Homosexuality in the Context of Christian Sexual Ethics

Part 5 of 5: Stanton Jones Brown Bag: Questions on Ministry to Homosexuals
with Stanton Jones, Darrell L. Bock, and Michael Brown
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Darrell Bock: Let’s start over here.

Question 1: Good morning Dr. Jones, Dr. Bock. As a counseling student, I realize that the counselor now is being called a multi-cultural counselor in terms of competencies, to be able to be a social advocate for all cultures and subcultures. And I was wondering how that might conflict, if you do have a position as a counselor, how that might conflict in the counseling session with clients who might be of that particular orientation. If you have to say what you represent, as you were articulating, the fact that you have an identity. In this age of soundbites and sensational journalism, people tend to just snatch what they want. How might that affect your clients or the relationship of the counselor and the client.

Stan Jones: Boy is that an important and huge question. I’m sort of glad you asked it. I was reminded of this yesterday, as I was driving down and reading that the State of California just passed the law – I believe it’s awaiting Governor Brown’s signature – but the State of California legislatures, the senate and house, just passed a law making it a point of criminal fines, criminal censure, if a person offers any kind of reorientation therapy to an individual under 18 years of age. And we are living at a time where I know that I’ve stuck my head up and I’m a bit of a pariah in my professional organization, the American Psychological Association. I’ve been an officer in that association; I was on the council of representatives of that organization. But it’s a very difficult place to be. I think people who are in the mental health professions are among the people who are on the front, front lines, because we’re being pushed to say that which really conflicts with our deepest moral convictions.

It’s interesting. Up to this point, the various professional associations (American Psychological, American Psychiatric, Marriage and Family, Counselors Association and so forth) have slightly different nuances to the way they spin their ethical statements and their professional statements. And I’m most familiar with my own. Interestingly, to this point, the American Psychological Association has not quite turned the corner of branding as unprofessional and unethical people who hold views such as the views that I hold. But they’re dangerously close – dangerous from my perspective – dangerously close to doing precisely that. And I’m trying to push back within the professional organization by talking about the need for academic freedom, for intellectual integrity, so that we’re not cookie-cutter approaches to each other. And it’s interesting to see how these things happen.
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I mentioned in my talk the controversy that’s currently exploding at the University of Texas. And I don’t know if anybody here is interested in this controversy. There’s a sociologist on their faculty – Mark Regnerus – who is a Christian, he’s a graduate of Calvin College, he’s a convert to Roman Catholicism, and he’s quite an accomplished sociologist. And he got funding from several conservative think tanks to do a study. There’s this prevailing question: What is the impact of same-sex parents on children? And what you’re hearing from the secular community is there’s no difference. It has no detrimental impact. I’ve reviewed some of that research on my own and have written about it, and what’s appalling is the quality of the studies that are being cited. And basically, people are way out beyond what the science legitimately says, because most of these studies are built around convenience samples that aren’t representative of the gay and lesbian community itself, so how can you make a judgment about gay and lesbian parenting when you don’t know what would be a representative sample of that group and you don’t have a study that represents it?

So Regnerus, intrigued with this idea, went out and got the closest to a representative sample that has been assembled to this day. He used a public opinion sampling corporation called Knowledge Works. They sampled tens of thousands of people in order to get a subpopulation of about 200 individuals who had some experience of one parent or the other coming out as same-sex sometime during their childhood. And he basically compared what are the life outcomes for these individuals who had some type of same-sex parenting in their background versus the people who came from intact, two-person biological families. And on the vast majority of the variables that he sampled, the people who were children from the gay and lesbian families had worse outcomes, on everything from mental health outcomes to imprisonment to being on welfare to educational attainment to job stability, and so forth and so on.

Regnerus himself was very, very careful to say, this does not mean that all gay and lesbian parenting is bad, because these are not studies of people who grew up in intact, committed, stable homosexual families. This is just, in some sense, a passing glance. But he said it does give you pause, and it points out how little we know about the impact of gay and lesbian parenting. Well, Regnerus has been viciously attacked, and he’s being in a sense, tried for scientific malpractice at University of Texas and in his professional organizations. And the journal that published the study, the Social Science Research Journal, the editor there is just going through a horrible time of calls for his denunciation and his resignation as the editor of the journal. So there’s this tremendous sort of professional backlash against any expression of conservative opinions.
For you as a professional, you’re going out into that professional world. I think the first thing is to become competent in what your profession actually says. Really know your Ps and Qs about what you ethics statements say, and find that way to express your views within the context of this professional matrix. But there can come a point where you really are faced with a fundamental choice—am I going to stand by what God’s Word teaches, or am I going to yield this aspect of my core identity. And that’s where I think Christians have to serve Christ and not Caesar. But to do so with grace. I’m hoping the day won’t come where I have to resign, or I’m thrown out of the American Psychological Association. I should mention in the process we not only need to know with rigor what our professional identity is about and what the professional standards say, but we also need to know with identity and rigor what Christian belief demands of me. So for instance, the American Psychological Association voted in the 1970s to eliminate homosexuality as a mental illness. Do Christians have a dog in that fight? Does scripture say homosexuality is a mental illness? Well actually the definition of what is and what isn’t a mental illness is extraordinarily conceptually complex, and I’m convinced that it’s in a sense a matter of neutrality. It may not, it may be from a Christian perspective. How does change happen? I think that change is a very complex phenomenon. There’s a whole host of issues we need to be very rigorous in examining what does Christian faith call me to say.
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One final thought: One of the best documents you can read is the 2009 study of the task force of the American Psychological Association on sexual orientation change efforts. Go to the APA website (apa.org), find their sheet of gay and lesbian resources, and you’ll find this 90- or 120-page study. But buried in the middle of that study is one of the most amazing admissions by a secular mental health group that I’ve ever read. And that is, after really demolishing the case for change – or they try to demolish the case that change is possible – they actually come out and say, we do have to admit that there’s a fundamental conflict between a psychological worldview and a religious worldview. And they encapsulate the psychological worldview by what they called “organismic congruence,” which is this clumsy term, but what they’re signaling is that my ultimate calling from a psychological perspective is to be myself. It’s congruence with my own organismic experience. So internal consistency. And they say, this seems to be in inherent conflict with certain religious teachings, which call for what they call “telic congruence” from the Greek word “telos,” the goal that lies outside of one’s self. And so they say, “These religions basically say organismic congruence is not the way to go. What you ought to be pursuing is God transforming you into that ideal.” And they sort of grudgingly say, sometimes the religious and the psychological really do come to blows. And I think they’re absolutely right about that. I think something like that can help us to know how to articulate our own views as Christians on these matters.

Sorry for the long answer. Great question.

**Question 2:** Good morning. I have two questions wrapped up into one. The first is how would one go about getting involved in reaching out to the GLBT community in loving and appropriate ways? And then second to that, how would you go about educating your church and the body of believers and just stepping into this fight? Where is a good start point to begin with this?

**Stan Jones:** Two great questions. I just have to confess to be the wrong person to answer the first one. My engagement is largely the intellectual, the scientific, the conceptual, and I do a lot of writing. And that puts me in conversation with other scholars who we argue back and forth by email and so forth, but I have had not as much opportunity to be an exemplar of the kind of outreach that I mentioned. I have a number of friends who are gay and lesbian, but I particularly have this one friend I’ve walked alongside of for 25 years now, whose journey is a very lonely one, because he’s had some terrible experiences within the church.
But I would say, in today’s world you’re more likely than not to have opportunities fall into your lap. And if you simply pursue caring relationships, just express interest in the people around you, then opportunities that will come up. But there are probably other ministry leaders on this campus and other places – churches – that could exemplify that. You can ask in this community, are there churches that have extraordinary forms of outreach and visibility in the gay and lesbian community and go and study how they get engaged in that.

What was your second question? Sorry.

**Question 2:** Educating the church.

**Stan Jones:** Oh, educating the church. I think people are actually anxious to talk about this question. And let me return to this issue about the reluctance of church leaders to take it up. I see this time and time again. On issues of sexuality, people can become quickly polarized, and sometimes pastors and church leaders get stuck in a position of weakness, of not wanting to stir up controversy within the church. This is an area where we have to realize that Christian integrity demands that we take on these issues. I would urge you to read everything that I put in that handout for you, and then just dive in. Find a group of Christian leaders that are willing to take this on. It’s amazing: you put sexuality on the discussion table, and people turn up in droves to have the conversations. I would also say that you can structure part of your conversation around the teachable moments of life that presents itself before you. Whether it’s political issues or the tangible issues that are happening in the community, there are opportunities for conversation that come up right before us.

**Question 3:** You said under your first point when you were making your presentation, do not start or end the conversation with moral judgment. And I’d like to ask what you mean by that, have you mention that a little bit more. And in particular, how do we practically not start with moral judgment when treating a person with respect as an individual but while being honest, so I can develop a real relationship.
Stan Jones: That’s a great question. I was at that point speaking in a sense in vague ambiguities, and it can be a delicate thing to cash that out. Let me pick up the last part of your question. If real relationship means that I’m honest, how can this not be part of the conversation. My response back would be, honesty is necessary, but honesty by itself doesn’t sort out what takes priority in your engagement with a person. So the honest truth might be that you see that this person is gay, and you have an honest opinion about that, but you also see that they’re Hispanic, and they’re a welder, and they’re this and that, and they’re profane, and they have this characteristic and that characteristic. So why do we pick out, in the name of honesty, the one thing that’s likely to create a barrier to us forming a relationship? Honesty doesn’t say, I must focus on this issue. It would be dishonest for me to pretend that it’s not there. So there’s a time and a place to address it, but it may not be on that first point.

I think, for instance, of my daughter who works in the culinary world. She’s around people who are obviously gay and lesbian, but she can also approach them on the integrity of their work as a chef. She can talk about their kindness to the people around them. Those are just as honest as a confrontation about the moral issues, but they form a better bridge to contextualize that engagement around the moral issues.

And to come at the other end, there can be a time about judgment. There was a wonderful question down front that we were having a brief discussion about. What about the fact that there seems to be times when you must exercise church discipline? Doesn’t the church discipline? Doesn’t the moral standards of the church eventually impose some standard? And I think the answer to that is, in some instances it does. The moral issues are absolutely fundamental. There’s times to say, “You are teaching falsehood in our church. You’re presenting that as being gospel truth which is not gospel truth. We cannot endorse that. We cannot enable that. And therefore we have to ask you to not speak out the way you are.”

But even there, I think the last word is not judgment. To my mind, when the apostle Paul, going back to that 1 Corinthians 6 passage, says, “Here’s various kinds of immorality. The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God,” it strikes me that his purpose in that exhortation is not to condemn and release but it’s to offer hope. Because what does he do? He immediately says, “And such WERE some of you.” So even when you have to exercise church discipline, you still have the opportunity to say to the person, even in voicing church discipline, “But God still loves you and will never let you go unless you refuse to embrace him all the way to the end.”
I work at Wheaton college and we’re shepherding this group of 2,400 undergrads, and I really have the highest respect for how our student development people deal with disciplinary issues. We suspend people at Wheaton. We discipline them. We sometimes come to the point of suspending them. We sometimes come to the point of expulsion. That is an act of judgment. But our student development people, as an exercise of Christian discipline, as they’re suspending someone, as they’re expelling someone – the last thing they say to them is not, “You are a bad person, we cast you out from among us.” The last thing they say to that person is, “Please come back. Please repent. Please come back to Christ. Please embrace Christ’s love. We would love to welcome you into this community. Nobody is irredeemable. God will never let you go.” And we’re amazed at the number of people who come back six months, one year, three years later, and say, “You know, I really have found my way back to faith, and your discipline was a part of that.” So that to me is an example of how judgment is sometimes necessary, but it’s not either the first or last word. Thank you for a great question.

Question 4: One of my professors had this saying: “What was once unthinkable becomes debatable becomes accepted.” This was in an ethics class, and he was talking about the homosexual movement, how one time it was unthinkable, then became debated in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and now is really widely accepted. The question I have asked is, what’s next? In the civil rights movement, where is this going to lead our culture to, in a sense? Do you have any ideas?

Stan Jones: I’m neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but there’s some things that are taking shape that are really quite amazing, I think. In the circles in which I run, success and full acceptance of homosexual identity is almost a given now. The big press is no longer on homosexuality because they’ve in a sense declared victory on that. The big press now is on trans-sexuality and transgendered issues.
In the podcast we did this morning, Michael Brown, who’s in Charlotte, North Carolina – what could be a quainter, more traditional southern Christian town, right? Michael Brown mentioned there’s a school in Charlotte – or maybe it’s the whole school system – where a teacher can no longer say to a class, “Good morning, boys and girls.” Because to say, “Good morning, boys and girls” is to impose an imperial gender classification that may violate the rights of people to declare themselves neither boy nor girl, or both, or to be something other. And so I think we’re living in a time where the press outside of the boundaries on sexual orientation, which is really focused on sexual partnership, is really being broadened to even deeper kinds of identity.

The church has always been living in Romans 1 times, but in some ways this seems more Romans 1 than any time that I can remember, where the press is, “I will not be tyrannized by a God who imposes definition and limits on me.” Even in something as indisputable as sexuality. When a baby pops out, you know it’s a boy or a girl. Yes, there are these once in 10,000 biologically confused conditions, and so forth and so on, but generally speaking you say, “It’s a boy, it’s a girl.” When we get to the point in our culture where we can’t even celebrate boyness and girlness, we’ve passed on a fundamental point.

First it was LGB, lesbian gay and bisexual, then it was LGBT, to add transsexual, then it’s LGBTQ, to add questioning or queer or there’s actually four or five different things that qualify as Q’s. I’ve seen one composition of that acronym that goes out 14 letters of the people who want to be categorized as just as legitimate as everybody else. And the underlying theme that unites the whole thing is Genesis 2 and 3, not just Romans 1. It’s, “I will not have God exercise dominion over me. I will not accept the creational givens of my condition. I will not accept finiteness. I must be the master of my own soul.” And that includes pushing back even on biological identity of male or female in order to establish my human autonomy.

**Darrell Bock:** It’s an irony that in Romans 1, where we talk about the exchanging of the role of the Creator for the creature as being the distortion, that’s actually what you’re seeing in this kind of an exchange.
It’s a great question to think about where things are headed. I want to raise this because I think it’s important. I think sometimes when this question is raised, people say, “Well here’s the list of things that are coming down the pike: polygamy, pedophilia, etc., etc., etc.” You sometimes see that argument raised. And the initial reaction is, that’s really harsh. Don’t blame Person A for Situation B. But one of the hard things about that is that as we watch this unfold, and we watch it happen, that in fact is the movement of what happens. Something else comes next. Now that we’ve got this one “taken care of,” we’ll move onto the next category we want to play with. I think it’s the nature of thinking through what it is to live in a fallen world.

The point that was made, in a chapel message about brokenness, is that we live in a context of brokenness, and that brokenness happens all over the place. It happens in homosexual relationships, it happens within families, it happens in heterosexual relationships. It runs across the board. And one of the ways to connect in this conversation – we really stress this in the podcast, and it hasn’t come out so much now – but one of the ways to connect is to make the point that the struggle you have in Area X is like the struggle I have in Area Y. And there’s a way in which you say, what Christ redeems is both X and Y. And He is working with me in Area Y while he’s working with you in Area X. And to have some sense of how the encounter with Christ transcends and steps into all those areas. God as the creator has the right to step into all those areas, and calls us to think about how we relate in those areas. It’s a great question.

**Stan Jones:**

Can I say one more historical note? I think it’s helpful to frame this that this is not the first time the church is facing this kind of thing. In as sense, our situation today was set up in the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s with two really fundamental shifts in our cultural view. One was the sexual revolution, and with the introduction of contraception, there was a time when sex was so intimately seen as being embedded with reproduction, and so sex was a family act. It had consequences. And the introduction of contraceptives has really fundamentally changed the view of sexual action in our culture today, where it’s really viewed as an expression of fun. It’s viewed as self-expression. And reproduction is really not even in the view. And hence we have the complete dismissal of issues of reproduction and consequences of our behavior and so forth and so on. One thing we need to do in our culture is to go back to a holistic view of sex. Praise be to God, sex is fun. But it’s not just fun. It’s a uniting human act that has reproductive consequences sometimes, or it can be under God’s grace. And so we need to expand that view.
The other thing that happened in our culture which I think we insufficiently appreciate and that you will face as church leaders, is a fundamental shift in our view of marriage. Where marriage was once a covenant, and was once a reality of the uniting into one flesh of two human beings. I firmly believe that my wife and I are one person. In some mystical way, we’re united into one flesh in Christ; there’s a unity that transcends everything else. That view has eroded so substantially in our culture. And it’s deeply, deeply rooted in our culture to view marriage as a contract that exists for my individual good. Part of the reason why we moved toward no-fault divorce is the fundamental sense that if my marriage is not giving me what I want, I should be able to bail.

But in Christian perspective, I believe marriage is meant to be a lifelong relationship that grounds the person and forms a context for God’s sanctifying work in life, through this creation of union. So when Brenna and I have sparks between the two of us, when we have tough issues to work out, the question is not, am I getting what I want? The question is, what does God want to do in me, and what does god want to do in her, and in our children, and in the lives of those we touch as a result of this engagement with each other? So there are these deep, fundamental issues that I think church leaders have to pay attention to. We have to fight to reorient the fundamental views of the people that are sitting in our churches if we’re ever going to have a hope of them being the whole Christian people that they need to be.

You know, one of the reasons we chose to talk about this in the context of sexuality, and will be talking about it in the context of sexuality, is because the way in which sexuality is defined in our culture is to make it an experience of some kind or another. And it can be fleeting, or it can be long-term – that’s left up to me. One of the things scripture says, when scripture is rebuking the union of a person with a prostitute, even if it’s in the context of temple prostitution, which might be the case in the passage in question (1 Corinthians), is the point that there is a union that takes place. This isn’t just an experience. There is a real bonding. There is something soulish about sexuality, if I can say it that way. And if there’s something soulish about sexuality, it isn’t casual. And I think we’re back to this issue of getting back to defining what it is something is designed to be, versus the way our culture is portraying it to be, and really the difference between those two things.

OK, over here.
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**Question 5:** In talking with someone about homosexuality, one of their strategies in engaging the community is to shift the focus from the homosexual identity to the propensity toward same-sex attraction—that they are predisposed to have same-sex attraction as some are to overeating or addiction or something like that. Do you find that that’s a helpful strategy to use, or does that do more harm than good?

**Stan Jones:** That’s a great question. You know, when Christians try to reorient the conversation by saying, “I’m not going to use the word homosexual for you; I’m just going to talk about your same-sex attractions,” there’s a sense in which some members of the gay community are on to that strategy, and their immediate reaction is to say, “Don’t trivialize me like that, by saying those are just the attractions I feel. This is who I am.” I think we need to be aware of the labels we use, but I would not let a label stand in the way of building the relationship. I would just say, keep your feet under you. Know where you’re headed in the relationship. But if you using that one term is going to build a barrier in that relationship, then I would say, don’t use that term. Keep up the relationship. But if the trajectory of the relationship is one of [the other person saying], I’m going to push you into my mold, at some point you have to say, “I’m in the mold that God has put me in. I’m expressing what I believe to be Christian truth. If you say what you want is a real relationship, then I am here, but who I am is transparently expressed in and through the Christian truth that I embrace.” So I think you have to keep that foremost.

**Question 6:** Welcome Dr. Jones. I thank Wheaton for its moral stand on postcoital contraception. Ten years ago when I was lost, I was a chief pharmacist for a government facility, and when I came to Christ that was the first conviction that I experienced. And because of that, I’m no longer a pharmacist. I would suggest, as I came here I was required to have insurance, Christian ministry cost-sharing as a possible alternative. What I found out was not only does the Lord possess my soul and my body, but He also possessed my job and everything else.
As a chaplain, I have the opportunity to kind of meet people out in the field where they’re at. And a strategy is kind of to meet them where they’re at and kind of bring them into the truth, and I appreciated that you said, not to misquote you, but you said you don’t draw a hard line or put a barrier up. Other than prayer and your testimony, and you used the Word, then the dialogue isn’t between me and the lost, but it’s between them and bringing them into God’s Word to Christ. Anything else along that [topic of] engaging them to bring them down into the Word or into Christ.

**Stan Jones:**
I appreciate your witness of integrity in the choices you’ve made in your career. But apart from the general things I’ve shared before, I don’t think that I have that much more to offer. I think that each of us are going to have to find that individual path in the calling of the relationships that God puts in front of us, and seek in love to be the witness that we can be. Beyond the few things I’ve said so far, I’m not sure I have too much to add on that. So thank you.

**Question 7:**
This may relate both to Dr. Bock’s X and Y illustration and also to the moral aspect, Dr. Jones. I’d like to focus my question more toward those who are Christian and claim to be homosexual. In my conversation with my neighbor who for 32 years was married to his wife but divorced her because he felt he had to be true to his way, and my other neighbor whose son just adopted in a gay relationship. In conversing with them, kind of what you were saying Dr. Bock, I asked them why would my adultery be any different from your homosexuality? We need to live holy lives for the Lord. He said, “You’ve got to realize, my homosexuality isn’t a sin. Your adultery is, but my homosexuality isn’t sin. It’s just temple homosexuality that was condemned, and the six verses in the Bible don’t relate to that. So really, don’t talk to me about my actions as sin. Yours are, but mine aren’t.”

How would you begin addressing Christians? I believe he’s a Christian, he’s confessed Christ, he lived for 20 years across the road, but he says, “I don’t know what you’re talking about because my homosexuality isn’t a sin.”
Darrell Bock: This is something that’s happening in the literature. I’m assuming this is actually in some ways a New Testament question and an Old Testament question. The problem that you have here is that in the conversation about the Bible and homosexuality, these texts have been read in very narrow ways to exclude what some in the gay community will call genuine monogamous homosexual relationships. So they’ll acknowledge if I have multiple partners, that may be a problem, but we’re talking about monogamous homosexual relationships that don’t apply. And to get there, many of the texts have been re-read or redefined or narrowed in terms of what they’re talking about.

Some of the texts that do address this area, do address issues related to temple prostitution and practices associated with the temple, but the categories you’re dealing with, generally speaking, I think, are broader than this. And the category itself is broader than this. But there’s a whole literature out there and one of the things that’s happened in the mainline churches is that this literature about these texts has “convinced” the denominations that these texts are more narrow versus broad, and therefore there’s an acceptability of these categories.

One of the things we’re actually going to do when we deal with this section later on, is we’re actually going to do a podcast on these passages. We’re going to talk about how these passages are handled, what the Bible is doing with them. Because you’re right, if someone says, “Well I don’t think it’s a sin, so the analogy doesn’t work,” in their minds you have made a connection that doesn’t exist. But in fact, if the Bible is making that connection, then the analogy does exist. Now the second fact is, and Stan can speak to this for sure, in most homosexual situations, you aren’t dealing with a monogamous homosexual relationship. The nature of the community is there’s a huge turnover; I’ll say as an aside, that’s also true in the heterosexual community too. So the point here is that even if someone tries to escape the accountability that the Bible is putting on them, in most cases, in fact in the reality, it often doesn’t apply.

Stan Jones: That’s right. And I would probably just add two things to what Darrell said. I’m really grateful to hear that they’re going to treat the text in greater length.
There’s a deep presupposition that’s often part of the hermeneutic that is behind those kind of narrow interpretations of the text, and that is the presumption that the ancient world is fundamentally different than the world today; we’re really in a new era. Well, I’ve swum in this stream long enough to see a very radical change in the broader scale of scholarship. The more we learn about the ancient world about these matters, the more the ancient world looks just like today. I mean, the number of texts and artifacts they’ve encountered that suggest that there was wide awareness of homosexual behavior patterns, homosexual inclinations, and so forth and so on in the ancient world, makes it much more likely that rather than being ignorant and focusing on an aberrant case, the apostle Paul and the Old Testament writers knew exactly what they were talking about, and that it was not that different from the current world.

And the other thing I would just mention is that I encounter people regularly who make that exact kind of argument. But what I oftentimes say back to them is, “Do you realize how that argument is now passé in the liberal Christian community?” It’s been interesting to see some of the best liberal scholars come around and say, “You know what, we really just can’t bend the text that way.” There’s a wonderful article by Luke Timothy Johnson, a mainstream New Testament scholar on the faculty at Emory University. He wrote in <i>Commonweal</i> about three years ago, “Look I’m sick of the gymnastics and the spinning to try to get the text to say what it doesn’t say. We know what the text says.” In other words, the text condemns all instances of homosexual behavior. And he says the only answer is to say, on this like on other issues, the text is simply wrong. When I get a chance to lecture on this to students at Wheaton College, I say to them, now that is a position that has intellectual integrity, because it puts the issue right there: Is the Bible authoritative or not? Do we have the authority to say the Bible is right on these issues and wrong on those? That is a position that has integrity. I as an evangelical don’t believe I have that capacity. I can’t pass judgment on Scripture; Scripture passes judgment on me. So that’s the fundamental question. But you know, there aren’t many really good scholars anymore who try to make that argument.
Darrell Bock: You know, one of the things that happens in this discussion is the combination of the two things you mentioned: We know better today, and thus we know that the people who were writing those ancient texts back in those ancient times didn’t really know what they were saying. And you get the combination of the two put side by side as another way of negating the discussion. It actually is important for people in the church to be aware of how these texts are being read, what’s being said about them, that kind of thing, so that’s why, as I said, we will dedicate some time and effort to working through these texts in detail, presenting both what the rationale is for the argument that says that these texts are narrow, as well as dealing with the response to how those texts are read in a broader way, in a way they’ve traditionally been read.

Question 8: Dr. Jones, if you were a journal reader, what would be some sources that you’d recommend in different disciplines to see what the professional and the academic research community is saying on the issue? What would be some journals that you would keep up with to see what they have to say?
Goodness. You’ve stumped me. Part of the reason you’ve stumped me is because the spectrum of journals where these kinds of issues are studied and talked about is just stunningly broad. There’s a sense in which gay-affirming scholarship is the lingua franca of today and so it’s just published so widely, it’s really quite remarkable. You can almost just throw a rock at random and you’ll hit a place. So I would suggest that if you want to track sort of the current trends of scholarship, almost all of the major professional organizations, the American Psychological Association, the American Anthropological Association, the American Sociological Association – almost all of them have websites that have resources for gays and lesbians as a major theme on there, if you want to read the latest cutting-edge, I would suggest going to those resources and locating them.<br />I mentioned earlier the Mark Regnerus controversy. If you want to get a sense of what that controversy is about, the journal where that was published was <i>Social Science Review</i>. And I just got to read pre-publication, I think they’re going to go live in a month of six weeks, but I just got to read several reviews of responses about how this controversy has spun out. And you might want to look for the next issue. It gives a fascinating depiction of just how tough the battles are in this area. I should just mention, by the way, that it is brutally hard to get anything published that comes in any way from a conservative perspective in this area. There have actually been empirical studies of how empirical studies get published, and when studies go against the prevailing winds of professional opinion at the time, it’s very difficult to get things published. I think one problem is that there aren’t that many conservative scholars doing really really good work out there. But when they do, they get punished, they get slanted into second- and third-tier journals. Science is a great self-correcting enterprise when it’s operating properly, but it is not always operating properly, and there’s a sense in which it’s operating in a halting and difficult way right now. </br>

Let me ask a variation of the question that was asked. If there were one or two books that you would say a Christian leader should read to get themselves oriented to this topic, do you have one or two you would put forward? I know you gave a list of almost a dozen, but is there one or two places where you would start?
**Stan Jones:** I would start with Mark Yarhouse’s book that was just published last year that’s on that list. It’s on the church and homosexuality. Mark is an absolutely superb scholar and I say that with a note of pride because he was my student and one of the great blessings you can have as a professor sometimes is seeing your students go on and do greater things than you ever dreamed of and that you ever dreamed they would. Mark is blessed with an excellent background in philosophy in undergrad at Calvin College and then did his doctoral studies at Wheaton and has just gone on to do amazing things.

In terms of getting an inside glimpse of what life is like for a true faithful gay Christian, I would read the book by Wesley Hill that’s on that list called *Washed and Waiting*. I was just stunned when that book came out. Wesley is completing a PhD in New Testament at Duke University. He’s someone who at age 17 or 18 came to grips with his stable same-sex attraction, and that book is the most compelling portrait of a young man who desperately wanted to read the Bible and find in it an affirmation for homosexual relationships, because that’s what he wanted. And he immersed himself with integrity, and said, “In integrity, I can’t read the bible that way. And so my question is am I going to be faithful to my desires or faithful to how I think God is calling me?” And it’s just a beautiful portrait, an in-depth portrait that gives a deep personal example of what it’s like to walk through these things in the best possible way.

**Darrell Bock:** Just to illustrate how real this situation is, although I probably don’t need to say this, but I’m involved right now in a church that’s dealing with a missionary who’s come back off the field because they have confessed to a homosexual relationship. And the church community is trying to deal with how to deal with the situation with this person. And the book that was recommended to us as elders to help us deal with this situation is the book by Mark Yarhouse.

Yes, Chaplain?
Dr. Jones, thank you so much for coming and being with us on this occasion today. Before coming here to be the chaplain, I was a pastor for 23 years, and over the course of those years, I had the opportunity to work with about 10 homosexuals who came to me concerned about their issues, and wanted help. I must say that my experience – this is personal – has been that I have never seen one who did not completely relapse and go back into the homosexual world. I’ve never seen anyone, quote, “cured.” I’ve never seen a change of identity. And that leads me to this question: As counselors and pastors, is our best hope change and control of behavior? Or change of identity?

Great question. How best to answer? What I say when someone is sitting before me and says, “What do I aspire to?” My response that I’ve come to over time is to say, “I urge you to just take the next step on the journey. God promises to be a lamp unto your feet.” And I’ve thought a lot about that image. The image is not, God is the searchlight that lays out the path that lies for miles and miles ahead of you so that you see every step that’s coming. But God is going to show you where to put the next foot down. A lamp unto your feet. And so I try to say, “Prepare yourself for a journey of uncertain outcomes. Prepare yourself for a journey that God would minimally call you to chastity.” I believe it is not within every person’s power to switch from homosexual orientation to heterosexual orientation. But I do believe God gives us the capacity to control our behavior. We are not robots. We’re not animals that cannot control our passions. So the capacity to have a morally accountable relationship with God where we can control our behavior is there.

Even that is a hard way. And the more deeply immersed the person has been in the sort of crazy promiscuity of some parts of the male gay world and so forth, the more difficult this is going to be. We see the exact same phenomenon with people struggling with heterosexual pornography. The rampant addiction to pornography among our young people, among pastors, Christian men, is really a scandal for the church. We have to realize that the long-term impact of the choices we make now to set up a moral trajectory. There’s a sense in which a person makes themself more and more vulnerable to future relapse by the choices they make now. But I still think that nevertheless, a call to chaste singleness is there and possible. And yes, people may have relapses, but every sinner has relapses, and at every point God’s call is what will you do next, what will be that next step? So I just don’t see any way to turn loose of that from a gospel perspective.
**Question 10:** Dr. Jones, I appreciate your relational approach to this conversation and how we engage them relationally. I have a question on some of the less interpersonal ways in which we make statements as to our beliefs about GLBTQ, and the corporate world especially and how that’s kind of blowing up right now. Chick-fil-A has become the standard for the traditional marriage, but at the same time, Amazon’s founder has just donated something like $1.4 million to getting gay marriage passed in Washington, and Target is putting out these advertisements with gay men, and now Starbucks is on that side. I have in my wallet an Amazon credit card, and I have a Starbucks gift card. What am I supposed to do as an individual, a consumer in America, as we attach ourselves so clearly to brands already? Now we’re supposed to be on this side or that side based on what we believe on an issue and how we’re spending our money. It’s just a confusing world that we live in.

**Stan Jones:** I’m so thankful for these easy questions you all have been throwing out. That’s a great question. That’s one that I don’t feel like I have a finished answer on. You know, what’s remarkable to me is just last year, the CEO of Starbucks was invited to the Willow Creek Leadership forum. Willow Creek has this major leadership training forum each year, and they invited him to come even though he’s not a Christian. And when this got out into the GLBT community, a petition was started to boycott Starbucks because they’re supporting an anti-gay evangelical church, Willow Creek Church in South Barrington, Illinois. And what’s amazing to me is basically he folded, cancelled his appearance, broke his contract at the Willow Creek presentation, and there were only 300 signatories on this. And yet, they folded the tent and withdrew from the conference.
You’re seeing more and more corporations and institutions basically say, this is the only way to be viable in this business environment – to be fully and aggressively supportive of gay and lesbian rights. We can ignore it. Or this is a power tactic and we can respond with counter-power tactics. Gays and lesbians are two percent of the population, though they have lots of friends and allies. Christians are 40 percent. Should we organize ourselves? But if we do so, aren’t we following the patterns and directions of the world? Aren’t we saying that we’re going to get our way by power? So there’s a part of me that wants to say yes. Because I’m very concerned about this. I’m very concerned about the ability of a Christian individual in the future to even wear a cross at their place of work when that’s a, quote-unquote, “symbol of hate” to some.

I’m worried about a person being brought up on charges because they simply say, “God loves you” as a greeting or a blessing on a person as they meet them in their workplace. We’re experiencing at Wheaton College a dwindling of corporate donations because many corporations in the past have had matching programs where when people give to 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. A person can give $1000 to Wheaton College and the corporation will match $2000. More and more corporations are saying, “You have to sign our statement of corporate responsibility, which includes a full affirmation of GLBT rights, in order to qualify for this donation.”

So we’re seeing these kinds of issues. This could head in directions that are very detrimental to the religious liberty of institutions like Dallas Theological Seminary, Wheaton College, Catholic charities, and on and on and on. This is a tough situation. But I don’t know that Christians are called to play the game in the mold of the world. And so, would it be more effective if 1,000 or 100,000 Christians wrote Amazon and said, “I just want you to know I have these moral views. I want to live a life of love, and I want you to know that your donation is counter to my moral convictions and I’m saddened and it makes me conflicted about supporting Amazon because part of my funds that I transfer to you are being used in this way. I wish you would remain neutral on issues of religious sensitivity and morality. This is not an issue of civil rights. It is an issue of moral sensitivities and moral disagreements.” Maybe that kind of witness would have more of an effect. And I say that not saying that’s the way to go. I haven’t resolved that in my own life.
There’s been numerous boycotts and proposed boycotts against Disney and against this and against that. You mentioned Target. Interestingly, Target just three years ago was slammed because one of its upper executives, I don’t remember who it is, is an evangelical Christian and gave out of his personal earnings a large gift to a major Christian organization. And when it became known, Target was subjected to a threatened boycott by the GLBT community, for the private actions of one individual in their executive leadership. And so now they’re giving in support of same-sex marriage. That’s the kind of power that is being exercised eight now. And it’s of grave concern, but I don’t have firm convictions of what the church’s response needs to be on that issue.

**Darrell Bock:** It’s ironic when Target gets targeted.

**Question 11:** Thank you again, Dr. Jones, for coming out and taking the time to discuss this issue. Obviously a huge issue that has kind of been swept under the rug for way too many generations. My question kind of tags along with Chaplain Bill’s about sexual reorientation programs. I know you’ve mentioned chastity a couple times, and we don’t idolize the nuclear family, but do we also want to say it’s Christian ideal to have heterosexual attractions versus just celibacy? Is that the ideal? Or how effective are these reorientation programs? And how helpful are they?

**Stan Jones:** Thanks for a great question and a huge question. Let me first start Biblically. In 1 Corinthians 6, the apostle Paul says, “Do not be deceived. The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.” And then there follows a list of who he characterizes as wicked, and on that list are two words that reference homosexual persons of various kinds. The NIV lumps the two terms again and just calls it “homosexual offenders” shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Then the apostle Paul says, “Such were some of you.” Now I think some Christians naively assume that that means, “Those homosexual persons were converted in heterosexuals.” But I don’t think that’s necessary in the text itself.
What the apostle Paul is talking about is people who have been freed from their bondage to habitual sin. And what does it mean to be freed from bondage from sexual immorality? For the Christian, it means that you’re free to pursue morality, you’re free to experience purity. And I think there’s sexual purity for the single person and there’s sexual purity for the married person. And they’re two variants of chastity. Chastity, in its classical rendering in the Christian tradition, is not something that’s applied just to single people. There’s chastity in marriage just as much as there’s chastity in singleness. So from a faith perspective, from a Biblical perspective, I think the outcome that we hope for is chastity for people. Now for some people, that takes the form of movement in heterosexuality. When I approach this subject, I start off by thinking there isn’t an ideal outcome. There’s a family of ideal outcomes. And where God leads a person is going to depend on God’s unique calling in that person’s life.

Now most of my work as a scientist and as a psychologist has been reading and reviewing and sorting through the implications of the literature that others have written. But I have contributed a few things of my own, and this question happens to fall in one of those areas. If you read my “First Things” article that’s on the reading list, you’ll get a quick summary of that work, but I’ll tell you: With Mark Yarhouse, we together did to this day the first and only study that actually attempted to follow people longitudinally over a six-year period as they were attempting to change their sexual orientation. We interfaced with the group Exodus and just followed a group of 98 individuals over six years. We lost some of them along the way. That’s what happens in these longitudinal studies. And in the end about 25 percent claimed to have had a significant conversion to heterosexuality. About 30 percent of the people who were left claimed to have attained stable, chaste singleness and to find that a satisfying way of life. About 25 percent of the group had gone back into the gay community in some form or another. And the remainder were people who were uncertain about their outcome and were still trying to find their permanent landing place for them. I don’t think that those percentages represent the average outcomes for Exodus, because we don’t know that our group was representative. What we were after in this study was to find out, is change possible at all? Is there anybody who’s still following the path that Exodus says is a good path at the end of these six years? And there were. There were people who were following it. Now one of the things I will tell you is that the people who said they’d converted to heterosexuality, their stories were not simple. The person who had a light switch go off and was exclusively homosexual and became exclusively heterosexual, in our sample did not exist.
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The person that I know best in this category is not a person who was in our study but who was actually the first man I ever met who claimed to have had a dramatic conversion from homosexuality to heterosexuality. Let me, for the sake of this conversation, call him Fred. When I met Fred, Fred had been married for 14 years and had five children and testified to having a loving and happy relationship with his wife. Fred had lived for 13 years exclusively in the gay community, fully identifying as gay from age 13 to age 26. He was saved by a dramatic gospel presentation, a street preacher, one of those things where he thought, “I’ll listen to this idiot for five minutes,” gave his life to Christ, joined a church, and he said he experienced no change of sexual orientation, nothing was dramatic, until one night when God said, “You will marry this woman” to him. He’s a charismatically oriented guy. I wish God would speak to me this way.

So I meet him 14 years later after he’s married this woman. So my crucial question to him was I said, “Fred, so you were homosexual, fully?” “Yes, absolutely. I was fully immersed.” “So you’re now a completely normal heterosexual?” And he said, “Absolutely not.” “What do you mean absolutely not?” He said, “Let me tell you what my experience is. My experience is I can still experience homosexual temptation from time to time.” He said, “It’s not very strong, it’s not very constant for me. But I do experience it from time to time. If I’m under stress, if I haven’t maintained my spiritual disciplines, I can still experience homosexual attraction. But praise be to God, it’s not the dominant theme in my life.” He said, “In terms of heterosexual, I’m very different than the typical heterosexual. God has given me sexual desire for one human being in the world: my wife.” He said, “I look at other women, I experience nothing. That’s not typical heterosexuality for men.” He said, “I wouldn’t want to be a typical heterosexual. God has given me a special gift.”

So his experience was really weird, and really unique, and that’s the kind of surprising journey that God may have. What is God’s call in the person’s life? I think the call in their life is faithfulness. What does God want you to do right now? And there are some people who report that they pursue a life of chastity, and then they find themselves in a relationship that’s characterized by love and attraction. And other people stay single their whole lives. So that’s just their experience.
There’s an element of the question that I want to address from a New Testament perspective. And that is, there’s a difference between temptation and sin. Sometimes we can confuse those two. James 1 is very clear that there is a difference and we ought to maintain an idea about what that difference is. Temptation exists in all kinds of ways for all kinds of people, but it’s when I embrace the temptation that temptation becomes sin and you’ve crossed a moral line. Part of the conversation rotates theologically around that idea, and it’s a very important idea as we’re thinking about this, regardless of whether we’re talking about homosexual or heterosexual desires.

Our time is up. I want to thank you for being the remnant of the first cultural engagement chapel and being so faithful in your attendance.