

Does Jack Rogers's Book "Explode the Myths" about the Bible and Homosexuality and "Heal the Church"?

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We saw in Installment 3 how Rogers twice lied about me "simply asserting, with no supporting evidence," that Paul's indictment of homosexual practice was inclusive of committed homosexual unions. I used Rogers's false witness to lay out my rebuttal of the "exploitation argument" so far as the Pauline witness is concerned. Rogers used this lie as a cover-up. By asserting that I had no supporting evidence he could give his readers the impression that he had dealt with, and dispatched, the leading arguments for an inclusive view of Paul's indictment when in fact he had not dealt with virtually any of the arguments. Essentially, Rogers was banking on the ignorance of his readers and the effectiveness of his own duplicity. But bad scholarship and duplicity cannot "heal the church," much less "explode the [alleged] myths" that Rogers claims that he "explodes."

Now we note a second prime lie and false witness on Rogers's part, which I will also use as a basis for discussing some of Rogers's treatment of science:

(B) The claim that I believe homosexuality is merely a "willful choice." Rogers makes the following outrageous misrepresentation of my views (boldface added):

Gagnon claims, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, that homosexuality is a willful choice. (p. 83)

Gagnon claims that all people who are homosexual have willfully chosen that behavior and therefore can successfully change their sexual identity. (p. 82)

By these remarks Rogers attempts to delude readers into thinking that I hold the extreme view that "all" persons who experience homosexual desires have simply willed themselves to have such desires and, further, that "all" such persons can simply wake up one day and decide by sheer force of will to eliminate every vestige of homosexual desire and become exclusively heterosexual in orientation. This is preposterous. Rogers makes this charge because he wants to construct an overall portrait of me for readers as an extremist. **On multiple occasions in my writings I have declared that this is *not* what I believe. Moreover, Rogers does not, and cannot, produce a single quote from my works on homosexuality to show that I believe what he claims that I believe.**

Note: Rogers words the quote on p. 82 to say that “Gagnon claims that all people who are homosexual have willfully chosen that *behavior*” (emphasis added). Strictly speaking, it is true that I and all other thinking persons believe that *behavior* of this or virtually any sort is “willfully chosen” (assuming, of course, that we are not talking about coercion on the part of some outside influence like having a gun pointed at one’s head). For example, when Dr. Fred Berlin, founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital and professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, talks about a pedophilic “orientation,” he can say:

The biggest misconception about pedophilia is that someone chooses to have it. . . . It’s not anyone’s fault that they have it, but it’s their responsibility to do something about it. (go [here](#) for this and other quotes from Berlin)

Does Rogers want to argue that a pedophile, whose orientation is every bit as innate and involuntary as that of a homosexual person, has no choice but to engage in pedophilic behavior consistent with his orientation? I have to assume, for Rogers’s sake, that he does not. A pedophile who has sex with a child is regarded by law as someone who has “willfully chosen that behavior,” irrespective of the involuntary character of pedophilic impulses. So Rogers *can’t* have a problem with me or anyone else believing that persons who experience involuntary same-sex attractions do have a choice in whether they engage in homosexual *behavior*—unless he believes the absurd notion that all intense and involuntary impulses have to be acted upon (which would certainly change the landscape of Christian ethics). Since Rogers is imprecise throughout his book in talking about “homosexuality” and “homosexual behavior,” it is likely that he maintains the same imprecision here (perhaps even deliberately). It is clear that in his following remarks he understands “behavior” as mere attractions for he goes on to summarize my view as “*homosexuality* is a willful choice” (p. 83). Moreover, he attempts to refute my view by quoting a remark from David Myers that “*sexual orientation* [is not] willfully chosen” (p. 82)—a remark that would have no relevance to the view that homosexual *behavior* is “willfully chosen” unless Rogers meant by *behavior* sexual orientation. Rogers’s obfuscation of orientation and behavior in a discussion of choice is another piece of evidence either that (1) Rogers is not a clear thinker on this issue or (2) Rogers is deliberately trying to promote confusion to make a reasonable view look unreasonable.

- The only quote that Rogers produces is one that he misinterprets for readers and takes out of context; namely,

Relying on his inaccurate assumptions about what is “natural” Gagnon claims, “Certainly no one is born a homosexual.” (p. 82; boldface added)

Now to say that “no one is born a homosexual” is obviously not the same thing as saying that all experiences of homoerotic desire are due to “willful choice.”

Rogers appears incapable of getting his mind around the notion that there is something in between (1) complete congenital determinism and (2) pure, willful choice. And yet that is exactly where the scientific studies suggest that we currently are.

- In connection with this, **it is important to note how poorly done is Rogers’s exploration of what science tells us.** Rather than critically review specific scientific studies to assess what science tells us on the matter of the origination of homosexual desires, Rogers contents himself with uncritically quoting the politically motivated assertions of organizations such as the two APAs (psychological and psychiatric)

whose committees on sexual orientation are led by self-identifying homosexual persons and their supporters (pp. 98-100). I found only one specific study cited in Rogers's book and even that study was quoted from someone else (David Myers; p. 99). It is a 1981 study of the Kinsey Institute that claims that homosexual males were no more likely than heterosexual males to have poor relationships with their father or to be sexually abused. The problem here is that Rogers appears totally unaware of subsequent studies that contradict these views. For example, two studies by the noted researcher on child sexual abuse Kurt Freund purport to show that homosexual "teleiophiles" (homosexual males attracted to other adult males) reported "significantly poorer father-son relations" (1983, 1987). There are also numerous studies that suggest childhood same-sex experience is a risk factor for later homosexual development (cited in my "Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture: Part II: Science," 30-34, [online](#)). Readers may contrast the dearth of direct interaction with scientific literature in Rogers's book and the abundance of such interaction in my own work. This interaction was true of my first book on the subject, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (pp. 395-432, 452-60, 471-85) and my first article on the subject, "A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, Part 1," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000): 184-89, 200-12 passim (also available [online](#)). It is also true of my more recent works: "Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture: Part II: Science" (Aug. 2005; 40 pages, [online](#)); and "Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice?," *Reformed Review* 59.1 (Autumn 2005): 30-36, 120-29 ([online](#)). I encourage readers of this review to start with the last-mentioned work and see for themselves some of the scientific evidence.

Let us return to the quote that Rogers gives from my work: "Certainly no one is born a homosexual." The quote is taken from p. 103 of *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* in my response to Via. I give here the immediate context on that page:

Scientific evidence indicates *at most* an indirect and secondary congenital influence on homosexual development (Gagnon 2001, 396-413; N146).

Certainly no one is born a homosexual, though Via talks as if homosexual desire were an inevitable part of God's creative intent in nature (N147).

In children exhibiting significant gender nonconformity (N148), early proactive intervention can decrease the chance of homosexual development (Gagnon 2001, 408-13; N149).

Sociological studies suggest that the incidence of homosexuality varies widely depending on the degree of societal support or rejection of homosexual activity (Gagnon 2001, 413-18). Via has not addressed this.

The vast majority of self-identified homosexuals will experience some heterosexual attraction at some point in life (Gagnon 2001, 418-20); so much for a general presumption of fixity (N150).

Therapeutic success in treating the homoerotically inclined may be no worse than for a number of other relatively entrenched conditions such as alcoholism or pedophilia (Gagnon 2001, 420-29; N151). Therapists define *success* as

management of unwanted desires, not complete elimination. *Change* is multifaceted (N152). (boldface added)

It follows immediately a sentence that acknowledges possible “indirect and secondary congenital influence on homosexual development” and is followed immediately by the clause “though Via talks as if homosexual desire were an inevitable part of God’s creative intent in nature.” **I don’t know a single scientific study that proves that primary homosexual orientation is an “inevitable” product of congenital influences, much less that homosexual development is due to “God’s creative intent” (a theological claim that science cannot establish). Does Rogers? If he does, let him cite the study.** He will not find a single one. I fully acknowledge that there are studies for which one possible and perhaps probable interpretation of results (though not the only one) is that congenital influences pose an increased risk for homosexual development. That’s it—and that is what I mean by rejecting the claim about being “born homosexual.”

Immediately preceding the sentence containing the clause “Certainly no one is born a homosexual,” for the sentence alluding to possible “indirect and secondary congenital influence on homosexual development” is a number: “N146.” “N” stands for “note” and the number for the note number. Because of severe space restrictions that Fortress placed on the size of my essay and response, all the note numbers in my contribution to *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* key to [online notes](#). **One would think that if Rogers were going to pinpoint his entire accusation that I think same-sex attractions are invariably and completely due to “willful choice” on a single clause from a single sentence of a single work of mine that he would check the online footnotes around it to make sure that he understood correctly what I was saying. Here is what “N146” says:**

146. For example, the most recent (2002), and largest, representative study of same-sex attraction in twins, done by researchers from Columbia and Yale (2002), concluded that “less gendered socialization” in childhood, not genetic or hormonal influences, plays the dominant role in the development of same-sex attraction. “If same-sex romantic attraction has a genetic component, it is massively overwhelmed by other factors” (Peter S. Bearman and Hannah Brückner, “Opposite-Sex Twins and Adolescent Same-Sex Attraction,” *American Journal of Sociology* 107:5 [2002]: 1179-1205).

An example of the kind of indirect and secondary character to congenital influences might be the following: (1) Genetic, neurological, or intrauterine hormonal influences may code for traits that (2) may lead to a sense of gender nonconformity and difference that (3) may lead to a distancing from one’s same-sex parent or peers that (4) may create an intense longing for love and affirmation from one’s own sex that (5) may become eroticized. Correlation is not causation. **Whether an individual develops a dominant homosexual attraction depends on the interaction of an individual’s incremental choices (indirect and direct, proactive and reactive) with personal biology and psychology, family dynamics, peer socialization, early sexual intimacy, and cultural sanctions and indoctrination.**

Edward Stein, a pro-homosex scholar, challenges deterministic models of homosexual development and posits instead a nondeterministic model that incorporates a significant role for indirect choice: *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1999). Like various forms of sexual disorders (paraphilias), the degree to which a homosexual “orientation” becomes fixed in an individual’s brain can be related to lifestyle choices regarding fantasy life, the extent of participation in homosexual activity, and degree of self-motivation for change. Cf. Jeffrey A. Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 132-45. (boldface added)

The first paragraph of the note refers to an important recent twin study that concluded that early childhood socialization (specifically, less gendered socialization) and not “genetic or hormonal influences” played the dominant role in homosexual development. Let Rogers refute the study if he disagrees with it. He just ignores it. The second paragraph lays out a model of how congenital influences might indirectly create a risk factor (though not *fait accompli*) for homosexual development. This is certainly not a claim that all homosexual development is due to “willful choice,” pure and simple. Indeed, I am quite clear in stating: “Whether an individual develops a dominant homosexual attraction depends on the interaction of an individual’s incremental choices (indirect and direct, proactive and reactive) with personal biology and psychology, family dynamics, peer socialization, early sexual intimacy, and cultural sanctions and indoctrination.” The third paragraph then quotes a legal and philosophical scholar, Edward Stein, who is fully supportive of homosexual unions and yet holds a similar view to what I had just espoused. Incidentally, even the *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* had this to say about Stein’s book:

A landmark book. . . . It so pulls the rug out from under biological arguments for lesbian and gay rights that anyone from now on who appeals to such arguments will have to answer to Edward Stein’s objections” (from back cover)

Not only does Rogers not answer to Stein’s objections, he apparently doesn’t even know what they are. Accordingly, there is obviously nothing extreme about the view that I espouse on homosexual development. **There is, however, something extreme about the notion apparently held by Rogers that all, or nearly all, homosexual development follows a “congenital predestination” model.**

- An aside here is that **Rogers** claims: “Clearly there is no biblical warrant for this statement” that no one is born a homosexual (p. 82). He **cites Jesus’ statement about “eunuchs who have been born so from the womb”** in Matt 19:10-12 as proof, noting (from Nissinen) that in the ancient world men who had no desire for women might include not only asexual men but homosexual men. I actually agree with the point that Jesus may well have had such figures in view. But there are several things of note here that Rogers doesn’t grasp.

(1) **Jesus’ statement, set in its ancient context, need not mean anything more than that some persons experience congenital risk factors for homosexual development.** Jesus isn’t focusing on scientific precision here. He is merely contrasting “eunuchs who were made eunuchs by people” (i.e., castrated men) with men whose lack of sexual desire for women is attributable not to castration but to other factors,

including congenital influences. To wring out of this statement a deterministic model of congenital causation goes far beyond the evidence. What I acknowledged when I talked about possible indirect congenital influence on homosexual development may well be, and probably is, all that Jesus meant.

(2) **Rogers appears not to notice the major contradiction with his entire orientation argument.** For Rogers, as we noted in Installment 2, insists that the Bible “has no concept like our present understanding of a person with a homosexual orientation” (p. 58). But when it suits his purposes to argue that Jesus might have been aware of the existence of “born homosexuals”—as when he wants to argue that sexual orientation is not a choice (thinking, falsely, that I believe all same-sex attractions are “willfully chosen”)—then Rogers is more than willing to adopt the opposite position. This is further evidence for what I have been pointing out; namely, that Rogers isn’t interested so much in what Scripture says as in making Scripture serviceable for viewpoints arrived at through other sources.

(3) **If, in fact, Jesus here is conscious of the existence of persons who are “born” with a propensity for developing same-sex attractions, then this text proves the exact opposite of the central thesis of Rogers’s book.** For Jesus here makes no concession for such figures to have sexual relations outside the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. In the context of Jesus’ statement, “eunuchs who makes themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God” are not men who have sexual relations outside marriage to a woman. They are men who forego all sexual relations for the sake of devoting themselves fully to the proclamation of the kingdom of God. And Jesus expressly compares the three types of eunuchs as all having one thing in common: sexual abstinence. Consequently, if Jesus was including in his remarks “born homosexuals,” then it is clear that **Jesus was unwilling to make any accommodation for such men having sexual relations outside a marriage with a woman. He simply assumed that such men had no sexual relations.** That Rogers does not recognize either the internal contradiction of his claim here about Jesus recognizing the existence of “born homosexuals” both for (a) his assertion everywhere else that homosexual orientation was unknown in antiquity and (b) his assertion that advocacy of committed homosexual unions is consistent with Jesus’ teachings speaks volumes for the quality, or lack thereof, of Rogers’s scholarship on the Bible and homosexuality and his capacity for logical and consistent thinking on this issue.

This is not the only place where Rogers could have discovered my views had he had the slightest interest in presenting those views accurately to his readers. **For example, in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice (2001)* I make the following statements** immediately following my 34-page discussion of the scientific data on homosexual causation:

The latest scientific research on homosexuality simply reinforces what Scripture and common sense already told us: **human behavior results from a complex mixture of biologically related desires (genetic, intrauterine, post-natal brain development), familial and environmental influences, human psychology, and repeated choices. Whatever predisposition to homosexuality may exist is a far cry from predestination or determinism and easy to harmonize with Paul’s understanding of homosexuality.** It is often stated by scholars supportive of the homosexual lifestyle that Paul believed that homosexual behavior was something freely chosen, based on the threefold use of “they exchanged” (*metellaxan*) in Rom 1:23, 25, 26. The use of the word *exchange* may indeed suggest that Paul assumed an element of choice was involved, though for the phenomenon globally conceived and not necessarily for each individual. Certainly, the larger context in which these verses are found indicates a willing suppression of the truth about God and God’s design for the created order (1:18). And indeed **who would debate the point that homosexual behavior is void of all choice? Even a predisposition does not compel behavior.**

Romans 1-8 indicates as well that Paul considered the **sinful passions** that buffet humanity to be **innate and controlling**. Corresponding to the threefold “they exchanged” is the threefold “God gave them over” (*paredoken autous ho theos*) in 1:24, 26, 28. Rather than exert a restraining influence, **God steps aside and allows human beings to be controlled by preexisting desires. Paul paints a picture of humanity subjugated and ruled by its own passions; a humanity not in control but controlled.** . . . Based on a reading of Rom 5:12-21 and 7:7-23, it is clear that **Paul conceived of sin as ‘innate’ . . . Paul viewed sin as a power operating in the ‘flesh’ and in human ‘members,’ experienced since birth as a result of being descendants of Adam. . . . For Paul all sin was in a certain sense innate in that human beings don’t ask to feel sexual desire, or anger, or fear, or selfishness—they just do, despite whether they want to experience such impulses or not. If Paul could be transported into our time and told that homosexual impulses were at least partly present at birth, he would probably say, ‘I could have told you that’ or at least ‘I can work that into my system of thought.’**” (pp. 430-31; boldface added)

Now I ask readers: Does this sound like I am stating that all same-sex attractions are purely and simply manufactured by the human will? Do I not suggest here, with the best science, that homosexual practice results “from a complex mixture of biologically related desires (genetic, intrauterine, post-natal brain development), familial and environmental influences, human psychology, and repeated choices”? That a view of same-sex attractions as being partly influenced by congenital factors is consistent with Paul’s own view of sin? Hasn’t Rogers misrepresented my views?

- **Remember, too, that Rogers also alleged: “Gagnon claims that all people who are homosexual . . . can successfully change their sexual identity.”** What Rogers apparently means by this is: Gagnon thinks that all homosexual persons can successfully change to become completely heterosexual, eliminating all their previous same-sex attractions.

- If one takes Rogers's reference to "sexual identity" literally, one ends up with an absurd inference; namely, that in Rogers's view people never have any say over their "identity." Identity is largely a matter of self-construction. For example, virtually all men experience a proclivity to "polysexuality"—that is, they would experience no particular distress over being forced to have sexual intercourse with multiple, very beautiful women. That doesn't mean that they should construct an identity around this entrenched impulse and refer to themselves as "polysexuals," does it? For my understanding of the difference between Christian identity and biologically based orientations, see my recent article, "Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity," in *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24.4 (Winter 2005): 293-303. A scriptural understanding dictates that Christians who experience attractions that are at cross purposes with God's revealed will must construct an identity distinct from such attractions. Anyone who doesn't believe that has a pagan or unreformed mindset. Scripture commands the renewal of the mind consistent with the person whom God is making us to be in Christ (Rom 12:1-2).

So Rogers is charging me with believing that *all* homosexual persons can successfully change to primary heterosexuality and can do so simply by willing it. This is ridiculous. As with Rogers's related allegation, it runs counter to explicit statements in my writings. Now I certainly do believe that significant reduction in the intensity of homoerotic attraction is possible for some and that some of these may also develop over time significant heterosexual attractions. I make this presentation in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (pp. 419-29). A more thorough case for this position can be found in Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (IVP, 2000), 117-51—another work that Rogers shows no awareness of. I believe, based on a significant body of research, that macro- and microcultural influences can affect the incidence of homosexuality in a population. In addition, when I use the word "change" it does not have the one-dimensional meaning that Rogers gives to it.

Rogers quotes another sentence of mine from the same page that he quotes the line "Certainly no one is born a homosexual":

When you probe beyond the assertion [that homosexuality is a willful choice and that homosexual persons can willfully choose to have a heterosexual orientation], Gagnon acknowledges that "therapists define *success* as management of unwanted desires, not complete elimination." (p. 82)

In effect, Rogers tells readers: "Although Gagnon *asserts* that all homosexual people willfully chose their homosexuality and can willfully choose a heterosexual orientation, when you really dig deeper into what he says you find that even he doesn't *believe* that. He contradicts himself." Rogers then goes on to conclude that "'reparative' or 'conversion' therapy is addressing *only* behavior rather than orientation" (ibid., my emphasis). In the following page he again summarizes my view, falsely, as "Gagnon claims . . . homosexuality is a willful choice."

This is just another example that Rogers doesn't read carefully the work of those with whom he disagrees; or, rather, reads to distort rather than reads to understand. There is no contradiction in my statement because, **contrary to what Rogers tells readers:**

(1) I never indicated with my statement “no one is born a homosexual” that all homosexuality is a matter of “willful choice”; rather congenital influences are not absolutely deterministic in homosexual development but instead create risk factors that then interact with other influences such as early socialization;

and

(2) I never indicated with my statement “therapists define success as management of unwanted desires” that reduction in intensity of homosexual impulses and/or development of some heterosexual functioning is unlikely or even that virtual change from homosexuality to heterosexuality is impossible for anyone.

When I talked about the definition of therapeutic success I stated this as an adequate *minimal* goal. No therapist for any condition can guarantee a change of impulses or feelings, much less complete change. No therapist, for example, can guarantee a man who has a problem with pornography that, after therapy, he will lose all intense desires to look at beautiful naked women (other than his wife, if he has one). At the same time, saying that is not the same as saying therapy never or hardly ever achieves a reduction of intensity of unwanted impulses. Therapists set a minimal goal, change of behavior, and hope for more, namely, reduction in the intensity of unwanted impulses and possibly (in a minority of cases or in rare cases) virtual elimination of such impulses. All of this should have been clear to Rogers from the sentence that immediately precedes the one quoted by Rogers:

Therapeutic success in treating the homoerotically inclined may be no less than for a number of other relatively entrenched conditions such as alcoholism or pedophilia.

Does Rogers mean to say that Alcoholics Anonymous addresses *only* behavior, in a mechanical way, and never accomplishes any reduction in intensity of impulses for anyone? This is Rogers’s little black-and-white world where the only two options are complete choice and complete determinism, complete transformation of all desires or no transformation.

Rogers follows up his remark about reparative therapy addressing *only* behavior with the theologically ridiculous observation that a desire that is “a part of someone’s nature” is likely to be “God-given” (p. 83). Who cannot think of, off the top of one’s head, a half-dozen or dozen desires that are deeply imbedded in human existence but are nonetheless sinful desires? How deeply imbedded is polysexuality in nearly all males and pedosexuality in a significant subset of the male population? How about arrogance, greed, self-centeredness, anger, envy, indifference, hate, laziness, etc.? All of these are “a part of our (human) nature.” So what? They are not God-given. Then Rogers, quoting David Myers again,

says: “Sexual orientation is like handedness.” Not exactly. Handedness is a benign, a-moral quality. There are “sexual orientations” to do things that God expressly forbids and which are clearly immoral. Does Rogers at his advanced age not realize this most basic of ethical points?

Moreover, while we are on the subject of **handedness**, one should note a contrary observation made by the researchers who put together the authors of the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (about which we will say more below). They write that a relatively uniform distribution of homosexuality in social groups “would fit with certain analogies to genetically or biologically based traits such as left-handedness or intelligence. *However, that is exactly what we do not find.* Homosexuality . . . is clearly distributed differentially within categories of . . . social and demographic variables” (p. 307; my emphasis; citation below).

Here’s what I have to say about change in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 426-29 (the section of my book that treats the question “Can Homosexuals Change?”):

It is surely unrealistic to demand that a person who comes out of a homosexual lifestyle and into a heterosexual one never again, under even the most stressful circumstances, experience homosexual urges if she or he is to claim a sexual-orientation change. **An acceptable standard of “cure” in other conditions is not the removal of every last vestige of temptation but rather the ability to successfully manage such temptations. . . .**

That changes in sexual orientation usually do not come about easily should occasion no surprise. Many pleasurable forms of behavior, particularly sexual behavior, tend toward compulsion and addiction. **They cannot be turned on and off like a light switch.** A close friend of mine, who has worked for over a decade counseling sex offenders in prisons, has shared with me the pessimism that prison mental health staff have about effecting permanent change. Despite the best effort of clinicians, the recidivism rate for rapists and child molesters is extremely high. **The reason why is clear: there is a biological or physiological component to their peculiar experience of sexual arousal.** Yet few would claim that change is impossible for such offenders. If society believed that, there would be no point to providing prison counseling services. **If once incarcerated sex offenders learn to manage and control their aberrant sexual impulses, it is appropriate to say that satisfactory change has occurred. Why not be able to say the same about once homosexually oriented people who are able to effectively manage such impulses?** One can also make comparisons with non-criminal forms of immoral or inappropriate sexual behavior (e.g., sadomasochism, bestiality, addiction to pornography, and intense dissatisfaction with single-partner monogamous relationships) or with non-sexual compulsions, addictions, and disorders which have a genetic or biological aspect (e.g., alcoholism, smoking addictions, eating disorders, depression, pathological gambling, aggression, and criminal behavior). **We have no difficulty acknowledging significant change in a “recovering alcoholic” who generally stays away from the bottle but from time-to-time struggles with an internal, physiologically connected desire to drink. Nor do we accuse Alcoholics Anonymous of being a failure because they have only a 25-30% success rate, where “success” is not defined as the complete abolition of temptation.**

. . . . We have argued strongly up till now that homosexuals *can* change; or, more precisely, that at least **some homosexuals, including some who claim to have been exclusively homosexual in orientation, are capable of change.** Of course, *empirically* not all homosexuals will change, if by “change” we mean make a major adjustment in sexual orientation. As a Christian, I have a strong belief in the power of the Spirit of God to change the lives of those who submit themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. . . . At the same time, **we have Christians who appear on the surface at least to have made sincere efforts to change, and yet have been unable to move from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation. Patterns of sexual arousal embedded in the brain are not easily removed.** When the apostle Paul referred to warfare between the flesh and Spirit in the Christian life, he spoke optimistically of the Christian’s ability to “walk” or behave in accordance with the wishes of the indwelling Spirit. Yet even that victory presupposes an ongoing struggle with sinful desires. **Christians are not guaranteed that they will be freed from such desires altogether, but rather that their identity is not defined by such desires. It is fair to say that Christians who no longer participate in the homosexual behavior of their pre-Christian life are ex-homosexuals.** “These things some of you were” (1 Cor 6:11). No longer obeying homosexual impulses but now obeying the will of God for their lives, they have been transformed into the adopted children of God. In the same way, heterosexuals who continue to experience temptations to lust after members of the opposite sex other than their spouse, yet resist such temptations and refuse to act on them, are ex-fornicators and ex-adulterers. Christians are not promised an end to sexual temptation in its various forms. They are given the anchored hope that those who endure to the end will be saved.

The best hope for change in the sexual orientation of homosexuals comes not in attempts to treat homosexuals after years and years of homosexual behavior but rather in limiting the options that young people have in terms of sexual experimentation. Some people will experiment under any cultural conditions. Nevertheless, cross-cultural studies prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that strong cultural disapproval of homosexual behavior can significantly curtail the incidence of such behavior. **So perhaps a better question to ask than “Can homosexuals change?” is “Can the numbers of self-identifying homosexuals in the population be affected by cultural attitudes toward homosexual behavior?” The answer to that question is “Yes, significantly so.”** (boldface added)

Again, no reasonable person can possibly read the material above and come to the conclusion that I think “change” as defined in Rogers’s totalistic way is doable for all homosexual persons or even most. I liken the success rate to AA and define change in the way that AA defines change. I also make clear that change even in this redefined sense is not easy. I affirm that Christians can consider themselves genuinely changed in Christ if they do not live out of impulses contrary to God’s will. Finally, I note that the “best hope” for change lies in trying to minimize cultural influences that transform congenital risk factors into developmental certainties. There is certainly nothing in these remarks that suggests, contrary to what Rogers alleges, that I believe that all persons experiencing strong same-sex attractions can will themselves to lose such attractions altogether and acquire in their place other-sex attractions.

I made similar points in an article widely publicized in Presbyterian circles, entitled “The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Theologies, Analogies, and Genes” in *Theology Matters* 7.6 (Nov./Dec. 2001), 11-12 (available [online](#)).

I do not contend that self-identified homosexuals can be easily rid of homoerotic desires. Disordered sexual “orientations” of any stripe, not just homosexual ones, do not change easily. This includes orientations toward multiple sex partners, sex with members of the inner family circle, sex with children or adolescents, sex with animals, commercial sex, sadomasochistic sex, and coercive sex. **Patterns of sexual arousal wired in the brain by life’s experiences are usually not easily removed, even after years of therapeutic intervention.** Ironically, those who argue that homosexual behavior should not be disavowed precisely because it is resistant to change would—to be consistent—have to contend that non-monogamous relationships be accepted for male homosexual relationships. For statistical evidence to date strongly suggests that male homosexuals have extraordinary difficulty, relative even to lesbians, in forming monogamous unions.

No, my point is more basic: homoerotic desire is not like race or anatomical sex. It is not a fixed, immutable birthright. It is closer to an entrenched (but not irrevocable) taste than to physical differences impervious to cultural shifts. This can be perceived by reviewing (a) the different levels of change that are possible for homosexual tastes and (b) the different mechanisms for inducing change.

(a) It is erroneous to restrict the meaning of *change* in this context to the complete eradication of homosexual desire. As we have seen above, change can include:

- A reduction or elimination of homosexual behavior;
- A reduction in the intensity and frequency of homosexual impulses;
- The experience of heterosexual arousal (whether in place of or in conjunction with homosexual arousal);
- Reorientation from exclusive or predominant homosexuality to exclusive or predominant heterosexuality.

Ultimately, in terms of Christian self-definition, the true ex-homosexual is not only someone who never experiences homosexual impulses, just as the ex-adulterer is not only someone who never experiences a desire for sex with women other than his wife. The true ex-homosexual (or, more precisely, ex-“homosexer”) is someone who, by God’s grace and the power of the Spirit, no longer acquiesces to homosexual impulses.

(b) Both the level of incidence of homosexual desire and fluctuations in its intensity and degree of exclusivity can be affected by:

- The degree of cultural incentives, opportunities, and indoctrination for or against homosexual behavior;
- Experiences at various points in an individual’s life, including the degree and character of parental and peer-group affirmation (especially same-sex), early sexual arousal, sexual experimentation, unsolicited erotic encounters, exposure to the homosexual subculture, the availability (or absence) of sex partners or satisfying sexual relationships, and vulnerability to outside influences (owing to personality type, stress, etc.);
- Therapeutic intervention.

The different types of change possible and the existence of various external mechanisms for producing change combine to put homosexual proclivities on an entirely different footing than race or sex. (boldface added)

Again, I argue here that patterns of sexual arousal of any sort are not easily removed; that change is a multidimensional concept that cannot be limited to eradication of homosexual desire; that the ex-homosexual includes persons for whom same-sex attractions persist but do not rule; and that macrocultural and microcultural influences can affect the incidence of homosexuality in a population in a way that they cannot affect a person's ethnicity or sex (gender).

There is a big difference—which Rogers seems incapable or unwilling to grasp—between saying that change of a person's sexual "orientation" is nothing but a "willful choice" and saying that environmental factors (including family, peer, and broader cultural factors) can affect the incidence of homosexuality in a population. I am not saying anything different than what the researchers (mostly from the University of Chicago) for the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) concluded in what is still regarded by many as the best sex survey done in the United States:

- Homosexuality . . . is clearly distributed differentially within categories of . . . social and demographic variables. . . . **An environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior. . . . There is evidence for the effect of the degree of urbanization of residence while growing up on reported homosexuality. This effect is quite marked and strong for men and practically nonexistent for women.** Men in urban areas were seven times more likely to identify as homosexual than are men in rural areas. Significant differences persisted from rural to urban even for those whose residence at the age of 14 or 16 was in an urban or rural area respectively. For women the differential was 3 times (Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 307-9; boldface added).
- Women who were college graduates were 5.5 times more likely (9.3%) to claim same-gender attraction than women whose education had not extended beyond high school (1.7%), and nine times more likely (3.6%) to identify as homosexual or bisexual (.4%). The difference for men with college degrees and those without was significant but not as great: only 2 times greater as regards same-gender attraction (8.3% vs. 4.3%) and homosexual/bisexual identification (3.3% vs. 1.6%). **"Education . . . does seem to stand out for women in a way that it does not for men."** Laumann et al. list several possible factors: (1) "Higher levels of education are associated with greater social and sexual liberalism and with greater sexual experimentation"; (2) "More education. . . . may also represent a higher level of personal resources . . . which would increase one's ability to please oneself. . . . [with] women's

sexual experiences becoming . . . more like men's" (ibid., 309-10; bold added).

Nor am I saying anything different than the following study by Gary Remafedi et al., "Demography of sexual orientation in adolescents," *Pediatrics* 89:4 (Apr. 1992): 714-21 (quote from abstract):

This study was undertaken to explore patterns of sexual orientation in a representative sample of Minnesota junior and senior high school students. The sample included 34,706 students (grades 7 through 12) from diverse ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic strata. . . . Overall, 10.7% of students were "unsure" of their sexual orientation; 88.2% described themselves as predominantly heterosexual; and 1.1% described themselves as bisexual or predominantly homosexual. . . . Gender differences were minor; but **responses to individual sexual orientation items varied with age, religiosity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.** Uncertainty about sexual orientation diminished in successively older age groups, with corresponding increases in heterosexual and homosexual affiliation. **The findings suggest an unfolding of sexual identity during adolescence, influenced by sexual experience and demographic factors.** (bold added)

Nor am I saying anything different from two professors of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins wrote a standard textbook on psychiatry:

Genetic factors play some role in the production of homosexual behavior, but . . . sexual behavior is molded by many influences, including "acquired tastes" (or learning) closely related to the culture in which the individual develops. . . . It is possible . . . to picture a future in which homosexual behavior will be so much in the cultural experience of every individual that the genetic contribution will become undetectable. . . . What may be inherited may not be a mechanism specific to a behavior but rather something related to qualities of that person that render him or her more vulnerable to social influences. . . . **That genes have a role in behavior can be demonstrated; that behaviors are influenced by other forces is also certain, particularly learning through models, instructions, and rewards from the sociocultural environment.** (Paul R. McHugh and Phillip R. Slavney, *The Perspectives of Psychiatry* [2d ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998], 184-86; boldface added)

Nor am I saying anything different from researchers Peter S. Bearman of Columbia University and Hannah Brückner of Yale University who in the largest twin study to date

- Found no significant difference in concordance rates for non-heterosexuality among identical twin pairs (6.7%) and fraternal twin pairs (7.2%), even though the latter are no more genetically 'identical' than non-twin siblings
- Found that opposite-sex twins were twice as likely to report same-sex attraction as same-sex twins; and that males without older brothers among opposite-sex twins were twice as likely to report same-sex attraction (18.7%) than their male counterparts with older brothers (8.8%)
- Concluded that **"less gendered socialization in early childhood and preadolescence shapes subsequent same-sex romantic preferences"**

(“Opposite-Sex Twins and Adolescent Same-Sex Attraction,” *American Journal of Sociology* 107 [2002]: 1179-1205; bold added)

Nor am I saying anything different from Brian Mustanski of Indiana University and J. Michael Bailey of Northwestern University when they contended:

It is also frequently assumed that traits that have genetic underpinnings are compelled, unchangeable, and innate.... The fact that a trait is heritable does not mean that it is immutable, or resistant to change. This is because heritability estimates can, and do, change over time.... For example, recent research has demonstrated that the percentage of young adults and the amount of migration in different communities strongly moderate the heritability of adolescent alcohol consumption.... A client who...expends considerable mental energy contemplating the origins of sexual orientation is focusing on the wrong issue, in our opinion. The value of a characteristic such as homosexuality depends on its effects rather than on its causes.... **The heritability of a trait provides little information about the extent to which it is compelled, immutable, innate, or most importantly, acceptable.** (“A therapist’s guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18:4 [Nov. 2003]: 432-33; boldface added)

Even Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Institute have published data indicating that the vast majority of persons who self-identify as homosexual will experience one or more shifts on the Kinsey spectrum of 0 to 6 in the course of life, even apart from any therapeutic intervention, with most having two or more shifts (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 419-20). **Even David Myers**, whom Rogers loves to quote, has to admit (in his more lucid or candid moments about the scientific evidence) that “women’s sexual orientation also tends to be less strongly felt and potentially more fluid and changeable than men’s”—a statement that presumes some degree of fluidity and changeableness in human sexual orientation (*What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage* [HarperSanFrancisco, 2005], 67). Can the reader imagine anyone saying with a straight face the same thing about race or sex?

This review should make two things clear: (1) Rogers has borne false witness about my views regarding the origin of same-sex attractions and the issue of change; and (2) Rogers doesn’t know the scientific research on the subject. It seems that the less Rogers knows about the subject, the more confident and strident he appears to be in his claims.

I can’t resist one final point on this second score, which will convey something important. Rogers uses James Dobson as his whipping boy for discussing the scientific evidence. He conveniently avoids any interaction with scientific studies whose results are at variance with his (Rogers’s) views or, for that matter, with any biblical scholars or theologians who have done their homework on this issue but arrive at different conclusions. Rogers quotes Dobson as saying: “Science can be a wonderful instrument of good as long as it respects the bound of moral principles.” Rogers rejects this as an unacceptable fundamentalist worldview (pp. 100-1). And yet he doesn’t realize that even psychologist **David Myers**, with

whom Rogers is enamored and whose book with Letha Scanzoni I have offered a long [critique](#), has said something similar. While “*science, rightly interpreted, has much to offer*” in terms of informing “our understanding of sexual orientation,”

science cannot . . . resolve values questions. Even if science someday explains *why* people differ in sexual orientation, we still have to decide whether to regard a homosexual orientation as a normal variation . . . or as an abnormality to be corrected. (*What God Has Joined Together?*, 55; italics, but not bold, original with the authors)

A similar conclusion is reached by two secular psychologists who, in this respect appear to know more about morality and theology than does Rogers:

Despite common assertions to the contrary, **evidence for biological causation does not have clear moral, legal, or policy consequences.** To assume that it does logically requires the belief that some behavior is non-biologically caused. We believe that this assumption is irrational because...all behavioral differences will on some level be attributable to differences in brain structure or process. Thus, **no clear conclusions about the morality of a behavior can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behavior is biologically caused.**.... Any genes found to be involved in determining sexual orientation will likely only confer a predisposition rather than definitively cause homosexuality or heterosexuality. (Brian Mustanski and J. Michael Bailey, “A therapist’s guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation,” 432; bold added)

Science can inform our ethics but it cannot decide for us moral questions. That must be decided ultimately from a careful reading of Scripture, something that Rogers has failed to do in this book. But this is not to say that Rogers understands the science side of the debate well and falls flat on Scripture. Rather, Rogers does neither aspect well.

To be continued in Installment 5