

# Same-Sex Attraction

## Grace Church Position Papers

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At Grace Church, we want to be a safe place for people struggling with all kinds of sin. This means creating a safe space to be authentic and vulnerable and establishing an environment of understanding. We strive to be a church that is defined and directed by scripture, meaning we believe the Bible is God's Word and is authoritative for us as believers.

For many years, the church has avoided the topic of same-sex attraction, which has resulted in shame and isolation for those who struggle with it and misunderstanding and fear among those who don't. We hope to begin remedying this situation.

### Defining Terms

Same-sex attraction (SSA) refers to intense emotional, physical, or romantic desires toward a person of the same gender. There is some confusion in the church when it comes to same-sex attraction and homosexuality. Some may be under the impression that when we refer to a person who experiences same-sex attraction, we are referring exclusively to a person who has embraced these same-sex attractions as their identity and has built a lifestyle around that identity.

There are people who fit this description. In our culture, they are often referred to as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans-gender individuals, or any number of other gender-related identities. There are others, though, who struggle with knowing what to make of these urges—who feel strongly, and at the same time, a heart desire to follow God and an intense emotional or romantic desire toward a person of the same gender.

Another term worth understanding is emotional dependency. It can be understood as a consuming, unhealthy attachment to one person, to the point that one's very well-being seems to depend on that connection. Emotional dependency is not unique to same-sex relationships, but it is commonly found in connection with them.

### SSA Is Not a Sin

While the idea of SSA may be closely associated with sex and sexual acts, it often is more tied to a powerful desire—albeit inappropriately directed—for emotional intimacy. We must be clear that these feelings in and of themselves do not constitute sin, any more than the temptation to steal something, to gossip, or to look at pornography. However, all sexual sin starts in the heart. Indulging these feelings—whether physically or in the mind—does constitute a form of sexual sin and can lead to addictive, unhealthy thought patterns and behaviors.

Our temptations and failures, though, do not define us as believers because of what Jesus has done for us. He has given us a new and greater identity than our appetites, desires, and sexual urges.

### What Does the Bible Say about SSA, Homosexuality, and Sinful Desires in General?

Many Christians—and even those outside the church—are familiar with passages in the Bible that explicitly speak about homosexuality. While homosexual acts can be a physical manifestation of SSA, inappropriate same-sex relationships can and do take a number of other forms, as does false thinking about one's own sexual identity. It is through the lens of the truth of God's Word that we must examine and evaluate these relationships and identities, and that is a much more challenging undertaking than simply finding what the Bible says about homosexuality.

The Bible is a book about God—who he is, how he thinks, what he has done, and what he will do. The sacrifice and exaltation of Jesus Christ is the primary story of the Bible. This story of redemption experienced by grace, through faith, is the basis upon which the Scriptures and our life experiences are understood.

In the many pages of the Bible, we find that it brings clarity to who we are, who we should be, and who we could be. Though distorted and twisted through sin, all people bear God's image (Genesis 1:27, 9:6) and are invited to experience his redemption by grace through faith in the work of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). This redemption affects all aspects of our lives, including our brokenness and identity.

The Bible is clear that God created men and women each with an important purpose and to reflect different aspects of his character. Because we live in a fallen world, there are legitimate cases of ambiguous gender—in rare cases, babies even are born with both types of genitalia. Beyond that, through a myriad of reasons (the sins of others, personal trauma, the pull of sinful nature, hormone imbalances, etc.), some may find themselves romantically or sexually attracted to someone of the same gender or feel that they personally identify more with the gender that does not match their anatomy.

Regardless of all of this, each of us, if we would follow Christ, must strive to live in the light of his Word and deny ourselves the powerful urges that would lead us down a different path. This is true no matter what a person's most challenging temptation is.



Jesus declared in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

In saying this, Jesus assumes that the inherent desires within the human heart can be, and often are, contrary to what he wants for his followers. SSA is not a sin in and of itself—rather, more of an inclination or desire. But according to the scriptures, that desire, like many others, must be restrained and turned away from rather than harbored and allowed to grow. As James 1:12-15 reminds us, any of us may be tempted and dragged away by our own desires, which easily give birth to sinful actions.

As is the case with many sexual sins, SSA, once indulged, frequently is a sin of the mind, marked by obsessive thinking and the playing out of romantic or sexual fantasies. These thought patterns and fantasies can become addictive to the struggler, as a means of escape or of numbing the pain he or she encounters in life. It is critical, therefore, to do as Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians 10, to “capture [our] rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.” He gives us guidance in Philippians about what our thoughts should be fixed on: things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Like every other follower of Christ, the person who struggles with SSA must be a vigilant keeper of their thoughts.

Romans 6 also is critical to consider in thinking about SSA. In this chapter, Paul pleads with us to remember that because we died with Christ, we have been set free from the power of sin, and sin has lost its power in our lives. Even as temptations and desires come, we must consider ourselves to be dead to sin and instead, alive to God through Christ. It is rarely made plainer than this: “Do not let sin control the way you live,” Paul says. “Do not give in to sinful desires.”

When we begin to follow Christ, we soon learn that the battle between our sin nature and our new, Spirit-led life in Christ continues to be waged daily. Paul eloquently shared the frustrating nature of this struggle in Romans 7:14-24. While we will never be free from sin while we live on Earth, if we continue to follow God, we will be radically transformed by God’s Holy Spirit into a new person that we never thought possible.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” God’s plan for every follower of Christ is sanctification, a

process by which we are made like Christ. It can be easy to become discouraged by current struggles, and the incremental changes can be hard to see, but over a period of time, through the nourishment of biblical community, prayerful dependence, confession and repentance, a radical transformation occurs and we become men and women of God that we never imagined we could be.

This process of sanctification and transformation enables us to shed struggles that have plagued us in the past as we grow in our understanding of God’s love for and approval of us in Christ. Take encouragement from these verses in the New Testament:

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” (Romans 12:2)

“Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God, truly righteous and holy.” (Ephesians 4:21-24)

The fact that we are being sanctified does not mean we will never be tempted by things that have previously been areas of weakness, but it does mean we should live each day with hope, knowing that God is in the process of doing a great work of transformation in our hearts and minds.

### **Ranking Struggles and Sins—We Must Avoid it**

Christianity teaches that all people are born with a bent toward sin. These propensities are the manifestation of a sin nature that’s been passed down from generation to generation, starting with the first man, Adam. These propensities are also created and purported forth by our own choices. Therefore, some people have an inclination toward SSA while others have proclivities which more easily lend themselves to struggles with alcohol, substance abuse, anger, greed, or many types of other sins.

We all have influences, tendencies, or traumatic past events that may push us to gravitate in any number of sinful directions. To our own detriment, we create niches of self-righteousness when we rank one sin or type of temptation as better or worse than another.



## **Identity and Authority**

The primary story of the Bible is that we, as marred image bearers who were once without hope, can now find hope through faith and gain a new identity in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The fact that God created mankind implies that he has authority over us. If that were not enough in and of itself, the Bible tells us that Jesus laid aside his divine rights, became human, and died like a criminal in order to redeem us from the slavery and consequences of our sin. This great and loving act firmly establishes the right God has to exercise authority over us as believers.

If God has authority over my person (my spirit, soul, and body), then it necessarily follows that he has authority over my emotions and sexuality. This means that if I am a believer, my sexual expression should follow the design set forth in the scriptures.

Our culture would tell us that a person who experiences attraction or romantic feelings towards another person of the same gender should embrace those urges—that this is their “true identity” and to live any other way is to deny that “true identity.” But we believe significant problems arise when the desires or struggles we have begin to form the very foundation of our identity as a person.

It can seem unfair to ask someone who struggles with SSA to lay aside their strongest heartfelt desires when they had no choice in the fact that they feel that way. It must be remembered, though, that for the sake of our rescue and redemption, Christ laid aside the perfect environment of heaven—a place where he was perfectly loved, understood, and worshipped—to enter into our broken world and die a humiliating death. If we suffer by denying ourselves of our intense desires and inclinations, we can take comfort in the fact that it is drawing us into a closer union with our Lord and Savior (Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 4:12-13). We must strive to maintain an eternal perspective, remembering that when we reach heaven and meet Jesus—the satisfaction of our ultimate hope—no craving, longing, or desire will go unfulfilled.

### **How Should the Church Respond to SSA Strugglers?**

While in the past, the church and those who struggle with SSA have seemed at times to stand on opposite sides of a battlefield, we must change this narrative. The church must approach those with varied experiences struggling with SSA and homosexuality first and foremost with a spirit of love and openness and a readiness to listen. While the

struggle may seem foreign to many in the church, it is critical to Christ’s mission that we provide a safe space for those who do struggle to share their story and their experiences authentically. It should go without saying that mockery, slander, and putting down of others is not something that should exist among God’s people.

There are some—the number would probably surprise many—who struggle with SSA and have been attending Grace Church for years. Because of the lack of a safe space to speak about their struggle, they have walked alone in large part, feeling isolation and shame. Sadly, we have lost a number of these to a culture that more readily offers space for authenticity in this area.

Then there are those who struggle with SSA and homosexuality who visit Grace Church out of a curiosity about God and what he has to offer. All of these people need to know they are loved, they need to be authentically known, and they need to be invited to pursue Christ in community for their healing and spiritual growth.

We believe that discipleship happens in the context of relationship, and the church must always be a safe place for broken people. We must remember that what God has to offer the SSA struggler in Christ is richer and more fulfilling and offers a truer freedom than any relationship with another person ever can.

As Christians, we are called to be truthful in our lives and speak the truth to others. We are also called to be agents of grace—dispensing the grace we have received from God to other people. John 1:18 states that grace and truth came together through Jesus Christ. The church should always respond to any person by holding out both grace and truth together.

### **The Idolatry of Marriage**

There is a weakness in our Christian culture that makes it particularly difficult for a struggler to deny the powerful urges of same-sex attraction—our idolatry of marriage. While marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred institution established by God, it is far too easy to fall into the trap of believing that intimacy, joy, and closeness are found more readily in the marriage relationship than they are in fellowship with Christ Jesus.

Marriage is supposed to be a representative picture of the intimacy we can experience with God. When we as a culture idolize marriage, an SSA struggler feels they are



at a particularly unfair disadvantage. The struggler begins to believe that in order to follow God, they must deny themselves the highest level of intimacy a person can experience because they desire that intimacy with a person of the same gender. But the truth is that there is a higher level of intimacy than any human relationship can offer, and it is only found in fellowship with God. This truth applies to every person, married or single, and whether or not they struggle with SSA.

This is an area we must be prayerful about and where we should examine our individual thoughts and beliefs. If we would truly create a safe space for those who struggle with SSA, we should not pity them as if they are missing out on something, but rather remind them or direct them toward the fount of living water where we all find true intimacy and fulfillment.

As a footnote, it should be mentioned here that contending with SSA and being in a fulfilling heterosexual marriage are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for a person who struggles with SSA to enjoy the intimacy offered by the traditional marriage relationship, but this must not be the ultimate end goal of those struggling to overcome SSA.

### **The Responsibility of SSA Strugglers within the Community of Believers**

With any sin or temptation that returns in the life of a believer time and again, it can be easy to fall into the fallacy of believing the only other believers who can truly know you and understand your struggle are those who have struggled with the same sin. This is especially true for a person who struggles with SSA. Many times, it takes years of self-examination and reflection for such a person to understand their struggle themselves, so they may feel those who don't struggle with SSA could never understand.

This is a lie, though, that we must reject. The book of Acts tells us of the diversity in the early Christian church. Not only were these people from vastly different cultures, but they came from a background of indulging in a variety of different sins, some of which are listed for us in 1 Corinthians 6. Paul tells these diverse believers in 1 Corinthians 12 that God has crafted them together into one body, the body of Christ: "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit."

It may be true that fellow believers who have not struggled with SSA will not fully understand the struggle, but they understand the alluring nature of sin in their own lives and the desperate need for the redemption that Christ offers us. James tells us in James 5:16, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." Healing is most often found when we are in authentic, biblical community with others who do not share our exact struggles.

### **Conclusion**

The Scriptures affirm that people are more than their sexual urges, preferences, or predispositions. We believe that human dignity is diminished whenever we define ourselves by desires or behaviors in general. Every person is created in God's image and deserves to be treated with dignity, and our hope is that Grace Church will be a safe place for all people to find hope and healing.

The goal of being safe and hospitable is not so that people can live comfortable lives and hold onto their sin, but so that we all can find hope, encouragement, and healing as we learn to turn from our sin and trust Christ for life and freedom.

