: that while the pagan behavioral code was more permissive, at least  
5 for men, the underlying logic or vision for sex propounded by Christians was vastly more  
6 positive and humane than the pagan one.<sup>66</sup> And the practical outcome was far more protective  
7 of the interests of both women and children. How so?

8  
9 Every culture has a sexual morality, and that morality is grounded in beliefs about what sex is  
10 *for*. A sex act is allowed if it meets that culture's *telos* (i.e., purpose) for sex and disallowed  
11 if it does not. In Rome sexual morality was determined by the social status of the parties and,  
12 therefore, by *power*. Sex was for the personal pleasure and enhancement of people with social  
13 rank. The rightness or wrongness of sexual acts depended on whether or not they kept persons  
14 in a right relationship with the *polis*, the social order and hierarchy. Those with more power  
15 and social honor (men over women, high social status over lower social status) had more  
16 sexual freedom than those with less.

17  
18 ***The First (Christian) Sexual Revolution***

19  
20 Christianity, however, brought in the first sexual revolution in the West. Christianity changed  
21 the "foundational logic" of sex so that "the cosmos replaced the city as the framework of  
22 morality."<sup>67</sup> Sex acts were judged as to whether or not they kept persons in a right relationship  
23 with the *cosmos*, God's created and redemptive order. Christians' sexual behavior had to be  
24 patterned after God's saving love for us. As God gave himself to us in Jesus Christ and we  
25 give ourselves exclusively to him, so sex is to be practiced only within a life-long covenant of  
26 marriage. As union with Christ bridges the gap and unites God and humanity, so sex is to be  
27 practiced in a marriage uniting two different genders. (See below under Challenge #3.) In a  
28 revolutionary break with the culture, then, Christians insisted that the rightness or wrongness  
29 of sexual acts be determined not by social status and power but by *covenantal love and gender*  
30 *difference*.

31  
32 There was an immediate concrete result that all could see. By breaking the connection of sex  
33 with the social order, Christianity guarded the vulnerable from exploitation. No man could  
34 demand sex of a woman without giving up his independence and committing his whole life to  
35 her. No man could demand sex from his servants. The vulnerable—women, slaves, and  
36 children—were protected by the insistence that sex occur only within the safety of the  
37 covenantal union of marriage. But beyond these practical results, the "underlying logic" of  
38 Christianity regarding sex went much further and higher. It re-imagined sex as no longer a  
39 mere appetite that we could barely control but rather as a joyous, even sacred, expression that  
40 reflects the way God is saving the world.

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<sup>66</sup> Harper writes that what happened as Christianity grew in the West was "a transformation in the deep logic of sexual morality." *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

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### 1    ***The Second (Modern) Sexual Revolution***

2    How does the Christian sexual revolution relate to the second, modern “sexual revolution”?

3    First, it is important to recognize that the very humanitarian values of our culture—including  
4    its affirmation of sex and consent—come from Christianity. The modern emphasis on the  
5    goodness of the physical body and of sex, as well as on consent and mutuality (1 Corinthians  
6    7:1-4) without a double standard for men and women, were Christian gifts to the modern  
7    world. Indeed, Paul’s statement that “the husband’s body does not belong to himself but to his  
8    wife,” just as the wife’s belongs to the husband, was a radical, unprecedented declaration in  
9    that patriarchal culture. Harper writes: “The social assumptions of pre-Christian sexual  
10   morality, such as the casual exploitation of the bodies of [powerless] non-persons, seem  
11   incomprehensible [to us today] precisely because the Christian revolution so completely swept  
12   away that old order....”<sup>68</sup> Harper here is referring to a growing body of scholarship  
13   demonstrating that the modern secular person believing fiercely in the equal rights and dignity  
14   of every individual is really borrowing a belief about human nature that originally developed  
15   from the Bible and grew out of Christian societies.<sup>69</sup>

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

30   Modern culture’s desire to retain some parts of the Christian sex ethic but not the others has  
31   created huge tension. The idea of consent goes best with covenant, not hook-ups.<sup>70</sup> Women in

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<sup>68</sup> Kyle Harper, “The First Sexual Revolution: Kyle Harper shows how Christianity transformed the ancient world,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 279, 2018, 41+. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/01/the-first-sexual-revolution> (accessed 04/26/2020).

<sup>69</sup> See Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019); Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150-1625* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1997); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> See Zoe Strimpel, “Why the Young are Falling Out of Love with Sex,” *Unherd*, November 26, 2019, which is a good look at “the state of modern sex.” Follow the links in the article to other empirical studies. <https://unherd.com/2019/11/why-are-the-young-falling-out-of-love-with-sex/?=refinnar> (accessed 04/26/2020).

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

6

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

9

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

13 Christian theology answers that sex is part of the image of God—it must image God and in  
14 particular his redeeming love. Sex is not about enhancing one’s power but about mutually  
15 giving up power to one another in love, as Christ did for us. The Christian answer to the  
16 question, “Why must sex be within heterosexual marriage?” gets us into the very heart of the  
17 gospel. We should not, then, present the sex ethic without rooting it in the Bible’s doctrines  
18 of God, of creation, and of redemption. Certainly Paul argues in this way. After reminding us  
19 that we are united with Christ by the Spirit (“He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit  
20 with him” 1 Corinthians 6:17), he immediately says in verse 18: “Flee from sexual immorality  
21 (porneia).” Why is sex outside of marriage wrong?<sup>71</sup> We note that Paul does not merely say,  
22 “It is wrong because the Word of God says so” although he certainly could have done that.  
23 Rather, he writes “or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...?”  
24 (1 Cor. 6:18, 19)<sup>72</sup> He is saying that sexual immorality is wrong because of our union with  
25 Christ, which must serve as the pattern for sexual union.

26

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

30

31 **GROUNDING THE PURPOSES OF SEX IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**

32

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

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

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<sup>71</sup> 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 guidance rooted in theology. But what Paul says here would hold for any sexual activity outside of marriage.

<sup>72</sup> 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.

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1      relationships. A consumer connection is about mutual self-fulfillment; the individual's needs  
2      are the non-negotiables and are more important than the relationship, which is provisional and  
3      easily terminated. A covenant, however, is based on mutual self-giving and putting the needs  
4      of the other party and the good of the relationship before your own. In marriage, spouses give  
5      up their independence for interdependence. They give their entire selves to each other—  
6      emotionally, physically, legally, economically. We must not "split the self" as modernity does,  
7      so sexual partners give their bodies to one another but not the rest of themselves.<sup>73</sup> The rule  
8      "no sex outside marriage" sounds "sex-negative" to modern people, but the opposite is the  
9      case. It elevates sex from a mere consumer good into a way to create the deepest community  
10     between two human beings—as well as a way to honor and resemble the One who gave  
11     himself wholly for us so we can be liberated to give ourselves exclusively to him.

12

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

16

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

32

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

36

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

---

<sup>73</sup> 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>.

1 unity with life-giving power. And if a marriage brings new lives into the world, the presence  
2 of both a father and a mother gives children deep, long-term relationships with and access to  
3 both of the gendered halves of humanity and therefore to the full range of human strengths  
4 and abilities. Again, this fits the pattern of our union with Christ. Just as the union of male  
5 and female produces the “fruit of the womb—a reward” (Psalm 127:3)—so the union of Christ  
6 with his people produces the fruit of new life in Christ, through conversion (John 15:16;  
7 Rom 1:13; Col 1:6,10) and growth into Christ-likeness (Gal 5:22-23).

8  
9 **Summary.** To recap: sex is (A) for self-giving, which is only complete if there is a life-long  
10 covenant, (B) for the bridging of difference across the barrier between male and female, and  
11 (C) for the creation and nurture of life. These theological purposes explain the ethic—why  
12 sexual intimacy is only to be experienced within marriage between a man and a woman.

13 **TOWARD A CHRISTIAN SEXUAL APOLOGETIC**

14 **The Rationale for the Christian View of Marriage**

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>74</sup> 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).

1    **The Christian Counter-Narrative of Sexuality**

- 2
- 3    1. ***The brutality of sex in the old world.*** Greco-Roman society was the historic forerunner of  
4    all western culture. In the ancient world sexual standards were very permissive. Sex was  
5    seen merely as a way to enhance personal pleasure and fulfillment of those in power, and  
6    so any sex was permitted if it did not upset the social order of the time—men over women,  
7    owners over slaves, rich over poor. While wives could not have sex with others, their  
8    husbands could have sex with most anyone they desired. This led to much brutality.  
9
- 10    2. ***A new personal identity.*** Christianity came into the world with a message of grace, namely,  
11    that it was possible to have personal communion with God in a relationship of love as a  
12    free gift through the work of Jesus the Son of God who died and rose again for us. This  
13    message of salvation by grace rather than good works, morality, respectability, or pedigree  
14    had a social-levelling effect. Christians who had social status in society stood in exactly  
15    the same place as sinners in need of grace as did the social outsiders and moral failures  
16    (cf. John 3 and John 4).  
17
- 18    3. ***A new social ethic.*** This new personal identity was unique. Christians' self-regard was not  
19    based on performance or on how one was regarded by family or society. Culture's ability  
20    to define believers' personhood was broken. It also meant Christians were all equal in  
21    Christ—equally sinners in need of grace, and equally loved, justified, and adopted as  
22    God's beloved children. This new identity had many practical effects. The Christian  
23    community was the first multi-ethnic religious community,<sup>75</sup> which brought wealthy and  
24    poor together in unprecedented ways. Relationships within the Christian community were  
25    to be based on self-giving, sacrificial love, rather than on class and status.<sup>76</sup>  
26
- 27    4. ***A new vision for sexuality.*** But one of the most striking applications of this new identity  
28    and social ethic was in the area of sexual relationships. Christians called for sex to be  
29    based not (as in the Roman society) on power but on love, to be captive not to the culture  
30    but to Christ who gave himself for us and brought us into an exclusive, covenantal  
31    relationship with him. Sexual love had to reflect God's saving love and this meant that sex  
32    was shaped by two principles. First, *the principle of self-giving*. Just as salvation and  
33    intimacy with God is only available inside an exclusive, life-long covenant relationship  
34    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  
35    humanity—a unity across deep difference—so marriage brings together the different—  
36    male and female. Just as each gender has some glories and abilities that the other gender  
37    cannot reproduce, so practicing gender-diversity in marriage combines the full range of  
38    human excellencies and abilities.  
39

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 3, "A Different Identity," in Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 77-105.

<sup>76</sup> 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.

- 1       5. ***The failures of western society.*** When laws enforcing Christian sexual standards across a  
2 whole country were disconnected from the animating high vision of Christ's love and  
3 grace, a kind of "sex-negativity" indeed did grow, so that in many places all sex was seen  
4 as shameful. Also, when Christian sexual mores are held by a largely nominal Christian  
5 populace—without a keen sense of being sinners saved by sheer grace—those mores were  
6 more often than not enforced very harshly, so that pregnant teenage girls or homosexual  
7 youths were treated with cruelty. And often society's leaders not only violated their  
8 professed morality, but used their power to coerce sex in the Roman way. Those without  
9 power felt excluded and oppressed.  
10
- 11      6. ***The modern sexual revolution.*** The modern sexual revolution was to some degree a  
12 reaction to this harsh regime. However, there is great evidence that the revolution is failing  
13 in many ways. While contemporary people have maintained the idea of mutual consent  
14 (an idea that came from Christianity), they have severed sex from whole-life commitment.  
15 That means we have "turned back the clock" to the ancient world, where sex was for self-  
16 fulfillment rather than for loving self-giving. Sex becomes transactional, a consumer good  
17 in which two parties exchange favors only as long as they are getting their needs met. The  
18 results have been great numbers of people who are having sex but feeling used (and,  
19 consequently, abandoning sexual intimacy for digital stimulation or other forms of  
20 societally-approved satisfaction and distraction), of people who feel no need to marry and  
21 have children, of people who feel lonely and detached as the numbers of people living in  
22 families plummet. These trends are especially devastating to the poorest communities and  
23 so, arguably, the modern sex ethic is hardest on those with the least power and societal  
24 protections.  
25
- 26      7. ***The Christian sexual counter-culture.*** Christians still believe that sex must be rooted in  
27 the larger story of God's saving love. Our culture tells us we must discover our deepest  
28 desires and then express them in order to become our authentic selves. But the reality is  
29 that we have contradictory impulses in our heart. We need some standard to help us  
30 determine which of our desires and instincts should be cultivated and which ones should  
31 not. Ancient people and modern people alike let their cultures set the standards.  
32 Christianity says: don't let tribe or culture control you and give you your valuation. Let  
33 God's Word give you the moral grid to understand your heart. And let God's love and  
34 grace, through Jesus Christ, give you your deepest validation and identity. We believe that  
35 this link between God's love and sexuality, that is lived out through the Biblical model of  
36 marriage, is the best way for human beings to live and thrive.  
37

## Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

## **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 47<sup>th</sup> 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**

Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*. Purcellville, VA: Good Book Company, 2013.

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.

## Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

1 Allberry, Sam. *7 Myths about Singleness*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

2  
3 In this short, hope-filled book, Allberry affirms the goodness of marriage as a  
4 picture of the gospel, while arguing that singleness demonstrates the sufficiency  
5 of the gospel—especially in our cultural moment that places so much emphasis  
6 on romance as the source of satisfaction. He argues against the myths that the  
7 single life is too hard, that it means no intimacy or family, and that it wastes one's  
8 sexuality, instead offering a picture of single life as a good gift from a good God.  
9

10 Black, Nicholas. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?* Greensboro,  
11 NC: New Growth Press, 2010.

12  
13 Black deals in concise and summary fashion with the major “revisionist”  
14 arguments regarding the Bible’s view of homosexuality. A helpful introduction.  
15

16 DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Say About Homosexuality?* Wheaton, IL:  
17 Crossway, 2015.

18  
19 A helpful popularization of some of the more scholarly work on the exegetical  
20 basis for the traditional interpretation of Scripture. Begins with Creation,  
21 explaining the importance of a God-defined sexuality and the picture it presents  
22 before setting up the contrast that homosexuality presents. An excellent resource  
23 for those who need to be convinced of the Biblical support for historic Christian  
24 understandings of sexuality.  
25

26 Geiger, Tim. *Explaining LGBTQ+ Identity to Your Child: Biblical Guidance and Wisdom*.  
27 Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018.

28  
29 Geiger explains the categories associated with the LGBTQ+ acronym with an  
30 understanding of common sin patterns. In doing so, he gives wisdom to help  
31 parents prepare their children to extend the love of Christ in this world,  
32 particularly to those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender identity.  
33

34 Gilson, Rachel. *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next*.  
35 Purcellville, VA: Good Book Company, 2020.

36  
37 Gilson demonstrates clear conviction regarding God’s love and trustworthiness  
38 in this reflection on her move out of the gay community and gay relationships  
39 toward Christ. She movingly tells of her embrace of a Biblical model for  
40 relationships, which involved the risk of loving others in healthy friendships, in  
41 the church, and eventually—for her—marriage to a man. She is laudably  
42 vulnerable in sharing her story of redemption, encouraging all of us to follow  
43 Jesus and trust Him with our own sexual brokenness.

## Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

1     Grant, Jonathan. *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a*  
2     *Hypersexualized Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.

3  
4     Grant exposes key cultural practices that shape our sexual and relational lives,  
5     unveiling assumptions regarding human sexuality that many Christians have  
6     unknowingly adopted from the broader culture. He addresses how to train our  
7     sexual impulses within God's will. Grant reveals how healthy relationships  
8     provide a solid foundation on which we can launch legitimate and healthy sexual  
9     relationships. His understanding of history and literary theory provides a rich  
10    backdrop for the picture he paints of faithful discipleship in the realm of sexuality.

11  
12    Perry, Jackie Hill. *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always*  
13    *Been*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.

14  
15    Perry shares not so much advice but her own story. She shares deeply from her  
16    heart and her own struggle to be faithful while experiencing same-sex attraction.  
17    This is not a "how-to" guide but a worshipful narrative that leads us, same-sex  
18    attracted or not, to find our identity and subsequent freedom in Christ and His  
19    gospel work.

20  
21    Pinson, Cooper. *Helping Students with Same-Sex Attraction: Guidance for Parents and Youth*  
22    *Leaders*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017.

23  
24    Cooper uses the Harvest USA model of gospel heart-change to help parents and  
25    youth leaders understand and help, with sensitivity and wisdom, young men and  
26    women who are struggling with same-sex attraction.

27  
28    Roberts, Vaughan. *Transgender*. Purcellville, VA: Good Book Company, 2013.

29  
30    In this very short book, Roberts lays out the foundational principles for a Christian  
31    view of gender identity and a Christian response to transgenderism.

32  
33    Shaw, Ed. *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate*  
34    *Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015.

35  
36    Shaw's book seeks to provide a balanced treatment of same-sex attraction. Shaw  
37    emphasizes the need for churches to create plausible pathways to faithfulness for  
38    believers who experience same-sex attraction. Very pastoral and helpful for  
39    discipleship. Shaw is strong on friendship and on suffering, both of which are  
40    relevant for faithful Christians struggling with same-sex attraction.

41  
42    White, David. *Can You Change if You're Gay?* Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013.

43  
44    This short book deals with the controversial subject of change. White avoids  
45    errors common to this topic by grounding the idea of change in the gospel.

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1           **RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY PCA GENERAL ASSEMBLIES**  
2           **AND OTHER CHURCH REPORTS**  
3           (Chronological Order)

5       Resolution on Homosexuality. Adopted by the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian  
6       Church in America (Overture 11, as amended), 1977. *M5GA*, 67–68.  
7       <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-398.pdf>

9       Declaration of Conscience. Adopted by the 21<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian  
10      Church in America (Overture 16, as amended), 1993. *M21GA*, 129–132. See also  
11      Communication #4, *M21GA*, 133. <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-399.pdf>

14      Resolution on Homosexual Marriage. Adopted by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the  
15      Presbyterian Church in America (Personal Resolution 7, as amended), 1996.  
16      *M24GA*, 315–319. <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/3-025.pdf>

18      Resolution on the “Homosexual Agenda.” Adopted by the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the  
19      Presbyterian Church in America (Overture 22, as amended), 1999. *M27GA*, 174–  
20      175. <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/27GA-Ov22.pdf>

22      “Pastoral Care for the Repentant Homosexual.” Report of the Reformed Presbyterian  
23      Church, Evangelical Synod’s Study Committee on Homosexuality, 1980.  
24      <http://pcahistory.org/rgo/rpcses/docsynod/301.html>

26      “Contemporary Perspectives on Sexual Orientation: A Theological and Pastoral Analysis.”  
27      Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 2011.  
28      <https://bapca.org/Contemporary-Perspectives-on-Sexual-Orientation-A-Theological-and-Pastoral-Analysis.pdf> or  
30      [https://www.crownandcovenant.com/The\\_Gospel\\_Sexual\\_Orientation\\_p/ds535.htm](https://www.crownandcovenant.com/The_Gospel_Sexual_Orientation_p/ds535.htm)

32      Report of the PCA CMC Subcommittee on Homosexuality. January 24, 2015. *M43GA*, 331–  
33      333. [http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/43rd\\_pcaga\\_2015.pdf](http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/43rd_pcaga_2015.pdf)

35      “‘From the Beginning’: God’s Design for Marriage.” Statement from the Anglican Church  
36      in North America, June 26, 2015.  
37      [http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/ACNA\\_College\\_of\\_Bishops\\_Statement\\_on\\_Marriage.pdf](http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/ACNA_College_of_Bishops_Statement_on_Marriage.pdf)

40      “Homosexuality and the Gospel of Grace: Faithfulness to the Lord’s Calling in an Age of  
41      Sexual Autonomy.” Missouri Presbytery, 2017.  
42      [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1iBLGL\\_2YhsIcI9\\_kZCBxLZHSYXWhFeLQ](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1iBLGL_2YhsIcI9_kZCBxLZHSYXWhFeLQ)

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- 1    “Nashville Statement.” Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2017. Declared by  
2       the 47<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to be “a biblically  
3       faithful statement,” June 2019. (*M47GA*, pp. 76, 89, 112, 589).  
4       [http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/47th\\_pcaga\\_2019.pdf](http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/47th_pcaga_2019.pdf)  
5       <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>
- 6  
7    “Position Paper on Human Sexuality.” 37<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Evangelical  
8       Presbyterian Church, June 2017. <http://epcoga.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Files/1-Who-We-Are/B-About-The-EPC/Position-Papers/PositionPaper-HumanSexuality.pdf>
- 8  
9  
10  
11  
12    “Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality.” 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Evangelical  
13       Presbyterian Church, June 2018.  
14       <http://wrfnet.org/sites/default/files/EPC%20Pastoral%20Letter%20on%20Human%20Sexuality.pdf>
- 14  
15  
16  
17    “Study Committee Report on 2018 Revoice Conference.” Central Carolina Presbytery, 2019.  
18       [http://www.ccpc.ca.net/news/ccp\\_study\\_committee\\_report\\_on\\_2018\\_revoice\\_conference.pdf](http://www.ccpc.ca.net/news/ccp_study_committee_report_on_2018_revoice_conference.pdf)
- 18  
19  
20  
21    “Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Investigate Memorial Presbyterian Church and  
22       Revoice.” Missouri Presbytery, 2019. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1IZstr-OYYnDbLdLBFEzrM1Y OwDpBPery>
- 22  
23  
24  
25    “The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Position Statement on Human Sexuality.”  
26       Minutes of the Two-Hundred Fifteenth General Synod of the Associate Reformed  
27       Presbyterian Church, 2019, 31–37. <http://arpchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Human-Sexuality-Position-Statement-2019.pdf>
- 27  
28  
29  
30    **BOOKS AND ARTICLES FOR FURTHER STUDY**

31  
32    Allberry, Sam. *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* Purcellville, VA: The Good Book  
33       Company, 2020.

34  
35       In this accessible and short book, Allberry treats sexuality in general, and in so  
36       doing provides helpful guidance for all members of the church. That guidance is  
37       rooted in a Biblical anthropology and Biblical sexual ethics, with human sexuality  
38       pointing ultimately toward the design and love of the Creator.

39  
40    Barr, Adam T. and Ron Citlau. *Compassion without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees Us  
41       to Love our Gay Friends without Losing the Truth.* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany  
42       House, 2017.

43  
44       Written by two pastors, one of whom (Citlau) used to be active in the gay lifestyle,  
45       this book focuses on practical application. Whether everyone agrees with all their

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1 practical advice, the tone is warm and winsome, while still clear on Biblical  
2 principles.  
3

4 Burk, Denny. *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.  
5

6 This is a good overview of a big subject—more of an introduction than a  
7 comprehensive analysis. Given Burk’s active presence online and his leadership  
8 behind the Nashville Statement, some will be predisposed to appreciate Burk’s  
9 writing while others will be less sanguine, but his views are anchored in a high  
10 view of the Bible and are accessible to a lay audience.  
11

12 Butterfield, Rosaria. *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey*  
13 *into Christian Faith.* Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012.  
14

15 Butterfield offers a compelling account of God’s grace at work in the life of a  
16 former lesbian professor of gender studies. She gives credit where credit is due—  
17 to Jesus Christ, who drew her to Himself using an obedient pastor and his wife,  
18 who loved her for years before she came to faith. Gets to the heart of the need of  
19 all sinners for redemption and then reveals the Redeemer in the person of Jesus  
20 (not in heterosexuality).  
21

22 Danylak, Barry. *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single*  
23 *Life.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.  
24

25 In this unique treatment of singleness, Danylak seeks to demonstrate that the  
26 entire story of Scripture affirms that the single life is a demonstrably good life.  
27 Less a book about the experience of singleness or a how-to manual for the single  
28 life, instead Danylak seeks to unpack a Biblical theology of singleness, wrestling  
29 directly with the tensions across the Biblical narrative between the importance of  
30 family life alongside affirmations of the goodness of the single life.  
31

32 Fortson, S. Donald and Rollin G. Grams. *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian*  
33 *Teaching on Homosexuality in Scriptures and Tradition.* Nashville, TN: B&H  
34 Academic, 2016.  
35

36 Fortson and Grams provide a survey of the faithful witness of the Church over  
37 the centuries on homosexuality as well a thorough treatment of Biblical passages  
38 addressing homosexuality. A helpful scholarly resource.  
39

40 Gagnon, Robert A.J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics.* Nashville,  
41 TN: Abingdon, 2001.  
42

43 Gagnon’s work is the most comprehensive treatment of the exegesis of individual  
44 texts on the subject of homosexuality. His scholarship is solid, though his tone is  
45 at times less than pastoral.  
46

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- 1 Harper, Kyle. *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late  
2 Antiquity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.  
3  
4 Harper provides scholarly, historical background on the introduction of the  
5 countercultural Christian sexual ethic into the ancient Roman world. For those  
6 wanting to explore how Christianity overturned pagan sexual dynamics and  
7 protected weaker parties—and hence was a religion of freedom, not oppression—  
8 this is an invaluable resource.  
9  
10 Hays, Richard. “Homosexuality.” In *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary  
11 Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996,  
12 379–406.  
13  
14 Hays is unequivocal in his presentation of Biblical prohibitions against  
15 homosexual practice and provides good, introductory treatment of the key  
16 Biblical passages. Perhaps because it was first published over 20 years ago, this  
17 chapter does not take into account changes in terminology that have become the  
18 focus of significant debate in the PCA, and Hays’s recommendations on public  
19 policy questions are clearly rooted in the Wesleyan tradition out of which he  
20 operates. Nevertheless, this is a helpful short introduction to the clear ethical  
21 positions presented in the Biblical text.  
22  
23 Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.  
24 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010; revised & expanded edition, 2016.  
25  
26 Part memoir, part biography, part theology, Hill’s writing is that of a Christian  
27 who struggles with his own sexuality. Hill provides a nuanced treatment of the  
28 topic which may prove helpful for those who are attracted to the same sex or want  
29 a picture of what the cost of discipleship looks like for those with that experience.  
30 Hill offers a different perspective on terminology than the authors of this Report  
31 have adopted, and Reformed readers may have other objections to his approach,  
32 but Hill preaches Christ and declares that his celibacy depends on him, while  
33 asking good questions of the Church.  
34  
35 Pearcey, Nancy. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand  
36 Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018.  
37  
38 Pearcey is strong on the sexuality debate as it interfaces with cultural and social  
39 issues. She offers important insights on the spiritual nature of our bodies, helping  
40 to distinguish Biblical from cultural perspectives.  
41  
42 Sprinkle, Preston. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue*. Grand  
43 Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.  
44  
45 Sprinkle takes a dynamic and thoughtful approach to dealing with the problems  
46 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

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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.

Stott, John. “Same-Sex Partnerships.” In *Our Social and Sexual Revolution: Major Issues for a New Century*, 3rd ed., 189–220. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.

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.

Stringer, Jay. *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2018.

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.

Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

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.

Yuan, Christopher. *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018.

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

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1 success—to avoid that temptation. Our intention has been to serve the wider church with a  
2 Report that we hope will be brief enough in its different sections to be useful for the differing  
3 ministry tasks that must be undertaken by churches, sessions, pastors, and parishioners. We  
4 still had to be comprehensive enough to address the many issues given to us by the General  
5 Assembly, but we also tried to be succinct in our Preamble and Twelve Statements to give  
6 readers an accessible view of the framework for our Biblical, theological, and pastoral  
7 discussions.

8  
9 For those who want to go into the theology of why unbidden desires remain sinful before God,  
10 there is a theologically and Confessionally rich essay to engage your minds with those ideas.  
11 For those who want to know how to pastor those who are struggling with same-sex attraction  
12 and related issues, there is also an important section on how the church shepherds such  
13 persons. And, for those who want to know how to speak to family and friends about how the  
14 Bible's plan for loving relationships is not bigotry but beauty, there is an essay for how to  
15 address modern culture.

16  
17 Knowing that some have anticipated that our Report will divide and polarize our church with  
18 recommendations that will try to press certain perspectives on others, we have made no  
19 recommendations. The PCA asked the members of this Committee to study these issues, and  
20 to express our understanding, and we have. Because of the consequences of a world-wide  
21 pandemic, we have not yet formally presented this material to the General Assembly. Still, we  
22 believe that our best service to the church will not be given by trying to leverage actions with  
23 recommendations, but asking that our church's leaders experience what we have on this  
24 Committee by listening with respect to what the Lord may intend to teach from those who  
25 have sought to honor his Word and each other in this Report. There are and will be many  
26 situations to which the principles and perspectives of this Report apply. We trust that the godly  
27 leaders of local churches and presbyteries determined to declare the truth of Scripture and  
28 share the grace of Jesus Christ are those best equipped to make such application.

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## 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 Overtu**

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

### 13 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 47<sup>th</sup> *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

- 1       e. Shall include suggested ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of  
2           homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that  
3           denies that understanding; and  
4
- 5       f. Should the Committee conclude it prudent, may, as one of its recommendations,  
6           propose a statement on the topic; and  
7
- 8       2. Be it further resolved, that, in its examination of Scripture and the PCA [*sic*] of *Faith* and  
9           Catechisms, the Committee consider studies and statements of other bodies outside and  
10          within the PCA, including, but not limited to:  
11
- 12          o. the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood's "Nashville Statement" [2017]  
13          o. the RPCNA's "Contemporary Confession [*sic*] Perspectives on Sexual Orientation: A  
14           Theological and Pastoral Analysis" [2011 Synod; 43 pages]  
15          o. the RPCES's "Pastoral Care for the Repentant Homosexual" [1980]  
16          o. Missouri Presbytery's "Homosexuality and the Gospel of Grace: Faithfulness to the  
17           Lord's Calling in an Age of Sexual Autonomy" [2017 report; 53 pages]  
18          o. Central Carolina Presbytery 2019 Study Committee Report on 2018 Revoice  
19           Conference [16 pp.]  
20          o. the 2019 Missouri Presbytery Report on the Revoice Conference [143 pages]  
21          o. the statements on homosexuality issued by the 5th, 24th, and 27th General Assemblies  
22           of the PCA and the January 14, 2015 Report of the [Cooperative Ministries  
23           Committee] CMC Subcommittee on Homosexuality [M34GA, Chattanooga, 2015, pp.  
24           331-33]  
25
- 26          and resources recommended in those documents; and  
27
- 28       3. Be it further resolved, that the Moderator of the 47th General Assembly appoint the seven  
29           voting members who shall be either PCA teaching or ruling elders, and the Committee  
30           shall include at least three teaching and three ruling elders; and  
31
- 32       4. Be it further resolved that the Committee be permitted to recruit others to serve the  
33           Committee as advisors within the confines of its budget, with particular concern to secure  
34           advisors with experience in counseling those dealing with same-sex attraction and  
35           transgenderism; and  
36
- 37       5. Be it further resolved that the budget for the study committee be set at \$25,000/year and  
38           that funds be derived from gifts to the AC [Administrative Committee] designated for that  
39           purpose; [see Summary of 2019 GA Actions, p. 57 below] and  
40
- 41       6. Be it further resolved that the committee shall present its report to the 48th General  
42           Assembly, including any recommendations it may present.

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

2  
3         The 47th GA's Overtures Committee (OC) voted 72-54 to recommend the appointment of the  
4         Ad Interim Committee on Sexuality proposed by Overture 42, and by a voice vote, the GA  
5         adopted the OC recommendation. It was one of four Overtures proposing an ad interim  
6         committee on this subject, and the other three were answered by reference to the Assembly's  
7         action on Overture 42.

8  
9         Prior to the GA discussion on Overture 42, several other overtures related to sexuality had  
10        already received lengthy debate (including some OC Minority Reports). This included 81  
11        minutes devoted to the OC's recommendation to answer Calvary Presbytery's Overture 4 in  
12        the affirmative, which asked the GA to "declare the Nashville Statement to be a biblically  
13        faithful statement." See the GA archive titled "Thursday PM Program #2,"<sup>77</sup> where discussion  
14        on the OC recommendation on Overture 4 begins at timestamp 00:28:15 and ends at 1:49:00.  
15        This included a Minority Report to recommit, which failed by a vote of 572-792. The OC  
16        recommendation on Overture 42 was adopted by a vote of 803-541 (60-40%) (*M47GA*, 76,  
17        89, 112, 589).

18  
19        The subsequent GA floor discussion and action on Overture 42 took nine minutes. After OC  
20        chairman TE Sean Lucas presented the OC's recommendation (at about 11 pm Thursday), and,  
21        after a three-minute floor speech in favor, a motion was made to "call the question." The  
22        Assembly adopted that cloture motion, thus ending debate by a vote of 1216-85 (a 93%  
23        majority). The OC's recommendation on Overture 42 was then adopted by a voice vote. For  
24        the brief discussion on Overture 42, see same archive titled "Thursday PM Program #2,"  
25        beginning at 1:53:00 and ending at 2:02:30 (*M47GA*, 77, 104-07, 701).

26  
27        Funding - A question arose about whether the AIC budget should be recorded as \$15,000  
28        instead of \$25,000, because \$15,000 was the original amount in Overture 42, and it was the  
29        amount in the recommendation from the OC. However, the Assembly had already adopted  
30        Recommendation 6 from the AC Committee of Commissioners which read: "That, in the event  
31        the Assembly, upon recommendation of the Overtures Committee, answers Overtures 30, 42  
32        and 44 in the affirmative, approving the establishment of an ad interim committee on the Study  
33        of Same-Sex Attraction, the budget of such committee be \$25,000, to be provided solely by  
34        designated gifts to the AC" (*M47GA* 70,77, 184, and timestamp 3:39:00 in archived "Thursday  
35        PM Program"). Prior to the vote on the OC recommendation, the Moderator clarified that  
36        amounts contributed over and above any specific budget amount would still be useable by this  
37        Ad Interim Committee and that there was "technically no cap, per se" (Timestamp 1:54:50 in  
38        archived "Thursday PM Program #2").

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<sup>77</sup> <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,<br><i>Northern Illinois Presbytery</i> (Chairman)                         |
| TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung   | Pastor, Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, NC,<br><i>Central Carolina Presbytery</i>                      |
| RE Dr. Derek Halvorson | President, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, TN<br><i>Tennessee Valley Presbytery</i>                  |
| RE Mr. Kyle Keating    | Teacher and Dean, Providence Classical Christian Academy,<br>St. Louis, MO<br><i>Missouri Presbytery</i> |
| TE Dr. Tim Keller      | Pastor Emeritus, Redeemer NYC & Redeemer City-to-City<br><i>Metro NY Presbytery</i>                      |
| RE Mr. Jim Pocta       | Licensed Professional Counselor, Dallas, TX<br><i>North Texas Presbytery</i>                             |
| TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar   | Harvest USA & Assistant Pastor, First Reformed PCA,<br>Pittsburgh, PA<br><i>Pittsburgh Presbytery</i>    |

**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.

## Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

1   **TE Kevin DeYoung**, Central Carolina Presbytery. *BA, Hope College; MDiv, Gordon-Conwell*  
2   *Theological Seminary; PhD, University of Leicester.* TE DeYoung has been Senior Pastor of  
3   Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, NC, since 2017 as well as Assistant Professor of  
4   Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. Prior to moving to  
5   Charlotte, he was Senior Pastor at University Reformed Church, East Lansing, MI. His Ph.D  
6   focused on the theology of John Witherspoon, a Scottish-American Presbyterian theologian  
7   and a Founding Father of the United States. Regularly blogging on [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org),  
8   DeYoung also has been invited as a keynote speaker to numerous conferences and lectures  
9   including Together For the Gospel, The Gospel Coalition, Ligonier, and many more. He has  
10   published more than a dozen books for adults and children, including *Just Do Something*, *The*  
11   *Hole in Our Holiness*, and *The Biggest Story*. His book, *Crazy Busy: A Mercifully Short Book*  
12   *About a Big Problem*, was named the 2014 Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Book  
13   of the Year. In addition, *Christianity Today* awarded Book of the Year honors to three of his  
14   books in 2009, 2010, and 2013. *World Magazine* named *What Does the Bible Really Teach*  
15   *About Homosexuality?* one of its 2015 Books of the Year. He is a member of the General  
16   Assembly's Committee on Administration, Class of 2022, and Chairman of the Board for the  
17   Gospel Coalition. He and his wife Trisha have three daughters and five sons.  
18

19   **RE Derek Halvorson**, Tennessee Valley Presbytery. *BA, Covenant College; MA, University*  
20   *of Arizona; PhD, Loyola University Chicago.* RE Halvorson is Covenant College's sixth  
21   president. After graduating from Covenant in 1993, Halvorson spent time trading foreign  
22   currencies in Charlotte and Chicago. He returned to academia, earning advanced degrees in  
23   history. From 2003 to 2009, Halvorson served at Covenant as Director of Constituent  
24   Relations and then as Regional Director of Development. In 2009, he became President of  
25   Providence Christian College, where he served until 2012, when he was appointed President  
26   of Covenant College. Halvorson serves on the boards of the Chalmers Center for Economic  
27   Development and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. He and his wife Wendy  
28   have a son and a daughter. They are members of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church.  
29

30   **RE Kyle Keating**, Missouri Presbytery. *BA, Univ. of Illinois Champaign-Urbana; MDiv,*  
31   *Covenant Theological Seminary.* Keating serves as a ruling elder in the Missouri Presbytery.  
32   After attending Covenant Seminary, he began teaching upper school history and theology at  
33   Providence Classical Christian Academy, where he now serves as Dean. Keating regularly  
34   speaks at churches and campuses on the plausibility of the biblical sexual ethic in the modern  
35   age. He served as one of three REs on the eight-member Missouri Presbytery committee that  
36   reported on Revoice and Memorial Presbyterian Church in 2019. Additionally, he served on  
37   the Missouri Presbytery committee that issued the 2017 report titled "Homosexuality and  
38   Gospel of Grace." He and his wife and fellow-teacher, Christy, live in St. Louis and have a  
39   daughter.  
40

41   **TE Tim Keller**, Metro New York Presbytery. *BA, Bucknell University; MDiv, Gordon-*  
42   *Conwell Seminary; DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary.* TE Keller is the founding  
43   pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife,  
44   Kathy, and three young sons. For 28 years he led a diverse congregation of young professionals  
45   that grew to a weekly attendance of over 5,000. He is also the Chairman & Co-Founder of

## Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

1      Redeemer City to City (CTC), which starts new churches in New York and other global cities,  
2      and publishes books and resources for ministry in an urban environment. In 2017 Keller  
3      transitioned to CTC full time to teach and mentor church planters and seminary students  
4      through a joint venture with Reformed Theological Seminary's City Ministry Program. He  
5      also works with CTC's global affiliates to launch church planting movements. Keller's books,  
6      including the *New York Times* bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have  
7      sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages. Keller previously served as  
8      the pastor of West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Hopewell, Virginia, Associate Professor  
9      of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and Director of Mercy Ministries  
10     for the Presbyterian Church in America.

11  
12     **RE Jim Pocta**, North Texas Presbytery. *BA, University of Texas at Dallas; MA Counseling,*  
13     *Amberton University*. RE Pocta has been a licensed professional counselor for 12 years and  
14     has practiced biblical counseling for over thirty years. He has his own biblical counseling  
15     private practice specializing in depression, anxiety, sexual trauma, and abuse, as well as  
16     helping those with same-sex attraction and being transgendered. A ruling elder at New St. Peters  
17     Presbyterian Church in North Dallas, Pocta has been married to Linda (a recently retired RN)  
18     for 40 years, and they have three sons and three grandchildren.

19  
20     **TE Jim Weidenaar**, Pittsburgh Presbytery. *MTS, Calvin Theological Seminary; PhD,*  
21     *Westminster Theological Seminary*. TE Weidenaar joined the Harvest USA staff in June 2012  
22     as Director for the Greater Pittsburgh Region. His 2011 PhD dissertation is titled: "*Totum*  
23     *Hominem Non Aliud...Quam Concupiscentiam*: A Study of Calvin's Doctrine of Concupiscence  
24     with Special Reference to its Place in His Soteriology." He lives in the eastern suburbs of  
25     Pittsburgh with his wife and daughter.