

THE JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL SOUL CARE

Advancing Scholarship *for the*
Biblical Care of Souls *within* Higher Education

Articles *by*
T. Dale Johnson
Heath Lambert

Evan Lenow
Daniel Dionne
Todd M. Sorrell

Copyright ©2026 by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

Published by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

www.biblicalcounseling.com

5401 North Oak Trafficway

Kansas City, Missouri

64118, USA.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-967495-10-8

ISSN: 3069-3578

TRUTH[®]
IN LOVE 



This journal provides a means for advancing scholarship within higher education in the historical, instructional, and practical areas of biblical soul care in an academic forum. We aim to facilitate profitable interaction among scholars through articles, critical book reviews, and reader responses. We stand on the shoulders of generations of men and women whose commitment to the Word of God and care of souls has laid the groundwork for a resurgence of biblical soul care. The *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* reflects our dedication to the sufficient Word of God and its ability to speak into the complexities of human nature and experience.

—In Truth and Love,
The Editorial Board

general editor

GREG E. GIFFORD

managing editor

EMILY STAHL

assistant editors

DALE JOHNSON, *content*

SAMUEL STEPHENS, *content*

RHENN CHERRY, *content*

ARTICLES

Editorial

“HE HAS MADE US AND WE ARE HIS” 1

Dr. Greg E. Gifford

IN PURSUIT OF APPROVAL: 5

The Sexual Revolution and the Degradation of
Conservative Christianity

T. Dale Johnson, Jr.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND HETEROSEXUALITY 31

Heath Lambert

BIBLICAL SEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDER SIN 43

Evan Lenow

**A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO THE TRANSGENDER
MOVEMENT:** 59

First, Do No Harm

Daniel Dionne

**LEGAL EFFORTS TO OUTLAW BIBLICAL
COUNSELING:**

How Bans on Conversion Therapy Are Being Used
Against Christian Discipleship 79

Todd M. Sorrell

Editorial

“HE HAS MADE US AND WE ARE HIS”
Dr. Greg E. Gifford¹

Welcome to the Spring 2023 volume of *The Journal for Biblical Soul Care* (JBSC). The following articles are a product of the ACBC Colloquium that was held in the summer of 2022. The colloquium was an invitation-only event where experts were invited to present on the topic of human sexuality and the varying facets that are connected to human sexuality—legal, worldview, medical, ethical, and, of course, biblical. Leading authors, researchers, medical doctors, and ethicists attended this colloquium at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to read their paper and field questions and feedback about their paper. It was a personal honor to be present for the colloquium.

This JBSC is a compilation of the papers presented at the ACBC Colloquium in 2022. Dale Johnson has written on the degradation of society to not only desire tolerance with transgenderism but to attack the church for acceptance of transgenderism. This trend rapidly is affecting just about all of society, but counseling is in the crosshairs of cultural sexual activists. Dr. Johnson is forecasting and predicting. Is it possible that “attack” is the best term to use? This article will answer that.

Although not present, Heath Lambert submitted a paper regarding “Biblical Counseling and Heterosexuality” in which he argues that general heterosexuality is not the goal of the Bible in sanctification, or biblical counseling for that matter. Dr. Lambert’s statements are somewhat controversial, as he acknowledges, because

¹Greg E. Gifford is general editor of the *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* and Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling and Chair of the School of Biblical Studies at The Master’s University in Santa Clarita, CA. He can be reached at ggifford@masters.edu.

he is arguing that all sexual desire is to be reserved for one's spouse. This provides a new and unique perspective to the goal of biblical counseling, rendering it palpably different from reparative therapy.

A newer voice to ACBC, Evan Lenow presented on "Biblical Sexuality and Transgender Sin." Evan argues that transgenderism is sinful, but sinful specifically because it is disordering God's good design in the human anatomy. Dr. Lenow walks us through God's plans as demonstrated in created order and then the way our theological and philosophical commitments should honor our physiological commitments. Moreover, physiological conversations about transgenderism are good and honoring to the Lord.

Daniel Dionne's article provides a medical doctor's perspective of transgenderism surgeries in "A Biblical Approach to the Transgender Movement: First, Do No Harm." He highlights the dangers and the irreparable effects of transitioning on a person's body. "It's not transitioning, but transformation that a person needs," Dr. Dionne claims. It is a much-needed call to understand the vastly dangerous impacts to a person's health that the transgender movement proposes.

Lastly, Todd Sorrell has presented some of the legal implications of the transgender movement. Todd highlights legislative attacks spear-headed by transgenderism and forecasts the potential risks of biblical counseling in such an environment. Todd is an attorney and biblical counselor and professor—a rare triad of skills. His arguments are striking and should prompt both discussion and strong consideration of the potential ramifications of corrupt legislation.

I commend these articles to you in two ways: first, I want you to chew on the thesis and content of each article. Discern, read, analyze, fact check each of these articles. There were private discussions at the colloquium of the strengths and weaknesses of the articles and I hope you would read with the same eye. Lastly, I commend these to you and invite a response. We openly invite responses to a published article. Let your question—or objection—prompt you to write a thoughtful and biblical response to these articles or the ideas presented in any of them. We, as the JBSC editorial staff, welcome your feedback for the sake of growing in excellence.

You can anticipate our next publication in the Fall of this year. Through ACBC’s investment, the JBSC has now found a platform, editorial staff, and a greater audience. I look forward to offering more articles then.

IN PURSUIT OF APPROVAL:
The Sexual Revolution and the Degradation
of Conservative Christianity
T. Dale Johnson, Jr.¹

INTRODUCTION

Until Christ returns, humanly speaking, there will always be debates about divine wisdom. In subtleties we repeat the question, “Did God really say?” This question, first uttered by Satan in the garden, has caused more controversy and consternation for the human race than all others combined. As finite and fallen beings, we are tempted to see things as they appear before our eyes much more than we are prepared to believe reality as God has revealed. Sin causes a spiritual astigmatism upon our human condition where we may see refractions of light but are unable to focus our eyes on the world as God made it. We fail to clearly see the full purpose, meaning, and value for which we were created.

More like the disciples than we care to admit, we struggle to understand the importance of Scripture as a guide for current events (John 20:9, John 12:12-16, Luke 18:34). We are told to be armed with the Word in order to “stand against the schemes of the devil,” and to remain pure so that “we would not be outwitted by Satan” (Ephesians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 2:11, Ephesians 4:19). Based on Romans 1, we should have known that a normal course of disregard for God’s honor leads to futile thinking and darkened hearts, “claiming to be wise, they became fools” in the great exchange of His glory. When that happens, God gives humanity over to their lusts and those dishonorable passions lead in succession to unnatural relations of sexual perversion. When there is a suppression and disregard for God’s

¹ Dr. T. Dale Johnson, Jr., is the Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors and the Director of Counseling Programs and Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

revelation of His glory, the natural digression is the sin of unnatural relations and of sexual perversion (Romans 1:18-32, Revelation 17 and 18).

Concerned about the effects of our culture's sexual perversion in the counseling room, I wrote an article in the *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* titled, "A Case for Religious Liberty in Soul Care" where I attempted to provide a historical perspective of a particular area where it seemed the church was vulnerable. "Inconspicuous to many," I said, "religious freedom in the area of counseling has not yet become the primary focal point of social activists intent on eliminating traditional Christian values from American life."² How quickly that statement became outdated. Now clearly visible and brimming with attention, sexual orientation infects discussions of counseling, education, supreme court confirmations, and legislation. Even professional athletes are pressured to wear rainbow branded uniforms in support of modern sexual identity constructs. "If states are able to limit counseling practices," I concluded, "attempting to address deeply moral, religious, and spiritual issues such as sexual orientation, then the state is demarcating the boundaries of religious freedom."³

But how did we get here? The tide is moving at a much faster pace than I anticipated only six years ago. Why is it that conservative religious values are under such duress? Why is sexuality and *sexual identity* at the forefront of cultural discussions? Activists are not content with freedoms to pursue their own sexual perversion but are driven to seek more than toleration of their preferences—they are seeking approval, endorsement, and even sanction.

TRUEMAN'S CULTURAL ANALYSIS

One of the most valuable cultural analyses of the twentieth century, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, was penned by Philip Reiff.⁴ Carl Trueman updated many of Reiff's arguments helping us grasp the seasoned story lines which shape and mold our modern conception of the self, and its rotten fruit of sexual

² *Journal of Biblical Soul Care*, Fall, Vol. 1, (1:2017).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Philip Reiff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006).

immorality.⁵

Trueman's arguments are fascinating and instructive as they meander through philosophy, sociology, and psychology. My desire is to remain tethered to his arguments to avoid seeing things, as Schaeffer warned, "in bits and pieces instead of totals."⁶ Acknowledging the sum of our circumstances as greater than their component parts is necessary to prevent myopia in our thinking. Yet, each component part is critical to the story. I am not attempting to improve upon Trueman's arguments but advance the application of those arguments for the work of biblical ministry.

Trueman claimed that "Freud's fingerprints are all over the Western culture of the last century."⁷ Freud's psychological thought, the church's theological apathy, and Christian endorsements of Freud aided the current sexual revolution. Our modern story of sexual perversion follows the pattern from Romans 1. It begins with the intentional suppressing of God's truth, which leads to the acceptance of faulty views of man, then culminates in man's attempt at finding meaning, hope, and value in unnatural relations and false identities.

For our purpose, a major part of this story is the impact of the sexual revolution upon the church at large and her biblical counseling ministry more specifically. My goal is to demonstrate that the conservative Christian church and the truths she guards are primary targets of sexual activists today as they are no longer content with cultural tolerance but seek approval of their socially deviant and biblically immoral behavior. The sexual revolution, with the aid of the philosophies of psychology and psychiatry, falsely equates sexual expression with personal identity in order for individuals to become a *de facto* creator of their own authentic self and seeking to eliminate biblical truth regarding identity and sexuality.

THE CHANGING SELF

The Puritan George Swinnock said, "We never come to a right knowledge

⁵ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1981), 17.

⁷ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 203.

about ourselves, until we come to a right knowledge of God.”⁸ We once believed that theology was the “Queen of Sciences” and that it afforded us the opportunity to understand the world God created, including human beings. The advent of Darwinian thinking certainly challenged that long-standing belief and provided opportunity for a changing of the guard. Darwin’s biological paradigm gave an intellectual framework that altered the focus of scientific inquiry and, therefore, altered a God-oriented understanding of man.

“Psychology,” Darwin stated, “will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.”⁹ He knew that his framework would have implications for understanding anthropology. Friedrich Nietzsche crystalized that humanistic perspective when he said, “Psychology shall again be recognized as the queen of the sciences to serve and prepare for which the other sciences exist. For psychology is now once again the road to fundamental problems.”¹⁰

Before 1879, psychology had been considered a study of the soul or mind. Wilhelm Wundt attempted to “mark out a new domain of science,” that could be scientifically measured and quantified. He wanted to study human experience, emotions, and behavior, utilizing the “mainstream of German scientism by redefining psychology as a physiological rather than a philosophical subject.” Wundt placed focus on the brain and central nervous system in order move from speculation to *science*.¹¹ This type of gnostic inquiry into the self, however, deserves a rebuke from Scripture since it leads our understanding of man, and his needs, astray. Thinking that we can understand man only from observable component parts produces a myopic perspective of man which only further jades our perception.

⁸ George Swinnock, *The Blessed and Boundless God*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 131.

⁹ Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859), 488.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: A Prelude to the Philosophy of the Future*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 36. It appears Nietzsche may be referring to a time in “psychology” when the Greeks, fifth century B.C., were enamored with the self. See also Arieti, 460-461.

¹¹ Paoli Lionni, *The Leipzig Connection: The Systematic Destruction of American Education* (Sheridan: Heron Books, 1993), 1-10. Wilhelm Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1904), 8-16.

Freud synthesized the thought of many but was principally in debt to Darwin for his foundational framework. He was not after a neutrality of the self. His views of man were an intentional departure from God as the creator, sustainer, and moral lawgiver. The psychosexual stages of development were infused with the growing thought of sexologists applying the framework of Darwinian biology to anthropology for normal patterns of growth and development. Freudian biographer, Frank Sulloway said, “Indeed, perhaps nowhere was the impact of Darwin, direct and indirect, more exemplary or fruitful outside of biology proper than within Freudian psychoanalysis.”¹² Two of the keys given to Freud by Darwin was an exploration of the irrational impulses of man akin to animals and phylogenetic stages of development which were critical to his theories of sexuality and human development.¹³

Freud was more significant than many realized, and his reach goes far beyond a branch of counseling psychology called Psychoanalysis. He was a moralist, even though his views of religion as an “illusion” are well documented.¹⁴ His theories, by necessity, drew moral conclusions built upon his worldview which highlighted a disdain for and rejection of Judeo-Christian ethics and values.¹⁵ His psychoanalytic theories were a sort of syncretistic appraisal of human life and, therefore, the inner drive necessarily had to rid itself of puritanical ethics, Victorian sexuality, and Augustinian depravity. All of these elements were quite inconvenient in Freud’s mind because explanations of hysteria or sexual perversion within each of these frameworks required categories of sin, guilt, and a moral lawgiver.¹⁶ Freud rejected these categories and attempted to explain the vexations of the human soul from a decisively contrary worldview.

¹² Frank Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 275.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, ed and trans. James Strachey. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 97-109.

¹⁴ Richard Webster, *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 179. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion*. ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 38-42.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion*. ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 38-57. Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Norton, 1989), 31-33. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), 202-207.

¹⁶ Freud believed hysteria was a result of sexual desires or fantasies of a person’s parents or may include memories of childhood sexual abuse. In Freud’s thought the longings were suppressed emotions which created dysfunctional symptoms of psychogenic origin.

To demonstrate the point above, consider the musings of Silvano Arieti, a psychoanalytic thinker in the mid-twentieth century. In an article he authored in 1952, he asked a profound question which is quite instructive, especially given his commitment to Freudian ideals. He pondered, “Why did it take so long for Freudian thinking to pierce intellectual thought?”¹⁷ In other words, why, in the history of ideas, did it take so long in for Freud’s ideas to come forward. Arieti’s reasoned arguments shed light on the thought barriers to Freud’s dynamic psychology. If Arieti is correct, then it stands to reason that the forces which once were hindrances to Freud’s thinking are now themselves hindered by the flourishing of Freud’s views of man and his problems.

Arieti made an attempt to study what he called, “antipsychoanalytic cultural forces.” He claimed that psychology took a step backward with the first of these forces which can be summarized as platonic rationalism. The logic of Plato, he argued, divides the soul in “two parts, the rational and the irrational.”¹⁸ This thought was furthered by Aquinas and exported to the whole of western civilization. The exaltation of reason removed focus from the individual and placed it upon the study of universals.

The second antipsychoanalytic force recognized by Arieti is the “suppression of the sensory and of the emotional.”¹⁹ Here Arieti links God as creator and man as creature to sensations and emotions which make man and divine different. Therefore, “carnal urges must be suppressed. All emotions which may originate in the body, should also be suppressed. Only love is permitted and esteemed; but love is removed from any sexual connotation.”²⁰ He goes on to say that “This early Christian approach to life did not attempt to repress only sexual pleasure, but all pleasant sensations and emotions.”²¹

The third antipsychoanalytic cultural force is as critical conceptually as the

¹⁷ Silvano Arieti, “Anti-Psychoanalytic Cultural Forces in the Development of Western Civilization,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Fall 1996, pp.469-472. Originally published in *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. V1, No. 1, 1952, pp.68-78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 462.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 466.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 467.

²¹ Arieti, “Anti-Psychoanalytic Cultural Forces in the Development of Western Civilization,” 468. Also see Webster, *Why Freud Was Wrong*, 192. He discusses transition in semantics for Christians regarding sexuality.

second. “Moral evaluation” tied to Christian thought from the sin of Adam and Eve was believed to be paramount. Arieti said that Augustine is most representative of this “concept of life.” In other words, the Augustinian concept of original sin served as arguably the most important antipsychoanalytic force in western civilization, according to Arieti, and “Freud had to fight against these very forces and to overcome them not only in the society at large, but also in the single patient.”²²

Freud’s theories demonstrated incredible resilience to overcome those forces. However, Christians ought to be concerned that the acceptance of Freudian thought is an outright rejection of God’s view of sensuality and Augustinian original sin. In other words, Freudian thought is a radical departure from the biblical doctrine of humanity, a suppression of the truth, which remains dominant today.

Sigmund Freud hoped to rid humanity of guilt from sin.²³ Yet, he still had to acknowledge man had problems or, “inherited taints.” He theorized man-centered explanations of problems and thereby offered a man-centered redemption from those problems. This is the essence of the therapeutic model born of humanism as a suppression of the truth of God. When the doctrine of depravity is compromised or confused, the glory of the cross in Christ’s sufficient restoration is lost.

Freud’s impact today has not been squelched as his thought remains a pillar of influence. This should be considered the fertile soil of our immediate sexual revolution and cultural chaos. Freud replaced the driving force of man’s nature, which had been considered moral, with a drive that was sexual. We will now turn to the specific sexology of Freud that is historically vital for understanding the current sexual revolution.

THE CHANGING OF SEX AND QUESTIONS OF GENDER

Sigmund Freud

Admittedly there are other factors in the story of the sexual revolution. Yet,

²² Ibid., 469-470.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion*. ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 51-57.

the purpose here is to highlight the impact of psychology on current questions regarding the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality. As mentioned earlier, once the truths of God are suppressed, futility of thinking and darkened understanding leads to an exchange of the glory of God. In typical fashion, the evil one covers sin in colors of virtue in order to calm the conscience and encourage acceptance.²⁴

Since God designed sexual intimacy between one man and one woman as a primary earthly foreshadow of the beauty of the gospel and our union with Jesus, then it should be no surprise that the moral degradation of our culture is displaying itself through sexual perversion. A *gospel* is heralded, but not the true gospel. This false gospel is void of the wrath of God against sinners, death to self, full forgiveness of sin, allegiance to Christ, authority of the sovereign, and so on.

The therapeutic gospel is primarily focused on the pursuit of pleasure. Trueman helps us understand Freud's therapeutic framework which serves as an antithesis to the true gospel of Jesus. He summarizes Freud, "If happiness is the desired goal of all human beings, then for Freud the pleasure principle—the quest for pleasure focused on sexual gratification—is central to what it means to be a self."²⁵ The logical conclusion to this statement is anything that keeps you from happiness or the pleasure of sexual gratification is evil and must be removed in order for you to obtain happiness.

Let us examine some of the details of Freud's psychosexual philosophy which began to reshape views of sexuality and pleasure. Freud's psychoanalytic theory took quite some time to develop and mature as he synthesized the thoughts of others. Sulloway said, "It was in December 1896 that Freud first took the fundamental step of equating neurosis with a pathologically repressed, or 'negative,' state of sexual perversion. And with this one key insight, psychoanalysis became an integral part of the nascent science of sexology."²⁶ Freud acknowledged that man dealt with problems, but he did not accept a philosophy of moral degeneration to explain

²⁴ Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (Feather Trail Press, 2010), 18-19.

²⁵ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 205.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, eds. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey. (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 180, 189. Frank Sulloway, Freud, *Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 277.

the existence and nature of those problems.²⁷ He believed hysteria must have a psychogenic explanation. Freud became convinced that hysteria was rooted in improper sexual development.²⁸ The driving force behind normalcy was moving through stages of sexual development without unconscious “libidinal fixation” or repression. Any fixation or repression, according to Freud’s theory, would lead to some form of neurotic symptoms, like hysteria.²⁹

Freud applied the Biogenic Law of Ernst Haeckel, Darwin’s chief European disciple.³⁰ This was a critical piece of the synthesis, because the Biogenic Law allowed Freud to describe the unconscious as pathologized by evolutionary forces.³¹ Webster summarized Freud’s thought:

In order to account for neurotic disturbances Freud thus came to rely on a makeshift version of the evolutionary concept of variation, holding that biological programme which determined the unfolding of the sexual instinct might vary from individual to individual and this would predispose some individuals to pathological disturbances in their sexual identity . . . Perhaps the most important element in Freud’s entire argument was his assumption that repression was

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton 1989), 83-96.

²⁸ Francine Shapiro, *Getting Past Your Past: Taking Control of your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (New York: Rodale, 2012), 48, 163-164; *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy* 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2018), 20, 299-300.

²⁹ Sullo way, 319. EMDR’s view of repressed memories finds its intellectual roots in Freudian psychoanalytic thought. See Karen M. Engelhard, “More than meets the eye: Taking a look at EMDR in trauma-focused therapy.” (*Educational Specialist*, 103) pg.15. retrieved 1/18/2023 <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1106&context=edspec201019>. See also Freud, “The origin and development of psychoanalysis” (*The American Journal of Psychology*, 21, 1910), 181-218. In a similar way to what Freud believed led to repression of a psychogenic nature, Francine Shapiro seems to have borrowed that basic philosophy and transferred it to a biogenic-like repression of trauma. Rather than memories being repressed in a psychogenic form which led to hysteria and neurosis in Freud, in Shapiro these repressions are stored in the body (or more particularly in the brain) which lead to maladaptive behaviors. Besser van der Kolk presents a similar ideology in *The Body Keeps the Score*. While the body is important, we must be cautious in ascribing determinative or causal features that remove moral culpability.

³⁰ Arieti, 490. Arieti said, “Freud believed that stages of development are repetitions of phylogenetic stages, and such belief has influenced his theories of fixation and regression of the libido.”

³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, ed and trans. James Strachey. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), xv, 12-14.

primarily an organic, phylogenetically determined process.³²

One of the reasons Freud's theory of psychosexual stages of development is so elusive, and yet so enduring, is he tried to encompass pathology of psychogenic and biogenic origins. He believed that sexual perversion may find its pathology in some primitive stage of animal sexuality as understood by his promotion of Biogenic Law— "ontogeny (the development of the individual organism) recapitulates phylogeny (the evolutionary history of the species)."³³ Freud utilized this concept which then rooted sexual pathology in forces that are outside of one's moral agency, thus, removing guilt, shame, and responsibility of any perversion.

This new psychobiology became the wings of fledgling theories of madness and hysteria. Freud took liberty to apply Biogenic Law, rooted in Darwinian theory, to his wavering theories of human development. Yet he was merely representative of the ways psychobiology gained acceptance. Whether it was the sterilization of the mad or the theory of infantile sexuality, there has been an explanatory bias toward psychobiology—the idea that problems of the inner man have biological origins. As sociologist Andrew Scull observed, "These mental gymnastics point to a larger problem that the theory of degeneration created for psychiatrists and for patients and their families. For the former, biological determinism provided an excuse for therapeutic failure and a new rationale for the institutions over which they presided, at the price of their claims to be part of a therapeutic profession."³⁴ Owen Whooley, author of *On the Heels of Ignorance*, added, "But most importantly psychoanalysis offered psychiatrists a new way to manage their ignorance. It did so through mystification, or the process of making expertise inaccessible to external judgment. As articulated and practiced, psychoanalysis, with its theoretical complexity and hermeneutic interpretation, was largely immune to public scrutiny and outside meddling."³⁵

For all its failures in the latter part of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic

³² Webster, *Why Freud Was Wrong*, 235.

³³ Ibid., 234. See also Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), 297-299. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, ed and trans. James Strachey. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 12-14, 107.

³⁴ Andrew Scull, *Desperate Remedies: Psychiatry's Turbulent Quest to Cure Mental Illness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2022), 38.

³⁵ Owen Whooley, *On The Heels of Ignorance: Psychiatry and the Politics of Not Knowing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 98.

thinking was a major digression toward the celebrated sexual expression and gender diversity of today. Freud left open the ideas that sexuality could be deviant, or it may simply be a normal phase of sexual development. While there may be inconsistencies, Freud did not believe that homosexuality was a “degenerative condition.”³⁶ Freud, “believed everyone is born with bisexual tendencies, expression of homosexuality could be a normal phase of heterosexual development.”³⁷ The point is that Freud began to unhinge the sexualized self from supposed moral oppression made up of a “patriarchal constellation.” This constellation included conservative theological and religious values, namely, any concept of original sin and moral responsibility to God.

After Freud’s death in 1939, “most psychoanalysts of the next generation came to view homosexuality as pathological.” This is evidenced by the categorization of homosexuality as sexual deviation beginning with the DSM I in 1952. The DSM I, and its second iteration in 1968, labeled homosexuality as a mental disorder.³⁸ Homosexuality was no longer categorized as sin, but the mental health label transitioned sexual deviation to the domain of mental health professionals. The results, then, were that mental health professionals became the arbiters delineating between sexually healthy identity and sexual deviation. As we will see, that which was once called sexual immorality, becomes a healthy means of creating, becoming, or discovering the true identity of self.

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 123-246.

³⁷ Jack Drescher, “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality” in *Behavioral Sciences* 2015, vol 5, pp. 568.

³⁸ It was during this time that Reparative Therapy and Conversion Therapy were popularized as means to repair the *labeled* mental disorder of homosexuality. I believe that homosexuality ought not appear in the DSM as a mental disorder. Homosexuality is sexual deviation, but it is an immoral expression of sexuality that should be called sin rather than a mental disorder. Conversion therapy for example, was an immoral attempt to eradicate homosexuality as deviant sexual behavior. Many Christians lacked discernment in accepting the DSM understanding of homosexuality as a mental disorder, rather than as a sin in the way God describes. Therefore, many Christians driven by deep empathy toward individuals who struggled with a *mental disorder* were vulnerable to the therapeutic approach of conversion therapy. Since the problem had been wrongly defined, the solution was also wrong and harmful. Biblical counselors are under obligation of the Scripture to speak the truth in love to anyone wrestling with questions of sexual orientation. There are no forced or coercive techniques involved in biblical counseling for sexual orientation change efforts. Any attempts at change are voluntary for the individual to accept the biblical wisdom, ethics, and counsel we share.

Alfred Kinsey

We will return to Freud, but first a quick detour to follow the cultural digression which continued the disdain for moral bearings and sexual ethics. The shedding of the moral stigma surrounding sexual deviation gave rise to the sexual revolution of the 1960's. Alfred Kinsey was a "scientist" whose sexology gained prominence in the United States due to his studies at Indiana University. While there continued to be a stigma regarding sexual deviation, Kinsey aimed toward free expression and sexual exploitation. He viewed sexual deviation as more common than psychiatry maintained, especially homosexuality.³⁹

The importance of Kinsey far outweighs his reports regarding homosexuality. He aided a sexual revolution which included a contempt for authority and establishment while capitalizing on cultural displeasure from the wars of the mid-twentieth century. Much like Freud, "Kinsey and his co-conspirators ambushed and vanquished three bedrock American values: the authority of Judeo-Christian sexual morals, the sanctity of marriage, and the protected innocence of children."⁴⁰

The *Kinsey Reports* were said to have scientific evidence of the normalcy of homosexuality. American psychiatrists who had stood by the diagnosis of homosexuality were not pleased with the reports and questioned their validity. More critically to the moral downgrade of our culture is that even though his reports were stripped of their scientific vitality, they gained cultural popularity. Susan Brinkman highlighted the investigation of the *Kinsey Reports*:

In the 1954 Congressional investigation by Congressman B. Carroll Reece of Tennessee, the Rockefeller Foundation, Kinsey's main financier, came under intense scrutiny. The unscientific characteristic of Kinsey's conclusions led the Foundation's president, Dean Rusk, to terminate the financial support of the Institute.

Playboy stepped in to provide the funds that launched Kinsey's false sex data into mainstream America. Playboy, the Kinsey Institute, Penthouse, and Hustler went on to form an unholy alliance with

³⁹ Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in The Human Male*, (London: Saunders, 1949), 617-623.

⁴⁰ Judith Riesman, *Sexual Sabotage: How One Mad Scientist Unleashed a Plague of Corruption and Contagion on America* (Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2010), 96-97.

prominent sex institutions in the United States, the same institutions that provide the nation's sex education.⁴¹

It has even been said that no two men have done more for “sexual freedom” in the West than Freud and Kinsey. The popularizing of sexual expression spread rapidly through sex institutions and sex education, which created a growing pressure upon the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to remove homosexuality from the DSM.⁴²

Sexual Deviation and Robert Spitzer

Opportunity presents itself in historical moments. Robert Spitzer became the DSM-III Task Force Chairman, due at least in part to a controversy in the early 1970s over the diagnosis of sexual deviation, namely homosexuality. It was at a meeting of the APA's Committee on Nomenclature where the sexual activists group, New York Gay Alliance, demanded a hearing. Robert Spitzer became an integral figure in removing the homosexual label from codification in the DSM-II. Ronald Bayer said that “. . . Spitzer was persuaded ‘that being homosexual had little to do with one's capacity to function at a high level.’”⁴³ Hannah Decker agreed that “. . . Spitzer had become increasingly convinced that there were many homosexuals who led perfectly ‘normal’ lives and functioned successfully in society. Why, then, should they be considered to have a ‘psychiatric disorder?’”⁴⁴

The change was not without major controversy. Many psychiatrists did not want the change, but others did. Some said that scientific research—the *Kinsey Report*, Evelyn Hooker's published study in the 1950s, and others—backed the proposal. That is still a belief today according to Douglas Haldeman, author of *The Case Against Conversion “Therapy,”* when he claimed, “Based on the preponderance of scientific research, in 1973 homosexuality was removed from the diagnostic manuals used by mental health professionals.”⁴⁵ There are many

⁴¹ Susan Brinkman, *The Kinsey Corruption: An Exposé On The Most Influential “Scientist” of Our Time* (Westchester, PA: Ascension Press, 2004), loc. 253

⁴² Hannah Decker, *The Making of the DSM III: A Diagnostic Manual's Conquest of American Psychiatry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31-33. See also Reisman, *Sexual Sabotage*, 168. Drescher, 571-572.

⁴³ Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 126.

⁴⁴ Decker, *The Making of the DSM III*, 32.

⁴⁵ Douglas Haldeman, ed. *The Case Against Conversion “Therapy”* (Washington D.C.: APA, 2022), 22.

who question the politics of the nomenclature change. Yet, basing the change on *scientific research* is quite a stretch in the data. The *Kinsey Reports* were said to be *scientific*, but the testimony of Spitzer tells a different story.

Robert Spitzer admitted that political forces were at play in the removal of the diagnosis. He simply came up with a definition to remove the homosexual diagnosis in a vote that some have called “democratic” rather than scientific.⁴⁶ Spitzer said, “I came up with a definition in 1973 that made it possible to argue that homosexuality was not a mental disorder.”⁴⁷ It can be concluded that this was more an issue of political activism under the guise of civil rights rather than the “science of psychopathology.”

Sexual activists believed a homosexual person could never change. Their hope was for society at large to be convinced of the same. If there is no opportunity for change, according to their logic, then *all* sexual orientation change efforts are harmful.⁴⁸ “The symptom-based model of mental illness that emerged in the DSM-III exemplifies how scientific revolutions can emerge not just from the discovery of new facts but also from changing worldviews.”⁴⁹

Spitzer called the new disorder “sexual orientation disturbance,” which only labeled homosexuals who were *uncomfortable* with their same-sex desires.⁵⁰ The compromise of Spitzer was a clear move toward a personal sense of well-being as the threshold between mental disorder and mental health. Pathology was determined by the individual’s feelings—progressive individualism in Trueman’s word—rather than some outside governing morality, whether God or biological science.

While Freudian concepts of neurosis and psychosis died with the controversies

⁴⁶ Decker, *The Making of the DSM III*, 33. Speaking about the vote of the APA Decker said, “Observers were astonished. Psychiatric disorders would be decided by a democratic vote? . . . The press had a field day, and psychiatry’s reputation as a scientific field sank even further.”

⁴⁷ An interview with Robert Spitzer (YouTube, “APA’s Political Decision—Spitzer”)

⁴⁸ Haldeman, ed., in *The Case Against Conversion “Therapy,”* stated that “Sexual orientation is tied to physiological drives and biological systems that are beyond conscious choice and involves profound emotional feelings, such as ‘falling in love.’”

⁴⁹ Allan Horwitz, *Between Sanity and Madness: Mental Illness from Ancient Greece to the Neuroscientific Era* (New York: Oxford, 2020), 214.

⁵⁰ This language is similar to what has more recently been labeled gender dysphoria.

surrounding the new DSM III, contrary to what many believed, Freudianism overall did *not* die with its publication. There was an attempt to rid us of his psychological explanations of neurosis and psychosis. Yet, the biogenic framework remained steadfast and was reinvigorated by Spitzer through the discussions regarding identity and sexuality. There is actually a sense in which Freud's labors to rid individuals of guilt and shame has spread to any expressed sexual deviations. Rather than being viewed as pathological, psychogenic, biogenic, or immoral, the triumph of the therapeutic now celebrates the variations of expressive individualism in sexuality and gender identity. Everyone has "become wise in his own eyes" (Isaiah 5:21, Proverbs 26:21, see also Ecclesiastes and Judges), rid of all shame and not even knowing "how to blush" (Jeremiah 6:15).

Mark Yarhouse

How did Christians in mental health professions respond to the changing language of sexual deviations? Many continued to use the unethical practices of conversion or reparative therapies—a negative consequence of accepting the homosexual label of the DSM without biblical critique. Haldeman, et. al., stated, "Respect for religion and religious diversity is important also, but we cannot discriminate or violate the rights of sexually diverse clients based on our religious beliefs, practices, or identification."⁵¹ Nonetheless, many Christians working in mental health take the position of the APA regarding sexuality and religion.

Mark Yarhouse is probably the most well-known professing Christian studying gender identities. In his recent book, *Emerging Gender Identities*, he suggested, "The Christian doctrine of free will highlights God's capacity to tolerate and honor human choices."⁵² Yarhouse likens navigating gender identity concerns to "the heavy weight of the cross being carried."⁵³ He goes on to suggest that an array of pragmatic management strategies "may help a person suffering from gender dysphoria," which includes medical interventions.⁵⁴

Yarhouse and Sadusky give much credit to the psychiatric and medical community's "distinction between sex, gender, and sexuality." Which they say,

⁵¹ Haldeman, *The Case Against Conversion "Therapy,"* 119.

⁵² Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Today's Youth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), 209.

⁵³ Yarhouse and Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities*, 209.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 209, 59.

“contributed to the later idea that there is no necessary relationship between the biological sex and gender identity.”⁵⁵ A troublesome position when we see God as creator of male and female. In case this small portion is unclear, the authors provide clarity on their views and methodology:

We approach gender dysphoria as a real experience—a diagnosable disorder—that can be quite painful for a person. If gender dysphoria does not resolve on its own by late adolescence or early adulthood, we consider interventions to gender dysphoria as residing on a continuum of options for managing distress. We do not begin with medical interventions; rather, we begin with a wide range of coping strategies, in response to an undeniably painful experience. If a person is not sufficiently helped by noninvasive coping strategies—strategies that are often utilized in a stepwise manner, moving toward increasing alignment with a transgender identity—a person might consider more invasive coping responses, such as medical interventions (e.g. cross-sex hormones, gender confirmation surgery.)⁵⁶

The capitulation to expressive individualistic ideologies is not without consequences. It remains a mystery as to how one would square that approach with Scripture, even if they do not believe in sufficiency to the same degree as biblical counselors. I cannot help but think of Francis Schaeffer’s warning: “Liberal theology is really humanism expressed in theological terms . . . as the materialistic view takes over more thoroughly we can be certain that what we so carefully take for granted will be lost.”⁵⁷ The Church may have to pay a high price in the increasing hostile culture.

When the church abdicates absolute truth, we will find ourselves adapting to the world’s version of good and evil. As David Wells said, “For what succeeds in this world is not necessarily what is true or what is right.”⁵⁸ In the mind of man, categories of good and evil are constructed from appeals to epistemological authority and it is to that subject that we now turn our attention.

⁵⁵ Yarhouse and Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities*, 16.

⁵⁶ Yarhouse and Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities*, 59.

⁵⁷ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982), 21 and 71.

⁵⁸ David Wells, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2021), 7.

APPEAL TO LESSER AUTHORITY

The God of Scripture is the Sovereign Creator and occupies the position of dominion over all creation. His declaration regarding good and evil as it relates to human sexuality is clear in both Scripture and nature (Romans 1:18-32). But what has happened to a culture that suppresses His moral authority over sexuality? Understanding of the self could only change as the revelation of God is dismissed.

In terms of authority, once God is removed as moral authority for sexuality there is no guilt or shame in sexual perversion. The parading of sexual immorality is demonstration that God gives people over to their own lusts to the “dishonoring of their bodies . . . *because* they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator” (Romans 1:24b-25, emphasis added).

Even as God’s authority was cast off, exemplified in Freud and Kinsey, there was an appeal to another authority. Practice is always rooted in epistemological appeal. The shift toward a biogenic reduction of sexual perversion was an attempt to morally justify homosexual behavior. This is a clear attempt to remove sexual deviation from the moral categories of good and evil. The movement was represented by the slogan “born this way” to describe homosexual expression as a product of *normal* genetic variation of sexuality.

Appeal to biological authority has now been trumped by the transgender movement. The point is that when man thinks himself to be wise, he does foolish things. Man-made philosophies turn inward to destroy and create chaos rather than build and restore. When following the science does not accomplish the outcome, there is an appeal to identity that supersedes the morality of God and the biology of sex given at birth. Man becomes the maker of his own image and identity.

Let us not forget the influence of humanistic psychology as a means to achieve this new philosophy of sexual perversion. Abraham Maslow’s self-esteem and Carl Roger’s self-empowerment aided in casting off any outside authority in order to be the person you are on the inside, which has now come full circle to give

“scientific” respectability to the transgender movement.⁵⁹ Dignity and worth in personhood, according to modern theory, is discovered and created if we have the power to fashion who we are from the inside, divorced from godly morality or natural biological science.

In the end, the freedom of self-expression becomes the true authority that man wants. Biology is now simply a surrogate serving the agenda of the psychological self. In the end, those empty philosophies always crumble because they were not meant to bear the weight of the reality of God’s world. Therefore, we see a rapidly changing secular culture attempting to appeal to different authorities in order to satisfy their own desires. While arguments are different from feminism and transgenderism, it is the same taskmaster calling the shots—the prince of the power of the air exalting the self and attempting to subvert the glory of God from His creation of humanity in His image as “male and female” (Genesis 1:27). We are witnessing the degradation of epistemological authority from a moral and good God to biology and now from biology to psychological impulses.

The Church is faced with a myriad of challenges related to modern sexual perversions and a faulty view of man. Attempts to add theological language as a coating upon the systems of secular theory and practices led to theology being altered much more than the other way around. As Wells said, “It is not that theological beliefs are denied, but that they have little cash value . . . if we do not recover our theological character and our sense of truth, in the same way, all that we are going to have left is power, politics, and persuasion.”⁶⁰ Of course, “hindsight”, as we say, “is twenty-twenty.”

The scheming of the evil one is not primarily focused on the exaltation of man, but the veiling of God’s glory. Man becomes a pawn in the scheme of the evil one where man is promised glory and exaltation. While being deceived into thinking he is his own creator, man becomes used and abused to join the work of the father of lies to steal the glory due to the one Creator of heaven and earth. In the end of that story, man is left “desolate and naked” (Revelation 17). Research is beginning to demonstrate that stigma and discrimination do not account for the increased

⁵⁹ Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1962). Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).

⁶⁰ Wells, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church*, 11-12.

risk of poor mental health.⁶¹ It is even suggested that sex reassignment surgery, or “Gender Affirming Surgery” as it is now called, leads to less stable mental health outcomes.⁶²

MORE THAN TOLERANCE

It is critical to consider the ways in which the church lost its saltiness by being trampled under the foot of systems of psychoanalytic and humanistic psychology. Following the supposed progress, it is clear that the culture is not content on simply gaining the tolerance of religious conservatives, but desire their approval for sexual perversion. My aim in this section is to argue that the Christian counseling room is a means to the pulpit in the cultural wars regarding sexual perversion and gender identity.

Conservative Christian views are not tolerated in the new morality of expressive individualism. As we have been discussing, Romans 1 warns man against suppressing God’s truth. The outcome is a steep downgrade in futility of mind and unnatural practices. But careful attention to the passage warns not only those who participate in sexual immorality, but likewise anyone who may “give approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).

As is the custom of the evil one, he schemes to invert the Scripture. So, if man will be judged not only by practicing sexual immorality, but also by giving approval—then is it any wonder that sexual activists are not content with tolerance of their behavior?

The sentiment against biblical truth, however, did not just begin in psychiatry’s history. Hannah Decker explained:

Psychiatry began as a medical specialty as it ousted religious beliefs in

⁶¹ *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society*, “Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences” (No. 50 Fall 2016). Retrieved on February 21, 2022 https://www.thenewatlantis.com/wp-content/uploads/legacy-pdfs/20160819_TNA50SexualityandGender.pdf

⁶² Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington D.C.: Regenery Publishing, 2020) 194-204. Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions About Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018) 209-224.

sin as the origin of mental pathology. In its early years, the new field placed stress on ‘moral’ treatment, basically a psychological approach that viewed the environment and the emotions as crucial to the formation of psychopathology.⁶³

Seeking tolerance, the gay pride movement utilized slogans like “born this way” in order to gain acceptance. The conscience desires approval from others in order to remove any guilt and shame. This explains why there are attempts to have bakers and photographers provide their services, against their will, in support of non-traditional marriages. It is not simply the toleration of the acts of sodomy, but the giving of approval that is the highest aim.

The need for approval is why activists remain diligent to target counseling, especially Christian versions of counseling. The ultimate goal is not simply to gain control over the counseling room, but to establish precedent that will muzzle the pulpit. The biblical counseling room is a front-line ministry for application of God’s word to the moral problems of our day.

When activists view sexual perversion as a healthy pursuit, anything that may hinder their view of health will come under attack. If counseling philosophies, like biblical counseling, uphold a Judeo-Christian worldview regarding sin and sex, grounded in Scripture, then the counseling room is a battleground. As in Canada, if the counseling room is bridled from speaking the truth of God’s word, the goal is to muzzle the pulpit, “because the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it” (Jeremiah 6:10). The prophet Jeremiah enlightens us as to the result when the Word of God is not heard. He asked, “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No,” he said, “they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush” (Jeremiah 6:11-15).

The removal of guilt and shame for an abomination against the Lord brings us full circle back to the greatest work of Sigmund Freud—removal of personal guilt in the concept of Augustine’s view of original sin. Ideas have consequences and so we must strategize and stand upon God’s word as we “guard against empty philosophies and vain deceptions,” which are at war with the truth of God.

⁶³ Decker, *The Making of DSM-III*, xix.

Consider, also, the aim of the APA to target conservative Christianity with the rhetoric surrounding Conversion or Reparative Therapy. It is a bait and switch to talk of the evils of Conversion Therapy and then use the phrase Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) as a synonym to equate conservative Christian views as if we promote the evils of Conversion Therapy. It is clear that they believe conservative Christians are a threat to their construct of *mental health* and, therefore, we should be regulated in what we say regarding sexuality. Below is an example of that type of rhetoric put out by the APA in 2022:

The term *sexual orientation* change efforts in the United States describes methods based on psychotherapeutic techniques and theories (e.g., behavioral therapy, psychoanalysis, medical approaches) and religious and spiritual approaches (e.g. prayer and Bible study) that aim to change a person's same-sex sexual orientation to other-sex orientation (e.g., gay to straight), regardless of whether mental health professionals or lay individuals (including religious professionals, religious leaders, social groups, and other lay networks, such as self-help groups) are involved.⁶⁴

The rhetoric continues:

For most who have undergone SOCE or GICE [Gender Identity Change Efforts], there is probably no stronger motivating force than affiliation with an organized religion whose dogma forbids same-sex behavior or any noncisgender identity or presentation.⁶⁵

SOCE [Sexual Orientation Change Efforts] and GICE [Gender Identity Change Efforts] are the systems of a patriarchal constellation of medical, social, cultural, religious, and historical factors. That same-sex attraction and transgender identity call for interventions intended to change or control them is a vestige of heterocentric and cisgender privilege and power.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Haldeman, *The Case Against Conversion "Therapy,"* 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

This demonstrates the philosophy of critical theory at base, which destroys reality or suggestion of external authority outside of modern views of progressive individualism. What contemporary pundits seem blinded to is the fact that expressive individualism becomes an “authority” of sorts that naturally leads to societal anarchy and chaos. Bible-believing Christians, and the truth we hold dear, become the collateral damage.

The spirit of the age is the destruction of legitimate authority. Critical Race Theory, Duluth, feminism, egalitarianism, etc. all have a similar underlying thread to remove authority because according to the theories, authority carries with it inherent evils. The vacuum of authority that remains is then filled with one philosophy, “every man does what is right in his own eyes.”

Ironically, this is not an anti-authority structure as many may believe. Rather, it becomes a chaotic war of competing individualistic versions of authority. The modern “cancel culture” demonstrates the reality of mob rule. The menagerie of morals built by what Trueman calls “expressive individualism” is not simply an alternate moral code but a competing authority against the absolutes given by our Creator.

That tension is being codified in statements on ethics that guide counseling relationships regulated by the state. Representing the APA, Haldeman said:

Ethics codes also underscore efforts to be nondiscriminatory toward others and to respect diversity, most especially diversity based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, and religion. Thus, it is important for us to treat everyone in a similar manner and not to deny or discriminate against those from LGBTQI+ communities. Respect for religion and religious diversity is important also, but we cannot discriminate or violate the rights of sexually diverse clients based on our or their religious beliefs, practices, or identifications.⁶⁷

The morality here is nondiscriminatory, but this seems an impossible position when different systems of belief hold tightly their convictions regarding what is most helpful or healthy for humanity. If nondiscrimination is one’s highest value,

⁶⁷ Haldeman, *The Case Against Conversion “Therapy,”* 119.

then they believe that self-pursuit and self-sovereignty is the means of health for humanity.

In that case sexual perversion becomes the means of health and a moral good, rather than the rotten fruit of a downgraded culture that God considers evil. It is through this therapeutic pursuit that we see the Christian faith as a hindrance to the therapeutic progress and the APA has conveyed as much in their book, *The Case Against Conversion “Therapy.”*

The Scripture explains the rotten fruit of sexual perversion in a very different manner than our cultural analysis and celebration of sexual expression and diversity. Our culture heralds sexual expression as a right to personal autonomy and declaration of freedom from any moral law. The Bible proclaims that sinful sensuality and sexual immorality are due to a rejection of God’s truth, the futility of the mind, and the foolish wisdom in unnatural practices (Ephesians 4:19, Romans 1:18-32).

The intensity of the sexual activist agenda is not simply to gain popularity and broad acceptance. Rather, it is to decimate any who would question the validity of or immorality behind such sexual perversion. There should be no doubt that conservative Christianity is in the cross hairs. Activists will not rest while there remains a viewpoint that Christ is supreme and demands our sexuality be reserved between one man and one woman in covenant relationship that expresses the beauty of His gospel—a relationship between Jesus and His bride. We must remember that anything we allow in the relationship between genders regarding *fluidity*—sexual expression— or roles must also be theologically reflected in the relationship of Jesus to His bride. The theological implications in gender diversity can never display the truths presented in Scripture regarding Jesus and His church, and must therefore be rejected (Ephesians 5:22-32).

CONCLUSION

Once you reject God’s natural order of sexuality there is a downward spiral of chaos which deteriorates social order. We have seen in the history of psychiatry that there have been intentional efforts to build ideologies which are opposed to

the Christian faith. As God's moral authority is rejected, the individualized self becomes the sovereign.

Finally, we are in a war over ideas of what is most healthy for individuals and the counseling room is one of the primary battlefronts. This is a war worth engaging. As George Swinnock eloquently stated, "Our words can provoke outward reformation, but only God's word can produce inward renovation . . . Human counsel can do something to hide the corruption of nature, but only divine instruction is effectual for the healing of corrupted nature."⁶⁸

For Christians, we believe that submission to God, living under His providential care in union with Christ, is the healthiest disposition for humanity. But the secular worldview believes that personal well-being, which is measured by perception of personal feelings, desires, and passions, is the measure of health. And this is the collision course that religious conservatives are on with the culture.

The world wants to squelch any speech they deem may be "harmful" to individuals wrestling with their gender identity.⁶⁹ Activists have been moving toward ordinances that eliminate any type of counseling, including biblical counseling, which aims to speak truth regarding God's design of male and female or sexual expression. An ordinance presented in West Lafayette, Indiana was an attempt to cease biblical counsel in cases regarding sexual orientation. But the counseling room is merely a gateway to the pulpit. If ordinances may be passed to regulate speech in a private counseling room, activists will move forward with attempts to limit the speech of conservative pulpits, as demonstrated in the Canadian Bill C-4.

One observation of this story is the Christian embrace of worldly ideologies. Freud was well accepted among Christians, even those considered conservative Christians.⁷⁰ We must be careful in our appraisal of secular methodologies and the worldviews which support them. We must remain as watchmen for the ministry

⁶⁸ Swinnock, *Blessed and Boundless God*, 105.

⁶⁹ Here I am not advocating for rude, harsh, or harmful counsel. I am suggesting how society will understand truth from God as harmful. I am advocating for the Christian responsibility to be gentle and speak the truth of God in love, even when the secular may deem it harmful to one's health. Consider Haldeman, *The Case Against Conversion Therapy*, ch.5.

⁷⁰ Samuel Stephens, *The Psychological Anthropology of Wayne Edward Oates* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2020).

of the Word of God as we proclaim it and guard it against empty philosophies which attempt to compromise it. Why is that such an important task? First, the glory of God remains veiled when the Word is compromised. Second, man can never understand himself without first knowing God. Third, sin remains hidden without the Word. Fourth, the Word of God keeps us from being deceived by cultural norms and guards us from giving approval of perversions against God.

We find ourselves abandoning the Word, not in confessional commitment as much as in the hearing and doing of it. The waning of confessional commitment is much later in the process of deconstruction. Describing the later part of the twentieth century, Wells says, “. . . the Church was quietly unhitching itself from the truth of Scripture in *practice*.”⁷¹ This is an issue of both the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Wells goes on to warn:

Biblical inspiration was affirmed but its consequences were not worked out for preaching, our techniques for growing the Church, our techniques for healing our fractured selves. These all happened largely without the use of Scripture. It is as if we think that the Bible is inspired, it is nevertheless inadequate to the tasks of sustaining and nourishing the twentieth-century church! It is almost as if God, when he inspired the word could not see what was coming in the late twentieth century! The result of this divine myopia is that he has left us with something that is inadequate to the great challenges that we face today.

If we do not recover the sufficiency of the word of God in our time, if we do not relearn what it means to be sustained by it, nourished by it, disciplined by it, and unless our preachers find the courage to preach its truth, to allow their sermons to be defined by its truth, we will lose our right to call ourselves Protestants, we will lose our capacity to be the people of God, and we will set ourselves on a path that leads right into the old discredited liberal Protestantism. We have to recover a vivid otherworldliness by making ourselves once again captives to the truth of God regardless of the cultural consequences.⁷²

⁷¹ Wells, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church*, 13.

⁷² *Ibid.*

BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND HETEROSEXUALITY

Heath Lambert¹

BACK TO BASICS

In 1961 the Green Bay Packers were leading in the fourth quarter of the championship game for the National Football League. Late in the game, just moments from victory, they squandered the lead and lost to the Philadelphia Eagles. It was heartbreaking to come so close to one of their sport's highest honors to see it vanish before their eyes. The team spent the off-season nursing their grudges, determining to do better, and wondering what their coach would have planned at the start of the next season to help them improve their game.

Their coach was Vince Lombardi, and he too had been thinking about how to help his team advance their game. His plan, however, was a surprise to members of the Green Bay Packers. On the very first day of training camp, Lombardi walked into the room ready to address his team for the very first time in the season. Standing in the room full of some of the best players in the NFL, he extended his hand that held the oblong leather ball for which his sport was named and declared, "Gentlemen, this is a football."² Lombardi then spent the entire season hammering away with his team on the basics of blocking and tackling. The instruction often felt so basic that members of the team would jokingly request that he please slow down. Lombardi was convinced, however, that the path to victory was found in mastering fundamentals that others took for granted. His conviction paid off. Six months later the Packers shut out the New York

¹ Dr. Heath Lambert is the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville and the former Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

² David Maraniss, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000), 274.

Giants 37-0 to win the championship game. This now famous account serves as a constant reminder that basics matter.

THE JOURNEY BACK TO BASICS

Basics matter in biblical counseling as well as in football. If Lombardi's journey to recover the basics traced back to the 1961 NFL championship, this journey back to basics goes back to the 2015 annual conference of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). The theme of the conference that year focused on homosexuality. That was the year that *Obergefell v. Hodges* changed the nationwide landscape of homosexuality and marriage, and many Christian ministries were highlighting the sin of homosexuality. The difference between the ACBC conference and many other Christian conferences, however, had to do with the theme of homosexuality and change. Whereas most of the evangelical conferences on the topic were highlighting the ethics of homosexuality, the ACBC conference was emphasizing ministry to people struggling with homosexuality, and how to help them change.

In preparation for that conference, I engaged in careful research regarding reparative therapy and read numerous resources on the topic. My concern was that even within biblical counseling there was an instinct to engage in integration on this topic and assume that reparative therapy was a biblical rather than secular approach to change. My research on reparative therapy led to many serious concerns about this secular approach to care which I have chronicled in other places. But one of my many concerns was regarding the secular goal of reparative therapy.

The goal of reparative therapy is that of replacing homosexual desires with heterosexual desires. None other than the founder of reparative therapy, Joseph Nicolosi, makes this quite clear, "As shame is slowly diminished in therapy and the same-sex attracted man grows in self-awareness and self-assertion, he should gradually begin to find within himself a naturally heterosexual response."³ One of my most consistent critiques of reparative therapy was that this goal was unbiblical

³Joseph J. Nicolosi, *Shame and Attachment Loss: The Practical Work of Reparative Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 324.

and wrong. In *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change*, which I wrote with Denny Burk, I argued this way:

In Scripture, same-sex attraction and behavior are repeatedly and consistently condemned. Because of that reality, it is possible to wrongly assume that opposite-sex attraction and behavior are repeatedly endorsed. In fact, this is not the case. The Bible never portrays heterosexuality in general to be a good thing. There is not one place in the entire Bible where men and women are commanded to have sexual desire for the opposite sex indiscriminately. The biblical norm for our sexual lives is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage. Thus, the marriage covenant provides the norm for our sexual lives, not heterosexuality as an identity category.⁴

Obviously, Christian marriage is a heterosexual institution insofar as it is reserved for one man and one woman but endorsing marriage as a heterosexual institution and setting apart our sexual desires as being exclusively reserved for this union is a very different argument than stating that all sexual desires are praiseworthy merely for being focused on the opposite sex.

I made a similar argument in an article entitled, “Oil and Water: The Impossible Relationship Between Evangelicalism and Reparative Therapy”:

Contrary to the teaching of reparative therapists, heterosexual desire is not a virtue in and of itself. The biblical teaching is more sophisticated, calling for purity and chastity, rather than the cultivation of general heterosexual desire. People who struggle with homosexuality change by pursuing the goal of chastity, which means fighting to eradicate any sexual desire outside of marriage, and fighting to cultivate exclusive sexual desire for one’s spouse within marriage.⁵

The argument I made then, and still believe now to be the biblical position, is that sexual desire must always be directed toward one’s opposite-sex partner in

⁴ Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (P&R: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2015) 74-75.

⁵ Heath Lambert, “Oil and Water: The Impossible Relationship Between Evangelicalism and Reparative Therapy” ACBC Essays, Vol. I (2017): 12.

marriage, not that one should pursue heterosexual desires in general as argued by reparative therapists.

This argument created some difficulty. I have been criticized many times, but in my writing about homosexuality, I received some of the staunchest criticism in my ministry up to that time. My arguments critical of the heterosexual goal of reparative therapy was an example of criticism I received from the right. There were countless anecdotal examples of critiques from conservative biblical counselors. Many ACBC members and Fellows wrote to me and called with significant questions. Even one board member reached out to express serious concern. All of these conversations were fruitful and ended well, but it proved that integration can creep in even in the most conservative of places. It also showed that at least a portion of my argument against reparative therapy was jarring even to the most biblically faithful.

The most strenuous arguments I received from the right, however, were not from biblical counselors, but from members of the ex-gay population. Over the course of several months, I spoke with many of the leading voices in the ex-gay movement. These men and women prevailed upon me repeatedly to stop criticizing reparative therapy in general, and, in particular, to desist from the argument that heterosexuality was unbiblical. I am not aware of any person in the ex-gay movement that I was able to persuade that my argument reflected the biblical position. In one notable example, none less than Robert Gagnon argued at a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society that my “insane” position was “giving aid and comfort to the enemy.” He could not understand why someone who opposed homosexuality as I clearly as I did would apparently undermine the faithful arguments of those he believed to be theologically correct.⁶

In an equal but opposite way, I was stupefied that an argument that seemed to me to be so clearly and patently biblical could not be understood. In spite of that misunderstanding, however, I would state the matter even more strongly and say that it is an elementary matter of biblical fidelity that the Scriptures do not require, but rather condemn general heterosexual desire as a moral good, and instead require that no sexual desires of any kind should be exercised until they

⁶ Robert Gagnon, “Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy Under the Bus”, Paper at Evangelical Theological Society (ETS: November 18, 2015).

exist in the exclusive confines of Christian marriage.

In what follows I will advance three biblical arguments that clarify for Christians that the Bible condemns the general heterosexuality as a goal of biblical change.

THE COMMANDS AGAINST ADULTERY

One of the earliest indicators in Scripture that general heterosexual desire is not good are the commands in Scripture against adultery. The simple clarity of the seventh commandment demands, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). The command makes clear that any sexual expression outside of marriage is wrong, even when it is heterosexual in nature.

Perhaps the most dramatic way this principle is demonstrated is in Proverbs with the language of the forbidden woman,

For the lips of the forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol. (Proverbs 5:3-5)

Two things are true of the forbidden woman in this passage. The first is that she is alluring. The language of lips that drip honey and speech that is smoother than oil is a graphic way of describing how enticing she is. This woman is forbidden, but not unappealing. This explains the sinful appeal of sexuality. It is a warning that sin can masquerade as a good thing, which goes a long way towards explaining the deception of reparative therapy regarding the virtue of general heterosexual desire.

The second truth is that one reason the woman is forbidden is that she is dangerous. The language in the text not only describes the appealing nature of the woman, but also her danger and deadliness. Her feet are described as following the path towards death and the grave. The people of God are commanded to stay away from the forbidden woman because she is a poison apple. These truths are clear proof of the sinfully dangerous logic of general heterosexual desire. It makes

a great deal of sinful sense to seek the forbidden woman because of her appeal. This search, however, is dangerous and ultimately deadly. Anyone who pursues a heterosexual encounter outside the exclusive bonds of marriage will come to regret it. This reality remains true even when that sinful search is meant to replace other sinful desires such as homosexuality.

THE COMMANDS AGAINST LUST

It is not necessary to leave the ten commandments before finding more proof of the sinfulness of general heterosexual desire,

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21)

This commandment functions as an internalization of the seventh commandment. As it does with the other commandments, it brings God's law into the heart. The seventh command stipulates that any heterosexual behavior outside of marriage is ungodly. The tenth commandment makes the same principle true for what one desires. Jesus, of course, fulfills this teaching in his Sermon on the Mount, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

It is good to remember that in Jesus' teaching the word rendered lust is the general Greek word for desire, *epithumēō*. In some contexts, this word communicates a morally good desire. For example, the Apostle Paul makes it clear, using the same term, that a person who desires the work of pastor desires a noble task (1 Timothy 3:1). What makes a desire good or evil is the object of desire. Desire focused on a moral good is praiseworthy. Desire focused on a moral evil is blameworthy.

Moses in the ten commandments and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount make it clear that it is wrong to have any kind of sexual desire for a person other than a spouse. This is an obvious refutation that general heterosexuality is a moral good.

Instead, purity happens when one's heterosexual desire is aimed only at a spouse. Any other heterosexual desire is condemned both by Moses and Jesus.

THE COMMAND FOR MARITAL INTIMACY

Each of the previous two realities are framed in a negative context. General heterosexuality is condemned in the Bible because any sexual attitude or action aimed outside of marriage is condemned. The argument here is more positive, condemning general heterosexual desire because of what the Bible commends. God's message in Scripture not only contains what His people must avoid, but also makes clear what His people should embrace. God makes the positive direction of desire clear when He commands His people, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love" (Proverbs 5:18-19).

In a prurient culture, it is easy to miss how deeply and sexually intimate Proverbs 5 is. The language demands that a man must be filled with sexual delight at the thought of the breasts of his wife. In a Bible that forbids drunkenness, here is a command to be intoxicated by the sexual relationship of marriage. But there is more. This joy, delight, and intoxication is not directed at the sexual pleasure from just any woman. This command is not one for general heterosexual desire. The command is to find sexual delight exclusively in the confines of marriage.

King Solomon reigned over Israel at its zenith of global political power. He also may have been the most heterosexual man in human history! Solomon's unchecked heterosexuality led to his condemnation in the text of Scripture,

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, 'You shall not enter into marriage, with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. (1 Kings 11:1-3)Ω

There are two criticisms of Solomon embedded in this passage. The first regards the sinful syncretistic worship practices that Solomon's many wives brought into his heart and life. The second, however, is the sheer number of wives Solomon took. In a moral universe, where God demands that each man must have one wife, Solomon's hundreds of wives serve as a severe shock to our moral imagination. And the condemnation he received (Nehemiah 13:26) is a remarkable demonstration that the Bible even condemns some kinds of heterosexual marriage, as it does here and in other prohibitions against marrying one who is not one of God's people (2 Corinthians 6:14). The Bible condemns heterosexual practices that happen apart from the exclusive confines of marriage with one man and one woman. This is yet one more clear rejection of the goodness of general heterosexuality.

CLARIFYING THE BASICS

These three considerations help us understand the appropriate way to understand the issue of heterosexuality. I would not want to be misunderstood to believe that any notion of heterosexuality is to be completely rejected. My contention that general heterosexual desire is not a moral good, and therefore not the goal of faithful counseling does not mean there is not a proper way to think of heterosexuality. In fact, heterosexuality is important in at least two ways.

First, heterosexuality characterizes the institution of marriage. As I have made clear, the Bible affirms that marriage is between one man and woman (Genesis 2:24). This means that, even though Christians must reject general heterosexual desire, we must affirm that marriage is a heterosexual institution, and can never be a homosexual one. The only marriages that are acceptable are the ones, therefore, that happen in the framework of heterosexual marriages.

Second, heterosexuality characterizes the only appropriate kind of sexual desire. Sexual desire, in order to be biblical, must be characterized by at least two realities. First, sexual desire must be in the confines marriage. Second, sexual desire must be toward the opposite sex partner in marriage. Heterosexual desire is the only kind of desire that is potentially honorable. Homosexual desire, on the other hand, can never be qualified in such a way to make it morally acceptable. It will, instead, always be wrong.

The case I am making here is much more careful than the one that reparative therapy seeks to make. Statements like the ones from Nicolosi never qualify heterosexual desire, but rather celebrate any heterosexual expression of desire as a counseling success and the presence of righteousness. Christians cannot afford to think in such dangerous and sinful ways.

What all of this means is that heterosexuality is not an absolute good, in and of itself, but is a potential and qualified good. In a sinful world, fallen people can take this potential good and corrupt it in any number of ways. In a broken world that reality is true for many other potential goods. Another issue that is relevant for biblical counseling regards the use of our words. We know that language has great potential to be good but is not an absolute good because it can be corrupted in so many ways. Words that would otherwise be good can be corrupted by being spoken at the wrong time, with the wrong motivation, to the wrong person, and in various other contexts that would corrupt them. It is the same with prayer. The potential good of prayer can be corrupted by praying out of accord with God's revealed will, by selfish motivations, and by the absence of faith. So it is with heterosexuality. Because it is a potential moral good, biblical counselors can never point to its general expression as a good in and of itself, but must be clear that it is qualified by other biblical truths in order to be commended.

THE PRACTICALITY AND HUMILITY OF GETTING BACK TO BASICS

The observations in this essay are crucial for a very practical reason. The history of reparative therapy has not proven to be an impressive one. I will not document here what I have shown in other places, but the heyday of reparative therapy seems to have passed. Much of that is because of shifting cultural values in favor of homosexuality. It also has to do with the poor record of reparative therapy. The therapy has not worked.

The observation that reparative therapy is ineffective is an important one that we must make with great caution. It is dangerous to consider the value of any counseling intervention based on effectiveness alone. That is true because counseling requires more than just a faithful counseling model implemented by

a skilled counselor. In order for counseling to be effective there must not only be a faithful counseling model communicated by a faithful counselor, but there must also be a willing counselee who listens carefully and works diligently to implement what they have learned. This reality means that the best counseling interventions in the world will experience failure whenever they are met with an unwilling counselee.

It is possible that the ineffectiveness of reparative therapy is based on the failure of counselees to implement the counseling instruction. That means the primary mechanism for an evaluation of any therapeutic intervention must be the text of Scripture. Christians must use the Scriptures to evaluate whether the theory of any counseling intervention is sound or faithless. As I have tried to show here, the Bible is unequivocal about the unbiblical mission of reparative therapy to pursue general heterosexuality as the goal of counseling.

But what about the success of reparative therapy? It has been demonstrated that reparative therapists do have some successes.⁷ Some simply refuse to consider this evidence, but this is not an option for faithful Christians. Indeed, the Scriptures give us a way to understand the effectiveness of unbiblical counseling approaches.

Faulty counseling interventions can often achieve a kind of success. For example, a former pastor at the church I serve was accustomed to motivating teenage boys to abstinence with the absolute guarantee that premarital sex would lead to a sexually transmitted disease. He would often describe these diseases in horrifying detail. This method often worked as I have learned from many in my church years after they heard this counsel. Many boys headed the counsel and remained celibate until marriage. But biblical counselors would express high levels of concern at using motivations of fear and misleading information as the basis for change. A theory can achieve a kind of “success” without being based on biblical principles.

Thus, the Bible makes sense of the successes and failures of reparative therapy by pointing us to the importance that counseling must have a biblical goal in order to achieve the kind of success that honors God. This means Christians have a very

⁷ Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) 117-152.

practical reason to be clear that the counseling goal for persons struggling with homosexuality is not heterosexuality, but purity. Any failure of reparative therapy will be, in part, to pursuing a goal that God has not ordained. Any “success” will be based on a faulty goal and will ultimately prove to be unhelpful. Biblical counselors must be motivated by practical care to show struggling people a better way.

But this elementary understanding of the sinfulness of general heterosexuality also encourages humility on the part of everyone with sexual sin. The Bible makes clear that any sexual desire, even when it is heterosexual, is sinful in every case unless it is directed toward one’s spouse in marriage. This means that heterosexuals have no ground for sexual boasting. Indeed, when you understand the basics, you see that every heterosexual has just as many sins as homosexuals. Heterosexual people sin in countless ways. Whenever we fail to have sexual desire for our spouses, when we pursue pornography, adultery, fornication, lust, and flirtation we demonstrate ourselves to be sinners. Whether homosexual or heterosexual we are all sexual deviants hating what God loves and loving what God hates. We all need the grace of Jesus to forgive us our sins and empower us to live with the chastity that he not only commands, but empowers to achieve.

That is my argument. It is not complex or novel, but it is important. Years ago when I first made it, I received too much criticism to assume otherwise. I want to take responsibility for that criticism. I took for granted that everyone would naturally see that my argument was correct. This was a failure on my part, which I wish to correct here. I needed to slow down and take more care in the argument. I have tried to do that here in demonstrating from Scripture that the pursuit of general heterosexual desire is not a moral good in itself, but is a sin. My desire has been to hold aloft the biblical portrait of sexuality, just as Vince Lombardi held aloft that football so many decades ago, and in declaring the obvious make an argument of crucial significance for our work as biblical counselors.

BIBLICAL SEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDER SIN

*Evan Lenow*¹

INTRODUCTION

It is probably safe to surmise that the average American only pays attention to competitive swimming during the quadrennial summer Olympic games. I consider myself to be a fairly engaged sports fan, but I couldn't name the current favorites for any of the swimming world championships unless they just happen to be Americans who also won high profile races in the most recent Olympics. Aside from Katie Ledecky or Michael Phelps (who is already retired), I'm not sure most Americans could name a competitive amateur swimmer until the 2021-2022 NCAA collegiate swimming season. What was once relegated to the almost exclusive domain of the summer Olympics, discussions of competitive swimming have dominated cultural debate for the first half of 2022, and the name Lia Thomas has been at the forefront of the discussion. Thomas is a transgender male-to-female swimmer who competed in women's collegiate swimming events for the University of Pennsylvania during the 2021-2022 season after spending three years on the men's team.² Despite the fact that Thomas graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in May 2022, the debate continued to foment as FINA, the international federation that governs the sport of swimming, issued a ruling that restricts transgender male-to-female athletes from competing in elite women's aquatic events if they did not transition prior to experiencing male puberty.³ If

¹ Dr. Evan Lenow is the Director of Church and Minister Relations and Director of Event Services at Mississippi College. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

² Robert Sanchez, "I Am Lia: The Trans Simmer Dividing America Tells Her Story," *Sports Illustrated* (March 3, 2022); <https://www.si.com/college/2022/03/03/lia-thomas-penn-swimmer-transgender-woman-daily-cover>.

³ The policy specifically states, "They are androgen sensitive but had male puberty suppressed beginning at Tanner Stage 2 or before age 12, whichever is later, and they have since continuously

anyone was not paying attention prior to Thomas' dive into women's collegiate sports, the transgender question is now front and center of the cultural moment. And many Christians are asking the question, "What does the Bible have to say about transgenderism?" This essay will attempt to answer that question and more specifically set the conversation within the context of God's design for sexuality. In doing so, this essay will conclude that transgenderism is a disordering of God's design for sexuality through the physical body that He has created.

THE BIBLICAL DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY

Before we begin to address the matter of transgenderism, we must first explore the biblical design for sexuality that God instituted as part of His creation order. This is a necessary first step in the conversation about transgenderism because much of the confusion over this issue stems from the fact that we are talking past one another instead of with one another. Outlining terms and principles for evaluation will aid in moving the conversation in a productive direction. At the same time, we must recognize the political momentum that the transgender movement currently exhibits and the resultant roadblocks for Christians who advocate for a biblical understanding of sexuality will face in the broader culture.

There are at least three key theological principles related to the biblical design for sexuality that have direct bearing on the transgender debate. These principles set the stage for our understanding of the body and sexual expression so that we can then evaluate transgenderism from a biblical perspective. The principles are 1) God created humans as male and female, 2) God created males and females as complementary in nature, and 3) God designed marriage as the context for sexual expression.⁴

maintained their testosterone levels in serum (or plasma) below 2.5 nmol/L." FINA, "Policy on Eligibility for the Men's and Women's Competition Categories," 7-8; <https://resources.fina.org/fina/document/2022/06/19/525de003-51f4-47d3-8d5a-716dac5f77c7/FINA-INCLUSION-POLICY-AND-APPENDICES-FINAL-.pdf>.

⁴ In addition to these three components, Mark Liederbach and I develop two more theological principles for biblical sexuality in a larger work. The other two principles are sexuality has a spiritual component and God intended childbearing and rearing to take place in the context of biblically defined marriage. See Mark D. Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2021), 572-581.

God Created Humans as Male and Female

Any discussion of human sexuality and transgenderism must begin with an exploration of biblical anthropology. While space restrictions limit the extent to which we can discuss anthropology, we need to begin with the creation of mankind and the key feature that God created humans as male and female as a significant component to the transgender question. At the first mention of humanity in Scripture, we find an affirmation of the first theological principle that guides our discussion:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. (Genesis 1:26-27)⁵

These words in the opening chapter of Genesis make a claim that is somewhat controversial in our contemporary context. In an age where distinctions between male and female are blurred, we find the testimony of Scripture to be that God created male and female as distinct expressions of humanity.

In our discussion of male and female, we need to clarify some terms so that we are not confused. At the most basic level, the claim that mankind is created male and female refers explicitly to biological sex. Biological sex refers to the genetic and anatomical distinctions that identify one as male or female. The presence of male versus female genitalia and the chromosomal markers of XY versus XX are the most obvious biological factors that determine maleness and femaleness in biological sex.⁶ Therefore, we find biological confirmation of what Scripture says regarding the creation of man as male and female. The binary categories of biological sex are part of God’s good creation. This is not to deny the existence of intersex conditions that blur the genetic and anatomical distinctions; rather, such conditions speak to the pervasive impact of sin on the created order that such

⁵Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible.

⁶The connection between sex as a category and the biological reality of the body is what makes the use of the phrase “sex assigned at birth” confusing. The idea of sex as a biological category has been accepted for most of human history. To say that sex is assigned rather than observed is an oxymoron.

anomalies exist as a disordering of God's original design.⁷

By extension, we must now deal briefly with the question of gender. While biological sex is clearly tied to the genetic and anatomical markers of the human body, the term gender is often used to refer to the psychological and cultural components of maleness and femaleness. Distinctions in gender may often refer to attire, activities, relationships, preferences, and even parenting styles. Different cultures may attribute certain expressions as normative for each particular gender, but the key is that cultures have historically linked these gender-based norms to the expected connection between biological sex and gender.⁸ For this reason, the terms biological sex and gender are often used synonymously in casual conversation even though they do not refer to the exact same concepts. In contemporary parlance, one's self-perception of gender is typically referred to as gender identity. This is a somewhat recent term that has been used extensively in the transgender debate, especially by those who experience dissonance between their biological sex and gender. Even though we note the differences in these terms, it is important to recognize that the traditional understanding of biological sex, gender, and gender identity is that they all align with one another—driven by the biological markers—and the terms male and female function as descriptors for all three terms.⁹

Therefore, our first theological principle related to the transgender debate is that God created humans as male and female. This is an anthropological assertion that focuses our attention on the binary categories embedded in the creation order for humans. This principle helps to guide our discussion because God designed both biological sex and gender/gender identity to coordinate with one another. A denial of this reality serves as the foundation for the transgender movement. Those experiencing cognitive dissonance between their biological sex and gender/gender identity are faced with a choice to bring the mind into alignment with the

⁷ For a lengthier discussion of biological sex, intersex conditions, and the impact of sin on creation, see Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics as Worship*, 564-567.

⁸ For an extensive discussion of the differences between men and women, see chapter 3 of J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington: ISI, 2012), 35-65.

⁹ There is no doubt that the debate over these terms and the interaction between these ideas extends far beyond the basic statements made in the previous three paragraphs. However, for the sake of this particular essay, the traditional understanding of the relationship between biological sex, gender, and gender identity will serve as the presupposition for all subsequent arguments.

physical body or to bring the physical body into alignment with the mind. We find the latter to be the most common approach in contemporary culture while the former is more in keeping with God's statements in Scripture about his creation.

The importance of God's creation of humans as male and female to the transgender discussion lies in the fact that God created a physical universe with clear markers of biological sex. These markers extend beyond humanity to most of the animal kingdom as well. To "change" from one sex (and by extension gender) to another is to deny biological facts and to assert something about oneself that is not observable in the physical world. While this may seem like an elementary point, it is key to the entire discussion.

God Created Males and Females as Complementary in Nature

The second theological principle guiding our discussion is the idea that God has created males and females to be complementary in nature. The complementarity expressed through the binary sexes falls into two categories—sexual complementarity and role complementarity. As with our previous theological principle, we will not exhaust the full extent of male-female complementarity, but we will briefly explore what it means for the transgender discussion.

Sexual complementarity first enters the biblical discussion in Genesis 1:28. Scripture reads, "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.'" With this pronouncement following on the heels of the declaration that God created humans as male and female, we rightly surmise that the process through which mankind would be fruitful and multiply was the sexual relationship that God designed to take place between a man and a woman. God's design is fleshed out more in Genesis 2, and it is also observed and affirmed throughout the pages of Scripture. Suffice it to say that God's command to be fruitful and multiply was directly tied to the complementary nature of the sexual bodies He created.

The second category of the complementary nature of humans relates to roles. God has designed men and women to express different roles as part of their biological and psychological makeup—ultimately as an expression of biblical

anthropology. J. Budziszewski writes, “Men and women aren’t just different, but different in corresponding ways. They are complementary opposites—alike in their humanity, but different in ways that make them partners. Each sex completes what the other lacks, and helps bring the other into balance.”¹⁰ Without going into an exhaustive discussion of role complementarity, let me just say that God’s design for the relationship between men and women, particularly in the marriage relationship, demonstrates that we are uniformly human but distinctly different (see Ephesians 5:22-33).

So how does the complementary nature of humans affect the transgender discussion? First, sexual union is only expressed through biological distinction. It is impossible for two biological males or two biological females to “be fruitful and multiply” without the contribution of another person’s gametes. Thus, when a transgender individual attempts to participate in sexual union for the purpose of procreation, he or she must do so with someone of the opposite biological sex, no matter how one might identify oneself. Even if procreation is not in view for the particular sex act, the biological complementarity of the reproductive systems still requires individuals of the opposite sex for intercourse as God designed it. Role complementarity is also tied to biological and social differences between the sexes. Merely identifying as the opposite sex does not change the inherent role complementarity that God has created. Transgenderism assumes one can alter gender and not minimize God’s design for complementarity, but this is a false assumption.

God Designed Marriage as the Context for Sexual Expression

The final theological principle that governs our understanding of biblical sexuality is that God designed marriage as the context for sexual expression. While this particular principle does not have direct reference to the transgender debate, it is so significant that we cannot have a proper understanding of biblical sexuality without it.

Marriage enters the biblical framework implicitly in Genesis 1:28, but it becomes an explicit component of God’s design for human flourishing in Genesis 2. Beginning in verse 18, we see that God sets the stage for marriage by declaring,

¹⁰ Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 41.

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.” In the following verses we read how God fashions the woman out of the man’s rib and then presents her to the man. At this point, the man affirms that she is “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). The passage reaches its denouement with the words of v. 24—“This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.”

From these opening chapters of Genesis and the subsequent descriptions of marriage that we find throughout Scripture, we recognize that God has given marriage to mankind for very specific purposes that include companionship and marital union, sexual expression and procreation, and faithfulness and fidelity.¹¹ As a result, we can define marriage in the following way: “Marriage is designed by God to be a comprehensive, covenantal union between one man and one woman intended to endure for a lifetime and proximally directed toward the rearing of the next generation.”¹²

Since a biblical definition of marriage demands one man and one woman and implies that these partners will have sexual complementarity through their biological distinctives, then marriage promotes an understanding of biblical sexuality in keeping with the theological principles already discussed. To affirm biblical marriage is to uphold the biological distinctions between men and women and the complementary nature of both their biological and psychological makeup.

Transgenderism promotes a disordering of marriage in one of two ways. First, it assumes there is no necessary distinction between men and women if a man who identifies as a woman (or vice versa) attempts to marry someone who holds the opposite gender identity while being the same biological sex. Such relationships cannot fulfill the sexual complementarity found in marriage. Second transgenderism denies long held gender distinctions when it comes to childbearing by promoting the idea that a man can give birth.¹³

¹¹ See Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali* (“On the Good of Marriage”), in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, translated by Charles T. Wilcox, vol. 27 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955) for further discussion on the purposes of marriage.

¹² Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics as Worship*, 615.

¹³ Simon Hattenstone, “The dad who gave birth: ‘Being pregnant doesn’t change me being a trans man,’” *The Guardian* (April 20, 2019); <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/20/the-dad-who-gave-birth-pregnant-trans-freddy-mcconnell>.

As we can see from these three theological principles, Scripture sets parameters around what we can accept as an appropriate expression of biblical sexuality. Transgenderism distorts these guidelines and moves beyond the God-given design for sexual expression. It simply cannot affirm the clear biblical teaching on sexuality. With that in mind, we still need to consider what the Bible says directly about transgenderism.

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING TRANSGENDERISM

Specific biblical instructions regarding transgenderism are very limited. We have already seen how Genesis 1-2 addresses matters of biological sex and gender, but neither of those chapters directly speak about transgenderism. In fact, a case could be made that the context into which Scripture was given would limit the need to even mention a topic that was completely foreign to them. That being said, we find at least one passage that touches on the issue even if it is to a limited extent. That passage is Deuteronomy 22:5, and it specifically speaks to cross-dressing. Moses writes, “A woman is not to wear male clothing, and a man is not to put on a woman’s garment, for everyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord your God.”

Even though the transgender movement stretches beyond simply wearing clothes that make one appear as the opposite gender,¹⁴ there is a significant application of this verse to the contemporary question of transgenderism. Commenting on Deuteronomy 22:5, Jason DeRouchie notes:

Within Israelite culture, then, there were certain styles of dress, ornaments, or items that distinguished men and women. As such, two things appear to be at stake in this law:

¹⁴ The transgender movement includes many different expressions. Dressing in a fashion that presents oneself as the opposite gender is sometimes an entry point for “testing the waters” of a new gender identity. However, some expressions of dressing as the opposite gender, such as dressing in drag, may not be a reflection of a desire to identify as another gender. In addition, dressing as the opposite gender or moving between gender expressions may move beyond the realm of transgenderism and into gender fluidity and non-binary expressions.

1. Everyone needed to let their gender expression align with their biological sex, and
2. Everyone needed to guard against gender confusion, wherein others could wrongly perceive a man to be a woman and a woman to be a man based on dress.¹⁵

The takeaway from this verse is that one ought to present himself or herself in such a way that affirms one's biological sex. This will likely include cultural expressions of gender consistent with the norms of a society.

It is interesting to note the force with which Moses records this instruction. Verse 5 ends with a declaration that to express one's gender in a manner that conceals one's biological sex "is detestable to the Lord your God." The Hebrew term used here is *toebah* and describes something that is an abomination. The same term is often used to describe idolatry, wickedness, sexual sins, and other egregious violations against God's laws and standards. God has employed perhaps the most strident of condemnations against this practice because it violates the God-ordered connection between biological sex and gender expression. Thus, the Lord takes very seriously that the humans He created are to express themselves in keeping with how He made them biologically.

THE BODY AS GOOD

Now that we have explored the biblical design for sexuality and the biblical instructions regarding transgenderism, we move to what may be the most important component in the discussion—the idea of the physical body as good. At the very heart of the transgender debate is the disconnect between mind and body as it relates to gender. As noted earlier, the most common solution to this sense of dysphoria in our culture is to bring the body into alignment with the mind rather than bringing the mind into alignment with the body. In doing so, a chasm develops between the value of the body and the mind.¹⁶ However, a proper

¹⁵ Jason S. DeRouchie, "Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5," *JBMW* 21:1 (Spring 2016): 63.

¹⁶ Nancy Pearcey describes this chasm as a two-story worldview, which she developed from the work of Francis Schaeffer. In this perspective, the lower story is the body and physical expression of being human while the upper story is the person as expressed through "the ability to make

understanding of anthropology views the body as an important piece of God's good creation.

Returning once again to the creation narrative of Genesis 1, we want to focus on an important but sometimes forgotten reality of creation. As we read of God's handiwork across the six days of creation, we find the declaration of the goodness of creation. On days three, four, and five, and twice on day six, we read the statement, "And God saw that it was good" (vv. 12, 18, 21, 25) with the second proclamation on day six adding more emphasis by stating "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (v. 31). The story of creation is the story of a physical world. God created the corporeal aspects of the universe and then declared them to be good. This is not a mistake or oversimplification—what God creates is good. Of course, we recognize that Genesis 3 introduces the reality of sin and its effect on the physical world, but this does not undermine the overall goodness of God's creation, especially as we consider the creation order design as God intended. While the fall may have corrupted our physical beings, it did not do so to the point that we are unable to recognize their goodness.¹⁷

Beyond the testimony of Genesis, we find the goodness of the body reflected in David's psalm that is so often applied to the pro-life conversation. In Psalm 139:13-14, David writes, "For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well." The words of these verses speak to the intricate handiwork of God in the creation of human bodies. Our bodies are not random assortments of parts constructed haphazardly; instead, they are the purposeful work of the hands of God. Therefore, they are good. As Sam Allberry notes, "It has been common among other religious (and nonreligious) belief systems to demean the body, along with our physicality—to see it as something unspiritual or in need of escaping. In contrast, the Bible sees our body as a good (if imperfect) creation of God. It is a gift."¹⁸

decisions, exercise self-awareness, plan for the future, and so on." In essence, the lower story is the body, and the upper story is the mind. See Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 27, 32.

¹⁷ Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics as Worship*, 600.

¹⁸ Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 21.

Despite the biblical affirmation of the goodness of the body, many respond to the incongruence between the mind and body related to sexual expression by demeaning the body and elevating the mind. The result is that treatment for such incongruence is to bring the body into alignment with the mind through various approaches, including outward cultural expressions of gender, hormone therapy, and sex-reassignment surgery.¹⁹ However, such elevation of the mind over the body results in a denial of the goodness of the physical body. This denial has been described by some as a form of Gnosticism. Andrew Walker writes, “Gnosticism says that there is an inherent tension between our true selves and the bodies we inhabit. The idea that our true self is different than the body we live in communicates that our body is something less than us, and can be used, shaped, and changed to match how we feel.”²⁰ Taking a Gnostic approach to the mind-body dissonance related to sexuality and gender will lead to more confusion over gender in our society and may ultimately result in erasing all gender distinctions. With that in mind, it is now important for us to think through how we can respond to transgender sin as both a church and culture.

RESPONDING TO TRANSGENDER SIN

In many respects, the Christian community is already behind the curve in our response to transgenderism. While some may have seen the wave coming of

¹⁹ For example, the American Psychiatric Association advises the following when addressing emotional distress in youth who experience dissonance between biological sex and gender identity: “Due to the dynamic nature of puberty development, lack of gender-affirming interventions (i.e. social, psychological, and medical) is not a neutral decision; youth often experience worsening dysphoria and negative impact on mental health as the incongruent and unwanted puberty progresses. Trans-affirming treatment, such as the use of puberty suppression, is associated with the relief of emotional distress, and notable gains in psychosocial and emotional development, in trans and gender diverse youth.” Note that the APA calls a lack of intervention, including allowing physical development to run its natural course, is “not a neutral decision.” See American Psychological Association, “Position on Treatment of Transgender (Trans) and Gender Diverse Youth,” (2020); <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About-APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Policies/Position-Transgender-Gender-Diverse-Youth.pdf>. Even the now-common phrase “sex assigned at birth” implies a demeaning of the body by inferring that someone other than the individual assigned an identity that must either be adopted or changed. In doing so, the observable biological realities of the body are relegated to an inferior position over one’s self-identification.

²⁰ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?* 2nd ed. (Centralia: Good Book Company, 2022), 28.

individuals (especially young people) who would identify with a gender that does not correlate with their biological sex, I think most who are honest will say that we got caught a little flat-footed on this issue. Therefore, our responses have been reactive and not proactive, combative and not compassionate, defensive and not discipling. At the end of the day, we must respond in a way that moves people toward embracing the goodness of the physical body that God created as well as discipling them on a path to worshiping God who created that body.

Embrace the Physical Body

To begin, let us consider the approach of helping people embrace their physical bodies despite the psychological dissonance they might be experiencing. Ryan Anderson identifies the crux of the issue as he states, “The central debate in treating people with gender dysphoria is whether therapies should focus primarily on the mind or on the body. How one answers this question depends not only on scientific and medical evidence, but also on philosophical judgments and worldview.”²¹ Space limitations prevent us from exploring the scientific and medical evidence,²² but the philosophical and worldview judgments are worth exploring briefly since we have already laid the foundation for such judgments in the preceding pages.

Teaching about the goodness of the physical world—and the body in particular—is crucial to the philosophical and worldview commitments that honor God’s creation while holding firm to the connection between biological sex and gender. We have already discussed this element at length, but there is more to it than just the goodness of the body as part of creation. Humans are not just bodies—we are embodied souls. As Mark Liederbach and I have noted elsewhere:

[H]uman beings are composed of both a material part (the body) and an immaterial part (the soul). The body and soul become integrated into a unified whole, sometimes described by theologians as a psychosomatic unity or dualistic holism. Christian ethicists normally describe the united nature of human beings with the term embodied

²¹ Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter, 2018), 97.

²² Anderson’s book is helpful in this regard to provide hard evidence as well as testimony from those who have struggled with gender dysphoria.

selves or embodied souls.²³

This union of body and soul describes the complex nature of humanity, but it is a complexity that God has designed to function in unity. Seeing the essence of humanity as an embodied soul helps us maintain a philosophical commitment to the goodness of both the material and immaterial parts of humanity.

While embracing the goodness of the physical body, we must also be careful not to undermine the immaterial component of humanity. Gnosticism elevates the immaterial—in this case the mind—over the material, but the pendulum can swing too far in the opposite direction. We cannot go so far as to adopt a type of metaphysical materialism whereby only the physical world matters with no value placed upon the immaterial. In one sense, this is the classic Plato vs. Aristotle question depicted by Raphael's *School of Athens*, in which Plato is pointing to the heavens while Aristotle is pointing to the ground. Instead, we need the balance of both the material and the immaterial, the body and the mind. When it comes to biological sex and gender, God's design is that they are a unified whole affirming one another.

When the cognitive dissonance of gender confusion appears, the counselor needs to begin by asking the question of what is causing this dissonance. In some cases, it might be as simple as seeking attention or acting upon a perceived cultural expression of sexuality that is popular in the moment. For others, the root causes may be much deeper. We must not take these matters lightly; instead, we must walk alongside these individuals as they seek to bring their psychological understanding of who they are in line with the physical reality of who God made them. All along the way, it is important to affirm the goodness of the body while not ignoring the importance of the soul.

Worshipful Discipleship

The other element of our response to transgenderism is perhaps the most important. The goal of ethics and moral discipleship is not mere obedience to a list of rules that make one look holy on the outside. Unfortunately, this could be an easy approach to working with people who struggle with their gender.

²³Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics as Worship*, 38.

We could impose a list of commands for “proper gender expression” that leads to socially acceptable behavior without heart change. These commands could include dressing in a gender-specific fashion, wearing a gender-specific hairstyle, pursuing gender-specific activities, etc. However, if this is our only approach to addressing transgenderism, then we are training people to be nothing more than the “whitewashed tombs” that Jesus accused the Pharisees of being in Matthew 23:27-28:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Rather than taking a simple, rule-based approach, we should desire to shepherd those who struggle with gender identity into a worshipful discipleship. Of course, this begins with an acknowledgement of sin, repentance, and confession that Jesus is Lord (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9). Beyond this, we guide people into worshipful discipleship that focuses our full attention and devotion upon the One who created us. We no longer worship the creature, but worship the Creator (Romans 1:25). Every aspect of our lives is focused on bringing glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31). When we start down this road of discipleship, we will then find that obedience to God’s commands and expectations for all things, including gender, will be an expression of love not merely an act of duty (John 14:15, 21).

The beauty of worshipful discipleship is that it leads to a complete change of who we are. Scripture is clear that all of us have fallen to the influence of sin. Even if we do not struggle with transgenderism, our personal struggles are real, and they could define us. However, all believers can have confidence that Christ has redeemed us from the power of sin. After listing a group of egregious sins, including sins of a sexual nature, Paul provides us with hope as he writes, “And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). We no longer have to be identified by our sinful struggles. This does not mean that our struggles disappear. It means that we have victory over them.

CONCLUSION

Transgenderism is the topic *du jour* in our American culture, and it does not seem to be going away anytime soon. The Christian community cannot simply sit back and pray that our people will not be swept into this movement. I dare say that many in our midst have already turned to the transgender lifestyle as a possible answer to their struggles. Therefore, we must speak up and address transgenderism on both theological and philosophical levels.

By identifying the theological and philosophical commitments that drive our anthropology, we will find that transgenderism is a disordering of God's design for sexuality through the physical body that he has created. But we must not stop at the level of theological and philosophical commitments. Those commitments must drive us to action in the church, in our discipleship, and in our culture. In the church, we must commit to teaching on the beauty and goodness of God's creation and the unified whole of the embodied soul. In our discipleship, we must commit to walking alongside people who struggle with their gender identity to see that their Creator loves them and that He has a creation-order design for their lives. In our culture, we must stand on our commitments to support those who create laws and policies that affirm God's design for gender and sexuality. The task before us is significant, but we cannot lose hope.

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO THE TRANSGENDER MOVEMENT:

First, Do No Harm

*Daniel Dionne*¹

MAKING MEDICAL HISTORY

Four hundred years before Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem, a Greek Physician named Hippocrates coined the phrase, “First, Do No Harm!” I first repeated the Hippocratic Oath on the day I graduated from medical school, and try to live by that motto every day. Doctor Luke wrote in Luke 8:43, “And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.” Seventeen hundred years later, Dr. Benjamin Rush was the only MD to sign the Declaration of Independence, and now has a medical school in Chicago named after him. But Ron Chernow writes,

In treating yellow fever, Rush adopted an approach that now sounds barbaric: he bled and purged the victim, a process frightful to behold. He emptied the patient’s bowels four or five times, using a gruesome mixture of potions and enemas, before draining off ten to twelve ounces of blood to lower the pulse. For good measure he induced mild vomiting. This regimen was repeated two or three times daily. Rush was a man of exemplary courage, but it is questionable whether he saved lives or only hastened deaths by wakening the body’s natural defenses.²

¹ Dr. Daniel Dionne is an Internal Medicine Specialist and elder at Faith Bible Church in Spokane, Washington. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

² Ron Chernow, “A Disagreeable Trade Chapter 24,” in *Alexander Hamilton* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2004), 449.

Now, in 2022, physicians and surgeons who specialize in transgender medicine, administer hormone blockers, cross-sex hormones, and perform “gender affirming” surgery to make a person’s body look more like their gender identity. Many believe that they relieve suffering when they do this. No one can deny there have been incredible advances in the science of medicine over the last 150 years. For thousands of years doctors have wanted to help and to heal, but when they had the wrong hypothesis, it often led to the wrong conclusion. In this essay, we will look at some of the harmful thoughts and actions that come from the transgender movement, and then look at the helping and healing truths from God’s word that will bring the transformation, not the transition, that people really need.

THE WRONG HYPOTHESIS

If I am on the top of a building with a box full of water balloons and hold a big red one over the edge and plan to let go, what is my hypothesis? What will happen? If I hypothesize that the force of gravity that God created is so reliable that I can count on that balloon plummeting toward the ground every time, then my results will be predictable, and they will back up my hypothesis. If my hypothesis is that the balloon will hover in the air, my results will be very disappointing. In Genesis 1:27 it says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” Later in verse 31 God calls what he made “very good.” Jesus affirms God’s sovereign design for humans and human relationships when he says,

Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let man not separate. (Matthew 19:3-6)³

The creation of the male and female sexes, and God’s design for marriage, are as stable and reliable as the law of gravity which holds us onto the surface of our planet. So how did we get to the place where a person decides that God made a

³Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

mistake about a person's sex, and thinks they will be more fulfilled if steps are taken to assert their right to transition? There is not enough space for me to describe that process here, but just about every author who has written a solid book about the transgender movement traces the changes in thought and values over the last 100 years, until we are now in the post Christian era. Andrew Walker says that when people are trying to make a decision, they look at three different things. We “are looking for a source of Authority (Who has the right to tell me what to do?), Knowledge (Who knows what is best for me to do?), and Trustworthiness (Who loves me and wants what is best for me?).”⁴

Walker says that “as far back as the sixteenth century, there has been a crisis of authority in the Western world.”⁵ Not so long ago, everyone knew that the right answer to those three questions is that God has the right to tell us what to do, knows what is best for us, and lovingly wants what is best for us. Now adults are teaching children even before they can walk that the child is their own authority, they should look in their heart for the right thing to do, and that they will want what is best for them. The hypothesis is wrong, and the results of this grand experiment have been disastrous!

GENDER DYSPHORIA AND SCIENCE

Those that talk about gender dysphoria have a confusing vocabulary. If a person is a trans man, it means he was female who has transitioned to the male gender, sometimes called female-to-male (or FTM). A trans woman started out as a male, but has transitioned to female gender, male-to-female (or MTF). A person who is cisgender, affirms that their gender aligns with their sex assigned at birth. If someone believes in God's design of male and female only, they might be referred to as binary.

The term “sexual orientation” is different. It doesn't have to do with what sex you identify as, but with whom you want to have a sexual or romantic relationship. For example, a homosexual person's sexual orientation is that they want to have

⁴ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?* (Centralia, WA: The Good Book Company, 2018), 39-40.

⁵ Ibid.

sex with someone of their sex. The sexual orientation of a gay person or a lesbian is that they want to have sex with their same sex. A person born with the male sex has one X and one Y chromosome (XY), and females have two X chromosomes (XX). Very rarely a child does not develop normal genitalia while in the womb, and they are born with ambiguous genitalia so that it is difficult to tell if they are male or female on casual examination. This extremely rare phenomenon is a scientific reality and is called “intersex” (<1/5000). These children are born with a medical problem, and it will be a challenge for their parents and doctors to care for them and raise them. The medical profession has not handled this well in the past, sometimes telling the parents to lie to their son who was born without male genitalia that he was a girl and to raise him as a girl. Often, these boys knew deep down in their hearts that they weren’t girls, and when puberty started their bodies changed and they wanted to be recognized as the males that they are.

When the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV*(DSM-IV) was published in 1994, Gender Dysphoria was called Gender Identity Disorder. But by 2013, the DSM-5 had changed the diagnosis to Gender Dysphoria. Politically, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) could no longer call it a disorder, but describing some level of suffering associated with wanting to be a different sex would require insurance companies to pay for treatment.

WHAT DOES THE DSM-5 SAY?

Here are the criteria that the DSM-5 uses to make a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria:

The patient needs to manifest at least two of these criteria for at least 6 months:

- A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- A strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one’s experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex

characteristics)

- A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
- A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)
- A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)
- A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)
- The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.⁶

If a patient believes he is a “man trapped in a woman’s body” but is not feeling any emotional suffering because of the perceived disparity, this cannot be called gender dysphoria. Currently, psychiatrists and mental health practitioners are often guilty of not giving their patients six months of observation to see if they still have dysphoria. A young person can “fast track” to get the diagnosis by threatening to be suicidal and manipulate their psychiatrist into giving them the gender dysphoria diagnosis more quickly, so they can get access to the medical treatments they desire.⁷

RECENT MEDICAL HISTORY

Johns Hopkins University Psychiatry Department started the Gender Identity Clinic in 1966, and soon the psychiatrists were “helping” their transgender patients by asking surgeons to remove unwanted genitals and create new genitalia to match the desired sex of the patient. At that time Gender Transition Clinics were only in academic university centers. Christian psychiatrist Dr. Paul McHugh

⁶Eric Yarbrough, Jeremy Kidd, and Ranna Parekh, “Criteria: Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults,” *American Psychiatric Association*, November 2017.

⁷Lisa Littman, “Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria,” *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 8 (August 16, 2018): 12-13, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>.

became chairman of the psychiatry department in the 1975 and began to see documented evidence that patients who underwent sexual re-assignment surgery were no happier than they were before. Essentially, they still had dysphoria about their gender identity. As chairman of the department, he put an end to these surgeries at Johns Hopkins in 1994. This was a courageous step for him, and he continued to be instrumental in speaking truth to the medical community. Sadly, this did not put an end to sex re-assignment surgery. It is now “privatized,” being performed in clinics and outpatient surgery centers. In 2015 after Dr. McHugh was no longer the chairman, the practice of gender affirmation surgery came back to Johns Hopkins University. So, how did trained medical doctors who all took the Hippocratic Oath to “First do no harm” get to the point where they truly believe they are helping their patients by practicing transgender medicine?

THE SCIENCE OF TRANSGENDER MEDICINE

Modern medicine has made incredible advances in the last 150 years. Diseases like smallpox and polio have been eradicated and the lifespans of people all over the world have been lengthened because of scientific breakthroughs that we now take for granted. It was not that long ago that we did not understand infectious diseases, and now we have antibiotics, antivirals, and vaccinations to prevent disease. I have been known to call the field of Psychiatry “squishy science” even though psychiatrists have gone to medical school and took the same oath that I did. Now, psychiatrists and physicians are prescribing medications and treatments, even surgeries, to relieve the suffering of those that identify as transgender. We expect physicians to base everything they do on scientific studies and facts that can be reproduced and proven, similar to how we expect gravity to always pull us back to earth. We call that “evidence-based” medicine.

In 2016, Dr. McHugh collaborated with another psychiatrist, Dr. Lawrence Mayer, who is known as a pro-LGBT physician, to look at the scientific facts about those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. They published a large paper in *The New Atlantis*.⁸ They did not conduct a new study, but they did

⁸ Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh, “Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences,” *The New Atlantis*, no. 50 (Fall 2016): 10-143, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43893424>.

an analysis of all the previous studies to see what they could prove scientifically about those with these diagnoses/identities. There is more science about lesbians and gay men than there is about transgender persons because the percentage of the population is so small. The transgender population in America is estimated at about 0.3-0.6% (1/300-1/150). It is very hard to study any disease or disorder if the population is small. The best scientific studies are called prospective random double-blind studies, but are very difficult to do in the real world with human subjects. The best studies will pick a population, make a hypothesis and then follow those people for the next 10-20 years to see what happens, and ideally only change one variable. Many transgender people that might enroll in a study are going to change their mind about their identity 10 years later and they will not want to follow up with the researcher. These people are referred to as “lost to follow up.” Many of the studies that are done with transgender medicine are retrospective, and not as helpful. Dr. McHugh and Mayer tried to answer several questions, and I will summarize their conclusions here.

Born That Way

Many LGBT people report they always felt like they were different from others of the same sex. If this could be explained genetically, like in Down Syndrome or Huntington’s Disease, that might be helpful. Their findings were that genetics does not fully explain the issue of sexual orientation (homosexuality), and that there is “little scientific evidence that gender identity is fixed at birth or at an early age.”⁹

Hormones

Some children have a genetic condition that effects their hormone levels even while in the womb, preventing them from developing normally, and giving them ambiguous genitalia at birth. They are referred to as “intersex” or Disorders of Sexual Development (DSD). This is an even smaller percentage of the population than those that identify as transgender, and they have a scientifically defined medical problem/diagnosis. A boy whose body cannot respond to the testosterone his testes are making in the womb may look like a girl when he is born and be raised as a girl. Because of his ambiguous genitalia no one knows there is a problem until

⁹ Mayer and McHugh, 86.

it is time for puberty, and ‘she’ does not start to have a menstrual cycle. A girl born with congenital adrenal hyperplasia, cannot synthesize enough estrogen and will be born with genital virilization, and her physicians and parents might perform surgery to normalize the genitalia. Hormone therapies might be used to lessen the effects of her excessive testosterone levels.

Neurobiology

Psychiatrists and neurologists are enamored with functional MRIs and PET scans that seem to show differences in the brains of some people. Last year during ACBC’s Colloquium, Dr. Jenn Chen showed us the problems with these studies, which are hard to replicate.¹⁰ Many transgender people claim that they feel like a “man trapped in a woman’s body,” or a “male born with a female brain,” which raises the question if transgender people have a different brain than those that are cisgender. At the time of this article, pediatricians and neurologists are unable to do a functional MRI on a child and, based on its findings, predict that one day this child will become transgender. The *New Atlantis* article says, “There are no serial, longitudinal, or prospective studies looking at the brains of cross-gender identifying children who develop to later identify as transgender adults.”¹¹

Social Stress Theory

There is more scientific evidence that a high percentage of those who identify as LGBT were exposed to trauma like physical and sexual abuse as a child.¹² There are those that theorize that just the relative trauma of going through puberty might cause some young people who are experiencing all the emotional awkwardness of adolescence to decide they would rather be transgender. This is supported in the work of Dr. Lisa Littman, who studied a phenomenon which she called Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD) in 2018. Her publication rocked the transgender medicine world and raised heated objections. She found that some teenage girls who had never identified or behaved as transgender during their childhood became part of a social group which interacted highly through social

¹⁰ Jenn Chen, “Research, Neuroscience, Modern Psychotherapies, and the Noetic Effects of the Fall,” Association of Certified Biblical Counselors 2021 Colloquium: Myths of Modern Psychiatry.

¹¹ Mayer and McHugh, 102.

¹² Mayer and McHugh, 42-50.

media platforms. These girls started to distrust their parents, listen only to voices they were hearing on social media, and then a high number of them would “come out” as transgender after only a few months. Their parents were alarmed to find that their daughters were strongly affected by these peer groups, with a majority coming out as transgender. Over 60% of these girls had already been diagnosed with a mental health disorder or neurodevelopmental disability prior to the onset of their gender dysphoria. Dr. Littman postulated that “social contagion” caused these girls to be vulnerable, not unlike the sort of social contagion we have seen with eating disorders, like anorexia where a person will have an unrealistic view of their body and weight. She called this a “maladaptive coping mechanism.”¹³

There is no doubt that young people are exposed to serious types of traumas which cause a broad spectrum of emotional and spiritual issues. There are plenty of statistics that show that the LGBT community has a higher incidence of depression, anxiety, crime, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide than the heterosexual community. These may be a response to the social stressors they have experienced, and these choices may contribute to more stressors in their lives as a result. Dr. McHugh and Mayer say,

Compared to the general population, non-heterosexual and transgender populations have higher rates of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, suicide, as well as behavioral and social problems such as substance abuse and intimate partner violence. The prevailing explanation in the scientific literature is the social stress model, which posits that social stressors-such as stigmatization and discrimination-faced by members of these subpopulations account for the disparity in mental health outcomes. Studies show that while social stressors do contribute to the increased risk of poor mental health outcomes for these populations, they likely do not account for the entire disparity.¹⁴

Psychiatrists, mental health practitioners, and physicians are observing true suffering in these patients and their families, and they want to be helpful. I maintain that most of these health care providers went into medicine so they

¹³ Littman, “Parent Reports,” 3.

¹⁴ Mayer and McHugh, 59.

could relieve suffering and they are gratified when they are able to bring relief to their patients. The privilege of helping to relieve physical and emotional suffering is one of the greatest rewards of being a physician. Unfortunately, because they are operating under the wrong hypothesis, they are actually doing harm!

A SECULAR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

Not so many years ago the correct way to treat someone with gender identity disorder was to treat the dysphoria. If the patient had been sexually abused, give them the type of therapy that would help them recover from that injury. If the patient had been physically abused or suffered the loss of a loved one, the therapy would seek to focus on how to find healthier ways to deal with the emotional pain, rather than to decide they were “a man trapped in a woman’s body.” Psychiatrists and psychologists knew that most young people that suffered from gender dysphoria (approximately 80%) were going to “grow out of it” by the time they were 18 years old, and that the best therapy for gender dysphoria was puberty, when an adolescent’s body started to tell them their indisputable gender identity.

Psychologist Kenneth J. Zucker chaired the Center for Addiction and Mental Health at the University of Toronto until 2015 when the Canadian government closed it. His approach to treating children with gender dysphoria was to evaluate the parents’ psychopathology, the child’s psychopathology, the child’s family environment and then help the parents and the child start limiting their transgender behaviors, while building relationships with same gender children.¹⁵ At some point this form of treatment was no longer politically correct and his program was “cancelled.” Unfortunately, there seems to be a real fear that one might lose their academic credentials or their job and get ostracized among their peers if their research or professional opinions do not support the transgender agenda. I myself experienced this recently when treating a young woman in her 20s who had depression, headaches, fibromyalgia, and then expressed her desire to transition to a man. I did not offer to help her with taking cross hormones and she found another physician in the community that would do that for her. Over

¹⁵ K.J. Zucker, “Children with Gender Identity Disorder: Is There a Best Practice?” *Neuropsychiatrie De L’Enfance Et De L’Adolescence* 56, no. 6 (2008): 358-364, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2008.06.003>.

the months I watched her voice deepen and her face break out with acne from the testosterone she was using. Once, while trying to understand her situation better I asked a question where I was not using “proper pronouns,” and she was quick to correct me for wanting to know if someone was male or female. Suddenly I found myself wondering, “Could I lose my job for not using preferred pronouns with one of my patients?”

When medical doctors try to be as scientific as possible in their practice they aim to practice “evidenced-based medicine.”

Levels of evidence describe the strength of study results and can aid in clinical decision making. Systematic reviews, with or without meta-analysis, provide the highest level of evidence (*Level I*), followed by large, multicenter randomized blinded placebo-controlled trials (*Level II*). Large, meticulously controlled studies generally provide a higher level of evidence than smaller studies, and experimental studies provide a higher level of evidence than observational studies. Reports of expert opinion provide the lowest acceptable level of evidence (*Level III*).¹⁶

Physicians that want to specialize in transgender medicine will often join an organization called WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health). It’s stated mission is: “To promote evidence-based care, education, research, public policy, and respect in transgender health.”¹⁷ This organization is in the process of developing its Standards of Care #8 (SOC8), but most of these standards are based on expert opinion evidence (*Level III*), because it is so difficult to design good studies that give the best type of evidence. They are promoting evidence-based care, but with the lowest level of evidence.

The secular response to the suffering of a transgender youth or adult is not to try to discover where their thinking has gone wrong, causing their dysphoria. The way to relieve anxiety, depression, suicide and mental health problems, and

¹⁶ MKSAP #19, “Clinical Decision Making and Interpreting the Medical Literature,” in MKSAP 19 (Philadelphia, PA: American College of Physicians, 2021), italics added by this author.

¹⁷ “Mission and Vision,” World Professional Association for Transgender Health, <https://www.wpath.org/about/mission-and-vision#:~:text=Mission%3A%20To%20promote%20evidence%20based,social%20services%2C%20justice%20and%20equality>.

the way to avoid social stigma or discrimination is to help the transgender patient transition as quickly as possible to a place where their body looks like their felt/ chosen sexual identity. Even though the DSM-5 criteria require that the patient have these symptoms for at least six months, there are social media websites that coach adolescents on what to say to get their diagnosis more quickly. If the patient says they are having suicidal thoughts, their mental health provider might give them the diagnosis on the first visit. Once the sufferer receives the diagnosis, they can ask a practitioner of transgender medicine to prescribe treatments to help them change their bodies, sometimes permanently. At the political level, there are many plans to make these options available to transgender people in the name of human rights. Insurance companies are being forced to offer expensive transgender treatments to their patients. The person who calls the transgender movement wrong could quickly be punished by society for discrimination and hate toward this subpopulation. We see regular examples of this in the media.

THE “PRACTICE” OF TRANSGENDER MEDICINE

We physicians often say that we are going to “practice” medicine until we get it right. In 2017 the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) “came out” with a politically correct policy for “Gender-Affirmative Care.” They acknowledge that transgender adolescents and youth have “high rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide.”¹⁸ The 66,000 members of the AAP promote the benefit of a “specialized gender-affirmative therapist, when available to help “children and their families build skills for dealing with gender-based stigma, address symptoms of anxiety or depression, and reinforce the child’s overall resiliency.”¹⁹ Here, a large body of physicians has abandoned evidenced-based medicine out of what may be fear of being cancelled, or a misguided belief that this is the best way to relieve the suffering they see every day in their offices. Of note, there is a different group of pediatricians that are members of the American College of Pediatrics, which has adapted a much more conservative evidenced-based approach to all their recommendations.²⁰

¹⁸ Jason Rafferty, “Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents,” *Pediatrics* 142, no. 4 (October 2018), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2162>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dr. Quentin Van Meter, a Pediatric Endocrinologist and President of the ACP is a believer

What does this “practice” of transgender medicine look like? If a child is pre-pubertal, and has gender dysphoria, the child and the parents may want to try “puberty blockers” to keep the child from starting to develop the secondary sex characteristics of an adult. Typically, during puberty boys get lower voices, more body hair, start developing broader shoulders, and more skeletal muscle. Girls start to have changes in their hips and breasts and start to have menstrual periods. These natural changes will feel unnatural to the transgender adolescent. The most commonly used puberty blocking medication has been around for years, called Lupron, which is given by injection and is often used for men with metastatic prostate cancer. The thinking is that if puberty can be delayed, then the child might have a little more time to sort out what they want to become and might become comfortable with their sex assigned at birth. But these meds are not without risk! A child who does not go through puberty naturally may stop growing and have shorter stature than their peers. They may develop weaker bones or even osteoporosis at an earlier age as an adult. These children may lose the ability to have children themselves when they are adults. They are too young to give “informed consent” and most 10-year-olds are not going to think rationally that they may someday change their mind about their sexual identity, and want to have children, but now it is too late. Their parents are being asked to sign these waivers and may be making it impossible for their child to give them grandchildren some day!

If an adolescent girl is a little older and has already started to go through puberty, her transition will require that she wear tight fitting binders to hide her breasts. These binders can be quite painful and cause damage to her breast tissue, also making it difficult to expand her lungs properly. She may want to change her name, her hair, and her clothing to feel more like a boy. She will have the monthly reminder that she is not a boy and might want to go on birth control pills to suppress her periods. An adolescent boy is going to develop an Adams apple, more facial hair, and a deeper voice. His genitalia grow and he might want to wear tight fitting garments to “hide” them. He also may want to change his hair, wear makeup, and change his name to feel more like a girl. Some of these transitions are called “social changes” where one asks family and friends to start using their preferred name, pronouns, and they may even pursue getting their name changed on their legal documents, even their birth certificate.

and does some excellent podcasts about the transgender movement such as his interview with Bettina Arndt, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8_HavG7u9s.

If an adolescent or adult feel that they cannot live with their secondary sexual characteristics, they will ask to be given “cross hormones.” Males will be given testosterone blocking meds like Spironolactone or Finasteride and estrogen so that their skin and body fat will change. Females will be given testosterone so that they can start having a deeper voice, more skeletal muscle and start developing facial hair. While they are taking cross- hormones they will not be able to have children, but as soon as they terminate these treatments these secondary sexual characteristics will start to revert to normal. In a sense, they can still reverse their decision with fewer long-term consequences. The transgender person who takes cross hormones and wants to maintain their transgender appearance will need to continue these expensive treatments for the rest of their lives.

For some transgender individuals a name change, different clothes and hormone treatments will not be enough, and they will want to have “gender affirming” surgery. Some trans women pursue breast implants, have their genitalia removed surgically and may even pursue having a vagina formed out of the skin from the scrotum. There are surgeons who have received specialty training to do these procedures, but the results can still be disastrous. The trans woman still has a prostate gland and “her” doctor will need to monitor her for prostate cancer when “she” gets older. The trans man may pursue mastectomy, may have a hysterectomy to remove her uterus and ovaries and may try to have surgery to form male genitalia. These surgeries don’t always go well leaving the patient permanently disfigured. There are websites that some trans people use to proudly display the results of their surgeries, but also one can find pictures of the complications when the surgery leaves someone with a painful deformity. Once someone has had gender affirming surgery it might seem like there is “no going back.”

GIVING HOPE

So far, we have discussed a secular approach to the transgender movement. We have defined the problem according to the DSM-5 and we have briefly summarized the way the world tries to solve the problem and to “do no harm.” Remember, when one has the wrong hypothesis, the results of the “experiment” will not turn out well. The first problem is that the word “dysphoria” is a feelings word; it describes the emotions that the sufferer is experiencing. In the biblical

counseling world, we consider emotions or feelings to be a symptom attached to the real problem. A good healer does not stop at the symptoms but keeps looking for the true problem.

In all cases, wrong feelings come from wrong thoughts. The transgender person has at least two serious problems. The first is separation from God, an unbeliever—what Dr. Jim Berg calls the “most miserable condition.”²¹ If this young person is a Christian, they are not walking closely with the Lord in a relationship that causes them to seek God’s truth (the second miserable condition). This person has become blinded, deluded by their sinful thoughts as described in Romans 1, where it tells us that God’s creation reveals the truth that He made men and women to be male and female. Verse 18 says that they are suppressing the truth and calls this unrighteousness. Suppressing the truth about one’s given gender is unrighteousness and will need a loving call to repentance. When a person starts to experience puberty, their hormones and genes show them that they are turning into a man or a woman, and what can be known about God’s plan for them is “plain to them.” They have become “futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts are darkened” (Romans 1:21). Genesis 1 and 2 show us how God designed people to be male and female and Genesis 3 shows how quickly a person can go astray, and pridefully choose what they think is a better way. If your counselee, friend or family member is thinking they know better than God they need to be rebuked in love. Once you have the correct diagnosis—a sinful rebellion against God based on wrong emotions and wrong thoughts—one can come up with a beneficial treatment plan.

THE TREATMENT THAT HEALS

So often, when I choose to sin, it starts from a heart of discontent. When I am discontent, I am essentially saying, “God, you don’t really love me, because if you did, you would let me have this one thing. Because you don’t love me, I am going to have to take matters into my own hands. My sinful choice is justified because you have deprived me of the thing I need.” The sinning and rebellious transgender person needs to really understand the Gospel! They have no idea how much God

²¹ Jim Berg, “Session 8-Beholding The God of Mercy,” *Taking Time to Quiet Your Soul* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2005), 14-15.

loves them. Those who love and care for them get to explain and show that to them.

How is love defined? Philippians 2:3-4 says I need to stop being selfish and think of others first. Sometimes loving someone means I have to say something hard to them, which is inconvenient to me and may lead to their rejection and a broken relationship. In Matthew 18, Jesus shows us how to lovingly pursue someone that we love who is in sin. If a transgender person does not belong to your church or is not claiming to be a believer, the principles are still helpful. The hardest thing about rebuking or confronting sin is that we need to do it in obedience to the Lord, but we never know how the “confronted” will respond. This is a humble act of faith.

How is love expressed? God told Israel in Exodus 20, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” A transgender person will feel very strongly that you need to call them by a new name or use their preferred pronouns. If you lovingly refuse to do that, you can appeal to them that God tells you not to lie and that they are asking you to become an accomplice to the lie that they are telling. This seems more appropriate if you already have a relationship with the transgender person who is in the process of coming out or transitioning. If you don’t agree to participate in that lie, then you may fear that you will lose any further contact with this person that you love so much. How frightening for you! Vaughn Roberts makes a case that if you are meeting someone who is already transgender and transitioned, it is appropriate to use their new name and pronouns in order to continue building a relationship with them.²² If you are a parent or a friend who genuinely fears that you might “lose” this loved one, I want to gently remind you what Jesus says in Matthew 10: 34-39. He talks about bringing a sword, and “whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Your child is demanding that you choose them. Jesus is saying that “whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that thoughts alone can be sinful, even if they don’t lead to actions. He knows our thoughts, and thoughts that are contrary to God’s will are sin. A transgender person may tell you that they did not “choose” to have gender dysphoria. The Bible demonstrates how desires quickly

²² Vaughn Roberts, *Transgender* (The Good Book Company, 2016), 71.

lead to sin, and that full grown sin leads to death (James 1:14-15). Why wouldn't an unhappy, most likely unsaved youth, who has spent too much time looking at social media contemplate the thought, "Would I be happier if I were the opposite sex?" The key is what they do with that thought! God holds us accountable for our thoughts and in the book of Romans He explains how much He loves us, then He tells us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The secular world tells the gender dysphoric to transition their body to conform with their wrong thoughts. The gospel says God has given you a new identity, now start renewing your mind so that your thoughts are transformed, so you can "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). This is the hope of the gospel!

Galatians 6:1 says that we who are spiritual need to restore the one caught in a transgression with a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness is going to be essential in all your interactions with a transgender person. You may be angry, afraid, frustrated, and have an entire gamut of emotions, but you will be the best ambassador for Christ if you can be "gentle and lowly in heart" in all your interactions (Matthew 11:28-30).

GOOD NEWS

How about some good news? The reality is well known, even in the secular world, that a percentage of those that have transitioned will realize their choices were wrong and will "detransition" back to their God-given sexual identity. Not all of them become Christians. Laura Perry is a woman who grew up in a Christian family, had some traumatic events affect her as a young person, and made the full transition to a man named "Jake." Her website is called "From Transgender to Transformed."²³ On her website there is a video testimony where her mother describes her process of loving her transgender daughter, and Laura describes how God drew her back to Himself as she came to understand the truth of the gospel.

Dr. Lisa Littman, who first observed what is now called Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD) just published a study in 2021 that looked at 100 people

²³ Laura Perry, "Find Hope and Freedom from Gender Dysphoria in Jesus!" Transgender To Transformed, May 10, 2021, <https://transgendertotransformed.com/>.

that had de-transitioned. Sixty nine percent of the participants were female, and thirty one percent were male. The number one reason for de-transitioning was, “My personal definition of female and male changed, and I became more comfortable identifying as my natal sex.” The second most common reason was concern for potential medical complications from transitioning. Third was “my mental health did not improve while transitioning.”²⁴ How many transgender people will choose to de-transition? No one is sure of those numbers, because as mentioned earlier, some are “lost to follow-up.” One study in 2021 found that 13.1% of their participants de-transitioned.²⁵

MORE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

If you are a parent or the one who is counseling the parent, there are some more truths to encourage hope in Christ. Parents cannot save their children, but they can be “faithful” as described in Ephesians 6:4. You are commanded to bring your child “up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The more you can point your child to Jesus and how much he loves them, the better. This is the definition of a good parent. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 encourages us to admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, and help the weak, and to be patient with them all. We can only do this when we put our faith in the loving God who has been so patient with each of us. The Apostle Paul describes how he spoke the gospel to the Thessalonians in a gentle parental way in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8.

I encourage parents to learn about biblical lament as described in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop. This will help for the long haul, choosing to trust God while you wait for him to save.²⁶

If your child seems to have ROGD or is highly affected by a harmful peer group and excessive social media influences, Dr. Littman described how some

²⁴ Lisa Littman, “Individuals Treated for Gender Dysphoria with Medical and/or Surgical Transition Who Subsequently Detransitioned: A Survey of 100 Detransitioners,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 50, no. 8 (2021): 3353-3369, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-02163-w>.

²⁵ Jack L. Turban et al., “Factors Leading to ‘Detransition’ Among Transgender and Gender Diverse People in the United States: A Mixed-Methods Analysis,” *LGBT Health* 8, no. 4 (June 1, 2021): 273-280, <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2020.0437>.

²⁶ Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

of these cases got better because something interrupted the influence of that peer group. The child was out of school for a while and their “insight improved.” Some of these gender dysphoric youths got better because they got “treatment” for their depression.²⁷ Your transgender youth might threaten to run away or threaten suicide. Perhaps there is a way to lovingly remove them from those harmful influences.

Finally, for the parent of any troubled youth, it is tempting to pull away from the church out of shame or fear. You need the church now more than ever, and we the church need to come alongside you in your pain and suffering. Do not isolate! Our counseling ministry sees more and more each year that the people that grow and graduate from counseling are the ones that are not just doing their homework and coming to counseling sessions but have committed themselves to the body of Christ and hear the truth from a multitude of witnesses.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR COUNSELORS

You probably feel totally overwhelmed by this topic, but I encourage you to share the information in this article with the parents and transgender people that you get to counsel. You might wonder if you will face some type of persecution if you take on this “challenging case.” We biblical counselors need to be reminded that Ephesians 4:15 encourages us to speak the truth in love. When you are speaking God’s truth you are right in the center of His will. You need courage based on the truth of God’s character as described in Psalm 27:1, “The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE ONE WHO WANTS TO DE-TRANSITION

The Bible shows us that it is never too late to draw near to God and be reconciled to him (Luke 23: 42-43). If you have not already become a Christian, the thing you need most is salvation as described in the gospel of Jesus Christ so you can be reconciled to God. This means you now choose to submit to His will

²⁷ Littman, “Parent Reports,” 15.

instead of your own. He loves you so much that you will never be disappointed with this decision. As a believer, you have a new identity in Christ as described in 2 Corinthians 5:17. God shows us the importance of “putting off and putting on” as described in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3. Ask a biblical counselor to show you what that looks like! As you grow in your walk with the Lord you will need to start learning the Christian disciplines as described in Ephesians 4:12. You need the Body of Christ, the Church, to come alongside you and help you in your de-transition process. The church is full of other sinners that are just like you, thankful that God has rescued them and wanting to live in a way that pleases him. Hebrews 13:12, Romans 12:3-13, and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 back up these words of encouragement.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning God’s design for men and women was perfect. Humans rebelled and tried to improve on God’s blueprint for humans on earth. Physicians have stumbled upon truths about biology and chemistry that have made it possible to save lives and relieve suffering and those discoveries have been incredibly exciting. Psychiatry has tried to understand the human heart but is a squishy science, comprised of people that mostly mean well when they see those with psychological suffering. We now see psychiatrists and physicians try to team up to solve the pain and suffering that comes with gender dysphoria, but most of those patients end up scarred and frustrated. In the end, pastors, biblical counselors, parents, and friends will need to point their loved ones back to the timeless truths of the gospel, the only lasting cure for gender dysphoria and the transgender movement.

**LEGAL EFFORTS TO OUTLAW
BIBLICAL COUNSELING:**
How Bans on Conversion Therapy Are Being
Used Against Christian Discipleship
Todd M. Sorrell¹

THE COLLISION

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. (Isaiah 59:14-15)

Approximately 6,000 years ago, God created all things (Genesis 1:1; Revelation 4:11). In that process, God created mankind, male and female, and designed them to join in physical union as husband and wife (Genesis 1:27, 2:21-24; Matthew 19:4-5). Over the course of the following 4,000 years, God made it clear that sexuality falling outside of the bounds of marriage constituted grievous sin, worthy of condemnation and wrath (see Exodus 20:14; Luke 16:18). God provided further clarity by specifying that homosexuality and cross-dressing are detestable and shameful sins, worthy of death (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Deuteronomy 22:5; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7). In other words, God made sexually deviant behavior against His law. Approximately 2,000 years ago, when Jesus ascended from earth to heaven, He declared what is popularly known as the Great Commission when He instructed His followers to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).²

¹ Todd M. Sorrell is a California attorney, author, businessman, and adjunct professor of biblical counseling and business. Please contact jbsc@biblicalcounseling.com with questions for the author.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Legacy Standard Bible.

On January 7, 2022—approximately 6,000 years after creation and the original marriage between one man and one woman, and approximately 2,000 years after the Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that true Christians will teach others to obey God, including His commandments against sexual perversion—Canadian Federal Bill C-4 took effect which criminalizes “conversion therapy.” This Bill defines conversion therapy so broadly as to prohibit any practice designed to help an individual put off homosexual, transsexual, or transgender practice or attraction.³ Also in 2022, the City of West Lafayette, Indiana, proposed Ordinance 31-21 which sought to ban “unlicensed counselors” from practicing “conversion therapy” on minors, enforced by a \$1,000 fine for each violation.⁴ This ordinance included a similarly broad definition of prohibited behavior, directed toward those who would seek to help individuals shed or change homosexual and other sexually deviant practices and attitudes. To put it bluntly, these laws seek to criminalize the fulfillment of the Great Commission. They outlaw obedience to God.

In light of this collision between God’s law and man’s law, those calling themselves Christians must make a decision. Either they jettison the Christian label (which means “follower of Christ”) or they choose to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Otherwise, claiming to know God but refusing to keep His commands means that one “is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). They will be banished from God’s presence for eternity, cast into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 7:21-23; 8:12).

For those true Christians who seek to fulfill the Great Commission by way of discipleship and biblical counseling, they should prepare themselves for persecution. Indeed, the two laws referenced above (the first one in effect and the second one proposed and later withdrawn) illustrate the current and coming worldwide legislative attacks on biblical Christianity and, specifically, against biblical counseling. Restrictions on so-called conversion therapy exist in at least

³ “Canada: Bill C-4 Banning Conversion Therapy Comes into Force,” *The Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-01-19/canada-bill-c-4-banning-conversion-therapy-comes-into-force/>; *Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (44-1) - Royal Assent - an Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)*, Parliament of Canada, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent>.

⁴ “West Lafayette Ordinance 31-21,” *Lafayette Citizens for Freedom*, 2022, <https://www.freedomlafayette.org/issues/wl-ordinance-31-21>; City of West Lafayette, “Ordinance No. 31-21 (Amended),” *Internet Archive*, https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/1163135/Ord_31-21_Ban_Conversion_Therapy__Amended_.pdf.

14 countries and countless provinces, states, and cities around the world.⁵ It is anticipated that the number of laws targeting this practice will only increase as the LGBTQ voices likewise increase in volume and gain further worldly acceptance. But is knowing that persecution is coming the only thing that biblical counselors can do? Does God provide any guidance as to how Christians should respond to these threats against the practice of true religion? The following discussion will provide a brief summary of these evil legislative attacks, a warning about other potential areas where biblical counselors may be persecuted, and how to plan ahead and best prepare to withstand the coming days. As the Apostle Paul states in his letter to the Ephesian church where he charges them to put on the whole armor of God, the goal is to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13).

DANGEROUS DEFINITIONS

Scripture is replete with warnings about speech. God calls man to be slow to speak (James 1:19), to set a guard over his mouth (Psalm 141:3), to be constructive (Ephesians 4:29), to be gentle (Proverbs 15:4), to be healing (Proverbs 12:18), to be pure (Ephesians 5:4), to be careful (Matthew 12:36-37), and to speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Satan, on the other hand, is the “father of lies” (John 8:44) and is the great deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9). From his very first interaction with humans, Satan redefined what God had said, calling evil good (Genesis 3:1-5). His pattern continues to this day.

Specifically, Satan has more recently been engaged in an attempt to redefine what biblical counseling is vis-à-vis the secular and misguided psychotherapeutic practice of conversion therapy. The term “conversion therapy” (sometimes known as “reparative therapy”) has long carried a negative connotation not only among the LGBTQ community and its supporters, but also among biblical counselors. As historically defined and practiced, conversion therapy is an unbiblical method of trying to change outward homosexual behavior and attraction. One popular premise behind the practice seeks to define homosexuality as a curable “disease,”

⁵ Stonewall Staff, “Which Countries Have Already Banned Conversion Therapy?” *Stonewall*, 1 Apr. 2022, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/which-countries-have-already-banned-conversion-therapy>.

thus seeking to redirect unbiblical homosexual desire *without* reorienting the heart toward loving God and desiring His glory. Certain aspects of secular conversion therapy have been described by one biblical counseling leader as constituting a “barbaric approach” to changing unwanted sexual desire, relying on unproven practices such as hypnosis and even going so far as to include behaviorism strategies like attaching electrical wires to an individual’s genitalia and delivering shock treatment when the person is inappropriately aroused.⁶ There are even more extreme aversion approaches, such as sick practitioners actually raping young men as part of this “therapy” to make them hate men and the desire for anal sex.⁷ Needless to say, such a “therapy” is not found on the pages of Scripture.⁸

If the term was used in its historic sense, Christians could perhaps align themselves with laws that prohibit the practice. But that is not what is happening. The problem for biblical counselors is that those in opposition to God’s Word are now using the term “conversion therapy” but defining it to include ordinary, biblical discipleship. There are definitions that are simple and broad, such as that used by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry which describes it as “interventions purported to alter same-sex attractions or an individual’s gender expression with the specific aim to promote heterosexuality as a preferable outcome.”⁹ Then there are specific and detailed definitions that go on for hundreds of words and subparts that rope in all sorts of practices, including Christian counseling. One example is Canadian Bill C-4 (discussed in detail below). With this in mind, the definitional section of a statute is where Christians

⁶ Steve Viars, “Conversion Therapy Bans – Coming to a Theater near You,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition*, 15 Apr. 2022, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/04/15/conversion-therapy-bans-coming-to-a-theater-near-you/>; Ignatius Yordan Nugraha, “The Compatibility of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts with International Human Rights Law,” *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, vol. 35, no. 3, Sept. 2017, pp. 176–192, doi:10.1177/0924051917724654.

⁷ Kori Cordero and Vanessa Carlisle, “Banning Conversion Therapy on Minors: A Guide for Creating Tribal and State Legislation,” American Bar, American Bar Association, Feb. 2019, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/sexual_orientation/banning-conversion-therapy-legislative-guide.pdf.

⁸ Historically, conversion therapy has been separated into two categories—aversion therapy and talk therapy. While aversion therapy (electric shocks, for example) is always problematic, and talk therapy may not be helpful if not biblically directed, it is easy to understand a qualitative difference between the two categories. LGBTQ proponents often group them together as if Christian speech is as dangerous as physical abuse in the counseling room.

⁹ “Conversion Therapy,” *Conversion Therapy*, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018, https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Policy_Statements/2018/Conversion_Therapy.aspx.

need to first direct their attention. More precisely, when faced with proposed legislation that purports to ban conversion therapy but, in reality, seems to ban biblical counseling, Christians must read and focus on the actual language of the law. Well-informed believers should not rely just on headlines or descriptions offered by others as substitutes for a personal understanding of what is being legislated. Only then can it be determined whether any particular law should be opposed and how far Christians should go in pushing back against it.

UNGODLY LAWS

International

In 1999, Brazil became the first country to ban conversion therapy.¹⁰ It then spread to places like Taiwan, Argentina, and Germany.¹¹ As mentioned above, Canada implemented a broad ban in early 2022, and France and New Zealand enacted similar prohibitions shortly thereafter.¹² While a number of these bans appear to restrict licensed health care practitioners from engaging in the practice with minors, it is clear from the Canadian Bill that the end goal is to close off *all* efforts to change homosexual/transsexual/transgender behavior and attraction, whether those efforts come from a licensed individual or not, or whether they are directed toward minor counselees or adults.

Canadian Bill C-4 passed without opposition and the preamble to that Bill states that it is a “myth” to believe that “heterosexuality, cisgender gender identity

¹⁰ Stonewall Staff, “Which Countries Have Already Banned Conversion Therapy?” *Stonewall*, 1 Apr. 2022, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/which-countries-have-already-banned-conversion-therapy>. The Brazil ban includes the overbroad definition that prohibits licensed therapists from attempting to reverse, adjust, or reorient those engaging in sexual sin, including homosexuals, transsexuals, and transvestites. See Conselho Federal de Psicologia, “Resolução Nº 1,” *CFP*, 29 J an. 2018, <https://site.cfp.org.br/>; IBDFAM Staff, “STF Extingue Definitivamente Ação Contra Conselho Federal De Psicologia Que Buscava Regularizar a ‘Cura Gay,’” *IBDFAM*, Instituto Brasileiro De Direito De Familia, 2020, <https://ibdfam.org.br/noticias/7315/STF+extingue+definitivamente+a%C3%A7%C3%A3o+contra+Conselho+Federal+de+Psicologia+que+buscava+regularizar+a+%22cura+gay%22%22>.

¹¹ *Ibid*; See also Rachel Savage, “Conversion Therapy Thrives Globally as Bans Gather Pace,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation Long Reads*, 15 Sept. 2021, <https://longreads.trust.org/item/lgbt-conversion-therapy-global-bans> (“Anyone carrying out conversion therapy on under-18s in Germany, or coercing, deceiving or threatening adults into it, risks a year in prison. Advertising or offering conversion therapy carries a 30,000 euro (\$35,535) fine.”).

¹² *Ibid*.

and gender expression that conforms to the sex assigned to a person at birth are to be preferred over other sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.”¹³ This sounds remarkably similar to Satan’s preamble to Eve eating from the forbidden fruit: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1). In other words, the serpent called God’s command a myth, something not to be believed. Bill C-4 does the same thing.

Bill C-4 defines “conversion therapy” as follows:

[C]onversion therapy means a practice, treatment or service designed to (a) change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual; (b) change a person’s gender identity to cisgender; (c) change a person’s gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth; (d) repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour; (e) repress a person’s non-cisgender gender identity; or (f) repress or reduce a person’s gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth.

For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates to the exploration or development of an integrated personal identity — such as a practice, treatment or service that relates to a person’s gender transition — and that is not based on an assumption that a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is to be preferred over another.¹⁴

With this definition in mind, Bill C-4 establishes the following as indictable criminal offenses (akin to felonies in the United States): (1) Knowingly causing another person to undergo conversion therapy or providing such therapy (punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment); (2) knowingly promoting or advertising conversion therapy (punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment);

¹³ “Canada: Bill C-4 Banning Conversion Therapy Comes into Force,” *The Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-01-19/canada-bill-c-4-banning-conversion-therapy-comes-into-force/>; *Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (44-1) - Royal Assent - an Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)*, Parliament of Canada, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

and (3) receiving a financial or other material benefit, knowing that it is obtained or derived directly or indirectly from the provision of conversion therapy (punishable by up to two years' imprisonment).¹⁵

To further the impact that this anti-biblical law will have, Canada's federal government also amended the law to allow courts to order that any advertisements for conversion therapy be deleted from the internet. Notably, this law is found in the very same Canadian Criminal Code section that governs the distribution of child pornography.¹⁶ Finally, Bill C-4 also amended another Criminal Code section to now criminalize the removal of minors from Canada for the purpose of subjecting them to conversion therapy abroad (an indictable offense subjecting the violator to up to five years' imprisonment).¹⁷

Canada's law may be the most comprehensive to date, but it certainly will not be the last effort to criminalize biblical counseling on issues of sexuality. As one LGBTQ advocacy organization has stated in its push for such a ban in the UK by the Fall of 2022, "We have the opportunity to secure a legislative ban which makes conversion therapy illegal: Wherever it occurs—in public or private, through healthcare or religious and cultural interventions."¹⁸ To go one step further, efforts are underway to redefine Christian practice as akin to torture. In fact, the argument is already being made that all sexual orientation change efforts are cruel, degrading, and inhumane, in violation of international human rights laws such as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture.¹⁹

¹⁵ Each of these also may be punished on summary conviction, which is akin to a misdemeanor in the United States. Ibid.

¹⁶ Legislative Services Branch, "Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, an Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)," *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)*, Justice Laws Website, 8 Dec. 2021, https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2021_24/FullText.html; "Canada: Bill C-4 Banning Conversion Therapy Comes into Force," *The Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-01-19/canada-bill-c-4-banning-conversion-therapy-comes-into-force/>; *Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (44-1) - Royal Assent - an Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)*, Parliament of Canada, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Ban Conversion Therapy," *Ban Conversion Therapy*, <https://www.banconversiontherapy.com/>.

¹⁹ Ignatius Jordan Nugraha, "The Compatibility of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts with International Human Rights Law," *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, vol. 35, no. 3, Sept. 2017, pp. 176–192, doi:10.1177/0924051917724654; Wansong Harley, "The Constitutionality

United States

In 2012, California became the first state to prohibit state-licensed mental health professionals from practicing conversion therapy on minors.²⁰ New Jersey was next in 2013.²¹ Many others followed to the point where approximately half of the United States have in place some sort of restriction on the practice of conversion therapy. In fact, the trend is moving so fast that there are interactive maps that track LGBTQ “progress” online in real time.²² Similar maps are available for smaller locales.

On a more local level, State College, Pennsylvania, enacted an ordinance in 2018 that outlaws conversion therapy for minors. It not only bans conversion therapy by a licensed or registered professional, but also appears to restrict any person who provides counseling, mental health, and behavioral health services as part of his professional practice.²³ That may not yet fit clergy or biblical counselors, but it is getting close. Advocates of the ban make no secret of their intentions. As one stated: “This ordinance bans conversion therapy for minors but also gives us the opportunity to bring legislation elsewhere and we’ll ban conversion therapy there, too.”²⁴

Those efforts reached West Lafayette, Indiana, by way of City Ordinance 31-21 (now withdrawn), which sought to ban “unlicensed counselors” from practicing “conversion therapy” on minors, enforced by \$1,000 fines for each violation. The proposed law defined the prohibited conduct as “any practices or treatments that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic

of Conversion Therapy Bans,” *The Colleges of Law*, 27 May 2020, <https://www.collegesoflaw.edu/blog/2020/05/27/the-constitutionality-of-conversion-therapy-bans/>; Mason D. Bracken, “Torture Is Not Protected Speech: Free Speech Analysis of Bans on Gay Conversion Therapy,” 63 Wash. U. J. L. & POL’Y 325 (2020), https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_journal_law_policy/vol63/iss1/16.

²⁰ See Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 865-865.2.

²¹ See N.J. Stat. Ann. §§ 45:1-54-55.

²² Movement Advancement Project, “Equality Maps: Conversion Therapy Laws,” https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy.

²³ “Borough of State College, PA: Conversion or Reporative Therapy for Minors,” *Borough of State College, PA Code*, 2018, <https://ecode360.com/33258772>.

²⁴ Geoff. Rushton, “State College Adopts Ordinance Banning Conversion Therapy,” *StateCollege.com*, 5 Jan. 2021, <https://www.statecollege.com/centre-county-gazette/state-college-adopts-ordinance-banning-conversion-therapy/>.

attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same gender.”²⁵ The law would have specifically allowed and not prohibited “counseling that provides assistance to a person undergoing gender transition,” or counseling related to a person’s exploration of his or her identity, “as long as such counseling does not seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity.” In simple terms, the law would not restrict a therapist from using techniques or practices designed to aid an individual who wants to “transition” from one gender to another. It would, however, have prohibited counsel to that same individual that such a transition would be detrimental, should be avoided, and that another plan (God’s, for example) would be more beneficial. Furthermore, the preamble to the proposed law says that the city “has a compelling interest in protecting the physical and psychological well-being of minors, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, and in protecting its minors against exposure to serious harms caused by conversion therapy by unlicensed persons.” Clearly, those advancing this legislation would agree with this statement by one advocacy group: “LGBTQA+ people have nothing to be ashamed of and there is nothing wrong or broken about who we are. Our sexual orientations and gender identities are diverse and should be celebrated.”²⁶ In short, the law would have prohibited any unlicensed person from providing a service or counsel to help a minor who may be struggling with homosexuality or transgender issues, and would prohibit counseling someone that such behaviors or lifestyles are wrong and must be repented of. To more fully refine how broad the reach of a law like this could be, the ordinance defined “counseling” to include “techniques used to help individuals learn how to solve problems and make decisions related to personal growth, vocational, family, and other interpersonal concerns.” Such an overbroad definition could include not only biblical counselors, but also pastors, youth leaders, teachers, coaches, and even parents.²⁷ Language matters.

²⁵ “West Lafayette Ordinance 31-21,” *Lafayette Citizens for Freedom*, 2022, <https://www.freedomlafayette.org/issues/wl-ordinance-31-21>; City of West Lafayette, “Ordinance No. 31-21 (Amended),” *Internet Archive*, https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/1163135/Ord_31-21_Ban_Conversion_Therapy_Amended_.pdf.

²⁶ “Ban Conversion Therapy,” *Ban Conversion Therapy*, <https://www.banconversiontherapy.com/>; Stonewall Staff, “Netflix’s Pray Away Shows Us the Horrors of Religious Conversion Therapy – Here’s Why We Need a Ban Without Exceptions,” *Stonewall*, 2 Aug. 2021, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/netflix%E2%80%99s-pray-away-shows-us-horrors-religious-conversion-therapy-here%E2%80%99s-why-we-need>.

²⁷ “West Lafayette Ordinance 31-21,” *Lafayette Citizens for Freedom*, 2022, <https://www.freedomlafayette.org/issues/wl-ordinance-31-21>; City of West Lafayette, “Ordinance No. 31-21 (Amended),” *Internet Archive*, <https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/>

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION OF U.S. LAWS

As laws in the United States continue to evolve, biblical counselors may wonder whether those laws are valid and how courts will interpret and apply them. While Christians will obey God no matter the cost, they rightly pray and hope that their ability to freely speak truth to hurting seekers will not be restricted. The following discussion will provide a brief primer on how courts in the United States interact with laws that are the subject of legal challenges brought before them.

The judicial branch in the United States is charged with interpreting laws that are enacted by the legislative arms of government. This includes reading those laws to determine what the words actually mean. Statutory interpretation presumes that lawmakers legislate with knowledge of the basic rules of statutory construction. The “plain meaning rule” requires that if the language of a statute is plain and unambiguous, it must be applied according to its terms. Ambiguity is not created solely due to definitional possibilities, but only when there is statutory ambiguity. Courts must determine whether language is being used in the ordinary, dictionary sense, or in a more narrow, specialized sense. For example, if a word or phrase is defined in the statute or in a related law, then that definition will govern. In drafting and analyzing legislation, words matter. Although sometimes there are ambiguities and a need to pull from different resources to make that determination, most courts are able to understand the meaning and intent of most laws. Once it is determined what a law intends to approve or proscribe, there remains an analysis as to whether the law is valid and enforceable.

In America, the United States Constitution is considered the highest law of the land. It is the document that stands in judgment over all other laws. If a legislative body passes a law that conflicts with the Constitution, that law is invalid.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

[attachment/pdf/1163135/Ord_31-21_Ban_Conversion_Therapy__Amended_.pdf](#)

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, Section 1, reads as follows:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

There have been many arguments about what these provisions mean and how they should be applied, but it is well-established that these freedoms are not unlimited. For example, an individual claiming First Amendment religious protection must demonstrate that he actually holds a sincere religious belief and that the law at issue imposes a substantial burden on his free exercise of religion. Even in that situation, the Supreme Court has stated that religious freedom may still be infringed when the federal government has a compelling interest to do so in order to protect the common good and to limit the ability of people to do harm to others.²⁸

The same limitation is true for freedom of speech and expression. Some speech and expression have such low First Amendment value that they are not protected. They include things like defamation, threats, child pornography, the leaking of classified information, or even yelling “fire” in a crowded movie theater when no such danger exists. But overall, the United States has historically valued an individual’s right to free speech and expression to the point where even offensive categories are tolerated (flag burning, wearing armbands, burning crosses, negative social media posts, and certain obscenities). Further, if a government restriction is “content neutral” and does not discriminate based on a particular viewpoint, it may be allowed. As an example, the government can restrict expressions or protests that block highway traffic or that pose safety hazards because the laws are equally applied to all, without regard to the content of the expression or protest.

²⁸ Taken to an extreme, most people understand that someone cannot, in the name of religion, practice child sacrifice or claim that his religion requires him to drive 100 miles per hour in a residential neighborhood. If everyone could come up with his own “religious belief” and ignore all contrary laws, government would cease to exist.

In other words, the government in that example is *not* singling out specific protests to disallow, or singling out specific speakers from expressing themselves. The law applies across the board.

Against that backdrop, Christians typically rely upon what are commonly known as the “freedom of religion” and “freedom of speech” provisions in the First Amendment as support for the idea that the government cannot enact laws that infringe on their ability to engage in Christian worship, life, speech, and practice. LGBTQ supporters typically rely upon what are commonly known as the “due process” and “equal protection” clauses in the Fourteenth Amendment as support for the idea that the government cannot discriminate against the LGBTQ lifestyle and practices, including the right to participate fully in society as homosexual, transsexual, and transgender individuals.

But what happens when those two sides collide? What happens when a statute is enacted that prohibits discrimination against LGBTQ-identifying individuals, but a Christian baker or photographer cannot in good Christian conscience provide their services in celebration of a same-sex wedding? What happens if a Christian website designer refuses to design wedding websites for same-sex marriage celebrations? These are cases that relate to compelled speech (as well as religious freedom), since both seek to require the Christian business owners to express themselves in ways they do not want. Time will tell where and how the Supreme Court will draw the line. At present, the law is somewhat ambiguous and Christians continue to be subjected to lawsuits by LGBTQ activists seeking to enforce the laws or put these believers out of business.

But what about laws that prevent speech or historically-accepted religious practice? For purposes of this discussion, the question is whether or not the government in the United States can enact laws that *prevent* Christians (biblical counselors) from telling people scriptural truth. Certain laws against “conversion therapy,” for example, seem to include Christian discipleship in their overly broad definitions. If this is the case, the laws constitute attacks on the ability to share the gospel. They seek to prevent Christians from sharing truth with those ensnared in sin. They specifically prohibit a biblical counselor from warning a confused individual that homosexuality, transsexual behavior, and transgenderism are all sins that should be confessed and forsaken before a holy God. They are direct

attacks on religious freedom and freedom of speech, not to mention the issues they raise regarding parental authority or the ability of an individual seeking counseling to provide informed consent.²⁹

To this point, the United States Supreme Court has not definitively ruled on any such case. However, various federal courts of appeal have *upheld* state laws prohibiting *licensed* mental health practitioners from engaging in the practice of conversion therapy with minors. Rejecting First Amendment arguments and parental rights, these courts have concluded that the statutes constitute a valid exercise of the states' power to regulate the medical profession and to protect the public health and safety. The idea is that the government has a compelling interest to protect minors against what the world calls unscientific, dangerous, and ineffective practices.³⁰ One court went so far as to rule that a claim that being LGBTQ is a curable mental disorder constitutes consumer fraud, and "any expert opinion based on the initial premise that homosexuality is a mental disorder or abnormal is unreliable and . . . barred."³¹ The court based its finding on the fact that "the generally accepted scientific theory is that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and not abnormal" given the removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ("DSM") and the "countless organizations [that] have followed the [American Psychiatric Association's] lead in removing homosexuality from its listings of mental disorders."³²

Although the United States Supreme Court has not yet invalidated a ban on conversion therapy, many court observers believe that the Court severely undermined the legal justifications for the bans. Specifically, in *Nat'l Inst. of Family and Life Advocates v. Becerra* (NIFLA), 138 S. Ct. 2361 (2018), the Supreme

²⁹ "The First Amendment grew out of an experience which taught that society cannot trust the conscience of a majority to keep its religious zeal within the limits that a free society can tolerate. I do not think it anymore intended to leave the conscience of a minority to fix its limits. Civil government cannot let any group ride rough-shod over others simply because their 'consciences' tell them to do so." *Douglas v. Jeanette*, 319 US 157, 179 (1943).

³⁰ See, e.g., "Commission On Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities: Report to the House of Delegates," *American Bar Association*, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/sexual_orientation/2015-hod-ann-mtg-doc-112.pdf, p. 3; *Pickup v. Brown*, 740 F.3d 1208 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 134 S. Ct. 2871 (2014) and cert. denied sub nom. *Welch v. Brown*, 134 S. Ct. 2881 (2014); *King v. Christie*, 767 F.3d 216 (3d Cir. 2014).

³¹ *Ferguson v. JONAH*, No. L-5473-12, slip op. at 27 (N.J. Super. Ct. Feb. 5, 2015).

³² *Ibid.*

Court ruled that a law was unconstitutional that (1) sought to compel unlicensed pro-life pregnancy clinics to provide notice that they were unlicensed and not supervised by a licensed medical provider and (2) to require licensed pro-life pregnancy clinics to notify clients of state-sponsored free abortion services and contact information for those service locations. The Supreme Court rejected the lower court's unique treatment of "professional speech" as a category entitled to lower constitutional protection than other speech. The Court determined that a law requiring these clinics to "speak" (provide notices contrary to their wishes) was unconstitutional. The ruling affording protection to professional speech prompted legal challenges to conversion therapy bans in various states, some of which have been at least temporarily successful (see the map reproduced above for those states protected by preliminary injunctions halting the enforcement of conversion therapy bans).³³

As one example of a recent success, one federal appeals court did side with two therapists who argued that a ban on sexual orientation change efforts was an unconstitutional infringement on their right to speak freely with counselees. In *Otto v. City of Boca Raton*, 981 F.3d 854 (11th Cir. 2020), the City of Boca Raton and Palm Beach County, Florida, enacted ordinances that prohibited licensed therapists from engaging in therapy with the goal of changing a minor's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Notably, the ordinances did permit therapy to assist minors undergoing gender transition, just not the other way around. In arguing against this restriction on their ability to use talk therapy with counselees, the therapists contended that their clients came to them with "sincerely held religious beliefs" that conflicted with homosexual orientation or gender identity confusion. Although the government conceded that the laws restricted speech, it sought to justify their enactment due to the increased depression and suicides rates supposedly caused by this type of therapy. The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeal analyzed the laws under the United States Constitution, held them invalid, and required the entry of a preliminary injunction preventing the enforcement of the ordinances.

³³ Mason D. Bracken, "Torture Is Not Protected Speech: Free Speech Analysis of Bans on Gay Conversion Therapy," 63 Wash. U. J. L. & POL'Y 325 (2020), https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_journal_law_policy/vol63/iss1/16, p. 328; Movement Advancement Project, "Equality Maps: Conversion Therapy Laws," https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy.

While the ruling is to be celebrated, there are at least two comments made by the court that are worth mentioning. First, the court recognized that “[t]his decision allows speech that many find concerning—even dangerous. *** People have intense moral, religious, and spiritual views about these matters—on all sides. And that is exactly why the First Amendment does not allow communities to determine how their neighbors may be counseled about matters of sexual orientation or gender. ‘If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.’”³⁴ The second is the recognition by the court that the opposing sides to this dispute contest what is meant by the term “conversion therapy.” The issue was phrased in a way that provides a dignified solution to biblical counselors who do not want to be mixed up with secular, abusive treatments that have nothing to do with the Bible: “We are mindful that the terminology itself is contested. Plaintiffs reject the often-used label ‘conversion therapy,’ which they associate with ‘shock treatments, involuntary camps, and other chimerical or long-abandoned practices.’ We will proceed with the broad (if imperfect) term ‘sexual orientation change efforts.’ This term is used in both ordinances, and all parties seem to accept it.”³⁵

While these trends provide some basis for optimism, scholars differ in their opinions as to how the Supreme Court will ultimately rule when it is finally presented with a case that is directly on point.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Legislative Attacks Against Biblical Counselors Will Grow

Scripture warns that as history progresses, evil influence will grow and be sharper and sharper against Christian living (2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3). At this point, every major psychological association in the United States has taken a public position against conversion therapy. While some have yet to expand that definition to specifically include Christian discipleship and biblical counseling, that day is coming.³⁶ Hand-in-hand with that secular evolution, legislators will push more

³⁴ *Otto v. City of Boca Raton*, 981 F.3d 854, 871-872 (11th Cir. 2020) (citation omitted).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 859 n1.

³⁶ See, e.g., Kori Cordero and Vanessa Carlisle, “Banning Conversion Therapy on Minors: A Guide for Creating Tribal and State Legislation,” *American Bar*, American Bar Association, Feb.

and more toward finding statutory solutions against Christian influence in the counseling room. Biblical counselors should expect that the initial attacks will not be outright bans on preaching or clergy-directed counseling. Rather, the danger will be in the quiet expansion of statutory definitions that seek to encompass what happens in the biblical counseling room.

As described above, this expansion already includes what “conversion therapy” supposedly means. But that is not even the most dangerous slippage. For example, California already includes a litany of professionals in its ban, including those that practice in the mental health arena.³⁷ Buried in the thousands of laws that California has enacted is this definition of the practice of marriage and family therapy: “[T]he application of psychotherapeutic and family systems theories, principles, and methods in the delivery of services to individuals, couples, or groups in order to assess, evaluate, and treat relational issues, emotional disorders, behavioral problems, mental illness, alcohol and substance use, and to modify intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors.”³⁸ Currently, “ministers of the gospel” are exempted from California licensure requirements, which is one reason why this author believes that Consent to Counsel forms should specify that biblical counselors are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁹ It is not difficult to see how legislators and advocates will someday try to jam biblical counselors into this overbroad state definition, thus requiring either a cessation of biblical counseling activities or voluntary submission to state licensure requirements and regulations. LGBTQ advocates already call what happens in the counseling room “medical treatment” as it relates to psychotherapy, and because the state is empowered to regulate such treatment, it should be anticipated that they will attempt to frame biblical counseling as the unlicensed practice of psychotherapy or medicine. Once that viewpoint is adopted, biblical counselors may find restrictive laws being applied to them and their counseling practices. Depending on when and where those laws are challenged, courts may defer to legislatures as to how best to govern their populace. And, as demonstrated by the political turmoil over

2019, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/sexual_orientation/banning-conversion-therapy-legislative-guide.pdf.

³⁷ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 4980 et seq.; see also Kori Cordero and Vanessa Carlisle, “Banning Conversion Therapy on Minors: A Guide for Creating Tribal and State Legislation,” *American Bar*, American Bar Association, Feb. 2019, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/sexual_orientation/banning-conversion-therapy-legislative-guide.pdf, p. 51.

³⁸ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 4980.02(a).

³⁹ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 4980.01.

the past handful of years, the balance of supposedly conservative justices versus liberal justices on the United States Supreme Court can change. Only God knows how that will impact future generations of biblical counselors. But no one should expect the climate to improve.

Lawsuits Against Biblical Counselors Will Increase

On the same day that Christian baker Jack Phillips won a hard-fought battle to have his case heard by the United States Supreme Court on whether he should have been penalized for refusing to make a same-sex wedding cake, he was sued again by a separate individual for refusing to make a cake celebrating that person's gender transition.⁴⁰ The goal is to crush this Christian businessman financially.

Mr. Phillips's experience should serve as a warning to biblical counselors. Those who warn their counselees of the spiritual (and physical) dangers of homosexuality and transgenderism may one day be targets of overzealous LGBTQ advocates and their supporters, whether through government enforcement, criminal proceedings, or private lawsuits. Such counselors will be subjected to accusations of malpractice, practicing without a license, consumer fraud, abuse, and negligence.⁴¹

Indirect Attacks Will Increase

Eliminating the Lawyers

At this point in American history, defendants still are entitled to an attorney of their own choosing. But biblical counselors should consider the American Bar Association's position on LGBTQ issues and conversion therapy, which is decidedly liberal with no tolerance for dissenting views.⁴² Lawyers already are being

⁴⁰ Colleen Slevin, "Christian Baker Sued Again for Refusing to Bake a Cake," *News & Reporting*, Christianity Today, 24 Mar. 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/march/colorado-christian-baker-jack-phillips-sued-lgbt-cake-court.html>.

⁴¹ See, e.g., <https://www.collegesoflaw.edu/blog/2020/05/27/the-constitutionality-of-conversion-therapy-bans/> (discussing potential avenues for regulating unlicensed sexual orientation change efforts and legislative attempts to classify the advertisements for those services as consumer fraud).

⁴² See, e.g., "Commission On Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities: Report to the House of Delegates," *American Bar*, American Bar Association, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/sexual_orientation/2015-hd-ann-mtg-doc-112.pdf.

required to participate in continuing education courses that seek to indoctrinate them on such issues, with the idea being to advance LGBTQ positions through attorney regulation.⁴³ They are prohibited from discriminating or harassing individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴⁴ It is not difficult to imagine a time when attorneys are required to either affirm such positions, represent “disadvantaged” LGBTQ clients in such cases, or simply resign from the practice of law. This could be accomplished through direct prohibitions by bar associations or through the refusal of insurance companies to provide malpractice insurance coverage for such lawyers. If that occurs, biblical counselors may find themselves named as defendants in various legal proceedings without competent lawyers to represent them.

Regulating Sunday School, Christian Youth Camps, and After School Programs

LGBTQ advocates make no secret of their disdain for any Christian effort designed to point homosexuals to Christ. Any talk of judgment or becoming a “new creature” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) is cause for extreme hatred and a gnashing of teeth (Acts 7:54; Psalm 35:16, 37:12, 112:10; Lamentations 2:16). They do not want to put this sinful life in the past (1 Corinthians 6:11). Instead, they claim that “LGBTQIA+ people don’t need to be cured, and interventions that seek to make a person straight or cisgender can and do cause significant long-term harm to victims. Conversion practice is abuse, and it must be banned, in every setting and for everyone subjected to it.”⁴⁵ They demand approval of the homosexual lifestyle, contrary to the warnings of the coming judgment set forth in Romans 1 and 2. And they are not content to stop at the church door. They want to ban every obstacle, whether based in Scripture or not.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kyle C. Velte, “Advancing LGBTQ+ Rights Through Attorney Regulation,” *The Regulatory Review*, The Penn Program on Regulation, 28 June 2021, <https://www.theregreview.org/2021/06/28/velte-lgbtq-rights-attorney-regulation/>.

⁴⁴ Kristine Kubes, “The Evolution of Model Rule 8.4 (g): Working to Eliminate Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment in the Practice of Law,” *American Bar*, American Bar Association, 2019, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/construction_industry/publications/under_construction/2019/spring/model-rule-8-4/.

⁴⁵ Stonewall Staff, “Netflix’s Pray Away Shows Us the Horrors of Religious Conversion Therapy – Here’s Why We Need a Ban Without Exceptions,” *Stonewall*, 2 Aug. 2021, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/netflix%E2%80%99s-pray-away-shows-us-horrors-religious-conversion-therapy-here%E2%80%99s-why-we-need>.

⁴⁶ “Ban Conversion Therapy,” *Ban Conversion Therapy*, <https://www.banconversiontherapy.com/>.

These efforts for approval and for LGBTQ converts often are veiled with language that seeks to “protect” children. They recognize the impressionable nature of young people and do not want any form of religious discomfort brought to bear on children who may be struggling with sexual sin. To them, the religious “trauma” associated with Christian youth camps is troubling and sufficient reason to cause parents to second-guess decisions to send their youth to such activities. The same arguments would apply to Sunday school curriculum or faith-based after school programs. So while LGBTQ proponents find it easy to direct vitriol toward Christian organizations that specifically are focused on conversion therapy, their not-too-distant goal is to eliminate all such influence.⁴⁷

HOW TO PREPARE

Pray

James 5:16 indicates that the prayer of a righteous man has great power. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Christians are called “the righteousness of God.” Therefore, the Christian prayer must be powerful and effective. Accordingly, biblical counselors should pray for at least the following: (1) For the welfare of this country (Jeremiah 29:7, “But seek the *welfare* of the *city* where I have sent you into exile, and *pray* to the Lord on its behalf, for in its *welfare* you will find your *welfare*”)⁴⁸; (2) that God would blind His opponents so that biblical counselors do not become targets; (3) that unbiblical legislation will not pass; (4) that those legislative attacks that do pass are stymied and struck down by the courts if they are enacted; (5) that biblical counselors are as prepared as they can be in anticipation of legal opposition; (6) that God would prepare competent Christian lawyers to assist when/where needed; (7) that God would lean courts in favor of biblical counselors if cases are ever filed; (8) that biblical counselors would be beyond reproach in their personal

⁴⁷ David Oliver, “‘Pray Away’ Details Trauma of LGBTQ Conversion Therapy – and New Leaders Are Still Emerging,” *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 4 Aug. 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2021/08/04/pray-away-netflix-lgbtq-conversion-therapy-documentary/5393364001/>; Casey Clark, “What Happens at Bible Camp? from ‘Cry Night’ to Shaping ‘Godly Women,’ Young Adults Who Went as Kids Say Parts of the Experience Make Them ‘Wanna Gag’ Today,” *Yahoo!*, 2022, <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/what-happens-at-bible-camp-and-should-you-send-your-child-161000993.html>.

⁴⁸ “America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.” William J. Federer, *America’s God and Country*, FAME Publishing, Inc, 1994, p. 205 (quoting Alexis de Tocqueville).

and professional lives; (9) that the biblical counseling ministry will increase and be fruitful in kingdom work; and (10) that those who are persecuted in this and in other countries will stand firm until the end, knowing that God wins. Above all, pray that God is glorified to the utmost, whether these worldly attacks result in pain, loss, and limitations on biblical counselors, or whether the world's attacks are stopped. God's purpose will not be thwarted (Job 42:2).

Anticipate Hatred

Biblical counselors should first expect that the world will hate them (2 Timothy 3:12, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"). As Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Why does the world hate Jesus? He answered that question in a way that relates specifically to biblical counseling. Jesus said the world "hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). This is precisely what biblical counselors are called to do. Proclaim truth. Identify sin for what it is. Encourage humble confession and repentance. Call evil exactly that—evil.

Provide Hope and Do Not Back Down

Laws that purport to restrict Christian practice, discipleship, and preaching cannot be obeyed by faithful Christians. The stakes are too high. There is a heaven and a hell. Those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved (Romans 10:13). Those who refuse will be cast into hell (Jude 1:7). Regardless of any law that tries to restrict Christian practice and discipleship, biblical counselors must proclaim truth, "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). The Apostle Paul also states:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

There is great hope in biblical truth that directs the soul to Jesus as the only avenue for lasting change. “Whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). This is God’s call to the biblical counselor. As John MacArthur has said, “Governments can make laws all they want, but they will never dictate to the church what its mission is. The church has a solemn duty to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that sinners might be converted. It is a mission of mercy.”⁴⁹ Do not back down.

Take Practical Steps

There are a number of ways biblical counselors can prepare for coming legal attacks. Specifically, biblical counselors should be engaged and aware of proposed legislation that may seek to infringe on the right to provide such counsel. They should be informed. When discussions arise that tend to blur the distinctions between godly counsel and worldly therapies (such as the attempt to redefine conversion therapy in such a way as to include biblical counseling), biblical counselors should be ready to articulate opposition to such language. When legislation is proposed or passed, those same counselors should pass along the information to the local church and to biblical counseling organizations, such as ACBC. During the course of those conversations, it may be decided that the threat of legal action may need to be transmitted to legislators with the understanding (at least in the United States) that the Constitution would seem to prevent restrictions on biblical counseling. Elected politicians typically do not like to lose lawsuits that require them to pay the prevailing party’s attorneys’ fees with tax dollars.

In addition, counselors should have their documents in order. Many lawyers and judges will advise that cases are often won or lost based on the documents. For a biblical counselor, this means that Consent to Counsel forms should be well-crafted in such a way as to clearly indicate that the counsel is part of the practice of sincerely held religious beliefs, that it is provided under the patronage and/or supervision of a local church (if it is), and that it is *not* secular psychotherapy or medical treatment.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ John MacArthur, “John MacArthur: ‘And Sinners Will Be Converted,’” *Decision Magazine*, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1 Mar. 2022, <https://decisionmagazine.com/john-macarthur-and-sinners-will-be-converted/>.

⁵⁰ A comprehensive discussion on Consent to Counsel forms has been provided by this author in other formats. See Todd M. Sorrell, “How to Avoid a Lawsuit,” *Legal Issues in*

There are other practical steps that biblical counselors can take to prepare for potential attacks. These include such things as obtaining insurance (or asking the local church if biblical counseling services are included in the church insurance), being careful in how website language is crafted so as to not run afoul of advertising rules, potentially not charging for biblical counseling or receiving public funds for biblical counseling services, and getting to know a local attorney who may be available in the future if the need arises.⁵¹ In addition, since the LGBTQ lobby has been drafting studies and surveys with an eye toward convincing courts that conversion therapy is ineffective and harmful, it may prove helpful for biblical counselors to garner information on those lives that have been changed by real biblical counseling, including testimonies of individuals who have passed over from a sexually deviant lifestyle or attitude to a fulfilled life in Jesus Christ.

The Ultimate Preparation

Biblical counselors should be prepared to lose—at first. In fact, Christians should be willing to lose everything—except salvation (Romans 8:35; Matthew 5:10). Nothing will stop Jesus from building His church (Matthew 16:18). Nothing will stop the conversion of the elect (John 6:37). And nothing will stop the wrath of God from being poured out on those who stand against Him and the saints (Psalm 2:1-3; Revelation 20:11-15). As to the current suffering of the saints:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

CONCLUSION

Biblical counselors have in their hands the pages of Scripture that contain

Biblical Counseling: Direction and Help for Churches and Counselors, edited by Dale T. Johnson and Edward Wilde, New Growth Press, 2022, chapter 5.

⁵¹ Likewise, biblical counselors should know that there are legal organizations committed to protecting religious freedom, freedom of speech, and other Christian freedoms enjoyed in the United States. See, e.g., Alliance Defending Freedom.

the gospel message for all who believe. It is divine power through which God effectuates change in a sinner's life. This is real conversion. No government will ever make a law that will stop the true church from proclaiming that truth. "Duty is ours; results are God's."⁵²

⁵² Jerod Jordan, "Duty Is Ours; Results Are God's," *Kingsbury Journal*, Kingsbury Journal, 9 Feb. 2022, <https://www.kingsburyjournal.com/stories/duty-is-ours-results-are-gods,5558#:~:text=The%20answer%20is%20found%20in,ours%3B%20results%20are%20God's.%E2%80%9D&text=John%20Quincy%20Adams%20died%20while,for%20the%20abolition%20of%20slavery>.



The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors is committed to championing the sufficiency of Scripture for the Church as she engages the problems people face, speaking the truth in love. Christians have the responsibility to bring the truth of God to bear on the problems of everyday life, and to embody that truth in a life of love.

At ACBC, we seek to strengthen the Church to speak the truth in love by providing a quality training and certification process, a global network of like-minded individuals and institutions, and a source of practical and biblical resources for the Church.

In short, we seek to bring biblical solutions for the problems people face, upholding that the method God has given to do this is truth in love.

Find all our ACBC resources at
BIBLICALCOUNSELING.COM