

What About Ex-Ex-Gays?

While speaking in Singapore at a seminar sponsored by Focus on the Family, I was asked the question: What about ex-ex-gays? Does their existence prove that it is really impossible for people to change their sexual orientation?

This past July, *Time* magazine ran a story entitled, “9 Ex-Leaders of the Gay Conversion Therapy Movement Apologize.” The article stated that, “Former members of organizations that advocated therapy to ‘cure’ homosexuality have joined LGBT groups in rejecting the concept.”

Last year, John Paulk, formerly a very prominent ex-gay married to his ex-gay wife, Anne, went back to his gay lifestyle after 15 years of marriage. (While working on my book *A Queer Thing Happened to America*, I wrote to John asking him how he was doing, and he replied that he was enjoying married life and raising his children. He has since left his wife.)

Do these significant failures demonstrate that change in sexual orientation is impossible? Certainly not.

First, for every well-known ex-ex-gay, there are 10 or 100 or 1,000 unknown ex-gays—meaning people who formerly lived as homosexuals but no longer do. Only God knows their numbers, but I run into them all the time, often smiling broadly as they share their stories with me after hearing me speak at a meeting.

These people are, by and large, not involved with ex-gay ministries and have nothing to prove by their stories and nothing to gain financially. They just want me to know about the new life they have experienced in Jesus, and quite a few are now happily married with children. (For a great example of this joy-filled new life, watch this five-minute video.)

Second, the term “ex-gay” has lots of different meanings (some leaders like the term, while others don’t), ranging from, “I used to be involved in same-sex relationships, and I am no longer am,” to, “My romantic and sexual desires have changed from homosexual to heterosexual,” along with everything in between.

I know some ex-gays who are thrilled to be free from their old lifestyles despite the fact that they have not become heterosexual, and they are overflowing with contentment, living for God as celibate singles.

I know others who, through counseling or a deep spiritual encounter with the Lord, literally went from homosexual to heterosexual (this is more common than you might realize), and they have lived like this for decades now.

A former lesbian wrote to me, “I experienced God’s love in a supernatural way after I chose to obey Him and deny my same-sex attractions. Those feelings have since disappeared gradually as my attention shifted from self-love to living for Jesus.”

This is her story, and I believe her, just as I believe the stories of those who tell me they tried to change and could not.

Some fail, and some succeed. Some experience radical change, others do not.

But isn’t this similar to what happens in many areas of life, where some people are greatly helped by a specific type of counseling or a unique spiritual experience, and others point to that same counseling or experience as being destructive in their lives?

The only fully documented, book-length, longitudinal study of the question of ex-gays, entitled *Ex-Gays?*, by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, came to very positive conclusions, despite

being ridiculed by gay activists.

Third, there are often other factors involved in a person's failure to change, and it would be wrong to make generalizations based on their personal stories, even if they have much in common.

And since the Bible clearly states that change from all kinds of deep, life issues is possible (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11), and since many have truly experienced change, I find it far better to believe that change is possible while at the same time showing compassion to those who have struggled or fallen.

Fourth, plenty of people are not happy living as homosexuals, be it because of their spiritual convictions or because of relational or health issues. (For a recent documentary sharing powerful testimonies, see *For Such Were Some of You*.)

Do we tell them, "Hey, there's no reason for you to think about changing, since there are prominent ex-ex-gays saying that change is impossible"? God forbid.

Fifth, we need to emphasize holiness more than heterosexuality. As one former lesbian remarked, "God never said, 'Be thou heterosexual for I the Lord thy God am heterosexual,' but rather, 'Be thou holy for I the Lord thy God am holy.'"

Put another way, the Word of God does not say that without heterosexuality no one will see the Lord but rather, "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

If someone wants to get to the root of their same-sex attractions, I'm all for it. Some have been changed through the process of discipleship, some through inner-healing or deliverance, some through an unexpected spiritual breakthrough, and some through counseling.

But if we focus on changing someone from homosexuality to

heterosexuality rather than from homosexuality to holiness, there is the possibility of great frustration and even disappointment and backsliding.

Sixth, human nature is frail and homosexual attractions are often very deeply rooted, to the point that people believe they were actually born gay.

That's why we must join together grace and truth when reaching out to those who identify as gay or lesbian, demonstrating compassion and longsuffering without compromising the truth of the gospel.

The bottom line is that homosexual practice, under all circumstances, is sinful, and nothing can possibly change that fact, but it is equally true that there is liberty and new life in Jesus, and those willing to take up the cross and follow Him will never need to look back.

Since I expect gay bloggers and ex-ex-gays to respond to this article critically, if you are one of the many who, by God's grace, have come out of homosexuality, please take a moment to respond here as well. It will glorify the Lord and encourage others too.

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