

Rainbows Around the Throne:
Theological Aesthetics in Evangelism to Same-Sex Attracted Men

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Abstract

Cultural barriers and worldview differences between American evangelicalism and the LGBTQ+ movement have historically hindered evangelism to same-sex attracted men. Although recent Christian theologians have offered wisdom for including same-sex attracted believers in the church and for combating prevailing secular worldviews, evangelistic strategies to reach gay unbelievers remain underdeveloped. This thesis identifies five desires common within the population of same-sex attracted men (beauty, friendship, romance, sexuality, and masculinity) and proposes a method of evangelism which targets these desires using theological aesthetics to communicate the beauty of the gospel creatively and compellingly. A focus on aesthetic apologetics, aesthetic community, and aesthetic biblical theology can demonstrate that the God of the Christian gospel is beautiful, satisfying, and worth trusting.

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Before his ascension, Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all the nations by baptizing and teaching them according to his commands (Matt. 28:18-20). The Great Commission provides the biblical foundation for continued evangelism and discipleship as the chief means for the church to advance the Kingdom of God. After 2,000 years, the perennial task of the church is still to glorify God by making him known among peoples who do not know him. Only the Spirit of God can draw sinners to repentance as the good news of Christ is declared, yet Christians should mirror the active pursuit of unbelievers demonstrated by Jesus (Matt. 9:10) and Paul (1 Cor. 9:22) through wise and creative cultural engagement as they proclaim the gospel.

One people group in the West who needs to be reached with the gospel is the LGBTQ+ community.¹ Tragically, many men who experience same-sex attraction (SSA), practice homosexuality, or embrace a gay identity and lifestyle have not heard the gospel shared in a manner that compels them to embrace the Lord and repent from their sin. To be faithful to Christ's command to make disciples even of this people group, the church must use wisdom and creativity to engage with the population of SSA men so that they understand the good news of the person and work of Jesus. Considering the history between the church and the LGBTQ+ movement, compelling evangelism to this population should utilize theological aesthetics to display how the Christian worldview satisfies common correlative desires in men with same-sex attraction: beauty, friendship, romance, sexuality, and masculinity.

¹ Although not an ethnic or linguistic group, the LGBTQ+ community in the modern West is arguably its own people group with cultural distinctives regarding philosophical-religious beliefs, social-familial systems, political values, and artistic affinities. This thesis addresses desires particular to SSA men who identify as gay or participate in the LGBTQ+ community, as well as remaining relevant to many SSA men who do not identify as gay.

“God Hates Gays?” – The Historic Difficulty of Engaging the LGBTQ+ Community
The Philosophical Heritage of the LGBTQ+ Movement

To understand the worldview of the LGBTQ+ movement, one must first understand the history of the secular Western worldview and origins of postmodernism. Historian and theologian Carl Trueman recently established the historical relationship between the Western view of self and the current LGBTQ+ movement.² Trueman’s work demonstrates that the philosophical canon which shapes the modern and postmodern imagination rests upon the foundational notion of selfhood. During the Enlightenment in the 17th century, philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced the idea that each man holds within himself his *true self*, composed of his inmost desires.³ The Romantic movement took this idea and developed it into a full philosophy of identity as one’s innermost personal feelings.⁴

Several key philosophers (whose ideas were unapologetically anti-Christian) continued to develop the self into its modern and postmodern shape.⁵ The founder of communism, Karl Marx, defined the relationship between the true self and the outside world as one of socio-economic oppression.⁶ He identified traditional social structures like family, nation, and religion as man-made sources of all pain and suffering through economic inequality, and he identified political

² See Carl R. Trueman’s *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), as well as its popular version, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 18.

³ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Then Should We Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 202, 245, 261-62.

⁶ Justin Ariel Bailey, *Interpreting Your World: Five Lenses for Engaging Theology and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 60.

revolution as the only solution.⁷ Because of Marx, politicians today are expected to hold positions on such private matters as using the restroom or having sexual intercourse in one's home.⁸ Even as Marx disparaged Christianity in the political realm, Friedrich Nietzsche sought to undermine the ethical framework of Christianity by introducing moral relativism and denying virtues like altruism and mercy.⁹ Consistent with naturalistic nihilism, Nietzsche's bleak view of cosmic origins doomed morality and aesthetics to arbitrary illusions by transient humans in a chaotic world.¹⁰ Nietzsche adapted Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to sociology, and he rejected any notion of absolute good outside the self, valuing instead selfish power and personal taste.¹¹

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychotherapy, continued to develop the modern ideas of Marx and Nietzsche by attaching sexual desires to the concept of the inner self.¹² Freud, another staunch opponent of Christianity, believed that yearnings for sexual expression are the core of human desires but these are controlled by the oppressive systems of family, nation, and religion in order to control the masses.¹³ Freudian sexuality interpreted psychology, aesthetics, and

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," and "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Third Edition*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 660, 663.

⁸ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," and "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Third Edition*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 749-50, 752-53.

¹¹ Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 117.

¹² Trueman, *Strange New World*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

morality through a hypersexualized lens.¹⁴ The ideas of these thinkers, in conjunction with the new technology of birth control, fueled the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s.¹⁵ Slowly, sex became increasingly detached from procreation, then from marriage, from partnership, from another person, and even from one's own body.¹⁶ The current worldview of the West largely accepts these ideas, and it fights to protect the self-expression of an individual's feelings and sexual desires from the oppressive traditional systems that seek to limit a person's right to happiness.¹⁷

The LGBTQ+ movement arose from this philosophical history and espouses the basic secular, postmodern worldview. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, queer or questioning people, and others who identify as LGBTQ+ possess experiences, crusades, and tragedies distinct from one another. However, the movement has united as a political and social campaign to advocate for sexual liberation and affirmation. The first partnership in this coalition occurred between lesbian women and gay men during the horrific AIDS epidemic in the 1980s – during which the church was perceived by the gay community as self-righteous and absent.¹⁸ No prior solidarity existed between these two groups, but they collaborated with tears and toil in an attempt to rescue those dying from this painful, appalling disease.¹⁹ Sharing this traumatic bond,

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams,” “The ‘Uncanny,’” and “Fetishism,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Third Edition*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 792, 799, 818.

¹⁵ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 82.

¹⁶ Grant, *Divine Sex*, 121. Grant identifies the dissolution of sex in each of these categories.

¹⁷ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 93-94. See also David France, *How to Survive a Plague: The Inside Story of How Citizens and Science Tamed AIDS* (New York, NY: Alfred Knopf, 2016).

lesbians and gays realized the effectiveness of their strategic cooperation, and they continued to work together, alongside bisexuals, transgender persons, and other queer or questioning people.²⁰ This coalition has continued advocating to destigmatize minority sexual orientations and secure sexual orientation as a protected legal status through political lobbying.

As of 2023, the LGBTQ+ movement has been largely successful in changing popular opinion and even public policy regarding issues of gender and sexuality.²¹ Homosexuality was repealed from the APA's DSM-III in 1973, which had formerly labeled SSA as a mental disorder.²² The Supreme Court decided in 2015 to support same-sex marriage across the United States in the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* case.²³ A 2017 global summit drafted the *Yogyakarta Principles*, calling for recognition of human rights for those of any sexual orientation or gender expression.²⁴ Again in 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County* to designate gender identity and sexual orientation as legal classes protected from employment

²⁰ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 97.

²¹ Approximately 63% of Americans surveyed by a Pew Research study support same-sex marriage in 2023, including 90% of the political left and 70% of the political center, 74% of adults aged 18-35, 85% of those religiously unaffiliated, and 96% of those who identify as atheists. There is a strong negative correlation between a subject's perception of religion's importance and their favor for same-sex marriage. See "How People Around the World View Same-Sex Marriage," *Pew Research Center*, November 27, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/27/how-people-around-the-world-view-same-sex-marriage/>.

²² Jack Drescher, "Out of the DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," *Behav Sci (Basel)* 5, no. 4 (2015): 565-575.

²³ *Obergefell v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health*. <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2015/06/26/obergefellhodgesopinion.pdf> (U.S. 2015) ("The Fourteenth Amendment requires a State to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-State").

²⁴ *The Yogyakarta Principles Plus 10: Additional Principles and State Obligations on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics to Complement the Yogyakarta Principles*. Geneva. November 10, 2017. https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf.

discrimination.²⁵ And U.S. President Joe Biden signed an executive order at the beginning of his term in 2021 that included gender identity and sexual orientation under the legal class of “sex” protected against discrimination in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.²⁶ Through the COVID-19 pandemic’s lockdown, which drove many teenagers and adults (particularly in Gen Z) further into social media, the LGBTQ+ movement has rapidly grown with many more young people identifying as members of the gay community.²⁷

Nevertheless, several significant philosophical conflicts persist between the LGB and the TQ+ halves of this uneasy political alliance. The coalition of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (which is itself precarious at times) seeks the legal protection of sexual orientation,²⁸ which requires a fundamental belief in biological difference between males and females. The trans movement sharply disagrees with biology by constructing a firm barrier between sex and gender, and it seeks to dismiss any biological differences between males and females as arbitrary and even oppressive.²⁹ However, by including any and all gender identities as groups seeking legal protection, the trans movement has effectively rendered sexual orientation as meaningless and robbed the LGBTQ+ movement of realizing many tangible changes.³⁰ Although fractured by major disagreements about the nature of the human body, the LGBTQ+ movement can agree that

²⁵ *Bostock v. Clayton County, GA*. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf (U.S. 2020) (“An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII”).

²⁶ *Executive Order 13988 of January 20, 2021: Preventing and Combatting Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation*, Federal Register 86, no. 14 (2021), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-25/pdf/2021-01761.pdf>.

²⁷ Mark Sanders, “Why Are So Many of Our Youth Identifying as LGBTQ+?” HarvestUSA, July 6, 2023, <https://harvestusa.org/why-are-so-many-of-our-youth-identifying-as-lgbtq/>.

²⁸ *The Yogyakarta Principles*, 8-9.

²⁹ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

the highest good is celebrating one's desires for happiness and allowing people to express their inner feelings in their bodies.

Modernist Philosophy in the American Evangelical Church

As American culture drifted from the Enlightenment through the ideals of anti-Christian philosophers to radical individualism and the LGBTQ+ movement, the American church has drifted along many of the same cultural currents toward modernism and individualism. The evangelical movement has seen crucial growth in the fervency and purity of the American church.³¹ Nevertheless, destructive trends toward anti-intellectualism, exaggerated emphasis on the nuclear family, and dilutions of the gospel have negatively impacted the church's capacity to reach the LGBTQ+ community.³²

The strong ties between mainstream American culture and Christian evangelical churches provided unfortunate opportunities for the organization and outreach of the church to become tangled with other secular ideologies, especially Enlightenment modernism.³³ Rooted in an epistemological reliance upon human reason and empirical experience, as well as skepticism toward religion, the humanities, and the arts, modernism demoted these unscientific disciplines from the realm of fact to the realm of feeling, called the "nonreason" by apologist Francis Schaeffer.³⁴ Historically, many evangelicals have borrowed from this modern flaw to their

³¹ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 257.

³² *Ibid.*, 269.

³³ *Ibid.*, 260.

³⁴ Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 206. See also Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 122.

detriment and thought of religion in purely emotional terms divorced from reason.³⁵ This has left them suspicious of art, literature, philosophy, and even church history or creedal theology.³⁶ The fundamentalist tradition most clearly exemplifies the common trend in evangelicalism to withdraw from the public spheres of intellectual and aesthetic engagement and retreat to a domestic, personal religious experience devoid of claims to comprehensive truth.³⁷

In addition to conforming to the modernist distrust of art and the inevitable anti-intellectualism that followed, the evangelical church has historically conformed to the individualistic emphasis on the personal self.³⁸ As a whole, the modern evangelical movement has often retired within its own subculture and glorified individual nuclear families as the hubs of community.³⁹ Many evangelical churches are largely composed of independent family units: one husband, one wife, and a couple kids living in their own house who attend Sunday services and participate in ministries specialized for their familial role (i.e. marriage, children's, or youth ministries).⁴⁰

The biological family is a beautiful gift from the Lord, providing the foundational structure for human relationships and pointing to the deeper reality of spiritual family. Nevertheless, Jesus clarified the superiority of spiritual family (i.e. the adoptive family of God's children) over biological, nuclear family (Mark 3:31-35; 10:29-31). An unhealthy overemphasis

³⁵ Karen Swallow Prior, *The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2023), 134.

³⁶ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 277.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.

³⁸ Constantine R. Campbell, *Jesus v. Evangelicals: A Biblical Critique of a Wayward Movement*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), 4.

³⁹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 293.

⁴⁰ Sam Allberry, *7 Myths About Singleness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 70.

of the nuclear family at the expense of deprioritizing friendship can fail to recognize the familial-friendly relationships at the heart of spiritual family.⁴¹ As a result of the church's conformity with the cultural pattern of individuals caught up in their own family matters, many single people in the church (young adults, widows, divorcees, celibate believers, etc.) cannot fit well within the organized community. Thus, local churches that neglect single people are unable to biblically function as spiritual families.⁴² Believers in these churches who have been influenced by secular individualism find lonely isolation instead of the biblical ideal of a rich spiritual community fashioned from brotherly and sisterly friendships between diverse biological families.

Western individualism has also greatly affected the American church regarding the content and communication of the gospel. The systematic theology born of the Protestant Reformers prioritized issues of individual soteriology so that these four or five truths were frequently central to evangelical gospel presentations: a) the sinfulness of man; b) the wrath of God; c) the substitutionary death of Jesus; d) an invitation to a personal response of repentance, and sometimes e) eternal life in heaven.⁴³ These truths correspond with Scripture and are genuine proclamations of the gospel, but they incompletely communicate the good news of Christ's redemption of the world.⁴⁴ Whenever Christians merely shared these religious assertions and stopped without proclaiming the Kingdom of God like Jesus did (Mark 1:14-15), they neglected the essential gospel message of the apostles – Christ's resurrection and exaltation – as well as the crucial content of creation, spiritual rebellion, incarnation, regeneration, adoption, sanctification,

⁴¹ Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next* (Epsom, England, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 72.

⁴² Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction* (London, England, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 46-47.

⁴³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 694-95.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Jesus v. Evangelicals*, 87.

and new creation.⁴⁵ Not only was the content of the gospel lacking, but the communication was warped into a reduced set of premises with which one must agree rather than a narrative announcement of the victorious King of Kings who commands trusting allegiance.⁴⁶ A linear, propositional approach to evangelism produced many professing Christians under the cultural philosophy of modernism; nevertheless, the current shift to postmodernism requires a return to biblical theology.⁴⁷ In contrast to the syllogisms of modern evangelism, biblical theology aesthetically portrays the compelling story of the gospel through the images and themes of the biblical authors.⁴⁸

The modernistic trends in recent generations of the church weakened its ability to biblically engage with secular modern culture.⁴⁹ In the contemporary postmodern moment in which the LGBTQ+ movement and its cultural values are fully present, Christians must adapt to a postmodern culture.⁵⁰ Rather than staying as modernists or becoming postmodernists, wise Christians should discern the positive components of the postmodern worldview, particularly the preference for narrative communication that aligns with the biblical gospel.⁵¹ Equally important

⁴⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 718-19, 709-12.

⁴⁶ Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 4-5.

⁴⁷ Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 6-7.

⁴⁸ Andrew David Naselli, "What Do We Mean by 'Biblical Theology?'" in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 20-21.

⁴⁹ Prior, *The Evangelical Imagination*, 167.

⁵⁰ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

is for Christians to avoid the dangers of hyper-individualism, moral relativism, and obsessions with sex or politics that deeply impact the current American culture.⁵²

Church Responses to Changing Culture

Evangelism to the LGBTQ+ community is not simple or easy. The worldviews of the LGBTQ+ movement and the Christian church are diametrically opposed to one another, and there are massive cultural differences between the lifestyles of a practicing gay man and a faithful, Bible-believing Christian.⁵³ The gay community values aesthetic intellectualism, open familial friendships, and communal, story-driven epistemology.⁵⁴ Although historic Christianity, particularly early evangelicalism, also upheld these three values, they have been weak in modernistic churches: modern Christian art is often sentimental; Christian friends are often merely replaceable, amateur therapists; and Christian testimonials are often formulaic, fabricated, or focused on the individual rather than the gospel.⁵⁵ Additionally, the falsehoods of modern and postmodern American culture have infiltrated both groups: radical individualism has distorted not only the LGBTQ+ community's perception of reality, but also that of the church by creating false dichotomies and encouraging tribalism.⁵⁶ Therefore, the most recent generation of the church has sought to overcome these barriers by intentional cultural engagement between Christians and the gay community.

⁵² Trueman, *Strange New World*, 128.

⁵³ Becket Cook, *A Change of Affection: A Gay Man's Incredible Story of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 22.

⁵⁴ The consistent pattern of relevance between the LGBTQ+ conversation and aesthetics, friendship, and biblical theology will be demonstrated in the next section of this thesis.

⁵⁵ Prior, *The Evangelical Imagination*, 82-83, 102-04, 106.

⁵⁶ Makoto Fujimura, *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 183. See also Campbell, *Jesus v. Evangelicals*, 77.

Outspoken camps of Christians have adopted opposite positions on the issue of homosexuality to engage with the gay community from both extremes. Members of the first group are called “affirming churches,” and they conform to the worldview of the LGBTQ+ movement. As postmodernists, they deny the biblical sexual ethic in order to demonstrate compassion for those who experience same-sex attraction, claiming that a loving God would want all people to love whomever their hearts desire.⁵⁷ Members of the second group are referred to as “condemning churches” because they frequently advocate hateful censure not only against the practice of homosexuality but also against people who experience same-sex attraction. Some of these appear in protests with signs reading, “God Hates Gays!” – or other derisive phrases labelling people with unmentionable derogatory terms.⁵⁸ Sharing tendencies with modernistic fundamentalists, this group retreats into its own private sub-culture and publicly criticizes the sinful world with which it disagrees.

A third group is the silent majority of churches who settle for functionally ignoring the conflict between Christianity and the LGBTQ+ movement. According to a 2020 Barna Research study, 44% of pastors surveyed felt limited in their opportunities to address homosexuality and LGBTQ+ issues, while 37% felt pressured to address these topics out of obligation rather than from desire.⁵⁹ Overwhelmed by the disagreements between biblical sexuality and their neighbors who claim a gay identity, many of these churches do not know how to handle preaching about sexuality and end up largely ignoring the issues. Caleb Kaltenbach, a Christian pastor who was

⁵⁷ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2014), 178.

⁵⁸ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), 4-6.

⁵⁹ “What’s on the Minds of America’s Pastors,” *Barna Group Inc.*, February 3, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/whats_on_mind_americas_pastors/.

raised by gay parents, identifies four common failures of these ignoring churches regarding their ungracious avoidance of the LGBTQ+ community: “fear of the LGBT community... lack of biblical understanding... absence of empathy... [and a] closed-door attitude.”⁶⁰

The fourth group is the only one to mirror the cultural engagement of Jesus and the apostles by discussing issues of sexuality with wisdom and creativity in order to appropriately defend biblical orthodoxy while loving those in the LGBTQ+ community. This engaging camp of the church is composed largely of conservative evangelical pastors, scholars, and theologians, many of whom experience same-sex attraction themselves. These authors include professors Rosaria Butterfield and Christopher Yuan, speaker Beckett Cook, pastors Sam Allberry and Ed Shaw, poet Jackie Hill Perry, writer Rachel Gilson, and apologist Rebecca McLaughlin.⁶¹ Each of these have graciously, truthfully, and beautifully addressed Christianity and the LGBTQ+ movement within his or her respective realms. As a community of theologians who experience SSA, these men and women have made many astute observations regarding biblical sexuality and have authored robust systematic and pastoral theologies of marriage, singleness, and sexuality. This thesis will assume these authors’ practical, apologetic, and theological conclusions espoused in Appendices II and III, as well as presuppose the biblical theology of sexuality elucidated in Appendix I, and it will build upon the foundation of those truths to contribute meaningful evangelistic wisdom for reaching SSA men with the gospel.

⁶⁰ Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Conviction* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2015), 7-9.

⁶¹ See Bibliography for the books authored by these faithful men and women on topics such as marriage, singleness, sexuality, homosexuality, spiritual family and friendship, evangelism, and apologetics. Others who debatably fall into this fourth camp are those in the “Side B” movement, like author Preston Sprinkle, biblical scholar Nate Collins, academic researcher David Bennett, and priest Wesley Hill, although these men are strongly denounced by Rosaria Butterfield and others for their arguably defective theologies of sin and identity. For further explanation on the nuances between Christian groups attempting to engage with the LGBTQ+ community, see Appendix II, Question 6.

“Born This Way?” – Defining Same-Sex Attraction

The Question of Identity

The common secular mantra regarding sexuality is that each person is “born this way,” meaning one’s experience of sexual and romantic attraction is innate, immutable, and uninvited, but it should not be ignominious; rather, it should be held proudly as one’s identity.⁶² Biblical Christians must test these claims to understand the experience of same-sex attraction shared by the men they are evangelizing. Regarding the origins of anomalous sexual attractions, there is currently much debate about the genetic or environmental factors that influence one’s sexual development, and no hypothesis has accounted for the diversity of SSA men’s experiences.⁶³ Although it is still unknown whether one’s sexual attraction is inborn, forms later, or varies case by case, Christians can affirm that one’s sexual desires are within that person’s fallen human nature and in alignment with the doctrines of original sin and the image of God.⁶⁴

Regarding the claim of unchanging sexual attractions, biblical Christians can affirm that many people experience persistent, consistent sexual attractions, but they must disagree with the LGBTQ+ concept of sexual orientation – that there are gay people, straight people, and bisexual people.⁶⁵ In agreement with the LGBTQ+ movement, Christians can affirm that sexual

⁶² Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 40, 176.

⁶³ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 157-58.

⁶⁴ Ed Shaw, “Why Are Some People Same-sex Attracted?” *Living Out*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/22/why-are-some-people-same-sex-attracted>.

⁶⁵ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World’s Largest Religion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 168-170.

attractions are unchosen and sometimes unwanted, but they must not forget that one's broken sexual desires result from original sin and therefore cannot be morally neutral.⁶⁶

Regarding the secular campaign to destigmatize SSA and support proud identification with one's sexual orientation, biblical Christians must carefully affirm that SSA should not be more shameful than the predisposition toward any other specific temptation, yet it will inevitably bear the natural shame of any sinful desire.⁶⁷ Homosexuality is not good or neutral but is a sin like heterosexual immorality. When a person with SSA experiences temptation toward homosexuality, he or she is not actively sinning; nevertheless, since the object of one's sexual desire is forbidden by God, the desire itself may be appropriately labeled as "sinful," although experiencing it is not sin.⁶⁸ Theologian Becket Cook, formerly a practicing gay man before coming to Christ, explains homosexuality's sinfulness not only as a behavior but as a cultural identity:

Yes, [homosexuality] is the same [as any other sin] in that all sin is an offense to God, from stealing to murder to greed. But no, there is a difference (and it's no small difference) in that homosexuality has become an identity, not just a sin. Again, there are gay pride parades, but not gossip pride parades. Homosexuality is so deeply tied to one's essence that it's very difficult to untangle this particular sin from the person who is engaging in it. It takes a lot of love and patience, not to mention the power of the Holy Spirit, to help someone break free from this sin/identity.⁶⁹

The LGBTQ+ movement claims that a person who experiences SSA is defined by that identity. Conversely, in biblical Christianity, a person's identity is rooted in his or her

⁶⁶ Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God Has Always Been* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 20-21.

⁶⁷ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, "Q&A on Same-Sex Attraction," interview by Melanie Denning, Office of Spiritual Development of Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 10, 2023.

⁶⁸ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013), 59-61.

⁶⁹ Cook, *A Change of Affection*, 186.

relationship to the Lord.⁷⁰ Humans are made in the image of God, and they stand before him either as a sinner or as a sinner who has been redeemed. Practicing gay men are identified not with their homosexual temptations but as sinners who need redemption that can only come from Christ. They are like the people described by Paul in Philippians 3:18-19: “For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, the identities of sinners are completely transformed if they repent from their sin and turn to Christ, as Paul displays in 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

HarvestUSA, a Christian ministry dedicated to discipling people who experience sexual brokenness, clarifies a wise, biblical position in their “Statement on Same-Sex Attraction”:

Same-sex attraction is the desire to pursue or enjoy any of these exclusively marital elements with someone of the same sex [e.g. romance, sexual contact and enjoyment, and the physical affection associated with such] ... We do not agree with the cultural perspective that same-sex attraction is genetic, fixed, and unchangeable, arising from the secular notion of sexual orientation; rather, we recognize that its genesis most likely involves multiple pathways in an individual’s life. In addition to original sin, multiple pathways can include the following: biological components, cultural factors, family history, abuse, and more... We believe that same-sex attraction, though a manifestation of original sin or indwelling sin, is differentiated from willful sin. If the struggler experiences a spontaneous, sexual attraction toward someone else but, in faith and submission to God, resists that pull and does not act on it in thought, word, or deed, then that individual is actively repenting and has not engaged in nurtured, willful sin... Same-sex attraction is frequently connected with legitimate desires of the heart, including, but not limited to, desires for love, intimacy, control, comfort, affirmation, and affection.

⁷⁰ Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2018), 16.

⁷¹ New International Version (used throughout).

Coming from a sinful heart, these desires have become idolatrous and disproportionate, replacing true love for God and love for neighbor as God intended.⁷²

Therefore, SSA is a distortion of holy sexual and romantic desires which became twisted toward homosexuality by this fallen world and will be healed in the new creation. In the meantime, faithful Christians who experience SSA in their broken human nature may struggle with persistent, unwanted temptations toward the sin of homosexuality, but they can resist them by the Spirit (1 Cor. 10:13) just as Christ did when he was tempted (Heb. 4:15). Since SSA is indwelling sin, Christians should not identify themselves with this temptation but with Christ.

Propensities Correlated with Same-Sex Attraction

The theologians with SSA mentioned above have addressed common philosophical and apologetic questions regarding sexuality and Christianity; their answers are summarized in the appendices of this thesis. Beyond these questions, five themes recur throughout the literature written by SSA theologians: beauty, friendship, romance, sexuality, and masculinity. Each of these seems to be a core desire commonly held by men with SSA (though certainly not limited to this population). It is necessary to note the clear distinction between the good affinities for beauty, friendship, and masculinity and the particularly sinful same-sex romantic and sexual desires. Christopher Yuan, another formerly gay man who came to faith in Jesus, wisely distinguishes between the specific experience of same-sex attraction, which is comprised of romantic or sexual desires, and these other correlative desires that are frequently found in the population of men with SSA.⁷³ Although desires for beauty, friendship, and masculinity are not characteristic of every SSA man nor exclusively of SSA men, these desires feature a prominent

⁷² “Statement on Same-Sex Attraction,” HarvestUSA, accessed October 2, 2023, <https://harvestusa.org/statement-same-sex-attraction-husa/>.

⁷³ Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 59.

place in the literature regarding homosexuality.⁷⁴ While sharply dividing the sinful desires of romance and sex from the good desires for beauty, friendship, and masculinity, this thesis does affirm the presence of all five propensities within this population.

Masculinity

Masculinity is a complex social-identity concept interpreted differently by various worldviews. The modern worldview dismisses biological sex as evolutionarily arbitrary, and the postmodern worldview trivializes gender as a socially-constructed identity; the LGBTQ+ movement assumes these ideas and sharply divides one's birth sex from one's gender identity.⁷⁵ While denying the existence of absolute masculinity and femininity in theory, the LGBTQ+ movement can in practice reinforce rigid gender stereotypes by categorizing men who exhibit traditionally unmasculine characteristics as feminine.⁷⁶

In the Christian worldview, a distinction can be made between the gender of a man (which is equivalent to his biological sex) and his expression of the God-given ideals of masculinity and the cultural stereotypes of masculinity.⁷⁷ Biblical manhood is an objective calling for all men rooted in how God psychologically, physiologically, sociologically, and

⁷⁴ The issues of friendship / spiritual family, romance, and sexuality all receive extensive treatment in the books of Yuan, Butterfield, Cook, Allberry, Shaw, Gilson, McLaughlin, and Perry, many of which include chapters dedicated to these themes, as well as in the material written by ministries to help SSA believers such as LivingOut, HarvestUSA, and TrueUnion Ministries. Gender issues regarding masculine (or feminine) desires and insecurities are directly addressed in the works of Butterfield, Cook, Allberry, Shaw, Gilson, Perry, LivingOut, and TrueUnion. Beauty is most often subtly intertwined throughout the works of Butterfield, Cook, Gilson, Perry, LivingOut, and TrueUnion through vocabulary of aesthetics, by high literary or graphic design artistry, and in discussing the artistic intellectualism of the LGBTQ+ community and the ideal for the church to improve in academic proficiency.

⁷⁵ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 195, 206.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁷⁷ Pat Sawyer and Neil Shenvi, "Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2019): 78.

spiritually designed men to behave, yet there is great diversity in how one may be obedient to the Lord as a man.⁷⁸ A man's desire for masculinity, which can be fulfilled by an obedient life consistent with biblical manhood, is his desire to be approved as a true man by himself, by his community, by other respectable males, by his social success, and by the specific cultural expectations of men particular to this historical moment.⁷⁹ The complex desire for masculinity can be simplified into a twofold yearning to be masculine – both to feel competent security in being a man and to be respected by other admirable men.⁸⁰ This longing for appreciation and approval on the basis of one's own male identity is shared by men of heterosexual and homosexual attractions. However, the desire for masculinity is especially significant for men with SSA because they have often experienced social stigmatization in correlation with their gender non-conforming behavior.⁸¹

Studies have shown that the strongest correlation in the LGBTQ+ population is between childhood gender nonconformity and same-sex attraction.⁸² Adults who experience SSA have a

⁷⁸ See Kevin DeYoung, "Act Like Men," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (2023); Denny Burk, "Mere Complementarianism," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2019); Colin J. Smuthers, "Creation and Discrimination: Why the Male-Female Distinction Makes a Difference," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2019); and Jenn Kinter, "Alike, but Different: Epistemological Development of Men and Women," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2019).

⁷⁹ Y. Joel Wong and Shu-Yi Wang, "Toward an Integrative Psychology of Masculinities," *Psychology of Men and Masculinities* 23, no. 3 (2022): 286-92.

⁸⁰ John Eldridge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret to a Man's Soul* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010). Eldridge correctly identifies this core desire of masculinity for men, in accordance with studies performed by other researchers. Nevertheless, his work praising aggression, adventure, and romance focuses on many common cultural norms for men rather than biblical masculinity, and it is sometimes misguided in its application of masculinity for Christian men.

⁸¹ Christopher Mellinger and Ronald F. Levant, "Moderators of the Relationship Between Masculinity and Sexual Prejudice in Men: Friendship, Gender Self-Esteem, Same-Sex Attraction, and Religious Fundamentalism," *Arch Sex Behav.* 43, no. 3 (2014): 519-30.

⁸² J. Michael Bailey, Paul M. Vasey, Lisa M. Diamond, S. Marc Breedlove, Eric Vilain, and Marc Eprecht, "Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 17, no. 2 (2016): 45-101.

significantly higher likelihood of having possessed temperaments and interests that diverge from cultural stereotypes during childhood and adolescence.⁸³ Research has also identified statistically significant personality trends that differ between heterosexual and homosexual men.⁸⁴ Many (although not all) men with SSA have more nurturing, warm, and culturally feminine temperaments, which some studies claim grant them an advantaged capacity to care for children and to be romantically desirable to women.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, when men exhibit culturally feminine traits, the positive traits are usually ignored, and they are often the victims of social ridicule by other men who frequently attack them with “gay” insults.⁸⁶ These jokes presume an incompatibility between having SSA and being a true man, and they offer shame rather than the respect men desperately crave as their most-sought form of love.⁸⁷ Studies show that men with highly sensitive temperaments, including many SSA men, have experienced a significantly difficult social environment growing up with the traditional gender stereotypes in the U.S.⁸⁸

⁸³ In similar studies, researchers have consistently discovered that children and adolescents who experience autism spectrum disorder are seven times more likely to be gender non-conforming than their peers. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is between six and fifteen times more likely for a child or adolescent visiting a gender clinic to be on the autism spectrum than in populations without the experience of gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction. See Azadeh Mazaheri Meybodi, Ahmad Hajebi, and Atefeh Ghanbari Jolfaei, “Psychiatric Axis I Comorbidities among Patients with Gender Dysphoria,” *Psychiatry Journal* (August 2014), doi: 10.1155/2014/971814. For further research, one could adapt this thesis’s method of evangelism in combination with research on autism spectrum disorder to propose a creative and strategic method of evangelism and discipleship to reach same-sex attracted men on the autism spectrum.

⁸⁴ Mark S. Allen and Davina A. Robson, “Personality and Sexual Orientation: New Data and Meta-analysis,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 57, no. 8 (2020): 953-65.

⁸⁵ Thomas Felesina and Brendan Zietsch, “The Desirable Dad Hypothesis: Male Same-Sex Attraction as the Product of Selection for Paternal Care via Antagonistic Pleiotropy,” *Arch Sex Behav.* (January 2024), doi: 10.1007/s10508-023-02780-7.

⁸⁶ Juan Manuel Falomir-Pichastor and Gabriel Mugny, “‘I’m Not Gay... I’m a Real Man!’: Heterosexual Men’s Gender, Self-Esteem, and Sexual Prejudice,” *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 35, no. 9 (2009): 1233-43.

⁸⁷ Shaunti Feldhahn, *For Women Only, Revised and Updated Edition: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004).

⁸⁸ Daniel C. Miller and Martin F. Lynch, “The Gender Socialization Experiences of Highly Sensitive Men,” *Psychology of Men and Masculinities* advance online publication (2024): 9. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000463>.

Christian philosopher and historian Nancy Pearcey recognizes this data and encourages churches to avoid the rigid gender stereotyping common in secular culture: “Churches should encourage [gender non-conforming children] to value their unique temperament and to resist pressure to interpret it as evidence they must be transgender or homosexual... In the body of Christ, we should celebrate a wide diversity of God-given personality types, even if they do not fit the current stereotypes.”⁸⁹ Non-conformity to the cultural norms of one’s gender, including in personality, temperament, or interests, is expected within the diversity of the image of God, and those divergent from the majority can still align with the others of their gender psychologically, physiologically, sociologically, and spiritually.⁹⁰

Biblical masculinity is established in Genesis 1:27-29 and 2:7, 15 with the Lord’s command to Adam to rule the earth by working and keeping the garden of Eden. Reformed theologian Richard D. Phillips identifies this as the “Masculinity Mandate”:

This idea should be extended beyond Adam’s local context to the relationships men are called to serve today. We are intended to “work” whatever field the Lord places us in, investing our energies, ideas, and passions to make good things grow. A biblical man, then, is one who has devoted himself to cultivating, building, and growing... God calls Christian men to “work” these gardens [especially as husbands and fathers], sacrificially serving so that there is an abundance of life and blessing in the hearts of those we love.⁹¹

Many of the macho stereotypes display a masculinity antithetical to Christian manhood, for, as psychologist and theologian Dr. Larry Crab says, “*Relational masculinity reveals the*

⁸⁹ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 223-24.

⁹⁰ Greg Johnson, “The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behavior,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Revised Edition: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 380.

⁹¹ Richard D. Phillips, “A Masculine Mandate for Today,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (2023): 18.

incarnational beauty of God.”⁹² An exemplar biblical character whose complex masculinity nearly reveals God’s intended design is King David: his maleness is marked by his courageous fighting against the Lord’s enemies, his intelligent eloquence, his physical beauty, his close male friendships, his independence from feminine seduction [excluding the Bathsheba incident], his musical skill, and his righteous reign over his kingdom.⁹³ Men with SSA frequently excel in many of these categories, and they can uniquely fulfill the expectations of biblical masculinity through their God-given personalities, interests, and temperaments.

God created all men to reflect his own nature as fathers, even if one’s fatherhood is spiritual and not biological.⁹⁴ SSA men need to be discipled to become spiritual fathers, but many of them also need discipleship to understand how God’s love for them as a Father differs from their own broken fathers. When a father fails to represent God to his family and neglects to initiate his sons into manhood, the sons, especially those who may be more inclined toward SSA because of gender-nonconforming behavior, need other father-figures to affirm their masculinity and help them become mature fathers.⁹⁵ Since many men have not had their biological fathers step into this necessary role, mature Christian men (including those who are celibate or childless)

⁹² Larry Crabb, *Fully Alive: A Biblical Vision of Gender That Frees Men and Women to Live Beyond Stereotypes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 70, 73, emphasis in original.

⁹³ David J. A. Clines, “David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, England, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212-43. King David’s flaw was his lack of devotion to being a godly husband and father, which is a crucial component of masculinity for those who have been given a wife and children.

⁹⁴ Calvin Robinson, “Esteeming Fatherhood,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (2023): 32.

⁹⁵ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Revised Edition: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 109.

are called to become spiritual fathers to help affirm younger men in the church.⁹⁶ By doing so, the older believer can cultivate the younger man's masculine maturity as he grows in the historic Christian male roles of provision, protection, pastoring (taking spiritual responsibility), and pleasing others selflessly.⁹⁷ To reach SSA men with the gospel, Christians must acknowledge their tendency toward gender-nonconformity, demonstrate how they can uniquely participate in biblical manhood, proactively commend them as real men, and display the beauty of God as the Father who adopts men to be his sons.

Sexuality and Romance

Sexuality. In contrast to the desire for masculinity that lies beneath the surface for many men, including those with same-sex attraction, the ostentatious desires for homosexual sexuality and romance are particular to the experience of SSA. As is discussed above, these desires are sinful, and each needs to be addressed wisely in evangelism to this population. Regarding sexuality, the natural pull for these men to find other men sexually attractive is not willful sin in itself, but there is no capacity to fulfill this desire for homosexual activity in a manner glorifying to the Lord.⁹⁸ To reach SSA men with the gospel, Christians must acknowledge their same-sex sexual desires, lovingly confront them with the truth about their sin, empathize with them in their experience of being a sinner with natural sinful desires, and display the beauty of the Holy Spirit as the regenerator who heals men's desires as he resurrects them to eschatological life.

⁹⁶ Welden Hardenbrook, "Where's Dad?: A Call for Fathers with the Spirit of Elijah," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Revised Edition: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 460.

⁹⁷ Jonathan E. Swan, "John Gills 4 P's of Masculinity." *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (2023): 6.

⁹⁸ For more clarification regarding sexuality and SSA, review the section on identity above and see Appendices I and II.

Romance. The desire for same-sex romance is slightly different than the desire for same-sex sexual activity. While SSA's sexual desires are always sinful, its romantic desires are sinful when directed at another human man.⁹⁹ Men with SSA tend to have romantic desires for a man to pursue them, protect them, and provide for them.¹⁰⁰ However, no ordinary man is capable of perfectly fulfilling these roles long-term.¹⁰¹ The natural (and sinful) expectation that another gay man can satisfy these desires is fundamentally mistaken; but these desires were indeed designed to be fulfilled by a man: Jesus Christ.¹⁰² In the Scriptures, the major purpose of marriage (e.g. the covenant in which sexual and romantic desires may be properly fulfilled) is to point to something beyond itself – a love with a Lover far more real and satisfying than any human partner.¹⁰³ The desires SSA men possess for a romantic partner to fill the male marital role are ultimately fulfilled by God the Son, not in a mere romantic relationship but in *the* relationship to which all godly romantic desires point.¹⁰⁴ To reach SSA men with the gospel, Christians must acknowledge their same-sex romantic desires, help them discern how Jesus can satisfy these desires, use biblical marital imagery to explain the relationship between God and his people, and display the beauty of Jesus as the Bridegroom who pursues, protects, and provides for his Bride.

⁹⁹ Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 64-65.

¹⁰⁰ These are the functions of biblical masculinity according to John Piper's "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Revised Edition: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 42. The romantic desires of man with SSA are for someone who is fulfilling these masculine functions. SSA Christian Andy Robinson offers a personal anecdote testifying to this in, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul: A Review," *Living Out*, July 25, 2022, <https://www.livingout.org/resources/reviews/46/jesus-lover-of-my-soul-a-review>.

¹⁰¹ Cook, *A Change in Affection*, 108, 111.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹⁰³ Ed Shaw, *Purposeful Sexuality: A Short Christian Introduction* (London, England, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 24.

¹⁰⁴ Cook, *A Change in Affection*, 23.

Friendship and Beauty

Friendship. Unlike the obvious issues of sexuality and romance, the common desires for friendship and beauty have not received as much treatment in the literature regarding same-sex attraction because they seem to be hidden in plain sight. All people need community, and a magnetic pull toward aesthetics is found in the hearts of many diverse men and women; since these desires are not exclusive to SSA men, their relevance to this population has been generally overlooked. Nevertheless, the cultural depictions and icons of gay men in the popular American imagination reveal the implicit recognition of these two desires.

The LGBTQ+ community is more than just a political alliance; it is a source of solidarity, belonging, purpose, and friendship. C.S. Lewis explains the nature of friendship as distinct from the companionship gained by familiarity and circumstance:

Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening friendship would be something like, ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one’ [*sic*]... It is when two such persons discover one another, when, whether with immense difficulties and semi-articulate fumbings or with what would seem to us amazing and elliptical speed, they share their vision – it is then that Friendship is born. And instantly they stand together in an immense solitude.¹⁰⁵

The shared history, similar worldview, and same experiences held by many gay men allow them to find easy connections with others who support and agree with them, especially as they stand alone the face of political, familial, or religious opposition.¹⁰⁶ Often this opposition is from all three fronts at once from religious families that politically stand against same-sex marriage.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Original copyright: C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1960, United States publishing: New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 83.

¹⁰⁶ Cook, *A Change in Affection*, 75-77.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, “A More Perfect Union? Christian Nationalism and Support for Same-sex Unions,” *Sociological Perspectives* 58, no. 3 (2015): 423-24.

Corporate victimhood has been a foundation of community in Western culture, and perceived hatred of LGBTQ+ people by evangelical Christians has driven gay men closer toward each other and farther away from orthodox churches.¹⁰⁸

Beyond their inevitable bonding from experiencing the same suffering, men with SSA share many of the same desires discussed in this thesis; these enable them to feel like they belong to a community of like-minded people seeking the same goals, valuing the same morals, and seeing the same truths, leading to the friendship Lewis describes:

Notice that Friendship thus repeats on a more individual and less socially necessary level the character of the Companionship which was its matrix. The Companionship was between people who were doing something together – hunting, studying, painting, or what you will. The Friends will still be doing something together, but something more inward, less widely shared and less easily defined; still hunters, but of some immaterial quarry; still collaborating, but in some work the world does not, or not yet, take account of; still traveling companions, but on a different kind of journey. Hence we picture lovers face to face but Friends side by side; their eyes look ahead.¹⁰⁹

Trustworthy friendships are also crucial elements of the practical Christian life and cornerstones of biblical spirituality.¹¹⁰ Though modernistic churches like the ones discussed above may lack a healthy quantity and quality of friendships, Scripture and church history are both rich with examples of two or more friends intimately aligning with their eyes fixed on the Lord and encouraging one another loyally and sacrificially.¹¹¹ The triune God is the source of friendship within himself (John 3:35), and he extends his friendship to mankind (Ex. 33:11;

¹⁰⁸ Sophie Bjork-James, “Christian Nationalism and LGBTQ Structural Violence in the United States,” *Journal of Religion and Violence* 7, no. 3 (2019): 295-96.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 76-78.

¹¹⁰ Michael A.G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Evangelical Press, 2007).

¹¹¹ Michael A.G. Haykin and Joel R. Beeke, *How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 5.

Num. 12:18; Isa. 41:10; Luke 7:34; James 2:23).¹¹² To reflect God, men can love one another intimately (Deut. 13:6; 1 Sam. 20:17), enduringly (1 Sam. 12:41-42; Prov. 18:24), selflessly (Gal. 6:2; Phil. 2:1-5), unconditionally (Prov. 17:17), and edifyingly (Prov. 27:17; James 5:16, 19-20); the biblical examples of David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1-4), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), and Paul and Timothy (Phil. 2:19-24) display the beauty of Christian friendship.¹¹³

Likewise, Christians throughout history like John Calvin, Esther Edwards Burr, and C.S. Lewis have deeply valued and practiced friendship.¹¹⁴ As fourth century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus wrote of his friendship with his fellow church father, Basil of Caesarea, “If anyone were to ask me, ‘What is the best thing in life?’ I would answer, ‘Friends.’”¹¹⁵ A spiritual friendship cultivated through hospitality can become an enduring relationship that reflects God and obeys the biblical command to participate in Spirit-led community (Heb. 10:24-25).

Historically, many Christians have not connected as friends with members of the LGBTQ+ community.¹¹⁶ Some suspect that the religious convictions and the political activism of evangelical Christians are to blame for the tension between the communities, but Christopher Yuan performed a study evaluating the friendships and sense of inclusion perceived by students with SSA at Christian colleges and universities which produced results that suggest otherwise.¹¹⁷ The participants, all of whom experienced SSA, and some of whom identified as LGB, were on a

¹¹² Haykin and Beeke, *How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?*, 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Bjork-James, “Christian Nationalism and LGBTQ Structural Violence in the United States,” 298.

¹¹⁷ Christopher Yuan, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: A Qualitative Study of Reducing Marginalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Same-Sex Attracted Students at Christian Colleges and Universities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 97.

spectrum of acceptance, identification, and action regarding their sexual attractions, and many were Christians who refused to practice homosexuality or identify as gay because of their belief in the biblical view of sexuality, despite their attractions.¹¹⁸ Regardless of their diversity in political or religious convictions, which variously challenged or matched evangelical Christianity, the participants reported similar experiences of loneliness, shame about their sexual attractions, negative and isolating campus cultures, and frustration at their Christian colleges.¹¹⁹ However, many of the participants also reported meaningful friendships with trustworthy individuals who loved them regardless of disagreements on matters of sexuality.¹²⁰

Yuan's study demonstrates the tendency for people with SSA to naturally feel isolated and friendless in groups of Christians, even if they themselves are biblical Christians who hold to the traditional orthodox position on sexuality; it also demonstrates the need for believers to reduce marginalization of SSA men (and women) in the church by proving themselves to be trustworthy friends like Scripture describes. To reach SSA men with the gospel, Christians must acknowledge their need for healthy same-sex friendships, befriend gay men just as Jesus was the "friend of sinners" (Matt. 11:19), faithfully walk alongside them in pursuit of truth, and display the beauty of Christian friendship as hospitable, loyal, and self-sacrificing.

Beauty. The common stereotype of the flamboyant, fashionable, and artistic gay man (although not an accurate depiction of all gay men) displays the strong correlation between men with SSA and aesthetics. For centuries, homosexuality has been associated with interest in the arts, especially in the work of eighteenth-century art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann,

¹¹⁸ Yuan, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless*, 98.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-100.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-01.

who insinuated a possible innate predisposition for beauty in homosexual men.¹²¹ Modern research has confirmed that the LGBTQ+ population is far more likely to participate in the arts than their heterosexual peers, including visiting art galleries or museums, and attending ballets, dance performances, operas, or classical music concerts.¹²² Gay men are much more likely than their peers to pursue a career in the arts or beauty industries, supporting the stereotypes of gay designers, florists, hair stylists, and professional artists.¹²³ Scholastic consensus has not identified the cause behind this correlation in the LGBTQ+ population, although the following have been proposed: higher demographic access (such as childlessness and higher education), higher innate creativity, gender-nonconformity (for gay men), and a welcoming environment.¹²⁴ Regardless of why LGBTQ+ people (particularly gay men) have a stronger affinity for the arts, aesthetics is a common cultural value of the gay community.

Unfortunately, American evangelicals in the latter twentieth-century did not value aesthetics through intellectualism and the arts, as was demonstrated above. They compromised with Western secularism and shared much with the popular social imagination of modernism.¹²⁵ Additionally, in response to controversial content depicted in federally-funded art, evangelical political conservatives, outraged with the gay community, advocated successfully to cut the

¹²¹ Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010) 157.

¹²² Gregory B. Lewis and Bruce A. Seaman, "Sexual Orientation and Demand for the Arts," *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004): 531.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 524.

¹²⁵ Prior, *The Evangelical Imagination*, 34.

budget of the National Endowment of the Arts.¹²⁶ This reinforced the postmodern belief that aesthetics, like morality and truth, is merely relative and based on personal preference.¹²⁷

However, historical Christianity has a rich legacy of objective theological aesthetics. From renowned artists, authors, and musicians like Rembrandt, Dante, and J.S. Bach; to intellectual renaissance men like Leonardo da Vinci, Blaise Pascal, and Sir Isaac Newton; to theologians like Augustine of Hippo, Jonathan Edwards, and Karl Barth who offered compelling and beautiful visions of Christianity; the church throughout history has consistently produced indispensable works of art and philosophy of the highest quality.¹²⁸ Staggering works of architecture like the cathedral of Notre Dame, awe-inspiring murals like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings, and breathtaking music like G.F. Handel's *Messiah*, at which the entire audience stands in solemn reverence – these are masterpieces crafted by men who beheld something glorious and invited other men to participate in the transcendent realities of truth, goodness, and beauty.¹²⁹ The syncretic imagination of modern evangelicals between Scripture and Western secularism has diluted much of the art these Christians have produced into mere sentimentality, but church history offers a plethora of examples of healthy theological aesthetics accessible for the contemporary church to emulate.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Gregory B. Lewis and Arthur C. Brooks, "A Question of Morality: Artists' Values and Public Funding for the Arts," *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 1 (2005): 10.

¹²⁷ Saskia E. Weiringa, "Heteronormativity and Passionate Aesthetics," in *The SAGE Handbook of Global Sexualities* (London, UK: Sage UK, 2020).

¹²⁸ Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 17.

¹²⁹ Russ Ramsey, *Rembrandt is in the Wind: Learning to Love Art Through the Lens of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 17.

¹³⁰ Michael A. Bodkin, "Christian Kitsch: A Preliminary Examination of Christian Materialism Through Theological Aesthetics and Cultural Politics," (master's thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 2016), 63-64.

The heritage of Christianity is one abounding in beauty, and the affections of the LGBTQ+ community are for that which is beautiful. Upon this common ground, Christians can spark valuable conversations with SSA men to point them to the Lord – the source of all beauty. To reach SSA men with the gospel, Christians must acknowledge their good desire for beauty, critically engage with the arts and philosophies from a Christian worldview, introduce them to communities of Christian artists, and display the beauty of the Christian worldview that is centered around the beautiful God on his throne.

Proposal of Evangelism Methodology

Creative and compelling evangelism to SSA men is possible, but it will require Christians to discard their diluted modernistic tendencies and embrace the rich historical inheritance of theological aesthetics to specifically display how the gospel satisfies the core desires of this population. Bold, intelligent, and artistic engagement with secular and Christian art will both invite an unbeliever into apologetic conversations that matter to him and establish beauty as rooted in the nature of God. By observing beauty together, a friendship between the Christian and the unbeliever will naturally form, in which the Christian can personally demonstrate the compassionate character of God through hospitality, shepherded conversations, and invitation into church community. Once a solid friendship is formed and the soil of the unbeliever's heart has been tilled in preparation for the gospel seeds to be sown, the Christian can share the gospel vividly by using biblical theology to trace three themes. To satisfy the unbeliever's misguided desires for romance, the Christian can trace the theme of Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom to introduce him as the Lover who died and rose to redeem his Bride. Sexuality, while not the only relevant sin of an SSA man, is still necessary to lovingly confront by tracing the theme of the Holy Spirit as the regenerator of new creation. The theme of God as Father depicts his adoption

of men as his own sons and his invitation for them to embrace an active and gentle masculinity and to avoid both effeminate passivity and beastly aggression. By addressing beauty, friendship, romance, sexuality, and masculinity with apologetics, community, and biblical theology, Christians can clearly portray the gospel of the triune God in a way that same-sex attracted men understand and value.

“Love Is Love?” – Evangelism to Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction

Affections and Aesthetics

An unbeliever’s heart is currently marked by disordered, idolatrous affections which leave him unable to truly love others, creation, or himself because of his refusal to love God.¹³¹ Each of the five desires addressed in this thesis is a different love: love for creation, love for community, love of receiving romance (from a partner), love of sharing sexuality (with a partner), and love for oneself (through security in masculinity). God created each of these loves to be properly ordered underneath love for himself. Love is not a fuzzy emotional feeling, as is usually implied by the phrase “love is love”; it is loyal affection that seeks the best for its object. because God *is* love, love is defined by the character of God expressed most clearly at the cross.¹³² If true love can only be seen fully in God, then it is necessary for the SSA man to reorder his loves underneath love for God so that his other desires may be fulfilled. Repentance

¹³¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine: Third Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 220-21.

¹³² Scripture abounds with specific images and characteristics of love to fully display its meaning. See 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 for a list of attributes of love, and see John 3:16-17; 15:12-13, 1 John 3:16-18; 4:7-21, and Philippians 2:2-11 for the definition of love according to the sacrificial death of Jesus.

requires a change of affections: he must abandon his fallen desires and loyalties for new holy loves and allegiances to Jesus the Messiah.¹³³

Theologian James K.A. Smith identifies the primacy of aesthetic liturgical habits in forming and transforming human affections toward (or away from) repentance:

[H]uman persons are not primarily thinking things, or even believing things, but rather imaginative, desiring animals who are defined fundamentally by love. We are embodied, affective creatures who are shaped and primed by material practices or liturgies that aim our hearts to certain ends, which in turn draw us to them in a way that transforms our actions by inscribing in us habits or dispositions to act in certain ways. In short, being human takes practice—and implicit in those practices is a social imaginary that orients, guides, and shapes our desire and action.¹³⁴

The Holy Spirit works through rhythms of beautiful conversations, community, and creativity to woo the hearts of men to himself and draw them to repentance by his kindness.¹³⁵ Christians can partner with the Spirit of God to share the gospel with SSA unbelievers and participate in the redemption of their souls by mundane, beautiful, and obedient proclamations of Jesus Christ.

Aesthetics in Apologetics: Beauty

The beginning of evangelism is apologetics: a defensible demonstration of the trustworthiness of God and the Christian worldview. Although many unbelievers may claim that God does not exist, Romans 1:18-23 explicitly shows that all people innately understand the existence and basic nature of God but suppress that truth so they may live however they please. Therefore, apologetics is not merely proving that Christianity is *true*, but that God is *trustworthy*.

¹³³ R. C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2014), 239.

¹³⁴ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 178.

¹³⁵ This is not to deny monergistic salvation, but to display the reality of evangelism from the perspective of the Christian man or woman sharing the gospel. The Spirit of God is the only one who can regenerate hearts and grant men with the capacity for faith and repentance (John 6:44-47, 65). Nevertheless, he chooses to partner with Christians to be the instruments of evangelism as he regenerates the hearts of listeners (Romans 10:14-17).

St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity explains that since God is of one ultimate indivisible existence, his truth, goodness, and beauty are intertwined as his own essence.¹³⁶ As such, displaying God's beauty will inevitably also display his truth and goodness, which validates the reasonability of Christianity and arouses affection for him.

The use of apologetics pioneered by Cornelius Van Til begins with the presupposition of God's own fundamental existence and displays the truth, goodness, and beauty that emanates from him into all creation.¹³⁷ Through presuppositional apologetics, unbelievers who have been intellectually blinded by their denial of ultimate reality may reawaken to see truthfully, righteously, and beautifully the world in which they live. As a mode of apologetics and spiritual formation, art functions "hermeneutically" to interpret truth, "doxologically" to direct worship, "analogically" to connect human bodily senses with the mind/heart/soul, and "eschatologically" to cast a worldview of where life is headed.¹³⁸ Therefore, aesthetic apologetics will reinterpret secular art from a Christian worldview, highlight beautiful art made from Christian communities, and portray God as trustworthy in all his beauty.

In conversation with an SSA man, a believer may begin by sharing intellectual and aesthetic evaluations of art produced by non-Christian artists. A prime example for useful apologetic analysis is the Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen*.¹³⁹ This Tony Award® winning

¹³⁶ Francis J. Beckwith and Shawn Floyd, "Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction*, ed. Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 241.

¹³⁷ K. Scott Oliphint, "Cornelius Van Til," in *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction*, ed. Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 490-491.

¹³⁸ Garrett Green, *Imagining Theology: Encounters with God in Scripture, Interpretation, and Aesthetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 120-21.

¹³⁹ *Dear Evan Hansen*, book by Steven Levenson, score by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, dir. Michael Greif, perf. by Ben Platt, Music Box Theatre, 2016.

musical depicts the tragic rise and fall of an ordinary high school student with social anxiety who is caught up in a web of lies regarding a classmate's suicide. This show especially appeals to young gay men who have felt solidarity with many of its emotional themes of social isolation, mental illness, yearning for male friendship, messianic community, and purposeful identity, as well as to those who have sometimes reinterpreted the platonic friendship between the two male protagonists to be homosexual.¹⁴⁰ Despite its heavy themes and some inappropriate humor (this is not a Christian show), this musical casts a beautiful vision of the true desires humans have for identity, community, and purpose in life. It asks the right questions about life but cannot provide any of the right answers — and this is perhaps its greatest strength. This story lacks satisfactory resolution because none of the characters have worldviews that can provide hope for fulfilling these core human desires. Thus, it casts a silhouette of a messianic figure and authentically displays the tragedy of sinful life apart from Christ and the need for the gospel.

Secular art can often honestly display the aesthetic value of brokenness; arising from conversations about this art come opportunities for the believer to introduce the SSA man to Christian artists who offer wonder, imagination, and mundane beauty in their works of literature, sculpture, illustration, music, cinema, etc. Universally acclaimed book series like C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*¹⁴¹ and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*¹⁴² offer rich worlds of

¹⁴⁰ Bethany Doherty, "'Tap, Tap, Tapping on the Glass': Generation Z, Social Media, and *Dear Evan Hansen*," *Arts* 9, no. 2 (2020): 7-8.

¹⁴¹ See C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); *Prince Caspian* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); *The Silver Chair* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); *The Horse and His Boy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); *The Magician's Nephew* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); and *The Last Battle* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995).

¹⁴² See J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); *The Two Towers* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); *The Return of the King* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); and *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

fantasy woven with true Christological threads in which beautiful stories subtly display the goodness of God. Lewis and Tolkien belonged to the Inklings, an intellectual artistic community of Christian friends which offers a prime example of believers in the modern era who have resisted the conformation to modernism. These Christians fought to continue advancing the Kingdom of God in the realm of literature by telling the beautiful truth about reality through art, as Tolkien portrayed in this excerpt from his poem, “Mythopoeia”:

I will not walk with your progressive apes,
erect and sapient. Before them gapes
the dark abyss to which their progress tends
if by God's mercy progress ever ends,
and does not ceaselessly revolve the same
unfruitful course with changing of a name.
I will not treat your dusty path and flat,
denoting this and that by this and that,
your world immutable wherein no part
the little maker has with maker's art.
I bow not yet before the Iron Crown,
nor cast my own small golden sceptre [*sic*] down...

He sees no stars who does not see them first
of living silver made that sudden burst
to flame like flowers beneath an ancient song,
whose very echo after-music long
has since pursued. There is no firmament,
only a void, unless a jeweled tent
myth-woven and elf-patterned; and no earth,
unless the mother's womb whence all have birth.¹⁴³

Christian authors like Tolkien challenged modern people through aesthetic apologetic claims that the modern worldview is even less realistic than the ancient pagan one. Although people in the twentieth century may have possessed many scientific explanations for what things are made from and how they function within the laws of nature, they completely forgot the

¹⁴³ J.R.R. Tolkien, “Mythopoeia,” in *Tree and Leaf, Including “Mythopoeia” and “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth”* (London, UK: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 88, 84.

meaning of what natural things *are* and their purposes in existence. According to an ancient observational worldview of the universe, the earth is experientially flat, the sky is experientially a dome, and the stars are experientially beautiful living jewels which have mysterious stories to tell. Tolkien's vision of reality salvaged the imagination of the ancients (which shared much with the Christian worldview) from being discarded alongside their scientific claims, and it preserved the rich cosmology possessed by humanity before technology and scientific discovery disenchanting the natural world. Though a man today may use "star" to refer to the flaming ball of gas which exists merely through telescopic lenses and mathematical formulas, he has no idea what a real star is at all. So too, he trades the security of the firmament sky for the terrifying vacuum of outer space and forsakes the warmth of mother earth for the sterility of machinery.

Contemporary Christians are continuing the rich artistic legacy of the Inklings and other legendary painters, composers, philosophers, and storytellers through communities of believers producing art today that captures its beholders as they are caught up into the transcendent. One of these communities is the Rabbit Room, founded by singer-songwriter and author Andrew Peterson.¹⁴⁴ Peterson himself has written award-winning young adult fiction in his *Wingfeather Saga*,¹⁴⁵ penned the liturgical song "Is He Worthy?" as an adaptation of Revelation 5,¹⁴⁶ and pioneered honest songwriting on biblical topics often overlooked in Christian art, such as the silence of God, the beauty and brutality of marriage, cries for justice among the oppressed, and

¹⁴⁴ "About the Rabbit Room," *The Rabbit Room*, accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www.rabbitroom.com/about-us>.

¹⁴⁵ See Andrew Peterson's *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2008); *North! Or Be Eaten* (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2008); *The Monster in the Hollows* (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2011); *The Warden and the Wolf King* (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2014); and the Rabbit Room collection written by Andrew Peterson, Jennifer Trafton, N.D. Wilson, A.S. Peterson, Jonathan Rogers, and Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Wingfeather Tales* ed. Andrew Peterson (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2021).

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Peterson, "Is He Worthy?" recorded March 2018, track 8 on *Resurrection Letters, Vol. 1*, Centricity Music, compact disc.

typology of the Sabbath.¹⁴⁷ In his memoir, *Adorning the Dark*, Peterson casts a vision for the beauty of Christian art in advancing the Kingdom of God:

Somewhere out there, men and women with redeemed, integrated imaginations are sitting down to spin a tale that awakens, a tale that leaves the reader with a painful longing that points them home, a tale whose fictional beauty begets beauty in the present world and heralds the world to come. Someone out there is building a bridge so we can slip across to elf-land and smuggle back some of its light into this present darkness.¹⁴⁸

Art evokes within men yearnings for beauty, goodness, and truth that can only be fulfilled in relationship with God; as C.S. Lewis says, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”¹⁴⁹

In Christian art, believers can demonstrate to SSA men the objective aesthetic values shown through magnificent creation (beautiful aesthetics), honesty about the darkness (prophetic aesthetics), joy in the mundane (hospitable aesthetics) and hope for future restoration (imaginative aesthetics), which all fit within the gospel narrative.¹⁵⁰ The most important beatific vision for Christianity, however, is not merely the stars or the human heart or epic themes but the Lord himself.¹⁵¹ Beholding the King of kings and Lord of lords in all his glory transforms those

¹⁴⁷ See respectively Andrew Peterson, “The Silence of God,” recorded February 2003, track 9 on *Love and Thunder*, Essential Records, compact disc; “Dancing in the Minefields,” recorded July 2010, track 2 on *Counting Stars*, Centricity Music, compact disc; “The Reckoning (How Long),” recorded July 2010, track 12 on *Counting Stars*, Centricity Music, compact disc; and “God Rested,” recorded February 2018, track 5 on *Resurrection Letters: Prologue*, Centricity Music, compact disc.

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Peterson, *Adorning the Dark: Thoughts on Community, Calling, and the Mystery of Making*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 73.

¹⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Original copyright: C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1952; United States publishing: New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 136-137.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor Worley, “Encountering God’s Story with the Arts,” in *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues*, ed. Joshua D. Chatraw and Karen Swallow Prior (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 289-91.

¹⁵¹ See especially the throne room visions of Isaiah 6:1-1-6, Ezekiel 1:1-28, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, and Revelation 1:9-20; 4:1-5:20, as well as the tabernacle and temple instructions which display the details for building an Edenic sacramental space for God’s presence to dwell on earth, as seen in Exodus 25-28; 35-40, 1 Kings 5-8, Ezekiel 40-48, and Revelation 19; 21-22.

who see the beauty of Jesus into beautiful beings themselves.¹⁵² The most precious jewels and riches and the most spectacular natural phenomena reflect a glimpse of the glorious One who sits on his heavenly throne encircled by a vivid rainbow (Rev. 4:2-6). This beautiful and righteous King reigns above all the cosmos as he dispenses justice and shows mercy in place of a flood of wrath upon those purified by the blood of Jesus (Rev. 5:9-10). Surrounding the throne is a glorious, innumerable multitude of the redeemed from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (including those formerly practicing homosexuality [see 1 Cor. 6:9-11]), sanctified as priests and crowned as rulers in Christ's Kingdom (Rev. 7:9-10). Beautiful are the rainbows around God's throne.

Aesthetics in Community: Friendship

After establishing a relationship with an SSA man by talking about beauty in apologetics, a Christian can focus specifically on loving him well as a friend, to reflect the character of Jesus. Shared conversations regarding the arts can be a valuable beginning for this friendship, but it can soon move into deeper conversations about philosophy, theology, and apologetics, especially focusing on the differences between the LGBTQ+ movement and the Christian church.¹⁵³ As the Christian and the SSA man encounter more differences between their beliefs and their lives, it is necessary for the believer to be modeling a healthy, aesthetic life that the unbeliever can admire.¹⁵⁴ From ordinary habits used as liturgical worship, to intentional care for creation at

¹⁵² Philip Graham Ryken, *Beauty Is Your Destiny: How the Promise of Splendor Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 15.

¹⁵³ See Appendices I, II, and III for valuable content to share with unbelievers in these conversations, including how to explain biblical sexuality, answer their intellectual questions, and address their emotional concerns.

¹⁵⁴ Bailey, *Interpreting Your World*, 131.

work and at home, to rational, hopeful, and confident beliefs which underlie all the believer's actions, the SSA man will be able to observe many mundane beauties particular to Christians.¹⁵⁵

Hospitality is the means not only of displaying the Christian worldview through word and deed in contrast to the secular worldview held by the SSA man, but also of engaging with him through personal love. Welcoming him into one's home invites him into one's life; warm reception into one's daily rhythms invites him to behold and belong to one's fellowship; sharing a meal with him invites him to share in one's friendship. Loving one's neighbor as oneself requires hospitality (Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9, 3 John 1:8). By opening one's doors to him even as he is an unbeliever – even if he is one's enemy – the believer may disprove the claim that Christians are hateful and reinforce the truth of Christ's love for sinners.¹⁵⁶ Hospitality is absolutely necessary, especially if the unbeliever must leave his LGBTQ+ community to become a Christian, as Rosaria Butterfield explains:

Jesus says that he expects we will lose partners and children and houses in the process of conversion, that conversion calls everyone to lose everything. God's people need to wake up to something. If you want to share the gospel with the LGBTQ community or anyone who will lose family and homes, the gospel must come with a house key. This hundredfold blessing promised here in [Mark 10:28-31] is not going to fall from the sky. It is going to come from the church. It is going to come from the people of God acting like the family of God. God intends this blessing to come from you. And real Christian hospitality that creates real Christian community expresses authentic Christianity in deep and abiding ways to a world that thinks we are hypocrites.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ For resources on forming these practical disciplines and this biblical worldview, see James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016); Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Jennifer Allen Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts: Cultivating the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); Makoto Fujimura, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017); Andrew Peterson, *The God of the Garden: Thoughts on Creation, Culture, and the Kingdom* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2021); Trevin Wax, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022); Gavin Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021); and G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Essentials, 2022).

¹⁵⁶ Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, 10-11.

¹⁵⁷ Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, 96.

To extend true friendship hospitably to an unbeliever with SSA is to invite him into a healthy relationship that can lead him closer to Jesus. Throughout the friendship, the Christian must put the needs of the SSA man above his own to display the love of Christ. Just as Jesus showed compassion toward those far from God by entering their lives and showing them that they mattered to the Kingdom, the Christian can surpass the bounds of worldly selfish friendship to care for the SSA man according to his unique needs, regardless of the sacrifice it may require. Practical ways to be a *good* friend include actively listening to him, responding with appropriate sympathy and action, and offering to help meet ordinary needs (especially if he does not have a family of his own). Practical ways to be a *godly* friend include not only these, but also serving him beyond his expectations by offering him one's own self, courageously telling him the truth in kindness even if it risks damaging the friendship, and seeking his well-being apart from his usefulness to oneself. By being a true friend, the Christian can demonstrate the beautiful character of God that pursues a relationship with people.

A valid caution regarding same-sex friendships with a gay man warns that a platonic relationship budding with intimacy and affection could be a stumbling block for the man with SSA, leading him to develop romantic feelings for the man with whom he is friends.¹⁵⁸ Certainly this is possible and has the potential to be problematic, but a genuine, healthy friendship will

¹⁵⁸ This situation would not be ideal because the purpose of this strategic friendship is to draw the SSA man closer to the Lord, not to distract him with lusts for sex or romance. However, this situation is plausible and manageable. Wise counsel surrounding the two friends can assist in establishing appropriate emotional boundaries to help with accountability. It may seem best to have more separation in the friendship and to have other Christians fill in the gap to continue the evangelism and discipleship process without the complex relationship between the original two men distracting from this. It is also possible that healthy boundaries could enable the friendship to continue effectively without separation; the presence of temptation is guaranteed in life, so it need not necessarily be avoided (although some situations may be best resolved by removing as many temptations as possible).

satisfy different desires and need not turn to romantic feelings. C.S. Lewis identifies a common misunderstanding of friendship that may cause some to mix up fraternal affection with romance:

It has actually become necessary in our time to rebut the theory that every firm and serious friendship is really homosexual. The dangerous word *really* is here important. To say that every Friendship is consciously and explicitly homosexual would be too obviously false; the wiseacres take refuge in the less palpable charge than it is *really* – consciously, cryptically, in some Pickwickian sense – homosexual. And this, though it cannot be proved, can never of course be refuted. The fact that no positive evidence of homosexuality can be discovered in the behaviour of two Friends does not disconcert the wiseacres at all... Those who cannot conceive Friendship as a substantive love but only as a disguise or elaboration of Eros betray the fact that they have never had a Friend. The rest of us know that though we can have erotic [romantic-sexual] love and friendship for the same person yet in some ways nothing is less like a Friendship than a love-affair. Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; Friends hardly ever about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest. Above all, Eros (while it lasts) is necessarily between two only. But two, far from being the necessary number for Friendship, is not even the best... Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend.¹⁵⁹

Regarding the inclusive nature of friendship, it is possible and plausible that an individual Christian may first pursue a one-on-one friendship with an SSA man, but it should eventually grow into inclusion within a larger body of Christian friends in the church. A plurality of Christian voices can reinforce the validity of the biblical worldview and provide the SSA man with a plethora of human resources for learning about God and being loved by him. The value of wider church community that differs from individual friendship is the presence of unity amidst diversity, which testifies to the gospel of the Kingdom itself.¹⁶⁰ The church community can offer irreplaceable friendships from both genders and various colors, cultures, and generations of Christians that make unbelievers feel seen, wanted, valued, and loved because the church reflects

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 76-78 (emphasis in original).

¹⁶⁰ Irwyn L. Ince, *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 115.

the glorious beauty of her Lover.¹⁶¹ “It is Christ’s gentle heart that adorns him with beauty...”

Pastor Dane Ortlund says. “[W]hat most deeply attracts us to Christ is his gentle, tender, humble heart.”¹⁶² Theologians Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves expound:

Where the Lord is present with his people, his very own light and life shine out. ‘Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, *God shines forth.*’ (Ps. 50:2). Contrary to many of our assumptions and experiences, the church *is* glorious with the glory of her Lord. The glory of the Lord of the church is not slick impressiveness, world domination, or smugness. His – and our – glory is a cruciform glory. It is not a grasping human glory that takes from and hassles the world, but a full, divine glory that gives away the cloak as well as the tunic (Matt. 5:40), passes on the best seats (Matt. 23:6), and welcomes the hungry, thirsty, and naked (Matt. 25:31-40). The church is, by its very nature, *ecstatic* – that is going out and outward-facing, like the Lord.¹⁶³

Gospel culture like this in a church, marked by hospitality, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, must be rooted in a solid understanding of gospel truth.¹⁶⁴ Christian friendship in the church is beautiful when it is saturated with men and women living in love in response to the love of Jesus.

Aesthetics in Biblical Theology: Romance, Sexuality, Masculinity

Through apologetics, a believer influences an unbeliever toward accurate, positive understandings of the Christian worldview, and through community, the church displays the character of Jesus to the unbeliever. Both of these are components of evangelism, but they are incomplete without explicitly sharing the gospel.¹⁶⁵ Beautiful Christian lives must be married to

¹⁶¹ Dustin Bengé, *The Loveliest Place: The Beauty and Glory of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 25.

¹⁶² Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 97.

¹⁶³ Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves, *God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 132 (emphasis and Scripture references in original).

¹⁶⁴ Ray Ortlund and Sam Allberry, *You’re Not Crazy: Gospel Sanity for Weary Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 7.

¹⁶⁵ The gospel can be concisely summarized as the proclamation that the Kingdom of God has arrived (Mk 1:14-15) with the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1-6) who has inaugurated the new creation (2 Cor 5:17-19) promised in the Hebrew Bible (Gal 3:8), as displayed in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation (1 Cor

beautiful biblical doctrine lest the gospel be diluted and robbed of its power.¹⁶⁶ Missionary Mack Stiles defines evangelism simply in his contribution to the *9Marks Building Healthy Churches* series: “Evangelism is teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade.”¹⁶⁷ The way in which Christians can effectively persuade SSA men and contextually proclaim the good news of Christ is through biblical theology; pastor Nick Roark and International Mission Board curriculum coordinator Robert Cline explain this in their installment of the same series:

Biblical theology helps us in our evangelistic outreach. Sharing the good news with those who are unfamiliar with Christianity requires explaining much more than “four spiritual laws” or the “Romans road.” People first need to grasp that the Christian worldview accompanies a total transformation of mind-set. In our evangelism, we must start with God and creation to see what’s gone wrong. From there, we’re able to follow what God has been doing throughout history, which will help us discover why he sent Jesus and why that matters today. Not until we rightly understand these past events in their proper contexts will we be equipped to uncover what God is doing right now and what he’ll do in the future.¹⁶⁸

Certain events in the history of salvation are crucial pillars of the gospel (e.g. creation, the fall, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, new creation, etc.), but Scripture offers a plethora of secondary stories and themes which tie these anchor points together into a christotelic narrative. As a believer teaches an SSA man the gospel, it is wise and persuasive to select relevant biblical theological themes that align with his desires. Therefore, this thesis will exemplify the themes of Jesus as the Bridegroom, the Spirit as regenerator and God as Father to

15:1-8). Upon hearing the gospel (Rom 10:8-15), all who repent from their sins (Acts 2:38) and follow Jesus in faith (Rom 5:1-2) receive salvation by grace (Eph 2:1-10) and are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).

¹⁶⁶ Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 18.

¹⁶⁷ J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 26.

¹⁶⁸ Nick Roark and Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 19.

help readers unite the shared gospel core into a compelling narrative of good news.¹⁶⁹

Progressing from Genesis to Revelation using biblical theology according to these three themes can be done in a single intertwined narrative or in multiple conversations each focusing on a particular theme.

The Gospel of Jesus as the Bridegroom

The first of these three themes to trace with an evangelistic focus is that of Jesus as the Lover of his people, the Bridegroom who sacrificed his life to redeem his Bride. Although it is possible to trace this theme using the imagery of sexual relations, since the desire of the SSA man being targeted in this step is romance, the pattern of wives meeting their husbands at wells will be the most useful type to follow.¹⁷⁰ In practical evangelism, the Christian will weave this theme throughout his storytelling of Scripture's metanarrative to contextualize the character of Jesus and his relationship with his people.¹⁷¹

Genesis 2 portrays Adam as the ideal husband to his wife, Eve. Adam was united to his wife just as the Lord was united to humanity before the Fall (Gen. 2:18-25). Together in the

¹⁶⁹ This thesis was not intended to provide a script for evangelism but to offer supplementary material from Scripture that can be woven into the reader's communication of the gospel narrative. The following three themes by themselves do not adequately address the necessary doctrines of sin, the atonement, and other important soteriological matters that should be shared with the SSA man. The reader should synthesize these themes with his or her standard narrative evangelistic content in order to communicate the fullness of the orthodox Christian gospel with these important, secondary biblical themes that directly relate to the SSA man's desires. The first theme is intended to introduce the SSA man to Jesus and the blessing that he came to bring. The second theme should be accompanied by a heartfelt conversation about the tragedy of people's sins, including their sexual ones, and the personal forgiveness the reader has experienced through the Lord's grace and restoration. The third theme can complement the reader's explanation of how men can respond to God through beautiful and compelling lives of worship that glorify him and satisfy their deepest desires.

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix I for a biblical theology of sexuality. This appendix is an example of using biblical theology in narrative form, as is also demonstrated briefly through the theme of resurrection in Appendix III, Objection 2.

¹⁷¹ Narrative form is most useful in practical evangelism, but because of the redundancy in repeating major stories (especially in Genesis 1-3) throughout each theme, the structure of this section of the thesis will highlight the passages of Scripture relevant to each theme so that the reader may incorporate them into a narrative evangelism.

temple of Eden, Adam and Eve rested atop the cosmic mountain, underneath the trees and beside the water of life (Gen. 2:8-17).¹⁷² However, Adam betrayed his bride by failing to protect her from the serpent's deception, and – rather than rescuing her by sacrificing himself – he joined her rebellion, proving himself to be an unfaithful husband (Gen. 3:1-6).¹⁷³ Adam's disobedience to the Lord cursed his relationship to Eve, twisted his relationship to creation, and severed his relationship to God (Gen. 3:6-19). Exiled from the cosmic garden, Adam and his wife descended the mountain into the wilderness, cut off from the wellspring of God's eternal life (Gen. 3:21-24).

Nevertheless, God's covenantal story of salvation had been established since before creation in which the Father would create a people for his Son to rescue and redeem so they would be united with him by the Spirit just as a bride is one with her husband.¹⁷⁴ The Lord began to pursue his people like a good husband by establishing a covenant with Abraham so that through his progeny would come salvation and blessing for mankind (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21).¹⁷⁵ Like Adam, Abraham failed as a husband and repeatedly betrayed his wife Sarah by refusing to protect her from other men (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Because Sarah was elderly and barren, she and Abraham schemed to conceive a child apart from the Lord's provision by abusing her

¹⁷² Andrew David Naselli, "What Is a Biblical Theology of the Temple?" in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 268.

¹⁷³ Nancy Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2023), 288.

¹⁷⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 518-19.

¹⁷⁵ Repeatedly in the Abraham saga, the author of Genesis continually described the dwelling place of Abraham to be underneath trees, oftentimes on hills or mountains (Gen. 12:6, 13:18, 14:13, 18:1, 18:4, 18:8, 21:33). Abraham's household was strongly associated with these small versions of Eden, demonstrating to the reader that the blessing of the tree of life in the presence of the Lord was following Abraham wherever he went; this blessing continued to grow in the wake of each of the patriarchs throughout Genesis.

maidservant Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6).¹⁷⁶ Despite her failure, the Lord himself appeared to Sarah beneath the trees and promised that he himself would provide her a son, Isaac (Gen. 18:1-15). Abraham too received a personal visit from the Lord on Mt. Moriah as he finally obeyed God by taking Isaac up with a tree tied to his back to surrender him to the Lord;¹⁷⁷ the Lord provided a substitute sacrifice caught in another tree to rescue Isaac and redeem Abraham.¹⁷⁸

God's blessing and presence faithfully followed Abraham's family, but they did not pass over Hagar. Ravished by her master and ravaged by her mistress, the pregnant woman fled into the desert, but the Lord personally met her by a well-spring of water and promised to bless her son, Ishmael (Gen. 16:7-15).¹⁷⁹ Hagar returned to her mistress but was again driven away after Isaac's birth and wandered out into the wilderness with Ishmael to die (Gen. 21:14). As she sobbed beside her son nearly dying from thirst, the Lord himself called out to her in theophany like the ones Abraham and Sarah had received (Gen. 21:15-18).¹⁸⁰ Her open eyes beheld a well of fresh water to quench her son's thirst and restore her life (Gen. 21:19).¹⁸¹ God himself stayed beside her and her son as Ishmael grew up, and together they raised the child (Gen. 21:20-21).¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ In doing such, Sarah and Abraham replayed the Genesis 3 fall, with Sarah playing the parts of Eve and the serpent, Abraham playing Adam, and Hagar becoming the forbidden fruit taken illicitly by the woman and given to the man for his partaking. See John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 153.

¹⁷⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 334.

¹⁷⁸ Nevada Levi DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 29.

¹⁷⁹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 176.

¹⁸⁰ DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch*, 29.

¹⁸¹ Rebecca L. Copeland, "Women, Wells, and Springs: Water Rights and Hagar's Tribulations," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2020): 197.

¹⁸² Ashley Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar: An Intergenerational Conversation of Belonging," *Cross Currents* 69, no. 4 (2019): 394.

In this first full instance of the typological pattern of wells and wives, the Lord established himself to be the true promised husband who would love and take care of his people; no matter the failures of the husbands in Abraham's covenantal family line, the Lord would be faithful to pursue, protect, and provide according to his covenant.

The motif of meeting a wife at a well recurs in Genesis, imperfectly echoing the Edenic marriage between Adam and Eve beside the water of life atop the mountain garden of the Lord. Searching for a wife for Isaac, Abraham's servant met Rebekah at a well, and when she offered him water to drink, the Lord revealed that she was to be the bride for his master's son (Gen. 24:10-25). He brought her to meet Isaac, and they wed in the same blessed tent as Abraham and Sarah had (Gen. 24:59-66). Isaac failed as a husband in the same way his father did, and Rebekah schemed and deceived like Sarah; yet the Lord appeared to Isaac to reinforce his promise, and the couple discovered multiple wells of blessing full of fresh water (Gen. 26:1-33).¹⁸³ Their deceptive son Jacob also received this same blessing, and he met his beautiful wife Rachel at a well as he offered her water (Gen. 29:1-14). However, Jacob was deceived into marrying Rachel's sister Leah as well, and he too proved to be a poor husband (Gen. 29:15-30).¹⁸⁴ Just as with Hagar, the Lord showed compassion on Leah because she was unloved by her husband, and He provided her children as a true husband would (Gen. 29:31-35).¹⁸⁵ Despite the failures in this family, God continued to bless them at by the waters with abundant livestock and

¹⁸³ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.

¹⁸⁴ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 114.

¹⁸⁵ Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar," 395.

riches (Gen. 30:37-43).¹⁸⁶ The well-meeting type occurs again when Moses, a foreign exile in Midian protected Zipporah, offered her water to drink, and then married her (Ex. 2:15-22).¹⁸⁷

This narrative typology from Genesis and Exodus is interpreted in the rest of the Hebrew Bible to represent the Lord and his people. Upon Mt. Sinai, the Lord entered a covenant with the nation of Israel that is described like a marriage (Ex. 20; Jer. 31:32). In the Torah, the Lord promised to be Israel's legal husband, to protect and provide for her as she submitted to him in loving relationship, just as the Law commanded husbands to take care of their wives (Ex. 22:16; Lev. 18, 20; Deut. 21:11-17, 22:13-30).¹⁸⁸ The marital union between God and Israel extended faithfully throughout time as both were obligated to remain loyal to each other out of love.¹⁸⁹

The Lord as the divine husband became a major theme in the Latter Prophets. Of all the families of the earth, God had chosen Israel to be his virgin bride (Amos 3:2; 5:2) so that together they could bless the earth (Mic. 6:8; Isa. 49:6).¹⁹⁰ In covenant relationship with her, the Lord delighted to give her provision, protection, pastoral care, and pleasure (Isa. 6:2:5; Jer. 2:2).¹⁹¹ But through spiritual adultery to other gods, Israel broke her covenantal marriage vows, so the Lord allowed her to temporarily bear her shame as an unfaithful wife (Ezek. 16:1-63). Nevertheless, he promised to rescue her (Hos. 2:1-23) and welcome her as her forgiving husband

¹⁸⁶ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 196.

¹⁸⁷ Leland Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 123. See also Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 244.

¹⁸⁸ Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 60-61.

¹⁸⁹ Samuel Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 52.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53. See also Swan, "John Gills 4 P's of Masculinity," 6-9.

(Isa. 54:1-8). The prophets foresaw God drawing her back to himself in a healed land (Jer. 3:6-18) where the rivers of life would send Edenic water into the wilderness (Ezek. 47:1-12).¹⁹²

Biblical narratives offer many negative examples of failed husbands, but the wisdom literature in the Writings offers a positive picture of a noble, empowering husband that reflects the character of God more clearly. The wise woman in Proverbs 31 partners with her husband, whose protection, provision, and encouragement frees her to be productive and beautiful as she carves out Edenic space in her household (Prov. 31:11-12, 24, 28-29).¹⁹³ A godly husband is not just a valuable partner in marriage but is also a passionate lover in the Song of Songs; he pursues his beloved with kind praise, romantic gifts, and sexual pleasure, creating an Edenic paradise through their love.¹⁹⁴ In these archetypal marriages, the good husband offers his wife freedom to flourish by how he leads and loves her. The lovers of the book of Ruth, Boaz and the eponymous protagonist, personify this ideal romance in the husbandly protection and provision offered to Ruth by Boaz, which led to their pregnancy of King David's grandfather and the continuation of the Messianic line (Ruth 2-4).¹⁹⁵

As Jesus the Messiah entered creation, the promise of the Lord to come rescue his bride was kept (John 3:16-17). The incarnate Christ, God the Son, revealed himself to be the true husband of his people, not in a sexual or romantic sense, but in the deeper sense which sex and romance can only suggest.¹⁹⁶ The typology of wives and wells reappears in John 4 as Jesus met a

¹⁹² Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 224.

¹⁹³ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 202.

¹⁹⁴ Tom R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 315.

¹⁹⁵ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 193.

¹⁹⁶ Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 235.

foreign woman at Jacob's well to discuss Edenic worship, husbands, and living water (John 4:6-26).¹⁹⁷ Jesus asked the woman at the well for a drink, just as the other romantic interactions had begun (John 4:7-8).¹⁹⁸ He invited her to ask him for a drink of "living water," referencing the rivers that flowed from Eden out into the wilderness and using this image to reflect eternal life by the Spirit of God (John 4:10-15).¹⁹⁹ He, seeing her truly, knowing her fully, and loving her deeply, invited her to bring her husband with her so they could partake in the Edenic life together; the woman, who had turned to multiple human husbands to satisfy her thirst for pursuit, provision, and protection, responded by diverting the conversation to sacred places (John 4:16-20).²⁰⁰ Jesus cast hope for her that the blessings of intimacy with the Lord would soon no longer be tied to the forbidden Edenic space of the temple but would be released freely with God's Spirit (John 4:21-24).²⁰¹ When the woman expressed her faith that the Messiah would explain and resolve this, Jesus identified himself as that very one: "I AM he" (John 4:25-26). Rather than providing her with another husband – which is what one would expect from the typological pattern of such encounters – Jesus pursued her in her brokenness and promised that he was the true lover who would restore his people to the blessing of Eden and reconcile them to the Father.

The apostles assumed the reality that Jesus Christ is the true husband as they provided epistolary commands to Christian husbands and wives.²⁰² Jesus's atoning blood flowed as the

¹⁹⁷ Eric John Wyckoff, *John 4:1–42 among the Biblical Well Encounters: Pentateuchal and Johannine Narrative Reconsidered* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 107.

¹⁹⁸ Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*, 123.

¹⁹⁹ Mark Wilson, "The Water of Life: Three Explorations into Water Imagery in Revelation and the Fourth Gospel," *Scriptura* 118, no. 1 (2019): 8.

²⁰⁰ N. Marias, "#Rainmustfall – A Theological Reflection on Drought, Thirst, and the Water of Life," *Acta Theologica* 37, no. 2 (2017): 75.

²⁰¹ Wilson, "The Water of Life," 9.

²⁰² Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 220.

water of life from the cross, and those from his Bride, the Church, who drink from it will never be thirsty again (John 19:34; 1 Cor. 11:25-26). The believing husband, according to Paul and Peter, is a sacramental husband whose role is to sacrificially love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).²⁰³

This theme culminates in the final four chapters of Revelation with the return of the Bridegroom, the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, and the restoration of Eden to be their home forever. The people of God are seen to be purified in righteousness like a bride wearing her wedding dress (Rev. 19:6-8, cf. Isa. 62:5).²⁰⁴ She beholds her husband who has finally returned to be united with the Bride he rescued by his own blood (Rev. 19:11-16). In all his beauty and majesty, she sees him judge the wickedness of the world and bring the kingdom of heaven into marriage with the newly created earth; she herself is the garden city, adorned with gold, pearls, jewels, and precious stones (Rev. 21:1-2, 9-21).²⁰⁵ The Lord is the Bridegroom, the true husband, and he is united to his Bride forever and ever (Rev. 21:3-5). In the middle of the city, Eden is restored upon Mt. Zion with the tree of life growing on either side of a river flowing from God's throne (Rev. 22:1-3). The water of life from this river is freely offered to all who come (Rev. 21:6); the Spirit and the Bride beckon all to come and drink from Christ's fountain of life so that he may satisfy all their deepest desires in his providing, protective presence (Rev. 22:17).²⁰⁶

This theme of Jesus as the Bridegroom, adorned with the biblical imagery of water, trees, and the cosmic mountain garden, can be used within a gospel conversation with an SSA man. It

²⁰³ Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 230.

²⁰⁴ Greg K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, "Revelation," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1150.

²⁰⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 164.

²⁰⁶ Wilson, "The Water of Life," 6.

beautifully introduces Jesus not only as Lord and Messiah, but also as the Lover who can satisfy the SSA man's romantic desires for another man's provision, protection, pastoral care, and pleasure.²⁰⁷ Jesus is not a substitute for a male romantic partner, but the biblical illustration of God as the divine husband proves that his love is how true romantic desires are satisfied.

The Gospel of the Spirit as Regenerator

In concert with introducing the SSA man to Jesus's person and character first through husband imagery, it is necessary to explain the core tenets of sin, salvation, and regeneration. Through the imagery of circumcision and baptism to depict spiritual resurrection, the Christian can trace the theme of the Spirit's work as the agent of new creation. Since the core desires of all sinners are twisted toward selfishness by their rebellion against God, it is necessary to challenge some of these, particularly the sinful desire for homosexuality. In sharing the gospel using this theme, it is crucial for the believer to be forthcoming about his own sinful desires and the redemption possible by the Spirit of God; hypocrisy will not compel surrender, but vulnerability can invite repentance. Humility is required to engage this theme of sin and regeneration in an engaging and personal narrative.

From the very beginning, the Spirit of God has been the agent of creation (Gen. 1:2).²⁰⁸ He bestowed life upon humanity by filling Adam's lungs with the breath of the Spirit (Gen. 2:7). Adam, as the federal head of humanity, was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-30), and he was empowered by the Spirit to freely live in accordance with his created design.²⁰⁹ However, Adam chose to reject the life given to him by God by breaking the Lord's command and eating

²⁰⁷ See Swan, "John Gills 4 P's of Masculinity," 6-9.

²⁰⁸ Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 95.

²⁰⁹ Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 232.

the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 3:6). As God had promised, Adam eventually died as the consequence for his sin (Gen. 3:19) — by grace, his physical death was delayed (Gen. 5:5). Yet immediately upon sinning, Adam died spiritually by losing his innocence and righteousness (Gen. 3:6), becoming a slave to sin (c.f. Rom. 6:20-23), unleashing the reign of sin and death upon all his descendants (Rom. 5:12-21), partnering with the serpent in his doomed rebellion (c.f. Eph. 2:1-3), and being exiled from Eden and separated from the presence of God (Gen. 3:23-24). Thus, theologians such as Augustine of Hippo have argued that from its very beginning, the biblical text asserts that the Spirit of God gives life to mankind to distinguish them from the rest of creation, but also that mankind has degenerated into spiritual death because of Adam's sin.²¹⁰ Although their desire for sin seems natural to men, it will kill them.

Throughout the Torah, the Lord by his Spirit consistently worked to revive humanity by bringing the chosen family of Israel from spiritual death to spiritual life through regeneration. After Adam's death, the remainder of humanity continued in rebellion until God sent a flood to destroy the world (Gen 6-7); yet he spared Noah and his family by rescuing them through the waters and recreated the earth by his Spirit, as is seen in the repeated imagery from Genesis 1-3 (Gen. 8:1-20).²¹¹ The renewed creation became again polluted by the death and destruction of humanity's sin, so God separated men into nations after their rebellion at the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11. Beginning in Genesis 12:1-3, God chose Abraham to be the head of a new family that would become his covenant people to bring the future blessing of life to the nations and creation.

As God formalized this through a covenant with Abraham, he instituted the seal of circumcision as a sign for Abraham's descendants that God would redeem the world through this

²¹⁰ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 271.

²¹¹ Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 98-99.

family (Gen. 17:9-27).²¹² By physically marking his reproductive organ in accordance with the command of the Lord, Abraham demonstrated his trust that God was going to bring a Savior from his biological seed (Gen. 17:1-8). Genesis does not explicitly describe Abraham's regeneration, but it identifies his faith in God that was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6) and narrates his growth from a sinful man, spiritually dead, to an obedient man who was restored as a partner of God (c.f. Heb. 11:8-19; Rom. 4:16-22; Jam. 2:21-23); Abraham's story aligns with the Reformer Martin Luther's "justification by faith."²¹³ This transformation occurred through regeneration as the Spirit of God raised him from spiritual death to spiritual life.²¹⁴

When Abraham's family grew into the nation of Israel, God's Spirit through Moses rescued them from Egyptian slavery as he dwelt among them in a pillar of fire and created them into a renewed, corporate image of God (Num 11:17; Ex. 14:19-20).²¹⁵ The blessing upon Israel to be truly alive as God's people was expressed through circumcision, which was commanded in the Mosaic Law (Ex. 4:24-26; Lev. 12:3).²¹⁶ Even in Israel's national laws, the Jews were not the exclusive people of God, but any Gentiles who became circumcised were also grafted into God's family (Ex. 12:43-49). The Law included clear expectations of inward obedience rather than mere outward ritual, expressed through the key idea of "spiritual circumcision" or "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. 10:16). Deuteronomy 28 proclaimed gracious blessings of life on those who

²¹² Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 64.

²¹³ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought, Second Edition* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 140.

²¹⁴ Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian*, 180.

²¹⁵ Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 37.

²¹⁶ Jason S. DeRouchie, "What Is a Biblical Theology of the People of God?" in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 237.

were obedient and spiritually circumcised, but upon those who were physically circumcised yet disobeyed and refused to love the Lord, the Law promised the curse of death.²¹⁷ God promised that after cycles of Israel's faithless disobedience as spiritually dead people, he would redeem them with future spiritual circumcision after their rebellion and exile (Deut. 30:6).

Despite God's faithfulness to them, Israel's history was full of rebellion from the days of the conquest to the last days of the kings. Through human prophets, the Spirit of God promised that judgment would be coming upon Israel because they rejected his covenant and persisted in idolatrous rebellion against him, just like the pagan nations (Isa. 1:2-31; Amos 3:1-2). He indicted Israel for their hypocritical obedience to the ritual law while breaking of the moral law; because their hearts were uncircumcised, their physical distinction meant nothing (Isa. 58:3-9; Hosea 6:4-10). Therefore, Israel was sent into exile and lost the outward benefits of its chosen status as the people foreshadowing new creation: flourishing life in the Lord's presence, holiness distinct from the nations, and blessing in the land.²¹⁸

God's prophets also offered a message of clear hope rooted in the future regeneration of the remnant of all his faithful people. Even as the rebels would receive judgement for destroying creation through death and injustice, the people of God would receive the Spirit of God by his mercy (Ezek. 32:19-32; Zech. 12:7-10). God renewed his covenant with his people on the grounds of his own faithfulness and promised to write his law upon their new hearts (Jer. 32:39-40; 31:33-34). Even as he commanded them to circumcise their hearts, the Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit to all his people to do this work for them (Jer. 4:4; Isa. 32:14-16; Joel 2:28-

²¹⁷ Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church*, 47.

²¹⁸ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 265-66.

29).²¹⁹ God described spiritual circumcision as the removal of a person's old, dead heart and the gift of a new heart (Ezek. 11:17-21). He repeated his promise of regeneration and clarified that his Spirit would do so for His own glory (Ezek. 36:25-27). The Lord promised to resurrect his people and bring them back to life by giving them his Spirit (Ezek. 37:1-14).²²⁰

The Writings portray the inevitability of spiritual and physical death (Prov. 3:5-8, Ps. 51:10-12, Eccles. 3:17-20) and highlights the need for new creation and resurrection. After the exile, Israel remembered that God made a covenant with them to be his chosen people and that he sent the Holy Spirit to work among them (Nehemiah 9:6-8, 20, 30). The Holy Spirit came upon a specific leader for a specific purpose, like Daniel as a prophet or Cyrus to reverse the Diaspora (Dan. 5:11-12; 2 Chron. 36:22-23); however, the Spirit did not abide with these Old Testament saints permanently, nor did he dwell among all the people.²²¹ Nevertheless, the model was established in the Hebrew Bible of what the Spirit would do to an even greater extent in the future. The Old Testament conveys the hope of spiritual circumcision to free the people of God from sin, reconcile them to God by the Spirit, and resurrect them for the new creation.²²²

In the New Testament, Jesus arrived as God the Son incarnate and proclaimed that the time had come for new creation: "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). His baptism reflected the creation and post-flood recreation accounts of Genesis 1 and 8, and it foreshadowed his descent into death and his resurrection into spiritual

²¹⁹ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 269.

²²⁰ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 483.

²²¹ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 279-79.

²²² Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 714.

life by the Spirit of God (Mark 1:9-11).²²³ Jesus commanded his disciples to join with him in this inauguration of new creation (Mark 1:16-20). By demonstrating his rule over creation, his authority over sin, evil, and death, and his forgiveness of sins, Jesus proved himself to be the messianic king of God's Kingdom (Mark 1:21-2:17).²²⁴ The Gospels announced the victorious coming of Jesus as the king of the new creation and promised the swift arrival of the Spirit to resurrect the repentant from all the nations, who were baptized to signify their place as new men in the people of God (Matt. 28:18-20).²²⁵ John the Baptist also prophesied the future baptism of the Holy Spirit to distinguish those who follow Jesus, using this imagery to describe repentance and regeneration (Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:4-8, Luke 3:16). Luke's gospel promised the Lord would give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks for Him (Luke 11:13) – Jesus asserted that the faithful ones who follow Him, regardless of their past or nationality, were the true people of God.²²⁶ Jesus and his followers were marked by obedience, which was distinct from the religious leaders who fulfilled the ritual and ceremonial laws but failed to keep the moral laws.

The teachings of Jesus clarified that regeneration is the work of Spirit (John 3:5-6). He explained that one must be “born again” to enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:1-14), which is not something that a man can do on his own; it is only by the active work of God that a man can be spiritually resurrected (John 1:12-13).²²⁷ The Spirit would apply the work of Jesus to believers in spiritual and ultimately physical resurrection (John 6:36-40). The Gospels described

²²³ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 59.

²²⁴ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 137.

²²⁵ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 124-26.

²²⁶ DeRouchie, “What is a Biblical Theology of the People of God?” 240.

²²⁷ Donald R. Love III, “John: Believe and Live,” in *The Essence of the New Testament: A Survey*, ed. Elmer L. Towns and Ben Gutierrez (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 102.

spiritual circumcision as being "born again" or being "baptized by the Spirit," to reflect the creation accounts in Genesis and foreshadow the day of Pentecost (John 20:22).²²⁸

At Pentecost, the Spirit was fully poured out upon the people of God. From this point forth, as the Spirit regenerates a believer, he then abides with him or her permanently (Acts 2:1-4, 37-41).²²⁹ Spiritual circumcision by the Spirit was depicted by many images in Acts and the Epistles.²³⁰ The Spirit changed Lydia's heart and enabled her to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance (Acts 16:14-15). Paul's regeneration featured a revelation of the Holy Spirit blinding him with the reality of Jesus as Lord.²³¹ This physical blindness was reflective of spiritual sight, and the scales of unbelief which had blinded his mind were torn off by the Spirit (Acts 9:1-13). Paul described baptism as spiritual death and resurrection for believers in participation with Christ's physical death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-7).²³² The work of salvation has been actively accomplished by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit — who brings about regeneration (Eph. 1:3-2:10). For Paul, the certainty of a believer's security in salvation is based on the faithfulness of God seen through the active work of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-39).

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, there is now a clear distinction between the lost and the redeemed, who are now called "the circumcision" (Phil. 3:2-11). The true people of God will follow the Spirit and turn from sin in obedience to Christ, and the unfaithful will prove

²²⁸ Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 119.

²²⁹ Ben C. Blackwell and R. L. Hatchett, *Engaging Theology: A Biblical Historical, and Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 150.

²³⁰ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 722-23.

²³¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2018), 52-53.

²³² Jason S. DeRouchie, "What Is a Biblical Theology of Resurrection?" in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 298.

themselves to be lost by their lack of spiritual fruit (Heb. 6:7-9).²³³ James used the language of “life” and “death” from Deuteronomy to contrast faith proven by works with claims of belief in Jesus that have no accompanying fruit (James 2:14-26).²³⁴ Because of the Holy Spirit abiding in them, those who have been born again do not make a practice of sinning (1 John 3:23-24); by this measure, one can distinguish between those who follow Jesus and those who do not (1 John 3:9-10). Believers have been born again eternally and now have a pure heart that obligates obedience.²³⁵ God himself makes a believer born again into spiritual resurrection after the physical resurrection of Jesus, completing the work of salvation to bring believers from death to life (1 Pet. 1:3, 22-23; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). Regarding the inclusion of the nations into the covenant people of God, the apostles concluded by the Holy Spirit that physical circumcision was no longer necessary as a seal because both Jews and Gentiles now possessed spiritual circumcision in Christ, as is displayed through baptismal resurrection imagery (Acts 15:1-11).

In Revelation, God's people are a heavenly Kingdom that will spread to all the nations despite the deadly persecution they face.²³⁶ God has sealed his followers with the Spirit to signify them as his people and protect them from his wrath (Rev. 7:2-3). People from every tongue, tribe, and nation – including the circumcised and uncircumcised – are depicted as followers of Jesus who remain faithful and prove their regeneration with their obedience (Rev. 7:9-10). God reigns from his throne and is actively at work by his Spirit among his people to advance new creation.²³⁷ Despite man's limited perspective to perceive God's work, he is working to redeem

²³³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 705.

²³⁴ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 630.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 638.

²³⁶ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 563.

²³⁷ Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church*, 54.

people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.²³⁸ He has brought them all from death to life and enabled them to obey the Lord with fully healed hearts (Rev. 19:7-8).²³⁹ Revelation ends as the new creation, inaugurated by Christ at the coming of his Kingdom and established by the Spirit in the hearts of Christians, becomes fully realized in a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21-22).

This theme of the Holy Spirit as regenerator, adorned with the biblical imagery of circumcision, creation, and resurrection, can be used within a gospel conversation with an SSA man. It beautifully portrays the Spirit's life-giving power to transform our own desires for death into new desires for a righteous life. Although confronting sexual sin may be difficult and should be approached with empathy and sympathy, the biblical illustration of the Spirit as the giver of life offers a beautiful hope for the restoration of all creation, including our broken desires.

The Gospel of God as Father

After introducing the SSA man to the person and work of Jesus Christ and confronting him with the realities of his sinfulness and the hope of regeneration by the Spirit, the Christian can invite him to follow God by clearly displaying the Father's character and the unique role the SSA man can play as a man in the Lord's family. Therefore, the third theme to trace through Scripture in evangelism to SSA men is the theme of biblical masculinity through the contrasting imagery of godly men as sons of the Father and fallen men as beasts. One important note regarding biblical masculinity is that queer theorists have reinterpreted Scripture according to their own critical systems with the presupposition that "gender is not an essentialist state" but is

²³⁸ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 504.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 736.

instead “the *performance* of repeated acts.”²⁴⁰ However, this is precisely the opposite of how the biblical authors discuss masculinity and femininity. In Scripture, a human has a fixed ontological identity as male or female, and he or she has opportunities for diverse interests, temperaments, and behaviors by which he or she may express his or her concrete masculinity or femininity in a manner glorifying to the Lord.²⁴¹ When having practical evangelistic conversations with real SSA men, it is wise to recognize their strengths and passions (including the gender non-conforming ones) and highlight positive examples from Scripture of men utilizing such talents for their Father who loves them dearly and is well-pleased with them.²⁴²

A canonical approach to biblical theology confirms the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in Genesis 1,²⁴³ and it reveals the divine character: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7). The beginning of Genesis contrasts with all other ancient creation myths by describing a singular, personal, trinitarian God who is self-existent and created mankind to be his children; Jewish Hebrew Bible scholar Umberto Cassuto identifies the uniqueness of the Lord among the other supposed deities:

Not many gods but One God; not theogony, for a god has no family tree; nor wars nor strife nor the clash of wills, but only One Will, which rules over everything, without the slightest let or hindrance; not a deity associated with nature and identified with it wholly or in part, but a God who stands absolutely above nature, and outside of it, and nature and

²⁴⁰ Steffan Mathias, *Paternity, Progeny, and Perpetuation: Creating Lives After Death in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2020), 24 (emphasis in original).

²⁴¹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *5 Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 226.

²⁴² Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 293.

²⁴³ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 5.

all its constituent elements, even the sun and all other entities, be they never so exalted, are only His creatures, made according to His will.²⁴⁴

The creature made by God at the pinnacle of the creation epic was man, created in God's very image to rule the world as God's sons and regent kings (Gen. 1:26-28), as biblical theologian Tom Schreiner asserts:

The image of God... is ontological, for human beings are in the image of God because they are servant kings and sons of God, and as a result of being made in God's image they rule the world for God... God is the sovereign creator who extends his kingship over the world. But he extends his rule through human beings, for as God's image-bearers they must govern the world for God's glory and honor.²⁴⁵

As Creator, the Lord formed each man with detailed care to make him unique (Ps. 139:13-16). Men like Adam, ruling over creation on the Lord's behalf, are agents of the Kingdom of God, and Eden is the intended throne room of this kingdom.²⁴⁶ The sovereign, beautiful King upon his throne had created men to be like him and to partner with him in the reign over all creation.²⁴⁷

Therefore, God clearly distinguished between Adam and the other beasts to show him the uniqueness of humanity among all living beings (Gen. 1:24-26). By allowing him to name the animals, the Lord, like a father, invited Adam to join him in responsibility, creativity, and caring dominion over the beasts (Gen. 2:19-20a). Additionally, the Lord created woman to be Adam's helper, to share with him in the rule over creation as his partner, spouse, and family (Gen. 2:18, 20b-24). The contrasting creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 offer complementary portraits of humanity's gender and sexuality as an aspect of the image of God.²⁴⁸ Genesis 1 emphasizes the

²⁴⁴ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I: From Adam to Noah (I – VI)*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992), 8.

²⁴⁵ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 6.

²⁴⁶ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 62.

²⁴⁷ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 7.

²⁴⁸ Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 310.

universal and equal worth of humanity as the image of God, though male and female are both distinct from one another with diverse roles to reflect God's nature; Genesis 2, in which man and woman are created separately with different roles, emphasizes their unified distinction from the rest of the beasts.²⁴⁹

The antagonist of Genesis 3 was one of these beasts, a serpent made by God with the gift of great craftiness (Gen. 3:1). Adam and Eve were commissioned by God to rule over beasts such as this one, but they instead submitted to its rule and followed its deception into rebellion against the King (Gen. 3:2-7).²⁵⁰ Having squandered his calling to hold responsible dominion over the beasts, Adam led the whole creation into a curse that poisoned both man and earth (Gen. 3:17-19). Adam's son, Cain, was offered the same choice when tempted with envy toward his brother, Abel (Gen. 4:5). The Lord warned him that sin, like a wild beast, was crouching near him, ready to pounce upon him, and he exhorted Cain to rule over it (Gen. 4:6). Cain failed as well, not by being passive like his father, but by actively becoming like the serpent; it was Cain who lured his brother out into the field and pounced upon him to murder him – Cain became the agent of sin (Gen. 4:8).²⁵¹

The descendants of Cain continued to join in the serpent's rebellion by behaving more like beasts than men. Lamech, seventh from Cain, took more than one wife, and he boasted in his aggressive murder of a man whom he perceived as a threat to his power (Gen. 4:19, 23-24);²⁵² these actions are those of an alpha male animal rather than befitting a regal human man. Beastly

²⁴⁹ Kyle E. Greenwood, *Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 31-32.

²⁵⁰ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 103.

²⁵¹ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 11.

²⁵² Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 71.

qualities were amplified in the Nephilim – half-men, half-fallen angels whose lust, ambition, and aggression corrupted the earth to such a great extent that the Lord sent a flood to destroy life on the planet (Gen 6:1-7).²⁵³ Nevertheless, God in his love for humanity chose a descendant of Adam named Noah to rescue the animals and his small family so they could repopulate the newly recreated world (Gen. 8:15-19). God formed a covenant with Noah and all creation to codify his relationship as that of a father to his son.²⁵⁴ He promised that he would never destroy the earth by flood again, and within the terms of this covenant was a provision for eating the animals as food (reinforcing the distinction between man and beast) and the command to distribute justice on murderous men by putting them to death (Gen. 9:1-6).²⁵⁵

Beastly men continued to roam the world after the flood, abusing their reign on earth to unleash death rather than to cultivate life, such as Nimrod (which means “rebel”), a warrior like the Nephilim, who founded the empires of Babylon and Assyria (Gen. 10:8-12).²⁵⁶ Even the men of Abraham’s chosen family became like animals. In each generation of the patriarchs, the men quarreled with their male relatives and neighbors, competed for wives, and fostered enmity between their sons.²⁵⁷ Although God chose smooth-skinned, domestic Jacob over hairy outdoorsman Esau, Jacob proved to be a serpentine character who repeated the sins of his fathers (Gen. 27:1-29). Nevertheless, the Torah revealed the Lord’s commands for appropriate expressions of masculinity, particularly in the catechization of a man’s sons and daughters

²⁵³ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 120.

²⁵⁴ Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 56-57.

²⁵⁵ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 111.

²⁵⁶ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 75.

²⁵⁷ James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 232.

according to the truth of the loving God whose relationship with his people mirrored that of a father to his son (Deut. 6:1-25; 8:5).²⁵⁸ In stark contrast to the beastly men living aggressive lives of sin, two men named Bezalel and Oholiab were chosen and filled by the Spirit of God – the first humans described as such – to be the artists who would design and make all the details of the tabernacle according to the architecture revealed on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 31:1-11).²⁵⁹

Albeit not all warrior men were beastly – the men of Israel fought in battles against the wicked Canaanites in obedience to the Lord their King under Joshua.²⁶⁰ The nature of masculinity requires faithful men to protect, provide, and pursue others and to avoid the dual selfish traps of aggression (like the beastly Samson, Judg. 14-16) or cowardice (like the faithless Gideon, Judg. 6).²⁶¹ King Saul, son of Kish, behind his handsome face and tall, strong exterior, exemplified the beastly man by revealing himself to be a selfish coward bent on preserving power (1 Sam. 9:2; 15:7-11; 20:30-33).²⁶² King David, short and young, exemplified a true godly man through his courageous fight against the Philistines (rather than cowardice), his faithful praise of the Lord in his psalms (rather than pride), his loyal friendship with Jonathan (rather than competition), and his submission to and forgiveness of Saul (rather than aggression). Regarding lust, however, David behaved just like a beast as he stole another man's wife and had him put to death (2 Sam. 11:1-27), and he failed to represent the Lord as a good father.²⁶³ The

²⁵⁸ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 119.

²⁵⁹ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 125.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁶¹ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 122, 124.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 425.

²⁶³ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 179-80.

subsequent kings of Israel and Judah, functioning with the divinely-given authority to rule, led their subjects in the same direction as themselves, either toward or away from the true King.

The book of Proverbs employs this same imagery to depict wise and foolish men. The feminine forms of Lady Wisdom and the Adulterous Woman dominate much of the book's content, but the narrator's framing of the book includes masculine images for Wisdom and Folly as well.²⁶⁴ Masculine wisdom is depicted as an old king offering fatherly instruction to his son (Prov. 1:1-9).²⁶⁵ Masculine foolishness is depicted as a hotheaded band of youths bent on beastly pleasures (Prov. 1:10-19).²⁶⁶ In Proverbs, the wisdom offered by the Lord is to heed his own words, given by the Father to his son (Prov. 2:1-8).²⁶⁷

More than any other biblical author, Daniel utilized the imagery of kings and beasts to portray men and the kingdoms they rule. The godly men who were loyal to the Lord as King – Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel – were wise, intelligent, and noble despite their youth, in contrast to their gluttonous and ambitious peers (Dan. 1:8-20; 3:9-12).²⁶⁸ Daniel even supernaturally ruled over the beasts through the Lord as the lions refused to open their mouths when he was cast into their den (Dan. 6:9-22). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was the character foil of these humble young men; this powerful king was granted authority from God to rule over the earth and provide for the nations and even the animals, but his pride twisted his reign toward selfish abuse of power (Dan. 4:10-12). Therefore, the Lord decreed that he be

²⁶⁴ The most prominent forms are the feminine characters of Lady Wisdom / the Noble Wife and Seductress Folly / the Adulterous Woman.

²⁶⁵ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 322.

²⁶⁶ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 288.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 282-83.

²⁶⁸ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 322.

stripped of his humanity and become like the beasts for seven years, eating grass just like livestock and growing out his hair and nails like the birds (Dan. 4:28-33). After seven years, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before the Lord and proclaimed the sovereignty of God's Kingdom over his own (Dan. 4:34-37).²⁶⁹ In Daniel's later visions, the wicked kingdoms led by fallen men were depicted as monstrous beasts that trampled the earth by their aggressive, destructive kingdoms (Dan. 7:4-28; 8:6-8).²⁷⁰ Daniel foresaw that these beasts and their bestial kingdoms would be crushed by the Kingdom of the Son of Man, a human man who would be exalted beside the Father's throne and rule over all creation on his behalf (Dan. 7:9-14).²⁷¹

"The Son of Man" was the title which Jesus most frequently used to refer to himself in the Gospels. By identifying himself with this figure, Jesus contextualized his announcement of the coming Kingdom as the conquest over the forces of evil and darkness and the restoration of the rightful order of creation under God's sovereign rule (Mark 1:14-15).²⁷² Being God the Son incarnate, Jesus was the truest image of the Creator God as he perfectly displayed the character of the Father to humanity (Heb. 1:1-3) and personified true biblical masculinity (Col. 1:15-20).²⁷³ He was gentle (Matt. 11:28-30) and compassionate (Matt. 9:36). He was courageous and stronger than the Pharisees, wild beasts, forces of nature, demons, disease, and death (Mark 1:13; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 5:1-43). He came to pursue sinners and rescue them (Matt. 19:9-10).²⁷⁴ Jesus

²⁶⁹ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 390.

²⁷⁰ These beasts were not only fallen men behaving beastly, but they were also chaos monsters emerging from the sea in league with the rebellious serpent, as happens later in Revelation 13.

²⁷¹ Charles H.H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2003), 122.

²⁷² Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 639.

²⁷³ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 137.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

reintroduced humanity to intimacy with God as a Father (Luke 11:2); the Father loved him and was pleased with him, and Jesus loved and obeyed the Father (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 22:42).²⁷⁵ As the only way for sinful men to be reconciled to their Father, Jesus offered himself (John 14:6-21). Through his sacrificial death and resurrection to new life, he proved himself to be the victorious king over all creation and reconciled men to the Father (Col. 2:13-15; Rom 5:6-11).

God the Father chose to rescue men and restore his image within them as they grew to become more like Christ, who was the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). He adopted men into his family to be his own sons, dearly loved by him and granted an inheritance alongside Christ (Rom. 8:14-17). Having chosen them before the creation of the world to be his children, the Father bestowed salvation upon them and sealed them with his Spirit (Eph. 1:3-14).²⁷⁶ Christians, as sons of God, have been called to continue the advancement of the Kingdom as they grow in maturity to become more like Jesus, each in their own way as part of his body (Eph. 4:14-16).²⁷⁷ Each member has a unique role to play, and God has created and gifted each man with exactly what he needs to reflect Christ and be the man the Father designed him to be (1 Cor. 12:4-27).²⁷⁸ As a man redeemed by the Lord follows him and flees from sin progressively, he lives as a new man becoming increasingly like Jesus as the image of God (Col. 3:1-14).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 136.

²⁷⁶ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 568.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 570.

²⁷⁸ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 575.

²⁷⁹ Men become more truly masculine as they become more like Jesus, for in him is true masculinity revealed. Nevertheless, God is not sexed nor male in the same way humanity is. Rather, masculinity and femininity each reflect an aspect of God's nature. Masculine imagery and pronouns are used to describe God frequently (though not exclusively) throughout Scripture, so though he is not a male, his nature includes everything necessary for masculinity. See Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 377.

Beasts made their New Testament return in John's Revelation to contrast with the kingly image of the Christian martyrs. One beast arose from the sea as a great king/kingdom like the beasts from Daniel's visions to rule the earth with the authority of the Dragon – the serpent who first deceived Eve (Rev. 13:1-8).²⁸⁰ A second beast arose from the earth as a great prophet/civil cult to reinforce the Dragon's reign through the first beast (Rev. 13:11-18).²⁸¹ These two fallen men and their fallen followers joined in the final rebellion against the King of Kings as they trampled the world and sabotaged their own doomed kingdom, just as Daniel's beasts did (Rev. 17:15-18).²⁸² Their destruction was complete in this vision, and the evil they unleashed was heaped upon their own heads as they were punished for their wickedness (Rev. 19:19-20). The Christians in Revelation were depicted as martyrs who testified faithfully to what they had witnessed of Jesus Christ even to the point of surrendering their lives unto death to become like him (Rev. 7:13-14).²⁸³ Just as Christ, they passed through death to resurrection and were seated upon thrones to rule with him in his Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).²⁸⁴ For eternity, they will reign in communion with the Father as sons and kings in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 22:5).

This theme of God as the Father, adorned with the biblical imagery of beasts and kingly sons, can be used within a gospel conversation with an SSA man. It beautifully portrays God as a good king who invites redeemed men to join in his reign as his sons. By living the life for which God created him, the SSA man's desires to be a true man can be satisfied in the Kingdom. The Father uniquely created him in his own image to rule over the earth and advance the Kingdom,

²⁸⁰ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 123.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁸² Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1139.

²⁸³ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 130.

²⁸⁴ Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1146.

and God extends his forgiving hand in an invitation to become his covenant partner and his dearly loved son. Thus, the SSA man will hear the gospel and can respond with faith or rebellion.

Conclusion

Because of the massive worldview and cultural differences dividing the Western church and the LGBTQ+ community, Christians must adapt from modernistic tendencies to creatively evangelize to men with same-sex attraction. This population possesses proclivities toward beauty and friendship, and beneath their desires for romance and sexuality is a deep desire to be respected and truly masculine. SSA men's affinities for beauty and friendship can be valuable commonalities for Christians to utilize as they invite them into the Kingdom of God to become the men he created them to be. By using the rich Christian history of theological aesthetics to shape how they approach apologetic conversations, creating communities, and sharing the gospel, believers may be able to present the truth, goodness, and beauty of Christianity in a compelling manner.

A Christian can initiate conversation with an SSA man regarding the arts or other intellectual topics that pique his interest and lay the groundwork for the Christian worldview and the glory of God. Simultaneously, the Christian can actively love the SSA man as a good friend to demonstrate the character of Jesus to him and welcome him with hospitable community. As the conversations turn to the gospel, the Christian can focus on the biblical metanarrative and trace themes that are relevant to the SSA man's inmost desires. As the Christian first introduces the SSA man to Jesus, he can highlight the husbandly qualities Jesus exhibits as the Bridegroom who gave up his life for his beloved people. The Christian can then highlight for the SSA man the good news of the Spirit's regeneration after gently and vulnerably confronting the sinfulness of the human heart and the need for salvation from man's fallen nature. Finally, the Christian can

invite the SSA man into relationship with God the Father by highlighting man's distinction from the beasts as God's image and the Father's redemption of his sons to rule alongside him forever.

No method of evangelism can force someone into submission to Christ. Nevertheless, wise evangelism that creatively cares to match the desires of the unbeliever with the truth of the gospel can be compelling. By enabling the lost man to behold the Lord on his throne in all his majesty, God may be glorified regardless of the unbeliever's response to the gospel.

Appendix I: A Brief Biblical Theology of Sexuality

In the beginning, God crafted the universe according to his good and purposeful design. As his ultimate masterpiece, he made humans in his own image to reflect his nature and to care for his creation as worship toward him (Gen. 1:26-28). Crucial to humanity's identity is the sexual complement between male and female – alike in value and calling (Gen. 1:27) yet distinct in role and responsibility (Gen. 2:18). In Eden, Adam and Eve together not only represented perfect human community, but they also portrayed the marital and sexual union between man and woman (Gen. 2:23-25). However, their rebellion against God shattered their innocence before him and their trust with one another (Gen. 3:7, 16). Humanity's fall descended deeper into depravity, and men's desires distorted even toward the sexual perversions of polygamy (Gen. 4:19) and angelic fornication (Gen. 6:1-7). The Lord poured out his judgement upon the wickedness of the world by allowing creation to collapse back into its disordered state, but he preserved a remnant through the righteous man Noah (Gen. 6:8-9:17). Tragically, Noah, too, failed like his ancestors, taking forbidden fruit – through drunkenness – and lying naked in his tent (Gen. 9:20-21). Furthermore, Noah's youngest son, Ham, the father of Canaan, snuck into his father's tent and committed incest, rape, and possibly homosexuality (Gen. 9:22-25).²⁸⁵ The Lord (through Noah) pronounced a curse upon Canaan but blessed Noah's other son, Shem, from whose loins descended Abraham, the patriarch of God's chosen family.

The protagonists of the rest of Genesis, Abraham and his family, also became riddled with sexual debauchery, including polygamy, incest, rape, prostitution, and adultery.

Homosexuality reappeared in a horrific account of Abraham's nephew, Lot, in the pagan city of

²⁸⁵ Depending on the interpretation, Ham either committed homosexuality with his father or the rape of his mother. See John Sietze Bergsma and Scott Walker Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (2005): 25-40. Whether Genesis 9 implies paternal-incest or maternal-incest, the typologically parallel story of Sodom and Gomorrah revisits incest, rape, and homosexuality.

Sodom (Gen. 19). Shockingly, the men of Sodom attempted to gang-rape two angels disguised as men – arguably the inverse of the antediluvian angelic fornication – and Lot’s daughters repeated Ham’s sin by getting their father drunk and raping him to impregnate themselves through incest.

Despite the failures of Abraham’s family – many of which were sexual in nature – the Lord protected and provided for his people as they grew into a nation. In the Exodus narrative, God redeemed their lives, freed them from bondage, baptized them through the Red Sea, and prepared them for the marital covenant between himself and their new nation of Israel. Crucial to the terms of this covenant were regulations about sexual purity to maintain holiness; for just like the tabernacle and the Sabbath, sex was to be considered sacred. Explicitly prohibited in the Mosaic Law were these acts of sexual perversion: incest, polygamy, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery, and prostitution (Lev. 18). However, Israel did not keep the terms of the covenant and forsook the Lord by turning to idolatry and sexual immorality, including the installment of male shrine prostitutes (1 Kgs. 14:24, 15:12, 22:46, 2 Kgs. 23:7). Israel’s fall into depravity was certain when the story of Sodom and Gomorrah repeated in the tribe of Benjamin (Jdg. 19).

As the prophets called the people to repentance, they used explicitly sexual terms to describe the broken relationship between the Lord and his people. Israel was like an adulterous bride who left her husband to become a prostitute in search of other lovers (e.g., Eze. 16). Despite her failures, the Lord promised to be a pursuing husband who would buy her back and clean her from her filth (e.g., Hos. 3). To stir up Israel’s affection for himself, the Lord inspired beautiful imagery of sexuality in Israel’s national poetry: Lady Wisdom and the Wise Father-King of Proverbs display the righteous woman and the righteous man; Ruth and Boaz personify these character archetypes in a historical romance; and the Song of Songs expresses sexual and romantic passion between the Shepherd-King Lover and his Beloved Bride.

Generations later, the Lord himself did come to his people in pursuit of them – the Father sent the Son by the Spirit to become human and dwell among the people of this world (John 1:1-5, 14). Jesus of Nazareth, being fully God, did not loosen the Lord's sexual ethics, and even strengthened them to include mental lust in all its forms (Matt. 5:27-32). Being fully man, Jesus faced temptation in every way (which presumably includes sexually), but he did not sin once (Heb. 15). Jesus nevertheless engaged with sexuality in ways that surprised those around him. First, he was single and celibate, and he promised blessings to those in society like the eunuchs who did not engage in marriage, sexual activity, or have biological children for the sake of God's Kingdom (Matt. 19:3-12). Second, he decreed that marriage was temporary and temporal (Luke 20:34-36) – clearly, while sex was important for Jesus, it was not ultimate. Third, he did not fear nor hate those who were sexually broken, but he went out of his way to pursue the prostitutes and the adulterous women (Matt. 21:31-32; John 4; John 8:1-11).

The narrative climax of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection secured redemption for sinners through forgiveness of their sins and rebirth to new life as new men (Ephesians 2:1-10). Among the first followers of Jesus were men like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28-39; Isaiah 56:3-5) and people from a variety of backgrounds who had been living in sin – including adulterers, those who had committed sexual immorality, and men who had practiced homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9). These people were cleansed of their sins and given new identities in Christ so that they no longer were the old men and women whom they had been (1 Cor. 6:11). Many still struggled against sexual sin (1 Cor. 6:12-20; Eph. 5:3-14), but they were always encouraged to follow Jesus faithfully and walk in purity.

Paul and the other apostles chosen by Christ repeated the sexual ethics of Jesus and the Mosaic Law (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:10). Most significantly, in Romans 1:18-32, Paul used homosexuality

(both sodomy and lesbianism) as the illustration of God handing humanity over to sin because of their damnable idolatry; he began his gospel message with this so that the churches in Rome might see human depravity and be ready for the good news of resurrection in Jesus. Paul revealed that the concrete morality about sex was in regard for its sacredness as the picture of Christ and his Bride, the Church (Eph. 5:22-33). Being single and celibate himself, Paul followed Jesus's example in exalting both singleness and marriage as beautiful roles for Christians to play within the church (1 Cor. 7). The people of God under the new covenant are no longer a biological family, but an adoptive one in which spiritual fathers and mothers may help raise younger brothers and sisters in the family of God apart from having biological children.

Ultimately, at the imminent Day of the Lord, he will bring judgement upon all the wickedness of the world and consummate salvation for his people, his Bride. The wicked world system, personified as the prostitute Babylon, has seduced all the lost to join in her adultery; she will be punished for her infidelity (Rev. 17-18). In contrast, the faithful people of God, Christ's Bride, are washed, clothed in white, and given a final home with the Bridegroom (Rev. 19:6-9). All the sexually-broken who have trusted in Christ will be finally healed and free to live the way they were designed to live because Christ has rid them of the punishment they formerly deserved (Rev. 22:15). The Wedding Supper of the Lamb will inaugurate the marriage between Christ and his Church, which will bring forth new life and blessings for all eternity (Rev. 21:1-5).

To summarize, in the creation and fall narratives of Genesis, sexuality is introduced; in the Torah and the Historical Prophets, sexual ethics are revealed; in the Prophetic and Wisdom Literature, sexuality becomes symbolism; in the Gospels, sexuality is seen untainted; in the Passion narrative and in Acts, sexually-broken people are redeemed; in Paul's epistles, sexual ethics and sexual symbolism are clarified; and in John's Revelation, sexuality is consummated.

Appendix II: Addressing Rational FAQs About Homosexuality in Christianity

Because of the prominent place homosexuality holds in the public spheres of culture, politics, and social discussions, Christians must be prepared to answer many questions about biblical sexuality. This appendix provides brief apologetic responses to some of the most relevant questions in this conversation, including what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, how to handle debates on biblical relevancy and translation, and why vocabulary matters.

Conclusions About the Bible and Homosexuality

1. What is the Purpose of Biblical Sexuality?

The biblical text suggests that sexuality has two major purposes. The first of these is to reflect the nature of God as being an aspect of the *imago Dei*. Reflecting God's nature includes three traditional functions of sexuality: "marital union," "having children," and "sharing pleasure."²⁸⁶ The unique complexities of human emotional relations can be expressed in the romantic intimacy found only in monogamous, covenantal marriages that display the capacity of humans to mimic their triune Creator as "the two become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). A significant part of the image of God is the Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:28-30) which includes biological procreation as a man and a woman partner with God to create new life. God also commanded Adam and Eve to enjoy the blessings of creation (Gen. 2:16), as is the purpose of mankind in the Westminster Catechism: "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever."²⁸⁷ Proper use of sexuality will demonstrate the image of God through covenantal intimacy, reproduction (primarily biologically, but also via adoption), and worshipful pleasure.

²⁸⁶ Ed Shaw, *Purposeful Sexuality: A Short Christian Introduction* (London, England, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 10-14.

²⁸⁷ "The Westminster Larger Catechism," Ligonier Ministries, May 12, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism>.

The second purpose of sexuality is more specific: to reflect the relationship between Christ and his Church. A biblical theology of sexuality clarifies that Paul's words regarding marriage in Ephesians 5 are not novel advice; they are the plainest explanation of a major biblical theme found in the genres of narrative, law, history, prophecy, liturgy, poetry, biography, epistle, and apocalypse. The dramatic relationship between God and his people is typified through sexuality. Ed Shaw, the founder of LivingOut Ministries, asserts that this is the primary purpose of sexuality, as he quotes from fellow pastor John Piper:

Here are just two sentences that have transformed [my life]: 'the *ultimate* reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable. The language and imagery of sexuality are the most graphic and most powerful that the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his people – both positively (when we are faithful) and negatively (when we are not)'... Piper is arguing that the chief reason we have a God-given sexuality is to help us grasp the full passion of God's love for us, his people, and the horrific pain he feels when we walk away from him. Our sexual feelings are a reference point for us in communicating the full power of God's loving feelings towards us, and how awful it is when we are unfaithful to him.²⁸⁸

Proper use of sexuality will demonstrate the sacramental nature of sex as the vivid image of the relationship between God and his people.

2. Why Does Biblical Sexuality Exclude Homosexual Practice?

Homosexuality is explicitly a sin according to Scripture, and orthodox Christianity historically has held a unanimous view condemning homosexuality.²⁸⁹ This sexual practice cannot reflect the nature of God, and thus cannot fulfill this purpose of sexuality. Despite some same-sex marriages including relational commitment, the concept of unconditional covenantal union between two diverse partners is absent in homosexual relationships. Same-sex sexual

²⁸⁸ Shaw, *Purposeful Sexuality*, 17-18.

²⁸⁹ S. Donald Fortson and Rollin Gene Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 251.

activity cannot biologically produce children, and it may even cause biological destruction of one's sexual partners and self.²⁹⁰ One may object that same-sex couples may adopt and provide for children, but this still leaves the void of either father or mother in the family which are both vital roles for a child's healthy development. And although same-sex sexual relationships can bring pleasure, their participants cannot glorify God by enjoying something which he has forbidden. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude that homosexuality fails to fulfill God's design for sexuality to reflect his nature.

Homosexuality also cannot reflect the relationship between Christ and his Church, and thus cannot fulfill this purpose of sexuality either. Gender difference in sex and romance matters because God and his people are not interchangeable in their relationship. Specifically, the pursuit by God the Son of his Bride mirrors the masculine role to pursue, protect, and provide for the wife. Likewise, the Church's repentant and joyous reception of Jesus Christ in respectful, loving, and trusting submission mirrors the feminine role to receive the husband's pursuit and join him in trusting partnership. These two roles in marriage are different because the characters they sacramentally portray are not identical. Two women lack the capacity to display God's love for his people; two men lack the capacity to display his people's respect for God. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude that homosexuality fails to fulfill God's design for sexuality to reflect Christ and his Church. Since same-sex sexual relationships are unable to reflect God's nature or the relationship between God and his people, the ultimate purposes of sexuality are not fulfilled in homosexuality. The very nature of biblical sexuality excludes homosexual practice from being acceptable for Christians.

²⁹⁰ Aaron J. Werner, "Is Homosexuality Really Wrong?" *Good Answers to Great Questions* (2020): 27-28, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://www.aaronjwerner.com/is-homosexuality-really-wrong>. For more information on the biological dangers of homosexuality and to observe an astute contextualization of scientific evidence into a moral argument against homosexuality, see Werner's full article.

Biblical Relevancy and Translation Debates***3. Does Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13's Ban on Homosexuality Apply to Christians?***

The Old Testament Law is not given to Christians as the covenant by which they are currently bound, but as the Word of God, which is helpful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness to equip the servants of God for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Although its commands are to the ancient nation of Israel, the Law reveals the character of God, explains the ritual and cultural liturgy by which the people of God demonstrated truth that points to Jesus, displays for any reader the nature of holiness and the tragedy of human sin, and codifies universal morality into a specific framework. For each command or story in the Torah, it is appropriate to see how each of these four purposes of the Law are fulfilled in it.

In Leviticus 18 and 20, the laws regarding sexuality display that sex is sacred, and sexual morality requires specific attention to use the power of sex for good. Sex matters to God because it demonstrates the passionate love between God and his people. Holy sexual practices contrasted Israel from the rest of her neighboring nations who frequently misused sex in pagan rituals. Perfect expression of sexual activity is only possible in the context of covenantal marriage between a husband loving his wife as God loves his people and a wife respecting her husband as she trusts him like the Lord's people trust their God; any other sexual deviation is desecration of something sacred. Sex is universally sacred, which is clear from the Bible's frequent appeals to the created order and the unchanging nature of God's love for his people, as well as from the continued affirmation of sexual morality by Jesus, Paul, and the apostles in different cultural and covenantal contexts. Therefore, the rich meaning of Leviticus 18 and 20 is deeply valuable for Christians today, and these specific laws reveal universal morality which Christians today are obligated to obey, including the specific prohibition of homosexuality.

4. Are *Μαλακοί* and *Ἀρσενοκοῖται* Relevant to Today's Gay Relationships?

In the New Testament, two words are used to describe homosexuality: *μαλακοί* [malakoí] and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* [arsenokoítai]. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11 include one or both terms alongside many other vices on their lists of sinners in need of salvation. *Μαλακοί* (1 Cor. 6:9) denotes the submissive partners in same-sex acts.²⁹¹ This is a plural substantive from the adjective *μαλακός*, meaning “soft, weak, tender,” and it can be translated as “effeminate men” or “homosexuals.”²⁹² *Ἀρσενοκοῖται* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10, c.f. Rom. 1:27, Lev. 18:22, 20:13 LXX) denotes the dominant partners in same-sex acts.²⁹³ This word is a compound between *ἄρσενός* (“man”) and *κοίτη* (“bed”), which Paul may have coined from the Septuagint translation of Leviticus, literally meaning “men who take other men to bed,” and best translated as “sodomites” or “homosexual men.”²⁹⁴ The authoritative lexicons of New Testament Koinē Greek agree that *μαλακοί* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* refer to men practicing homosexuality.²⁹⁵ Therefore, all the

²⁹¹ United Bible Society, *The Greek New Testament with Dictionary, Fifth Revised Edition*, ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), 560.

²⁹² Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Warren Baker and George Hadjiantoniou (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, Inc., 1993).

²⁹³ UBS, *The Greek New Testament*, 504, 560, 692. See also *Septuaginta: A Reader's Edition, Volume I*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs, Robert Hanhart, Gregory R. Lanier, and William A. Ross. Stuttgart (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2018), 306, 311.

²⁹⁴ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*.

²⁹⁵ See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur F. Gingrich (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979); J.P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989); Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Eighth Edition* (Oxford, England, UK: Clarendon Press, 1901), 223; and Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. III*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985).

major English translation committees in biblical scholarship choose language for same-sex sexual activity, including the ESV, HSCB, KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NLT, and NRSV.²⁹⁶

However, some contemporary readers object to this translation and claim that these terms are irrelevant to gay relationships today.²⁹⁷ The most common argument is that these terms refer to pederasty, prostitution, or some other form of sexual activity that is different from consenting adults who share a same-sex orientation loving one another with commitment.²⁹⁸ The issue with these arguments is that they contradict the consensus of scholarship mentioned above, and they cannot fit within the New Testament's appropriate historical linguistic context. Regarding same-sex sexual activity, Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, first-century AD Roman-Jewish historians, discussed frequent drunken orgies between Roman men and their male social inferiors, as well as condemning pederasty, male cultic prostitution, cross-dressing, gay & lesbian intercourse, same-sex marriage, and homosexuality between equal citizens.²⁹⁹ Likewise, other Second Temple Jewish literature, such as the *Sibylline Oracles* and *2 Enoch*, upheld Roman condemnation of sexual perversions and added consensual sexual intercourse between adult men to this category of forbidden sexual sin.³⁰⁰ Thus, in first-century Jewish thought (of which Paul was a member), there was a distinction between homosexuality between equals and other forms of sexual perversion; certainly Paul condemned the other forms of immorality

²⁹⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 61.

²⁹⁷ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 37.

²⁹⁸ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2014), 123-24.

²⁹⁹ William Loader, "Paul on Same-Sex Relations in Romans 1," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 74, no. 3 (2020): 247.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

elsewhere in his writings (e.g. prostitution, lust, adultery, etc.), but in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, he specifically prohibited all homosexuality.

5. Could Paul Be Referring to Excessive Lust or Cultic Prostitution in Romans 1:18-32?

The New Testament passage that most strongly condemns homosexuality is Paul's illustration of human depravity through the example of unnatural, shameful, same-sex lusts and actions in Romans 1. Contemporary readers who seek to affirm gay relationships have challenged traditional interpretations of this passage by asserting the possibility of other sins being denounced rather than homosexuality. Liberal theologian James Brownson argues that Paul focused on excessive lust that surpasses the bounds of appropriate sexual desire into gross perversion, which means that the apostle did not censure an ordinate amount of sexual desire for a member of the same-sex within a committed marriage.³⁰¹ Biblical scholar Robert K. Gnuse proposes the Cult of Isis as the specific historical debauchery about which Paul wrote, maintaining that his mention of idolatry toward animals is likely a reference to Egyptian religion rather than an appeal to Genesis 1-2.³⁰² Matthew Vines, LGBTQ+ activist and founder of the Reformation Project, has popularized these scholarly objections and claimed that "what Paul was describing is *fundamentally different from what we are discussing*."³⁰³

Nevertheless, a contextual reading of Romans 1:18-32 clarifies that Paul condemned not only these additional sexual perversions, but all homosexuality between men and between women. Paul's major argument in Romans was to establish a foundation for gospel unity among

³⁰¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, and Sexuality*, 124.

³⁰² Robert K. Gnuse, "Seven Gay Texts: Biblical Passages Used to Condemn Homosexuality," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (2015): 84.

³⁰³ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 103 (emphasis in original).

the Christians in Rome, and this rested upon a correct doctrine of sin: humanity's idolatrous perversion of God's good creation deserves his righteous wrath. Within this specific chapter, Paul used the example of homosexual lusts and behaviors to illustrate the human propensity toward perversion of one's desire away from God (where it ought to belong) to created things.³⁰⁴ The object of one's desire, not merely its intensity, is the key to its holiness or sinfulness. Thus, it is impossible to have an appropriate amount of same-sex sexual desire because the sin in this text is people exchanging the natural desire for persons of the opposite sex for the unnatural desire for persons of the same sex.³⁰⁵ To demonstrate the sinfulness of all people in this opening section of Romans, Paul clearly appealed to the created order from Genesis as the foundation for why the rejection of heterosexual marriage for homosexual lust and intercourse exemplifies the nature of sinful idolatry and rebellion against God.³⁰⁶ Therefore, because Paul intended the example of homosexuality to fit within his universal argument, the text excludes the possibility of eliminating same-sex lusts or actions from the scope of sin which he is condemning.

LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Within the Church

6. Can Someone Be Gay and a Christian?

This question taps into a large debate among people with same-sex attraction (SSA) who claim to follow Jesus.³⁰⁷ Some would heartily answer, "YES!" because they see no problems with practicing homosexuality or with participating in the LGBTQ+ community. A major proponent of this view is Matthew Vines, whose book, *God and the Gay Christian*, challenges

³⁰⁴ Loader, "Paul on Same-Sex Relations in Romans 1," 251.

³⁰⁵ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 252.

³⁰⁶ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, 54-55.

³⁰⁷ These four positions have been sometimes labeled as Side A, Side X, Side B, and Side Y, respectively.

Christian orthodoxy by denying the biblical sexual ethic.³⁰⁸ These people, although they may mean well, do not understand that “they cannot be more merciful than God,” to quote Rosaria Butterfield;³⁰⁹ therefore, though they offer an alternative gospel in the name of compassion, they are offering only damnation. In the words of Trevin Wax, the Vice President of Research and Resources at the North American Mission Board, the doctrine of biblical sexuality is a “load-bearing wall” in the house of Christianity; any attempt to tear it down and move it elsewhere will eventually lead to the collapse of the entire structure, as is seen by the eventual abandonment of orthodoxy by all the denominations which began by rejecting biblical sexual ethics.³¹⁰ To reject biblical sexuality is to reject the gospel of Christ and his Church displayed through Christian marriage.

In contrast, others would heartily answer, “NO!” and would identify as “ex-gay,” having renounced the experience of SSA and purportedly finding restored heterosexual desires.³¹¹ Ministries like the now-defunct Exodus International and others who perform “conversion/reparative therapy” seek to change one’s sexual orientation to heterosexuality.³¹² They have allegedly found some success in doing so, but the veracity of these claims is highly disputed. The reported success contradicts statements from the American Psychological

³⁰⁸ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 28.

³⁰⁹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, “Q&A on Same-Sex Attraction,” interview by Melanie Denning, Office of Spiritual Development of Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 10, 2023.

³¹⁰ Trevin Wax, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 99-101.

³¹¹ Joe Dallas, *Speaking of Homosexuality: Discussing the Issues with Kindness and Clarity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016) 39-40.

³¹² Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, “Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation,” paper for the *American Association of Christian Counselors* (Nashville, TN: AACC, September 13, 2007), 1.

Association, which identifies such therapies are harmful rather than helpful.³¹³ Although the APA may be biased by their pro-LGBTQ+ advocacy, the claims of conversion therapy's harm resound also from those who have received it and those who have administered it.³¹⁴ It is difficult to sort through the experiences of those who have undergone conversion therapy because of the mixed results claimed. However, as theologian, author, and poet Jackie Hill Perry asserts in her memoir, *Gay Girl, Good God*, the underlying worldview behind this "ex-gay" movement is a variation of the prosperity gospel, promising the blessing of marriage and deliverance from suffering for everyone with SSA if one is faithful enough to God.³¹⁵ This turns heterosexuality, not holiness, into the object of Christian pursuit and can even become idolatry.

A third group, calling themselves "Side B" (referring to the back side of an album and showing solidarity with the LGBTQ+ movement and other "Side A" gays),³¹⁶ would answer, "Yes, but even if someone is a gay Christian, he or she should not practice homosexuality." Authors like Wesley Hill and David Bennett, as well as Nate Collins' ministry *Revoice* and Preston Sprinkle's *The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender*, all support biblical sexual ethics, but favor identifying with the vocabulary of the LGBTQ+ movement, often freely identifying themselves as "gay" rather than reporting the experience of "same-sex attraction."³¹⁷ This

³¹³ "Opposing Conversion Therapy: APA Joins 28 Organizations in Call to End Conversion Therapy in the United States," American Psychological Association, October 10, 2023, <https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/news/opposing-conversion-therapy>. See also "LGBTQ+ Health and Civil Rights," American Psychological Association, June 2023, <https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/issues/health-equity/lgbtq-health-civil-rights>.

³¹⁴ Jones and Yarhouse, "Ex-Gays?" 2.

³¹⁵ Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God Has Always Been* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 177-78.

³¹⁶ Butterfield, "Q&A on Same-Sex Attraction."

³¹⁷ See Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), David Bennet, *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), Nate Collins, "Sexual Ethics and Christian Obedience," *Revoice*, 2023, <https://www.revoice.org>, and Preston Sprinkle's "Statement of Faith," *Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender*, 2023,

movement of “celibate gay Christians” arose in the 2010’s and has gained popularity for its mediating position between the church and the LGBTQ+ community, but this has made Side B Christians many enemies on both sides as well.³¹⁸

The fourth group of SSA theologians would answer the question very cautiously: “Yes, you can certainly become a Christian if you are gay, but you will not remain living in homosexuality nor claiming a gay identity once you are following Christ.” Led by individuals such as Rosaria Butterfield, Christopher Yuan, and Becket Cook, this conservative group of Christians who experience SSA sticks firmly to biblical sexuality and strongly opposes identifying with the LGBTQ+ community or using the vocabulary of “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “queer,” or “straight,” to refer to Christians.³¹⁹ According to Butterfield, the LGBTQ+ movement is not only a political coalition, but also a religious movement that is demanding idolatrous worship of the postmodern self through tolerance, affirmation, and the use of doctored vocabulary.³²⁰ She and her colleagues are concerned that the willingness of Side B Christians to compromise on this battleground of language reveals deeper compromises of ideas which lead believers with SSA farther away from holiness and further into rebellion against God through sinful identification with the forces of darkness behind the LGBTQ+ movement.³²¹ As

<https://www.centerforfaith.com/about/statement-of-faith>, and *Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage?: 21 Conversations from a Historically Christian View* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2023).

³¹⁸ Karen R. Keen, “Cultural Influences on Hermeneutical Frameworks in the Debate on Same-Sex Relationships,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 74, no. 3 (2020): 261.

³¹⁹ Many other Christian authors, including Sam Allberry, Rachel Gilson, Rebecca McLaughlin, Jackie Hill Perry, and Ed Shaw agree with this end of the spectrum, but they do not condemn the use of language as strongly and are more willing to partner with those from the Side B group. I personally agree with all these authors, as well as Butterfield, Yuan, and Cook.

³²⁰ Butterfield, “Q&A on Same-Sex Attraction.”

³²¹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, “Convocation with Rosaria Butterfield,” speech at Liberty University Convocation, Lynchburg, VA, November 10, 2023, https://watch.liberty.edu/playlist/dedicated/82178501/1_nsbkpyf/1_62111pc3.

the martyrs have done throughout the ages (Dan. 3:1-30; Rev. 20:4), Christians ought to faithfully testify as witnesses for Jesus Christ, regardless of the social consequences. Butterfield convincingly shows the flaws in the other three groups and makes a compelling case for why Christians must avoid the common cultural vocabulary lest they desecrate the Word or discourage other Christians who do experience SSA.

7. How Should Believers with Same-Sex Attraction Identify Themselves If Not as “Gay”?

Christians who experience same-sex attraction ought to identify primarily with Jesus rather than morally-compromise by appropriating LGBTQ+ culture. Along with the faithful SSA theologians mentioned above, these Christians have the opportunity to testify to the goodness of the gospel by strongly opposing their former sins (including homosexuality) as they die to themselves daily to be raised with Christ as his new creation. Rather than condemning others who struggle with temptations natural to their flesh, this group of believers can encourage them to follow the Lord faithfully even with their experience of SSA, in agreement with Dr. Michael Brown: “While it is possible to have same-sex attractions and be a devoted follower of Jesus, living a holy life and not yielding to those attractions or affirming them, it is impossible to follow Jesus and engage in same-sex practice at the same time.”³²² Christians who have been tempted by homosexuality may faithfully love fellow believers who experience various struggles and help them grow in maturity, holiness, and pursuit of the Lord while recognizing that he may never take away their struggle on this side of eternity.

³²² Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?: Responding With Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House Book Group, 2014), 147.

Appendix III: Addressing Emotional Objections to Christian Bigotry

As philosopher and historian Nancy Pearcey astutely observes in her work, *Love Thy Body*, “Many people are no longer asking: Is Christianity true? They’re asking: Why are Christians such bigots? The challenge is to show that biblical morality expresses a higher view of creation and the body than secular morality does. It grants greater dignity and worth to the human being, and is ultimately more fulfilling.”³²³ Before answering the questions and claims in this appendix, it is important to affirm that the people raising them likely either a) directly experience same-sex attraction (SSA) and cannot fathom how the gospel is good news or b) have sympathy for those who experience SSA, especially their real family members and friends. The hearts of non-Christians asking these questions are usually full of practical pity for those who identify as LGBTQ+, even if they are strongly opposed to the gospel. Their rejection of Christianity is not just because it seems false, but because it *feels wrong*.

For a Christian to respond to accusations of hatred in the church and claims of compassion in the LGBTQ+ movement, he or she must be willing to repent from the church’s prior failures and put forth a winsome display of the compassion Christ requires of all his followers. In responding to these questions, the Christian must not attempt to win debates, but to obey 1 Peter 3:15-16: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”³²⁴ The goal is to empathize with the emotional roots beneath these questions while challenging their intellectual framework.

³²³ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 114.

³²⁴ New International Version (used throughout).

Objection 1: *Why Can't Christians Be Compassionate Like the LGBTQ+ Community?*

One of the strongest cultural values in the LGBTQ+ worldview is compassion. People in this movement may experience SSA or gender dysphoria, may know loved ones who do, or may be caught up in a compelling community that is fighting for an attractive cause. For these people, the cause of oppression for so many of their friends and family members is the perceived restrictive abuses of power by the traditional familial, national, and religious authorities.³²⁵ As a result, they are quick to perceive disagreements, criticisms, or even tolerance without full affirmation as condemnation and hatred.³²⁶ Therefore, it is unsurprising that Christianity is perceived not only as wrong, but as hateful, unloving, and the source of great injustice. Tragically, some professing Christians have met the negative expectations of the LGBTQ+ movement by refusing to show compassion and perpetuating hate and injustice, profaning the name of Jesus.³²⁷ Nevertheless, an honest examination of the LGBTQ+ community and authentic, biblical Christianity reveals where true compassion lies.

Without an absolute morality standing above humanity to which one's choices are accountable, the only standard which matters is one's personal tastes and feelings. Within this worldview, showing people compassion requires celebrating their personal feelings and their life choices as the means of affirming their chosen identities.³²⁸ People in the LGBTQ+ community frequently celebrate these aspects of one another's lives, which makes them seem loving and

³²⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 166.

³²⁶ Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2018), 167.

³²⁷ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), 4.

³²⁸ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2014), 176.

compassionate.³²⁹ But the truth of this worldview's intolerance, acidity, and downright hatred reveals itself whenever anyone raises an objection.³³⁰ Although it claims to be compassionate, the LGBTQ+ movement only loves those who love it. Many who disagree with the practice and advocacy of homosexuality, from traditionalist political opponents to Christians who follow the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics, receive vehement hate from the gay community.³³¹

Compassion in the LGTBQ+ movement remains within its bounds but does not extend to its enemies.

True compassion is central to authentic Christianity. God's own description of himself in Exodus 34:6-7, which is the key character creed of the Lord throughout the entire Old Testament, identifies him primarily with this characteristic:³³² "the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..." Compassion is a core element of God's very essence, and he is therefore able to be far more compassionate than any fallen human. That the gospel of Jesus Christ is marked by true compassion, justice, and mercy is evidenced by his love not only toward those who love God, but also toward his enemies (Rom. 5:6-11). Genuine compassion through forgiveness and loving one's enemies is commanded by Jesus for all his followers (Matt. 5:43-45). When Christians live in this way, they behave like the Lord and testify to the truth of the gospel by their actions as well as their words.

It can be difficult for people in the LGBTQ+ community to understand why the gospel is good news because it does not tell people what they want to hear. Nevertheless, showing real

³²⁹ Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, 5.

³³⁰ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 97.

³³¹ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013), 62.

³³² Mark J. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 28-29.

compassion requires telling someone the truth even when it challenges them. Love seeks the best for its object, not simply its happiness. The gospel of God's compassion for his enemies is like surgery to a dying heart; it cuts it open, intentionally wounding it so that it can remove the disease and bring it back to life. The painful truth of God does wound men's pride to the death, but in the death of their desires, they may be raised to new life. The flourishing life offered by Christ, as will be further discussed in the following sections, is the fruit of God's far greater compassion than mere celebration of one's life choices by people who are living the same way.

Objection 2: Can SSA People Hope for a Flourishing Life Without Satisfying Their Bodies?

The idealization of sexual pleasure in the LGBTQ+ movement is derived from a foundational philosophy of the human body. The claim of the gay community regarding the body is that the capacity to follow one's inmost desires liberates one to use the body in whatever manner seems best to oneself.³³³ This flippant praxis is the conclusion of the extreme individualism upon which the movement is founded. If the highest good is one's happiness through self-expression, then one is allowed to freely use one's body to please oneself. However, because the LGBTQ+ movement arises from the common secular worldview of the West, its view of the human body is limited within the constraints of naturalism and weakened by the whims of postmodernism. Even a retreat to Eastern forms of spirituality like the New Age Movement cannot rescue the philosophy of the body from being poor, ugly, and meaningless.

The secular and pagan worldviews are far less satisfying for people with same-sex attraction than the biblical worldview, especially regarding their bodies, because the foundational narratives for these worldviews devalue the strong desires SSA people possess to use their bodies

³³³ Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God Has Always Been* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 49.

meaningfully. Within a godless world of chaos and disorder which lacks morality, truth, biology, and aesthetics, there is no purpose behind each person's yearnings for justice, self-fulfillment, pleasure, and meaning. The modern Western worldview is void of valid explanations for the inescapable attractions to beauty, community, romance, sexuality, and masculinity.³³⁴ So also, the Eastern and ancient Gnostic worldviews devalue the human body in the opposite direction; secularism robs the natural of all meaning by its rejection of the supernatural, and paganism robs the natural of all meaning by its escapism to pure supernaturalism. The mystic religions of the East, like Hinduism and Buddhism, and the dualistic Far Eastern philosophies, like Daoism, devalue human desires, human dignity, and even the human body.³³⁵ The occult and the New Age Movement – syncretic remnants of secularism, mysticism, animism, and ancient Gnostic worldviews – greatly demean the body by denying any importance to the physical realm and promoting a flight upon one's own terms to the spiritual realm without absolutes or guidance (except from spiritual powers of darkness).³³⁶ Therefore, neither the worldviews of the East or West to which people from the LGBTQ+ community subscribe can adequately account for both the physical and metaphysical components of the human body.

These inadequate secular and pagan worldviews cannot support the complex reality of sexual activity in the human body. If sex is physical yet also emotional, relational, mental, and even spiritual, only a worldview that fulfills all five of these can be truly satisfying. It is only the holistic worldview of Scripture that can adequately account for the beautiful mind-body-spirit

³³⁴ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 120-123.

³³⁵ Thomas A. Robinson and Hillary P. Rodrigues, *World Religions: A Guide to the Essentials, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 161, 195, 248.

³³⁶ Ron Rhoads, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions: The Essential Guide to Their History, Their Doctrine, and Our Response* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 134.

reality of the human person that is expressed in sex.³³⁷ The biblical worldview provides the foundational framework for all that is good, true, and beautiful: morality, truth, science, aesthetics, justice, self-fulfillment, pleasure, meaning, logic, mathematics, music, friendship, romance, masculinity, and femininity, to name a few. The reason why humans experience such strong love for human life, dignity, self-expression, and satisfaction is because humanity was made by God to experience such things in a flourishing life. This is not a life that is merely physical, nor one that is merely spiritual, but one that is fully integrated in which sexuality is far more than mere physiological arousal, but no less. As theologian Jonathan Grant explains, “Yet this truth sits at the heart of our faith: the Christian view of sexuality is an aesthetic vision of human flourishing just as truly as it is one of sacrificial self-denial.”³³⁸

Nevertheless, even if Christianity provides the most satisfying foundation for the nature of sex and for the holistic human person, the question remains regarding how the biblical worldview can be good news for the bodies of those whose sexualities do not match the perfect design idealized in Christianity. At the heart of Christianity is resurrection. Upon this truth hinges the entire proclamation of good news and the entire ethical system for sexuality (1 Cor. 15:1-58, 6:12-20). Good is the news that God has not forsaken his children nor abandoned his creation despite their rebellion against him. Good is the news that God himself descended to earth and became human to make all things new, both in humanity and in the universe. Good is

³³⁷ See Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel is Good News for Our Physical Selves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021). Allberry offers a rich theological anthropology focused on the human body in the Christian worldview as good, true, beautiful, dearly loved by God, and purposed by him to become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:13-19). From Adam’s creation as animated flesh to the incarnation of God the Son to the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the promised restoration of the whole earth at the ultimate resurrection, the gospel is deeply focused on real people whose physical bodies need holistic healing through Jesus’s redemption of the natural creation.

³³⁸ Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 127.

the news that God has crushed the rebellion against him, conquering sin, evil, and death itself. Good is the news that God has sacrificed himself so that men could repent of their rebellion and enter his Kingdom as new men. Good is the news that Jesus is risen, that his sons are alive, that by following him in his righteous suffering they may also attain his bodily resurrection, that redeemed men's faithfulness is guaranteed by the sovereign Savior, that even these bodies will be raised anew, and all their sickness, disability, and temptations will be healed. Good is the news that God's Kingdom is advancing in the darkness and will be consummated soon. Good is the news that every tribe, tongue, and nation will be represented, resurrected, and reigning with Christ in a new creation forever and ever.

The gospel is good news even to the sexually-broken because Jesus empathizes with their sufferings and temptation and genuinely loves them. No matter what one's past contains, Christ offers forgiveness freely and true life abundantly. He is gracious to sinners, and all who are poor in spirit find spiritual healing and future holistic redemption. Many of the followers of Jesus in the Church's first generation came from backgrounds of sexual brokenness, including specifically homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-11). But resurrection requires death before rebirth. To follow Christ means surrendering one's dead life and hanging the filth of one's sin and self-righteousness upon his cross. Only in this way may one be resurrected to a flourishing life within a community of living brothers and sisters who have been reconciled to the good, loving Father who made them and is healing all that is wrong with this world. There *is* hope. The only hope of flourishing life for same-sex attracted people is the same as for all other kinds of people: hope in the resurrected Christ who has inaugurated the resurrection of the world.

Objection 3: *Is There a Place in the Church for Single People Who Lack Nuclear Families?*

Since the affirmation of biology is often seen to be oppressive in the LGBTQ+ worldview and the traditional authority of the family is rejected by postmodern thought, family is not a strict concept in the LGBTQ+ community. Intimacy in friendship and in same-sex romantic or sexual relationships is much more common than nuclear families.³³⁹ This is a common cultural clash with evangelical Christian churches which often structure most church events based on addressing the needs of nuclear families. Single adults in the LGBTQ+ community build families of friends; Christian husbands and wives too often isolate their families and maintain mere companionship rather than genuine friendship with people from their churches.³⁴⁰ In this area, the LGBTQ+ community is stronger than many churches. Certainly, the foundation of friendships in this community is shaky because it crumbles as soon as there is disagreement, but the genuine friendships that are formed there have deep affection and intimacy.³⁴¹ There is loyalty within the LGBTQ+ community that is rooted in years of suffering alongside one another and sticking with each other in the face of strong opposition as a found family of friends.³⁴²

For someone in the LGBTQ+ community to become a Christian requires not only that he or she sacrifice his or her desires and former life, but also lose many dear friends he or she has gained throughout the years.³⁴³ To leave this life and enter a church alone without any prospects for making friends is terrifying. Whether this person remains celibate for life, which is possible

³³⁹ Becket Cook, *A Change of Affection: A Gay Man's Incredible Story of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 75-80.

³⁴⁰ Ed Shaw, *7 Myths About Singleness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 69-70.

³⁴¹ Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, 16, 61.

³⁴² Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 94.

³⁴³ Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next* (Epsom, England, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 74.

and healthy, or whether he or she will eventually have a holy heterosexual marriage, the initial entrance into the church should be welcoming with a place in the family of God prepared for this person.

Although family in Christianity certainly does include the biological family of a husband, a wife, and their children (begotten or adopted), the chief center of Christian family is in the church. Some people treat the church as if it were only for biological families to gather together, but they are mistaken. The church is for everyone who follows Jesus Christ as Lord. It is a tragedy that some Christians do not understand the church's role to advance the Kingdom of God, and therefore cannot comprehend how their lives can be part of its advance. While the structure of some local churches emphasizes Christianity exclusively for nuclear families, this should not be the case according to the pattern of spiritual family and church community found in Scripture. Biological family matters a great deal less to Jesus than spiritual family (Matt. 19:29, Luke 8:19-21). It is no longer primarily through passing on truth from parents to children that God's family grows, but through mature believers passing on truth to unbelievers and new believers, not only from parents to children, but from any social group to members of any other social group (Matt. 28:19-20). Salvation is not hereditary but comes from God's faithful mercy (Rom. 9:6-18).

Yet, Jesus does not destroy the concepts of nuclear family; rather, he expands their scope to include people regardless of their marital or biological family status. Through the adoption planned by God since before the creation of the world, believers have become part of a new family (Eph. 1:4-6). The New Testament primarily uses the language of "brothers" [and "sisters"], as well as "children," "sons," and "mothers/fathers" to depict the roles believers are to have within the family of God underneath the Lord himself as Father. This unified family

restructures other social roles so that husbands and wives are free to complement one another in emulation of Christ's romance with his Bride, children and parents are free to honor one another, and slaves and masters are free to be equals in the church and in the eyes of God despite their status of employment (Eph. 4:1-16; 5:21-33; 6:1-9). When a nuclear family becomes spiritual family, it is a powerful force for the Kingdom of God.³⁴⁴

Although it is clear to see the ideal of spiritual family in Scripture, many churches have not applied this well to individuals in their congregations, especially single adults. Despite the imperfections of real Christians, the truth of Christianity stands unchanged: Scripture explicitly applauds a life of single celibacy as a very good life for some believers to live, and healthy churches should also celebrate and include people with the gift of singleness into their spiritual families. Paul, who exalts marriage to its place of highest honor in Ephesians 5, says that celibacy is so valuable for the Kingdom of God that he wishes everyone were single as he is (1 Cor. 7:7-8). He provides great wisdom about how the celibate believer may fully devote his or her time, energy, and resources for the advancement of the Kingdom and to love his or her spiritual family unhindered by the urgent demands of a spouse and children: a life he highly recommends for any believer who can do so (1 Cor. 7:25-40). Single Christians are not second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God; they are uniquely positioned to advance the Kingdom and care for the spiritual family to an even deeper extent than married Christians. Therefore, the church is a family made up of many nuclear families and *especially* single people.

³⁴⁴ Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, 103.

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