

## **How should the Church respond to homosexuality?**

### **Part 1: Law and Gospel and the Roots of Homosexuality**

It is difficult to decide where to begin the discussion of any topic as broad and as explosive as the topic of homosexuality. As a general rule, I would normally begin any Bible study from the same direction as a sermon with the Law first and then the Gospel. And, indeed, that is where most Bible studies on the topic do begin. Unfortunately, outside of Lutheran ones, the vast majority of Bible studies stop with the Law, basically saying, "God says it's wrong," as if having pronounced God's opinion on the matter ended our responsibility. However, God's call to us is not primarily to point out the world's faults and then sit back feeling we have done our job. Our job is to seek and to call the lost to the merciful and almighty love of our Savior. To that end, I believe it is best to begin this Bible study not with the Law, pointing out where others have sinned, but with repentance, understanding how we, the Church, have contributed to the problem and have failed in our own calling.

#### **Law and Gospel:**

First, we need to review the concepts of Law and Gospel.

The Law in Lutheran theology is all the rules, orders, threats and commands of God. We find it in both the New and the Old Testament. The Law shows us our sin and tell us that in God's eyes we are sinners who deserve nothing but death and punishment. Most importantly, the Law can only bring to repentance. It can not ever bring salvation. A good example of Law is Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

The Gospel, or "Good News," is like the Law in that it is God's inspired word. But it is completely opposite the Law in its message. The Gospel is the message that Christ has washed away our sins and given us freedom and salvation through Christ alone. Only the Gospel can give salvation through faith and only the Gospel gives power to change lives. The Law can not do these two things. A good example of Gospel is Romans 2:24 "and (all) are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

In regards to the topic of homosexuality it is vitally important that we keep these two straight and especially that we always remember that the Law cannot and does not change anyone. It can bring us to repentance and no further. It can threaten us and make us aware of our sins but it can do nothing to forgive our sins or to help us overcome our sins. As 2 Corinthians 2:6 says "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (Paul is using "letter" to mean "Law" and "Spirit" to mean "Gospel").

We must also be aware that, because the Law and the Gospel perform different functions, grave consequences occur when each is used at the wrong time.

Law can only bring to repentance. It can not give faith and it can not save. So what happens when Law is preached to sinner who is already repentant? The Law can do no more than has already been done in the person's life. To continue to hammer a repentant person with the Law will only drive them to despair. It turns them back to the commands and threats of God; commands they can not possible keep. The only thing Law can produce in an already repentant sinner is fear of God, self-loathing and discouragement.

Imagine, for a moment, a father telling his young son to pick up a heavy object. The child tries and fails because the object is too heavy. Instead of helping, the father scolds the son and orders him once again to pick it up. Such a situation can only produce shame and discouragement in the child that he is unable to meet his father's commands.

That is exactly what happens if we preach law to a sinner who is already repentant. We are telling them to do what they can not do and creating only despair, not salvation.

Preaching Gospel at the wrong time can be just as deadly, however. Telling a person who does not know or admit they are sinning that God loves them doesn't help them understand what the grace of God means.

It can not produce faith because they don't understand why God needs to forgive them in the first place, since they don't recognize the fact they have sinned. Repentance is necessary for faith because it is only when we understand how much we have failed God that we understand what a wonderful gift God has given us in free salvation. It is only when we understand what we owe God because of our sin that we understand the price Christ paid for us to earn our forgiveness. Preaching Gospel to a person who has not repented does not produce faith. It produces a hardened sinner who neither understands God's love for him or her nor cares about the weight of their own sin.

Ok, so Law is to be preached to an unrepentant sinner and produces repentance only. Gospel is to be preached to repentant sinners and produces faith and good works. So when should we use each in regards to homosexuality? To understand this we need to look at the roots of homosexual attraction.

The Missouri Synod has always been careful to stay out of the debate on whether homosexual desire is inborn or learned. I believe this is, for the most part, wise. The Bible does not specify and where the Bible is silent we can not give definitive answers.

However, in order to understand how we have often failed as a Church we do need to understand the factors which contribute to homosexual attraction.

### **Genetics or Choice?**

In spite of how often the media and Hollywood repeat the claim that people are born homosexual, no reputable study has ever substantiated that claim. In fact, studies consistently show that genetics can not be considered the dominant factor in the development of homosexual attraction.

On the other hand, this does not mean that homosexual desire is a choice either. The majority of homosexuals began sensing an attraction to others of their own sex just before or at the onset of puberty and probably felt "different" much earlier than that. Far from choosing these desires, most desperately wanted to get rid of them but were unable to do so. Though there may be a few who do indeed "choose" homosexuality as it becomes more accepted and popular, the majority of homosexuals tried very hard to hide and to fight against their own desires at a very young age.

So if homosexuality is neither in-born nor chosen, what causes it?

Probably the best and most succinct explanation I have come across is this one:

"Every child has a healthy need to identify positively with the parent of the same sex, have same-sex friendships, a positive body image and a confident sexual identity. Homosexual feelings can occur when these needs are not appropriately met. The adolescent's unmet needs become entangled with emerging sexual feelings and produce same-sex attraction."<sup>1</sup>

Overall, several major factors seem contribute in one degree or another to those needs not being met. Not every homosexual will have been affected by all three factors but there is significant enough occurrence within the experience of homosexuals compared to heterosexuals in these three areas to say they certainly play a part in the development of homosexuality.

It is very important to keep in mind that humans are not machines, however. While one person may respond to these factors by developing homosexual attractions, another person with the exact same factors in their life may respond in a complete different way.

### **Biological:**

While genetics are not the sole cause of homosexuality, they certainly may play a part. We are all born with certain character traits, potentials and temperament. Some are more aggressive, some less. Some are introverts and shy, others extroverts and outgoing. Some are sensitive and empathize well with others, others are less able to put themselves in another's place. And so on. There is a wide variety of traits which

combine with our environment to make us who we are with our unique personalities. It is quite possible that certain inherited traits make it more likely the child will enter adolescence with some important needs unmet. It may be that a child who does not fit the “norm” for his or her peers may be ostracized or teased, resulting in a wounded sense of self and gender identity. Heredity, by itself, however, does not cause homosexuality.

For more information on this factor, you might want to look at the article, *How Might Homosexuality Develop? Putting the Pieces Together* Excerpted from "The Complex Interaction of Genes and Environment: A Model for Homosexuality" by Jeffrey Satinover, M.D. (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH AND THERAPY OF HOMOSEXUALITY).

For a much more complete explanation of the limits of heredity, [narth.com/docs/080307Abbott\\_NARTH\\_article.pdf](http://narth.com/docs/080307Abbott_NARTH_article.pdf) is an excellent resource.

Overall, having moved from the idea of a purely genetic cause, even secular counselors seem to be accepting the idea that homosexuality results from a mix of biological factors combined with the child’s environment.

### **Nurture:**

This is not a politically popular area of study. Getting funding for studies of parent/child relationships in homosexuals has been difficult in recent years. Getting them published can be just as difficult.

However, before political correctness became so powerful, many studies were done in this area. These studies very dramatically show that, on the whole, homosexual men report having a more distant or difficult relationship with their father during their childhood than heterosexual men. In many cases this distant relationship with their father was combined with over-involvement with their mother. Studies with women vary as to whether their relationship with their mother or their father had more of an impact in their lives. Some women also report that their father’s treatment of their mothers had a profound effect on them and their relationship to their parents. This difficult relationship with a parent, seems to be tremendously important in the development of homosexuality

It should be stressed that this does not mean that the parents were necessarily to blame. There may be many reasons why a child feels a distance between himself/herself and a parent. For instance, the parent may be absent due to divorce, death or work out of town. Dr. Nicolosi, mentions 2 cases he worked with where the separation between father and son was not due to any real rejection on the father’s part. In one case the father was in medical school and trying to support his family when his son was small. He simply did not have time available to form a strong bond. In the other case the marriage was strained in its early years and so the father was often physically absent from the home.<sup>ii</sup>

Nevertheless, homosexual men do strongly tend to report feeling rejected by their fathers with many also reporting having an over-attached mother.

Father-son Relationships and Male Sexual Development by Gregory Dickson, M.A. analyzes many of these studies and, I believe, 2 quotes are significant.

“Since 1962 when our volume was published, I have interviewed about 1,000 male homosexuals and 50 pairs of parents of homosexuals. The classic pattern was present in more than 90% of cases. In my entire experience, I have never interviewed a single male homosexual who had a constructive, loving father. A son who has a loving father who respects him does not become a homosexual. I have concluded that there is a causal relationship between parental influence and sexual choice”<sup>iii</sup>

And:

“The current study replicated findings that homosexuals and heterosexuals have significantly different recollections of their childhood father-son relationships. Adult male homosexuals remember their fathers as being less loving, more rejecting, and less attentive than their heterosexual peers”<sup>iv</sup>

So, a sense of rejection by a parent (especially the father in the case of males and either parent in the case of women) certainly seems to play a large role in the development of homosexuality.

### **Sexual Abuse:**

Far more homosexuals than heterosexuals report having been molested by an adult. One particular study found:

“One of the more salient findings of this study is that 46% of homosexual men.....reported having been molested by a person of the same gender. This contrasts to only 7% of heterosexual men.....reporting having been molested by a person of the same gender.”<sup>v</sup>

The authors of this study point out that there is no way to know if the molestation contributed to development of homosexuality or if homosexual boys were simply more vulnerable to molestation than heterosexual boys because of their isolation from their peers.

Nevertheless, whether it is cause, contributing factor, or vulnerability, studies consistently show that between 32% and 47% of male homosexuals in America were molested as children with, generally, an even higher percentage for female homosexuals.

I don't think we need to imagine too hard to see how an incident of molestation could damage or destroy a child's gender identity and make it difficult for them to fulfill their need for affirmation as male or female.

### **Others:**

Other factors that are often listed would be:

- Early exposure to pornography or sexual language
- Negative impressions of gender or familial roles
- Isolation from same-sex peers.
- Name-calling (“fag,” etc.)

However, from what I have read, these factors seem to be less influential than the three I already mentioned or are simply part and parcel of one of the main three. Isolation and name calling, for instance, can result if a boy has a naturally more sensitive nature or a girl is born with a more aggressive nature than their peers. Early failure to form a strong gender identity at home may also result in a child acting differently than their peers and being isolated or teased for that reason.

### **Root Cause:**

So, what is the root cause of homosexuality? There probably is no one root cause for everyone. All the factors mentioned contribute to the situation. Which came first in an individual child's life would be impossible to tell. What is important to note is that all the factors are linked together and that the roots are set at a very early age. The factors play off of each other and reinforce each other.

For instance, a child who feels rejected at home will begin school socially behind their peers when it comes to forming same sex friendships, resulting in isolation. That isolation fills the child with shame, which in turn affects the child's already weak relationship with his or her parent(s). Isolation may make it more likely the child will be a target for molestation, filling the child with more shame and making the child even less able to relate to same sex peers and family.

For another child, however, the process may have begun with a incident of molestation which began a cycle of shame and distance between the child and parent or between the child and peers.

As far as the Church is concerned, what specific event or trigger began the whole process is unimportant. What is important for us to recognize is that, while an individual may not have experienced every single factor, the vast majority of homosexuals will have experience a number of these factors in their lives, resulting in loneliness, confusion and shame from a very early age.

### **Law or Gospel? The Failure of the Church**

Ok, now, what does all of this have to do with Law and Gospel?

Well, keep in mind that by the time a pre-homosexual child reaches puberty, he or she is probably struggling with one or more of these factors. Plus, with the onset of puberty, sexual desire toward members of their own sex begins to occur. Having been called, "gay," "fag," or "queer" by their peers, such children begin to realize to their horror that those taunts are "true" and they begin to label themselves as homosexual.

In the next study we will look at the sin of homosexual behavior and what the Bible says. But first, I believe it vital we see our own sin and repent of the mistakes we ourselves have made, for the consequences have been severe. Remember – the Law can NOT save or change anyone. ONLY the Gospel can both save and give the power to change. Yet, we must ask ourselves, what did these kids hear in Church? Were they repentant and, if so, did they hear the Gospel applied to themselves?

From the Exodus International website, here are some examples of the experiences young teens who were struggling with sexual identity had in their relationships with the church:

"I was used to living without a father because when I was very young my parents divorced. The sudden death of my dad at age eight simply made his absence permanent, leaving me with a hole in my heart and unequipped to live in a boy's world. I didn't have a clue how to do things I would have learned from dad, like playing baseball, shooting hoops and relating to other boys.

Not too long after dad died, a man in my church focused his attention on me. Unfortunately, I didn't have the capacity to process what was happening. At the time, being sexually abused didn't feel like a violation – I finally felt special and close to a father figure. I also discovered that I could use fantasy and masturbation to help me achieve the same counterfeit feelings of closeness that I felt from my abuser.

In the contest for peer acceptance, I struck out. While other boys played together outside, I lived isolated in my world of fantasy. ....

Equally endless were my desperate, private confessions to God. Growing up in the church, I heard that homosexuality was an abomination, attendant with remarks like, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." I got the picture – I was an abomination. I even got good at laughing at all of the jokes that made light of my most profound struggles; in reality I was dying inside.

I did have my musical skills. They not only provided me with a means to receive approval from people, but also from God. If I can perform well enough for God, I thought, than hopefully He will overlook my sin. I expected my gifts to redeem me. In the Church's unwillingness to deal with this issue, many like me are driven into closets of shame, only to emerge in leadership where the consequences of their brokenness are much greater." (Carlton Quattlebaum)

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From my earliest memories, I felt different from other boys. I was gifted musically, and labeled "sissy" by other boys.....At church, I heard people say, "All homosexuals should be shipped

out of the country--they deserve to go to hell!" I felt condemned by their remarks, and had no idea where to turn for help. So I hid my same-sex desires through high school. In college, I discovered other students who were also struggling with homosexual desires. We gravitated toward one another, and I became entrenched in the physical and emotional aspects of homosexuality. But the more I believed homosexuality was my "real" identity, the more miserable I became.

By my senior year, I was totally confused and frustrated. I decided that my life was not worth living. After all, I had begged God since childhood to remove these feelings and it seemed like nothing had happened. (Dennis Jernigan)

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In middle school, I felt so insecure and inadequate as a boy. The other boys were very intimidating to me, yet I was very attracted to them. As puberty set in so did the desires for other boys. As these attractions grew, the teasing began. I was so fearful and inadequate that I would walk around the baseball field during gym class just so I didn't have to play sports with the other boys. My peers began to taunt me with names and threaten me. I went to school in fear everyday.

As I questioned my identity, the names which my peers labeled me repeated over and over in my head. I allowed their words to have power over me and my identity. I knew I was attracted to other boys and everyone else knew – so was I gay? I went in search for the answer. I was too ashamed to go to my church where all I heard growing up was condemnation of homosexuals. (Chris Stump)

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As I continued to grow, more and more people called me names: sissy, fag, queer, and gay. My pain intensified when my parents got divorced. By the age of twelve we moved across the state, so contact with my father was limited, which I was okay with.

As puberty started, because of my bad experience with my dad and the abusive relationship with my brother, I began to find solace in hanging around with girls. They were safe and enjoyed the things I enjoyed. I felt fear and trepidation around large groups of boys, and sought escape with the girls.

At the same time, I also had a strong desire to be with another guy, and to feel loved and desired by another man. As a teenager, I became really involved with my church youth group. As a Christian very involved with church, my attractions seemed more detestable and shameful. (Ethan Martin)

Notice that in each case, these children, mostly in their young teens at the time of these experiences, were about as repentant as anyone can be. They were facing hurts, confusion and struggles most adults would have trouble dealing with. They did not want to be homosexual and had often begged God to change them. In other words, they had gone as far as the Law could take them. They needed the Gospel. They needed to know that they had a Father in heaven who loved them and a Savior who had forgiven them. They needed to know that all Christians are sinners and that Christ died for all sin. The Gospel, only the Gospel, could give them any hope or strength to believe and to change.

But what did they receive? They received only more Law. Is it any wonder that what happened to many of them is exactly what Luther predicted would happen when a repentant sinner hears the Law? They became despairing sinners at the age of 12 or 13. Do we really wonder why so many leave the Church, which seems to offer only Law, and give up on a God who has been portrayed as offering only anger?

This is our fault, our sin. We were right to pronounce homosexuality sin. We were desperately wrong to do so without proclaiming that, like all sins, homosexuality is forgiven in the cross of Christ.

As a consequence, far too many of our young people leave the Church and look for a copy of love in a world that will only destroy them. If we get them back at all, it is far too often only after they have suffered depression, suicidal feelings and attempts, broken hearts, shattered lives and, often, diseases such as AIDS. And, unfortunately, many do not ever return at all, letting anger and hurt at the Church and God destroy all faith they once had.

This because we failed to give the Gospel to young hearts that were ready, open and thirsty for it.

In the next lesson we will look at why homosexuality is a sin. But before we contemplate the sin of others, let us remember and repent of our own. For we have failed too often in the task given to us to proclaim the good news of Christ, crucified for sinners. Thank God, we have a merciful Savior who forgives even this sin of ours. And let us pray He will help us to remember to proclaim that forgiveness to all.

<sup>i</sup> NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH AND THERAPY OF HOMOSEXUALITY  
Homosexuality Is Not Inherited, and Science Fiction Solutions Won't Help  
Richard Fitzgibbons, M.D.,  
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<sup>ii</sup> NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH AND THERAPY OF HOMOSEXUALITY  
Fathers Of Male Homosexuals: A Collective Clinical Profile  
by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D.

<sup>iii</sup> Bieber, I. (1976). Psychodynamics And Sexual Object Choice. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 12(3), pp.366-369.

<sup>iv</sup> NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH AND THERAPY OF HOMOSEXUALITY  
Father-son Relationships and Male Sexual Development  
Gregory Dickson, M.A.

<sup>v</sup> ARCHIVES OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, VOL. 30, NO. 5, 2001  
Comparative Data of Childhood and Adolescence Molestation in Heterosexual and Homosexual Persons  
Marie E. Tomeo, PhD, Donald I. Templer, PhD, Susan Anderson, PhD, and Debra Kotler, PhD