

A Question About Being Gay¹

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Question: “I was saved many years ago. I grew up in church, and still go regularly. But the deal is, well, I am gay; and I’ve been gay as long as I remember – even since I was a little kid. I never chose to be gay, so I can’t help but think that God made me this way. I know what the Bible says about being gay — that it is a sin that God detests. Will being gay keep me out of heaven?”

This question is actually a composite of nearly identical correspondences and discussions that I have had with no less than four individuals in unconnected circumstances in the last three months alone. All four were struggling with pretty much the very same questions. And I dare to think that for every person brave enough to make their questions known, there are dozens, if not hundreds, who struggle silently with the same questions.

The gay moment is growing, and there is reason to believe that its popularity is going to continue to increase. According to one BMAA leader in touch with the today’s youth, being gay is one of the big fads of the day among young people. With its growing popularity, we Christians who are to be the salt and light in this old world must get our heads out of the sand and learn how to deal with it. This sermon is an attempt to help us start.

The Place to Begin: Our Own Attitudes

We must first take stock of our own attitude toward the subject of homosexuality and the people who are caught in its grips. Many of us grew up in a time when it was disgraceful to even speak of such things openly, and our discomfort sometimes expresses itself in outbursts that

¹ This article was published January 28, 2009, in the *Baptist Trumpet*.

attack the sin and sinner alike. On the other hand, there are those who wish to be so accepting of the sinner that they feel they must tolerate or ignore the sin.

But these approaches do not reflect our Savior's attitude. In His dealing with people who had sexual-immorality issues (the woman at the well and the adulterous woman, for example), Jesus had deep compassion for the individual, and yet loved them enough to take issue with the sins that brought their hurt. As we deal with people in similar situations in our day, we too must show compassion to those who struggle while refusing to wink at or ignore the sin causing their problem.

Will Being Gay Keep You Out of Heaven?

Without question, the Bible takes a stand against same-gender sexual relationships, making it clear that it is a sin. (Of course the same is equally true for sexual relationships of any kind outside of marriage.) One cannot give an honest and open reading to the applicable portions of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 20:13) and New Testament writings (Rom. 1:21-32) without seeing that God obviously condemns such actions.

Again and without question, such actions are sin, and one cannot enter into Heaven with such sins on their spiritual "account." (I Cor. 6:9-10) However, once a person has genuinely been saved, all of his sins are transferred to Christ and His death on the cross. (Col. 2:13-14) So that means that even for the saved person that struggles with some form of sexual immorality (as with other sins), that sin will not prevent them from going to Heaven.

However, I must make it clear here what genuine salvation involves. Among other things, it means that, from the bottom of our hearts, we agree with God that the things in our life that He calls sin are wrong. In this particular case, it means the gay person must own up to God that the

homosexuality is a sin. It also means that he genuinely regrets his sin and truly desires to put it away from him. It doesn't mean that there are never relapses into those sins, but it does mean that there is a genuine desire to be rid of it.

I must also add here that just because Heaven is assured doesn't give a person freedom to do anything he wants — sin always comes with consequences. While I believe that one can truly be saved and still struggle with sexual sins, I do question the legitimacy of one's salvation if he can commit such sin and never be troubled by it. God placed the Holy Spirit within our heart at the moment we were saved, and one of the Spirit's jobs is to convict us of our sin. (John 16:7-8) If the gay person has no conviction for the sexual sins, I have to wonder if the Spirit ever resided in his heart in the first place — if that person was ever really saved.

Intentional Confusion About What "Being Gay" Means

We need to understand some distinctions our society has tried to blur. There are some activities that are arbitrarily labeled as feminine and masculine, either by society as a whole, a smaller subgroup, or just our immediate family and friends. For example, a little boy may carry around a purse or prefer to play house with the girls instead of run or play ball with the other boys. From the feedback I'm getting, some feel that such "cross-activity" is an indication the child is gay, or at least "pre-gay."

But I have to ask — is there anything in Scripture that says that this kind of play-preference is a sin? Of course not. Just because society labels playing house as a girl's game doesn't mean that a boy who likes to play house has gay tendencies. Similarly, a girl can like to do things that are more often done by boys, such as sports, interest in cars or guns or the like. Do

such interests mean that she is gay or has gay tendencies? Not in the least. Don't let the world confuse you by its attempts to mislabel and cloud the issue.

The Digression Into Sin

As we look into today's Bible text (Josh. 7:19-21), we find Achan brought before Joshua and all Israel to explain the sin that he had committed. In a previous battle at the city of Jericho (when all the spoil was to be given to the treasury of God) Achan recounts: "*When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent...*" (v. 21)

Achan gave what might be called a four-step digression into sin — a digression that caught Achan and dragged him down to his death. It likewise catches many people today, and I dare think it happens to many of those that slip into the gay lifestyle.

I Saw

"*When I saw...*" Achan began in his description of what led to his sin. In a separate situation we find King David's fall into sexual sin beginning in the same way: "*...And from the roof he saw a woman bathing...*" (II Sam. 11:2) Both men's fall into sin began with being tempted by what they saw.

One distinction we must clearly understand is that temptation itself is not sin. Say you're walking past someone's wallet or purse, see a \$20 bill and have a fleeting thought that says, "Hey, I could lift that and no one would know I took it." That is temptation. But is that temptation sin? No. And Achan was at this stage of temptation when he said, "I saw."

The world tells us that if a person is tempted toward same-gender sex it means that they are already gay. As I tell my church at times, there is a Greek word for that — hogwash! Being tempted to steal doesn't make you a thief, being tempted to kill someone doesn't mean you were born a murderer and being tempted to be involved in a same-gender relationship does not mean you are already gay or were born gay. I don't mean to minimize the struggle of that temptation, but don't let the world convince you that just because someone is tempted in that area that she is already gay.

I Coveted

After saying he “saw” the enticing items that were forbidden to him, Achan went on to say, “then I coveted (desired, longed for, took pleasure in) them.”

While being tempted is not a sin in itself, we must realize that a person crosses the line into sin when he decides to pursue the temptation. In Proverbs, within the context of a sexual temptation of a seductress, the wise man instructed, “Do not desire her beauty in your heart.” While the passing temptation is not a sin, the heart that grasps that temptation and enjoys the desire of giving into it has provided sin a place to reside within that heart.

It is important to understand that having a desire for a same-gender sexual relationship is a sin of the heart — it shows a heart that is given to and to some degree driven by sin.

But if you are struggling with those kinds of desires, does that mean that you are gay? Some will have a different opinion on this, but I'd have to answer by asking — does having a desire to rob a bank in itself make a person guilty of stealing; and does having a desire to copy someone's answer on a test (but not doing it) make you guilty of cheating? If you have toyed

with gay desires but haven't yet acted upon them, it is clear that you need to ask forgiveness for those thoughts, but I can't say that the desires alone mean that you are a homosexual.

I Took

No longer was the thought of the Jericho's goodies limited to a passing temptation for Achan. Nor was he content with just having the sinful desire for that which God said was not his to have. He worsened his sin by choosing to take those things as his own.

What was true for Achan is true for most, if not all, of our sinful ways. It begins with a passing temptation in our thoughts, often from something we notice through our sight or other senses. If we are not careful (and maybe without a conscious decision to do so) we will give room in our heart for the temptation to implant itself and it will become a desire of our own that grows to be a longing or yearning. And, given the right circumstances, that longing is often allowed to be realized in our actions so that, like Achan, we have moved from "I saw" to "I coveted" to "I took."

Within the context of today's topic, the "I took" stage is when one chooses to actually become involved in a gay relationship.

Some might say, "Well, if desiring it and doing it are both sins, I might as well go ahead and do it." Not only does that mindset make a mockery of God's command that we abstain from sin, it is just bad thinking. Moving from the sinful desire to the sinful act adds sin upon sin. And although all sins are odious in the eyes of God, the sinful act has much more dire consequences than the sinful thought. Both are to be avoided.

I Hid

But the digression into sin was not over for Achan — there was one more level he went through. It wasn't enough that he just took the garment and precious metals that were not his; Scripture says he hid the stolen things among his personal things. Although they were hidden from the sight of anyone else, Achan had made the sinful items a regular part of his belongings.

Like Achan, we often allow sin to become a routine part of our life. We may try to hide it from the view of those around us, but we find the more that we “take” sin, the more that it becomes “hidden” among the stuff of our lives.

Why does this happen? I believe the answer, at least in part, comes from the fact that one of the characteristics of sin is that it is addictive. The Bible describes that addiction in terms of slavery. When we choose to sin, we become a slave to that sin. (John 8:34) The more we pursue the sin, the more we are enslaved by it.

I'm sure this addictiveness is true for all sins, but it seems that it is more evident in the sexual sins. I believe this is because, by the Creator's design, sex generates an appetite for more sex. (Granted, that varies by individual, and sin has twisted it all out of whack.)

This is at least part of the drawing that is designed to bond a husband and wife together. So, with the designed self-generating attraction between those who are sexually involved, combined with the addictiveness of sin, when people play with sexual sins a little, it has a magnetic draw pulling them back to it. They play with it a lot and become enslaved to it. This enslavement is why many say, “God made me this way. I can't change it.” And in a sense, they are partially right — they can't change (on their own). But it's not because God made them that

way, it's because they chose to put their foot in the bear trap in the first place when they gave in to the temptation to take the sexual sin into their lives.

However, it's very important to notice that "I can't change it" doesn't mean one's condition is irreversible. While a person may not be able to free himself from his sexual sins, that doesn't mean God can't or won't free him. But that freedom comes from the same process that one goes through in salvation itself – admitting that both the desire and the action are sin; having a genuine desire to have those sinful activities and thoughts out of his life; and asking God to forgive him and take the sinful desire and sinful activity away.

But what if someone truly does seek God's forgiveness and genuinely strives to get out of the sin (over and over again) and is still not free? Is that person beyond hope? Does the repeated offenses mean the person was not sincere in his faith or repenting? Not necessarily.

Sometimes the sexual sins, while still wrong, are themselves the results of other things that lie deeper within a person. And if we fail to deal with the deeper issues, we usually fail to deal with the root of the problem. That usually means we become repeat offenders.

Let's follow the story of a hypothetical person – Pat, which could be a male or female name. Pat grew up feeling unloved and unwanted, so over time attempts to find that sense of being loved in an inappropriate sexual relationship. In time, Pat realizes that this is sin, becomes genuinely sorry for sinning and asks God for forgiveness. But Pat still hasn't dealt with the deeper issue of the feelings of being unloved, so pressure builds and builds until Pat falls victim to the sexual temptation again. If Pat is particularly strong, he/she might fight off repeating the same sin, but the pressure will eventually build to the point of forcing a break somewhere else.

The only real cure is to deal with the deeper issue: Pat has to accept that God does love in all the ways that he/she needs; understand that it was a sin to pursue love in the improper ways; and ask God to forgive that sin. And even then, with the core issues dealt with, Pat must be wise enough to know that the self-generating attraction designed within sexuality will still likely be a strong temptation for a long time to come. But the more Pat fights the temptation — praying, asking God for help and maybe getting an accountability partner — the weaker the grip of the attraction will grow in time.

Summary

There are a few things that we need to keep in mind concerning homosexuality and what God's Word says about it.

- **The gay movement is growing.** We must prepare ourselves with a good understanding of what God's Word says about the issue in order to be able to take our proper stand to try to stem the tide, and to try to help those struggling with this sin.

- **The world is trying to win this battle (in part) by blurring lines of distinction.** We must understand that boys who play "girl" games or girls that prefer "boy" activities are not gay or even "pre-gay." Nor does being tempted indicate that a person is gay. Even a person's sinful desires do not make a person a homosexual. Don't accept the world's mislabeling of you or others.

- **Homosexuality is an abomination before God, but there is hope for those caught up in the gay lifestyle.** Forgiveness is available to anyone who humbly bows before God, asks forgiveness of their sin and desires to abandon their sinful ways.

• **No one is born gay, just like no one is born a murderer.** Rather there is a digression into sin as one chooses, even if unknowingly, to progress from looking, to coveting, to taking, to hiding that sin within their heart and lives.

• **Sexual addictions can be particularly addicting.** They are at times best handled with an outside accountability partner (Gal. 6:1-2) in addition to prayer and dependence upon God.

• **Sometimes sexual sins are the expressions of even deeper issues within a person.** In such cases freedom from the sexual issues may require properly dealing with the deeper issues as well. If you need help getting to the root of such issues, see your pastor or a qualified Christian counselor.

• **As God's ambassadors, we must be bold in our legitimate condemnation of the sin, but we must remember that it is not our place to condemn the heart and motives of the sinner.** Few will ever know the struggles such people go through, or the circumstances that have brought them to where they are. Who knows... had we experienced the same things we might have committed the same acts. As we deal with those legitimately trying to break the grip of this hideous sin, let's remember that we, too, are fellow strugglers.

• **We must follow God's wisdom in dealing with those caught in this sin.** On the one hand, the Bible (I Corinthians 5) demands that we disassociate from those who call themselves Christian yet live in ongoing wanton sin. (v. 11) On the other hand, we must be willing to reach out in loving help to those who acknowledge their sin and struggle to genuinely live as they should. (Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20) We must also be willing to reach out a helping and loving hand to those outside of the church that are caught up in this vicious sin. (I Cor. 5:9-10)

• **Remember that the digression into sin often begins with “I saw.”** We must therefore be wise in what we allow ourselves to see. This is especially true for those with children and adolescents — those particularly susceptible to the enticements of the people promoting the gay agenda. We must be extra diligent to guard against TV shows, movies and anything else that presents this abominable sin as an attractive package to these impressionable young people.