

Article #1

Learning to Hate our Sin without Hating Ourselves

July 4, 2018 by Denny Burk and Rosaria Butterfield

A response to a *Public Discourse* essay written by a catholic man, Ron Belgau, who calls them “unreasonable critics of the Revoice conference and Spiritual Friendship project.

Purpose of Article

- ❖ To trace the current debate about gay Christianity to a centuries-old dispute between Protestants and Catholics about the doctrines of man and of sin
 - Roman Catholics do not regard involuntary desire for sin (**concupiscence**) to be sinful.
 - Reformed Protestants do.
- ❖ To show how different theological commitments will necessarily produce different theological applications (Revoice & Spiritual Friendship movement)

Outline:

1. Protestant vs. Catholic distinctions
2. Spiritual Friendship vs. Scripture
3. Repentance vs. Sublimation

Protestant vs. Catholic

Augustine's doctrine of concupiscence (meaning *desire*):

- The key pre-behavioral component of our sin
- Fallen inclinations experienced before *choosing* to sin
- Romans 7 -- Paul giving the name of sin to that from which all sins spring -- the *lust/concupiscence* of the flesh
- The *desire* to sin *is* itself *sin*
- An unchosen longing for anything outside of God's will is sinful

Augustine on Romans 7:15-25 - "*This lust/concupiscence is not some kind of alien nature...it's our debility, it's our vice. It won't be detached from us and exist somewhere else, but it will be cured and not exist anything at all [in the resurrection].*"

(cont.)

Protestant vs. Catholic (cont.)

- The **Catholic Catechism** calls homosexual activity sinful, but labels homosexual desire as “objectively disordered” because it is not ordered to the good of marriage, but it is *not in itself sinful*

Reformed Christians believe:

- Our original, actual, and indwelling sin *all* condemn us
 - Same-sex **desire** is Adam’s thumbprint on one’s life
 - Baptism doesn’t remove original sin
 - Redemption in Christ doesn’t make all **effects of our sinful nature disappear**

“Redemption gives us ransom and Christ’s power and compassion to fight against our sinful nature, but until the final consummation we groan, struggling against indwelling sin and longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.”

Protestant vs. Catholic (cont.)

The gay Christian movement:

- Limits the effects of the Fall
 - Allows man to somehow be his own Savior
 - (Joel Beeke) *“If his intellect is not darkened, then he can find salvation by the use of reason and improve himself through education. If his will is not enslaved, then man has the final say in his salvation, quite apart from God’s will. If man’s body does not bear the marks of the fall, then defects, deformities, disease, aging, and death are natural and normal for our race, not evils to be opposed and overcome or enemies Christ died to defeat. Let us ask God to show us ever more profoundly the tragic results of our fall, that we might understand ever more profoundly the amazing wonders of the gospel.”*

Spiritual Friendship vs. Scripture

This debate is rooted in disputes about the doctrines of man and sin (Prot/Cath)

Ron Belgau / Catholic:

“The desire to have sex with others of one’s own sex is a temptation to sin which is a result of the fall, but it is not, in itself, sinful. I believe that gay sex is sinful, and that the desire for gay sex, though not itself sinful, is a temptation..”

Heidelberg Catechism #10 says:

- *“He is terribly displeased with our inborn as well as actual sins and will punish them in just judgment in time and eternity.”*

Rosaria writes in response, *“It’s not the chosenness of the desire or its voluntary/involuntary nature but **God’s law** that determines **the standard** of rightness or wrongness of our desires.”*

(cont.)

Spiritual Friendship vs. Scripture (cont.)

Scripture:

- All of our desires are morally implicated
- The moral character of a desire is determined by its object
- This is true for all desire not just sexual ones

Exodus 20:17 -- *“You must not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

- In Hebrew and Greek, the underlying terms mean desire
- The other commandments forbid certain *actions*, but this 10th one shows that God forbids even *desiring* those prohibited actions (without specifying the voluntary or not nature of the desire)

Matthew 5:27-28 -- *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.”*

- Jesus highlights the connection between the 7th and 10th commandments
- The desire for sin is sinful.

Repentance vs. Sublimation

What are the implications of this biblical understanding for Christians experiencing same-sex desires?

- Christians can recognize these desires as Adam's thumbprint *shaping* their feelings
- They ought to drive a fresh nail daily (through repentance and mortification) into this aspect of original sin or else sinful desire will lead to sinful deed
 - James 1:14-15 *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by **his own desire**. Then **desire** when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”*
- “True Christian repentance never leaves you in a state of shame; rather it opens you up to the love of Christ.”

(cont.)

Repentance vs. Sublimation (cont.)

- Recognize that sin produces suffering -- first for our Savior (on the cross), then to ourselves
 - This order matters
 - Pronouns matter
 - *Our* sin produces suffering

Wesley Hill (Spiritual Friendship) describes his homosexual erotic orientation to the world **not** as something to be repented of and mortified but as...the foundation of forming spiritual friendships (if he weren't gay...he says he couldn't form these)

-This is not mortification of sin and repentance unto life in any way

(cont.)

Repentance vs. Sublimation (cont.)

Distinguish between the *eros* + *philos* of same-sex desire:

- Those in the gay Christian movement say repent of *eros* (romantic love) but embrace *philos* (brotherly love)
- But the *philos* looks a lot like *eros*
- So they end up embracing and claiming, that Christ is embracing what he (Christ) indeed died for
 - *“Christ did not make an ally of the sin for which he was crucified. And we must steer clear of any ideology that makes us the unwitting ally of unmortified sin.”*

(cont.)

Repentance vs. Sublimation (cont.)

The founder of **Revoice** argues that same-sex attraction calls for **sublimation** - a Freudian notion that requires *not repentance*, but *redirection* of same-sex erotic love.

Rosaria/Burk respond:

“Sublimation directs strugglers away from the biblical invitations of mortification and repentance - Christian graces that lead to God’s honor and our blessing and growth in union with Christ.”

*“We want the gospel to flourish in the lives of strugglers, for all Christians to learn how to hate our sin without hating ourselves. We rest in Christ’s compassion for the repentant struggler. That compassion is our greatest encouragement to **fight the sin that remains within us all.**”*