



Charis Counseling Centers
Christ-Centered Counseling for Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Position Statement on the Issue of Homosexuality

As Christian counselors, staff members at the Charis and Lighthouse centers occasionally counsel both male and female clients who are struggling with the issue of sexual or gender identity. Some clients report that they have engaged in homosexual behavior, or at least have been tempted to, but desire to change not only their behavior, but also their sexual orientation. Less commonly, we do receive clients who profess to be Christians and who are actively engaged in a homosexual lifestyle, but have no desire to change, seeing no conflict between their stated Christian beliefs and their sexual behavior. Even less commonly, but still a possibility, is the client who also believes he or she is homosexual, does not profess to be a Christian, and is seeking help only with other issues in their life. It is important that counselors at Charis Counseling Centers have a clear, biblically-based perspective on this complex issue, and that they are unified in their approach to such clients.

The prevailing belief in the fields of psychiatry and psychology, and within the minds of the media and general American public, is that homosexuality has now been scientifically proven to be a naturally occurring phenomenon which is entirely determined by one's genetic makeup. A few studies were performed in the early 1990's that appeared to solidify the basis for this argument. The implications drawn from such research for the counseling field was very significant: the modern mental health community has concluded that homosexual tendencies, if not behaviors as well, no longer have any moral, ethical, or spiritual connotations, since the individual has no personal responsibility for what "nature" has endowed them with. It is, in fact, considered unethical for a counselor to attempt to change the sexual orientation of a homosexual client, even if the client requests help in doing so. However, such studies have been at least partially questioned, if not entirely discredited, by others who have challenged the validity of the research methodology, including one of the original researchers, who were unable to replicate the same results in a latter study. Further discussion on these studies and the current state of research can be found in sources such as the following: Stanton L. Jones & Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

These authors, writing from a Christian perspective, are cautious in their own assessments. While discrediting the research studies just mentioned, they cannot conclusively state that there are absolutely no genetic, neurochemical or neuroanatomical

links to the phenomena of same-sex attraction. They leave room for “nature” affecting one’s physiology to the extent that some individuals are genetically predisposed towards homosexuality. However, they also argue that “nurture” (environmental) factors can play an important role in the development of gender identity. What they do attack is a “biologically-reductionist” approach, which would argue that differences in neurochemistry and anatomy directly “cause” homosexual behavior. This “one-way street” model is inadequate, since other research confirms that changes in behavior can actually lead to changes in the physiology of the brain. This leaves room for the possibility that a young boy who never had any homosexual tendencies is exposed to, and encouraged or forced to engage in, homosexual behaviors, over time begins to develop new neuropathways and actual changes in brain structure that result from the behaviors. Thus, a cycle ensues between brain physiology and behavior. This would contradict the prevailing view that such a boy was born with “latent” homosexual tendencies that simply came to the fore when he began interacting with other homosexuals.

This has been, and will continue to be, a hotly contested issue between Christian and secular camps of modern society, and to some degree within Christian circles themselves. Former Surgeon General, C. Everett Coop, himself a professing Evangelical Christian, was banned from speaking at a major Christian conference a few years ago, because of his statement that some male children seem to be born with effeminate tendencies. While research is important to the question of “nature vs. nurture,” a biblical perspective on the issue of homosexuality must begin at an even more fundamental level: in accordance with Charis’ statement of faith, “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the inspired and only infallible and authoritative Word of God. We therefore believe that all psychological principles should be thoroughly evaluated and tested through the grid of Scripture and that God’s Word always holds final authority.” With the Bible as our authority, we appeal to God’s original creation of men and women, starting in the Garden of Eden, as heterosexual beings. The expression of sexuality is to occur only within the context of a heterosexual marriage, and is to symbolize the intimate and loving relationship which exists between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5).

A homosexual orientation is the result of the fall of humanity into a sinful condition that pervades every person. Whatever biological or familial roots of homosexuality may be discovered, these would not sanction or excuse homosexual behavior. Thus one may legitimately struggle, due to “nature” or “nurture,” with homosexual tendencies, but such a person has the capacity to choose whether to remain celibate or to behaviorally act upon those tendencies. To quote Stanton and Jones, *“The church’s moral concern is with what an individual does with his or her experiences of same-sex attraction. Only in the case of extreme biological determination at the level of individual acts would moral culpability be seen as obliterated. Homosexual persons are not subhuman robots whose acts are predetermined. They are moral agents who inherit tendencies from biology and environment, and who share in shaping their character by the responses they make to their life situations. Like all persons, they must ask, ‘This is what I want to do, but is it what I should do?’ The existence of inclinations or predispositions does not erase the need for moral evaluation of those inclinations.”* (p.90).

As Christians, we are to have great compassion and patience towards those who do wrestle with such sexual temptations. We believe that there is hope for the person with a homosexual orientation, regardless of its specific origins. Ultimately, Jesus Christ offers a healing alternative in which the power of sin is broken and the person is freed to know and experience his or her true identity in Christ. As is true of heterosexual behavior outside of marriage, homosexual behavior can be understood as a form of addiction. An “addiction” can be defined as any experience that we as human beings pursue with a greater degree of passion than we pursue God and our relationship with Him. According to this broad definition, “to be human is to be addicted,” in the words of Dr. Gerald May (*Addiction and Grace*). Sex, drugs, gambling, etc. are only the more obvious forms of addiction. When sex is pursued outside the context of a loving, committed marital relationship, then it’s purpose is either to provide a mood-altering experience, and/or as a means of pursuing approval of another person. In either case, the participants are addicted, or overly attached to the experience of feeling good—either physically and/or psychologically.

Of course, such a self-centered approach to sex can occur within a marriage relationship as well, but only to the degree that the spouses are not using sex as means of expressing godly love and intimacy towards one another. The Bible suggests that whatever is not done out of love is sin, since the only alternative to true love is sinful self-centeredness. As in the case of heterosexual activity outside of marriage, homosexual behavior is motivated by the self-centered attachment to the physical pleasure of sex and/or the pleasure of feeling approved by one’s partner. Mature Christ-like love always involves commitment to the relationship and the good of the other, even if my own needs and desires are not fully met. Thus, by definition, any sexual expression outside of a committed heterosexual marriage is primarily sinful and addicting because it seeks pleasure and fulfillment over and above a passion to lovingly serve the other. Additionally, while homosexuals may argue that they can commit to a monogamous, long-term relationship, that union still does not comply with the Biblical definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Like all human beings, those struggling with homosexual tendencies must progress in a growth process towards desiring God above all else. As this process continues, we all find our true sense of identity, value, worth, significance and meaning in the context of an intimate relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, empowered by His Holy Spirit. Also like all human beings, homosexual persons are those who have been in some way wounded by the sinful self-centeredness of others. Addictions become the means of attempting to heal the “wounded self” by either numbing the pain (by altering one’s feeling state) or by attempting to elevate the self by winning others’ approval. Whenever we attempt to “heal ourselves,” rather than relying ultimately upon God’s saving and healing power, we are guilty of the sinful drive to be independent of God. In this sense, addictions can be understood as forms of idolatry, because we in essence worship an experience or a relationship with someone or something other than God, rather than worshipping God as Lord of our lives.

As in the case of other forms of addiction, homosexual clients need both healing from the wounds inflicted by others, but also through confession and repentance, freedom from their own drive to heal themselves via sexual behavior. We recognize that every client we treat is both hurt and wounded by others' sin, but also a sinner themselves. A balanced approach is therefore required as therapists attempt to address both these aspects of a persons' experience. Growth and healing may lead to a complete freedom from any homosexual tendencies, but this is not necessarily the case. Christian literature (and some secular literature as well) highlights testimonies of "former" homosexuals and lesbians who through godly counseling and spiritual healing have become "straight."

Yet, experience also teaches us that not all who seek such a complete freedom from homosexual tendencies seem to achieve it. This, of course, is similar to many who struggle with alcoholism – some lose the desire entirely to ever drink again, while others strive for abstinence in spite of some continual degree of temptation.

Counselors at Charis Counseling Centers seek to communicate God's grace to those who struggle with homosexual tendencies. The experience of grace allows us as therapists to lovingly accept all our clients as valuable creatures made in God's image, regardless of their personal struggles. Grace does not ignore the fact that God does have standards of personal holiness, which we all fail to achieve one way or another. Instead, grace upholds such standards, yet it allows Christ's righteousness to fulfill them on our behalf. When one truly understands this unmerited favor extended by God towards us, then one's natural response will be to eagerly obey and conform to God's desires for us as much as we are able to do so with the help of His indwelling Spirit. Thus, the client who continues to struggle with homosexual tendencies, but whose heartfelt desire is to love, obey and develop an intimate relationship with his or her Savior, will not choose to displease God by acting upon those tendencies.

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