

Was Al Mohler Right About Sexual Orientation and Secular Counseling?

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is one of the pre-eminent Christian leaders of our day. He is as clear-headed as he is courageous, always a source of truth and sanity in the midst of a deeply confused culture.

Dr. Mohler has also played a significant role in addressing the issue of homosexuality and the church, demonstrating both humility and conviction, thereby helping to set an example for pastors and leaders trying to navigate their way through an emotional and spiritual minefield.

How do we stand against gay activism in our society while at the same time reaching out with compassion and sensitivity to those who identify as LGBT?

Summarizing his comments at the recent national conference on “The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage” held by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Mohler explained how his views have shifted on the subject of “sexual orientation.”

He wrote, “I had previously denied the existence of sexual orientation. I, along with many other evangelicals, did so because we did not want to accept the sexual identity structure that so often goes with sexual orientation. I still reject that notion of sexual identity. But I repented of denying the existence of sexual orientation because denying it was deeply confusing to people struggling with same-sex attraction. Biblical Christians properly resist any suggestion that our will can be totally separated from sexual desire, but we really do understand that the will is not a sufficient

explanation for a pattern of sexual attraction. Put simply, most people experiencing a same-sex attraction tell of discovering it within themselves at a very early age, certainly within early puberty. As they experience it, a sexual attraction or interest simply 'happens,' and they come to know it."

For Dr. Mohler, though, this presented no problem at all, given the biblical description of human beings as fallen and flawed: "In some sense, each of us finds within ourselves a pattern of desires – sexual and otherwise – we did not ask for, but for which we are then and now fully responsible. When it comes to a same-sex attraction, the orientation is sinful because it is defined by an improper object – someone of the same sex. Of course, those of us whose sexual orientation is directed toward the opposite sex are also sinners, but the sexual orientation is not itself sinful."

How then should we deal with same-sex attraction?

According to Dr. Mohler, while refusing to agree with the world's affirmation of same-sex attraction, "At the same time, our biblically-informed understanding of sexual orientation will chasten us from having any confidence that there is any rescue from same-sex attraction to be found in any secular approach, therapy, or treatment. Christians know that the only remedy for sin is the atonement of Christ and the gift of salvation. The only hopeful answer to sin, in any form, is the Gospel of Christ. Understanding the complexity of sexual orientation and sexual sin should make us all cling to the Gospel ever more closely, and to the authority and truthfulness of the Bible ever more faithfully."

Of course, I categorically affirm Dr. Mohler's statement that the "only hopeful answer to sin, in any form, is the Gospel of Christ," but I question whether it is right to put homosexual attraction into a special category that is somehow averse to "any secular approach, therapy, or treatment." Why should this

be so?

People find themselves attracted to the same sex for many different reasons, some of which can be unpacked through counseling, including secular counseling. In fact, as countless gays and lesbians have shared with counselors, their attractions can often be traced back to sexual abuse or serious family crises.

Cannot a secular counselor deal with these issues too? Must we put homosexuality into a special category of its own?

Surely there are many other areas of our lives that are deeply affected by our sinful nature, yet we do not say that counseling cannot help us make progress in those areas, do we?

Like Dr. Mohler, I put my own energies and efforts into the proclamation of the gospel rather than secular counseling, but I have fine colleagues who have been helping LGBT people for decades, and some of them are not Christian believers.

One example would be JONAH, Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing, “a non-profit international organization dedicated to educating the world-wide Jewish community about the social, cultural and emotional factors which lead to same-sex attractions. JONAH works with those struggling with unwanted same-sex sexual attractions (SSA) and with families whose loved ones are involved in homosexuality.”

JONAH has many success stories as well, despite the fact that as a Jewish organization, they do not accept the gospel of Jesus.

Just this week, the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity issued a statement on the integration of faith and professional counseling. (The Alliance is “a multi-disciplinary professional and scientific organization dedicated to preserving the right of individuals to obtain the services of a therapist who honors their values, advocating

for integrity and objectivity in social science research, and ensuring that competent licensed, professional assistance is available for persons who experience unwanted homosexual [same-sex] attractions [SSA].”)

In the statement, the Alliance said that it “has great respect for the religious faith and spirituality that animates many individuals experiencing unwanted same-sex attractions and behaviors,” noting, however, that “some in the faith community have promoted a faith versus therapy dichotomy, we would respectfully disagree with such a limiting perspective. Rather, for many individuals, the interaction of their religious faith and their participation in a scientifically informed therapy for unwanted same-sex attractions and behavior is experienced as mutually beneficial.”

With all respect to Dr. Mohler (and with readiness to hear his reply), I submit that we make a mistake by putting homosexual orientation into a special category, one that is impervious to secular counseling or therapy, as if behavioral change can only come through discipleship and spiritual growth.

And while I wholeheartedly affirm the blood of Jesus as the only cure for sin, and while I have given my life to help make disciples in America and the nations, I do not discount the great help that many people, including gays and lesbians, have received through secular counseling as well.

To me, this is not much different than recognizing that the ultimate cause of sickness is spiritual – namely, the fall of man – yet that doesn’t mean we discount the good that non-Christian doctors can do.

Why not avail ourselves of everything God has given us to help those with unwanted same-sex attractions?

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