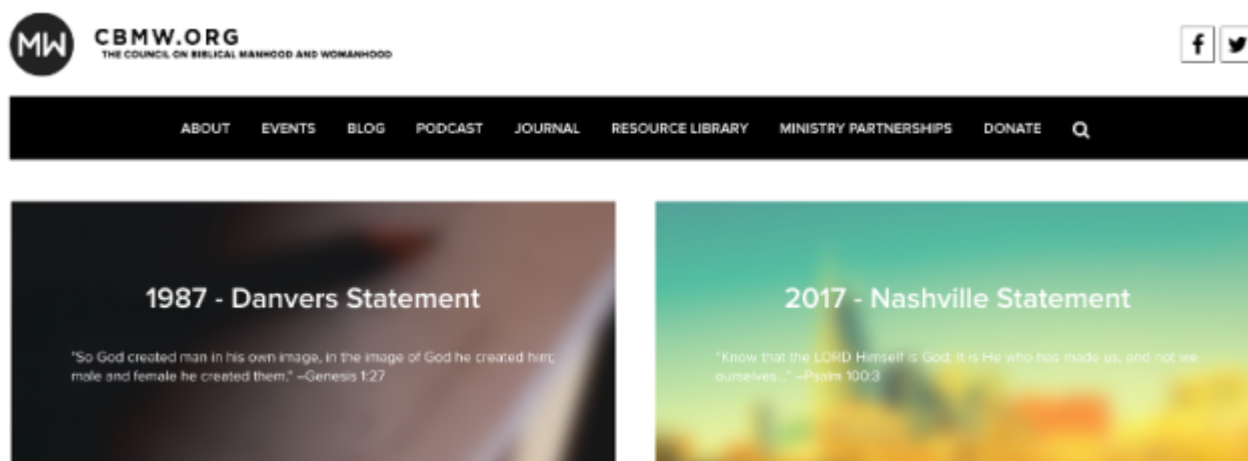


Not heterosexuality but holiness

Dalrock | 20 March, 2019 | by Dalrock

As I've outlined my series on Loud and Proud Complementarians there is a striking connection between the complementarian movement and activism for conservative churches to accept homosexuality. In a nutshell, complementarians are now doing regarding homosexuality what they have done regarding feminism for decades.

Consider Dr. Denny Burk, the current president of the CBMW. Burk announced his book [Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change](#) in October of 2015. He became president of the CBMW [eight months later](#). Burk's focus on homosexuality may make him seem like an odd candidate to lead what most would assume is an organization focused only on feminism, but the CBMW has positioned itself in recent years as the center of conservative Christian response to homosexual activism. The 2017 Nashville Statement regarding gay marriage is now featured alongside the CBMW founding Danvers Statement on the organization's [website](#):



True to complementarian form Burk's focus has been to give the appearance of orthodoxy on homosexuality while cutting off anyone whom he deems is *too* traditional on the subject. In *Transforming Homosexuality*, Burk and his coauthor Dr. Heath Lambert affirm that both homosexual acts and homosexual desire are sinful, but at the same time argue against reparative therapy (emphasis mine):

The Bible teaches that God's plan for *all* Christians is to *transform* them into the image of Christ. It's a process that takes a lifetime to complete. But this transformation is nevertheless what the Holy Spirit is doing inside of all Christians—not just some of them—including those who experience same-sex attraction. **The change that God wishes to accomplish in same-sex attracted individuals is not necessarily heterosexuality but holiness.** For this reason, our book opposes reparative therapy as a Christian approach to change.

Holiness, not heterosexuality is a catchphrase among conservative Christian gay activists, and Burk literally wrote the book on the subject. To see how core this idea is to conservative Christian homosexual activism, [try searching on the term](#). Not surprisingly, the top editorial reviews for the book on [Amazon](#) are from Pastor Sam Allberry and Rosaria Butterfield:

“Denny Burk and Heath Lambert have written a clear, compassionate, and thought-provoking book on how the gospel brings transformation to those struggling with homosexuality. Our hope is not the heterosexuality-or-bust shtick of reparative therapy, but the wondrous prospect of growing in holiness and Christlikeness that comes through repentance and faith. This is

essential reading for every pastor and for any seeking to bless and minister to those with same-sex attraction in our churches.” —**Sam Allberry**, Associate Minister of St Mary’s Church, Maidenhead UK; author of *Is God Anti-Gay?* and *James For You*

“In *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray reminds us that ‘the line of demarcation between virtue and vice is not a chasm but a razor’s edge.’ In *Transforming Homosexuality*, Denny Burk and Heath Lambert shine scholarly and pastoral light on that razor’s edge, helping Christians to discern the difference between sexual temptation and sexual lust as it bears on same-sex attraction. This is a bold and provocative book. It will also likely be a controversial book. But it is predominantly a loving book that seeks to help people with unwanted homosexual desires be transformed by the full knowledge that God’s grace for us in Christ is sufficient for all our various struggles and sins.” —**Rosaria Butterfield**

Another example of Burk skirting the line is his review of Gregory Coles’ Book, *Single Gay Christian*. In the run up to Revoice, Burk [explained](#) why he hadn’t written about the (then planned) event:

1. I’ve already written extensively about the celibate gay identity movement. For starters, you can check-out the book that Heath Lambert and I co-authored [Transforming Homosexuality](#) in which we argue that same-sex attraction and sexual orientation are morally implicated in scripture. I make a similar case in an article I wrote for *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* titled “[Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?](#)” More recently, I wrote a review of [Gregory Coles’s book](#) that takes a critical look at his version of celibate gay identity.

Burk says he was critical in his [review](#) of Revoice worship leader Gregory Coles’ book *Single, Gay, Christian*, which is technically true. For reference, here is how Coles describes the book on his [website](#):

Is it possible to be gay and still follow Jesus? And if so, what happens next? If you believe the Bible calls you to celibacy, is it possible to embrace that calling without feeling like a divine typo?

Single, Gay, Christian is the story of one person’s journey through these questions. It’s about acting like your own alter ego, about getting epiphanies from mosquitoes, about singing happy birthday to yourself while literally hiding in a closet. It’s about being gay, loving Jesus, and choosing singleness in a world that fears all three.

After opening with two full paragraphs praising the book, Burk does reject Coles’ embrace of a gay identity:

So there is much that I resonate with in Coles’ story. In the end, however, I share the same concerns about the book that Rachel Gilson expressed in her review at TGC.

First, this book falls squarely within the celibate gay identity genre, in which the author rejects gay sexual behavior and gay marriage but embraces a gay identity.

Burk then quotes a truly blasphemous section from the book, and instead of soundly condemning it responds tepidly that he doesn’t know how to reconcile this perspective with scripture or natural law:

Is it too dangerous, too unorthodox, to believe that I am uniquely designed to reflect the glory of God? That my orientation, before the fall, was meant to be a gift in appreciating the beauty of my own sex as I celebrated the friendship of the opposite sex? That perhaps within God’s flawless original design there might have been eunuchs, people called to lives of holy singleness?

We in the church recoil from the word gay, from the very notion of same-sex orientation, because we know what it looks like only outside of Eden, where everything has gone wrong. But what if there's goodness hiding within the ruins? What if the calling to gay Christian celibacy is more than just a failure of straightness? What if God dreamed it for me, wove it into the fabric of my being as he knit be together and sang life into me? (pp. 46-47)

Coles suggests that same-sex orientation may be a part of God's original creation design and that homosexual orientation within Eden is an ideal that exceeds that which people experience outside of Eden.

I do not know how to reconcile this perspective with scripture or with the natural law. Same-sex orientation is not simply a "creational variance" (as Nicholas Wolterstorff has described it). Scripture teaches explicitly that homosexual desire and behavior are "against nature"—meaning against God's original creation design (Rom. 1:26-27). Nor can I reconcile this perspective with what Coles says elsewhere about same-sex orientation being a "thorn in the flesh," which suggests that same-sex orientation is not a part of God's original design. Which is it? A thorn in the flesh or something God "dreamed" for people as a part of his original design?

After pointing out other instances of terrible theology in the book, Burk concludes his review with:

I really enjoyed getting to know Coles's story. I can't help but admire his continuing commitment to celibacy and traditional marriage. I want to cheer him on in that and say "amen." Still, I am concerned that the celibate gay identity perspective he represents is not biblically faithful or pastorally helpful. And the issue is important enough to flag in a review like this one. Evangelicals need to think their way through to biblical clarity on sexuality and gender issues, but the celibate gay identity view is muddying the waters.

Burk does just enough to separate himself from Coles' radical gay activism while praising Coles for living as a faithful Christian. It is also worth noting that while Burk disagrees with Coles embracing his "Christian" gay identity, Burk went a long way to create room for *just that* by declaring that heterosexuality isn't God's plan for Christians.

But while Burk has weak kneed criticism for Coles, he is effusive in his praise of [Christian gay activist Pastor Sam Allberry](#) (emphasis mine):

Sam is a same-sex attracted Christian, and a faithful brother. I cannot overstate how grateful I am for his life and testimony. **The Lord has raised him up for our time.** If you haven't yet read Sam's book, you need to. It's titled *Is God Anti-Gay? (Questions Christians Ask)*.

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