

Transformation of a Homosexual: What Change Looks Like

In a recent conference on homosexuality put on by the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, I was shocked and deeply saddened at the absence of those who could speak on the topic of “change” for the homosexual. Where were they? They were all sitting in the audience, ministry leaders who have been on the front lines of helping the homosexual for decades, uninvited to share about the power of Jesus Christ to heal the brokenness that causes homosexual confusion.

The message was loud and clear: “Dude, if you come to Christ, there’s no hope that you can change, so get ready for a life of celibacy, ’cause it’s your only option.” Meanwhile, dozens of former homosexuals, many now married with children, sat in the audience unable to share the truth about the power of Christ to transform lives. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Baptist leaders were spending hours “dialoguing” with leaders of the so-called “gay Christian” movement. It broke my heart.

In the recent documentary, *Such Were Some of You*, Dr. Neil T. Anderson was asked if change was possible for the homosexual who has given his or her life to Jesus Christ. His reply: “God has only one plan. It’s that we conform to His image. And so: Is change possible? That’s what it’s all about! That’s what Christianity is—it’s the process of becoming somebody we already are. We’re children of God, now we are becoming like Christ.”

That is a description of the sanctification process where, throughout the rest of our lives, we who have been made holy by the sacrifice of Christ progress in the outworking of that

holiness as we grow and mature (1 Cor. 6:11). As we fall more deeply in love with our Savior in the course of an ongoing pursuit of Him (Phil. 3:8-16), we are transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18) and we are conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29).

Biblically, change is no less an expectation for the homosexual than it is for the porn addict, the liar, the murderer or anyone else who has been under the power of sin.

So the question is not "Can a homosexual change?" but "What might change look like for the one who has been trapped in homosexual confusion but has now decided to follow Jesus Christ?"

Briefly stated, substantive change is the fruit of a deepening relationship with God. It is not the result of self-engineered grasping for the ring of holiness but is a natural result of the life-changing revelation of His glory (Jer. 29:11-14; Heb. 11:6) and the transformation of the will that occurs in His presence (Phil. 2:13). The more often we encounter Him and the more deeply, the more transformed we become in our inner man.

Change for those struggling with same-sex attraction occurs on the level of: 1) behavior, 2) belief, 3) identity and 4) desire. It may also involve deliverance from demonic strongholds and family-line curses, the unmasking of hidden roots of idolatry, fear, unbelief, unforgiveness, the renouncing of ungodly judgments and vows, the healing of emotional wounds, as well as the impartation of missing developmental pieces, such as affirmation and love.

The person in pursuit of more of God will be led by the Holy Spirit into a discovery process—shown a way of escape for some issues (1 Cor. 10:13) and a way of healing for others. While they focus on the glory of the person of God and pour out their love for the One they encounter, God reciprocates by opening up a healing path, guiding them on it, empowering them

in it and imparting whatever is needed along the way (Ps. 23:3; 119:133; Prov. 3:5-6; 4:11-12).

Progress in sanctification is hastened by complete surrender, childlike faith, humility and the willingness to do whatever God reveals to be necessary. It is slowed by self-effort, unbelief, distraction from the pursuit of God and an unwillingness to do whatever it takes. It can also be hindered by perfectionism (a variant of works righteousness that is unsatisfied by partial healing) or by a transformation process that is painful or lengthy.

Another common impediment is demonic deception and the embracing of lies. This is where knowledge of the Word of God is invaluable. The Bible is a sword in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:17), to sanctify believers (John 17:17), to cleanse them (Eph. 5:26), to renew the mind (Rom. 12:2) and to give them hope (Rom. 15:4). It is living, active, sharp, penetrates soul and spirit and flawlessly judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb. 4:12). The one who rejects the divine origin and entire counsel of Scripture will not get very far.

Two deceptions for which believers seem to fall the most are:

1. the idea that temptation is sin, and
2. the idea that they are defined (and/or condemned) by what tempts them.

Were either of these true, even Jesus Christ would have been a sinner (Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2; Heb. 4:15) and we would all be without hope.

The first lie is easy enough to reject on an intellectual level, but when the temptation actually invades the heart, the defilement of it can cause us to feel as though we have sinned. But the truth is that we do not sin unless we embrace the temptation and give it a place in our fantasies and actions (James 1:14-15). And should we indeed cross that line,

we have the provision of grace that offers forgiveness and cleansing should we repent and ask God to deliver us and forgive us (1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 10:13).

The second lie is also the result of the defilement we feel upon being tempted in such a perverse way. In this case, however, the battle is between belief and unbelief, i.e., what is objectively true as revealed by God vs. what we feel to be true. This is often a battle royal. Are we going to return to our former identity and/or way of life or are we going to embrace the new creation that the Scriptures proclaim we now are (Rom. 6:5-14; 2 Cor. 5:17; 6:16; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:5-10; 1 John 3:1-3) even while our bodies are screaming at us that it is not true?

How Change Happens

Let's examine what change looks like for the believer. The picture varies widely because each former homosexual is at a different stage in their healing/sanctification process. Additionally, some are more committed to it than others, some started late and have more issues to deal with, some have lived a more perverse life than others, some a more broken life. And some have more faith, more love for God and/or a better support system around them.

Essentially, however, it begins at the point of being born again, when a newfound desire to love Jesus through obedience arises in our hearts (John 3:3,5-8,12-21; 14:15,21,23-24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 7:1,10).

God begins to work in us the desire to do His will (Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 1:21; 3:5-6; 4:7). And as long as we remain committed to the process and pursue God for the revelation and the power necessary for transformation, we progress in wholeness and Christlikeness. Some days it's two steps forward and one step back, but overall, as one author put it, it is "a long obedience in the same direction."

A change of behavior ...

This is normally the first to appear. The Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin, we confess it and renounce our love for it (Prov. 28:13; 2 Cor. 4:2), seek Him for the power over it (Ps. 37:23; 55:22; 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24), receive that empowerment by faith (Rom. 1:5) and then turn away from the idolatrous behavior (Rom. 1:25). From a growing love for God, forged while in His presence, we position our heart against that which put Him on the Cross, renounce it and consider it no longer an option (Rom. 6:11-18; 8:12-14; Gal. 2:20).

For most believers, permanently leaving homosexual behavior occurs immediately at salvation. For some who do not know the Scriptures, it may take some days or weeks for the love and kindness of God (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:14) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to lead them to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Others may lack a facility in appropriating the power of God over temptation, or may have demonic strongholds yet unknown, or lack the spiritual knowledge for how to remove them. For these, there may be an initial renouncing of the sin but, in a moment of weakness, a temporary return to it. Eventually, however, they are won by God's grace (Titus 2:11-14), taught by Him, empowered by Him and renounce it for good.

Those who do not experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit, however, are not yet saved. They may have had an experience of God or "said the magic prayer," but have not yet come to know Him through saving faith, which is faith that produces new life as a result of the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit (James 2:14-24; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:6,24; 5:4).

A change of beliefs ...

Operating alongside a change of behavior in the transformation of the former homosexual is a change in beliefs. We embrace God as the One who loves us, who has our best in mind and who is worthy of our obedience. We exchange false beliefs about

Him (as well as false beliefs about ourselves) for the truth revealed in God's Word.

Whereas we used to believe that we were unforgiveable, unredeemable and unlovable, the truth revealed by the Scriptures and the presence of God—the Word made flesh (John 1:1,14)—exposes those beliefs as the lies that they are. As a result, we are persuaded to embrace our true selves—regenerated and adopted (Eph. 1:3-8), dearly beloved children of God (1 John 3:1-3) who no longer bear likeness or give allegiance to the world and its god, the devil (John 15:18-19; 1 Pet. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:10).

Our former love for the world is now fading away (1 John 2:15-17), and we seek to conform our beliefs in all things according to God's Word, whether we understand them or not and whether He removes those things that tempt us or not. Oswald Chambers once wrote that "the core of all sin is the doubt that God is really good." We now choose to believe He is good based on His demonstrated love for us on the Cross of Calvary.

A change of identity ...

Because our beliefs have changed, we undergo a change of identity. We now see homosexuality as the lie that it is—an idol and a pitiful substitute for unmet need. We also recognize the concept of "gay Christian" as the same distortion of reality and reject it. No longer do we allow our history, our feelings or our temptations to tell us who we are (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7; 6:16; 10:4-6).

We were created and designed by God to operate heterosexually, and although that identity may have become distorted, or remains unformed, we embrace it as God's intent and by faith open ourselves to whatever healing God might have for us. Even still, we do not derive our identity from what may result, but from what God has declared from the foundation of the earth (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-25).

A change of desire (or attraction) ...

This begins with loving God more than the idols of our past—those things that named us, and falsely promised to provide identity and completion. As we pursue a love relationship with God the Father, He begins to unravel the mysteries behind our same-sex attractions and shows us what to do about them. For some, it will be things that made them repulsed by certain characteristics of the opposite sex. For others, it may be incidents (or beliefs) that created fear or hatred of the opposite gender.

For still others, it has more to do with deficits they experienced in their same-gender identity formation, thus leaving them with an idolatrous bent toward their same sex and a never-ending search to acquire the masculinity or femininity that was never called out or affirmed in childhood. The range of possibilities is too great to cover in this article, but even if we had a perfect blueprint of our brokenness, that alone would not bring healing. Only God can do that. And only He can reveal the series of actions, and the timing of such actions, that can transform us. Don't get me wrong—knowing why helps, but knowing Him is what heals.

We have a penchant for focusing our hope on the wisdom of man, for trying to fix ourselves, for unbelief and for returning to idolatry when things don't proceed according to our timetable. We also have a strong tendency to waver in our commitment to the process and to the necessary pursuit of an intimate relationship with God the Father. These are common and great impediments to progress. But our God is longsuffering, patient and full of grace.

My “healing process” has been ongoing for the last 34 years, though the lion's share of it happened during the first seven. I did not go through a program, a support group or counseling—not that there's anything wrong with that, as long as those don't become the focus of our hope for change.

I learned the process of transformation from the Spirit of God directly, through His Word and through His Church. As I knelt in worship before Him, night after night, singing love songs to Him, savoring His Word, laying out my needs, periodically He would show me the root of one of my problems. Then He would show me what to do about it. It was that simple. It is that simple. Not easy, but simple.

We are transformed into His image as we gaze upon His glory (2 Cor. 3:18), through the washing of the Word (Eph. 5:26), through a healing of our broken hearts (Is. 61:1-3) and impartations of identity and affirmation that went missing in childhood. While I worshiped Him, He imperceptibly took away my fear of woman. I didn't even know He was doing it but only saw the evidence of it after the fact. As I sang hymns in seminary chapel services, I became a man among men. In that safe place of faith and worship, I became solid, integrated. As I focused on Him rather than obsessing on me and my problems, He solved my problems, one by one.

Am I still tempted? Yes, just like the former porn addict, smoker and chronic gossiper! God doesn't give us lobotomies at salvation. I still retain all the memories of my past, and they do haunt me from time to time. And the demonic realm still retains its knowledge of how to blast me every now and then. But I now know where to take those temptations (Gal. 2:20). I no longer allow them to name me or drive me to sinful actions. I use them instead to run back into the arms of my Savior, to practice my dependence on Him and to obtain His power over them.

My behavior has changed, my beliefs have changed, my identity has changed and my desires have changed—at significant levels. I am nothing like I used to be, yet very little of what God intends to make of me. And during the past 34 years of ministry, I have met thousands of others who have left homosexuality behind and found healing and transformation through Jesus Christ.

“Is change possible? That’s what it’s all about!”

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