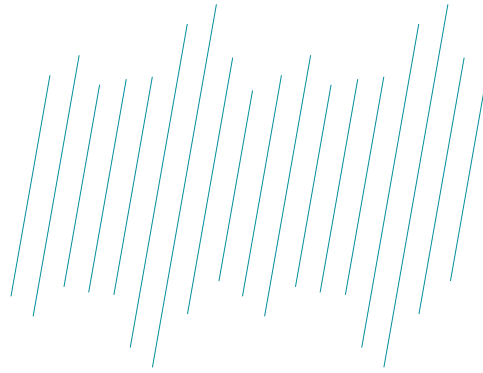




TOUGH TOPICS

Can Gays Really Change?



About ReStory Ministries

ReStory Ministries is a nonprofit organization committed to resourcing churches to address homosexuality and gender identity. We are working to see every church equipped, every family prepared, and every believer informed by equipping pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders to respond biblically to these issues and the people affected by them. Ultimately, we believe that when the Church is equipped, new stories of transformation are told!

ReStory Ministries is endorsed by the Assemblies of God. We are in agreement with the Assemblies of God core doctrines, position papers, and official statements. We do not make any official statements on behalf of the Assemblies of God.

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Obedience and transformation both show up regularly in the New Testament. Saul of Tarsus yields and is transformed into Paul the Apostle (Acts 9:6). Simon Bar-Jonah agrees to follow and morphs into Peter the Rock (John 1:42). A Samaritan sinner believes and becomes the local evangelist (John 4:29). **When people are apprehended by Christ, they say “yes,” He speaks change, and a transformation described by Paul in the most sweeping terms is birthed** because in Christ, as Paul notes, it’s all new, it’s all changed (2 Cor. 5:17).

That’s been business as usual for believers since the Church was birthed and women and men turned away from any number of sins to follow Christ. Homosexuality was, according to Paul, one of those sins, a point he confirmed in his letter to the Corinthians when he insisted that people practicing certain behaviors cannot inherit the kingdom of God:

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).¹

Then the clincher:

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

And that is what some of you were.

- 1 Corinthians 6:11

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011.

Clearly, then, there have always been believers who had once engaged in homosexual practice but then abandoned it, going on to live sanctified lives.

“That is what” - past tense! - “some of you were.” Cue the Doxology.

Now the Greek word Paul uses to describe homosexuality (*arsenokoite*) describes a sexual act, not sexual feelings. So his phrase “and that is what some of you were” indicates a change of behavior. A change of feelings is not clearly addressed here. So was Paul implying that repentance of homosexual behavior guarantees the removal of homosexual temptations? Or was he implying just the opposite—that someone may repent of such behavior, but will continue wrestling with same-sex desires? Or is the truth somewhere in between?

That’s one of the hottest debates going on in modern Christianity. Can gays really change? Does God call them to repent and then change their sexual responses, or are they called to obedience without transformation?

Ask Them

Those of us who’ve been called out of homosexual practices testify to a uniform obedience—we all said “yes”—but with a variety of results.

Many of us report changes in our behavior and feelings, changes brought about by following discipleship principles, or by receiving specialized ministry, or through professional counseling, or a combination of the three. But the kinds of changes and the degree to which they have occurred varies. Some report complete change in sexual desires. Some report diminished homosexual responses; some describe increased heterosexual desire. Predictably, some report both.

Ministry approaches to same-sex attracted people should take the “change” question into account.

That’s why ministry approaches to same-sex attracted people should take the “change” question into account. Can gays really change? Yes. How do they change? Four areas stand out in particular.

1. Change in Behavior

Christians are called to repent of behaviors that are apart from God's intentions (Acts 2:38), repentance being a foundational aspect of conversion and ongoing sanctification (Rom. 6:19; Heb. 12:1). So we're both commanded and empowered by God to abandon sinful acts (Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 10:13) and, should we repeat them, we're called to confess them as sin and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9), then take necessary steps to avoid returning to them again (Matt. 5:30; Gal. 5:16; Jas. 5:16)

2. Change in Identity

While believers are encouraged to recognize sin where it exists and deal with it realistically (Ps. 139:24; 1 John 1:8), we're also called not to identify ourselves by any sinful tendency but rather as new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), as children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), as saints (Rom. 1:17), and as "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37).

Such a change in self-identification is not a denial of whatever attractions the person feels. Rather, it is a refusal to be identified by them.

Such a change in self-identification is not a denial of attractions but a refusal to be identified by them.

3. Change in Frequency and/or Intensity of Temptations

Temptations are inevitable, since the old nature ("the flesh") has been inherited by every child of Adam (Rom. 5:12-14).

Those in Christ have been reborn and given a new nature (2 Cor. 5:17), so the old one is to be recognized and reckoned as dead (Rom. 6:11), to be "put off" (Eph. 4:22) since it's no longer the dominant force in the Christian's experience.

But that old nature remains until death or Christ's coming, so believers do have temptations, evidence of an ongoing battle between the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:17). They are expected to occur and to be resisted, which God gives us the grace and the ability to do (1 Cor. 10:13).

So temptation is not a sin or an indication of a shortcoming. Indeed, Paul acknowledged his own watchfulness against sinful urges without apology (1 Cor. 9:27) and warned against presuming you're above, or exempt from, temptation (1 Cor. 10:12).

The temptation resisted often becomes the temptation which fades.

Since that's true of Christian life in general, it's true for believers who turn from homosexuality. Experience has shown, though, that the temptation resisted often becomes the temptation which fades.

Therefore, homosexual attractions or temptations may remain but decrease in frequency over time, or in their strength or intensity, as they are regularly resisted. We recognize that temptations of different sorts affect believers in different ways, so we do not believe in a "one-size-fits-all" result.

Yet we do believe, firmly, that all Christians receive grace to say "no" to sinful desires when they occur because, as Paul declared, "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14, KJV).

4. Change in Sexual Responses

Freud described the treatment of homosexuality as sometimes being able to "develop the blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies, which are present in every homosexual."²In other words, he felt the potential for opposite-sex response may be awakened in those who have been same-sex attracted.

We see Freud's observation as relevant. In many cases, people who turn from homosexual behavior find that, having closed the door on same-sex erotic intimacy, they do have the potential for opposite-sex erotic intimacy.

That's not to say heterosexual responses can simply be "chosen." But they are often discovered by the individual who leads a sanctified life and, in the process, experiences attractions to a member of the opposite sex that she or he may not have experienced before.

2 "Historical Notes: A Letter from Freud," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 107, no. 10 (1951): 786-787.

Newly-formed heterosexual attractions don't necessarily mean the end of attractions to the same sex. That may or may not be the outcome. But many people who've turned from homosexual behavior do find that, in the course of living their lives in obedience, heterosexual responses do emerge.

Experiences Are Unique; Principles Are Universal

Christians are works in process, being changed from glory to glory on a regular basis (2 Cor. 3:18), growing in holiness, self-control, and understanding (2 Pet. 1:5-7), while retaining, to some extent, struggles between the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:17). Some of these struggles may be with tendencies we have had for decades; others may be relatively new.

Some areas of struggle are resolved to the point they no longer exist; some are with us for life. We do not know, nor are we required to know, why such experiences vary from person to person. It's enough to know that God gives us grace to resist sin (1 Cor. 10:13); changes our behavior, identity, and emotional makeup in every case; awakens new responses in some cases; erases old responses in some cases; and glorifies Himself within us in all cases (2 Cor. 12:9).

For these reasons we say boldly that **homosexual people can and do change when their lives are submitted to Christ**. Their behavior and identity changes, their relational patterns change, and, to differing degrees, their sexual responses change. Since all of these changes are substantial and desirable, we celebrate them in light of the redemption all believers receive from the One who has declared:

Behold, I make all things new.
- Revelation 21:5