

THE CENTER FOR  
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# Pastoral Paper

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IS SAME-SEX ATTRACTION  
(OR "BEING GAY") A SIN?

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# Introduction

Is being gay a sin? We argue that the answer to this question is “no.” Simply *being gay* in sexual orientation is no more or less sinful than *being straight*.<sup>1</sup> Our attractions and orientations don’t make us sinful or holy—it’s what we do with our attractions and orientations, the way we steward our sexuality, that counts in the eyes of God.

Notice that we’re *not* saying same-sex sexual behavior is permissible. We continue to affirm the traditional Christian sexual ethic that reserves sex for marriage between a man and a woman. In fact, we will assume the traditional Christian sexual ethic throughout this paper.<sup>2</sup> But Christians can’t just take the Bible’s prohibitions of same-sex *sexual behavior* and use those same prohibitions to condemn same-sex *attraction* or *orientation*. If we’re going to learn how to best love and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ who experience attraction to the same sex, we need to start paying attention to the critical distinctions between *attraction* to the same sex, *lust* for the same sex, *sexual behavior*, and *sexual identity*. If we simply say “being gay is a sin” and move on, we risk condemning people for their unchosen orientation towards the same sex, communicating the falsehood that people must become straight in order to follow Jesus.

A quick word about terminology before we begin. Since the word “gay” can refer either to same-sex orientation (apart from sexual activity) or to same-sex sexual activity, many Christians prefer the term “same-sex attraction” as a way of distinguishing sexual inclination from sexual behavior.<sup>3</sup> However, the term “same-sex attraction” is also not free from the danger of

misunderstanding. This term was historically aligned with the Christian “ex-gay” movement, which argued vociferously that gay persons seeking to follow Jesus would experience change over time in their sexual attractions. Because we do not promote the “ex-gay” narrative, we will avoid the term “same-sex attraction” and instead use the language of “being gay” and “same-sex orientation” to identify a persistent sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction to members of the same sex. This attraction, while it creates the capacity for both sinful lust and sinful sexual activity, is not in itself sinful, as we will show.

# What is Same-Sex Orientation?

Despite what some Christians assume, sexual orientation is fully distinct from sexual activity. That is, “being gay” or “being straight” doesn’t necessarily mean that a person has had sex in the manner implied by that orientation. Although most people who are gay in orientation will also engage in same-sex sexual expression, others might be gay even though they remain celibate for life or choose to marry someone of the opposite sex. In fact, both authors of this paper are gay in the sense that we experience attraction to the same sex, and yet we don’t believe that same-sex sexual behavior (even in the context of marriage) is God’s design for sexual expression. One of us is married to an opposite-sex partner, but that doesn’t make him heterosexual—because sexual orientation is determined not by sexual activity, but by the nature of a person’s attractions.

Not only is sexual orientation defined by *attraction* rather than sexual behavior, but the attractions that make up sexual orientation are not all sexual in nature. The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation this way:

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.<sup>4</sup>

By this definition, “being gay” is about far more than the capacity to desire same-sex sexual behavior. Same-sex orientation also includes emotional and romantic desires which are not at all sexual in nature. For instance, the desire to have a deep heart-to-heart conversation with someone and the desire to watch a romantic sunset together might both be motivated by sexual orientation, but wanting these activities is not the same as wanting sex, just like engaging in these activities is not the same as engaging in sex. (If having heart-to-hearts and watching sunsets were the same as having sex, I suspect we’d all have a lot of repenting to do.)

Of course, sexual attraction is one of the key components in how we experience our orientation. But even sexual attraction isn’t always easy to understand. Sometimes our bodies respond in sexual ways to both sexual and nonsexual—and even non-intimate—stimuli. In these situations, it’s important to keep in mind that sexual arousal is not the same as sexual attraction.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, sexual attraction can exist without being accompanied by feelings of arousal. A man might be conscious of the sexual attractiveness of his wife, for example, without also experiencing arousal. Or a woman who hopes to someday marry a man might be generally aware of her attraction to men, even though there are no men currently in her life with whom she wants to pursue marriage and sex. Sexual attraction, at its most basic level, is what people feel towards someone with whom they *might potentially* experience a desire for some kind of sexual intimacy. Sexual attraction creates

the *capacity* for lust and sex, but it doesn't make you *guilty* of lust or sex, any more than "being a dog person" makes you guilty of going to the pound and picking out a German Shepherd.

Thus, our modern category of sexual orientation is simply not equipped to describe sexual immorality or sexual purity. A heterosexual woman is, by definition, *capable* of desiring men she isn't married to, but this capacity isn't itself sinful. There are ways of stewarding her orientation that will honor God, and other ways of stewarding her orientation that will dishonor God. Likewise, a gay man *capable* of desiring men he isn't (and cannot biblically be) married to isn't committing sin by his mere existence. It is not *having* a same-sex orientation that the Bible forbids, but *acting* on that same-sex orientation through lust or sexual activity.

# What Romans 1 Says (and Doesn't Say) about Same-Sex Orientation

How does this understanding of sexual orientation map onto what the Bible has to say about homosexuality? Most of the Bible passages which address same-sex sexuality speak *only* about sexual behavior. Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13 describe a man who “lies with a man as with a woman” (ESV), saying nothing about the predisposition that might motivate this activity.<sup>6</sup> And in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10, Paul appears to coin the Greek word *arsenokoitai* (translated “men who practice homosexuality” in the ESV) by combining the words *arsēn* (male) and *koitē* (bed), the same two words used in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18 and 20. Once again, it is clear that Paul has only same-sex sexual behavior in view; same-sex lust is not addressed, let alone same-sex *attraction* as such. Thus, these passages certainly cannot be invoked as proof that same-sex orientation is sinful.

The only Bible passage that speaks directly of same-sex lust appears in Rom. 1:26-27:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (ESV)

Paul’s condemnation of same-sex lust (what he euphemistically refers to as “dishonorable passions”) should be unsurprising both to his first century readers and to us. Whenever a specific sexual relationship is forbidden in Scripture, lusting after that sexual relationship is likewise forbidden, because lust is an incipient form of sexual gratification. This is why Jesus tells his listeners in Matt. 5:28 that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (ESV). Setting our hearts towards sinful behavior is itself a sin that is comparable in kind, if not in degree, to acting out that behavior physically.

Here is where the confusion often occurs. Because Paul condemns same-sex *lust* in this passage, some Christians have understood Romans 1 to mean that same-sex *orientation*—that is, “being gay”—is likewise condemned. They assume that “dishonorable passions” must refer not only to same-sex sexual acts and lusts, but also to the *capacity* to desire such acts and to experience such forms of lust. On the basis of Romans 1, then, they declare that “being gay is a sin,” believing that same-sex orientation is a sign of rebellion against God.

To use Romans 1 as a condemnation of same-sex orientation, however, is to misunderstand both the meaning of Paul’s original Greek in these verses and the broader context of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. By paying careful attention to both the text and the context of this passage, we find

that Paul is definitively not making a case for the sinfulness of what we now call same-sex orientation. Thus, it would be both irresponsible and unloving to invoke Romans 1 as a way of condemning people who experience an unchosen orientation towards the same sex.

First, let's consider the *text* of Rom. 1:26-27 a bit more carefully. In English, it's difficult to know with certainty whether the phrase "dishonorable passions" refers only to lust and sexual activity, or whether it also includes sexual orientation. After all, we might reason, isn't a sexual orientation a kind of "passion"? What if Paul is using the phrase "dishonorable passion" to condemn not only same-sex lust but also the capacity for same-sex lust? Is "being gay" a form of dishonorable passion that is inherently sinful?

Were our discussion limited to English, our best answers to these questions might be mere guesswork. In Greek, fortunately, the answers become more apparent. The word for "passions" in Rom. 1:26 is *pathos*, a word which appears only two other times in the Greek New Testament, both in Paul's epistles (Col. 3:5 and 1 Thess. 4:5). Although *pathos* has a wide range of possible meanings in Greek literature, Paul's three uses of the word all connote sexual excess. Col. 3:5 includes *pathos* in a list of things Paul is calling his fellow believers to avoid, and there is nothing to suggest that it is limited to same-sex lust or desire. It seems that Paul objects to *pathos* of any kind, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Paul's condemnation of *pathos* is still clearer in 1 Thess. 4:5, where he uses *pathos* as an antonym of the kind of holy behavior commanded by 1 Thess. 4:4: "each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable" (NIV). Assuming that the

majority of Paul's readers in Thessalonica experienced primarily heterosexual temptation, the kind of *pathos* Paul forbids must likewise be primarily heterosexual in nature. Whatever Paul means when he speaks of *pathos*, then, it is something that is wrong for all people, gay and straight alike.<sup>7</sup>

Is Paul condemning heterosexual orientation in Col. 3:5 and 1 Thess. 4:5 when he condemns *pathos*? Certainly not. It is not the *capacity* for heterosexual desire that Paul calls sinful in these verses. Rather, it is when heterosexual desire is not disciplined—when it becomes uncontrolled heterosexual lust and sexual activity—that it becomes sinful. All sexual desire, gay and straight, needs to be disciplined. This is why Paul urges his readers in 1 Thess. 4:4 to learn to *control* their bodies, rather than to seek the total expurgation of their sexuality. Although heterosexual *pathos* is a sin that must be repented of, heterosexual orientation remains even in those who are submitted to Christ.

Thus, Paul's use of *pathos* in Romans 1 most probably does not refer to a sexual orientation—same-sex or otherwise. Since Paul is *not* condemning opposite-sex orientation when he speaks of *pathos* in Col. 3:5 and 1 Thess. 4:5, it is unreasonable to believe that *pathos* must condemn same-sex orientation in Rom. 1:26. What Paul condemns is same-sex lust and sexual activity, not the mere capacity for homosexual desire.

This reading also accords with the broader context of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Having depicted in Romans 1 a form of sinfulness and rebellion against God that Paul's readers will clearly recognize as sin, Paul flips the script and

turns the lens back onto his readers in the first verse of chapter 2: “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (NIV). The sinfulness that Paul’s readers are so quick to recognize in *others* lives equally within them.

If Paul’s intention is to demonstrate the sinfulness of all people—to level the playing field at the foot of the cross—it stands to reason that he might point out the obvious sinfulness of homosexual lust in order to subsequently equate that sin to the more insidious danger of heterosexual lust. However, condemning same-sex orientation as something uniquely fallen and evil—and then congratulating those with a heterosexual orientation for being less intrinsically sinful—would be completely antithetical to the broader mission of Paul’s letter. And yet, ironically, this is precisely how many heterosexual Christians have interpreted Romans 1. They use the passage to condemn same-sex-oriented individuals for simply being gay, while congratulating themselves for what they assume is the comparative “holiness” of a heterosexual orientation.

Here’s the bottom line: Romans 1 confirms the sinfulness of gay lust. But the sinfulness of gay lust doesn’t make gay orientation sinful, in the same way that the sinfulness of heterosexual lust doesn’t make heterosexual orientation sinful. Both opposite-sex orientation and same-sex orientation can incline us towards certain forms of lust and sinful sexual behavior, because both are products of the Fall. Read in light of Romans 2, Romans 1 isn’t making a case for the unique sinfulness of homosexual orientation; rather, it

shows that the capacity for sin exists equally in all of us. Paul isn’t interested in whether we’re gay or straight—he’s interested in what we choose to do about it.

# Understanding Claims about the Sinfulness of Same-Sex Orientation

If Romans 1 does not condemn same-sex orientation, how is it that some Christian thinkers have still concluded that a same-sex orientation is inherently sinful? The most noteworthy apologists of this perspective are New Testament scholar Denny Burk and biblical/nouthetic counselor Heath Lambert, who make a case for the sinfulness of same-sex orientation in their book *Transforming Homosexuality*.<sup>8</sup> According to Burk and Lambert, the morality of a desire depends entirely on the object of the desire. In their words,

If you desire something good, then the desire itself is good. If you desire something evil, then the desire itself is evil (i.e., “lustful”).<sup>9</sup>

As Burk and Lambert observe, the Greek word for desire, *epithymia*, can communicate good or morally neutral desire as well as sinful desire. For instance, Jesus’s “desire” to eat the Passover with his disciples (Luke 22:15) and Paul’s “desire” to depart and be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) are instances of *epithymia*; but, on the other hand, the “lusts” of Rom. 1:24, Eph. 2:3, and numerous other passages are also *epithymia*.<sup>10</sup> An *epithymia* may be admirable or sinful, depending on the target of the desire. Based on this linguistic analysis, Burk and Lambert suggest that attraction to the same sex is an *epithymia* towards a sinful end, and thus it is itself a morally culpable sin.

Although intriguing in principle, this analysis fails to account for how the word *epithymia* is actually used in specific biblical texts. In all three of the New Testament passages where *epithymia* is “good” (Luke 22:15, Phil. 1:23, and 1 Thess. 2:17), the “desire” being discussed is a *relational, nonsexual* desire.<sup>11</sup> When the term is used of *sexual* desire, it is always negative—it is lust or unrestrained passion.<sup>12</sup> If a husband were to sexually desire his wife in a righteous manner, New Testament writers would *not* use the term *epithymia* to describe his desire. Thus, we cannot simply say that all *epithymia* exists on a two-dimensional spectrum from “good” to “bad.” In the New Testament, “good” *epithymia* is topically different than “bad” *epithymia*. That is, “good” *epithymia* is non-sexual, and all sexual *epithymia* is considered “bad.”

Why does this matter to our present discussion? It matters because Burk and Lambert argue that gay *epithymia* is bad, whereas heterosexual *epithymia* can be good.<sup>13</sup> Yet the New Testament depicts *all* sexual *epithymia* as bad. For example, all three of the New Testament passages that use the word *pathos* (discussed above) have the word *epithymia* in close proximity. In Rom. 1:24, Paul condemns same-sex *epithymia*; in Col. 3:5 and 1 Thess. 4:5, he condemns (primarily) opposite-sex *epithymia*. Whenever the New Testament condemns a sexual *epithymia*, then, it is condemning lust, not the mere capacity for lust (gay or straight).

Simply put: we can't use the biblical notion of *epithymia* to condemn same-sex orientation while maintaining the correctness of opposite-sex orientation. When it comes to sex, gay or straight, *epithymia* is always bad.

Burk and Lambert's assertion of the sinfulness of same-sex orientation also relies on their claim that sexual attraction is the sole defining characteristic of orientation. In their comments about the APA's definition of orientation, Burk and Lambert state that "the sexual attraction component is the foundation for everything else in the definition."<sup>14</sup> When they address the question of whether a gay orientation is sanctifiable, then, they do so by placing the desire for same-sex sexual activity at the forefront of the conversation. They conclude that both sexual attraction and emotional/romantic attraction to the same sex (along with simply identifying as gay) are intrinsically sinful since they are rooted in an active desire for an object that is off-limits.

Burk and Lambert's approach here is problematic because it distills the multifaceted experience of "being gay" down to a mere longing for gay sex. Yet orientation, whether straight or gay, does not necessarily involve an active desire for sex. Consider a woman who has only ever been attracted to men, is married to a man, and is sitting at her computer planning a weekend skydiving trip while her husband tries to wheedle her into bed with him. Does she have an active longing for sex? Apparently not, much to her husband's chagrin. Is she "experiencing opposite-sex attraction"? No, she's more attracted to the thought of jumping out of an airplane. And yet she is the textbook definition of a straight woman. Her heterosexuality isn't contingent on the degree of her sexual desire at any given moment.

Or consider a gay man who accidentally wanders into a room full of scantily clad women. Whereas a straight man who has made the same mistake would likely be sexually aroused by his surroundings, this man is incapable of feeling sexual desire for these women even if he wanted to. In this case, it is actually the *absence* of a sexual desire for women, rather than the *presence* of a desire for men, that marks him as gay. Sexual orientation might be said to be as much about the things we *don't* desire as it is about the things we *do* desire. And this man's same-sex orientation turns out to be an advantage in this case, at least as far as resisting sexual temptation is concerned.

Having a sexual orientation doesn't mean that you're always in the throes of lust. It means that, *when* you have a sexual desire, that desire will be oriented in a certain direction. To condemn the whole of same-sex orientation simply because it includes the possibility of temptation towards same-sex sexual activity is as reductive as condemning electricity because it comes with a risk of electrocution.

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# Pastoral Implications

The question of whether “being gay” is a sin is not simply an abstract thought experiment. On the contrary, getting this question right has vital implications for the ways we engage in ministry around issues of sexuality and sexual identity in the church. By coming to understand that same-sex orientation is not itself sinful, and by banishing the phrase “being gay is a sin” from our Christian vocabulary, we will be far better equipped to guide those both within and beyond the walls of our churches into deeper relationship with Jesus. Here are five pastoral implications of this conversation.

First, recognizing that same-sex orientation is not a sin will free sexual minorities within our congregations from the burden of unnecessary guilt and shame. Same-sex oriented Christians have often been told that they are in sin merely for being gay—even if they remain sexually pure. This false accusation weighs people down with an unbearably heavy load, demanding that they cannot truly experience the love of God unless they also experience a change in sexual orientation. By recognizing that no orientation is more or less inherently sinful than another, we become equipped to truly preach the gospel to sexual minorities—a gospel in which all are equally invited on the dangerous journey of self-denial and obedience to Christ.

Second, once we acknowledge that “being gay” is not inherently sinful, we can begin to imagine what lives of faithful obedience might look like for same-sex oriented Christians. For many years, the only narrative offered to such Christians was the reparative therapy narrative: become straight

or live in sin. When the vast majority of those enrolled in reparative therapy failed to become straight, they were faced with the choice of either abandoning the traditional theology of sexual ethics or abandoning their faith altogether. If, however, “being gay” is not itself a sin, then a third way must be possible: a path of repentance, holiness, and wholeness in Christ must also exist for those who remain same-sex oriented and continue to hold a traditional sexual ethic. It is possible to repent of the sinful byproducts of same-sex orientation (that is, lust and sexual behavior) and to journey into deeper intimacy with Christ without also “repenting” of same-sex orientation and becoming straight.

Third, abandoning false narratives about what constitutes sin equips people to better recognize and resist things that are actually sinful. If a same-sex-oriented woman is told that her capacity for same-sex lust is already sinful, she may be more likely to give in to lustful thoughts or to sexual activity because she feels she has already “sinned” by merely noticing her orientation. Instead of condemning this woman for her orientation, wise pastoral leaders would do better to invite her to steward her sexual desires in a way that honors God. Her pursuit of sexual holiness will undoubtedly be difficult enough without the additional discouragement of being told that she is always and already guilty of unrepentant sin.

Fourth, by correcting the false belief that same-sex orientation is sinful, we become able to address and challenge the sins of pride and homophobia among heterosexual Christians.

Many Christians need to be reminded of Paul's message in Rom. 2:1 that those who pass judgment, those who feel morally superior, are in fact equally a product of sinful humanity. The people most obsessed with the "sinfulness" of gay orientation are those who most need to be reminded that their straight orientation also comes with a unique capacity for sinfulness. If Christians can stop insisting that "being gay is a sin," perhaps we can finally begin working against anti-gay bigotry, bullying, and homophobia instead of silently acquiescing to them or fueling their fires.

Finally, once we recognize that being gay is not a sin, we will be far better situated to engage in missional conversations with sexual minorities outside the church. Most same-sex-oriented individuals are rightly cautious of Christians who view them as uniquely deficient reprobates or who promise that following Jesus will make them straight. As long as Christians persist in the assertion that "being gay is a sin," far too many sexual minorities will hear the message that their orientation places them outside the reach of God's grace—that they cannot follow Jesus as long as they don't experience attraction to the opposite sex. But the gospel has never been about orientation change. The gospel never ranks anyone as more or less worthy of grace. The gospel is a messy and democratizing invitation to follow Jesus, no matter what desires we must learn to steward along the way, no matter how costly the journey turns out to be.

# Notes

1. We are not trying to suggest that sexual orientation is only a binary opposition between “gay” and “straight”; most scholars, from Alfred Kinsey to Lisa Diamond, agree that the reality is far more complex. However, we will make our theological case using the categories of exclusive same-sex orientation (“gay”) and exclusive opposite-sex orientation (“straight”) because we believe these categories can illuminate the current discussion about whether it is possible for any orientation to be inherently sinful. Also, we will use “gay” in its gender-inclusive sense to include the same-sex orientation of both men and women.

2. For an extensive apology of the traditional Christian sexual ethic, see Preston Sprinkle’s book *People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), as well as other pastoral papers published by *The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender*.

3. Some people also prefer the label “same-sex attracted” to “gay” because of they believe that “gay” asserts a problematic sexual identity and that Christians ought to avoid such identity categories for themselves. The debate about identity and language use, although important, is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes in this paper, “being gay” simply refers to the experience of attractions towards the same sex, not necessarily to the adoption of a particular identity label.

4. <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>

5. Some rape victims, for example, report experiencing a kind of physical arousal while being sexually assaulted. Feeling a sensation like arousal while experiencing the horrific trauma of sexual assault produces enormous confusion and guilt in these situations. (See Roy J. Levin and Willy van Berlo’s study “Sexual Arousal and Orgasm in Subjects Who Experience Forced or Non-Consensual Sexual Stimulation – A Review,” in *The Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2004, pp. 82-88.) When we

don’t distinguish between sexual arousal and sexual attraction, it is easy for some victims to draw the conclusion that they somehow deserved their abuse, or that they are somehow at fault for it because they experienced some level of arousal.

6. Of course, same-sex orientation is not the only reason a person might choose to engage in same-sex sexual behavior. For example, powerful (and presumably heterosexual) men have historically used same-sex rape as a means of asserting dominance over weaker men. According to Leviticus, someone who engages in same-sex sexual behavior stands condemned regardless of whether that person has a same-sex orientation or an opposite-sex orientation. Conversely, and most importantly for our purposes, someone who abstains from same-sex sexual expression is not condemned by these verses, regardless of whether that person has a same-sex orientation or an opposite-sex orientation.

7. In Rom. 1:26, of course, Paul modifies *pathos* with the adjective *atimia* (“dishonorable”), probably to emphasize the fact that the same-sex *pathos* he depicts is regarded by his readers as exceptionally disgraceful. (This emphasis further heightens the contrast of Paul’s tonal shift in Romans 2.) But Paul is clear that *pathos* does not need an adjective in order to be sinful (cf. Col. 3:5); opposite-sex *pathos*, like same-sex *pathos*, is outside of God’s intention for humanity.

8. Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015).

9. Burk and Lambert, 46.

10. See discussion of the semantic range of *epithymia* in BDAG, 372.

11. The two uses which BDAG regards as “neutral” (Mark 4:19 and Rev. 18:14) are likewise nonsexual. The use of *epithymia* for sexual desire falls only under the heading of forbidden or inordinate desires.

12. See Rom. 1:24, Col. 3:5, 1 Thess. 4:5, and 2 Pet. 2:18. In an additional seven passages (Rom. 13:4, Gal. 5:16, Gal. 5:24, Eph. 2:3, 1 Pet. 2:11, 2 Pet. 2:10, and 1 John 2:16), *epithymia* is paired with a form of the word *sarx* (“flesh”), often translated “lusts of the flesh”; sexual desire is certainly in view (and negatively so) in these passages as well, though it is not the only sinful desire in view. Thus, whenever sexual desire is even a component of *epithymia*, it is regarded as sinful.

13. This argument is rooted in their analysis of James 1:13-15, a passage which depicts *epithymia* luring and enticing people into temptation. However, since *epithymia* cannot include sexual orientation (for the reasons we lay out here), we will not discuss it at length. In short, we would argue that the *epithymia* of James 1 is best understood as lustful (and therefore morally culpable) desire, not as a mere capacity for lust.

14. Burk and Lambert, 27. A few pages later they explicitly state that “the defining element of same-sex attraction is desire for a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex” (34).

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