

“KANSAS OR NEPAL?—THE TERRAIN OF SIN”

A Response to Flat Earth Sexuality

Michael A. Dirrim

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Preface

I'm writing this paper for my flock, Sunnyside Baptist Church. I love them. They love me. I'm writing this paper for my fellow elders, Ken, Brian, Randy, Jerry and Dwight. We lovingly shepherd together. I'm writing this paper in hopes that it will help us and even others to think clearly about the doctrine of sin. We all need help to apply the Scriptures faithfully as both scalpel and balm to those who identify as LGBTQ+ attracted Christians.

Polemics is pastoring. I'll never get over losing my first family to a false teacher. I'm still repenting for not being proactive enough, loving enough, careful enough, patient enough and courageous enough. There's a volume being planned right now for pastors, written by a mentor. Thirty plus articles will appear on equipping and encouraging the pastor. It's going to be a great book. Not one of these articles, at least at this point, will address how to fight false teaching. We live in a church culture that is doctrinally anemic and thus allergic to conflict.

I will be naming lots of names in this paper. I will be naming denominations, local churches, organizations, pastors, professors, speakers, writers and authors. I'll say a lot of confrontational things. I'm not bitter. I'm not slandering. I'm pastoring. If there are otherwise faithful men who are cultivating false teaching in a particular area, their lies need to be exposed and refuted for the good of the church. If I believe, cultivate, teach and apply falsehood, I need to be confronted with the clear reading of the Scriptures and called to repentance. I need that.

I don't like conflict. I excel at avoiding it. I don't write this paper because I want to mix it up with the heavy-weights and see if I can land a few punches. I am compelled to write in my love for Christ, my love for His word and my love for His church. I suspect that most of those with whom I disagree also love Christ, love His word and love His church. I am glad for this common ground. *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy"* (Proverbs 27:6).

There will undoubtedly be some confusion as you begin to read through this paper. The organizations and names I call out will seem unassailable in their orthodoxy. I agree. Those I engage with in this paper believe the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Gospel and the inerrancy of Scripture. They believe that homosexual "marriage" and homosexual activity are sinful, prohibited by God's Word. They do well. Even Joel Osteen believes all this. We need to pay closer attention to what truths are being denied, muted or changed.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is famous for what we now call "the Hegelian Dialectic." He sums it up like this, "Truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two." Biblical/Traditional marriage is the thesis. The Sexual Revolution is the antithesis. Flat Earth Sexuality is the synthesis emerging amidst seemingly faithful teachers and churches. This paper answers the synthesis in order to show that it is in rebellion to Christ and His word.

This paper will unfold in three parts. The first two parts answer the two major falsehoods of Flat Earth Sexuality. The third part counsels those harmed by the false teaching. It will be important to remember that "Flat Earth Sexuality" is my own term. No one I identify as part of this group would own that name, nor are all their views monolithic. I am not trying to be unfair in this. I am attempting to bring definition to "the emerging synthesis." Until it is defined it cannot be evaluated and corrected. All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted will be from the 1995 updated edition of the New American Standard Version of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, Mark Fonstad and William Pugatch from the Dept. of Geography, Texas State University joined their academic prowess with that of Brandon Vogt from the Department of Geography at Arizona State University. Their scientific study, published by Utah State University, labored to answer the following critical question, “Is Kansas as flat as a pancake?”¹ Applying a combination of mathematics, scientific innovation and basic techniques, they constructed a formula which would answer their question. Applying this formula relatively to the surface of a pancake and to the topography of Kansas, they compared their values. Mathematically, a value of 1.000 would indicate perfect flatness. The IHOP pancake they tested registered at 0.957. It was flat, but not quite perfectly flat. Kansas registered at 0.9997. In other words, Kansas was much flatter than a pancake. In considering the terrain of Kansas, one could not find a more opposite landscape than that of Nepal. Nepal is 25,000 mi² smaller than Kansas, and features a far greater variety in topography. Nepal’s lowest altitude in its tropical zone hovers around 300 feet above sea level. Nepal’s highest altitude, of course, is Mt. Everest, over 26,000 feet above sea level.²

When God looks at sin, does He see a terrain like Kansas or Nepal? Is sin flat to God? Does all sin look equally sinful to Him? Or does sin, in God’s view, have variety in elevation (severity)? This question comes to the fore in Protestant Evangelicalism’s current debate about those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted Christians.³ This question features particularly in the evaluation of innate sexual attractions. Are we morally culpable for involuntary sexual attractions? Are some innate attractions more sinful, fallen or broken than others? Can “repentance” ever apply to “sexual orientation” and should it? These questions deliver our thinking into the middle of a most vital disagreement splitting evangelicalism today. These are not esoteric, theoretical queries.

Real folks, identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted Christians, are hearing two radically different kinds of pastoral counsel, with a whole lot of muddled muttering and silence in between. They need genuine scriptural preaching, teaching and counsel. They need to be conformed to Christ. Real folks, members of evangelical churches, are also reaching out for help. They want to know how to love and what to say to their family members, neighbors and friends who identify as LGBTQ+. They’re hearing the same debate and confusion. They need to be conformed to Christ through accurate Biblical exegesis and application. This paper is my attempt as a pastor to shepherd my flock into truth, love and holiness. To whatever degree it aids my church and other churches and Christians, may God receive the glory.

What kind of disagreement are we dealing with? It is a popular-level disagreement with deep doctrinal divide. The debate is easily accessible. Clarifying the scriptural answers takes some labor. Much of this paper will focus on popular and influential sources which tend to flatten sexual sin and absolve sexual attraction. Four websites feature prominently in the list of

¹ Mark Fonstad, William Pugatch and Brandon Vogt, “Kansas Is Flatter Than a Pancake.” Improbable Research, 2003. <https://www.usu.edu/geo/geomorph/kansas.html> (accessed October 26, 2018).

² “Geography of Nepal.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Nepal (accessed October 26, 2018).

³ LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and whatever future sexual orientations may be identified as a sexual minority.

recommended helps for those struggling with LGBTQ+ attraction. Writers and speakers for Revoice, Living Out, The Gospel Coalition and Desiring God often flatten LGBTQ+ attraction. They believe it is fully compatible with godliness.

Ed Shaw, writing for TGC, favorably relays the following pastor's comments about his sons, "We, most of all, want our boys to grow up as godly and mature Christians. Some of the most godly and mature Christians we know are same-sex attracted. So why would we be so afraid of them growing up as same-sex attracted?"⁴ An article from Living Out guides parents' engagement with their same-sex attracted children. Parents are encouraged to "Normalize It." They are instructed to explain to their sexually conflicted children that everyone sins. Parents must guard against "the assumption that being 'straight' is the normal sexuality which they are deviating from." After all, "'straight' sexuality is equally fallen from God's good original created purposes."⁵

How equal is equal? Christopher Asmus, writing for Desiring God, depicts a Kansas-like terrain of sin:

The Earth is flat. When it comes to sexuality, everyone has fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Or you could say, none is truly "straight," no not one (Romans 3:10). . . . Whether gay or straight, married or unmarried, single or dating, everyone lives in some state of sexual and emotional dissatisfaction and unfulfillment. We all are sexually broken. When it comes to sexuality, the earth is flat.⁶

Flat Earth Sexuality consists of two concurrent departures from the doctrine of Total Depravity. These two divergences intersect at the point of LGBTQ+ attraction. The first divergence we will examine is that of sinless concupiscence, an older Roman Catholic doctrine which might be called "No-Fault-Lust." The second divergence we will examine is that of moral equivalency, a kind of unvariegated nomism we might rename, "Equal Depravity." Departures from the biblical doctrine of sin abound in Church History, and they are never pretty. Andrew Fuller cautions, "I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian, the Arian, the Socinian, or the Antinomian schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity or blameworthiness."⁷ Such historical terms may not send the appropriate chills up our spines, but they should. Souls are at stake. Gerald Bray asserts:

There is no subject of greater importance to Christian theology than its understanding of the concept of sin and its effects. . . . Knowing the nature and effects of sin is the

⁴ Ed Shaw, "Godliness Is Not Heterosexuality." The Gospel Coalition, December 3, 2015.

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/godliness-is-not-heterosexuality/> (accessed February 16, 2019).

⁵ "How should I respond if my child comes out to me?" Living Out. <http://www.livingout.org/resources/how-should-i-respond-if-my-child-comes-out-to-me> (accessed October 26, 2018).

⁶ Christopher Asmus, "Satisfied in the Arms of Another: Four Lessons for Same-Sex Attracted Christians." Desiring God, October 24, 2018. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/satisfied-in-the-arms-of-another> (accessed October 26, 2018).

⁷ Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Controversial Publications*. Vol. 2, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 662.

essential preliminary to understanding what Christ did to defeat it. If we get that wrong, our appreciation of salvation will be distorted and the gospel will be lost.⁸

As a pastor, I am concerned to preach Christ from all the Scriptures until He is formed in all of His people. What this means for those identifying as LGBTQ+ Christians will mean the same for all of Christ's people.⁹ As I orient myself to this long term labor, I am aware that professing believers reach out to many easily accessible sources to help them grow in Christ. This can be very helpful. This can be very harmful. Flat Earth Sexuality comes not in the form of a white paper presented to professional theologians, although this has occurred.¹⁰ Flat Earth Sexuality arrived in my consciousness not through a plenary session at a conference or in an article on a website, though both can be accessed.¹¹ Flat Earth Sexuality did not come to me in the form of a book I had to buy, although I could.¹²

Flat Earth Sexuality appeared before my eyes in the form of popular media. Christopher Asmus' blog was sent out by Desiring God to all its subscribers and made available to anyone else just browsing for content. I soon discovered his blog post was not a recent aberration. The pattern of Flat Earth Sexuality is well established.¹³ These departures from Total Depravity inform me as a pastor that the people I preach to need a better understanding of sin. Rather than compartmentalizing sin to the active will or flattening the moral quality of all sins, we need to go deep in the Word of God on this matter. D. A. Carson writes, "A Generation that is singularly unaware of its sin while being awash in sin desperately needs a robust doctrine of sin to begin to understand redemption."¹⁴

Someone might wonder, what is the big deal about homosexuality anyway? I think the Holy Scriptures can answer that for us. We just need to pay close attention to our doctrine (*1 Timothy 4:16*). If we do not, we will easily be swayed in the wind of popular sentiment. How many implicitly trusted Tim Keller as he quipped in a Veritas interview, "Heterosexuality does not get you to heaven [laughter], I happen to know this, so how in the world can homosexuality

⁸ Gerald Bray, "Sin in Historical Theology" in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin* eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 163.

⁹ Different voices disagree whether or not to call believers "Gay Christian" or "Same-Sex attracted (SSA) Christians." I will not use the abbreviation SSA. It does not communicate as well as "those who identify as LGBTQ+ attracted." The latter phrase admits no acceptance of false presuppositions while still acknowledging the pressing horizons of sexual perversion.

¹⁰ Several can be found at Nate Collin's website (<https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources>). I would be remiss if I did not list here a whitepaper by Mark Yarhouse, who was asked by TGC to help formulate their collegiate outreach to the LGBTQ+ communities (<https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Yarhouse-Homosexuality.pdf>).

¹¹ (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6rzVr-tB8ZE6wUHipoc7ng>); (<http://www.livingout.org/>).

¹² (<https://www.ivpress.com/same-sex-attraction-and-the-church>); (<https://www.amazon.com/Spiritual-Friendship-Finding-Celibate-Christian/dp/1587433494>).

¹³ See Desiring God and TGC blogs on the LGBTQ+ influence in the church. Not all the writers for these websites are as equally compromised. Some ardently defend the faith, for which I am grateful. As with the Corinthian church there are some things that are praiseworthy and others that are definitely not praiseworthy and need to stop (*1 Corinthians 11:2, 17, 22*).

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, "Sin's Contemporary Significance," in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, 35.

send you to hell?”¹⁵ This is bumper-sticker-level wit—incredibly accessible. Bumper stickers have never been considered excellent purveyors of orthodoxy. But when Flat Earth Sexuality slogans are plastered all over the rear end of the Evangelical hatchback, you’ve got to wonder if you’re still comfortable as a passenger.

The good news is that we will not have to resort to internet devotions, pop-Christian authors, websites, conferences or the seminary to refute the devilish notion that “*When it comes to sexuality, the earth is flat.*” We will read the Bible. Christians should eagerly examine the Scriptures to see whether Flat Earth Sexuality is so (*Acts 17:11*). Fundamental questions must be answered. This paper will answer three questions. What are the relationships between lust, temptation and sin? Does God differentiate between kinds of sin and levels of the same kind of sin? Why should the church respond to “flat earth sexuality”? As the three parts of this paper unfold, I hope to show within the pages of Holy Scripture we have all the necessary information to think rightly, lovingly and sacredly on the matters of sin and sexuality.

BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

Key terms used in Flat-Earth-Sexuality are not biblically defined. Major confusion reigns where terms like “attraction” and “temptation” are used. What relationship do these have with sin? To what degree are humans morally responsible for their own desires? Without clear, biblical definitions of these terms, confusion will remain. Confusion in Christian thinking is like opened up space under your house. The more confusion you have, the greater the space there is and the more holes there are under your beliefs. Confusion allows bad doctrine into your Christian thinking the way spacious holes allow all manner of diseased varmints to squirm happily beneath your feet. Eventually, you’ll smell their stench and find their waste inside your home. You may fight the smell with scented candles, you may sterilize your baseboards and set traps, but until you close the holes and fill the spaces, you are only maintaining, not repairing. Anyone who would go so far as to welcome the pests as their pets should be locked away. Yet this is what has happened with the purveyors of Flat Earth Sexuality. Confused about sin, they have adopted many bad doctrines as pet beliefs.

Consider the following quotes from Living Out,¹⁶ “By being open about our own experiences and journeys on this site we hope to show that there is nothing any more intrinsically shameful about same-sex attraction than about any other temptation, sexual or otherwise.”¹⁷ There are two flattening moves here. First, shame is steamrolled flatter than a pancake. “Intrinsically,” as pertaining to the nature of something, one attraction cannot be more or less shameful than any other attraction. Second, notice how the term “attraction” is

¹⁵ “What do Christians Have Against Homosexuality?” The Veritas Forum, November 29, 2011.

<https://youtu.be/lZFCB9sduxQ?t=201> (accessed February 16, 2019).

¹⁶ “Living Out is coordinated by three Christian leaders who experience same sex attraction: Sam Allberry, pastor at St. Mary’s Church in Maidenhead UK, speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, editor for The Gospel Coalition; Sean Doherty, lecturer in ethics at St. Mellitus College in London; Ed Shaw, pastor of Emmanuel City Centre in Bristol.” “What We’re About,” Living Out. <http://www.livingout.org/what-we-re-about> (accessed February 13, 2019).

¹⁷ “Washed and Waiting,” Living Out. <http://www.livingout.org/resources/washed-and-waiting> (accessed February 13, 2019).

equated with “temptation” of any kind. What are the moral/theological consequences of weaving these two fibers together to make one smooth bolt of cloth? This confusion will need unraveling. Ed Shaw, writing for Living Out, marries same sex attraction to a theology of beauty. He repeatedly voices his desire for a beautiful man, his wanting to become one with him, is normal because of how all those made in God’s image respond to something beautiful:

You want somehow to stay and enjoy it, experience it, become part of it forever. That’s the natural effect of beauty on you. That’s just how it works. I think that will help me next time I see a beautiful man and find myself wanting to be united to him. I am, at one level, just responding to beauty as I am created to respond to it. There is little I can do to avoid this natural response. We are all wired to appreciate beauty. That’s just how we work.”¹⁸

This is Flat Earth Sexuality, “God made you to desire beauty; your same-sex attraction to male beauty is legitimate.” Where is sin in all this? Whatever happened to attraction being bad or good? The definitions and relationships of desire, temptation and sin need the clarifying light of Scripture.

The Definition of Sin

Responding to Flat Earth Sexuality requires a clear understanding of sin. The confusion evidenced by advocates of LGBTQ+ godliness can only be ascribed to inadequate conceptions of sin. What is sin? When does it begin? How does it manifest? We should care to answer such questions biblically. What is at stake if we do not know what sin is? “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). “*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8) What if we sin and say that we have not? “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us*” (1 John 1:10). How can we define sin?

Defining Sin by God’s Word

When it comes to the main course of a Monday night family dinner, one might have trouble identifying the type of food. It has noodles. Is it pasta? It has beef. Is it a steak? It has sauce. Is it a soup? It has vegetables. Is it a salad? Thankfully, we have a word to capture it all, “Casserole.” When it comes to defining the essence of sin, it can be challenging. God uses many different words to describe sin. R. Stanton Norman identifies many of these, “Depravity, corruption, inattention, error, guilt, godlessness, ignorance, iniquity, lack of integrity, lawless, lust, missing the mark, perversion, rebellion, transgression, treachery, wickedness, badness and unrighteousness.”¹⁹ Thankfully we have a term to capture all these, “lawlessness.”

The Apostle John writes, “*Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4). How can “lawlessness” truly wrangle that many terms of sin into

¹⁸ Ed Shaw, “How do you cope with sexual attraction as a Christian with same-sex attraction?” Living Out, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.livingout.org/how-do-you-cope-with-sexual-attraction-as-a-christian-with-same-sex-attraction>.

¹⁹ R. Stanton Norman, “Human Sinfulness,” in *A Theology for the Church*. Ed. Daniel Akin. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 412-22.

one corral? Sin is not to be defined by the multifarious human experience, but by the immutable character of God. Herman Bavinck writes, “Though sin is appallingly many-sided, with untold moral dimensions, at its heart is a religious revolt against God and thus appropriately summarized as lawlessness.”²⁰ Reflecting on *1 John 3:4* Joel Beeke speaks of the breadth and depth at which sin operates, “Sin is *any* failure to conform to the moral law of God in our actions, attitudes or *nature*.”²¹

Why would this prove the best understanding of the essence of sin? Many others have been proposed. Norman lists several modern and ancient Christian notions, “Disruption of shalom, idolatry, selfishness, pride, sensuality, rebellion and unbelief.”²² Norman believes idolatry best describes the essence of sin. Augustine and Calvin considered pride to be the heart of sin. Whatever sin is, it is sin because it is against God. Bavinck makes this point in several places:

[Sin] denotes a violation not of a human but of a divine law. It situates humans, not in relation to their fellow humans, society, and the state, but in relation to God, the heavenly Judge. . . . The sin may be great or small; it is sin only because it is contrary to God and his law (*Gen. 13:13; 20:6; 39:9; Exod. 10:16; 32:33; 1 Sam. 7:6; 14:33; 2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51:4; Isa. 42:14; Jer. 14:7, 20; etc.*) . . . For the standard of sin is God’s law alone.²³

Perhaps deceit is the inner essence of sin. God spoke humanity into existence through truth. Sin killed the human race through a lie (*Genesis 3:1-7; John 8:44-47*). In the rebel palace of every sin, a lie reigns. Those made in the image of God must somehow deny the word of God in order to oppose the will of God. Bavinck describes sin as “an incomprehensible mystery,” noting, “It exists, but has no right to existence. . . . Sin *is* not: it *wants to be*; it neither has nor ever achieves true reality. It is falsehood in its origin and falsehood in its ending.”²⁴ What an ironic travesty would occur if a lie sat enthroned in the midst of a person’s definition of sin!

Defining Sin by Man’s Experience

Tim Keller is notable for stating that homosexuality sends no one to hell. Single-minded folk believing *1 Corinthians 6:9-10* and *Revelation 21:8; 22:15* will disagree. When his interviewer, a gay rights activist, asked Keller how then homosexuality could still be considered a sin, Keller answered indirectly. “Greed is a sin, in other words it doesn’t help human flourishing.”²⁵ Keller defines sin by that which does not help human flourishing. Where did he derive such a definition?

²⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*. Vol. 3. Ed. John Bolt, Tr. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 126.

²¹ Joel Beeke, “Human Depravity” in *Free Grace Broadcaster: Radical Depravity*. Is. 247 (Pensacola, FL Chapel Library, 2019), 11. (My emphasis).

²² Norman, 423-28.

²³ Bavinck, 130, 135, 140.

²⁴ Bavinck, 145, 148.

²⁵ “What do Christians Have Against Homosexuality?” The Veritas Forum, November 29, 2011. <https://youtu.be/IZFCB9sduxQ?t+294> (accessed April 18, 2019).

This definition of sin is rising rapidly in popularity. It is the first on Norman's list, "disruption of shalom." In 1995 Cornelius Plantinga Jr. wrote a book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. In 2010 he wrote an essay distilling the essence of that book. In that essay he defines God and sin in relationship to shalom, "Because God is at the pinnacle of shalom . . . Christians usually define sin with reference to God."²⁶ He believes our tendency to see sin in view of God is only due to God's perfect embodiment of shalom.

Plantinga privileges his understanding of shalom over law, righteousness, truth and holiness as the standard which sin breaks. This shift of standard plays a major role in Flat Earth Sexuality's expression of human nature, morality and holiness. Note how Plantinga places God along with us in orbit around the sun of shalom:

But once we possess the concept of shalom, we are in position to specify our understanding of sin. God is, after all, not arbitrarily offended. God hates sin not just because it violates his law but, *more substantively*, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be. . . . God is enthusiastically for shalom and *therefore* against sin.²⁷

How one understands shalom, then, governs one's understanding of both God's nature and sin's essence. What is Plantinga's definition of shalom? It is in this definition that we discern Keller's connection between sin as that which is against human flourishing:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. . . . In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as the creator and savior opens doors and speaks welcome to the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be.²⁸

Plantinga proceeds in his next five paragraphs to illustrate what this shalom would look like in our world today. This amounts to pouring the thick, sweet syrup of tolerant, egalitarian utopianism all over the pancake of American society.

At least Keller's relating of sin to degrees of human flourishing is now better understood. Sin is that which is against human flourishing because sin is against shalom. Sin is injustice. Justice means restoring human flourishing, indeed shalom. Keller writes, "In general, to 'do justice' means to live in a way that generates a strong community where human beings can flourish. Specifically, however, to 'do justice' means to go places where the fabric of shalom has broken down."²⁹ This is why my friend concerned for social justice considers "peacemaking"

²⁶ Cornelius Plantinga Jr. "Sin: Not the Way it's Supposed to Be." (Christ on Campus Initiative, 2010), 4. May be downloaded at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/neal-plantinga-on-sin/> (accessed February 4, 2019).

²⁷ Ibid. (The first *emphasis* is mine. The second is his.)

²⁸ Plantinga, 2-3.

²⁹ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 113.

the art of helping the poor, and has little conception of reconciling offended parties. Definitions have consequences.

Plantinga's definition of sin informs us as to why "human flourishing" is the expressed goal for ministries seeking to help those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted Christians.³⁰ What that goal practically looks like will be determined by the human experience of shalom. Would not the immutable holy character of God, truthfully expressed in His law, serve as a better standard? Has not our tendency been to heal brokenness superficially crying "'*Shalom, shalom, but there is no shalom*'"? (*Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10, 16*). We should stand by the old paths where the good way is and allow God's word to define sin, desire and temptation.

The Relationship of Sin and Desire

Clarifying this relationship will require biblical definitions for "attractiveness" and "attraction". What God names desirable and what man may desire are not necessarily the same. Our vision of shalom may not accord with God's promised peace. Attractiveness and attraction are not intrinsically two sides of a single coin. The Scriptures disagree with Flat Earth Sexuality. Beauty and desire do not cohabitate in the same moral bedroom. What is the biblical difference between "Attractiveness" and "Attraction"? It amounts to the difference between Creation and the Fall.

Attractiveness

Consider the beauty, the attractiveness of God's creation, "*Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (*Genesis 2:9*). God caused every tree to grow out of the ground, even the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Every tree God made was pleasing to the sight and good for food. This assessment included the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God made all the trees beautiful. God said of all these trees, "very good" (*Genesis 1:31*). They were good and beautiful by His standard. Adam and Eve, made in His image, also beheld the beauty of all these trees. Even the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was attractive to their eyes. That was the way God made it. God forbade Adam and Eve the attractive fruit of this one tree, "*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die'*" (*Genesis 2:16-17*).

First, God made the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil both pleasing to the sight and good for food. Second, God outlawed this fruit. Did God tempt Adam and Eve by making the fruit inherently attractive and then commanding them not to eat from it? James writes, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone*" (*James 1:13*). The fruitful tree was not evil. The attractive fruit was not sinful. The good Creator gave a good command to His good

³⁰ (<https://www.revoice.us/about/our-beliefs/statements-of-conviction/statement-on-sexual-ethics-and-christian-obedience/>); (<https://covchurch.org/embrace/events/revoice-conference/>) (<https://www.livingout.org/search-results?search=flourish>).

creatures about good fruit. It was righteous for Adam and Eve, having received abundance in creation, to adhere to their Provider's will.

By obeying God, Adam and Eve demonstrated they loved the Creator more than the creation. On the right side of this commandment was worship. On the wrong side of this commandment was idolatry. Yes, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was pleasing to the sight and good for food, but God was more pleasing than the fruit, and far better than the food.

Attraction

God made Sarah and Rebekah beautiful (*Genesis 12:11; 24:16*). Abraham was attracted to Sarah. Isaac was attracted to Rebekah. Such attraction was good and proper. Abraham and Isaac knew other men would notice the beauty of their wives and lust for them. They would covet them. Such attraction was bad and unlawful. The end result would mean death for Abraham and Isaac and enslavement for Sarah and Rebekah (*Genesis 12:11-14; 24:7-9*). Attraction can be good, a husband desiring his attractive wife. Attraction can be bad, a man desiring another man's attractive wife.

Attractiveness and attraction do not cohabit in one moral bedroom. If God did design man to be helplessly attracted to beauty, He is the author of evil. This is not the case. God did not make an infallible bug light and then fashion light-addicted bugs forbidding them to go to that light. The forbidden fruit was inherently attractive, something good (*Genesis 2:9, 17*). Adam and Eve were not inherently attracted to do with that fruit what God had forbidden. They did not want "to stay and enjoy it, experience it, become part of it forever" as Ed Shaw would say. This is not always the human response to incredible beauty. The fruit was attractive. The thought of eating that fruit or even touching it was abhorrent, disgusting, to Adam and Eve (*Genesis 3:3*).

Attractiveness, beauty, is defined by God and is very good. All that God made was very good (*Genesis 1:31*). So, how is attraction not completely intertwined with attractiveness? Attraction, as a human desire, can be aimed at that which God forbids. Man may be attracted to what, in God's eyes, is abhorrent and hideous. Man may even call the abhorrent, "attractive." Such is the autonomy Adam and Eve grasped in eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They became like God in this way: defining for themselves good and evil, beauty and horror, attractiveness and repugnance (*Genesis 3:22*). They may call flat what God has called jagged. They may call "shalom" what God says is not shalom. They may paint Kansas landscapes while touring Nepal.

Lust

Attraction for what God forbids is called lust.³¹ Man's feeling of attraction was divorced from God's definition of attractiveness in the fall. Lust came into the human experience for the first time in the fall. The forbidden fruit was not inherently a temptation, something bad. How

³¹ "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead" (*Romans 7:8*). Joel Beeke and Mark Jones note that this verse ". . . has reference to Paul in his unconverted state. The sin in Paul in this verse is original sin, and original sin produced in him 'all manner of concupiscence,' that is, all kinds of covetous lust or desire for things forbidden." *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 209.

then did Adam and Eve sin? When did the forbidden fruit's beauty become the object of humanity's lust? The serpent tempted Eve (*Genesis 3:1-6*). Leading Eve to question the goodness of God and the truth of God's word, the serpent presented the forbidden fruit in a new light. He claimed God restricted the fruit, oppressing Adam and Eve. Satan claimed this needless prohibition kept them from becoming as wise, powerful and glorious as God. *Genesis 3:6* tells us first Eve, then Adam sinned against God, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

Notice the transition from righteous attractiveness to unrighteous attraction, lust. The tree had always been good for food. This good food was forbidden. Adam and Eve now want to eat the fruit more than they want to obey God. This tree had always been pleasing to their eyes. This attractive tree was denied them. Humanity's desire now opposes God's will. *Genesis 3:6* reads like a dark parody of *2:9*. In *2:9* the tree is called "pleasing to the sight." In *Genesis 3:6* Eve sees the tree as "desirable to make one wise." The translations "pleasing" and "desirable" cover the same Hebrew term, "*chamad*." The tree which had been inherently attractive (*chamad*) now became sinfully desirable (*chamad*).³² How did this transition occur?

It is important to observe how Adam and Eve sinned in their hearts before they sinned with their hands. Bavinck describes original sin, as a sinful act originating from a heart which had sinned first:

The very act of eating was itself already a revelation of a sweeping moral change that had occurred in his inner self. Strictly speaking, it was not the first sin, but the first fully matured sin in the sense of *James 1:15*. Anterior to the sinful deed, there were sinful considerations of the mind (doubt, unbelief) and sinful tendencies of the heart (covetousness, pride).³³

Adam and Eve believed the lie of Satan and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for another glory, their own (*Romans 1:23*). They chose to disbelieve their Creator Who had drawn the lines of good and evil according to His supreme value. They would now draw the lines of good and evil according to their chosen values (*Genesis 3:22*).

Having sinned in unbelief, Adam and Eve now experienced not just Satan's external temptation, but an internal unrighteous lust, an attraction for what God had forbidden. Is such lust forbidden by God? Yes, He said, "Do not covet." The tree which had been inherently attractive (*chamad*) now became sinfully desirable (*chamad*). This shift is instructive. "*Chamad*" moves from describing comeliness to covetousness. Understanding biblical teaching on covetousness will expose many false assumptions made by Flat Earth Sexuality.

Covetousness

Eve's desire for the forbidden fruit comes into sharp focus in the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor"

³² The Hebrew term, "חָמַד" / "*Chamad*" is written in the same form in both places.

³³ Bavinck, 108.

(Exodus 20:17). The Hebrew term for “covet” is the same as Eve’s lust for the forbidden fruit, “*chamad*.” Covetousness is lust. Lust is covetousness. Like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a neighbor’s persons and possessions are created as good by a good Creator. As in the beginning, God prohibits a measure of what is good. God kept back from Adam and Eve the good fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God also prohibits unrighteous use of a neighbor’s persons and possessions, “*You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal.*” (Exodus 20:14-15). God prohibits all attempts to acquire a neighbor’s persons and possessions by force, “*You shall not murder. . . . You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*” (Exodus 20:13, 16). The lust which gives rise to murder, adultery, theft and lying is named in the tenth commandment, “*You shall not covet*” (Exodus 20:17).

Covetousness is a fountain of evil. Covetousness is not an orientation or a state of fallenness, but a fundamental sin. Covetousness means more than noticing the inherent attractiveness of a piece of fruit, a statue or a body type. Covetousness means desiring what God forbids. Your neighbor’s persons and possessions might be somewhat attractive, they might even be beautiful. Should your desire fixate on what God has forbidden, you sin. When you behold that which God has forbidden, any desire “to stay and enjoy it, experience it, and become part of it forever” is lust. Covetousness means desiring what God has forbidden. Lust is being attracted to what God has prohibited. So we see that desire is not always natural and good. Desire is certainly not neutral. Attraction may be holy. Attraction for what God has outlawed is always sin, always unholy.

Fallen Desire

Flat Earth Sexuality sometimes dilutes the sinfulness of sin by proposing that attractiveness and attraction move in together. If our God-designed attraction is merely the created response to God-created attractiveness, what culpable sin may be found in LGBTQ+ attraction? If desire is merely the natural partner of beauty, what is there to repent from? Desires, of course, have not escaped the gravitational pull of the fall. Flat Earth Sexuality broadly confesses the fallenness, indeed, the brokenness of our desires in an equalizing manner.

If all attraction is disordered, how can LGBTQ+ attracted fallenness be presented as something from which to repent? Tucking their desires away, deep inside an equalizing curse, those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted Christians may as soon repent from their sexual attractions as their aching joints. Walking backwards with the garment of Genesis 3 to cover all sexual attraction with a levelled fallenness, sexual flat earthers eliminate any need for repentance.

For many in the Flat Earth Sexuality camp, if sexual orientation precedes the will, repentance is not in order. How can you repent of the color of your eyes? Yes, your eyes are fallen (*Genesis 3:7; Job 31:1, 7; Proverbs 21:2; Ecclesiastes 6:9; Jeremiah 5:21; Mark 8:18*), but you don’t repent of their color do you? When many authors for Flat Earth Sexuality write about sexual orientation, they speak of something intrinsic to human identity. The form it manifests is always broken, but never should be repented from. We need to be careful when using such terms. In our engagement with false ideas should we make our vocabulary sanctuary cities for unbiblical idioms, such as “sexual orientation”?

This is a real challenge. Dr. Mohler famously repented from his denial of sexual orientation, “The concept of sexual orientation is not only helpful, it is in some sense essential. . . There is a pattern of sexual interest and attraction that is discovered in early adolescence. It is not something that is, in itself, freely chosen.”³⁴ It can sometimes be confusing when hearing the same terminology being used with a wide variety of meanings. When I first heard and read this I thought Dr. Mohler had “joined the other side.” Dr. Mohler has clarified he does not mean to sanctify unbiblical sexuality like those speakers and writers for Revoice.³⁵ We need to continually define our terms in the midst of this fluid controversy. I think we can all agree confusion is not our goal, biblical correction is. Christians ought to be “*destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and . . . taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Christianity’s borders are not secure. Many rebellious thoughts have secretly immigrated into the church. Prior to Revoice ‘18, the personalities of Crosspolitic interviewed Greg Johnson, pastor of the PCA church hosting the conference. Having labeled various forms of sexual sin as “disordered friendships” Greg Johnson at one point asked with exasperated voice, “How do you repent of an orientation?”³⁶ Such labeling and such a question arise from conflating attractiveness and attraction, from jettisoning the obvious meaning of lust and covetousness. Such language alerts all of us to our need to properly define the relationship of terms like “temptation” and “sin” to “lust.” To help us with this need, God has given us definitions from James 1, and stories from the lives of Christ, David and Joseph.

The Relationship of Sin and Temptation

In his article, “Four Ways to Fight Sexual Sin,” on Desiring God’s website, Sam Alberry gives helpful pointers on fighting temptation from Proverbs 5.³⁷ The four ways he identifies as weapons against temptation are all true as far as they go. He never once looks at the root cause. In battling sexual temptation, he repeatedly states, “sexual sin is attractive.” Yet, Mr. Alberry does not ponder why. Solomon asks why. After affirming sexual satisfaction in marriage, Solomon asks his son, “*For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?*” (Proverbs 5:20). Why would sexual sin be attractive? Actually, that term “attractive” is misleading. Sexual sin is not attractive to God. Why would those made in God’s image label it attractive? This lie arises from our lust. If Mr. Alberry had repeatedly stated, “sexual sin is born of lust,” he could have added a fifth way to fight sexual sin—confessing and mortifying the lust which leads to temptation. James describes lust,

³⁴ Albert Mohler, “Aftermath: Ministering in a Post-Marriage culture.” ERLC: Video 29:22, October 28, 2014. <http://erlc.com/resource-library/event-messages/aftermath-ministering-in-a-post-marriage-culture-ablert-mohler> (accessed February 13, 2019). Also: Mohler, “Sexual Orientation and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” on Albert Mohler’s official website, November 13, 2014, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/11/13/sexual-orientation-and-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ/>.

³⁵ <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/02/briefing-8-2-18>.

³⁶ “Family Meeting w/Greg Johnson, Pastor and Host Church of Revoice.us” Crosspolitic: Video 40:37, July 15, 2018. <https://youyu.be/wb5yk2ldGpc?t=2429> (accessed February 13, 2019).

³⁷ Sam Alberry, “Four Ways to Fight Sexual Sin.” Desiring God, 2.28.19. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/four-ways-to-fight-sexual-sin> (accessed March 6, 2019).

temptation and sin in ways which help us know the depths of our own sinfulness and the lengths of our needful response.

James 1:13-16

Consider the broader context to begin. James, the brother of Jesus, elder in the Jerusalem church, writes to Christians under fire (1). He encourages them to persevere through various trials by God's wisdom and faith in Jesus Christ (2-8). He strips the saints of any confidence in the flesh, leaving us to rely on God's strength in our weaknesses (9-12). The first twelve verses are connected to the next four by use of a key word. The noun James uses for "trial" (2, 12), he employs as a verb for "tempt" (13-14).³⁸ The former speaks to difficult circumstances, the latter to sinful enticement. What is the connection between these two similar terms?

Experientially, when believers encounter trials, we learn more about the sinfulness of our own hearts. The heat of the trial fires the crucible of our lustful hearts and the dross of temptations rises to the surface. Our opportunity for repentance and purification is apparent in such a combination of tests. The first test comes from God for our good, the second comes from within our lustful heart for our ill. The first kind of test is from God in His holy nature to graduate us (4). The second kind of test is from our own sinful nature to flunk us (15). The first is something we fall into,³⁹ the second is something that grows within.⁴⁰

We must not think wrongly about the connection of these tests and blame God for our own lusts, temptations and sin (13, 16). Calvin writes, "To draw out what is hid in our hearts is a far different thing from inwardly alluring our hearts by wicked lusts."⁴¹ The shifting circumstances of our trials are given to us as good gifts from our good Heavenly Father who never shifts in His goodness (17). Having considered the larger context of James 1:13-16, each of these four verses may be examined more closely.

James 1:13

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." James has just used and discussed a vital term, "trial." The Greek term behind "trial" is translated almost as often as "temptation" in the New Testament.⁴² James, accordingly, clarifies his meaning by decisively separating God from temptation. Temptations are qualitatively different than trials. To tempt is to entice unto

³⁸ The noun translated as "trial" reads, "peirasmos" / "πειρασμός". The verb translated as "tempt" reads, "peirazo" / "πειράζω". Both come from the primary word, "peira" / "πείρα" which means "a trial, an experiment." We might say, "a test, a probation."

³⁹ Where the ESV reads "meet," and the NASB "encounter," in James 1:2 the KJV, NKJV and GNV all more accurately read "peripipto" / "περιπίπτω" as "fall into."

⁴⁰ Lust "conceives" and "gives birth to sin" (James 1:15). Both maternal terms emphasize inward development towards outward manifestation.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. Tr. and Ed. John Owen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005), 288.

⁴² Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 4:31; 11:4; 22:40, 46; 1 Corinthians 10:13 (*2); 1 Timothy 6:9. (9 times out of 21 occurrences, "peirasmos" / "πειρασμός" is translated "temptation" rather than "trial".)

wrong behavior, unto sin.⁴³ It denotes deceit and craftiness which originate with Satan (*John 8:44*). The verb translated as “tempt” is the same translated as “trap” in those contexts when Jesus’ opponents sought His downfall through tricky questions.⁴⁴

While a saint should confess that their trials are good gifts from God (*James 1:2, 17; 1 Peter 1:3-7*), a saint should never say the same about their temptations. No one must say in the midst of his temptation, that it is from God. God is “untemptable.”⁴⁵ God’s character is such that He cannot lust, cannot be tempted, cannot sin. He is holy, holy, holy (*Isaiah 6:3*). His eyes are too pure to approve sin (*Habakkuk 1:13a*). There are many things God cannot do. All of them are contrary to His character and nature. Included in the list of things God cannot do is this, “*He Himself does not tempt anyone.*” James emphasizes this truth in such a fashion as to leave no confusion. Should anyone, anywhere, in any form find themselves tempted with some manner of sin, that person must never speak the lie, “this temptation is from God.” God is not the author of temptation. God is not the sustainer of temptation. God is not the agent of temptation.⁴⁶

Why would any saint be tempted to ascribe to God their temptations? This blaming maneuver arises from an inner craving to justify oneself. When God confronted Adam in his sin, how did the first man reply? He blamed God to justify himself, “*The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate’*” (*Genesis 3:12*). God gave Adam a woman to be his wife. She sinned by believing the serpent and eating the forbidden fruit. Adam blamed God for his defective wife. Adam saw God as responsible for Eve’s temptation of Adam. Adam believed her enticement to join her in rebellion against God somehow had to do with the fact that God had given Eve to Adam (*Genesis 3:6b*). This was as inept a moral covering as the fig leaves were a physical covering.

It is nothing new for men and women to blame the sovereign Creator for their own temptations. Some Christians identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted may point to the fallenness of Creation to excuse their lusts. “*This creation you made me to live in, it is fallen and so I have inordinate desires.*” The charge, however, does not stick. We do not get to talk that way to God (*Romans 9:19-20*). Let God be true though every man found a liar (*Romans 3:3*). God says that we are tempted because of our own sinful lusts. The blame game evidences real shame.

Other LGBTQ+ attracted Christians may choose to call lust by a different name. Lust, a close synonym of covetousness, clearly refers to desiring what God has forbidden. If “lust” were renamed “attraction,” “desire” or “orientation,” guilt feelings might be relieved. Would guilt itself be relieved? Sinners may change their name, but it leaves them the same. Redirection and euphemisms do not address the real problem. Bavinck observes, “Sin is enthroned not outside the sinner but in the sinner and guides the sinner’s thinking and desiring in its own direction.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Danker, Fredrick William, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 793. S.v. “πειράζω”, “πειρασμός”. Henceforth “BDAG”.

⁴⁴ Matthew 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35; Mark 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Luke 11:16; 20:23; John 8:6.

⁴⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: General Epistles*. (Nashville: Broadman, 1933), 18. “apeirastos” / “ἀπίραστος”.

⁴⁶ The KJV reads in Genesis 22:1 “that God did tempt Abraham...” but this means that God tested, proved and tried Abraham, not that He deceptively enticed Abraham to sin against Him.

⁴⁷ Bavinck, 144.

James 1:14

“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.” James’ general denial that God tempts anyone leads into James’ particular affirmation that each one is tempted by his own lust. This word for lust means, “A great desire for something, a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate.”⁴⁸ The Greek term for “lust” is not neutral. Occasionally it means a good desire; most often it means a bad desire. The positive or negative intention for the term in each passage is always made clear by the context.⁴⁹ When the use of the original term is surveyed in the New Testament and examined alongside its Hebrew equivalent, “sinful passion,” “evil desire,” and “covetousness” emerge as excellent translations.⁵⁰

Notice what temptation requires. First, lust must be present. Second, the will is moved upon, enticed by that lust. When a man’s lust engages his will, temptation has begun. Lust precedes the will. We should be aware of the controversy in this truth. Lust is sin. Lust is the same as covetousness. Covetousness is sin (*Exodus 20:17*). In other words, sin precedes the will. The impure thoughts and rebellious desires arising in us prior to and apart from our will are, nevertheless truly our sins.⁵¹ We should not be surprised to see that the involuntary sin of lust, when conspiring with a sinning will, leads to more sin. James teaches that sin begets more sin (*James 4:1-2*). Sin attempts to propagate by means of self-temptation, wherein a man’s lust entices his will to conspire against God. Should the man use his will to reject temptation, no new sin is conceived.⁵²

We need more careful thinking about the nature of temptation. James uses two terms to describe the temptation process, “carried away” and “enticed.”⁵³ These two terms expose our inner culpability in the temptation process. They identify “the passion which hurries away the will, and the pleasure which bribes the judgment.”⁵⁴ James selects these terms not only for their precision but also for their vividness. They may be winsomely translated, “lured” and “hooked.” Together, these terms form a striking metaphor of fishing, “In like manner the first effect of lust is to draw the man out of his original repose, the second to allure him to a definite bait.”⁵⁵ Such allure and entrapment entails a cooperation of the man’s will with the sinful lusts which burn within him. He indulges in the lust, entangling himself. Simon Kistemaker notes the moral limits of the fishing metaphor:

⁴⁸ BDAG, 371-2. S.v. “ἐπιθυμέω”, “ἐπιθυμία”.

⁴⁹ See Appendix C of this paper.

⁵⁰ Where ESV, NKJV and RSV have “desire,” KJV and NASB have “lust.” “Desire” is like “Attraction” (see above) and can mean either a good or bad affection. “Lust” is a better translation in that it communicates wickedness.

⁵¹ Bavinck, 143. Bavinck, explaining the connection between involuntary sin and personal guilt, quotes Augustine “Even though I do not consent to lust (concupiscence) and even if I do not pursue my desires, nevertheless, I still feel desire and am personally present in that very part of me.” 144.

⁵² Resisting temptation is the duty and the joy of every Christian (1 Corinthians 10:13-14).

⁵³ “ἐξέλκω” and “δρακίζω”. The first refers to being dragged. Some force works upon the man to propel him in a new direction. The second term is the verb form of the noun for “bait.” See BDAG, 347, 217.

⁵⁴ Robert Scott, “The General Epistle of James,” in *The Bible Commentary*. Vol. 10, Ed. F. C. Cook, (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1877), 117.

⁵⁵ Cleon L. Rogers Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers 3rd, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 554.

A fish sees the lure and is tempted to strike. When the fish takes hold of the bait, it is suddenly dragged away and pays with its life for its innocence and ignorance. But man cannot claim innocence and ignorance. James puts it pointedly: “Each one is tempted . . . by his own desire.” He deprives man of any excuse to place the blame on someone or something else. He says, in effect, that the cause lies within ourselves.⁵⁶

The popular move, however, exonerates temptation from any need for repentance. Caleb Kaltenbach is no stranger to wrestling with the LGBTQ+ agenda and the church, yet he makes a critical error when it comes to attraction, temptation and sin. He writes, “Same-sex attraction is *temptation* to sin; it’s not sin in itself. If temptation were sin, then that means Jesus sinned when he was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days.”⁵⁷ We’ll take up the second part of his quote below, when considering Christ’s temptation. For now, look at the way in which Caleb, like others, conflates attraction with temptation.⁵⁸

It is true that the temptation to sin is not the sin itself. If I am tempted to commit physical adultery, I have not actually committed physical adultery. Yet, just as the temptation is not the sin, so also the attraction is not the temptation. The attraction for what God has forbidden is lust (*Matthew 5:27-26*). This lust gives rise to the temptation to act on that lust, to stay and enjoy it, experience it, become part of it. Temptation signals the need to repent from lust.

When I ask the question, “Where does temptation come from?” I would prefer to exclusively blame the devil or someone else. Though I would prefer to excuse myself from the room of guilt, James pins me to the wall.⁵⁹ I am tempted by my own lusts. It is true that when we are tempted, the deceitful enticements may at times originate outside of our hearts.⁶⁰ The devil may tempt (*1 Thessalonians 3:5*). The world may tempt (*1 Peter 4:2-4*). These temptations are sinful endeavors, wicked attempts to bring about our sin. Such temptations will find within us an ally of indwelling sin.⁶¹ Temptation does not signal a neutral heart, but one in need of repentance. Jesus told us sins arise from our sinfulness:

⁵⁶ Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James*. In *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*. Baker Academic, 1986, 49.

⁵⁷ Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Conviction*. (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2015), 195. (*His emphasis*).

⁵⁸ See fn 14. Interestingly, Sean Doherty for Living Out and Dave Zulegar for Desiring God do distinguish between “same-sex-attraction” and temptation. They have, however, renamed lust as “sexual feelings” or “same-sex-attraction,” obscuring the need for repentance. (<https://www.livingout.org/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-conversion-therapy>); (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-same-sex-attraction-disqualify-someone-from-ministry>).

⁵⁹ Calvin writes “As the inclination and excitement to sin are inward, in vain does the sinner seek a cause from an external impulse.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, Tr. Ed. John Owen, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, 289.

⁶⁰ John Owen observes, “Satan tempts sometimes singly by himself, . . . Sometimes he makes use of the world, . . . Sometimes he takes in assistance from ourselves also.” *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*. Eds. Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2006, 155.

⁶¹ Owen admits Satan “has, for the compassing of most of his ends, a sure party within our own breasts.” *Ibid*.

That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mark 7:20-23).

Our wickedness within is the fuel to temptation's fire. To rename lust "innate desire," or "sexual orientation" and to equate such renamed lust with "sinless temptation" are flattening errors that disregard the sinfulness of sin. These are foolish and dangerous errors. One who has prepared maps and gear to hike the plains of Kansas has no business starting up the Himalayans of Nepal. Lust, even when unrecognized or mislabeled, still leads to death through conceiving and birthing sin. Sin begets sin and sin culminates in death.

James 1:15

Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.: James follows up his fishing imagery with another memorable and pithy saying.⁶² This time, James uses the generation motif. Lust conceives and gives birth to sin. Sin grows up and gives birth to death. Solomon taught this lesson to his son. Through the imparting of wisdom, Solomon sought to deliver his son from "the strange woman" and from "the flattering adulteress." Why did he do this? "*For her house sinks down to death And her tracks lead to the dead*" (Proverbs 2:16, 18). He also warned about the young fool who seeks the cunning harlot (Proverbs 7:7-10). In the end, he is trapped and slaughtered, hunted and killed (7:22-23). Solomon's last line chills the bones, "*Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death*" (7:27). Lust ends in death through matured sin. Solomon taught this lesson through the image of the harlot. James taught this lesson through the image of generations.

Look, there by the warm fire in the tender evening, a touching family scene. Grandmother Lust fondles Death on her knee, spawn of her bastard⁶³ daughter, Sin, who equally caresses her own mother and child. Lust, sin and death relate closely. How closely? Notice the progression. "Then," once temptation arises from lust, "When lust has conceived," once a person's will has gone all the way with their lust consummating the temptation, "it gives birth to sin." How does lust conceive? Each one is tempted by his own lust (v. 14). Sin's conception happens by illicit consent. Man's will was made for righteousness, to hear God's word and live by it. Instead, his will consorts with wickedness.⁶⁴ Rather than repenting from lust, when a man's will yields to lust like a fool towards a prostitute, he has succumbed to temptation.⁶⁵

⁶² In the Greek, James' winsome saying shines. The sentence is evenly divided 6 words and 6 words. Each half features four main terms which have the same phonetic endings in the same order "ia, sa, ei, an, ia, sa, ei, on." Additionally, the next to the last three words all start with the same vowel. Balance, rhyme and assonance make this a memorable saying in the original.

⁶³ C.f. Deuteronomy 23:2, KJV. Illegitimacy carried a ten-generation curse.

⁶⁴ The will of man is totally depraved, desiring sin rather than God. Man willfully embraces sin and cannot desire righteousness and holiness outside the sovereign grace of God, Genesis 6:5-6; 8:21; Psalm 14:1-3; 51:5; 58:3; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-20; Ephesians 2:1-3.

⁶⁵ "The will yields to lust and conception takes place." Robertson, 18. Proverbs 6:24-26; 7:4-27.

Lust conceives sin by the illegitimate consent of the will through temptation.⁶⁶ Sin conceived is soon born. The sin of lust through consensual temptation produces more sin. This sin initially is conceived in the mind and heart. Think of the murderous hatred and lustful indulgence Jesus warned against (*Matthew 5:22, 28*).⁶⁷ The sin conceived is soon born as slander, hateful raging, murder, faithlessness, seduction and adultery. When the sin is full grown, when sin has fully matured in all her parts and functions,⁶⁸ she gives birth to death. What death? Matthew Henry offers an autopsy report, “There is a death upon the soul, and death comes upon the body. And, besides death spiritual and temporal, the wages of sin is eternal death too.”⁶⁹ Lust’s house is the temple of a death cult. Consorting with lust is a suicide pact. But what of the interpretation which renders “lust” in James 1:15 as non-culpable desire?

Romanist-Protestant Divide. James 1:15 serves as an interpretative watershed in the debate for and against flat earth sexuality. How a man traces “lust” and its relationship to sin and temptation determines how he will sketch the whole landscape of sexual ethics. This verse serves as an ancient continental divide. Rivers of thought concerning the doctrine of sin have long flowed in opposite directions from the interpretation of this passage. At this point we need to become familiar with the older term for lust, “concupiscence.” Geoffrey Bromiley writes, “Concupiscence is the equivalent of the Greek *epithumia* usually translated ‘lust’ . . . It signifies for the most part the wrongful inclination of the sinner which characterizes his nature and leads to sinful acts.”⁷⁰ He goes on to note different understandings of concupiscence by Romanist and Reformed theologians.

In contrast to Rome, the Reformed position identifies concupiscence with original sin and states, “This corruption of nature, during this life doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, both itself and the first motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.”⁷¹ This is the exact opposite of Rome’s claim put into her catechisms and councils. Rome catechizes concerning concupiscence, “Concupiscence stems from the disobedience of the first sin. It unsettles man’s moral faculties and, without being in itself an offence, inclines man to commit sins.”⁷² At the Council of Trent, Rome actually anathematizes any who would make concupiscence a culpable transgression in a Christian:

In the one baptized there remains concupiscence or an inclination to sin, which, since it is left for us to wrestle with, cannot injure those who do not acquiesce but resist

⁶⁶ “Sin is the union of the will with lust.” Robertson, 18.

⁶⁷ The lust which precedes the will may be furthered by the will. Once the will acquiesces to the lust, then a man indulges in the lust. Desiring another man’s wife is sin to be repented. Meditating on how you might stay and enjoy her, experience her and become part of her forever is further and greater sin.

⁶⁸ Rogers Jr., 554. “By perfected sin, therefore, I understand, not any one act of sin perpetrated, but the completed course of sinning.” Calvin, 290.

⁶⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 782.

⁷⁰ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Concupiscence” in *Wycliff Dictionary of Theology*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1960, 133. Also see Appendix C of this paper.

⁷¹ *The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 16. See Ch. 6, p. 5.

⁷² Catechism of the Catholic Church. ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/chatechism/files/assets/basic-html/page-602.html# (accessed 3.12.19.)

manfully by the grace of Jesus Christ. . . . This concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy Synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood it to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is *of* sin, and inclines *to* sin. But if anyone is of the contrary opinion, let him be anathema.⁷³

The Roman Catholic theologian Bellarmine interprets James 1:15 in typical Romanist fashion. Locating sin only where the term “sin” is used, he concludes, “Hence we learn that the inclination of the concupiscence, and its first irregular motion, is not to be called sin.”⁷⁴ This interpretation depends on observing that James does not call lust, “sin.” “Lust” appears in the same verse as “sin” and is not called “sin.” Therefore, lust is not sin. Is this good exegesis? Is this good reasoning?

The term “lust,” as used here in James 1:14-15, cannot be understood as anything good or even neutral.⁷⁵ It is clearly meant to be understood as sin, ever as much as in passages like Matthew 5:28 and 2 Peter 1:4. John Davenant rightly complains against Bellarmine’s interpretation, “As though it were necessary, that whensoever [*sic*] mention is made about any sin, the word ‘sin’ should be used! St. James shows sufficiently that this concupiscence is original sin, when he says that it bringeth forth actual sin.”⁷⁶

The Romanist-Reformed disagreement runs deeper than the terms in the text. While both sides agree lust is prior to the will in James 1:14-15, they disagree on what that priority means. Romanists make man’s active will an essential prerequisite for sin.⁷⁷ Whatever precedes the will a Romanist might call corruption, fallenness, a stain or a disease, but he will not call it sin. If there is no acquiescence to concupiscence, it cannot be sin. If there is no okra in the pot, it cannot be gumbo. Calvin also complains against Rome’s interpretation of James 1:14-15:

And the Papists ignorantly lay hold on this passage, and seek to prove from it that vicious, yea, filthy, wicked, and the most abominable lusts are not sins, provided there is no assent; for James does not shew when sin begins to be born, so as to be sin, and so accounted by God, but when it breaks forth.⁷⁸

Romanist-Flat Earth Sexuality harmony. It is helpful to review the Romanist-Reformed division over concupiscence when evaluating the claims of Flat Earth Sexuality. Desiring God and The Gospel Coalition, claim affinity to Reformed teaching, hosting authors from Living Out

⁷³ The Council of Trent. <https://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/trent5.htm> (accessed 3.12.19). (*My emphasis*).

⁷⁴ Quoted by John Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, Abridged, Josiah Allport Tr., (Dublin, George Herbert), 20.

⁷⁵ Appendix C.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Calvin also agrees, “It seems, however, improper, and not according to the usage of Scripture, to restrict the word *sin* to outward works, as though indeed lust itself were not a sin, and as though corrupt desires, remaining closed up within and suppressed, were not so many sins. But as the use of a word is various, there is nothing unreasonable if it be taken here, as in many other places, for actual sin.” Calvin, 290.

⁷⁷ Bavinck reproduces Scholasticism’s three levels regarding desires, “1) those thoughts and desires that arise in us spontaneously before any consent of the will . . . are not at all sinful; 2) those against which the will has offered resistance but by which it has been overpowered . . . are venial sins; 3) and those to which the will has consciously and fully consented . . . are mortal sins.” 142.

⁷⁸ Calvin, 290.

and Revoice, yet most of their writing on LGBTQ+ issues approximates the Roman Catholic position on the will and sin.⁷⁹ They significantly depart from the doctrine of Total Depravity. When it comes to interpreting the generation image in James 1:15, Flat Earth Sexuality and Roman Catholicism generally agree. At least as it pertains to sexual desire, they generally agree whatever precedes the conception and birth of sin cannot be understood as sin. Ron Belgau, a speaker at Revoice '18 precisely reconstructs the Roman Catholic position on homosexual attraction:

A traditional Christian sexual ethic distinguishes between two things. First, it teaches that the desire to have sex with others of our own sex is a temptation to sin which is a result of the fall, but it is not, in itself sinful (nor can we necessarily choose who we are attracted to). Second, it teaches that homosexual activity is a sin, because we can choose how we act in response to our desires.⁸⁰

Belgau's understanding of desire, temptation and sin are all the same as the Council of Trent. Desire cannot be repentable sin, like homosexual activity, because it is not something we can choose.

This reduction of the meaning of sin has been popularized by websites like Living Out. Living Out wants to be an accessible and trusted resource for evangelical churches, but their doctrine of sin is not trustworthy. Sean Doherty offers an explanation as to why Living Out rejects Reparative Therapy®/Integrated Therapy®.⁸¹ What he writes typifies the position of Flat Earth Sexuality and mirrors Roman Catholicism:

The implication (of reparative therapy) is that homosexual orientation is problematic in itself, adding to the possibility that people will experience shame and guilt concerning an orientation which they have not chosen and which is simply part of who they are. . . . We believe it is essential to help people accept themselves as they are, just as God accepts us as we are. This will include accepting our sexual orientation."⁸²

⁷⁹ "Calvinism Humbles, Frees and Satisfies" Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/calvinism#calvinism-humbles-frees-and-satisfies> (accessed March 22, 2019). "Confessional Statement" The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/#confessional-statement> (accessed March 22, 2019).

⁸⁰ Ron Belgau, "'Gay': Clarity or Obfuscation? (Part 1)," *Spiritual Friendship: Musings on God, Sexuality, Relationships*, August 13, 2013. <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/08/13/gay-clarity-or-obfuscation-1/> (accessed April, 12, 2019).

⁸¹ "Reparative Therapy® is a professional offering of helping people to resolve past trauma, insecurities, fears, and sexual broken ways of relating. Therefore, reparative therapy receives its name from a reparative drive of the homosexual trying to "repair" himself through homosexual activity or relationships. This therapy never involves coercion from practicing professional offering of care and is for people who want it. 'Conversion Therapy' is a ruse term that no one uses in practicing counseling, professional therapy or pastoral care. This term was mainstreamed in the media by several LGBTQ+ politically motivated organizations." <https://gone2far.org/professional-therapy-counseling-and-skilled-pastoral-care-saves-lives/> (accessed 4.3.19).

⁸² Sean Doherty, "Does Living Out Support 'Gay Cure' or 'Conversion Therapy'?" *Living Out* (<https://www.livingout.org/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-conversion-therapy/>) accessed 3.13.19.

Doherty rejects any disparagement of homosexual orientation. How can sexual orientation rightly deserve shame or properly induce guilt when it has not been chosen? Doherty insists on the human will's activity prior to culpability. Since sexual desires precede choice, how can they be labeled as sin?

Doherty, as the Romanists, sees involuntary desires as non-culpable.⁸³ God would not punish non-sin, would He? If God accepts our sexual attraction as simply part of who we are, so should everyone else. Doherty does not mean sexual attraction is inherently pure. Flat Earth Sexuality confesses fallenness as consequence of original sin. Doherty clarifies from the beginning of his article, "Our belief is that all of us have fallen sexual desires (whether heterosexual or homosexual)."⁸⁴ Differing sexual attractions stretch out evenly along a Kansas-like moral plane. Doherty continues, ". . . and what we need isn't more heterosexuality or less homosexuality but the holiness found in Jesus Christ."⁸⁵ All sexual orientations are presented as equally fallen; one is just as disordered as the other.

Doherty's Flat Earth Sexuality echoes the Catholic Catechism and the Council of Trent. Fallenness is seen as an unsettling of one's moral faculties, an inclination to sin, a disposition to be manfully resisted by the grace of Christ. This fallenness, however, is not seen as truly and properly sin. Like Bellarmine, Doherty maintains the innocence of concupiscence, at least in regards to sexual desire. Bavinck quotes Bellarmine and sums up the Romanist position, "'Not everything that is contrary to the law is sin'; the involuntary motions, though in conflict with the law, are nonetheless not sins."⁸⁶

It is in these involuntary motions that Flat Earth Sexuality locates LGBTQ+ attraction. Such desires may not actually spawn prior to the will.⁸⁷ Even if it does, as Mohler, Shaw and others claim, God gives it no quarter. Henri Blocher observes God's plain indictment of concupiscence:

When James vividly describes the process of temptation, he does not deny the sinfulfulness and guilt of the enticing evil desire (*epithumia*); far from wishing to exonerate the propensity, he brands it as the real culprit. Formally, *epithumia* must be defined as sin, for it breaks the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet . . ." ⁸⁸

⁸³ Bavinck replies, "If the condition of being voluntary in this sense were a necessary element of sin, not only all impure thoughts and desires would cease to be sin, but almost all actual sins could be excused with the motto 'To understand all is, in a way, to forgive all.'" 143.

⁸⁴ Doherty, *Living Out*.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bavinck, 143-144. Homosexuality is against the law, but finding it in the involuntary motions, Flat Earth Sexuality insists LGBTQ+ attraction is not sin.

⁸⁷ The constructivist vs. essentialist debate is beyond the scope of this paper. In many ways the clear reading of Scripture renders the whole debate irrelevant. Regeneration, repentance, renewal and resurrection: God's sovereign saving grace is not hampered by psychological GPS coordinates.

⁸⁸ Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 24.

Dave Zulegar also speaks for Flat Earth Sexuality. On March 16, 2016, he wrote an article for Desiring God, “Does Same-Sex Attraction Disqualify Someone from Ministry?”⁸⁹ His answer arrives with the final sentence, “The Bible does not disqualify them from the ministry will you?”⁹⁰ How Zulegar constructs his conclusion typifies Flat Earth Sexuality. We first hear that the world is fallen, meaning, equally fallen. “We forget that the Bible says that the world is going to be a broken place because of sin (Genesis 3:1–18), with all sorts of things misfiring, including same-sex and opposite-sex desires.”

Zulegar wants the church to have the proper view of God-fearing, Christ-exalting, LGBTQ+ attracted people. We should not think that holiness means LGBTQ+ attractions go away for such folks, “any more than it might mean heterosexual attraction completely ceases to exist for those in Christ.”⁹¹ He equates heterosexuality with homosexuality. What then does holiness look like for Zulegar? Holiness cannot be located in the attractions, but in resistance to temptation. He pastors by the language of Trent, “they now fight any temptation stemming from these attractions by the power of the Spirit because they have been washed in the blood of Christ.” Desire and attraction are not the same as lust in Zulegar’s estimation:

Someone attracted to the same sex, like someone attracted to the opposite sex, does not mean giving themselves over to sinful lust or to sinful sexual activity outside of the God-ordained covenant of marriage. . . . Sin is serious. But, same-sex attraction does not necessarily equal practice or indulgence. . . . That means, if same sex-attraction does not equal same-sex lustful indulgence, then it would be unbiblical to exclude people with same-sex attraction from ministry positions if they are qualified.

Zulegar’s progression of thought is clear. Flat Earth Sexuality must in principle claim equal moral experience for the homosexual and the heterosexual. Once this equality is established, a haven is made for LGBTQ+ attraction by exonerating it.⁹² LGBTQ+ attraction is not the same as “sinful lust,” “indulgence” or “lustful indulgence” in Zulegar’s view. Note his qualifiers attending “lust.” Plain old lust never gets mentioned; only sinful, indulgent lust seems to be the problem. James 1:14-15 indicates that lust, all by itself, is a deadly sin.⁹³ Flat Earth Sexuality, like Roman Catholicism, classifies it as corruption, fallenness, disease, disorder, misfiring or some other euphemism. Zulegar even says “all manner of sin lives in us,” but clearly he understands such sinfulness in terms of an equalizing general disorder and leveling ailment

⁸⁹ Dave Zulegar, “Does Same-Sex Attraction Disqualify Someone from Ministry?” Desiring God, March 16, 2016. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-same-sex-attraction-diqualify-someone-from-ministry> (accessed March 14, 2019).

⁹⁰ Ibid. All further quotes will be from this source until otherwise noted.

⁹¹ LGBTQ+ attraction completely disappearing is not the promise of the Gospel. If, however, one is truly born again, that saint is called to active, daily repentance against sinful lusts.

⁹² Flat Earth Sexuality essentially consists of two false doctrines applied to LGBTQ+ attraction: 1) Sinless Concupiscence, i.e. “No-Fault-Lust.” 2) Moral Equivalency, i.e. Unvariegated Nomism / Equal Depravity.

⁹³ “For that which, in the form of an innate and corrupt disposition incites to actual sin, is thereby shewn to be Original Sin. But the evil against which the regenerate are constantly striving, is not merely a disease . . . but a rebellious principle which, in its very nature, leads to condemnation. . . . Concupiscence is an evil deserving the hatred of both God and man, therefore it is sin.” Davenant, 128-129.

of the curse. Many others think the same way.⁹⁴ Once desires, even inordinate, corrupted, fallen desires, are excused from culpability, any call to repent from those desires seems itself inordinate.⁹⁵ What does the scripture say? *“To the law and to the testimony!” (Isaiah 8:20)*. How should we understand of temptation in light of our own damnable lusts?

Relationship of Lust and Temptation. James shows we are tempted by our own lusts. If these lusts, preceding the will, are sinless, what moral character does temptation have? Arising from mere corruption, is temptation merely corrupt? Is temptation, like sexual orientation, a misfire? Yet we have seen that lust is sin. Indeed, involuntary concupiscence kills and damns. Since temptation arises from a man’s own damnable sin, how should he view temptation? Temptation itself is a sin. Every temptation is a lie fueled by lust, a deceitful enticement, and an attempted seduction of the will.

When Brett the bully is tempted to steal Orville’s lunch money, Brett has not actually committed theft. He has not sinned by stealing. He has not even yet sinned by willfully indulging in covetous daydreams—happily playing out his violent redistribution scheme in his head. The temptation to steal arises from his lust. Brett’s heart is depraved. His inner man simmers with concupiscence, original sin. Brett is tempted by his own sin. Brett begins to think, “Orville always has enough money for breakfast, lunch and a snack. I’ve even seen him give away extra money. I never have enough. Orville only likes vest-wearing geeks like him. He doesn’t like me and I don’t like him. I’ve never taken anything from him before. I can keep him quiet. I won’t get into trouble.” The temptation enticing Brett’s will to commit the sin of theft must argue against God’s law written on his heart (*Romans 2:14-15*). The temptation must deceive, must lie, and must employ irrational inducements and attractive absurdities. Brett lies to himself from his own lust until he believes and acts.

Temptation to sin in a particular way is not that particular sin, but temptation is a sin. Deceitfully lying to someone, artfully persuading that person to disobey God is a sin. It is a sin if you tempt someone else. It is a sin if you tempt yourself. Each man must deal with his sinful concupiscence so as to avoid temptation where possible. Here, we focus on “self-temptation.” James is talking about self-temptation. It arises from personal lust to entice our wills unto conceiving more sin. Self-temptation is itself not a willful act, but can be avoided by the regenerate will’s active prevention. Self-temptation can also be arrested and defeated by the repentant will’s active combat.

Paul commands an appropriate level of sanctifying introspection, *“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (Galatians 6:1)*. A man cannot keep Satan or the world from tempting him. He *can* look to himself. By wise and skillful acts he may avoid temptation from his own lust. Paul actually makes us responsible for

⁹⁴ C. S. Lewis, for example, wrongly compares those with homosexual desires with the man born blind in John 9:1-3, saying, “every disability conceals a vocation, if only we find it, which would ‘turn the necessity to glorious gain.’” What vocation does Lewis recommend? Singleness and abstinence to the glory of God. Repentance from sinful desire is never mentioned. This lack of repentance stains the whole tablecloth of flat earth sexuality. C. S. Lewis, “CS Lewis on Homosexuality,” *Living Out*. <https://www.livingout.org/resources/cs-lewis-on-homosexuality> (accessed March 12, 2019).

⁹⁵ Greg Johnson is genuinely perplexed by the notion of repenting from unlawful sexual desire. See fn. 23.

avoiding temptation, not just the giving in to temptation. Those who are truly spiritual are expected to oppose their inward lust and thereby eliminate temptations.

Peter makes clear the necessity of this saintly combat, "*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*" (1 Peter 2:11). Our own lusts wage war upon us. Shall we draw near to hear deceitful enticements or willfully stay away, find our range and fire holy missiles at the sin within us? Peter would have remembered in writing this verse the words of Christ, when He woke His sleeping followers in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). Christ did not see temptation as a neutral experience. He told His disciples to do what they must to avoid temptation arising from their own flesh. We are responsible for our own temptations, not God. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

James 1:16

"*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.*" The Spirit's symmetry in James 1:13-16 grabs us by both ears. Prohibited actively at the beginning, passively at the last, we are responsible for both what we say and believe. James writes "*Let no one say...*" then writes "*do not be deceived.*" These two commands stand in parallel. They serve as bookends for his densely packed treatise on sin in verses 14-15. Do not lie. Do not believe lies. Such deception must not be allowed to persist in Christians. James writes to believers, as his "*beloved brethren.*" He makes each believer responsible concerning deception. Those born again by the word of truth must live in the truth (James 1:18).

We are morally responsible for what we believe. We may assume that if a deceiver leads us astray, we are not to blame. Yet Eve still perished when, deceived by Satan, she disobeyed God's law. She was culpable. We are morally responsible if we believe God is a rock in the shape of a tree, no matter how convincing the Rock-Tree priestess was in her belly-dance.

What particular deceptions does James warn against? The scope of the first prohibition encircles the crosshairs of the second prohibition. When James, led by the Spirit, feels the need to say, "Stop lying about your temptations" we know it is because the believers to whom he writes believe false teaching about their temptations. Jesus knows how we operate, "*the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*" (Matthew 12:34). James also knows if we believe wrong things about lust, temptation, sin and God we will claim wrong things about their definitions and relationships. The deceptions we publically affirm arise from the deceptions we privately believe. If we say, for instance, that God led us into same-sex temptation because He made us to enjoy beauty, we have believed several falsehoods, not least of which is blaming God.

We must not be deceived about lust. This covetousness, desiring what God forbids, is sin. This concupiscence, this original sin, is diabolical, death-laden, damning sin. We must not be deceived about temptation. Deceitful enticements unto sin are themselves sins. To make God the agent of temptation in any way is to deny His holiness, goodness and righteousness. We must not be deceived about sin. Sin is not restricted to the exercise of the human will. Sin, allowed to ferment at the lust and temptation stage, will soon intoxicate and finally kill. It is not easy to hear, but Matthew Henry says it well, "Your own heart's lusts and corruptions are your tempters; and when by degrees they have carried you off from God, and finished the power

and dominion of sin in you, then they will prove your destroyers.”⁹⁶ Sin must be fought against early and at all times. We are responsible for our own lusts, temptations, sin and death, not God. Henry sounds the horn of truth again, “And this will justify God for ever in their damnation, that they destroyed themselves. Their sin lies at their own door, and therefore their blood will lie upon their own heads.”⁹⁷ Who can afford to be deceived about lust, temptation and sin?

Notice James’s motivation in writing verses 13-16. He cares for his brethren. He loves his fellow believers. James loves the brethren, so he tells them the truth about their lust, temptation and sin so that they will not continue to deceive or be deceived. My former pastor was fond of telling his congregation, “those who love you the most, tell you the most truth.” The wisdom of this saying may be immediately authenticated when reflecting upon the fact that God sent His Son into the world. God’s most loving act toward us, sending His Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior, is combined with God’s most revealing act concerning truth (*John 3:16-21; 14:6; 18:37; Ephesians 4:21; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 John 4:8-10*).

When Jesus desired to affirm how much He loved his disciples, He pointed to all the truth He had spoken to them, “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (*John 15:15*). Jesus then goes on to talk about His choice of them, His love for them, and their love for Him and one another. He taught that although His followers would suffer persecution, they may take comfort in the fact that He was also persecuted. Then Christ comforts His followers, affirming His loving provision for them through the Holy Spirit, Who is called “*the Spirit of truth*” (*John 15:26*).

Ultimately, this paper is written to my beloved brethren. I love my church. I love Christ’s Church. Contending for the truth by exposing the deceit of Flat Earth Sexuality is a loving effort. Contending for the truth builds a genuine community of beloved brethren. Agreeing to disagree about Flat Earth Sexuality is not an option. As R. C. Sproul once winsomely stated, “If we disagree doctrinally that’s a bad thing, but we can’t be satisfied with it, because truth is too important to kill it in the streets for the sake of peace.”⁹⁸

Stories of Temptation

How do the truths about lust, temptation and sin from James 1:13-16 play out in real life? Do we accurately understand the contours of the temptation experience both resisted and affirmed? There are many stories in the Bible which plainly demonstrate the natures and relationship of temptation and sin: Achan’s covetousness at Jericho, Amnon’s lust for Tamar, and Ahab’s coveting of Naboth’s vineyard come to mind. The three stories which are most well-known and most helpful are Christ’s temptation in the wilderness by Satan, David’s lusting for Bathsheba and Joseph’s temptation by Potiphar’s wife. Each of these stories offers helpful insight concerning temptation and sin. The most misunderstood, the most erroneously interpreted is, unsurprisingly, the temptation of Christ. No one has been more defamed,

⁹⁶ Henry, 782.

⁹⁷ Henry, 782.

⁹⁸ R. C. Sproul, “Let’s Talk Post-Modernism and the Emergent Church...” YouTube, accessed 4.3.19 (<https://www.youtube.be/gv6uxCch7oc?t=431>).

slandered and just plain lied about than Jesus. The deceiver's best work, his most ardent labor, his most convoluted conspiracies all have the person and work of Jesus as his aim. In his warring, Satan is one of the most Christ-centered beings in the universe.⁹⁹

The Temptation of Christ

Matthew, Mark and Luke all write about the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness.¹⁰⁰ While Mark's account amounts to a brief summary, Matthew and Luke tell the story in great detail. Christ's battle by the Spirit and the Scriptures with the damned tempter has long served as both encouragement and exhortation for Christ's people. We gain a galaxy of help from this passage in our fight against lust, temptation and sin. There is one particular wrong-headed interpretation we must file under "sounds good, but untrue." Earlier in this paper I quoted Caleb Kaltenbach as saying, "If temptation were sin, then that means Jesus sinned when he was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days."¹⁰¹

What actually happens in Matthew's account of this temptation? Who is tempting whom? "*And the tempter came and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'*" (Matthew 4:3). The devil then tempts Christ two more times before leaving. Are these temptations from God? No. We know from James that God does not tempt anyone. Are these temptations from Christ's own heart? No. The Second Adam does not have original sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He has original righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5-6). As the Second Person of the Godhead in human flesh, He is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). As the devil tempted Adam and Eve, so he tempted Christ in hopes of destroying His bride. The devil deceitfully enticed Jesus Christ to sin. Is this action of the devil sinless? No. I believe Caleb would agree with me that the devil sinned against Christ, especially in light of Christ's rebuke to Satan, "*On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the LORD your God to the test'*" (Matthew 4:7).

It is true that Christ never sinned while being tempted by Satan. When others tempt us, they sin not us. What is missing from Caleb's observation? He fails to note the differences between the sinless Christ and sinful man. He fails to note the sources of temptation. He fails to note the moral quality of temptation itself. These are easy oversights. How often have I counseled someone, "Temptation isn't sin. Don't beat yourself up about temptations." James Montgomery Boice is not alone in his pastoral exhortations, "As long as the temptation to sin is merely in the mind and the sin itself is not performed, there is room for victory. Indeed, there is room for perfect victory, for the temptation itself is not sin. But what if I *do* sin? Ah, then the battle is lost."¹⁰² Such ministrations focus on the moral distinction between the temptation and the actual sin. This is right and true. What about the moral quality of the temptation itself? Would any true follower of Christ fail to label deceitful enticement as sin?

Christ's temptation by the devil teaches us, among many other things, it is a sin to tempt someone to sin. The devil sinned against Christ in this way. The devil sins against us when he

⁹⁹ I suspect that Satan is far more "Christ-Centered," far more aware of Who Christ is and what His reign means, than many "Christ-Centered" programs, ministries and churches.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁰¹ Caleb Kaltenbach, 195.

¹⁰² James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary*. Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2006), 923.

tempts us to sin. The seducer sins against the object of his lust when he tempts her to commit adultery. The fool sins against her friend when she tempts her to secretly rebel against her parents. The sinner sins against himself when he tempts himself. While we learn a great deal about our necessary spiritual combat against the enemy and temptation from Christ's wilderness temptation, we should not apply the wrong lesson. We should not point to the sinlessness of Christ and then say, "Our temptations are never sin."

One reason why this interpretation gains so much validity is the way two passages in Hebrews are commonly read. How can we think adequately about Christ's temptations without considering the following passage?

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18).

The Preacher to the Hebrews looks at Christ's temptation in what He suffered as the propitiation for His people's sins. Certainly, God the Son had to empty Himself by taking on full humanity, becoming like His brethren in all things. He knew hunger as we know hunger. He knew mortal weakness as we know mortal weakness. This was essential for His service as the perfect Mediator, the merciful and faithful High Priest. However, He did not know original sin as we do. If He was made like us in our concupiscence, self-temptations and sin, He could not have been our High Priest or perfect, bloody propitiation. It is precisely because He is fully like us in our God-created humanity *and* fully unlike our sin-soaked fallen state that He so ably redeems and rescues those who are tempted.

Does this passage teach us that temptation is not sin at all in any respect? Does this passage look at temptation as sinless? Can we extrapolate from this passage that because Christ was tempted like we are, and Christ was sinless, therefore our temptations are sinless? This passage actually does not say that Christ was tempted in the same exact circumstances as us. This passage makes it clear we need propitiation, redemption, salvation. Why?

We are those who are tempted. If temptation is sinless, why is it something we need rescue from? Far from exonerating temptation, this passage tells us that Christ's death and resurrection takes aim at our temptations, to defeat them. Having suffered for our sins, He knows personally what temptations we each struggle with. As our merciful High Priest, He will faithfully see us through every sanctifying moment to glory. He knows how to get us there. He is not going to fail to ultimately deliver us from the ensnaring sins for which He's already atoned.

Another passage in Hebrews takes up the same themes of Christ's priesthood, His completed atoning work, incarnate identity, sinlessness and help for those tempted:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of

grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

The text states that Jesus, the Son of God, as our High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses. What weaknesses are these? Is it that Jesus knows what it is like to be hungry, thirsty, cold and tired? Is it that Jesus knows what it is like to be disappointed, frustrated and betrayed?

We certainly affirm that Jesus, in the fullness of His humanity, experienced the frailty of the human body and the pathos of human emotions. But the term “weakness” can also speak of something which Jesus never experienced. The word, “*astheneiais*” is used right away again to speak of the earthly high priest who is “beset with weakness” (*Hebrews 5:2*). This imperfection is in contrast with Jesus, Who is the Heavenly High Priest. The preacher clarifies this again *For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28)*.

We are intellectually and morally weak, ever falling into sin. This is exactly why we need a great High Priest. The lie, “Someone can only sympathize with me and help me if he has experienced the exact same terrible time and deeply rooted attractions I have” has no place in our interpretation of this verse.

The whole idea of Christ being an effective High Priest Who can actually help us, is that He has blazed the trail through suffering to glory as the architect of our salvation. He has gone through a life of suffering, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, all without sin. He must be all at once one of us and above us to be of any help to us. It has been pointed out that the Sinless One knows the force of temptation in a way that we who sin do not. We give in before the temptation has fully spent itself; only He who does not yield knows its full force. F. F. Bruce writes, “Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that mankind could endure, without any weakening of his faith in God or any relaxation of his obedience to Him. Such endurance involves more, not less, than ordinary human suffering.”¹⁰³

There is no need to profess the sinlessness of temptation when reflecting upon Christ’s temptations. Actually, there is the need to profess the sinlessness of Christ when reflecting upon Christ’s temptations. This is what the Preacher to the Hebrews does when he refers to Christ as, “*One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (*Hebrews 4:15*).

There is similarity and dissimilarity. He has been tempted in all things as we have been, yet His temptations were sinless. This declaration does not severely limit sin to the willful act—giving into temptation. We learn here that Jesus’s experience of temptation was without sin entirely. He knew no sin in His involuntary affections, and no sin from any form of self-temptation.

How different from our own struggles with temptation is this? Our experience of temptation, in light of James 1:13-16 and other passages, cannot be understood without reference to sin. Our original sin in the form of concupiscence gives rise to self-temptation, a sinful deceit. The devil and the world find an ally of indwelling sin in us when tempting us. We have only known temptation in close relationship to sin.

There’s no need to deny these truths, or, by association with Christ, to claim sinless affections and sinless temptation for ourselves. The Spirit declares good news, Christ ran the

¹⁰³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1990), 116.

full gauntlet of temptation “yet without sin!” He really is a worthy Savior, One truly powerful enough to help us who face temptation always with sin. What about examples of men like us, who knew temptation in their sins?

The Temptation of David

David’s adultery with Bathsheba makes for a riveting study on lust, temptation and sin. David’s diabolical schemes caution the best of believers; let those who think they stand, take heed lest they also fall. For our purposes, we will concentrate on the beginning motions of this avalanche of sin:

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house (2 Samuel 11:1-4).

After Goliath, no other person factored more prominently in David’s story than Bathsheba. David’s victory over the giant marked the beginning of his rise to power. David’s defeat concerning Bathsheba marked the beginning of his decline in power. Both stories have been mined for the smallest factors which contributed to David’s victory and defeat. No smooth stone has been left unturned in understanding David’s success. No angle has been left unviewed in understanding David’s failure.

Matthew Henry’s analysis of David’s adultery proves typical. Observing David’s choice to remain at home from the war and his rising from bed in the late afternoon, he cites “neglect of his business” and “love of ease” as contributing factors to David’s fall. These two choices may not necessarily indicate bad decision making. David was at one point encouraged for good reason to stay home from battle (2 Samuel 21:17). It would not be uncommon for the people of the ancient near east to take a siesta. Neither choice must be seen as a negative. David’s trouble did not start so much with his downtime as his sightline.

The point of temptation and sin is found in between verses two and three. At the end of verse two David saw a very beautiful woman bathing. Sight is emphasized in verse two with the same root word occurring twice as “saw” and “appearance.” God made Bathsheba attractive. David could not deny that. He could deny himself what God had prohibited, a woman not his wife. He could have followed the wisdom of Job, “*I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?*” (Job 31:1).

As we noted from Genesis three, attractiveness and attraction do not cohabit in one moral bedroom. David is not inexorably drawn to Bathsheba’s beauty, helplessly wanting to stay and enjoy her, experience her, become part of her forever. His lust, enflamed by his eyes, gave rise to self-temptation.

What happens in David's heart during the white space between verses two and three is all important. Rather than turn away from the sight, David wanted to know more. As soon as we hear David ask around for her number we know his will is conspiring with his own lust's temptation. David, like Eve, crossed the line from noticing beauty to desiring what God prohibited. God made the forbidden tree and its fruit attractive. Noticing its beauty is not the same as desiring to rebel against God by eating of it.

There is a distinction made between noticing the attractiveness of something God has made and being attracted to that which God has forbidden. King David saw that Bathsheba was beautiful. This was not sinful. His pursuit of her was sinful. He sinned in the lust of his heart, in the lies of his temptation, in the capitulation of his will and in the act of adultery.

The Temptation of Joseph

We now come to a third famous and helpful story about lust, temptation and sin. Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers. Purchased by Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, Joseph succeeded in his master's house for one reason—the LORD was with him. Joseph proved so successful Potiphar left everything in Joseph's charge. Being the man about the house, the woman of the house saw a lot of Joseph. She liked what she saw:

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside (Genesis 39:6b-12).

Potiphar's wife desired what God prohibited. Joseph told her so. Joseph made it clear that she wanted him to sin against Potiphar, against her and against God. Joseph called wickedness by its real names, "evil" and "sin." Undeterred, Potiphar's wife persistently attempted to seduce him, and Joseph resisted temptation day after day. How did he succeed at the first? Not merely by refusing to lie with her or to be with her, but by refusing even to listen to her. This is instructive for us.¹⁰⁴

Her seductions must have had some impact on Joseph. Her proposals worked on some level. Her prominence in the household held sway, her tireless persistence wore down, and her natural beauty shouted for attention. Then, when she added the cloak of privacy and the

¹⁰⁴ Edwards writes, "This behaviour of Joseph is doubtless recorded for the instruction of all. Therefore from the words I shall observe, that it is our duty, not only to avoid those things that are themselves sinful, but also, as far as may be, those things that lead and expose to sin." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 2 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 227.

dagger of touch, “he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” (Genesis 39:12, KJV). No one else would get him out of her clutches, so he got himself out. This is how he succeeded at the last. By fleeing, Joseph not only defeated her temptation but he also mortified his lust within. He got himself out. Why did he not entertain her proposals? James Montgomery Boice points at Joseph’s principles, “If he had not had his principles straight before Mrs. Potiphar accosted him, he might have paused to try and think through the matter, and his delay would have been fatal.”¹⁰⁵

Eve offered the forbidden fruit to Adam. He took from her and ate. Potiphar’s wife offered herself to Joseph. He took off and ran. God had made the tree and fruit attractive. God had made Potiphar’s wife attractive. God prohibited the fruit. God prohibited another man’s wife. Any desire for what God has prohibited is covetousness, yes, lust. Adam accepted the fruit as the fulfillment of his lust. Joseph ran from Potiphar’s wife like a bat out of Hell. She was Death and Hell clutching his sleeve. Jonathan Edwards writes, “He not only refused her, but fled from her, as he would have done from one that was going to assassinate him; he escaped as for his life. . . . Every sin naturally carries hell in it! Therefore all sin ought to be treated by us as we would treat a thing that is infinitely terrible.”¹⁰⁶

Joseph models what Paul promises the Corinthian church, struggling against such sexual sins as incest, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, divorce and effeminacy:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:13-14).

Temptation may overtake us, but God will not let it overwhelm us. If we succumb to temptation we failed to flee. God offers us escape from temptation, not a lifestyle of remaining in temptation.

Summary

We have properly understood the relationship between lust, temptation and sin. We have biblically defined these terms. We have tested the concepts of attractiveness and attraction in the context of Genesis 1-3. We have examined the meanings of lust, temptation and sin in James 1:13-16. We have seen clear examples of all three in critical moments of Jesus, David and Joseph. Flat Earth Sexuality’s first departure from Total Depravity has been addressed. There’s no such thing as “no-fault lust.” Sinless concupiscence is a dangerous myth, a worldly fable fit only for old women. Along the way we have been given pastoral help in addressing our indwelling sin, self-temptation and external temptations. Now, it is time to address the second departure of Flat Earth Sexuality from the doctrine of Total Depravity. This

¹⁰⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*. Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2006), 924.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, 227, 228.

departure may be described as “Moral Equivalency,” “Unvariegated Nomism” or “Equal Depravity.” Is all sin equally sinful to God?

BIBLICAL DISTINCTIONS

As we move forward in biblically responding to Flat Earth Sexuality it will help to revisit that fantastic claim made by Christopher Asmus on Desiring God’s blog, “Whether gay or straight, married or unmarried, single or dating, everyone lives in some state of sexual and emotional dissatisfaction and unfulfillment. We all are sexually broken. When it comes to sexuality, the earth is flat.”¹⁰⁷

This trio of sentences comes flashing by us like a well-dressed, time-conscious rodent. Like Alice, should we descend through the rabbit hole, we would find prostitution, sodomy, incest, orgies, necrophilia, bestiality, pedophilia and rape all on Kansas’ level land. These would be considered as equally depraved as the faithful, fruitful sexuality treasured by a godly husband and wife, indeed, dead level with the chaste virgin Mary, explaining the facts of life to the angel Gabriel.

Charitably, I hold no doubts that Mr. Asmus stands outside the rabbit hole and levels in his mind all currently acceptable sexuality. But are the sexual feelings, experiences and expressions of mankind all equally broken in the sight of the Holy Maker? Is there no moral distinction between one kind of sexuality and another, between one sexual pursuit and another?

Haydn Sennitt wrote an interesting article for The Gospel Coalition in 2012. It was removed sometime late in 2018. He is obviously conflicted in his thinking. He has drunk the Flat Earth Sexuality Kool-aide, but it leaves a weird aftertaste. Quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 as proof, he writes:

In God's view of sin being equally offensive as other sins, homosexuality is not all that special. . . . For some, this is good news: homosexuality is no worse than other sins in the eyes of God, as all sin is equally punishable. I'm no better or worse a person for having SSA. I'm no more or less broken than anyone else simply because of the particular manifestation of my brokenness. I am no more or less saved because of it, and I need no extra portion of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁸

The last sentence is true. Every other sentence is false.

Sennitt, like every other advocate for Flat Earth Sexuality, abuses the meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. We’ll be dealing with the misuse of this passage below. Sennitt, however, is conflicted. This sugar-free Kool-aide leaves a weird finish. How does he account for the reality of LGBTQ+ attraction?

¹⁰⁷ Asmus, “Satisfied in the Arms of Another.”

¹⁰⁸ Haydn Sennitt “The Unique Struggle of Same Sex Attraction” The Gospel Coalition, 9.13.12. (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-unique-struggle-of-same-sex-attraction/>) accessed 10.26.18. All following quotes are from the same source until noted otherwise.

He writes the following, "Same-sex attraction, though, is almost doubly harmful because it involves lusting after people who are not the natural object of sexual attraction. In other words, those with SSA struggle not only against lust but also to an unnatural form of lust." While on the one hand Sennitt claims all sin is the same, on the other hand he knows some lusts are worse than others. Here is a man afflicted with confusion. Biblical definitions have been stolen from his mind. Sympathetically he quotes another person identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted:

I would like to comment on the notion that . . . homosexuality should not be treated as being bigger than most other issues. It should be, because it speaks to the very identity of a person. Stealing or pride does not inherently prevent me from mating and having children. They do not cripple my sense of manhood and intrinsically modify my every relationship. [Same-sex attraction] does. So there should rightly be a greater cry and more rallying call to aid and support those who deal with it as our daily and nightly, often hellish companion.

We must stop exonerating perverse lusts with intersectional euphemisms. We must call sin by name.¹⁰⁹ We must define sin and holiness, iniquity and righteousness by God's standards rather than man's standards. When we do this, we can mercifully rescue some from the fire hating the garment stained by the flesh (*Jude 1:22-23*). There is no savior for crippling, hellish attractions. There is a Savior for sinners. He will wash them with His blood, forgiving and cleansing them from their sins (*Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:7-10*).

God's Standards vs. Man's Standards

In his book, *The Holiness of God*, R. C. Sproul writes on the insanity of Martin Luther, describing it as genius. Whereas we might take comfort in the fact that all fall short of God's standard, Luther knew God would never lower His standards. Sproul writes:

He realized that if God graded on a curve, He would have to compromise His own holiness. To count on God doing so is supreme arrogance and supreme foolishness as well. God does not lower His own standards to accommodate us. He remains altogether holy, altogether righteous, and altogether just.¹¹⁰

God's standards are different from man's standards. God spoke through the mercenary prophet Balaam to the stubborn king, Balak, "*God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?*" (*Numbers 23:19*). God will not change His standards. His word through Balaam

¹⁰⁹ Boice writes, "The problem with these attempts to justify sin by renaming it is that they conflict with reality. By that I mean, call it what you will, sin is still sin and it will operate destructively as sin regardless of your nomenclature." James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*. Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 920.

¹¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 107-108.

makes for good evidence of His immutability. Man will rationalize, euphemize, equivocate and accommodate. Balaam's career with Moab and Midian is good evidence of mankind's corruption (*Numbers 22-25, 31:8, 16*).

As we have seen, our definition of sin must be tied to the unchangeable character of God expressed in His law. Sin cannot be rightly understood as anything other than divergence from God's immutable virtue. Should our definition of sin be anchored to the human experience, we will soon find ourselves theologically adrift. We must make a Biblical distinction between God's standards and man's standards, between God's character and man's character.

God's Immutable Character

The comfort and exhortation of God's unchangeable perfection should inform all our thinking. Sexuality, sin and the Church's mission are but squirming bacteria on a slide, to be examined through the perfectly tuned microscope of God's immutable character. Mankind flails about in religion, philosophy and morality like a drunk in an inflatable bouncy castle. You never know just what direction he'll go next. Man is a changing, contingent creature corrupted by sin.

God fundamentally differs from mankind in that God is self-existent, not contingent. God is creator not creature. God is immutable, not changing. These three attributes of God hang together. Their glory evokes our praise as Isaac Watts shows in a hymn:

From thy great self thy being springs;
Thou art thy own original;
Made up of uncreated things,
And self-sufficiency bears them all.
Thy voice produc'd the seas and spheres,
Bid the waves roar, and planets shine;
But nothing like thyself appears,
Thro' all these spacious works of thine.
Still restless nature dies and grows,
From change to change the creatures run:
Thy being no succession knows,
And all thy vast designs are one.¹¹¹

Where did Watts get such poetic inspiration? Scripture repeatedly attests to the creative power, aseity and immutability of God:

Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end (Psalm 102:25-27).

¹¹¹ Isaac Watts, *The Psalms and Hymns of the Late Dr. Isaac Watts*. Vol. 2. Ed. Robert Goodacre. (London: Francis Westly, 1821), 7.

God governs creation. As Creator, He is not governed. God changes us. As Maker, He is unchanging. Commenting on this passage, Stephen Charnock writes, "All things else are tottering; God . . . remains fixed and immovable; His wisdom and power, His knowledge and will, are always the same."¹¹²

God's Perfection

This perfection extends infinitely to the full measure of His character. Charnock defines God's immutability and its scope, "God is unchangeable in His essence, nature, and perfections. . . . Immutability is a glory belonging to all the attributes of God."¹¹³ God's goodness, holiness and righteousness are immutable. "*God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5). He is so pure and holy no man may approach Him other than by the Mediator, Jesus Christ (*Habakkuk 1:13; 1 Timothy 6:16; John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5*).

God's perfection never changes, no matter how altered our circumstances become. James reminds those undergoing trials, "*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*" (*James 1:17*). God is Light and His light never dims, no matter what sky we walk under. Calvin comments on this verse:

God is called the *Father of lights*, as possessing all excellency and the highest dignity. And when he immediately adds, that there is in him *no shadow of turning*, he continues the metaphor; so that we may not measure the brightness of God by the irradiation of the sun which appears to us.¹¹⁴

We are constantly reminded of God's constancy in character and His perfection in purpose throughout Scripture. "*But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases*" (*Psalms 115:3*). What a wonder that all He pleases is constantly, perfectly good! "*You are good and do good*" (*Psalms 119:68*). Indeed, it is to the good of faithless mankind that God remains faithful. "*For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed*" (*Malachi 3:6*). At the heart of the Gospel is the fact that the immutably just Creator is satisfied in the unchangingly righteous Mediator, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (*Hebrews 13:8*).

What does the immutable perfection of God have to do with Flat Earth Sexuality? If we are going to trace the shape of sin in our lives and in our culture, we need a straight edge. God's unchanging character gives us that objective standard. God's perfections are unfailingly revealed without error in Holy Scripture. Sin is thoroughly and deeply exposed by this living and active word (*Hebrews 4:12*).

¹¹² Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 316.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 317-8.

¹¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. Tr. and Ed. John Owen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005), 291. (His *emphasis*).

God's Law

God bases His law on His own character and nature expressed by His name. His pattern is evidenced at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Before He issues a single command, He bases all of them on His identity, "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*" (*Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6*). This pattern continues throughout the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. God says, "I am the LORD" seventy-five times in the Torah (forty-nine of these are in Leviticus) and sixty-seven times in Ezekiel alone.

Why does He repeat His name so often? God did not forget Who He was. His creatures forgot Who God was. What commandments and judgments He has to say need to be grounded in Who the LORD Is. All of His prohibitions on vengeance, His provision for property rights, His standards for justice in the courts, His instructions for ritual purity and His prohibitions on perverse sexuality begin with this one fact, "I am the LORD." His immutable goodness informs His eternal commandments (*Psalms 19:7-10*). Such perfection stands in stark relief to the moral flailing of mankind.

Our understanding of sin cannot be attached to mankind's aggregate experience of shalom or one's personal experience of human flourishing. An absolute standard is needed. Bavinck writes:

According to Scripture God is the sum total of all perfections (metaphysical goodness). All virtues are present in Him in an absolute sense. . . . He always aims at Himself because He cannot rest in anything other than Himself. Inasmuch as He Himself is the absolutely good and perfect one, He may not love anything else except with a view to Himself. He may not and cannot be content with less than absolute perfection.¹¹⁵

God's law displays His absolute virtue, revealing our sin (*Romans 3:19-20*). Jesus Christ reveals God to us in all His perfect character, fulfilling the law, flawlessly satisfying the justice of God (*John 1:17-18; Romans 3:21-26; 10:3-4*).

God demands nothing less than absolute perfection because of His righteous self-orientation. How else can sin be measured other than by falling short of His glory? How else can God's offended justice be satisfied than by the fullness of His own perfections? So we see the importance of rightly defining sin according to God's immutable character. Our understanding of salvation depends on it. God's standards are higher than man's standards.

Man's Moral Contingency

We have seen throughout this paper that Flat Earth Sexuality claims equal depravity for sexual feelings, expressions and experiences. All human beings are sexually broken. Though this brokenness manifests in various ways, the degree of brokenness is equal to us all. At the same time Flat Earth Sexuality claims that such brokenness, even when manifested as effeminacy, lesbianism and homosexuality, should not be considered worse than other sins like greed. Later on we will hear how Flat Earth Sexuality at times will view certain sins as worse than others, but the reasoning will need to be examined.

¹¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*. Vol. 2. Ed. John Bolt, Tr. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 211.

How will we measure the weight of sin? How can we distinguish between the moral experience of one sexual feeling and another? Does mankind innately possess a precise moral compass by which we may chart the degrees of sin? Such questions incite us to carefully discern the source of our moral claims. Will morality campaigns trending on the internet determine our moral bearings? Will poignant anecdotes of urgent human interest define our moral categories? Will your personal history plot the course of your moral journey?

Created Contingency

Made in God's image we deeply care about right and wrong. In this we are like God. Unlike God, we are contingent. Charnock writes, "God is a necessary Being; He is necessarily what He is, and, therefore, is unchangeably what He is. Mutability belongs to contingency."¹¹⁶ In this regard, one could hardly stress a greater divergence between God and those He made in His image. Paul informs the idolatrous philosophers of Athens accordingly:

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things... for in Him we live and move and exist (Acts 17:24-25, 28a).

God is life. By Him we live. God is the giver. We only receive from Him. God needs nothing, and so never changes. Our comprehensive list of needs—life, breath and all things—continually fluctuate. We are ever changing. It is precisely in this contrast, made starkly manifest by the Scriptures, that we come to know the glory of God in His creation and providence. A. W. Tozer observed, "The immutability of God appears in its most perfect beauty when viewed against the mutability of men. In God no change is possible; in men change is impossible to escape."¹¹⁷

Man, due to his finiteness and depravity, cannot serve as his own moral arbiter. Consider Adam's righteous state. Before he sinned, Adam's moral consciousness worked perfectly. God made mankind very good. Nonetheless, Adam was dependent upon God for moral revelation. Made in the image of God, Adam could not make sense of right and wrong without reference to his Creator. In fact, from the beginning, God issued special revelation with moral consequences:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:15-17).

How would have Adam known which tree was forbidden, or that any very good tree was forbidden? Adam derived his morality from God, not from his own innate goodness. Cornelius Van Til maintains man's contingency, "Even in its original perfect condition the moral

¹¹⁶ Charnock, 318-9.

¹¹⁷ John Blanchard, *More Gathered Gold*. (Welwyn, Herfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1986), 113.

consciousness of man was derivative and not the ultimate source of information as to what is good.”¹¹⁸ The finiteness of the good creature meant he must depend on the revelation of the good Creator.

Depraved Dependency

If the righteous man exercised his morality contingently, how much more dependent is the depraved man? Has mankind’s moral vision improved since Eden? Consider God’s moral assessments of mankind bracketing the global flood, “*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth;*” (Genesis 6:5; 8:21b). Commenting on Genesis 6:5 and 8:21, John Murray surveys the totality of man’s depravity:

There is the *intensity*—‘The wickedness of man was great in the earth’; there is the *inwardness*—‘the imagination of the thoughts of his heart’, an expression unsurpassed in the usage of Scripture to indicate that the most rudimentary movement of thought was evil; there is the *totality*—‘every imagination’; there is the *constancy*—‘continually’; there is the *exclusiveness*—‘only evil’; there is the *early manifestation*—‘from his youth.’¹¹⁹

What ability then does depraved man have to accurately assess what is pleasing to God? The Apostle Paul affirms the polarization, “*the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God*” (Romans 8:7-8). Passages like these from Genesis and Romans, along with many others, formed the basis for the doctrine of Total Depravity articulated by the Reformed church. The Canons of Dort III and IV state the effect of the fall on human nature in Article 1:

Man was originally formed after the image of God. his understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole man was holy. But revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and by his own free will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and in the place thereof became involved in blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked rebellious and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.¹²⁰

Meaningful moral differentiation or equivocation requires an accurate objective standard. Sinful man certainly cannot provide this of his own reason, nature, affections or experiences. Van Til writes, “The doctrine of the *total depravity* of man makes it plain that the

¹¹⁸ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*. 4th Ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 76.

¹¹⁹ John Murray, “Sin”, in *New Bible Dictionary*. J. D. Douglas et. al. Eds. (London: Intervarsity Fellowship, 1962), 1191-2. (His *emphasis*.)

¹²⁰ *The Canons of Dort*. (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2010), 21.

moral consciousness of man as he is today cannot be the source of information about what is ideal good or about what is the standard of the good.”¹²¹ Untainted mankind, enjoying original righteousness, knew right from wrong contingently. Depraved mankind, with darkened mind, will and affections, offers no reliable standard. What about regenerated mankind?

Regenerate Receptivity

While we can easily see the folly of relying on depraved men for objective morality, perhaps we too easily accept the moral judgments of the regenerated man. Born again of the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, instructed, convicted and led by the Spirit, regenerate mankind remains dependent upon God in making an account of morality. Even Christians need God’s revelation. This is the essential difference between non-Christian and Christian approaches to morality. Van Til writes, “In the case of non-Christian thought man’s moral activity is thought of as *creatively constructive* while in Christian thought man’s moral activity is thought of as being *receptively reconstructive*.”¹²² In other words, our morality is received from God. Our labor in deciphering right from wrong is a reconstruction effort depending on God’s revelation.

When we believe our values match up perfectly with God’s values, we must still confess the limits of our self-evaluation. King David prays:

Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:21-24).

In his exposition of Psalm 139:23, Steven Lawson comments on David’s prayer request concerning his heart, “Unless God made it known to him, he would not correctly know his own heart. We are so often self-deceived about our own motives and spirituality.”¹²³

The continued need for receiving our morality from God and adjusting our values according to His Word is definitional to our progressive sanctification. Van Til cautions, “The regenerated moral consciousness is changed in principle only and therefore often errs. Consequently it must constantly seek to test itself by Scripture.”¹²⁴ This religious cycle of repentance and faith leads to increasing godliness. In his book on holiness Kevin DeYoung writes, “We have to undergo the difficult task of looking at our lives and seeing how we may be out of step with Scripture.”¹²⁵

God’s Word for God’s Image

As we proceed with the necessary business of discerning the moral distinctions inherent in various sins, we must do so humbly. This means refusing to marshal our own reason, emotion and experience as evidence to sway the ruling. We are dependent upon the special revelation of God. Paul confesses, “*I would not have come to know sin except through the Law;*

¹²¹ Van Til, 77.

¹²² Van Til, 76.

¹²³ Steven Lawson, *The Moment of Truth*. (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2018), 153.

¹²⁴ Van Til, 78.

¹²⁵ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 107.

for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET" (Romans 7:7).

Paul would have known the shame of sinning. How exactly he was to define sin, to measure sin? For this he needed the Scriptures. Without special revelation, man is left to derive the "ought" from the "is" of general revelation. To say this is an inaccurate endeavor is to massively understate the matter. Bavinck admits, "The knowledge that general revelation can supply is not only meager and inadequate but also uncertain, consistently mingled with error," and then cites as an example Plato's philosophy which "defends the practice of abandoning weak children, pederasty, community of wives, etc."¹²⁶

Thus without special revelation the moral drunk, intoxicated with autonomy, staggers boldly into the future social conscience, making it up as he goes. What we make up tends to favor wickedness and suppress righteousness. When we put our attention on ourselves, on the anecdotes of our own moral experiences, we end up with a capricious tyranny. For example, in our current cultural milieu sexual perversion is treated with moral equivalency, while racism is treated to finely tuned excoriations.

The need for man to judge with a righteous judgment is made clear by our finite understanding and propensity to equivocate and use double-standards (*Proverbs 18:17; John 7:24; Matthew 7:1-5*). The only standard by which we should judge others is the standard by which we should judge ourselves. Made in God's image, made kings and priests in Christ's kingdom, we must use the divine standard provided in Scripture. Van Til affirms, "The regenerated moral consciousness which constantly nourishes itself upon the Scripture is as the plenipotentiary who knows fairly well what his authority desires."¹²⁷ How strange and unfitting for the ambassadors of Christ to adopt the standards of those rebelling against Christ!

Degrees of Sin and Punishment

The claim that all sin appears the same in the sight of God is as fantastic as it is unbiblical. The narrower claim that when it comes to sexuality the earth is flat is still extraordinarily wrong. Why is this so? The Law of God makes distinctions between various kinds of sin and makes distinctions between various violations of the same moral principle. We will look at several biblical examples in this section of the paper. First, we must address the misuse of Scripture in supporting moral equivalency.

Unbiblical Moral Equivalency

"We're all sinners deserving Hell. I'm no better than you. God has not made me judge over you. You have your struggles and I have mine, but it's all the same fix for God. So what if you're gay? I'm fat! God sees all sin as the same." Those who say such things may have good motives. They may believe they have scriptural warrant. They may be attempting to humbly love sinners unto Christ. Yet these thoughts are at best unbalanced sentiments and at worst subtle deceptions.

¹²⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*. Vol. 1. Ed. John Bolt, Tr. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 313.

¹²⁷ Van Til, 78.

We have established that mankind's experiences are not a stable or accurate measure for morality. Man is ever contingent and changing. We cannot read heart-rending stories of those identifying as LGBTQ+-attracted Christians into the canon of Biblical ethics. The only reason why Flat Earth Sexuality might be true is if God declares it so in His Word. To the law and to the testimony we must go.

Moral equivalence has no place in Christian doctrine. Equal Depravity is no friend of Total Depravity. Exchanging the jots and tittles of the law for sweeping generalizations draws Christ's ire (*Matthew 5:17-20*). Only by paying attention to the full counsel of God's Word will we be delivered from inferring all kinds of relativism to lists of sin. Let's look at some Scriptures which deal with depravity, the law and list sins together. What do these passages not communicate and what do they actually say?

Does Depravity Level Sin?

I find that passages which break down the depths of our sinfulness may often be read in unhelpful ways. We have acknowledged from Scripture the depths of man's depravity earlier in this paper (*Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 8:7-8*). Such passages do not mean that every man is as bad as he can be.¹²⁸ They also do not mean that all men are equally as bad as one another. This certainly may seem to be the case when we read other passages.

We will spend most of our effort in interpreting *Romans 3:9-23*. First, we should consider two shorter passages from Paul's writings:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Ephesians 2:1-3).

We see that in our fallen state, our nature is equally the same: dead, worldly, enslaved to Satan, sons of disobedience. By nature we were all children of wrath before God's saving actions through Christ. This humbling and true doctrine leads inexorably to the hope of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Does it state that one lust is as equally bad as another lust? Does this passage indicate that every desire of the flesh and mind manifests equally sinful to God? Total Depravity does not necessitate Equal Depravity.

Certainly our shared nature in Adam puts our Gospel endeavors into proper perspective. While instructing believers on right relations with worldly people, Paul employs the doctrine of the universal sinfulness of mankind:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to

¹²⁸ The Second London Baptist Confession states that God's providence "most wisely and powerfully boundeth" the sin of both men and angels. He restrains sin as a common grace. *The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 15. See Ch. 5, p. 4.

various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another (Titus 3:1-3).

Remembering our slavery to sin will condition our interaction with those still enslaved to sin. We will do well to refrain from blaspheming the unregenerate man, rather demonstrating gentleness, reflecting on our own decadence outside of grace. How does this peaceable approach manifest? Shall we cast protective shade over every stripe of sin and every sexual preference with the heading of “equally broken”? The previous five verses of Titus reveal the need for preaching repentance to unbelievers, albeit with patience.

Arguably the most important passage in the whole Bible on the matter of Total Depravity is Romans 3:9-23. From this passage, a reader conditioned by a culture of moral equivalency may easily derive the wrong lessons. Consider Paul’s list of quotations from several Psalms and Isaiah:

as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES" (Romans 3:10-18).

Collectively, this is an accurate description of mankind, fallen in sin, depraved in nature. Certainly, by stitching all these quotations together Paul is not advocating that telling a lie is morally equivalent to cutting open someone’s throat, but more on that later.

Why is Paul emphasizing our common Total Depravity? He had just asked a question in the previous verse. This question was designed to move forward his argument for salvation in Christ alone, “*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin*” (Romans 3:9). In other words, does it take more or less to save a Jew or a Gentile? Are some more savable than others? No. God’s law while not equalizing sin, equally shuts our excuse-filled mouths (Romans 3:19-20). We all need righteousness before God. We all need God’s own righteousness before God,

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:21-23).

There is no distinction. Does Paul mean there is no distinction from one sin to another? No. Paul means there is no distinction from one person to another in the manner in which they need salvation. We are all equally sinners. We have not all equally sinned. We are all equally in need of the righteousness of Christ. We have not all committed an equal amount of unrighteousness. Paul holds the Jews more responsible and under greater condemnation for

their sins than the Gentiles due to their greater revelation from God. They were given the law and the promises (*Romans 2:12-3:2*). We should turn our attention to God's law.

Does God's Broken Law Level Sin?

There are many effective truth-lie combinations. By effective I mean that these half-truths gain a following. "Time-zones are incredibly confusing and we cannot see the curvature of the earth from places we would expect." This is true. "The earth is flat and the space race is all a hoax." This is both false and a fallacious conclusion from the prior statement.

One of the most effective truth-lie combinations for Flat Earth Sexuality has to do with the nature of God's law. God's law exposes the fact that we are all sinners because we have all transgressed His law. This is true. The wages of sin is death. All have sinned and all deserve death. This is true. Since God renders the same punishment for all sin, God sees all sin the same. This is false. But we should look at the passages where it may seem true.

Consider *James 2:8-11*. After rebuking the church for making distinctions between rich and poor in their gatherings, favoring the former and despising the latter, James applies the nature of God's law to the situation:

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."

In the context, James deals with the sin of partiality in the church. If we are to obey Christ's commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself" we must do so thoroughly. This summation of the second table of the Ten Commandments cannot be kept only for those we prefer, but for all men. Jesus clarifies through the parable of the Good Samaritan the scope of this royal commandment (*Luke 10:25-37*).

Calvin rightly observes the consternation and confusion *James 2:10* may cause. His comment is worth quoting in full:

What alone he means is, that God will not be honored with exceptions, nor will he allow us to cut off from his law what is less pleasing to us. At the first view, this sentence seems hard to some, as though the apostle countenanced the paradox of the Stoics, which makes all sins equal, and as though he asserted that he who offends in one thing ought to be punished equally with him whose whole life has been sinful and wicked. But it is evident from the context that no such thing entered into his mind.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Calvin, 306.

In the context, James is not promoting moral equivalency, but rebuking partiality. He is not stating that one transgression is as egregious as the other. Rather, he's focusing the church on the God Who has commanded them. It is instructive unto both salvation and holiness that we see how the Law coheres in the Lawgiver. James selects two commandments from the second table, "Do not commit adultery," and "Do not commit murder." He shows the uselessness of keeping one and breaking the other. More importantly, James points to the One Who gave these commandments. "For He who said . . . also said . . .". To break a single commandment is to break the whole of the law (*Galatians 3:10; 5:3*). To stumble in one point of the law is to fall short of the glory of God. To profane the glory of God in one area is to offend the whole of God's glory. Bavinck observes:

The law of God is an organism that, when violated in one of its commandments, is violated in its totality, for God, who gave the commandment that was violated, is the author of all the other commandments as well (*James 2:10*). But not all sins are for that reason equal. The different names used for sin already bear this out.¹³⁰

This means that all sins are equally damning in the sight of God. For the sake of a single sin, the sentence of death in its physical, spiritual and eternal ramifications is rendered. This does not mean that all sins are equally damnable in the sight of God. Douglas Wilson writes of sins and the error of flattening sins:

All are equally damning, but they are not all equally damnable. There is a profound category mistake in all of this. It is true that a man can go to Hell for incorrigible vanity, and it is also true that a man can get there because of serial murder. This does not put vanity and murder on all fours together. There is a falsehood here that is functioning as a wrecking ball when it comes to our understanding of Christian ethics.¹³¹

To be faithful to the Scriptures we must have both emphases. James helps us along with *Romans 3:23* and *6:23* to stress the former. But truth is not a house divided. "All sins equally damning" is a rafter set together with its partnering beam, "Not all sins are equally damnable." We will see more of how this is so later.

Do Biblical Vice Lists Level Sin?

Often, biblical interpreters effort to destigmatize homosexuality by pointing to passages which list several vices together. If homosexual activity is merely one sinful corruption among many, why should anyone make a big deal about it? It seems presumptuously hypocritical for arrogant greedy slanderers to rile up religious supporters through unfairly demeaning those who struggle with same-sex attraction. This, of course, is sinful. This, of course, is not what I or many other opponents of Flat Earth Sexuality are trying to accomplish.

¹³⁰ Bavinck, RD2, 149.

¹³¹ Douglas Wilson, "The Sin of Flattening Sins." *Blog & Mablog: Theology that Bites Back*, December 10, 2018 (<https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/the-sin-of-flattening-sins.html>), accessed May 23, 2019.

Biblical interpreters sympathetic to Flat Earth Sexuality tend to focus their landscaping efforts on two vice lists authored by the Apostle Paul, *Romans 1:18-32* and *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*. This is logical, as homosexuality is particularly highlighted in the first and carefully listed in the second. We will look at both passages and how Flat Earth Sexuality interprets them. Additionally, for helpful context, we will look at a third vice list in *Galatians 5:19-23*. As we apply the analogy of Scripture, the meaning of these passages will be made clear.

Romans 1:18-32. This critical passage deserves a much longer treatment than I have to give. Yet, the plain reading of the passage sufficiently sanctifies our thinking:

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures (*Romans 1:18-23*).*

These people, made in God's image know God by what He has made. They suppress the truth of God through dishonor and ingratitude. They abandon Creator for creature in their idolatrous folly. As their thinking and desires fail and darken, God reveals His wrath from heaven upon these unbelievers. How is His wrath manifested? Through a series of releases:

*Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper (*Romans 1:24-28*).*

God's wrath manifests in His handing these recalcitrant sinners over to their consuming and corrupting sin. Paul envisions this manifestation of wrath proceeding from bad to worse. Some interpreters look in vain for any progression here. I would suggest that the fundamental problem of redefining God (as a creature to be worshiped) leads to the further perversion of redefining those made in the image of God (as female and female or male and male) which results in the final peril of redefining the "yes" and "no" of the word of God. Depraved mankind, left to himself will soon celebrate what God refuses to tolerate:

being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:29-32).

How do those supporting Flat Earth Sexuality handle a passage like this? Two objectives should be clear from the outset. First, homosexuality must not be allowed to remain singled out as a kind of sin worse than any other. Second, the real point of the passage needs to be advanced in order to silence any kind of homophobia in the church. In his sermon on this passage, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, J.D. Greear, accomplishes both objectives. First, he talks about homosexuality as more affliction than a sin, “Gay and lesbian people are not worse sinners than other people or a different kind of sinner. They just got affected with a different dimension of the curse.”¹³²

His expressed purpose in handling Romans 1:26-27 this way is to change the way the church thinks and talks about homosexuality. In what way does he want us to think and talk? Pointing to this vice list, Greear advocates for moral equivalency, “Paul lists homosexuality as simply one corruption among many. . . . Do you think of deceit and boasting as equally ‘depraved’? Greed? How about a rebellious attitude toward your parents? They are.”¹³³ Greear then lists sins even from other contexts as equally depraved.

Moral equivalency cannot last for long, however. It is like the pink elephant in the attic. As soon as the climbing effort is made to prove its existence, it leaves. Bill might ask, “Are not all sins equally sinful before God?” Should Sally present the unmitigated gall of saying, “I think some sins are way worse than others,” righteous indignation spews forth against this feminine Pharisee. Bill rebukes Sally from his morally superior perch, “Well, Jesus says the worst sin is thinking others have sinned worse than you!” Pinky just moved out.

Greear goes on in the next couple of paragraphs to talk about materialism and religious pride as far more sinful than sexual sins. His reasoning depends on the passion he feels is evident in the texts condemning certain sins and how often certain sins get mentioned in the Bible. His attempts to move from moral equivalency to moral hierarchy will be evaluated later. It does give us pause to wonder how effective word counts and affective perceptions are at charting our moral course.

Sam Allberry’s take on *Romans 1:18-32* also manifests the objectives of Flat Earth Sexuality. He writes to expel the demon of homophobia from the church, “The strength of Paul’s language here should not make us think that homosexual conduct is the worst or only form of sinful behavior.”¹³⁴ It is an unnecessary exorcism. Who in the history of the church has

¹³² J. D. Greear, “How the Fall Affects Us All.” (<https://jdgrear.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Copy-of-Romans-1-24-32-Judgment.pdf>), page 5. Accessed May 25, 2019.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Sam Allberry, “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?” *Living Out*. (<https://www.livingout.org/the-bible-and-ssa>), accessed May 25, 2019.

called homosexual conduct the worst sin or the only sin? I am eager to learn their names and read their positions.

What does Mr. Allberry want us to think about the “strength” of Paul’s language concerning homosexuality?

Paul may be highlighting it because it is a particularly vivid example, and may have been especially pertinent for his readers in Rome given their cultural context. Either way it is illustrative of something that is the case for all of us: as we reject God we find ourselves craving what we are not naturally designed to do. . . . There are no grounds for singling out homosexual people for any kind of special condemnation. The same passage indicts all of us.¹³⁵

Homosexuality was rampant in Paul’s time, not just for those in Rome.¹³⁶ The widespread cultural acceptance of the practice and the desire made it necessary for Paul to address the matter. Why is homosexuality a particularly vivid example when there are no grounds for singling it out? Surely Mr. Allberry believes that homosexual activity, though serious is no more serious than any other unrepentant sin.¹³⁷

It is true that in our rejection of God we crave what we are not naturally designed to do. Many of those unnatural cravings and behaviors are listed in verses 29-32. Verses 26-27 should not be interpreted as some kind of general analogy for our rejection of God. This general rejection has already been stated in verses 18-21. Idolatry, sexual immorality and homosexuality are all then listed as specific instances of such apostate rejection. It is not as if Paul mentions homosexuality by itself and then makes some sweeping statement about our rebellion against God. Homosexual desires and activities are singled out, not as illustrative examples which apply to all of us, but as specific perversions evident in those who idolatrously suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness.

One interpretive error that Greear and Mr. Allberry persistently employ is one of universalism. They read *Romans 1:18-32* as applying to all mankind, when it obviously refers to all men outside of Christ. Sinners certainly suppress the truth in their idolatry. Yet can we say that all mankind embrace the full catalogue of horrors in verses 29-32, celebrating them? Certainly in our depravity, mankind may degrade to this nadir. The warning of wrath applies to all men outside of Christ, but not all have been judged to this degree have they? Can we say that all men and women are homosexual in their desires and behavior? No. Should a Christian say of *Romans 1:24-32*, “That is me! I own it all!” God forbid that we would sin that grace may abound.¹³⁸ This passage is descriptive of those upon whom the wrath of God has been revealed. Christians are described necessarily and robustly different (*Romans 8:1-14*).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Thomas K. Hubbard ed. *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹³⁷ See below.

¹³⁸ *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2).*

1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Paul writes to a church with many questions. He has sought to settle various disputes, to discipline unrepentant church members, to correct several false doctrines and strive for the Corinthian church's unity in Christ, the risen, reigning Lord. While ignoring especially heinous sins in their midst, like incest, the Corinthian, church members were suing one another in pagan courts. Such patterns of sin demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding about holiness and authority. They needed to know Whose they were if they were to know who they were to be in their lives. Paul writes:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

There is no other biblical passage referencing homosexuality more quoted in favor of Flat Earth Sexuality than *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*. We have already noted Haydn Sennitt's conclusion from this passage, In God's view of sin being equally offensive as other sins, homosexuality is not all that special. . . . homosexuality is no worse than other sins in the eyes of God, as all sin is equally punishable."¹³⁹

Nick Roen, writing for *Desiring God*, sees a pressing need to expunge homophobia from the church. Paul's vice list in *1 Corinthians* is essential to his argument, "The truth is that sin is sin, temptation is temptation, and "men who have sex with men" is listed right alongside greed, drunkenness, deception, and slander as worthy of exclusion from the kingdom. All equally damnable. Who among us is innocent?"¹⁴⁰

By virtue of all these vices lining up on the same list, their moral values are thus seemingly equalized. Dave Zuleger, also for *Desiring God*, agrees with Sennitt's and Roen's interpretation of *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*, "None of these sins is elevated above the others. There are not some sins that should cause us to question our standing while others we can feel secure in. Greed and idolatry (of any kind) sit on the same level as same-sex sexual activity."¹⁴¹

Sam Alberry has his own way of dealing with this proof text, "Homosexual sin is incredibly serious, but it is not alone in being so. It is wicked, but so is, say greed, drunkenness, reviling, and defrauding others."¹⁴² Mr. Alberry thus levels all kinds of sin with Homosexual activity as "very serious." I think he sees the point of the passage when he writes "Paul says . . . all active, unrepentant sinners will not enter God's kingdom." He notes this vice list as those sins which "characterize the unrighteous." Yes, this is the point of the passage, to call all kinds of sinners to repentance. To then infer from this passage that greed is as serious and as wicked as sodomy is an exegetical fallacy.

¹³⁹ Sennitt, "The Unique Struggle of Same Sex Attraction." *The Gospel Coalition*.

¹⁴⁰ Nick Roen, "Homophobia Has No Place in the Church," *Desiring God*, March 29, 2016 (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/homophobia-has-no-place-in-the-church>), accessed May 23, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Zuleger, "Does Same-Sex Attraction Disqualify Someone from Ministry?" *Desiring God*.

¹⁴² Sam Alberry, "What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?" *Living Out*.

It would be an understatement to say that when it comes to their fleet of hermeneutical steamrollers, Flat Earth Sexuality's pride and joy is this reading of this passage. Every upstart moral molehill for 82,278 mi² trembles under the approach of this flattening mega-machine. It only makes sense that when various related items are put on the same list that this indicates they all have the same value. Right?

Actually, anyone reading Flat Earth Sexuality into *1 Corinthians 6:9-11* is guilty of an exegetical fallacy. D. A. Carson calls it the "Failure to recognize distinctions" and defines it as, "the fallacy that argues that because x and y are alike in certain respects they are alike in all respects."¹⁴³ In this case, since effeminacy and theft, sodomy and drunkenness are sins which keep us from inheriting the Kingdom of God, such sins are entirely alike in their moral quality. All sins are equally sinful to God because some of them land on the same list?

Let's put this exegetical fallacy to full use, shall we? *Joshua 12:7-24* lists the Canaanite tribes and kings Joshua and the sons of Israel defeated in the strength of the LORD. Are the Jebusites as mighty as the Hittites? Is the king of Ai as glorious as the king of Jericho? Though we are given no indicators one way or another in the text, the answer is, "No." This is not a text to distinguish their differences, though there were many. We have other texts that tell us so. *Joshua 13-19* lists the Israelite tribes, their cities, and their land allotments. Are the tribes all equal in significance and number? Are their cities equal in importance and grandeur? Are their land allotments equal in size and resource distribution? No. These chapters don't explicitly tell us so, but others do.

1 Kings 6:15-36 lists all the articles and furnishings of gold which Solomon made for the Temple. The point of the passage is to show us the glory of the Temple. Are we then to think the chains overlaid with gold are as valuable as the 15 foot tall golden Cherubim with the 15' wingspan? No. *Mark 3:14-19* lists the twelve disciples Jesus appointed. Is Thaddaeus as significant to the group as Peter? Is James the son of Alphaeus as close with Jesus as John the son of Zebedee? No. The rest of Mark's Gospel distinguishes their relationships.

So it is also with *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*. Not all the groceries in the same shopping basket have the same price. Simply because we find all these vices in a list does not mean they have all the same moral value. This biblical observation, this logical principle, disassembles Flat Earth Sexuality's flagship steamroller. That one sin is not as bad as another will be proven *ad nauseum* below.

Galatians 5:19-23. Another vice list by the Apostle Paul proves very helpful for our interpretation of *Romans 1:18-32* and *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*. Unlike the other two, this one is followed up with a virtue list. Like the other two, several kinds of sins are listed along with the damning judgment of God. In his attempt to establish the genuine difference between living by the flesh and living by the Spirit, Paul writes:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the

¹⁴³ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 92.

kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:19-23).

I would like to make two observations of this passage in relationship to the other vice lists already examined. First, Paul emphasizes here in Galatians as in the other passages how unrepentant sinners will not enter the Kingdom of God. The only two sins that cross over from 1 Corinthians' list of ten and Galatians' list of fifteen are idolatry and drunkenness. Obviously, these lists are not meant to be exhaustive, but they are to give a comprehensive sense. All unrepentant sin is to come to mind. Paul is not creating loopholes. He's closing them. In this sense, these passages remind us of the wages of sin. Whether you are a greed-mongering swindler or an envious effeminate, repentance is required to enter the Kingdom of God. There is no warrant, however, to then call all these sins equally depraved.

Second, if the proper interpretation of Paul's vice lists necessitates reading all these sins as equally depraved in God's eyes, what are we to make of Paul's virtue list in *Galatians 5:22-23*? Surely if the vices are all equal, the virtues are all equal. Are we ready to say that all virtues, all acts of righteousness are equal in the sight of God? How many essential doctrines are altered by such a claim? Yet we know that in the list of virtues, "the greatest of these is love" (*1 Corinthians 13:13*). How do we know that? We have to read other passages! Likewise, we will see the moral distinctions between sins when we read other passages of Scripture.

Unbiblical Moral Distinctions

One of the great concerns within Flat Earth Sexuality is the establishment of a new standard. The old standard is seen as traditional and homophobic. The old standard seems to condemn and isolate without concern and love. The new standard, sadly, is moral equivalence. Eliminating variance in the degrees of sin sacrifices biblical truth on the altar of relevance. R. C. Sproul writes in his classic, *The Holiness of God*:

The idea of gradations of sin is important for us to keep in mind so we understand the difference between *sin* and *gross sin*. Again, all of our sins require forgiveness. All of our sins are acts of treason against God. We need a Savior for our "little" sins as well as for the "major" ones. But some sins are more significant than others, and we need to identify which these are, lest we fall into the pharisaical trap of majoring in the minors.¹⁴⁴

This certainly seems to be the concern of some in Flat Earth Sexuality who advocate for equal depravity on the one hand and develop a hierarchy of sins on the other hand. They believe those who call sodomy an abomination or stress the perversion of homosexuality are majoring on the minors. They see this as a kind of pharisaism, particularly homophobic and pridefully condemning, which needs repentance.

A good example of this approach is J. D. Greear. We have already looked at part of his sermon from Romans 1. The confusion which occurs when one tries to flatten sin and still call

¹⁴⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 206.

for opposition to sin is apparent in his preaching. He lists several sins as surprisingly equally depraved and then says, "In another one of his letters, Paul even talks about the pride that comes from religion and an obsession to be better than others as an example of . . . idolatry (Gal 4:8-9). Is that equally depraved in your book?"¹⁴⁵ It seems that the religiously proud are as equally depraved as the homosexual and the greedy. Yet, J. D. Greear feels that of this list, some are indeed worse than others. He continues:

"We see Jesus demonstrating great sympathy for those in sexual sin and great animosity toward the religiously proud. He never said it was hard for the same-sex attracted to go to heaven; he said it was hard for the materially rich and those who thought they were religiously good to get there. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than (sic) for one of those to get there."¹⁴⁶

At first Greear states that these sins are equally depraved. He then indicates the greedy and the religiously proud are far worse off than the homosexual. This kind of doublethink is disturbing in that it occurs within a single section of 225 words. Greear does not distinguish between offending the law-giver and the nature of the law-breaking as we have done above. He merely asserts that these sins are equally depraved and that some are worse than others.

What makes the difference? How does Greear think sins ought to be weighted? Within these same set of words he writes:

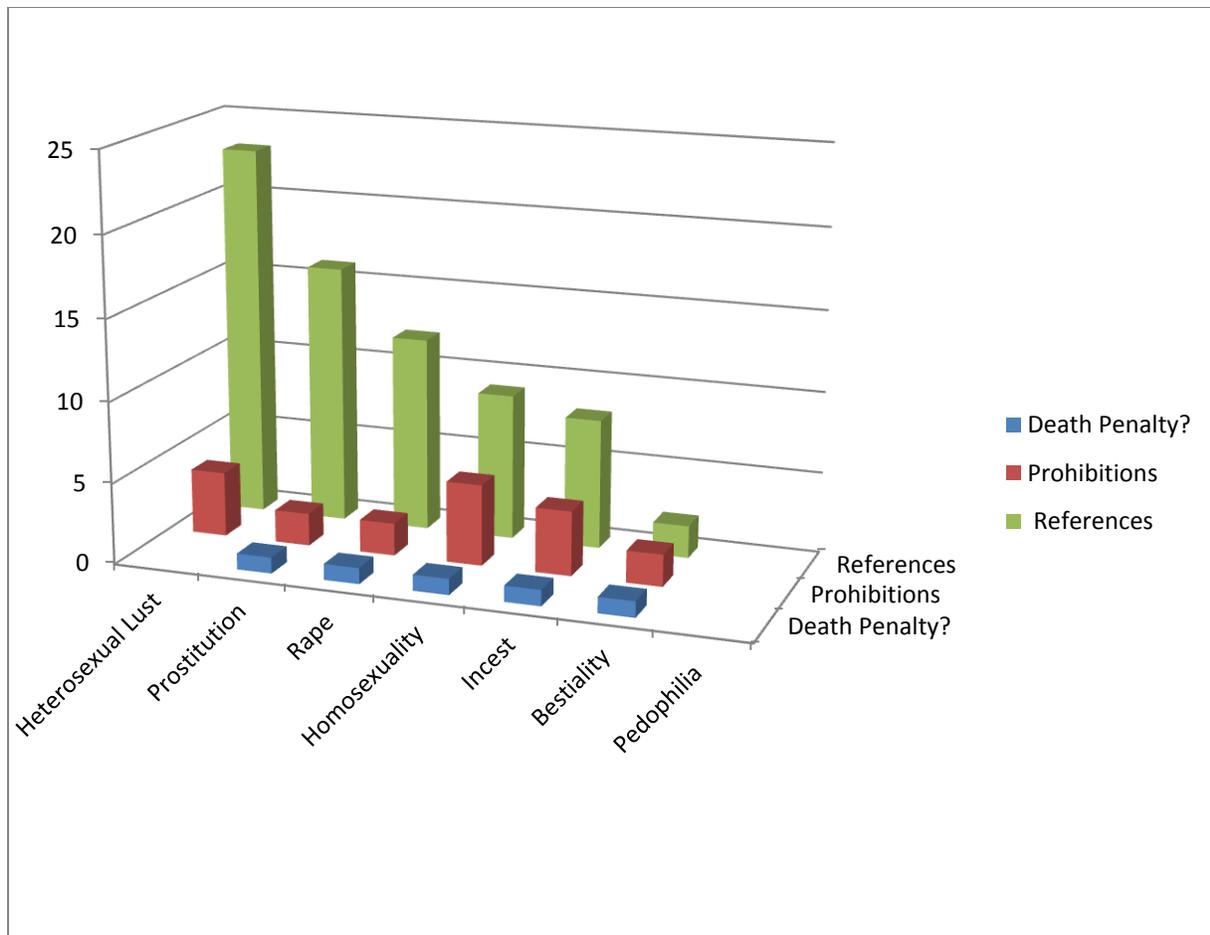
"In terms of frequency of mention and passion, it would appear that quite a few other sins are more egregious in God's eyes than homosexuality. Jen Wilkin says we should whisper about what the Bible whispers about and shout about what it shouts about. The Bible appears more to whisper on sexual sin compared to its shouts about materialism and religious pride."

There are several concerns that I have with this kind of thinking. First, declaring that certain sins are equally sinful based on the fact that they end up on the same list is not any kind of reasonable hermeneutic. We have already looked at this error. Second, using frequency of mention to ascertain the seriousness of sin is fundamentally flawed. If we weighted various kinds of sexual sins in this way, we would end up with the following chart:¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ J. D. Greear, "How the Fall Affects Us All." (<https://jdgrear.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Copy-of-Romans-1-24-32-Judgment.pdf>), page 5. Accessed May 25, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., page 6.

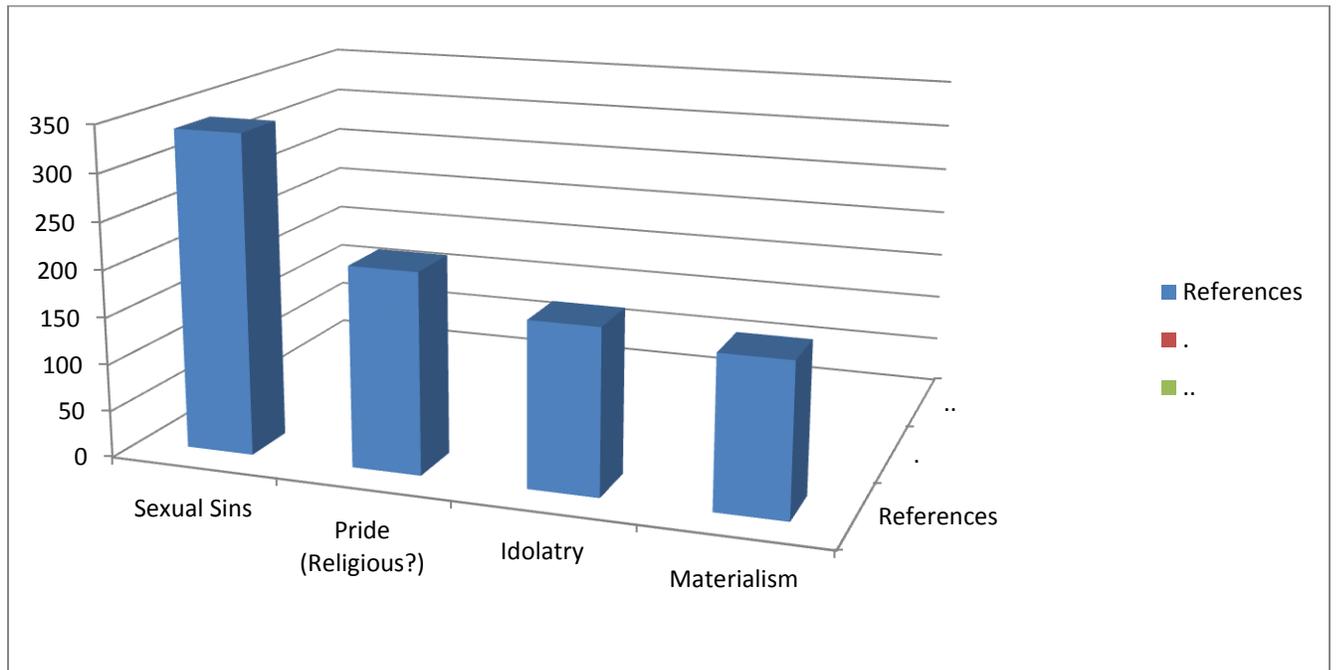
¹⁴⁷ **Heterosexual Lust:** Genesis 12:11-13; 20:11-13; 26:7; 34:1-3; 38:16; 39:7; Exodus 20:17*; Deuteronomy 5:21; Judges 14:1-3; 2 Samuel 11:2-5; 1 Kings 11:1-3; Job 31:1; Proverbs 6:25; 7:25; Jeremiah 5:8; Ezekiel 23:5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16, 20; Matthew 5:28. **Prostitution:** Genesis 38:21ff; Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14; Isaiah 57:3; Hosea 4:14; Matthew 21:31f; Luke 15:30; 1 Corinthians 6:15ff. **Rape:** Genesis 34:2; Judges 5:30; 19:24-25; 20:5; Deuteronomy 22:25, 28; 2 Samuel 13:12, 14, 32; Isaiah 13:16; Lamentations 5:11; Zechariah 14:2. **Homosexuality:** Genesis 19:5; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Judges 19:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10; Revelation 22:15. **Incest:** Genesis 19:30-38; 38:18; Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:11-14, 19; Deuteronomy 27:22; 2 Samuel 13:12; Ezekiel 22:11; 1 Corinthians 5:1. **Bestiality:** Leviticus 18:23; 20:15-16. **Pedophilia:** Child rape often incestuous and sodomite, is not specifically mentioned. *[References underlined indicate Prohibitions.]



If we weight sin by how many times the Bible references it, bestiality is a far better option than *straight* up lust. Perhaps pedophilia is better than prostitution, as it is never mentioned at all. I think J. D. Greear and Jen Wilkens would be appalled if I suggested to them that cisgender erotic fantasy is a far worse sin than rape or incest. I think we can see the uselessness of weighting sins by their frequency of appearance. If there is any pattern we may be able to discern from the Biblical data it would be that the more perverse a deviation from righteousness is, the less it gets mentioned. When these greater perversions are dealt with, the more likely the passage will be a prohibition. Why does the Bible then seem to “whisper” about rape, sodomy, incest and bestiality? Paul writes “*Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret*” (**Ephesians 5:11-12**).

To be fair, Greear and Wilkens maintain the distinction between sexual sins and others like greed and religious pride. It seems to them that the Bible only “whispers” about sexual sin in contrast to the shouting it does about other kinds of sin, like greed and religious pride. Yet, in addition to the 70 references to sexual sin already surveyed above we find 15 references to sensuality, 37 references to immorality, 74 references to adultery and 135 references to harlotry. Some of these refer to spiritual unfaithfulness. Yet such metaphors are grounded in the physical sin-acts. It is difficult to agree that the Bible only whispers about sexual sins with over 340 references. It is also difficult to agree that greed and materialism are more

emphasized by word count when all the biblical references to extortion, swindlers, unjust gain, trusting in wealth, loving money, oppressing the poor, greed, coveting, theft and stealing amount to a grand total of 161. Furthermore, a search for haughtiness, hypocrisy, arrogance and pride delivers up 213 references. Not all of these refer to religious pride. One may of course add idolatry (175) to the religious pride category and best the total of sexual sin references. At this point, though, I hope all my readers can see the silliness of the exercise.¹⁴⁸



It is obvious that Greear and Wilkens are not aware of the biblical data when they say that the Bible only whispers about sexual sin due to the paucity of references. The Bible does not shout about materialism in contrast to sexual sin. It says far less. One might stretch the references out to gain an equal footing for religious pride and sexual sin, but the original claim concerning the frequency of mention is thereby disproven.

Greear also cites “passion” as a distinguisher between sins. How are we to evaluate the affective tone of any given reference to sin to determine how severe it is? Shall we measure sin based on our perception of how angry or forceful God speaks in the text? This seems to lend itself to subjectivity. We should, however, acknowledge God’s anger explicitly poured out on the wicked such as in Sodom and Gomorrah. The whisper/shout theology of sin fails to accurately convey the biblical truths about sin. Are word counts and mood rings really indicators of anything at all? Perhaps the terms God uses of various sins and His sentencing of those sins provide a more consistent measure.

¹⁴⁸ These searches were done with the NASB 1995 update using BibleWorks 5.0. Yes, I know that’s an ancient program, and everyone is using Logos now, but I don’t even use a smartphone or text. As a technologically repressed minority I am offended by your privileged snickering at my expense.

Biblical Moral Distinctions

There are several ways we might search the Scriptures to see if Flat Earth Sexuality is so. Word counts aside, I propose three studies that might spark even further research. This three-fold cord is not easily broken. In dealing with the definition of sin, I passed over the traditional examination of the biblical terms. As we now study the vocabulary of sin we will discover variance in meaning, indicating variance in the degrees of different sins. Further, as we have rooted the meaning of sin in the Law of God, the Nepalese topography of sin will be evident in the varied punishments rendered. Finally, we will need to examine the Scripture's sexual ethic as defined in Creation and fulfilled in Christ's consummation of all things. This positive vision in agreement with God's law lays down a thick chalk line from which any deviance is made all the more manifest.

My desire in understanding the biblical moral distinctions between various sins is pastoral. In the final section of this paper I intend to put all the exegesis, polemics and biblical theology to work, snatching sheep from wolf jowls. This is not to say that we may or should attempt to precisely locate every sin on a line from least to most wicked. Sin is personal. Sin harms, wrecks and kills personally. We must have a biblical understanding of sin so that we may biblically seek forgiveness, cleansing, holiness and victory. We cannot approach sin from merely a word-count level or even a mere forensic level, as with the Romanist delineations of Venial and Mortal sins. Bavinck writes, "Sin is not a quantity that, isolated from the perpetrator of it, can be counted on one's fingers and weighed in a scale."¹⁴⁹ If we want to understand the degrees of sin, to trace the lines of Nepal, we must pay attention to the Law-giver's view of the law-breakers. What terms does He use? What punishments does He render? What boundaries has He drawn?

The Vocabulary of Sin

We will not have space to deal with a full etymology of sin. While the vocabulary range of sin in the New Testament is more concentrated, Henri Blocher observes, "Nowhere is the vocabulary of biblical Hebrew richer than in the semantic field of 'sin' (no fewer than fifty terms deserve consideration)"¹⁵⁰ Not all terms for sin in Hebrew and Greek are used interchangeably.

Some terms are more general than others. Some are exclusively used of certain kinds of sin. The most common Hebrew word for sin is "chata / חָטָא". It speaks of missing or failing. It is like the Greek term that often translates it, "harmatia / ἁμαρτία" meaning to miss the mark.¹⁵¹ These general terms recognize that sin is deviance from a standard. We have identified that standard as the character of God as revealed in His law.

Some terms for sin are quite particular. To trespass "ma'al / מָעַל" is different than to be negligent "asham / אָשָׁם". Some sins are inadvertent "shegagah / שְׁגָגָה", and do not break the covenant (*Leviticus 22:14*). Other sins are committed consciously and intentionally, "with a high hand / biyad ramah / בְּיַד רָמָה" making the violator worthy of death (*Numbers 15:30-35*).¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Bavinck, RD2, 154.

¹⁵⁰ Henri Blocher, "Sin" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner Eds. (Downers Grove, IL: 2000), 783

¹⁵¹ Carl Kromminga, "Sin" in *Wycliff Dictionary of Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 487.

¹⁵² Bavinck, RD2, 149-50.

There is a difference between making a false step “*paraptoma / παράπτωμα*” and knowingly crossing a line, “*parabasis / παράβασις*”.

Already in the basic etymology of sin we hear different weights of sin. Some are more egregious than others based on the degree of rebellion in the perpetrator. Some deserve greater punishment than others due to their heinous nature. *Leviticus 18:22* calls the act of sodomy an “abomination / *toebah / תועבה*”. This term refers to something detestable, or loathsome (*Genesis 43:32; 46:34; Exodus 8:26; Psalm 88:8*). It amounts to being cut off from the covenant and deserves the death penalty (*Leviticus 18:29; 20:13*). Is committing an abomination like sodomy the same as unintentionally sinning (*Leviticus 4:27*)? Are they the same to God? If so, why would God use different terms for them? If so, why would God punish them differently?

Depending entirely on our English translations we may easily see that some sins are worse than others. We do not need Hebrew and Greek lexicons to know that “abomination” (*Leviticus 18:22*) is more serious than “going astray” (*Psalm 119:176*). We do not need a four-volume systematic theology to tell us that Judas’ premeditated betrayal was worse than Peter’s panicked denials. As we read through our Bibles we find not only different primary terms for sin, but different modifiers for these terms.

There is sin and then there is great sin (*Genesis 20:9; Exodus 32:21, 30, 31; 2 Kings 17:21*). Not all generations sin equally (*1 Kings 14:22*). Some provoke the LORD more than their forefathers. Not all Israel’s kings sinned equally (*1 Kings 16:25; 2 Kings 21:11*). Some, like Omri and Manasseh do more wickedly. Some cities or cultures sin worse than others (*Lamentations 4:4-6*). Some nations sin worse than others (*Ezekiel 5:6*). Some abominations are worse than others (*Ezekiel 8:6, 13, 15*). Some forms of sexual promiscuity and idolatry are worse than others (*Ezekiel 23:1-34*). Some demons are worse than others (*Matthew 12:45*). Some heretics are worse than others (*Matthew 23:15*). When it comes to the greatest act of wickedness ever perpetrated on the earth, there is still room to differentiate levels of guilt and severity of sin. In His brief reply to Pilate’s questioning, Jesus answered, “*You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin*” (*John 19:11*).

Clearly, not all sin is equally sinful to God. Some sins are given names which are worse than other names. Some sins are called great. Various kinds of sins are shown to be worse than others. Even the same kinds of sins may be greater or lesser. It does no good to claim that when it comes to sexuality the Earth is flat. Scripture speaks otherwise. We should not read *Romans 1:28-32* and conclude that greed, murder, gossip, God-hating and being without understanding are all equally depraved, all Kansas level with each other.

The Variance of Punishment

We have established the unchanging perfect character of God. We have seen how God’s character expressed in God’s law defines sin. Not only does God’s law define sin, it delineates sin. We do not have to rely on word counts and mood meters to guess which sins may be of more consequence than others. We may simply read and meditate on God’s law. When we do, our understanding of God and sin will be deeply rooted, well watered and primed for producing the fruit of holiness in our lives.

By looking at God's prescribed punishments for various sins, we discover that some are more severe. Some sins require the death penalty. Other sins do not. Consider the Ten Commandments. The death penalty is mandated for seven out of the ten. Are not all ten commandments from God? Why then does God command execution for murderers but not for liars? Why does God command execution for adulterers but not for thieves? Why does God command execution for breaking Sabbath but not for coveting? Some sins are worse than others.

When we read through *Leviticus 20:9-16* we read a litany of sins which call for the death penalty: cursing father and mother, adultery, incest, sodomy and bestiality. As we continue reading through *Leviticus 20:17-21* we read of sins which will cut people off from the covenant community or result in childlessness, but the death penalty is absent. When we read through *Matthew 11:20-24*, we see that Jesus distinguishes between the level of eternal punishment for various cities:

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

The amount of revelation received by some cities increased the level of their accountability. To whom much is given much is required. Tyre, Sidon and Sodom will be better off than Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum in the day of judgment. So we see in general, different punishments are rendered for different kinds of sins and different levels of sin.

Consider the difference between the unjust killing of a man and the unjust killing of an animal. Both are sins. One is more severe than the other. The first time God commands mankind to employ the death penalty is in *Genesis 9:5-6*, *Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.* If an animal kills a man, the animal must die. If a man murders a man, the man must be executed by other men.

Various scenarios are listed in *Exodus 21:28-32* which explain both the Genesis passage as well as the sixth commandment:

"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. "If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. "If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. "Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to

him according to the same rule. "If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

It might be obvious to say, but it seems necessary in light of Flat Earth Sexuality, not every misdeed by an ox's owner is equally sinful. When it comes to oxen, the earth is not flat.

An ox may at some point kill a man or a woman, a son or a daughter, a male or female slave. The ox will always then be killed. The owner may then be responsible to make restitution to the household his ox attacked. Is the owner executed? Only if his ox was known to have a violent streak which he did nothing about. At that point he is liable. He knowingly endangered the lives of his neighbors and so he must be executed for his crime. He has broken the sixth commandment. There is a difference in severity due to complicity. The following verses detail what should happen if a man's irresponsibility leads to the death of an ox. In no case is he executed. There is a fundamental difference in severity.

What about sexual sin? Is it conceivable that throughout God's law, all other kinds of sin are delineated by levels of severity and appropriate punishments, but when it comes to sexuality, the earth is flat? *Deuteronomy 22:13-30* lists several different scenarios in which sexual sin occurs. If a newly married man falsely accuses his wife, he is punished with a fine and public accountability. If a woman is discovered to be a harlot, she is executed. Adultery requires the death penalty. If man and a betrothed virgin copulate within city limits, she cannot claim rape if she does not scream. They will be executed. If she does cry rape in the act, the man will be killed, not her. If this happens in the field where no one could hear her, the man still dies:

*But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. "But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. "When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her (*Deuteronomy 22:25-27*).*

If a man takes a virgin who is not betrothed, and they are discovered, they must marry. The man is fined. The payment goes to the girl's father. They are married under strict public accountability. *Leviticus 19:20* also specifies what happens if the girl is a slave, excluding the death penalty. What we would call rape is sometimes punishable by death, sometimes not. What about adultery, homosexuality and bestiality? These are always punishable by death (*Leviticus 20:10-16*). So, when it comes to sexuality, the Law is textured, varied, appropriate—anything but flat.

The Christian Sexual Ethic

God designed sex holy and good. God made sex for His glory. God made sex in all its desires and expressions for the marriage relationship. God ordained marriage for the good of those made in His image and for His glory. God's original design, so carefully upheld and so richly applied throughout scripture offers us a clear Christian sexual ethic.

Advocates of Flat Earth Sexuality propose that LGBTQ+ orientations are not to be labeled as “deviant.”¹⁵³ By claiming all sexual attraction is equally depraved they erase the original standard by which anything may ever again be called “straight.”¹⁵⁴ Biblical moral distinction is thereby made impossible. They go so far as to say that they are being consistent with the Christian Sexual Ethic by maintaining opposition to homosexual acts. But, surely, biblical morality runs deeper! Have we kept the sixth commandment by merely refraining from murder? If I hate in my heart, scathe with my words, even bruise with my hands but refrain from the actual act of murder, am I practicing the Christian ethic of love? We must have a better understanding of the Christian sexual ethic than just ultimate prohibitions.

The scriptural sexual ethic is the Christian sexual ethic. There is no Christian ethic which ignores sections of the Bible. *All Scripture is God breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16)*. We must always interpret Scripture according to Scripture in view of Christ. In this we are greatly helped in understanding God’s sexual design for those He made in His image. Over one hundred years ago, Herman Bavinck addressed the sexual deviance fomenting in the Netherlands. Along with sexual liberation had come venereal diseases. Along with antipathy towards marriage had come prostitution. In light of such issues Bavinck writes:

Most changes currently being proposed to solve the sexual problem not only contradict Christian principles but also come into conflict with the facts and demands of reality. . . . [They] fail to take into account reality whether it be sound or sick. . . . In a manner that cannot be surpassed, Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, have distinguished between reality that is safe and that which is sick.¹⁵⁵

The fact that some sexual affections and behaviors are safe and others are sick, that some are godly and others are ungodly means there is a biblical standard. There is a Christian sexual ethic. It is not explained by stating, “there is none straight, no not one.” There is a scriptural model for sexuality from affection to action, from creation to consummation. It is not honored by stating, “God accepts us just as we are, so we must also accept our sexual (even LGBTQ+) orientation.” The Christian sexual ethic operates on two ideas. First, God made sex for goodness. Second, God made sex for glory. These ideas are manifest within the marriage of one man with one woman. Outside of this frame, sexual desire and activity are sinful and profane.

Goodness. God establishes marriage before the fall and sustains marriage after the fall for our good. Marriage serves as the primary solution for aloneness. Marriage is the primary partnership for ministry. Marriage remains the primary sanctifier of sexual desire. In all these ways Marriage is God’s normative good for those He made in His image.

Marriage serves as the primary solution for aloneness. We read in *Genesis 2:18*, “*Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for*

¹⁵³ “How should I respond if my child comes out to me?” *Living Out*.

¹⁵⁴ Sean Doherty, “Does Living Out Support ‘Gay Cure’ or ‘Conversion Therapy?’” *Living Out*. / Christopher Asmus, “Satisfied in the Arms of Another” *Desiring God*.

¹⁵⁵ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*. Tr. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 63-64.

him.” While many may generalize this verse into the abstraction of human society, community and so on, the specificity of God’s meaning is inescapable. God brought a parade of animals past Adam. Adam, as God’s vice regent upon the earth, surveyed birds and beasts. By the authority God invested in him, Adam named these animals.

God did this, according to 2:19, “*to see what [Adam] would call them.*” What did he name the cattle? He named them “bull” and “cow.” He named them “ram” and “ewe.” What did he name the birds? He named them “gander” and “goose.” He named them “rooster” and “hen.” What did he name the beasts of the field? He named them “stallion” and “mare.” He named them “buck” and “doe.” He named them “Lion” and “lioness.”

God’s point did not escape this king on earth. He had no queen, “*for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.*” God creates Eve from Adam’s rib. Adam then names her, not as the finale of the parade, but as his queen, alongside of him in appraisal of the whole created order. He calls her “*ishshah (woman)*” for she was taken out of “*ish (man)*” (2:23). The woman was taken out of man and brought to the man for the man (1 *Corinthians 11:9*).

It was not good for the man to be alone so God made a woman specifically for Adam. The answer to aloneness was marriage. Marriage is not merely sexual intimacy. It is certainly not less than that. Adam pastored Eve and they worshiped God together, but their relationship was not merely a church. Our understanding of church relationships emerges from this primary human relationship first by distinction, second by comparison. Adam delighted in Eve and relished her completion of him, but their relationship was not merely a serious, intimate friendship. They became one flesh sexually and emotionally, as a distinct family unit. Our understanding of friendships emerges from this primary human relationship first by distinction, second by comparison.

When it comes to aloneness, God says, “It is not good.” His solution was not first a church or a friend. His solution was a spouse. *He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD (Proverbs 18:22)*. Marriage is the normative good God designs for those He made in His image. *House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD (Proverbs 19:14)*. To devalue marriage despises the good God designed. Certainly, through sin, a husband or a wife may live in a profound sense of loneliness while married. This perversion is precisely that—a sinful deviation from God’s normative good. Marriage serves as the primary solution for aloneness.

Marriage is the primary partnership for ministry. Loving service for Christ begins practically and primarily in the marriage relationship. I do not say “exclusively.” I do not even say that secondary partnerships for ministry are less valuable or have less potential. We are taught by the doctrine of the Trinity that “primary” does not indicate value or capacity, as if the Holy Spirit were less glorious or less powerful than the Son and the Son less than the Father. Marriage as the first, original human relationship offers to us in essence all the ingredients for every other human relationship.

Throughout Christ’s kingdom, ministry relationships of authority, service, protection, provision, submission, helping, trust and collaboration abound. The categories of all these relationships are contained in the seed of the marriage relationship. Richard Phillips writes, “As Genesis 2 describes it, marriage is designed by God for intimate, complementary, and mutual

ministry between a man and a woman.”¹⁵⁶ Certainly this help, this mutual ministry, pertains to the cultural mandate given in *Genesis 1:26-28*. It manifests personally in the love and honor of the husband and the wife for one another. Scripture has much to say about how a husband and a wife minister to one another in their advancement of Christ’s reign in their lives and the world (*Colossians 3:1-19 [esp. vs. 18-19]*). Richard Phillips locates the marital good:

We can say that husbands are called to minister to their wives through loving encouragement and sacrificial service (*Ephesians 5:25-30; 1 Peter 3:7*), and wives are called to minister to their husbands through helpful support and a respectful demeanor (*Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; 1 Peter 3:1-6*). Mutual ministry, following the divine pattern for husbands and wives, makes marriage a blessed foundation for all human society and the context in which God’s love and truth may reign in the believing home.¹⁵⁷

As well as answering aloneness and advancing ministry, marriage remains the primary sanctifier of sexual desire. I say primary in terms of God’s means for holiness through human relationship. Unless the Father draws us through the Spirit to the Son to be united with Him by the grace of faith we will never experience personal holiness. When it comes to sexual desires, only God can conform us to His goodness. His primary means for this sanctification is the marital relationship. Paul writes:

Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

We will examine more of this passage in the third section of the paper as Paul goes on to speak to the proper role of singleness in Christ’s kingdom. Some will undoubtedly protest that this only applies to those with heterosexual affections. Yet, consider that the term “immoralities” covers all manner of sexual divergences. Those with sexual desires for animals, children and relatives are perverse. Men with sexual desires for men, women with sexual desires for women are perverse. Those who want to rape, fornicate or adulterate are perverse. Such appetites must be abandoned for a proper diet. Just because someone desperately wants to drink fabric softener, does not mean they should refrain from drinking water because to do so would deny their true chemical orientation. Solomon instructs his son:

Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. Should your

¹⁵⁶ Richard D. Phillips, “God’s Design for Gender, Marriage, and Sex” in *God, Adam, and You*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015), 112.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths (Proverbs 5:15-21).

Time and again God's prescription for sexual holiness is marriage. When marriage is universally honored, when sexual expression within marriage is championed, righteousness abounds. With the dishonoring of marriage comes the increase of sexual sin and the judgment of God, *"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."* (Hebrews 13:4). God knows all our ways. God also knows the only good way for us as sexual creatures to express such sexuality is within the framework of marriage as He designed it. Such sexual intimacy "takes place within the walls of a protected garden, after the locked door has been opened by the proper key (Song of Solomon 4:12)."¹⁵⁸

Glory. The Christian sexual ethic is not only about goodness, but also glory. Both this goodness and this glory center on the marriage relationship. There is no positive moral sexual expression outside of marriage, but marriage is more than a sanctifying shield. Marriage is eschatological. "God does not only glorify his saving grace in delivering us from sexual sin. He also glorifies his covenant love in faithful Christian marriage."¹⁵⁹ The glory revealed in the Christian sexual ethic may be understood in past, present and future ramifications. There is glory rendered, glory realized and glory remaining in marriage.

Glory is rendered to God as those He made in His image do His will. In the beginning God created mankind in a particular intersection of relationships:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:26-28).

Loving God supremely, loving each other rightly and stewarding the creation righteously, Adam and Eve would bring glory to God. Through their marriage they would be fruitful and multiply. Through the marriages of their descendants, this fruitfulness and multiplication would continue until the whole earth would be filled with the image of God.

We cannot reduce marriage to sex, but we cannot have a Christian sexual ethic outside the frame of marriage. We must set apart our sexuality as under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁸ Phillips, 116.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 123.

Sex can only be obedient to Christ within the marriage bond. Christian sexuality can only be understood as an inherent blessing of marriage and thus a hope-filled delight. Christian sexuality is created sexuality and consummate sexuality.

Sex is eschatological in orientation. Peter Jerman notes, "It is because we could be parents that our lived-out sexuality inherently affects others. . . . Our sexuality points us away from ourselves toward the consideration of others who also could be parents and toward those who are yet to be born."¹⁶⁰ How will there be a multitude of the redeemed which no man can count unless God ordained their creation through His gift of sex? That many bastards are made brothers and sisters in Christ's blood, and that many orphans are made the children of God through the Spirit's new birth show God's grace abounding. This is surely no motive for adultery and fornication to abound!

Indeed, the glory of a great redeemed population is not made more glorious by attributing the procreation of children to consenting adults. The glory of sex is not in mere consent, which may be used for all manner of unholy and unjust actions. The glory of sex is realized in what Anthony Esolen calls "trans-consensual delight."¹⁶¹ The essence of this husband and wife co-glorifying in one another to the glory of the Creator Who gave them to each other is captured in the dialogue between *Genesis 1-2* and the *Song of Songs*. As God was glorified in Adam and Eve eating freely and fully of the fruit of His garden, so He is glorified in their free and full enjoyment of one another, "*both naked and unashamed*". This informs the imagery of *the Song*. Barry Webb writes, "The love experienced by the lovers becomes a kind of return to Eden. To Love as they do is to enter a garden and to be satiated with its abundant fruit and fragrant perfumes (4:12-5:1). It is to taste again the unalloyed goodness of the gift once given."

Glory rendered in God's design for marriage is glory realized in our continued sanctifying of sex for the glory of Christ. Fruitful and faithful marriage magnifies the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ray Ortland Jr. observes God's gift of marriage "erects barriers around the man and woman, and it destroys all barriers between the man and woman." This covenantal joining in the beginning, creates all manner of categories necessary for us to understand God's ultimate redemptive story which "unfolds in the rest of Scripture."¹⁶²

Marriage is central to our renewal into the image of God as it was central to the original creation of mankind in God's image. Our renewal into the image of God, into the image of Christ, glorifies God (*Colossians 3:1-11*). How husbands and wives grow in their love for each other matters for bringing glory and praise to Christ (*Colossians 3:17-19*). Our temporal marriages are to be treasured and sanctified for the magnification of the eternal fulfillment of marriage, Christ and the church (*Ephesians 5:22-33*). Richard Phillips writes, "At the end of redemption, God will present the entire company of the redeemed as the glorious bride to enjoy eternal bliss in the love of his Son. It is with this incomparable end in mind that Christians are wise to embrace now the biblical design for gender, marriage, and sex."¹⁶³

Glory is rendered in the design of marriage in creation. Glory is realized in the renewal of marriage in Christ. Glory remains in the destiny of marriage in the consummation. Writing of

¹⁶⁰ Peter Jerman, "Sexed Messages" in *Touchstone* January/February 2019, 44.

¹⁶¹ Anthony Esolen "Surprised by Delight" in *Touchstone* January/February 2019, 35.

¹⁶² Raymond C. Ortland Jr. *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 23.

¹⁶³ Phillips 124.

the New Jerusalem, Bavinck concludes, “All the glory of the nations is gathered there; and in the spiritual association of Christ with His church, marriage will also reach its end.”¹⁶⁴ Filling the Earth with His image has always been God’s gracious goal for His own glory. The reason marriage was created is the reason marriage will cease. The function, purpose and glory of sex will pass into the eternal consummation of Christ with His bride, forever eclipsed by the brightness with which it always flickered. Bavinck brings these themes together:

Marriage was instituted so that the glory of the King would come to light in the multitude of his subjects. Once it has attained this goal, marriage itself will pass away. The shadow will make way for the substance, the symbol for the reality. The history of the human race began with a wedding; it also ends with a wedding, the wedding of Christ and his church, of the heavenly Lord with his earthly bride.¹⁶⁵

BIBLICAL DENOUNCEMENTS

In this final section of the paper, I need to bring a biblical critique against several claims of Flat Earth Sexuality. We’ve already analyzed and refuted two departures from Total Depravity by Flat Earth Sexuality: sinless concupiscence and equal depravity. It is not true that desires preceding the will lay outside the realm of sin and the need for repentance. It is not true that all sins before God are equally sinful. Many more particular claims have been made by adherents of Flat Earth Sexuality which are echoed by others in the same circle. Their echo chamber resonates with many in the evangelical church. Their false teaching needs to be taken captive, arrested and brought to trial before Jesus Christ (*2 Corinthians 10:3-5*).

In this effort I am not at all accusing my brothers and sisters in Christ of being horrible people. We must always submit our traditions, our accepted, attested body of beliefs to the test of Scripture. Scripture is the “norm of norms and without norm.” If Sam Allberry, JD Greear, Tim Keller, Nate Collins and others all come together and basically affirm Flat Earth Sexuality, they do not thereby “norm” the Scriptures. Their attestations must be examined and refuted. Scripture calls all Christians to this task.¹⁶⁶ Our work should be diligent, done with integrity and expressed in a Christ-like manner.

This section will not be exhaustive.¹⁶⁷ The purpose will be to address some of the more popular false teachings of Flat Earth Sexuality, applying the corrective biblical doctrine we’ve studied already. I find it difficult to classify these false teachings into helpful categories. I will simply use their slogans and evaluate them according to Scripture. I will do my best to identify the main ideas of these slogans and what impact they have on the church, the family and the individual. I hope through this effort, this poisonous gas afflicting the church will be cooled to a liquid and then to a solid. We need to see clearly and handle carefully these lies. There will be further developments and degradations in the advance of Flat Earth Sexuality. I pray its fog will soon recede before the prayerful and faithful opposition of God’s people with God’s word.

¹⁶⁴ Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 161.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ *Jeremiah 29:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 1 John 4:1*

¹⁶⁷ For a more thorough treatment see Tim Bayly, Joseph Bayly and Jürgen von Hagen, *The Grace of Shame: 7 Ways the Church Has Failed to Love Homosexuals* (Bloomington, IN: Warhorn Media, 2017).

“Godliness Is Not Heterosexuality”

This slogan comes from Ed Shaw’s book, *Same Sex Attraction and the Church*. In several of his chapters he names “missteps” when it comes to following Jesus’ way of sex and relationships. Shaw believes we will all be called to repent from these missteps which damage and cripple.¹⁶⁸ He names misstep seven, “Godliness is Heterosexuality.” He claims this damages and cripples. According to Ed Shaw, those who think there is an inherent connection between heterosexuality and godliness, or an inherent connection between homosexuality and ungodliness need to repent. After giving examples of Christian paranoia and damaging practices in the church, Shaw offers a new way of thinking about homosexual passions. Rather than thinking that same-sex desires are sins from which to repent, he suggests we ought to think of how compatible same-sex desires are with godliness.

Shaw confesses his own thought revolution on this matter came by listening to a conference speaker share his ideas during a panel discussion. This speaker led his church’s support group for those identifying as LGBTQ+-attracted Christians. He said, “We, most of all, want our boys to grow up as godly and mature Christians. Some of the most godly and mature Christians we know are same-sex attracted. So why would we be so afraid of them growing up as same-sex attracted?”¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, this experiential testimony had more impact on Ed Shaw than the Scriptures. My heart breaks as I read Shaw’s excited response:

It finally blew apart my wrong presumption that same-sex attraction and godliness, like oil and water, don’t ever mix. It made me recall that some of the most godly people that I have ever known are those who’ve also experienced same-sex attraction. In fact, one of the Christian leaders I most respect as godly has been made so *through* his struggle with same-sex attraction.¹⁷⁰

False teaching tells folks what they want to hear. When it hits, it is like watching someone shoot up with heroine. They are euphoric. They are killing themselves. Your stomach twists in agony for them.

What is godliness? This seems to be a critical definition for Ed Shaw’s claim. He defines “godliness” as “being like Jesus.” If godliness is to be like Jesus does that mean Jesus was same-sex attracted? After all, incredibly godly people are same-sex attracted. Connected to this, what does it mean to “struggle” with same-sex attraction? Does this mean denying same-sex attraction, dying to it daily? Or does it mean men burning in their lusts for men, frustrated by their celibacy and loneliness, oppressed by a homophobic church structure? Shaw writes, “True Christ-like, self-sacrificial love means saying no to any sexual activity outside marriage (*Ephesians 5:3*), as well as giving up a whole host of other attitudes and actions. But crucially, this call to sexual purity is a subsection of godliness, not *the* definition of it.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ed Shaw, *Same Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 22. (His *emphasis*).

¹⁶⁹ Shaw, 97.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

Notice that sexual purity for Ed Shaw has to do exclusively with “activity.” Sinless concupiscence informs his notions of godliness. He does struggle with his same-sex attraction. It seems from the tone of his book he would rather not have same-sex attraction. But his opposition to these desires does not manifest as “killing sin” or “repentance.” For Ed Shaw, sexual attraction might be a struggle, but only sexual activity can be a sin. How does that approach comport with biblical, Christ-centered godliness?

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience (Colossians 3:1-6).

Immorality speaks to the sexually sinful act of fornication. Impurity speaks of uncleanness. If this does not invoke ceremonial laws, than what kind of uncleanness is in view? Dirty hands, dirty words, dirty thoughts? This same “impurity” is described in Romans 1:24 as the “*lusts of their hearts*” which led to sexual immorality. It seems the impure thoughts as well as the actions are sinful. Passion speaks of strong internal, ostensibly sinful, emotions. Surely these arise from our orientations we cannot control, but they must be put to death. What about evil desire? This is bad longing, vile lusts. These too, in view of being Christ-like, must be killed. When a man abandons the natural use of a woman and burns (passion) within for another man (vile lust) should this be considered compatible with godliness?

If, indeed, all sexuality is equally broken and no same-sex attracted Christian church member should ever be asked to do anything more or less than any opposite-sex attracted Christian church member,¹⁷² why does God not treat the matter that way in His word? God in His wrath does not turn truth-suppressing idolaters over to faithful monogamous marriage. He turns them over to “degrading passions.” Women sexually desiring women and men burning in their desire for men precede their sexually perverse intercourse, but both the affections and the actions are condemned (*Romans 1:26-27*).

Stating “Godliness is not heterosexuality,” Ed Shaw distracts himself and others from the truth, “Homosexuality is ungodliness.” Can we say the same about heterosexuality? Can we biblically, categorically state, “the sexual desire of a man for a woman is ungodly?” No. Adam’s desire for Eve was good. Isaac’s desire for Rebekah was good. Joseph’s desire for Mary was good. Can we biblically, categorically state, “the sexual desire of a woman for a woman is godly?” No. Can we biblically, categorically state, “the sexual desire of a man for a man is godly?” No. What if we said, “Godliness assumes heterosexuality?” Yes. This is not to say that every red-blooded American male is automatically less sinful than the most celibate of gay men. This is to say that when God made mankind in His own image, He made them godly and He made them exclusively heterosexual. He made Adam and then made Eve for Adam.

¹⁷² Shaw, 102-103.

Godliness is being like Jesus. I agree with these words from Ed Shaw. Why is godliness tied up with being like Jesus? Because Jesus Christ is the Image of the invisible God (*Colossians 1:15*). When we grow in godliness we are being renewed into that image. “*and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*” (*Colossians 3:10*) How did God create us? He made us in His image, heterosexual for monogamous marriage. Christ is the man of all men, the most human of us all, and the very epitome of what it means to be in the image of God. He is the second and last Adam. He has a bride He seeks to make beautiful, not a groom. To be godly is to be like Jesus, renewed into the image of God. Homosexuality is incompatible with godliness. In fact, same-sex attraction is antithetical to godliness.

“Orientations Should Not Be Changed.”

At the 2019 general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, Greg Johnson spoke in opposition to the Nashville Statement on Biblical sexuality.¹⁷³ He claimed that sexual minorities were being unfairly targeted as a people group. He sees his gayness as not unlike a barren woman or a man with one leg—perhaps not optimal, but certainly not damnable. One of his false assertions deserves particular attention:

At this point, I’m forty-six years old and still same-sex attracted. My orientation has not changed, and for those who are exclusively same-sex attracted who are men, we don’t know for certain of even (he pauses). I have, I have talked to every head of every ministry and can’t find a single instance of same-sex attraction going away.¹⁷⁴

Greg Johnson lied. He has not spoken with the every head of every ministry. There are thousands of examples of people being delivered from same-sex attraction.¹⁷⁵ This false claim, “Orientations don’t change,” is made by many advocates of Flat Earth Sexuality. Others acknowledge change occurs, but not because of some kind of biblical counseling unto repentance. Sexual orientation to them is fluid.¹⁷⁶ What these varied claims are used to support is the same approach. No effort *should* be made to change someone’s sexual orientation. This is considered damaging.¹⁷⁷

Mark Yarhouse, one of the academic authorities for Flat Earth Sexuality, has written an oft cited paper, “A Christian Perspective on Sexual Identity.”¹⁷⁸ After surveying the data on

¹⁷³ “The Nashville Statement” Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2012 (<https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>), accessed 7.16.19.

¹⁷⁴ Honza Pokorny “Greg Johnson’s speech at the PCA General Assembly 2019,” *YouTube*: June 28, 2019 (<https://youtu.be/NkWdMBQyVkc?t=104>), accessed 7.16.19

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Black, *Freedom Realized: The Complete First Stone Ministries Effectiveness Survey Report* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2017) 109-110.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Ould, “Can your Sexuality Change?” *Living Out*, (<https://livingout.org/can-your-sexuality-change->), accessed 7.17.19.

¹⁷⁷ Sean Doherty, “Does Living Out Support ‘Gay Cure’ or ‘Conversion Therapy’?” *Living Out* (<https://www.livingout.org/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-conversion-therapy>) accessed 3.13.19.

¹⁷⁸ Mark A. Yarhouse “A Christian Perspective on Sexual Identity”. *Christ on Campus Initiative*, 2010. (<https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Yarhouse-Homosexuality.pdf>), accessed 7.16.19.

attempts to change sexual orientation through various forms of counseling and therapy, he writes, "As important as these findings are for those considering a change attempt, most people do not experience change of sexual orientation; the reported changes are best thought of as gains along a continuum of attraction rather than categorical changes from homosexual to heterosexual."¹⁷⁹ Yarhouse questions the relevance of such data as, in his view, change of sexual orientation has no connection to morality, "Christians understand that change is also not directly relevant to the moral debate."¹⁸⁰ Focusing only on sexual activity, Yarhouse excludes attractions from moral character, "Same-sex behavior is the primary concern rather than same-sex attraction or orientation. If neither attractions nor orientation change, the sexual ethic remains."¹⁸¹ This ethic focuses only on the activity, not the attractions, employing the Roman Catholic doctrine of sinless concupiscence.

It is helpful to note how the development of Flat Earth Sexuality progresses. The claim, "orientations do not change," is easily falsifiable. Indeed it is too restrictive for many in Flat Earth Sexuality, who like to speak of sexual fluidity. The point they agree on is that one's sexual orientation should not be operated on by external pressures like counseling and therapy. According to Flat Earth Sexuality, there is no need for repentance from sexual orientation.

What does the Bible say? The Bible not only states that those who desire what God abominates should repent, but that they may be wonderfully cleansed and changed:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Are we to understand that the unrighteous are only those who act out their sins? Is the washing and sanctification of Christ restricted to external behaviors, while desires and affections remain unchanged? Are affections for fornication, idolatry, adultery and theft legitimate identifications for a Christian? Can I be racist and greedy in my affections and yet holy because I have not acted on them. Should I claim I am a Racist Christian? God Forbid! Paul writes, "*Such were some of you.*" Their new identity in the name of Christ has nothing to do with their previous sins, either by affection or behavior.

Greg Johnson stated in his protest to the PCA that Jesus had washed him as a gay Christian. His idea is that he is a holy homosexual because he does not engage in sodomy. Shall we then claim that all other sinful orientations are to be equally claimed in the name of Christ? Tim Bayly follows the rabbit down the hole:

If we start identifying everyone in church by their besetting lusts and sins, where will it stop? Instead of introducing ourselves as Ben, Joe, and Sam, will we shake hands and

¹⁷⁹ Yarhouse, 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Yarhouse, 10.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

say, “I’m Gay Gary,” “Incest Isaiah,” or “Pedophile Peter”? In the entryway after worship, will we introduce our friends to visitors as “Greedy Gus,” “Thief Tim” and “Zoophile Zane”? If not, why not?¹⁸²

Answers to these kinds of questions are not forthcoming. There does not seem to be any future for Flat Earth Sexuality’s defense of Christian Sexual Minorities based on clear reading of the Scripture or a logical application of ethics. The only play Flat Earth Sexuality has left is to trot out the Kafka trap¹⁸³, “Claiming to love homosexuals by calling them to repentance only proves your homophobia from which you must repent.”

“The Church Must Repent”

In his talk given at Revoice ’18, Nate Collins donned the prophetic mantle and dispersed the same to those present. Those identifying as gay Christians do not need to repent. No. They are prophets God sends to call the church to repent:

Is it possible that gay people today are being sent by God, like Jeremiah, to find God’s words for the church, to eat them and make them our own? To shed light on contemporary false teachings and even idolatries, not just the false teaching of the progressive sexual ethic, but other more subtle forms of false teaching? Is it possible that gender and sexual minorities who have lived lives of costly obedience are themselves a prophetic call to the church to abandon idolatrous attitudes toward the nuclear family, toward sexual pleasure? If so, we are prophets.¹⁸⁴

The church, according to Flat Earth Sexuality, thinks too much and too highly of marriage. The church, according to Flat Earth Sexuality, puts too much emphasis on the good of sexual expression within marriage. This is felt deeply by gender and sexual minorities who by their irrepressible affections are committed to the “costly obedience” of permanent celibacy.

Churches which do not honor such celibate commitments as much as marriage are seen as intolerant of sexual minorities. Living Out published an audit for local churches to help them identify how intolerant they are toward sexual minorities.¹⁸⁵ It begins with this question, “How biblically inclusive is your church?” It then offers ten statements to be answered true, false or unsure. Doing so will, according to Flat Earth Sexuality, lead a local church toward repentant inclusiveness which reflects the Bible.

¹⁸² Tim Bayly, *The Grace of Shame*, 65.

¹⁸³ Stephen Wolfe, “The Sorry State of Evangelical Rhetoric” *Sovereign Nations*, June 22, 2018 (<https://sovereignnations.com/2018/06/22/sorry-state-evangelical-rhetoric/>), accessed 7.16.19.
Wendy McElroy, “Beware of Kafkatrapping” *The Daily Bell*, August 14, 2014 (<https://www.thedailybell.com/all-articles/editorials/wendy-mcelroy-beware-of-kafkatrapping/>), accessed 7.16.19.

¹⁸⁴ Nate Collins, “Revoice 2018 – General Session 2: Lament | Nate Collins & Ray” *Revoice* August 2, 2018, (<https://youtu.be/SHe2y2SVjlc?t=2189>) accessed 7.17.19.

¹⁸⁵ “The Living Out Church Audit” *Living Out*, (https://www.livingout.org/UserFiles/File/Living_Out_Church_Audit_2019), accessed 7.17.19. Previous version accessed 9.23.2018. See Appendices A and B.

Statements nine and ten serve as particularly strong examples of the kind of repentance Flat Earth Sexuality seeks from the church:

9) Church family members instinctively share meals, homes, holidays, festivals, money, children with others from different backgrounds and life situations to them. 10) No-one would be pressurized into expecting or seeking any “healing” or change that God has not promised any of us until the renewal of all things.¹⁸⁶

In essence, we must normalize LGBTQ+ attraction in the church and never pressure anyone identifying in such a fashion to repent of those desires. Churches that have no normalizing program should repent and begin one in order to be *biblically* inclusive.

How biblical is it to normalize sexual perversion in the church? How biblical is it to exert no pressure toward repentance? If we practice such “inclusiveness,” are we to be proud of ourselves? Paul strongly rebukes this kind of inclusiveness:

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. . . . Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6-7).

Flat Earth Sexuality would protest and state that the man had actually committed incest. Those who “experience same-sex attraction” have not committed any such heinous sin. I would say that the passage still applies. Flat Earth Sexuality has become arrogant and boastful. Men who desire to have sex with men desire what God forbids. This applies as well to every other form of sexually perverse desire. When sexual deviants are taught not to repent of their desire, their immorality is hardened in their hearts. When a church accepts such sexually immoral desires into its communion they welcome leaven into their Passover celebration.

What should be the response to those who harbor unrepentant sexually deviant passions? Is there such a thing as “biblical inclusiveness” for unrepentant immorality? No. There is such a thing as “biblical exclusiveness” for unrepentant immorality:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

¹⁸⁶ Living Out Church Audit. This is quoted from the 2018 version, wherein it is made clear that Flat Earth Sexuality sees proper inclusivity as sharing children with those who hold unrepentant homosexual desires.

As with any kind of sinful affection, LGBTQ+ attraction should be mortified, put to death. Show me a church member actively repenting from their same-sex attraction, refusing to claim it as their special status, refusing to allow it to define their lives, and I give a hearty “Amen.” While adherents of Flat Earth Sexuality often present themselves this way, we have seen they actually deny any need for repentance of the desire itself.

It only makes sense that when a sin is relabeled as non-sin, the church then must be in sin for calling the now non-sin, sin. Eve Tushnet, a speaker at Revoice '18, calls for repentance “When you speak and act, you’re speaking and acting in the context of a deranged, disordered culture which has made an idol of heterosexuality, and sacrificed queer children to that idol.”¹⁸⁷ Flat Earth Sexuality in particular calls the Church to repent from thinking far too much and far too highly of heterosexual monogamous marriage as family. This leads us to our final denouncement.

“Honor Singleness as Much as Marriage”

Here is a premiere goal for Flat Earth Sexuality. Once sexuality is made flat, relationships are made flat. Marriage cannot be allowed to have any kind of exalted state over singleness. A husband’s and wife’s relationship with one another cannot be seen as privileged over a single, male-attracted-male’s “spiritual friendship” with another male-attracted male. Statement number eight on “Living Out’s Church Audit” reads, “God’s gifts of either singleness or marriage are equally promoted, valued and practically supported in your church family’s life together.”¹⁸⁸

Ed Shaw gave a talk surveying all ten statements of this audit. He stressed the importance of a church ministering to singles, and upholding singleness as honorable. In his explanation of statement eight, he said, “The most encouraging thing anyone has ever said to me about my church family was, ‘It’s quite hard being a couple in this church.’ [smile... audience laughs] I was thrilled, in a very ungodly way.”¹⁸⁹ Is this the way the scriptures read? Is this the biblical emphasis?

Why are these sodomy-attracted men telling the church we need to promote singleness as an alternative as honorable and celebrated as marriage? Why do those who identify as “Gay Christians” belabor the sacrifices in their celibacy as honorable and righteous? Greg Johnson appealed to the PCA emotionally at the general convention this year, listing all the blessings of family life as those things he has given up to follow Christ.¹⁹⁰ Actually, he’s given up all these things for a lie. Greg Johnson has given up marriage, family and many other precious blessings for the sake of his homosexual attraction. One wonders if he would give up his homosexual attraction for the sake of Christ. Such a possibility he deems impossible.

¹⁸⁷ Eve Tushnet, “O Wanderer, Come Home: Notes from the Gay Christian Network Conference,” Patheos, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/evetushnet/2015/01/0-wanderer-come-home-notes-from-the-gay-christian-network-conference.html>, accessed June 10, 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Living Out Audit.

¹⁸⁹ Ed Shaw, “Introduction to Living Out Church Audit: How Biblically Inclusive Is Your Church?” *Living Out* July 20, 2018, (<https://vimeo.com/280927726#t=392s>) accessed 7.17.19.

¹⁹⁰ Honza Pokorny “Greg Johnson’s speech at the PCA General Assembly 2019,” *YouTube*: June 28, 2019 (<https://youtu.be/NkWdMBQyVkc?t=104>), accessed 7.16.19

Flat Earth Sexuality takes up passages in the Bible which speak to singleness and makes them about the honorable celibacy of those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted. They would make Christ out to be the champion of singleness and a cautioning influence concerning family. What do we do with Jesus' words about singleness, marriage and family in context of sacrificial discipleship (*Matthew 8:20; 19:12; Luke 9:24, 58; 14:33*)? Barry Webb addresses these sacrificial themes and then comments on their meaning:

Properly understood, this [singleness] is simply a recognition that dedication to God involves self-sacrifice, and it part of a broader teaching about the nature of discipleship. The true disciple must be willing to forgo marriage, home, loved ones, even life itself if need be, for the sake of the kingdom. This is no more an idealization of singleness than of homelessness or death. In fact, it is a strong affirmation of the goodness of marriage, and a recognition of the very real deprivation involved in singleness."¹⁹¹

The local church cannot and should not be obligated to utterly remove the sting of loneliness. While we are to bear one another's burdens, each one must bear his own load (*Galatians 6:2, 5*). The single person who knows loneliness cannot blame the church for his or her deprivation. That is part of God's sanctifying gift of singleness. Webb elaborates,

Singleness remains a state that is 'not good' in the sense that it is a state of loneliness in which certain natural created desires are not met. There are compensations, of course, and important benefits, but particular needs remain unmet, and the single person has to live with that fact and work through it.¹⁹²

Flat Earth Sexuality also points to *1 Corinthians 7:7-8* to demonstrate that their sacrifice of singleness over and against their same-sex desires should be as celebrated as marriage. Paul writes, "*Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.*" Each man has his own gift. Marriage is a gift. Singleness is a gift. We can all thank God for these words. Is there any warrant from this passage to say that the sacrifice of singleness should be as normative, honored and celebrated as marriage?

More to the point, is Paul here making provision for women with degrading passions for other women and for men who abandon the natural function of women and burn in their desires toward one another? Is the Holy Spirit giving an honored way for those with degrading passions and unnatural desires to remain in those passions and desires without condemnation? Is this the "gift" of singleness Paul envisions here? He states that God gives the gift of singleness. Is Paul stating that God gives the gift of singleness through bestowing to this man unnatural sexual desire for men and bestowing to this woman degrading sexual passions for women? Is this the meaning of the passage?

¹⁹¹ Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 33.

¹⁹² Webb, 33-34.

Indeed, Paul makes no provision for sin in this passage. While he recognizes the good of both marriage and singleness, he cautions against singleness, *“But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”* (1 Corinthians 7:9). What recourse is left to those who burn with passion for the same-sex? By hallowing perverse sexual desire, Flat Earth Sexuality leaves this class of sinner without recourse of repentance, without hope of healing, without any avenue of advancement. They must remain single, burning in their passions. They are told they are being especially holy, but such teaching is especially hellish.

First, those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted are told their affections are fallen but sinless. No repentance is necessary or even possible. Second, they are told their future is celibate singleness as *“Even loving, monogamous same-sex activity . . . falls outside of God’s revealed will.”*¹⁹³ Thus, they must burn in their passions, for they cannot repent unto heterosexuality or get married according to God’s revealed will. Paul warns young Timothy:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

By forgoing any call to repentance and denying any promise of cleansing, Flat Earth Sexuality forbids marriage to those identifying as LGBTQ+ attracted. This is demonic doctrine.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis Flat Earth Sexuality hallows perverse desire by teaching a false doctrine of sin. It is not true that concupiscence is sinless. It is not true that all sins are equally depraved. It is not true that the church’s opposition to same-sex attraction is sinful. These lies being promoted by Revoice, Living Out, Desiring God, The Gospel Coalition, Nate Collins, Tim Keller, Sam Allberry, Ed Shaw and many others need to stop. Those who have been promoting these false teachings must publically repent and recant their bad doctrine.

Faithful followers of Christ must remain vigilant upon the walls of the church. The watchman’s gaze must peer inward as often as outward. As the pillar and ground of the truth, we cannot make peace with false teaching. It is no surprise to Christ or His apostles that false teachers in the form of trusted voices would arise in our midst:

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

¹⁹³ Zulegar, “Does Same-Sex Attraction Disqualify Someone from Ministry?” *Desiring God*.

APPENDIX A
Living Out Church Audit 2018

 **HOW BIBLICALLY INCLUSIVE IS YOUR CHURCH?**

10 statements to help you audit your church family:

- 1** Your church family meetings include people who could be labelled LGBTQI+ / are same-sex attracted. **True / False / Not Sure**
- Derogatory language or stereo-typing attitudes towards sexual minority groups would not be tolerated either up-front or in conversation between church family members. **True / False / Not Sure** **2**
- 3** All in your church know that we all experience sexual brokenness and all are being encouraged to confess their own sexual sins. **True / False / Not Sure**
- Same-sex sexual relationships are never mentioned in isolation from other sinful patterns of behaviour, or from the forgiveness offered to all through faith in Christ crucified. **True / False / Not Sure** **4**
- 5** All in your church are hearing the same call to radical self-sacrifice of themselves in response to God's giving of himself in Jesus. **True / False / Not Sure**
- All in your church are encouraged to develop an identity founded first and foremost on their union with Christ. **True / False / Not Sure** **6**
- 7** A godly Christian's sexual orientation would never prevent them from exercising their spiritual gifts or serving in leadership in your church. **True / False / Not Sure**
- God's gifts of either singleness or marriage are equally promoted, valued and practically supported in your church family's life together. **True / False / Not Sure** **8**
- 9** Church family members instinctively share meals, homes, holidays, festivals, money, children with others from different backgrounds and life situations to them. **True / False / Not Sure**
- No-one would be pressurised into expecting or seeking any "healing" or change that God has not promised any of us until the renewal of all things. **True / False / Not Sure** **10**

APPENDIX B
Living Out Church Audit 2019

 **HOW BIBLICALLY INCLUSIVE IS YOUR CHURCH?**

10 statements to help you audit your church family:

- 1** Your church family meetings include people who could be labelled LGBTQI+ / are same-sex attracted. **True / False / Not Sure**
- Derogatory language or stereo-typing attitudes towards anyone would not be tolerated either up-front or in conversation between church family members. **True / False / Not Sure** **2**
- 3** All in your church know that we all experience sexual brokenness and all are being encouraged to confess their own sexual sins. **True / False / Not Sure**
- Same-sex sexual relationships are never mentioned in isolation from other sinful patterns of behaviour, or from the forgiveness offered to all through faith in Christ crucified. **True / False / Not Sure** **4**
- 5** All in your church are hearing the same call to radical self-sacrifice of themselves in response to God's giving of himself in Jesus. **True / False / Not Sure**
- All in your church are encouraged to develop an identity founded first and foremost on their union with Christ. **True / False / Not Sure** **6**
- 7** A godly Christian's sexual orientation would never prevent them from exercising their spiritual gifts or serving in leadership in your church **True / False / Not Sure**
- God's gifts of either singleness or marriage are equally promoted, valued and practically supported in your church family's life together. **True / False / Not Sure** **8**
- 9** Church family members instinctively share meals, homes, holidays, festivals, money, family life with others from different backgrounds and life situations to them. **True / False / Not Sure**
- No-one would be pressurised into expecting or seeking any "healing" or change that God has not promised any of us until the renewal of all things. **True / False / Not Sure** **10**

APPENDIX C

“A Survey of “חָמַד”, “ἐπιθυμέω” and “ἐπιθυμία”,
their Use in Scripture and their Semantic Relationship.”

Strongs’ Listing and Definition of Terms:

- 1) “חָמַד” *Transliteration*: “chamad”: A Hebrew verb meaning: *to desire, covet, take pleasure in, delight in.*
- 2) “ἐπιθυμέω” *Transliteration*: “epithumeo”: A Greek verb meaning: *long for, desire; covet; lust for.*
- 3) “ἐπιθυμία” *Transliteration*: “epithumeo”: A Greek noun meaning: *desire, longing; lust, passion; covetousness.*
- 4) “ἐνθυμέομαι” *Transliteration*: “enthueomai”: A Greek participle meaning: *think about; think.* The root of this term would indicate a passionate, consuming type of thinking.
- 5) “LXX”: Abbreviation of “The Septuagint”, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic Scriptures completed 200 years before the time of Christ. This translation gives us helpful insight into the ways certain terms were used by the biblical authors.

Old Testament: The importance of the term, “חָמַד” in Genesis 2-3 invites more study of the term. The following references (A & B) note where “חָמַד” is translated into the English semantic range of “covet” and “lust.” Additionally, where the Greek verb “ἐπιθυμέω” is used to translate the Hebrew “חָמַד” in the LXX a single underline is used. Where the Greek noun “ἐπιθυμία” is used a double underline is used. And in the single case where the synonym, “ἐνθυμέομαι” is used an intermittent underline is used.

- A) “חָמַד” = “Covet” Exodus 20:17; 34:24; Deuteronomy 5:21; 7:25; Joshua 7:21; Proverbs 12:12; Isaiah 1:29; Micah 2:2.
- B) “חָמַד” = “Sinful Desire/Lust” Job 20:20; Proverbs 6:25;

New Testament: The verb and noun so often translated in terms of coveting and lusting deserve to be surveyed. While used positively from time to time, these terms are never neutral and the context always clearly indicates the negative or the positive use.

“ἐπιθυμέω” = “Covet” Acts 20:33; Romans 7:7; 13:9; James 4:2;

“ἐπιθυμέω” = “Sinful Desire/Lust” Matthew 5:28; Luke 15:16; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Galatians 5:17; Revelation 9:6.

“ἐπιθυμέω”, as a NT word is used 6 times in the positive sense—strongly desiring good (Matthew 13:17; Luke 17:22; 22:15; 1 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 6:11; 1 Peter 1:12).

“ἐπιθυμία” = “Covetousness” Mark 4:19; Romans 7:7, 8;

“ἐπιθυμία” = “Sinful Desire/Lust” John 8:44; Romans 1:24; 6:12; 13:14; Galatians 5:16, 24; Ephesians 2:3; 4:22; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Titus 2:12; 3:3; James 1:14, 15; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3; 1 John 2:16, 17; Jude 1:16, 18.

“ἐπιθυμία”, as a NT word is only used 2 times in the positive sense—a strong desire for what is good (Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17).

Friedrich Büchsel, writing in TDNT, describes the use of these key terms: “הַמְדָּה”, “ἐπιθυμία” and “ἐπιθυμέω”.¹⁹⁴ Writing about the Old Testament, he makes their semantic connection through the LXX, “The LXX uses ἐπιθυμία and ἐπιθυμειν predominately for constructs of the stems “אָוּדָה” and “הַמְדָּה”. When explaining the use of ἐπιθυμία in the LXX he states:

There is condemnation not merely of the evil act but also of the evil will. The Decalogue forbids stealing and the desire for the goods of others, including their wives. The inability in obedience to God to renounce what may be in themselves natural and legitimate desires, the longing for sexual satisfaction outside of marriage is called sin . . . in Numbers 11 and Genesis 39. Self-discipline in the sexual sphere even to the control of one’s glances is a duty of the righteous from the time of 2 Samuel 11:2 and Job 31:1.

He goes on to claim that through the development of Jewish thought in the Intertestamental period, “the view is reached that desire is the chief of all sins. The will of God can be expressed in the single formula: not to desire. In the OT and Judaism ἐπιθυμία is an offence against God, who demands of man total obedience and love from the whole heart, Dt. 5:5” His observations of “ἐπιθυμία” in the New Testament are similar.

For Paul . . . ἐπιθυμία is a manifestation of the sin which dwells in man and which controls him, but which is dead apart from the ἐπιθυμία stirred up by the Law (*Romans* 7:7, 8). That desire is a result of the prohibition of sin reveals the carnality of man (*Galatians* 5:16, 24), his separation from God, his subjection to divine wrath (*Romans* 1:18ff). In *James* 1:14, 15, ἐπιθυμία is regarded as the constant root in man of the individual acts of sin to which the author’s attention is mainly directed. . . . What the NT has to say concerning ἐπιθυμία is not based on the reflection which seeks to dissect the nature of man. It is part of the preaching of repentance (*my emphasis*). The seriousness of man’s God-given duty has to be fully impressed upon him in order to stir his will to resolution in self-denial. . . . The essential point in ἐπιθυμία is that it is desire as impulse, as a motion of the will. It is, in fact, lust, since the thought of satisfaction gives pleasure and that of non-satisfaction pain. ἐπιθυμία is anxious self-seeking. . . . Even after the reception of the divine Spirit, ἐπιθυμία is always a danger against which man must be warned and must fight.

¹⁹⁴ Friedrich Büchsel, “ἐπιθυμία, ἐπιθυμέω” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 169, 171.