

**THE BLOODIEST REVOLUTION OF THEM ALL:
SOME NOTES ON THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION AS IT COMES FULL CIRCLE**

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These are some rough notes, mainly drawn from various email discussions I've been a part of, regarding abortion, lust, modesty, same-sex attraction, and homosexuality. This is not a polished or tightly organized paper, but I trust it's contents will still be helpful to many who seek to navigate these issues as the church deals with them in 2018 and beyond.

Homosexuality and abortion are practically sacraments for American liberalism. To speak against them is to commit blasphemy, as proved by Facebook's censorship policies (just ask Robert Gagnon!). But this is simply because we live in a culture that on a wide scale hates the true God and therefore loves death. Both homosexuality and abortion are forms of bloody death. They are both sterile. Homosexuality cannot produce new life and abortion kills new life. Homosexual acts place the member of the body intended to create life into the part of the body from which death exits. Abortion makes the part of the body that should be as safe and secure as any on earth (the womb), intended to nurture and cultivate life, and turns it into a place of violence, bloodshed, slaughter, and death. Homosexuality and abortion are both life-denying rather than life-affirming. They belong to the culture of death, not the culture of life. They are signs God is judicially blinding us. When a culture gives legal approval to men sodomizing other men, or women murdering their own offspring, that culture is clearly in deep darkness. Our culture is blind; we cannot even see the big "E" on the eye chart. Our culture is largely lost; we have no moral compass and no direction. We are celebrating the wrong things, calling light darkness and darkness light.

Christians oppose both homosexuality and abortion because they contradict not only biblical law but also the biblical gospel. How does homosexuality contradict the gospel? God designed male/female marriage to image the gospel. A man is to picture Christ to his wife. A woman is to take her cues from the church in terms of how she relates to her husband. Together, they are to become an icon of the gospel, a living picture of Christ's one flesh union with his bride. A man/man or woman/woman union preaches a different kind of gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Homosexual "marriage" is actually anti-gospel. We want male/female marriage preserved because (among many other reasons) we want the greatest living symbol of the gospel we have to be upheld and honored. The structure of marriage derives from and symbolizes the gospel. To redefine marriage is to preach another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

What about abortion?¹ At the last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, “This is my body.” But in the pro-choice movement, a woman says, “This is my body” with a meaning diametrically opposed to Jesus’ meaning. Before Jesus went to the cross, he said, “This is my body given for you.” When a woman has an abortion, she says to her baby, “Your body will be given for me.” Jesus gave his body to cover our sins; he said, “I will die for you.” In abortion, a baby is sacrificed to cover the sins of the parents; they say to their baby, “You will die for us.” Abortion is, in short, an evil inversion of the gospel. It reverses the principle of sacrificial love that stands at the heart of the gospel. It is an evil parody of the Eucharist, the edible, sacramental sign of the gospel. Because of abortion, the sexual revolution is the bloodiest revolution of them all, far more bloody than the American, French, and Russian revolutions put together. In the 1960s, the sexual revolution’s slogan was “make love, not war.” But what they actually gave us was a war on the products of love-making.

Behind everyone of those 60 million aborted babies is an orgasm. Abortion means adult pleasure is sought at the expense of the lives of innocent children. Adults play; children pay. We have become a nation that worships at the altar of the almighty orgasm, and we are willing to sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of our own momentary pleasures and conveniences.

Obviously *Roe vs. Wade* is the denial of motherhood. Mothers are supposed to nurture babies, not pay to have them slaughtered. But it is also a denial of fatherhood. The *Roe vs. Wade* ruling made abortion a private matter, not between the mother and her partner, but between the mother and her doctor. Every child in America is a bastard according to *Roe*. There could be nothing more emasculating for American men than this: when a woman chooses to kill a man’s offspring, she’s essentially saying, “You are not man enough to be a worthy partner for reproduction. You are not man enough to provide and protect.” A woman who aborts her baby is essentially saying to the baby’s father, “Your offspring isn’t worth preserving and bearing. You’re not the right man. Indeed, you are no man at all.”

Of course, most of the time this is entirely accurate in terms of the way abortion actually works out. Indeed, many women end up getting abortions against their will because their male partners force them to – either by pressuring them or neglecting them. Abortion is certainly a woman’s issue, and women have used it as a way of leveraging cultural and economic power for themselves. Abortion allows woman to choose to career over family. Abortion allows women to pretend nature has not designed them to bear and nature children. But behind all of that, abortion is really a man’s issue. Ands abortion is rampant because our men have failed. Men lack self-discipline to refrain from sexual intercourse apart from a covenant commitment. Men lack the strength to protect and provide for the women they sleep with and the children they sire. The prevalence of abortion is proof our men have lost their manhood.

¹ I am quite certain I first heard this line of reasoning developed by Peter Kreeft.

If men are going to become true men, they must learn sexual self-control. Real manhood is not found in being a womanizer, notching as many conquests as possible. A real man is a “one woman man.” Men are emasculated when they allow themselves to be seduced (from the Latin “seducere,” meaning “to lead away”) by women, whether pixilated or in real life. A man cannot lead a woman when he is being led by her – and that’s what happens when he is seduced.

If a man is to truly lead a woman, he must lead a woman to the altar, and he must do so honorably. Even in conservative circles, we have often adopted a double standard, in which men can be promiscuous without censure while women are expected to be the gatekeepers of virtue. In reality, men and women are held to the same standard of sexual purity. And if men want the respect of women, they need to show that they can exercise sexual discipline.

Manhood is a choice. A man must “man up.” He must choose to act and be a man. And part of the choice to be a true man is the commitment to sexual self-control. Our culture is effeminate, and one way men have lost their manhood is by giving up sexual virtue.

The practice of chastity and the maintenance of virginity before marriage supplies the strongest possible foundation for fidelity and trust within marriage. Often times, we tell our youth they should save themselves for marriage because it will make marital sex that much more passionate and enjoyable. While this is no doubt how it plays out for many Christian couples once they tie the knot, I have been a pastor long enough to know that premarital discipline does not always lead in a straight line path to sexual bliss on the other side of the wedding ceremony. We cannot present chastity as a series of premarital sacrifices that lead to marital rewards. Sometimes, yes; always, no.

Rather, the practice of chastity cultivates and strengthens a set of virtues, such as self-control, discipline, sacrifice, self-denial, and love. These are the very virtues that make for a godly marriage, even if it turns out to be more sickness than health, more poverty than riches. In other words, chastity prior to marriage is not preparation for a great sex life; it is preparation for the totality of what marital life will throw at us, the good as well as the bad.

The real point of chastity is not future sexual pleasure within marriage, but a life completely oriented towards pleasing God. The point is always holiness. Yes, holiness often, and ultimately, coincides with happiness. God will make us completely happy when we are completely holy. But in the meantime, in a fallen world, holiness and happiness often seem to be at odds. By learning to put holiness ahead of happiness before we get married, we are prepared to do the same within

marriage. Chastity forms us into the kind of person who can remain faithful even in an unfulfilling or difficult marriage.

Jordan Peterson has rightly raised the question, “Why do women wear makeup to work?” In the #metoo era, this is a valid question, and it forces us to think through some crucial issues. But I am very much in favor of women continuing to wear makeup (if they desire) because even in the workplace men and women are different, and we should not hide those differences. It is good and natural for women to desire to be attractive. But I also recognize the dangers Peterson is calling us to our attention. Women who accentuate their beauty with makeup and stylish clothes do change the dynamic of the workplace.

G. K. Chesterton once said, “All women dress to be noticed — gross and vulgar women to be grossly and vulgarly noticed, wise and modest women to be wisely and modestly noticed.” There is nothing wrong with a woman wanting to look pretty. Women want to be beautiful the same way men want to be strong. But a wise woman will recognize that not all forms of attention are equal, and she should not dress in a way that actually cheapens her beauty and draws the wrong kind of attention. She should not dress to entice or flaunt.

The church certainly has a “modesty message,” but we have sometimes garbled it in such a way that it produces all kinds of shame and grief for young women. The main point of our modesty message is this: People should be able to tell which team you are playing for by the way you dress. Or, at least, they should be able to tell which team you are *not* playing for. When Christian girls and women dress in overly ostentatious or sexually provocative ways, they are not only ignoring the way God made the world, they are sending mixed messages about who they are and who they belong to. There is no such thing as a “Christian dress code” or “Christian uniform” — this is a wisdom issue at root -- but there are certainly forms of dress (or undress!) that are inconsistent with Christian identity and calling. It is easy for a woman to dress attractively and immodestly; it is easy for a woman to dress modestly and unattractively; but to dress both modestly and attractively in our culture is an art. Christian women should like daughters of the King. They should dress like Christians. There is nothing wrong with being fashionable per se, nor is there any virtue in appearing frumpy and dour. Our women should dress in a way that accentuates their true beauty and glory, found in Christ. They should not present themselves mainly as a collection of body part to be gawked at.

So how have we gotten this wrong? We tell young girls, “Cover up so your Christian brothers won’t stumble.” There is something profoundly true about this: Women can often be naïve about the effect their dress will have on the ordinary men. Out of love, they should want to make it easy as possible for others to obey Christ. If a woman dresses in such a way that a godly man would be uncomfortable being around her, that is a problem, even if she is not being intentionally provocative. But

all too often, women are not really honest with themselves. They *know* what they are doing, they just won't admit it because they don't want to be viewed as "that kind of girl." But this is the reality in a fallen world: Women want to be lusted after, just as men want to lust. All of this has to be acknowledged.

So what's the issue? Here's the problem with the way the message is often framed: It puts the burden of the man's purity on the woman's shoulders and it makes women feel ashamed of the bodies God gave them. Women are responsible for the way they dress; they are *not* responsible for the thought lives of the men around them. Also, many young women are rightly creeped out by the thought of all the men around them viewing them as sex objects. But if we over-emphasize the sinful thought patterns of men, women (especially young women) are all too likely to start to associate shame with their bodies (and sex) and perhaps assume (wrongly) that all men are sexual perverts. This can all kinds of unintended consequences down the line. We can end up causing young women to stumble, when our goal was to keep them from causing men to stumble!

Women should know that faithful men are working hard to not be sexually provoked in a sexually provocative world. It's great if Christian women help them in that by how they dress, but men have an obligation to resist viewing women as sex objects, no matter how they dress. Men cannot use women as scapegoats for their unbridled lusts. Jesus lays the blame for lust solely at the feet of the man (Matthew 5:27ff).

Women should also know that their natural beauty is given by God. Their bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. Their bodies are holy temples of the Spirit. The Bible's overall message in this area is very positive. The body is nothing to be ashamed of. Sex, rightly enjoyed within marriage, is nothing to be ashamed of. Our modesty message should not become a sexually shaming or Gnostic message.

Of course, we have to teach all of this as a way of countering the culture's message that female immodesty equals empowerment. Of all the follies feminism has foisted on women, this is one of the worst. The culture tells women, "If you've got it, flaunt it. If you cover up, clearly you are lacking in confidence." Some women can certainly use their sexuality to make money or gain fame in today's culture, but money and fame are not identical to power. In all the ways that really count, the immodest woman has cheapened and weakened herself – as have the men who take illicit pleasure in treating her as an object. If women do not want to be treated as objects, they should not objectify themselves. If women want real power, they will find it in faithfulness and service.

There are many Christian women wisely addressing these issues for our young women and wives. Shaunti Feldhahn's work comes to mind; she can help today's women understand what it means to say that men are visually wired, without the creep factor found elsewhere. But as our culture finds new and ever more creative ways to rebel and sexualize everything, we must be diligent dealing with this issue.

And with all the problems presented by social media, we have to train our women to exercise discernment, even as we train our men in self-discipline. Further, our men should also recognize that one of the best ways they can quench the desire of their wives and daughters to dress immodestly is to continually praise their beauty. When their tanks are full of male encouragement at home, they are a lot less likely to seek that male affirmation elsewhere.

In giving young women the “Christian modesty message,” we need to be honest with them – and make sure they are honest with themselves. Sure, women should dress modestly because they should not want to cause men, who are visual by nature and prone to lust, to stumble. But dressing modestly is not just a favor godly girls do for boys. It is something girls must do for themselves.

When a woman dresses immodestly, she *might* cause a man to stumble – but in truth she has *already* stumbled herself. She has already fallen into sin even if all the guys around her exert perfect self-control. Why should women be careful how much of their bodies they reveal? The issue is not just that guys like to look. The issue is that girls like to be looked at. And girls need to know that it is wrong for them to compete with one another for the boy’s lustful looks and sexual attention. They should present themselves in this way. It is just as wrong to objectify oneself as a sex object as it is to objectify another.

Sure, some women will say they “had no idea” that their dress affected men so profoundly. But nine times out of ten this simply isn’t true. And if it is true, it isn’t true for long. Women learn pretty quickly how to catch a man’s eye. If they are dressing in such a way to get looks, they certainly will, but they need to know the looks will most likely come from the wrong kind of men and this kind of cheap attention isn’t likely to ever lead to a good place.

A woman who dresses modestly is not only helping out the godly men around her who want to do right. She is also doing the right thing for her own sake. She is showing that she is not just a piece of flesh to get cheap thrills from giving cheap thrills. She is *imago Dei*, a daughter of God to be respected and known as a holistic person.

Fake evangelical Rachel Held Evans addresses modesty here:

<http://qideas.org/articles/modesty-i-dont-think-it-means-what-you-think-it-means/?im=%2Fimages%2Fmade%2Fimages%2Fuploads%2FModesty Rag 1 1024 600 80 c1.jpg>

This is my response:

Evans makes a few good points.

First, she is right that women should never be made to feel ashamed of their bodies or their femininity in any way! The Bible describes femininity as a kind of glory, not something to be embarrassed about. I do not want any of my girls dressing in frumpy or unattractive ways. I want them to look beautiful, like a woman should. I think Evans is right that a lot of damage has been done to women because they were told (or thought they were being told) by authority figures that their female sexuality was somehow shameful. I have counseled many newly married brides who simply could not adjust to marital sex with their husbands because everything they were taught about their bodies, about sex, about nakedness was negative; for them, it was very difficult to “let go” once they were married because sex and sexuality were associated with shame, and as a result their marriages really suffered. So Evans has identified a real problem here, with at least some forms of evangelical culture that do not know how to embrace God’s good gift of sexuality and of our bodies. It’s important to remember that one whole book of the Bible is dedicated to marital love and sex (Song of Solomon) and the woman is clearly just as sexually aroused and interested as the man (if not more so!). That’s the way God designed sex to work within marriage, where the gift of sexuality and the vulnerability of sexuality are protected by the strong boundaries of the marriage covenant. The only place sex is really safe is inside marriage — but inside marriage it truly is one of God’s greatest gifts to us.

Second, Evans is right that women are not responsible for what men do with their eyes or their thoughts. Women should not be taught to think of their feminine curves as nothing more than stumbling blocks to men. In fact, it is certainly not wrong to catch a man’s eye (or even to want to, when the time is right!) — and it’s not lust per se for a man to notice how attractive you are! That’s part of how God made us: women want to look beautiful and men want to behold that beauty. Amen! Physical attraction is a part of God’s good creation and the Bible repeatedly notices and praises women for their physical beauty. So I agree with Evans on this point: a woman should not be blamed or saddled with guilt just because a man may have had an inappropriate thought about her. She cannot help the fact that she is beautiful, nor should she try! And men could have lustful thoughts about women in burlap sacks, just as they can have lustful thoughts about women in bikinis. If a man lusts, that is the man’s sin and he needs to be the one to address it, as Jesus says in Matthew 5. To blame the woman for the man’s sin, when she is really the victim, would be very wicked indeed. Or to make the point another way, a man should not lust after a woman no matter what she is wearing; he should treat her as a person, not an object, and should show her respect, because even if she is dressed in a provocative way she still bears God’s image. Even if a woman objectifies herself, the man should not join in objectifying her.

Third, Evans is right that the “go to” passages for modesty in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 are really addressing ostentatious materialism and not sexually provocative dress per se. So there is more than one way to get clothing wrong. Translated into a

modern context, being overly concerned about clothes — by spending too much time or too much money on how you look and what you will wear — would be the kinds of things 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 forbid. The apostles did not want wealthy Christian women turning church into a fashion show, or using clothes to show off their social status in a way that would humiliate others.

Fourth, Evans is right that, to some degree, there is an inescapable cultural relativity when it comes to determining standards of dress. The Bible does not prescribe a set dress code, so much of this falls into a gray area. It is not simply a matter of developing a rule book, it is a wisdom issue that requires careful judgment on a case by case basis. For that very reason, it is crucial that we listen to people who have greater wisdom than we do in these matters. With no hard and fast rules, we have to rely on those who have better understanding than ourselves. This is why it is so important for a young woman to listen to her parents and for adult women to have trusted guides and mentors all throughout her life: she will always be confronted with issues which do not have hard and fast, black and white rules, but which require wisdom. These decisions are best made in the family, with fathers and husbands, but certainly it is also an area where younger women can serve as guides to the younger women.

Fifth, Evans is right that while our culture tends to overvalue a woman's physical beauty or "sex appeal," Scripture calls us to put a much higher value on character. This is probably the most important point of all. True, lasting beauty is found in the heart, not the body; the latter is valuable but the former much, much more so. However much time and energy and thought you put into looking good, make sure you put even more into becoming good!

But I still think her article is problematic for these reasons.

First, Evans is not respecting the way God made the world – and the way the world has become since the fall. It is a basic failure of common sense. The fact that modesty matters is – or should be – obvious. Evans has screened out certain texts that don't fit her paradigm (a common trait of her work). There are other biblical passages, besides 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3, that do explicitly address sexually provocative clothing for women. See, for example, Proverbs 7, which indicates there are certain clothes associated with the adulterous woman and the prostitute. Evans ignores this. Proverbs makes it clear that a wise woman is going to carefully consider what her way of dressing says about her and the kind of woman she is; she does not want to inadvertently end up dressing like a prostitute. Yes, she will also carefully consider the effect of her clothing choices on others and if she is really wise, she will know quite a bit about how men think. But even apart from what men might think she is going to recognize that what she wears affects not just how others see her, but how she sees herself. If she is the kind of woman who does not think men should objectify women, then she is going to be the kind of woman who does not dress like a sex object. She is going to understand that there is a difference between dressing attractively and seductively. She is going to know the difference

between dressing in a way that might catch a man's attention innocently versus a way that virtually demands she become the center of his attention in an inappropriate way. As a man I'll put it this way: There are some things a woman can wear that will make any godly man have to avert his eyes. That's just the way it is. A godly woman, of wisdom and high character, is going to try to learn what those things are for her and avoid them. I fully grant that this does not equate into a dress code and what one woman might not be able to wear could be fine for another woman. But Held is simply ignoring the basic issue that drives modesty.

Second, Held dismisses the whole notion that we should give thought to others in the way we dress, but that is simply self-centered. In one sense, everything we do has to take others into account; this is just the shape of the Christian life, a life in which we "consider others better than ourselves," as Philippians 2 puts it. While you are not responsible for the sins of others (as I said above), you still have responsibilities towards others. I'm not saying you let others dictate what you like or what style you wear, but Scripture is very clear that we should give thought to the wellbeing (and weaknesses) of others when we do anything. Applied to dress, this means a person should not dress in a way that flaunts wealth or that flaunts sexuality. We should want to make it easier for others to do what is right. For women, this means listening to godly men and learning something about how they think – and how they will think of you based on how you dress. You don't want to inadvertently send a message you don't intend. I suggest young women read Shaunti Feldhahn's *For Young Women Only* to get a feel for this; it will help them understand the male mind. She also has a book entitled *Men Are Visual* that is also helpful; it's really just pointing out certain aspects of the natural world that everyone should acknowledge. Sometimes women think, "Oh we're visual too. We like to look at handsome men." But women saying things like that just proves they really have no idea how men operate. It's just totally different, and we know this not just from the testimonies of men and women but also from science, which shows us the extremely different ways in which men and women's brains react to certain stimuli. (Another way to get at this would be to consider the porn epidemic: Porn is entirely visual, but how many men get addicted to it versus women? The numbers are not even close. And again, neuroscience points out the deep differences between men and women's brains and sexuality.)

Finally, Evans' article is simply naive. For example, overall I like her instructions about what to look for in a bathing suit, but I'm also very troubled by what she leaves out. On the one hand she says that character is the most important trait in a woman, but then she turns around and says "wear what you want" or "wear whatever is comfortable" — as if what you wear has no connection to your character. No, what you choose will reveal your character. It always does, just as our speech and other actions reveal our character. And so there are other criteria that have to be brought into the discussion.

Men struggle with lust. But what is lust? And how can we kill it, by God's grace?

First, as John Frame says, to desire something sinful is sin; to desire what is unlawful is unlawful. This is largely Jesus' point in Matthew 5:28. Thus, for a married man, it is wrong to sexually desire a woman other than his wife. Proverbs 5 spells out the ways a married man should channel all of his sexual energy and passion towards his wife alone (which, as God has designed it, actually has the effect of making sex with his wife that much more fulfilling, compared to a man who is constantly filling his mind with images of attractive women other than his wife and thus diluting his own sexual pleasure with the wife God gave him).

Second, 1 Timothy 5:2, Paul makes a paradigmatic comment when he says we are to treat younger women as sisters, in all purity. A good man can certainly notice that his sister is attractive/physically beautiful but he would never allow himself to be sexually attracted to her. Objectively she is beautiful, but subjectively he does not allow that to provoke a sexual response in his heart. This paradigm allows us to recognize an obvious fact about the world (God made some really good looking females) while also pointing us to the right way to deal with that fact. The culture trains us to think of every attractive woman as a potential sex partner. But Paul says they are not sex objects, they are sisters. So train yourself to think of them that way. That's what purity looks like.

The latest sexual perversion to sweep the over the culture is transgenderism. I need to put in a plug for Ryan Anderson's book *When Harry Became Sally*. It's an excellent analysis of our culture's "transgender moment." The book includes some timely insights into the public policy issues surrounding transgenderism. It goes deep into the science and sociology of sex, gender, and transgenderism to show the problems with the way our culture is dealing with these issues, largely due to internal contradictions within transgender ideology itself. It also has some heartbreaking testimonies of people with gender dysphoria who went the hormones+surgery route and regretted it later. Chapter 7 on gender and culture is worth its weight in gold and should be required reading for every pastor. Anderson shows that while gender (the cultural ways in which masculinity and femininity are expressed) can vary within a certain range, there are immutable differences between men and women that cannot be eradicated because they are rooted in our biology, psychology, etc.

Anderson's case against transgenderism is drawn largely from nature, but we should not hesitate to use Scripture as well. I certainly think we can build a *sola Scriptura* case against transgenderism. The declaration in Genesis 1, "male and female he created them" is enough to refute transgenderism. If God made us each either a male or a female, we cannot unmake and then remake ourselves the opposite gender. Everything Scripture has to say about the respective roles and orientations of men and women serves to refute transgenderism. It is obvious from

Scripture that our sex/gender is an immutable feature of our identity. It goes all the way down. The Bible says so.

But there is no doubt we need to make an appeal to nature (in the sense of God's creational design) as well. While [this article](#) by Shane Morris goes too far in rejecting a proper sense of the sufficiency of Scripture, and probably overestimates how effective appeals to natural law can be in a postmodern context (thanks Darwin!), it also makes the valid point that bare appeals to biblical authority, divorced from creation, are not enough to develop a fully Christian ethics. We will simply lack the categories we need to speak to all the issues that confront us.

We cannot interpret nature aright without the lenses of Scripture (cf. Calvin's analogy of Scripture as "spectacles" through which we look at the world in ICR 1.6.1 and 1.14.1). *But neither can we give a full interpretation and application of Scripture's commands without a grasp of God's creational design and nature's inbuilt moral order.* Biblicism divorced from nature is too thin. Scripture works in harmony with natural revelation and empirical observation, not apart from them and certainly not against them. The gospel does not eradicate the natural moral order but reinforces it, restores it, reaffirms it, and glorifies it. Anderson's book is an excellent model of how appeals to the created order should be developed and set forward in the public square. His book is a fine example of public apologetics on this particular issue.

We need to carry out the same kind of reasoning with LBGT+ identity and SSA (same-sex attraction). With regard to the recent Revoice conference (<http://revoice.us/>), we have to make the argument that LBGT+ identity and identity in Christ are incompatible. It is true that Christians can struggle with same-sex attraction even as they struggle with a multitude of other sins. But this struggle is not so much a part of the Christian's identity as it the contradiction of his true identity. In some sense, all Christians are walking contradictions in this life – but we should be very clear that these particular sin struggles are peripheral, not central, to who we are as new creatures in Christ.

But we can go further. There is not only something anti-Christian in finding one's identity in these sexual perversions, there is also something anti-human and unnatural. LBGT+ not only contradicts Christ, it contradicts creation, it contradicts human nature. Claiming that is not identical to proving it, but that's the direction we need to go in this discussion. It's the same with SSA. I think some people in the church do not see the problem with SSA if the person who struggles with SSA keeps on struggling and therefore does not act on it. But this is naive. Exegetically, we can point to Romans 1. Paul calls the same-sex sexual attraction "vile passions." Same-sex sexual activity is unnatural, but even the passion/lust/desire for it is considered sin by Paul. But we need to go on to explain *why* this is the case. When a man experiences SSA, he is not just noticing that someone of his sex is attractive. That, in itself is no problem. Some people, after all, are attractive and there is nothing wrong with taking note of that fact. I can notice that Tom Brady is attractive without being gay and my wife can notice that Tom's wife is beautiful without becoming a lesbian.

But SSA is much more than that. A man with SSA has a *sexual* attraction to another man. In other words (to be graphic), he wants to take his erect penis and ram it into another man's anus (or he wants to be rammed, or both), as a way of realizing sexual fulfillment. Once we understand what's really being desired, we can start to build a much more powerful case against it. Even in 2018, sadly, most people inside and outside the church are pretty naive about what the gay lifestyle is really like, particularly gay sex. The long term practice of sodomy cuts more years off a man's life than smoking. Why is it celebrated rather than outlawed? Why isn't outlawed and marginalized the way we treat smoking? How can the desire for this -- which is really the desire for death -- ever be acceptable in any way, shape, or form? A study of the natural order helps us understand what Paul means when he says that "they receive in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1:27). There is a sense in which sodomy is its own punishment. But if the fruit is so deadly, how can the root from which it comes (SSA) be benign?

I realize there are many in the evangelical and Reformed communities arguing that their experience of SSA does not match what I have described here. Some have even tried to argue that SSA is really a form of disordered friendship rather than a disordered sexuality. But I do not see how someone can be considered "gay," or claim to experience SSA, unless there is a sexual component to it. It is that sexual component that is problematic.

Is SSA (same-sex attraction) a sin in itself? This has been hotly debated in evangelical and Reformed circles lately. Can a man desire sexual relations with another man and that desire not be sinful in itself (provided he remains celibate)?

The whole SSA debate is over sexual desires. Gays desire sex with same-sex partners. That's what it means to be gay. The debate is whether or not those *sexual desires* are sinful and should be mortified. The debate is NOT over whether or not someone is attractive in non-sexual ways, or whether men desire same-sex friendships. It is about sexual desire and defining legitimate forms of such desire for us as Christians. What boundaries should be drawn around sexual desire? Who is the proper object of sexual desire? What is legitimate?

If SSA is not sinful in itself, what about attraction to children? If homosexual attraction is not sinful, is pedophilic desire? Is pedophile attraction no more sinful in itself than adult heterosexual desire?

A man who sexually desires children should not be content with having those desires so long as he resists acting on them. He should actively work to kill his attraction and reorient his sexual desires in a proper way.

I am not saying "sexual attraction" is always already lust. It depends on the object of sexual attraction. The sexual attraction I have for my wife is good and isn't lust. If I

am sexually attracted to another woman not my wife, that is the lust Jesus condemns in Matt 5.

Does this mean the mere temptation to engage in homosexual sex is sinful? No, no one has said temptation itself is sin, assuming the temptation comes from outside. Sin and temptation are distinct categories. But it should be noted that temptation can also come from within, from our own sinful desires. In this case, the temptation is actually to go further into sin one has already entered.

I'd say much of what I've learned about this issue comes from John Frame. Frame is not at all comfortable with the notion of "sexual orientation" and describes it a "slippery idea." I agree: the category of "orientation" is not innocent but very problematic. Frame goes on to say "if 'orientation' refers to sexual desire that is contrary to God's law, it is sin." So if "homosexual orientation" = SSA, it is sin, because it is a desire for something God forbids. Further, Frame defines "lust" as any "desire to engage in acts that are contrary to God's law." He says that to think/fantasize about the sexual attractiveness of someone (man or woman) who is forbidden to you is to cross the line Jesus draws in Matt. 5:28 (we should think of woman as sisters, not potential sex partners). This is true even if one never actually decides to commit physical sexual sin. The desire itself is wrong and sinful.

I am quite certain Frame would not go along with the idea of a "gay Christian" as a good descriptor (though, like Sam Allberry and a few others he might be able to use that language in highly, highly qualified and nuanced ways — but it would be exceptional, not the norm). And I think he would agree with me that there are no godly, lawful ways of expressing same-sex sexual desires.

So if SSA is someone's temptation, what should he (or she) do? Confront the temptation and defeat it. Strategize about ways to overcome temptation. Flee temptation and tempting situation. Make no provision for the flesh. We need to be honest about our points of vulnerability, etc. But incorporating my temptations into my very identity (e.g., identifying as a "gay Christian" because this is my big struggle) is a losing game. If I go that route, my repentance will never go deep enough.

In attacking lust, we do not want to inadvertently attack creation. Young people should not be made to feel guilty just because they have hit puberty and now find themselves attracted to the opposite sex. They need to know that's good, natural, and will likely drive them to fulfill a central calling in life (marriage and multiplication). We need to teach the beauty of God's sexual design, not just all the perversions of that design that they have to say No to. I've counseled more than one newly married couple where the wife (it's always the wife) could not embrace marital sex because all the messages she had heard about sex growing up were negative and shaming. Sexual desire is good in itself, but our sexual desires should

be submitted to and shaped by the Word of God. That means something quite different for the unmarried than the married. How do we distinguish holy sexual desire from shameful sexual desire?

A married man should not allow himself to be sexually attracted to women who are not his wife. Indeed, he should recognize the great payoff of being a one-woman man mentally and emotionally as well as physically. The men who have the best sex lives are the men who are most “into” their wives. Proverbs 5 says a man should be satisfied with his wife’s breasts — but by implication, he should also be satisfied with her hair, face, legs, eyes, etc. A man who lets himself continually be attracted to other women is simply going to find his wife less attractive and is going to diminish his own sexual pleasure. He’s wasting his strength on other women, even if only mentally and emotionally. He’s let the springs and streams of his sexual passion be spread abroad (Prov. 5:16). The reality is that when sexual attraction is totally focused on one woman, as opposed to being diluted over many, it actually intensifies. This is the opposite of what many in the world would say — they’d say stoke the flames of desire with porn or images of other women, and then use your wife to satisfy yourself — “it doesn’t matter where you get your appetite as long as you eat at home,” as I’ve heard it put. But (besides being dishonoring to God and to one’s wife) this is not the recipe for the best sex. We know this because men who get really involved in porn eventually can no longer even have sex with their wives. That’s a more extreme case, but it makes the point clear. Allowing yourself to be attracted to other women is not only wrong, it actually hurts you and the quality of your marriage, especially your sex life. God has designed us for total monogamy in heart and mind as well as body. Thankfully, our sexual desires are quite plastic, so we can train ourselves to be continually attracted to our wives even as they get older, have children, etc. When a man gets married all his sexual desires should particularize on this one woman whom he has “forsaken all others” in order to make his wife.

[Note: Our discussion of sexual attraction has been entirely from the man’s point of view. But this is a question that should also be considered from the woman’s perspective. Their drives work quite differently, but are just as real. This is a point to note, though I have no time to develop it here.]

In light of the 2018 Revoice conference, here are the key questions to answer in the SSA discussion:

1. What is SSA? What is the nature of the attraction under discussion? What kind of desire is involved in SSA?
2. What does it mean to be gay? Or homosexual? If someone self-describes using these labels, what do we take them to mean? What does it mean for a believer to self-describe as a “gay Christian”? Is this even possible?

What if we are dealing with sexual desire for children rather than someone of the same sex? Some have argued that SSA in itself is morally innocent. Can the same be said of pedophilic desire? Is that also a morally innocent/neutral and benign thing? Or is it a red flag that something is deeply wrong?

Treating SSA as morally innocent is highly problematic. And it is hard to see how it doesn't lead to a very slippery slope.

What can we say about those who claim to be gay and Christian? Is "gay Christian" a coherent identity? I would argue No. Yes, it is true that in a certain sense, all of our sin struggles and temptations are part of our identity, but that does mean we should identify ourselves in terms of those struggles.

What gives us our identity? We have all kinds of habits, roles, etc. that feed into our sense of identity. Our various relationships (dad, son, husband, etc.), our work (pastor, teacher, etc.), our interests/preferences (the food we like, the drink we like, etc.), and so on are all factors in personal identity. None of those things in themselves create any tension for us as Christians. They're all creational goods. But then there are those aspects of our identity that are in tension with and even contradict our identity in Christ. This would be our indwelling sin, such as destructive or idolatrous patterns we still have, disordered desires, etc. When a person identifies as a "gay Christian," how does the gay part relate to the Christian part of their identity? If he does not act on his gayness by sleeping with another man is there no tension at all? Or are these identities intrinsically at odds even apart from engaging in homosexual acts? If SSA really is morally neutral and innocent, then there is no tension between having a gay orientation and being a Christian. And thus there is no reason why someone should not describe himself as a "gay Christian." If having a gay orientation is not problematic in some way in itself, if it is just one more feature of my identity, like other preferences, and not something I should work at changing, then why object to the "gay Christian" label?

But if there *is* something fundamentally problematic and wrong with SSA, then the two identities cannot be combined without creating tension. Now, sadly, some believers cannot shake that tension even if they'd like to. They cannot fully overcome their attraction to the same sex. But the Christians I've known who I trust the most who have been in this situation would be quick to tell you that they wish they could rid themselves of their SSA altogether. They don't want to get aroused from the sight of a same sex person. They would do anything to normalize their sexual desire, and the fact that their sexual desire is twisted in this way is not something they accept as neutral or benign about themselves. They reject the label "gay Christian" because being gay is contrary to their deepest identity in Christ.

Rosaria Butterfield makes a number of excellent points here, and shows the moral dimension of our desires, whether chosen and unchosen:

The Bible teaches that our desires—all of them, voluntary or involuntary—are morally implicated. Desire is teleological, and its moral character is determined by its object. If someone desires a good thing, then the desire itself is good (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1; Matt. 13:17). If someone desires an evil thing, then the desire itself is evil, quite apart from whether or not the desire is voluntary (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:6). This holds for all human desire, including but not exclusively sexual desire.

Where does the Bible teach this? This teaching is throughout scripture, but perhaps the best place to start is with the tenth commandment:

You must not *desire* your neighbor's house; you must not *desire* your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exod. 20:17, our translation)

Note that the English renderings “covet” and “lust” are but two ways of describing illicit *desire*. In both Hebrew and Greek, the underlying terms mean *desire*, which can be either good desire or evil desire depending on the object of the desire. [See here](#) for a fuller explanation.

In the other commandments, many actions (conscious acts of the will) are forbidden. In the tenth commandment, however, God forbids even *desiring* those prohibited actions. For example, the seventh commandment prohibits adultery, and the tenth commandment prohibits the *desire* for adultery (“you must not desire your neighbor’s wife”). There is no stipulation about whether the desire is voluntary or involuntary. All such desire is prohibited.

Jesus was not innovating when he said that looking at a woman to desire her sexually was tantamount to adultery (Matthew 5:27-28). As the master teacher, he was simply highlighting the connection that already existed between the seventh and tenth commandments. He was teaching us that desire for sin is itself sinful.

Because of this truth there are enormous pastoral implications for people who experience same-sex sexual desires. We must recognize same-sex sexual desire as one of the many possible ways Adam’s thumbprint shapes our feelings. If we do not drive a fresh nail daily into this aspect of original sin, sinful desire will eventually give birth to sinful deed (James 1:14-15). It is urgent to recognize the need for quick—and daily—repentance and mortification of these and other vestiges of original sin. Our mortification and repentance give glory to God, and they help us grow in both holiness and union with Christ. True Christian repentance never leaves you in a state of shame; rather, it opens you to the love of Christ.

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its *desires*. (Rom. 6:11-12)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly *desires*, which wage war against the soul. (1 Pet. 2:11)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to *desires* which were yours

formerly in your ignorance. (1 Pet. 1:14)

God knows that sin produces suffering—first and most deeply for our Savior, and secondarily for ourselves. But in God’s economy, the order matters greatly. Our sin produces our suffering. Our original sin, for which we are held accountable, comes first. But this clear, pastoral implication is not clear in Belgau’s writings nor in the writings of his colleagues at *Spiritual Friendship*. In their writings, same-sex sexual desire appears not as sinful but as a vocation of suffering that God uses to produce good spiritual fruit. [Wesley Hill](#) says it this way:

Being gay colors everything about me, even though I am celibate . . . Being gay is, for me, as much a sensibility as anything else: a heightened sensitivity to and passion for same-sex beauty that helps determine the kind of conversations I have, which people I’m drawn to spend time with, what novels and poems and films I enjoy, the particular visual art I appreciate, and also, I think, the kind of friendships I pursue and try to strengthen. I don’t imagine I would have invested half as much effort in loving my male friends, and making sacrifices of time, energy, and even money on their behalf, if I weren’t gay. My sexuality, my basic erotic orientation to the world, is inescapably intertwined with how I go about finding and keeping friends. Notice that Hill describes his homosexual “erotic orientation to the world” not as something to be repented of and mortified but as the foundation for forming “spiritual friendships.” This is so much the case that he says if he weren’t gay, he wouldn’t be able to form such friendships. Again, this is not mortification of sin and repentance unto life. It is something else altogether. Hill’s words on this point are relevant because Belgau claims that that we have misread Hill and that Hill actually says that same-sex desire must be mortified. We do not deny that such qualifications can be found in Hill’s writings, but it is precisely on this point that Hill is inconsistent in spite of his qualifications, as the quotation above illustrates. We believe that such inconsistencies can be found not only in Hill’s writings but also in the writings of [other authors associated with Revoice and Spiritual Friendship](#). This confusion stems from the fact that Hill, Belgau, and others believe same-sex desire to be comprised of both *eros* and *philos*. Their aim is to repent of the *eros* part of their same-sex desire while embracing and cultivating the *philos* part. But again, much of what they describe as *philos* looks more like *eros* (as [Steven Wedgworth](#) has recently shown). So they end up embracing—and claiming that Christ is embracing—what Christ indeed died for. Christ did not make an ally of the sin for which He was crucified. And we must steer clear of any ideology that makes us the unwitting ally of unmortified sin.

Belgau accuses us of being Freudian, which is simply inaccurate. Eve Tushnet and Nate Collins (the founder of Revoice) have both argued that same-sex attraction calls for sublimation—a Freudian notion that requires not *repentance* but *redirection* of same-sex erotic love. [Collins writes](#), Christians *should* outline their own theological account of sublimation, or something like it, so they can understand how libido can be redirected in

productive ways that are faithful to the call to pursue holiness. Someone is introducing Freudian concepts into this conversation, but it is not us. In fact, we [have argued](#) that Freud's influence poisons this conversation and ought to be rejected. *Sublimation* directs strugglers away from the Biblical invitations of mortification and repentance—Christian graces that lead to God's honor and our blessing and growth in union with Christ.

Some have pointed out that the church often has a double standard, treating homosexual desires and acts much more strictly than heterosexual lust and promiscuity. This is a fair point and one we need to address.

Certainly, we can say that opposite-sex attraction is NOT a result of the fall the way same-sex attraction is. It IS the way it's supposed to be. In that sense, there is no comparison between these kinds of desires. To treat them as such is naive and incoherent.

But that does not mean a "straight" man has freedom to lust after a woman just because his desires are "natural" in the ways that a gay man's desires are not. He is held to the same Scriptural standard. If a married man is sexually attracted to a woman other than his wife, he should discipline and kill that desire because it is sinful. A man's erotic desire should be channeled entirely towards his wife (Prov. 5 + Matt. 5).

Women besides my wife should be viewed as sisters. I could say that my sister (if I had one) is an attractive woman without eros/sexual desire entering into it all. That's the key distinction.

Is SSA parallel with OSA (opposite sex attraction) in any way? How do they compare?

One of the issues in the debate over OSA and SSA is whether or not desires, emotions, etc. that do not feel chosen or willed can be sinful. The traditional Protestant answer to this question is Yes, unchosen desires can certainly be sinful. In fact, sometimes those instinctive responses can tell us a lot about ourselves because they reflect who we are. For example: When I see a pretty woman, is my gut response "sex object" or "sister"? If it's not "sister," there is still work to be done on my heart. In regard to SSA, I am still completely convinced that all sexual attraction between those of the same sex falls into the "dishonorable passion" category of Romans 1. There is no other biblical way to describe SSA.

Randy Alcorn's "Guide to Sexual Purity" is a very helpful resource for understanding what the biblical sex ethic requires:

<https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Jan/28/guidelines-sexual-purity/>

How can we distinguish lust from lawful sexual attraction? It depends on the object of my sexual attraction. The sexual attraction I have for my wife is good and isn't lust. If I am sexually attracted to another woman not my wife, that is the lust Jesus condemns in Matt 5. The kind of desire a man has in an entirely appropriate way towards his wife, is entirely inappropriately towards anyone else.

Knowing exactly where the line is to be drawn between an innocent appreciation of a beautiful woman God created vs. falling into lust is a question I've wrestled with since I was about 11 years old. Again, John Frame is as good as anyone I've read on this: to desire what is unlawful is unlawful. A sexual desire that cannot be lawfully fulfilled is a lustful and sinful desire. Period. Is it possible to appreciate a woman's beauty without lusting? Is possible to see a woman as attractive without that attraction including sexual desire? Sure. Can most men do so? No, or at least not for long. And that's why we know that we need to turn our eyes away from the beautiful woman quite quickly most of the time. A second look or lingering glance spells trouble for most of us. If we could train ourselves to view all women other than our spouse as sisters, that would change — but in a highly sexually charged culture like ours, that can be hard to do.

But aside from those details, the more crucial point to the current discussion is whether or not the kind or not hetero and homo forms of attraction are parallel. I would argue they are not. One is natural and good itself. The other is unnatural and vile. Consider:

OSA is not always right, but it can be.
SSA is always wrong. Always.

OSA is built into the creation. It was there in the beginning, with Adam and his wife.
SSA is a perversion brought in by the fall. It was not there in the beginning.

OSA, properly channeled, drives a man to do something good, namely find a wife and have children with her. OSA is God's design.
SSA can never be properly channeled. It has no proper telos, no good end, and is contrary to God's design.

OSA can find its proper end in a marital relationship.
SSA can never find any lawful fulfillment.

That's really the problem: SSA can never be lawfully satisfied. And so what is there to do with it other than kill it? SSA impulses, even in their most seed form, cannot

lead anywhere good. SSA itself is the problem. SSA is always sinful. It is wrong to tell people struggling with SSA that the basic orientation is acceptable so long as they do not act on it. No! We need to be compassionate towards those struggling with SSA, as we are with all sinners, but we also need to tell them the truth about their sexual orientation and sexual desires. To not do so (as apparently Revoice is advocating) is a massive case of pastoral failure. It's pastoral malpractice.

Can a man who is attracted to other men have an innocent, morally neutral, benign attraction to another man? I don't see how. His passions and desires are twisted and disordered (and as a Protestant, I take those disordered desires to be sinful in themselves, even if they seem to rise involuntarily). Paul calls sexual attraction between men a "vile passion" and says it is unnatural. I do not think it can be redeemed in any way. That's really what this discussion (or at least this part of the discussion) is about. I would point again to the analogy of pedophilia. Is there any way in which a man's attraction to children could be innocent, neutral, and benign? No way, no how. The man's very orientation itself — his proclivity to find children sexual — itself has to be killed and eradicated. And so it is with the gay man as well. His tendency to find other men appealing sexually, his proclivity and predisposition to desire other men in sexual ways, can never be redeemed so it must be repented of and eradicated from his character as much as possible. This is my point.

I think one of the great evils of the Revoice conference (at least according to their promo materials), and others in the evangelical world who talk in similar ways, is that they are muddying the waters. They are actually making our sexually confused culture even more confused. They are dragging the world's confusions into the church. They are actually making it harder for people to deeply repent and easier for them to slide into sexual sin. This is an example of trying to help but actually hurting. I don't doubt their sincere intentions, but if the conference is consistent with the advertising it will be a disaster. That's why I think we must speak out against it. We need to bring clarity to this mess, for our own sheep, if not for the wider flock.

Here is the WLC on the 7th commandment:

Q. 138. *What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?*

A. The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.

Q. 139. *What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior,

immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others. The teaching of the catechism rejects SSA in all kinds of ways. SSA is certainly not a form of the required “chastity” in “mind” or “affections.” SSA is certainly a form of “unnatural lust” that is forbidden. I see opposition to Revoice (again, as advertised) as an application not only of the Bible but of the confession.

My understanding is that the proponents of Revoice (from what has been published thus far) are saying that someone who identifies as gay does not have to mortify or repent of their gayness provided they do not ACT on it. It's fine to be gay (embracing an effeminate manner and culture, but also including the experience of SSA because that is the essence of what it means to be gay) provided one remains celibate. The orientation is fine, just don't act on it.

No!

I would argue that the person with SSA that he has to go to war with his unnatural affections. I find the position of Revoice completely unstable and untenable. I think it also fails to reckon with Paul actually says about SSA in Romans 1 — that it is a vile passion. This is the most important thing to drive home: Paul says that mutual attraction between men is vile. Paul says the desire for a same-sex sex partner is vile. All sexual desire towards someone of the same sex must be mortified. Gayness must be mortified. The orientation must be mortified. It is vile. This also means mortifying effeminacy. Men should dress, act, and carry themselves like men (as women should dress, act, and carry themselves as women). Yes, there is some cultural variation in how manliness and femininity are expressed. But those variations are range bound by our created natures. A man who is “soft” is in sin.

Technically, Christians are rarely, if ever, identified as sinners in the NT, which suggests sin is not part of our identity (even though we certainly still have sinful desires and commit acts of sin). I would put it this way: Christians are saints, not sinners. We find our identity in our union with Christ. However, because God's redemptive work is not yet finished, we have things in our lives that contradict that fundamental identity, what we could call indwelling sin or the flesh. So am I sinner? Yes. To say otherwise would make me a liar (1 John 1). But that sin does not identify me, it is the *contradiction* of my true identity. This is why Paul's ethic can be boiled down to “Be who you are!” (Rom. 6). We're to live out our union with Christ, and in Christ we are dead to sin and alive to righteousness. If my sin is still allowed to define me just as deeply as my union with Christ, then “Be who you are” is an exhortation to live in sin as much as it is the opposite.

This is why it's so problematic to identify as a "gay Christian." It's not that real Christians cannot struggle with same SSA. Christians struggle with all kinds of sins. But those sins do not define the real me, they contradict the real me. Calling oneself a "gay Christian" is like saying there is such a thing as "dark lightness" or "square circleness." It's an absurdity, a contradiction.

Can we make arguments against sexual perversions not named in Scripture, e.g., sexbots? Yes, but we will also need to invoke the category of nature to fill out the arguments. But a bare appeal to nature is insufficient, at least if we want to be persuasive. We actually have to construct an *argument* that shows why, e.g., a sexbot is unnatural, and therefore a perverted use of our sexual powers. This is where the natural lawyers like J. Budziszewski and Ryan Anderson are helpful since they develop natural law/creational design arguments and demonstrate how they work. While Vantillians (like myself) might have objections to various philosophical commitments Budziszewski and Anderson operate from, there is no reason why Vantillians should not embrace this kind of argumentation since it is really just an unpacking and application of Romans 1:18ff.

What is a homosexual orientation? Frame says, "if 'orientation' refers to sexual desire that is contrary to God's law, it is sin." I cannot see how a gay orientation can be separated from gay desire, so the orientation itself is sinful in that sense. If a man does not have sexual attraction towards other men, he isn't gay. But if he is sexually attracted towards other men, those attractions are vile and should be crucified. There is no space carved out for a man to have lawful attraction to another man.

As Frame points out, "orientation" is a "slippery concept." And as Hannon points out, it has a very dark and short history — it's a real novelty that arises from a particular worldview. Talking about patterns of temptation would be much better. It also gets us away from an essentialist understanding of human sexuality, which treats homosexuality as an incorrigible, immutable condition. If we are talking about patterns of temptation, personal vulnerabilities, etc., it's much easier to expect and account for changes. 1 Cor 6 ("such *were* some of you") starts to make more sense.

There is no analogy between OSA and SSA. OSA, considered as an "orientation" is natural and good in itself and SSA, considered as an "orientation" is unnatural and shameful in itself. I don't have to repent of the fact that, as a man, I am attracted to women. As a married man, I have "forsaken all others" and so my sexual desires should focus completely on my wife. But for someone who experiences SSA, the SSA itself must be repented of. A person with SSA is not permitted to experience or

foster desire for a person of the same sex who may someday become his or her spouse. By being attracted to the same sex, they are rebelling against the way God made them and what he calls them to. Men are called to be attracted to women and then give themselves to a particular woman; and vice versa with women. OSA in itself is not a sinful condition. SSA is a fallen and sinful condition. They cannot be treated in exactly parallel or analogous ways.

Not all forms of OSA are lawful (lust is not), but the fact that OSA can be lawful, and is part of God's original good creation, makes it a qualitatively different kind of thing from SSA, which can never be lawful in any way and is not part of God's original creation design. I understand wanting to hold OSA and SSA to the same standard — but that standard should be the Word of God itself, not some abstract definition of lust or desire that forced onto to both cases.

When I was a single man I could say “I am attracted to women” without necessarily implying any sin involved. It's just another way of saying I was seeking a wife. That attraction was fundamentally good and God-given (though no doubt twisted by my own sin at times). God gave me those desires so I would get married and start a family. I may have found myself attracted to several different women during those single years of my life but my desires were not fundamentally wrong because when I was attracted to them, I intended to satisfy those desires only after taking marriage vows. The desire was for something lawful (therefore not lust) and moved me in a good direction, in accord with God's design for my body and his calling for my life.

Technically, I don't see any way to get married without being sexually attracted to someone who is not (yet) one's spouse – and to be clear, there is no problem with this. There are obviously lawful and unlawful ways for single persons to desire someone — but the main point here is that there indeed a lawful form of OSA. I don't have to repent of the fact that, as a single man, I was attracted to women as I was seeking a wife, provided I did not intend to satisfy that attraction apart from marriage. And now that I am married, I do not need to repent of being sexually attracted to my wife. But if I allow myself to be attracted sexually to anyone else besides my wife, that would be a sin because I would not be treating that woman as a sister, in all purity, and I would be betraying the loyalty I have pledged to my wife.

Now that I am married, I should be satisfied sexually only with my wife (Prov 5) and not desire anyone else (Matt 5). It would be wrong for me to sexually desire another woman because there is no lawful way for me to have her. I would be desiring something sinful, which is always a sin.

But there is no parallel for SSA. A person with SSA cannot legitimately seek a spouse or sexual partner who will fulfill those desires. And even if they were to “marry” and be monogamous in thought, attraction, and action, that would not help.

Sexual attraction is a broad and complex category. It could include the legitimate attraction a single man feels towards the girl he wants marry (which is entirely appropriate, provided he is committed to only fulfilling that desire within marriage) and it can include fantasizing about a pretty girl at the beach you just saw yesterday (which is certainly unlawful).

My best shot at this is the paradigm I already gave, which I get from Paul in 1 Timothy 5: women are to be treated as sisters. This allows us to acknowledge that, yes, some women are very attractive and they don't magically get ugly the day you get married, while also insisting that none of these women should be thought of in a sexual way (e.g., fantasizing about them as potential sex partners). I can notice that my sister is attractive without being sexually attracted to her. I can acknowledge her beauty while recognizing it does not and never can belong to me. The sister paradigm allows us to recognize beauty while not treating every pretty woman as a potential sex partner (even if only mentally). It allows us to value and respect women instead of viewing them as sex objects.

Anthony Kennedy's *Obergefell* opinion treated OSA and SSA as parallel and analogous. The logic/justice of that leads to SSM (same-sex marriage). But we reject that conclusion so we must reject the reasoning it is based on. It is wrong to for a man to "marry" another man for the same reason it is wrong for a man to desire another man sexually. If a man finds in himself sexual attraction to other men (or the potential and proclivity for such sexual attraction), he should not treat that condition as morally neutral or benign. He should seek to normalize and naturalize his sexual desires. There are legitimate debates over the best way to do that, and the success rate varies, but that is a goal he should have for himself.

OSA can be lawfully fulfilled. SSA never can be. They are qualitatively different. OSA is good and natural when a man and a woman come together in marriage. SSA has no such parallel and thus is always wrong.

If two men who are sexually attracted to each other said, "We want to marry each other and we will only sexually desire each other. We will not lust after other men but will channel all our sexual energies and passions towards each other as spouses," how would we respond? They're going to focus desire solely on one another just like a faithfully married couple. They're going to be strictly monogamous, like a faithful heterosexual couple. Why can't they marry? If SSA is treated as parallel to OSA, why shouldn't SSM be treated as parallel to OSM?

But these are not parallel cases. For the argument, see my paper "*Obergefell* and America's War on God" (<http://trinity-pres.net/essays/obergefellandamericaswarongod.pdf>).

SSA is not just a temptation, it is a condition of the person's heart. That condition makes them vulnerable to certain same sex temptations in a way I never would be, but do not confuse the condition of "same sex attraction" with various occasions of "same sex temptation." SSA may provide the occasion for SST, but they can be distinguished.

From my conversations with people who experience SSA as a condition (Christian and non-Christian), it is a form of desire that arises from within, first and foremost. Yes, there can be external stimuli that enflame it, but the desires are already there in the person. The temptation does not create the desire, it appeals to the desire.

I sympathize with these Christians who have to deal with SSA and I respect their efforts to live chaste and faithful lives. My heart breaks for them, given all they go through. I also realize for many of them, the battle with same sex desires (and therefore, same sex temptations) may never go away in this life. But ideally, they will embrace the sexuality God created them to have, including the direction their sexual desires should go.

Proverbs 5:1-23 shows Jesus was not really teaching anything new in the Sermon on the Mount when he forbade lust. Obviously the text from Proverbs is a warning against adultery, but it also has a lot to say about how a man channels his sexual desire and energy. "Drink water from your own cistern" certainly applies to thoughts as well as actions. If a man is satisfied with his wife's breasts, he won't be attracted to another woman's. And so on. The whole passage is a warning about guarding yourself against sexual desire apart from a marital covenant. He is not to be sexually attracted to someone it would be wrong to have sex with.

I would also point to 1 Tim. 5:2. If you are treating women as sisters, how can you be sexually attracted to them? Can you really say you are treating women "with all purity" if you are having sexual thoughts and feelings about them?

If someone is tempted to lust after a person of the same sex, when they give in to that temptation, they are sinning. When they reject and resist that temptation, they are not sinning. I do not think we need a label to describe what's happening in this case. If I am tempted regularly to overindulge in alcohol, but consistently resist, I do not say I have a "drunkenness orientation," and I certainly do not identify as a "drunkard Christian" or something similar. Yes, I have a particular weakness that leaves me susceptible to temptation in that area, but I do not create a label or identity or orientation out of that weakness. If anything, I seek to rise above, to become the kind of person who is not so weak or easily tempted in the presence of

alcohol. I try to eradicate my attraction to alcohol abuse: I seek to mortify my desire to get drunk.

I think there are huge problems with the whole notion of “sexual orientation” (or “sexual identity”). If all one means by “orientation” is that each of us has a particular vulnerability in an area, and some people struggle with the temptation to sexually lust as members of the same sex, then I suppose it’s ok use that language. In that case, we can distinguish orientation from desires and desires from acts. But the history of the whole concept of “sexual orientation” is very problematic and should make us wary. It’s a slippery concept and can do a lot of harm. The way it is generally used, it is an unhelpful (and unnatural) social construct. The Scriptures know of no such thing. The language of “sexual orientation” is especially problematic when joined with a kind of essentialism, in which one’s orientation becomes a fixed part of one’s identity. This is how it is typically used in the wider culture and now (unfortunately) quite often in the church. We know from 1 Cor 6 as well as countless personal testimonies that this is not true. A "sexual orientation" is actually quite fluid and one’s sexual proclivities can change over time, by God’s grace. Once a homosexual does not mean always a homosexual.

What’s the advantage of creating categories of people and identities for people based solely on their temptations? Or their disordered desires? We don’t do that with any other sin, so why do it with sexual sin? See footnote 16 of [this paper](#) and especially the essay by Hannon that I cite there. Hannon argues we should do away with the whole notion of “sexual orientation” and his case is quite compelling. Here’s the money quote from Hannon:

As long as we do not succumb to sinful acts, why does it matter if people—even we Christians—continue to identify as homosexuals or heterosexuals?...[W]ithin orientation essentialism, the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is a construct that is dishonest about its identity as a construct. These classifications masquerade as natural categories, applicable to all people in all times and places according to the typical objects of their sexual desires (albeit with perhaps a few more options on offer for the more politically correct categorizers). Claiming to be not simply an accidental nineteenth-century invention but a timeless truth about human sexual nature, this framework puts on airs, deceiving those who adopt its labels into believing that such distinctions are worth far more than they really are... If homosexuality binds us to sin, heterosexuality blinds us to sin...I am not my sin. I am not my temptation to sin. By the blood of Jesus Christ, I have been liberated from this bondage. I will have all sorts of identities, to be sure, especially in our crazily over-psychoanalytic age. But at the very least, none of these identities should be essentially defined by my attraction to that which separates me from God.

In the case of someone who claims to have a homosexual orientation, there is no attraction that is not also sexual attraction, and therefore lust. His sexual desire for a

person of the same sex can never be legitimate; therefore it is always a forbidden lust. Likewise, can a pedophile distinguish attraction to a child from lust for that child? No. Would you let someone babysit your kids if he told you, "I am attracted to children, but I try hard to not let my attraction become lust"? That just doesn't make any sense. When it comes to normal, natural sexual attraction, I can distinguish finding another woman attractive from actually lusting after her (this is the paradigm I have given from 1 Timothy 5 — "treat young women as sisters"). But in the cases of homosexuality and paedophilia, there is no corresponding paradigm.

What about a case like this: A gay man goes into a gay bar and starts checking out the other guys there. He sees one guy and thinks to himself "Oh, he's cute, but he's not really my type." Here we have a case of man who has sexual desires for other men, he finds a particular man attractive, and yet he does not lust after him. So attraction and lust are distinguished. But this is hardly some kind of victory. The man's sexual desires are still disordered. His heart still wants something he should not want. He is still sexually attracted to the wrong things. The only way for him to ultimately gain victory over lust for other men is to eradicate his attraction to men altogether — and that's how we should counsel him. We will not help him if we tell him, "It's ok to be attracted to men, just don't lust after them." I have personally ministered to enough gay men to know that does not work. It would like telling a heterosexual teenage male, "You can watch porn, just don't lust after the women." You are asking someone to parse things more finely than can be done in actual, lived experience. If a Christian man struggles with same-sex sexual attraction, he may never fully overcome his attraction to men, even as he resists acting on those impulses. This may be his thorn in the flesh. But he should certainly long to have his sexual desires redirected in ways that are natural and lawful, even if it never fully happens in this life.

Our bodies are symbolic. They architecture of our maleness and femaleness points to deeper, heavenly realities. Shane Morris helpfully captures certain aspects of this:

I recall years ago at a Promise Keepers event in Tampa balking at a speaker's suggestion that "as men, our very anatomy indicates that we are to be givers." Was this guy telling me my penis was symbolic of the architecture of creation? That there was some deep, metaphysical truth to be found in the human vagina?

Well, not to put too fine a point on it, yes. And he was right. Probably more than he knew.

In sex, men empty themselves. They give something that forms and fills a void. They hover over the formless, virgin ground and say, "let it bring forth living things." They sow a seed into the earth that "must die before it brings forth much fruit." It is not for nothing that ancient cultures thought of Heaven as masculine and Earth as feminine.

A woman – who was taken out of man – reunites with him in a more voluntary – and thus profound – fashion. She magnifies glory through her receiving and giving back nine months later. Everything in a man that is nascent and unfinished becomes incarnate reality in a woman. In her, the dark materials of creation become mature and “very good.”

Together a couple brings into existence “icons of their love.” They make new beings who bear both of their images. They become “one flesh” in the most literal sense imaginable. The flesh, bone, hair, eyes, and (if you are a traducian) souls of their children are a perfect combination of their parents. Your child, in whose face you can clearly see both yours and your wife’s, is a living testimony of love. Who else but God would ordain the creation of new people through such a means?

And if we are brave enough to extrapolate the language of Paul in Romans 8, a woman’s work in sex and childbearing is one of the purest symbols of not just creation, but of New Creation. In her travails, she brings forth something fresh and never-before-seen. She reveals a new son (or daughter) of God. And of course, the complete picture is of Christ and His Church, in whom and through whom the Last Adam brings forth from His Eve the most profound glory the universe has ever known—something angels long to look into: creatures formerly marred by evil who are reborn into new and eternal goodness.

God help us when we turn from this weight of glory to an image of a naked man treating a naked woman like an animal and reveling in sterile (but by no means sanitary) fluid exchange. God help us when we tell lies with our bodies by re-enacting the dance of creation while fully intending to call an Uber at the end of the night and never see our one-flesh partner again. God help us when we take the beauties in which we can hear the vast, choral music if we’re quiet enough, and turn them into something to leer at in a dark room, on a laptop or tablet, while we abuse ourselves. God help us when we turn this marvel of marvels into something to conduct under florescent lights, in a petri dish. And Lord Jesus, help us when we rip the fruit of New Creation from the earth before it is ripe and murder it.

This kind of abuse of God’s sacred symbols cannot last. As Lewis would say, we will call Deep Heaven down on our heads.

Our bodies determine how we inhabit the world. The design of a man’s body shows he was made to protect, provide, and take dominion. The design of a woman’s body shows she was made to receive and give back, to bear and nurture new life. This is not to say there is not all kinds of overlap between what men and women do – there is. Our bodies have a lot in common, even as they are profoundly different. But the differences are under attack today, and so we have to emphasize them.

Here is another example, this time from the woman’s body: Women’s bodies give them a monthly reminder that only through the shedding of blood can new life come into the world. Women have a parable of the gospel inscribed in their very bodies.

Men only bleed when something is medically wrong, e.g., an injury. Women bleed as a sign of their role in bearing new life into the world.

We must teach young men and women alike to resist the lies of feminism and androgyny. Women often realize too late that their careers are not as fulfilling as bearing and nurturing children. Men fail to realize that what women really crave is strong, confident, decisive, servant-leadership.

Here's one way to capture at least one aspect of the male/female relational dynamic: "Nature is kind to women, but cruel to men. Time is kind to men, but cruel to women." Break this down. Women are given everything they need by nature to attract a man. But she will lose it over time, as her beauty and fertility fade with age. This is one reason why I would encourage women to be open to early marriage – and certainly not put it off until getting established in their careers. It is different for men. A man does not have what he needs by nature to attract a woman. He needs time to build it – to develop the skill, resources, strength/power, and capital to prove to her he can be a capable provider. In short, he needs to develop a resume that shows a woman he is a trustworthy man, worthy of partnering with to raise children. This does not necessarily mean men should marry significantly later in life – a young man who is on the right track can probably convince a young woman to marry him based on his potential and trajectory. But it does mean men and women approach one another in profoundly different ways, and these attractional and relational dynamics should be part of our common knowledge in the church.

I recommend women read Suzanne Venker's writings and men read Aaron Renn's essay series "The Masculinist." Venker and Renn are far from perfect. Often times their arguments and especially their theology is sorely lacking. But they are both in touch with the deep realities that make women and tick in profoundly different ways.

I also recommend Nancy Pearcey's fine book *Love Thy Body*, which is an excellent response to all the follies of the sexual revolution from a Christian perspective. Carrie Lukas' book *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Feminism* is a superb secular overview of the problems with modern feminism. The book has a terrible cover but is filled with practical wisdom that both men and women need.

Having done some reading and listening to folks involved in the Revoice movement, I am deeply troubled by the conference. I see it as a disaster for the church. In one sense, I can understand and can even sympathize with what they are trying to do. Those who struggle with same-sex sexual attraction and want to live as faithful

Christians have a tough path. We do need to develop effective ways to help them find community. We also need to recognize that many of them will never shake free of their illicit desires and patterns of temptation in this life. They can and still should be regarded as faithful Christians even if they do not become "straight." They are not sinning every single moment because of some "orientation" they have. But they should be very vigilant to guard themselves against sexually desiring those of the same sex every time occasion arises to do so. They should make it a goal to normalize their sexual desires, in accordance with God's design for their bodies. In all of this, we need to be compassionate and patient. 1 Cor. 6 has that wonderful line "such were some of you" so we should never lose confidence in the grace of God to change people, even their sexual responses and desires. But we must also realize that, in our age at least, SSA is a very stubborn foe. It takes great wisdom to provide the right kind of counsel to those struggling with SSA, and not many of us have it.

The Greg Johnson interview on the Cross Politic podcast (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb5yk2IdGpc>) reminded me that the great vice of our age is empathy. Greg is so full of empathy, it oozes right out him, even when pedophiles come into the discussion. Empathy can be a virtue, but only if guided by moral convictions that reign it in. Left to itself, empathy destroys morality. Why do pastors and counselors have such a hard time confronting the sin of homosexuality? It's largely because they are overly empathic. It's the same reason some parents cannot discipline their children: they are so empathetic, they are scared to inflict any pain or confront sin directly. Empathy all too easily makes experience and feelings the moral authority. Empathy is the besetting sin of an effeminate age. If you overly empathize with the person who struggles with SSA you are not going to be willing to say anything that might challenge, or offend, or make them uncomfortable. You are going to bubble wrap the truth so no one ever gets hurt by it. But then the truth never really connects with the person. Trying to synthesize a gay identity and a Christian identity is one way of doing this — it's an attempt to provide a soft landing place for these folks in the church, to make it as easy as possible for them to come into a congregation. But in the long run, it's going to do more harm than good. And perhaps even in the short run it will. Revoice's ad campaign, with its talk of queer culture's treasures and "sexual minorities" and hyphenated identities and so on, screams out empathy — and I'm sure many struggling with SSA will hear the invitation and come running. But what will they find when they get there? I'm afraid when we practice empathy at the expense of truth it always results in disaster.

At the same time, having no empathy at all is a surefire way to lose this debate and render ourselves hopelessly ineffective. The hosts of Crosspolitic were right to push back hard against Greg and the perversions he is promoting. But they showed virtually no empathy to struggling sinners and so it's not likely anyone on the other side will listen to them.