

Review: JAR1406

## WRESTLING WITH THE “GAY CHRISTIAN” LABEL

a book review of

*Single, Gay, Christian:  
A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity*

by Gregory Coles

(IVP, 2017)

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A two-fold fracture over homosexuality seems to be happening among evangelicals today. One is over legitimacy — *Is it right or wrong?* — while the other is over approach.

The first division is longstanding and obvious. Over the past decade, well-known evangelicals have revised their position on the subject from prohibitive to affirmative.

The second, more subtle and less controversial, signals a change in the way Christians who wrestle with homosexual temptations are identified. They call themselves gay Christians, a broad term applying both to those who identify as Christian and engage in homosexual relations and those who resist such attractions. The latest contribution to their writings comes from Gregory Coles (who belongs to the latter, nonaffirming group) in his book *Single, Gay, Christian*. Endorsed by other high-profile gay Christians such as Eve Tushnet, Wesley Hill, and Preston Sprinkle, along with more traditional figures such as D. A. Carson, president of The Gospel Coalition, Cole’s book is moving and troubling.

It’s moving because much of what Cole says needs to be said. In recounting his coming of age, he describes feelings and experiences anyone who’s wrestled with homosexuality will recognize: the early realization, the prayers for it to disappear, the experimentation with the opposite sex in hope of a cure, and above all, the overarching feeling of being, quite involuntarily, different, “other than,” and misunderstood.

Also, the contemporary church needs to be reminded of many assertions he makes. People do not choose to be attracted to the same sex (though they surely choose whether or not to express those attractions); repenting of homosexual behavior does not guarantee complete relief of homosexual temptations; celibacy is a highly commended biblical option: single Christians should not be viewed as inherently incomplete. These are all points Cole raises, and he raises them well.

The disturbing element of the book begins with its title. From the beginning of my read, I found myself asking aloud, "Is it ever biblical to identify oneself by a sinful tendency or to label that tendency with a positive term such as *gay*?"

No doubt an honest admission of sexual temptations is a good thing, whether homosexual or heterosexual in nature. James encourages us to confess our faults to one another (James 5:16); Paul admitted an area of weakness (2 Cor. 12) and disclosed his strict self-watch over his body (1 Cor. 9:27). A Christian who experiences attractions to the same sex should do no less. But nowhere in Scripture do we see encouragement to self-identify by such attractions. Indeed, the term "gay" denotes "good," and when we adopt good labels for sinful tendencies, that adoption can erode our conviction that the tendencies are sinful.

Such was the case with Christian blogger Monica Gee, whose marriage to a man self-identifying as a gay Christian recently ended. Looking back on her husband's decision to adopt such a label, and the path to which it eventually took him, she writes, "I think we were wrong. Not for getting married, not for attempting to stay married, not for pursuing Christ and forsaking all others. Those things were right, and I wholeheartedly believe our marriage could have survived based on that foundation. But we were wrong to embrace 'being gay' as an identity."<sup>1</sup>

This approach of labeling Christians who experience homosexual temptations as "gay" is growing in acceptance among churches that are otherwise doctrinally sound. Yet if we encourage such believers to "come out" as "gay Christians" who find community and identity based on such temptations, are we not establishing within the church a sanitized version of a gay pride parade? Should we therefore be surprised when their identification with their homosexuality morphs into approval of it, as this man's did?

*Single, Gay, Christian* reminds us, inadvertently, that confession of sinful behavior is a mandate, and confession of sinful tendencies is useful. But identification with them, combined with minimization of their sinfulness, seems neither biblical nor expedient. —  
*Joe Dallas*

**Joe Dallas** is the program director of Genesis Counseling in Tustin, California, a Christian counseling service to men dealing with sexual addiction, homosexuality, and other sexual/relational problems. He is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors and is the author of several books on human sexuality, including *Speaking of Homosexuality* (Baker Books, 2016).

## NOTES

- 1 Monica Gee, "It's Time," Deliberately Domestic, September 3, 2017, <http://www.deliberatelydomestic.com>.