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YOU CAN'T CHANGE A HOMOSEXUAL

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Adulterer? Fornicator? Swindler? Gossip? The apostle Paul clearly said people who habitually and impenitently behave in such a manner “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10). These are actions that we all can get caught up in at one time or another in our lives; nevertheless, if we are living a life dominated by any one of these or even several of them, God says it is possible for us to be sanctified by the washing of the blood of Jesus Christ. Our lives can become dramatically different. This requires first and foremost a born-again relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ and a willingness to submit to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, which comes through a process of conviction, repentance, and seeking forgiveness from God and others whom we have offended along the way — for God who is faithful will forgive us our sins (see 1 John 1:9).

If we know the truth about these matters, then why do we accept the cultural definition of homosexuality? When non-Christians and Christians use the term “homosexual,” they often think of a person who is innately different from other types of people. We wonder how someone might have become a homosexual. Family and friends of those caught in homosexuality go deep into grief and despair because they cannot imagine how their loved ones got there, and they believe it is a lifelong prison from which there is no escape.

Think of it this way: Mr. and Mrs. Jones came into my office grieving over their son’s ongoing homosexuality. They cried, we spoke, and I attempted to help them understand the real issues surrounding their plight. I asked them about their other children. “Well, John, our other son, lives with his girlfriend,” they replied. In an attempt to bring some reality to them, I asked why they were not so concerned about John. The truth became evident; they knew that there was hope for this other son either to marry his girlfriend or to leave her and get back to a moral life. Their homosexual son, however, was in their minds and hearts destined to remain in this horrible condition of being a “homosexual.”

Three Decades of Living a Lie. For the past 30 years, the modern American culture has bought into a lie! We have been sold a bill of goods about the nature of homosexuality that is spiritually and practically untrue; moreover, the jury is still out on any form of biological or physiological causation of homosexual desires. The common belief among Christians and non-Christians is that homosexuality describes a person who has something innately different about him or her. For many people, the term “homosexual” has become a noun. Many believe this is a descriptive word to help sort a certain person into a different category, a different type of gender, we might say.

Why the past 30 years? In 1975, the gay rights movement began to market the words “gay” and “homosexual” to refer to an inborn character or to the identity of men and women with same-sex attractions and behaviors. Today, they have succeeded in redefining those words to suit their agenda in our culture. We in the body of Christ — and even ministries seeking to help those caught in homosexuality — regularly buy into that deceptive definition, often without thinking about it. How many times have we used the term “gay,” “orientation,” or “ex-gay” to describe ourselves or someone else? Even in the church we talk about ministering to “the homosexual,” immediately labeling an individual just as secular activists do.

What Difference Does This Make? If we define homosexuality as an identity, an inborn characteristic, or a hormonal imbalance, there is no answer or hope. If, however, we call it what it really is — a struggle with sinful desires and behavior — then throughout Scripture we're given ways to handle it.

If we use the false definition, where does one draw the line? Are you a homosexual because you have a homosexual thought for one moment in time? If not for one moment, then how long? A season? A lifetime? Is a man or woman a homosexual who engages in one act of homosexual behavior or a series of encounters or relationships? Are those who engage in exclusive homosexual practice for a lifetime the only "true" homosexuals? Often we have stumbled in our efforts to share the truth of freedom in Christ because we were wrestling with opponents over what makes a person a homosexual. Since there is really no such a thing as a "homosexual," then we are chasing a mirage, a cloud, something we will never be able to grasp.

Already in the first moments of our battle with proponents of "homosexuality equals identity," we give ground by using their terminology; and we lose more ground as we seek to put forward a solution based on the terminology of their lie. The truth is there are no homosexuals.

There are over one hundred ministries in the United States devoted to helping people and their families practically and biblically process through the dilemma of homosexuality. These ministries are commonly called "ex-gay" ministries. Even in this slang title there is a subtle message that people used to be "homosexual" and they aren't any longer. This message is clearly understood when we are talking about an adulterer or a thief because we know that we are speaking of a behavior; but, once again, when we are talking about leaving homosexuality, so many see it as a change in a more innate way than in behavior. Some Christians might be thinking of a miraculous change from one kind of person to another!

Over the many years I have worked with Love In Action, I have heard of one common burden from many men and women: "John, I prayed all my life to be free from homosexuality, and God has not done anything to help me. I guess He either doesn't care about me, or He doesn't care about my homosexuality."

This kind of thinking falls into deep theological error due to a great misunderstanding about the real issue of homosexual temptation, thought, and behavior. God has never promised that He would take away the temptation (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10). It is often the case that we have a lifelong struggle in which God gives us the grace to live obediently according to His will and good purpose. Some people who have homosexually addictive thoughts or behaviors will pray that God would take them away. If He doesn't, they conclude there is no other option but to act on them; there is no other hope.

What Does Happen When a Person Leaves Homosexuality? The early Christians never viewed homosexuals as being born with that particular disposition. Today, as believers, we would never say, "Johnny was born a thief or extortionist," and then add, "Let's pray that God changes his genetic structure or innate predisposition from thief to philanthropist." We do so regularly, however, when referring to those who struggle with the sin of homosexuality.

The Devil, working behind the scenes, has succeeded in redefining the meaning of key words, and therefore we only reenforce and strengthen a false identity by calling individuals by a name that does not apply. Homosexuality involves feelings, attractions, and sexual behavior; it can be a mindset, and it can include cultural association. From these factors, one can embrace it as a personal identity. People investing their lives into this kind of identity can expend so much of themselves that to think of leaving that identity can be quite threatening and very difficult even to discuss.

Based on that false identity, many people we see at Love In Action who struggle with homosexuality can tell of the heart-wrenching pain of waiting for a "change" that never comes. They struggle with feelings of rage, confusion, rejection, abandonment, and hopelessness because their prayer for change was based on a lie. They are asking God to change them from something they never *were* in the first place.

The first step of the process is to move away from the subtle lies of the Enemy and take back the truth in our communication and thinking. God can and will bring progressive freedom from struggles with

homosexual thoughts and practice as we begin to adjust our thinking and the thinking of those to whom we minister the truth. Jesus declared, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Foundational Truths. At Love In Action, our belief is based on three foundational truths.

Truth One: There is no such creation as a “gay” or “homosexual” person. There is only homosexual attraction and behavior; accordingly, there can be no “change” from a sexual identity that never existed in the first place.

Truth Two: The truth for most men and women who struggle with homosexual behavior is that they *will*, at times, continue to experience attractions and even struggle with those attractions in large and small ways for a lifetime. It is often misleading and harmful to speak vaguely of “total” deliverance without mentioning the normal, ongoing struggles with temptations *all* believers have.

Truth Three: God sees homosexuality as sin — like any other — and directs us to apply the same biblical model to it that we would to any other sin. His real solution for deliverance and healing is based on repentance and obedience; that is, finding freedom in Jesus Christ.

Does this mean that people choose homosexuality? Not exactly. The feelings, the temptations, or the desires are certainly not chosen. They culminate from what we might call a conspiracy of factors. As with any temptation, they just come about. We believe God holds us accountable for the ways we act upon those challenges that come to us. People are responsible for the choices they make when acting on wrong sexual desire or behaviors.

Biblical change from homosexuality requires that we respond correctly to the message God speaks of in 1 Corinthians 6. This message of repentance will bring forth the truth that will, in fact, set people free from this kind of bondage. When we begin to see homosexuality as a sin, a behavior, a wrong mindset, then and only then can we find forgiveness and freedom.

There is no such thing as a homosexual! There are many individuals, however, who struggle intensely with homosexual temptation and addictive behavior. Once we get the message right, then we will be effective in ministering to those caught in this kind of deceptive bondage.

— John J. Smid