



**VOLUME 1
ISSUE 3**

THE PRESBYTERIAN
PLUMB LINE

The Presbyterian Plumb Line is an online journal published four times a year and designed to biblically inform the Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church about issues that impact our ability to govern under Christ's authority and faithfully shepherd the flock.

We strive to provide content that is accessible, firmly rooted in God's Word, spiritually guided, and committed to the highest standards of truth. Through viewpoint and observation, news items, sermons, book reviews, and other material, we seek to lead our denomination toward a more biblical expression of our Presbyterian conviction: that biblically informed elders, seeking the mind of Christ in the courts of the Church, is the most faithful way to align with God's plumb line. The editors welcome all inquiries to info@presbyterianplumbline.org.

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Note from the Plumb Line Editors

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus issues a stern warning: “*Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves.*” The problem with false teachers is they don’t look like wolves: they appear harmless and friendly. Outwardly, they look like sheep and mimic the vocabulary of sheep. Inwardly, they are ferocious wolves waiting to devour the flock.

In this issue of The Plumb Line we focus on Greg Johnson, a former PCA pastor who is now seeking to join the EPC. Johnson identifies as homosexual and claims to be living a celibate life. Inwardly, however, he admits to same-sex attraction and the desire to sleep with men. We believe Greg Johnson represents a grave threat to the EPC. In this issue, Nate Atwood provides a compelling biblical argument from the story of creation, describing God’s design for human sexuality. In addition, Don Fortson examines the PCA investigation of Greg Johnson and how it caused five years of discord and turmoil in that denomination. Also, David Weber looks at the trajectory of Side B Christianity and how it is a slippery slope that leads to full acceptance of homosexuality. And, we have a book review by Carl Moore of *Dangerous Affirmation: The Threat of “Gay Christianity.”* Also, check out Gordon Miller’s “Meanderings” section which includes links to significant articles on the topic of Side B.

We hope these articles inform and edify the church. We are grateful for the 8,300+ readers who have checked out the Presbyterian Plumb Line so far, and we encourage you to please share the Plumb Line with others you know who might be interested. As always, we welcome and value your comments.

Genesis, Gender, and Greg Johnson

By Nate Atwood

TE, Presbytery of the Central Carolinas

Perhaps you're old enough to remember Francis Schaeffer. Without doubt he was a tour de force of biblical insight, and I still hear him quoted with appreciation. Recently, I watched the sermon Schaeffer delivered at the first EPC General Assembly in 1981 and was struck by his statement, "The primary message of the Old Testament prophets was the doctrine of Creation."

Isn't the doctrine of Creation at the heart of our conversation about Greg Johnson and ordaining "same-sex attracted" (SSA) pastors in the EPC? After all, what's more basic to Creation than sexuality and sexual attraction? Is it time to remember that Scripture tells us that "in the beginning" we were created "male and female" and designed for the covenant relationship of marriage between one man and one woman? (Genesis 1:16, 27).

Those who support ordaining SSA pastors point to the importance of reaching the gay community for Christ and the foundational doctrine of grace. I get it. All of us struggle with temptation, so how is it fair to exclude those who are homosexually tempted yet celibate?

Still, shouldn't a fully biblical debate include not only evangelism and redemption, but the Creation standard of "boy meets girl"?

Returning to Francis Schaeffer, I admit that I wasn't originally convinced that Creation was the central message of the prophets. As I listened to his sermon, I immediately thought, "What about the doctrines of God's covenant faithfulness or His holiness? Aren't those still more central to the prophets than Creation?" My curiosity piqued, I spent a few days perusing the prophets to test Dr. Schaeffer's claim. Gradually, I began to see his point. While I'm not prepared to say that Creation is the primary theme of the prophets, it is at least essential to their preaching. For example, when God appealed to wayward Israel through the prophet Isaiah, He reminded them:

"Lift up your eyes on high and see, who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one of them is missing." (Isaiah 40:25-26).

Similarly, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Joel, Jeremiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all meaningfully include Creation themes. Turning to the wisdom books, Job finds its climax in the final few chapters which poetically retell the story of Creation. The psalms do the same:

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“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said ... ‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.’” (Job 38:1,4).

“The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of His hands.” (Psalm 19:1).

Why this constant appeal to God as Creator, and how might that inform our current debate about sexuality and ordination in the EPC? The sad reality of ancient Israel included descent into the sexual sins of adultery, ritual prostitution, and homosexuality as legitimated by the various Canaanite religions. At the foundation of this pagan belief system was a view of the natural world created by amoral gods for whom sexual perversion was normative. The prophetic call back to Creation was God’s reminder that God had established and ordained an order for humankind in Genesis 1 and 2.

Switching to the New Testament, we find more of the same. John 1 echoes Genesis 1, reminding us that God is the Creator and revealing that Jesus is God’s logos: “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). We find references to Jesus as Creator as well as Logos in 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; and Colossians 1:16-17. Hebrews 1 advances the thought still more, explicitly connecting the doctrines of redemption and creation in Jesus Christ:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” (Hebrews 1:1-4).

What conclusion is there other than the Doctrine of Redemption and the Doctrine of Creation exist side-by-side in the Person of Jesus? Said differently, the New Testament makes it clear that Redemption and Creation are a package deal bound together in Christ Himself.

The Cultural Debate

Recently, speaking at a pro-life rally in Charlotte I pointed out that the abortion battle was not only a moral battle but also that it centered on the doctrine of creation. Did God create the child inside the womb or not? If so, the implications are obvious and far-reaching. Similarly, so many of our most intense cultural battles center on Creation. Gay marriage and transgenderism are really Creation debates. Did God create us, and if so, did He make us male and female? In fact,

the whole of the LGBTQ+ constellation of ideas is nothing other than an alternative and godless view of the natural world.

Into this broken time we should preach the grace of Christ and the power of the Cross. However, if we are to preach the whole counsel of God how can we neglect Creation, particularly at this moment in time? In fact, some theologians have noted that Creation has become the “theological stepchild” of the Church at the very moment we most need to champion this most basic truth.¹

When Israel descended into sexual confusion and compromise the prophets fearlessly and faithfully returned to the first words of the Bible, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). When the Pharisees attempted to justify divorce and the dissolution of marriage, Jesus countered by saying, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,” and said, “Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.” (Matthew 19:4,5). When the early church first penned her most basic statement of faith, let’s remember how it began: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

Maybe it’s time to follow the lead of our spiritual forefathers and respond to sexual confusion, perversion, and brokenness in our time by running to the doctrine of Creation rather than running away from it.

Toward a Complete Doctrine of Ordination

Although the doctrine of Creation is central to the whole of the Bible, it has been conspicuously absent in the EPC conversation about Greg Johnson, ordination, and SSA. In fact, I believe that a fully biblical view of ordination immerses us in the Doctrine of Creation rather than ignoring it. Let me explain.

I made the case in the Open Letter to the EPC that Old Testament ordination required priests to be married. In other words, heterosexuality was simply assumed. While scholars generally agree that the Old Testament standard of marriage was defined as it was to prevent divorce among those ordained, let’s not forget that God had established and ordained an order for mankind in Creation itself (Genesis 1-2).

The same pattern exists in the New Testament. When establishing the requirement for ordination of elders, Paul states that elders must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2). The general consensus among scholars is that Paul uses the language of “one wife” to establish a “no divorce” standard among elders, thus mirroring the “no divorce” standard among priests. Still, let’s not miss the creation context. “No divorce” means marriage, marriage means husband and wife, husband and wife means Creation, Creation means heterosexuality.

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Taken as a whole, it's clear that you can (and should) draw a straight line from the New Testament ordination standards back through Old Testament ordination standards and ultimately to Creation itself. The common and connecting thread is heterosexuality. Rather than ignoring Creation and the heterosexuality it views as both binding and normative, ordination is built upon it.

Ordained Ministry is Iconic

In my 42 years of ministry, I have figured something out — ordained life is iconic. Whether we are comfortable with it or not, the demanding language of obedient children, well managed households, and lifelong marriage tells us we are examples and models to others within the church. I learned this early as Helen and I looked to our pastor, Percy Burns, and his wife, Sara Jo. They lived out man and woman, husband and wife, parent and child with grace, consistency, and clarity. Almost inexorably, though wordlessly, they imprinted the most basic life messages of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5) and man and woman (Genesis 1-2) upon an entire generation of younger couples at St. Giles. Far beyond what Percy or Sara Jo did, it was who they were that mattered most.

Yes, the family standards in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are high. They are meant to be. God's people have a right to expect a faithful and unconfused pattern in the lives of those who lead them. Is it wise, especially in these sexually disoriented times, to place before our people anything less than whole marriages in which the marriage bed is kept in purity, both in act and attraction, or single individuals whose most basic identity and attractions are consistent with the whole counsel of Scripture — including Creation? If we turn our back on this, what other clear Scriptural requirements will we conveniently minimize in the face of an ungodly culture?

I have no animus against someone who is gay or same-sex attracted. Over my decades in the pastorate, I have keenly felt the responsibility to pray with and encourage any who are seeking Christ and yet caught in the broken world of LGBTQ+. How can any pastor do less? Ordination, however, is not church membership. The clear biblical standard to serve as an elder, whether ruling or teaching, is unflinchingly heterosexual and thus grounded in Creation as well as grace and the call to evangelize our lost culture.

As Francis Schaeffer pointed out to the EPC in our first General Assembly, we forget the Creation mandate of the prophets to our own peril — especially in times such as ours. From sexual dysphoria, God calls us back again to His design and blueprint in Creation, to which the Bible offers no alternatives.

¹ See Dr. Rolf Rendtorff and Dr. Walter Brueggeman as quoted in "Creation in the Old Testament Prophetic Literature." Perspective Digest, Volume 16, Issue 3. July 1, 2011. Available at www.perspectivedigest.org/archive/16-3/creation-in-the-old-testament-prophetic-literature

The PCA and Greg Johnson: The Real Story

By Don Fortson
TE, Presbytery of the Central Carolinas

There is a narrative circulating in the EPC that Greg Johnson's positions on homosexuality and same-sex attraction are orthodox since the PCA judicial cases that deliberated on allegations against Johnson exonerated him. This is incorrect. There were two cases: the first addressed Johnson's views; the second dealt with theological concerns raised by the 2018 Revoice conference hosted by Johnson's congregation.

This article will focus on the first case.

While discipline did not proceed against Johnson in the first case because PCA courts did not agree there was a strong presumption of guilt, at no point did the court endorse or support Johnson's positions. In reality, Johnson's views caused controversy and division over a period of many years before he finally withdrew from the PCA in 2022.

The case against Johnson was adjudicated by the PCA's Standing Judicial Committee (SJC) in 2021. A majority warned that Johnson's position "unsettled and alarmed the church" and that he "identifies himself as a same-sex attracted man Johnson provides enough evidence from his own statements to make it obvious that this characteristic is so core to his being and so central to his personal narrative that it disqualifies him from ordained service."

We will examine the PCA's 2021 SJC case (Case No. 2020-12, Complaint of TE Ryan Speck v. Missouri Presbytery, Decision on Complaint, Oct. 21, 2021)¹ by amply quoting from the PCA records. But even at the outset, if Johnson has "unsettled and alarmed" the PCA, why should we in the EPC — who are committed to maintaining the peace and unity of our church — even consider receiving him?

The Backstory

In 2024, TE Greg Johnson and his congregation, Memorial Presbyterian in St. Louis, applied for membership in the EPC's Mid-America Presbytery. Johnson is a same-sex attracted ordained minister who left the PCA in December 2022. He openly asserts a fixed homosexual orientation but practices celibacy. Memorial Presbyterian has hosted the controversial Revoice conferences; the first conference was held at Memorial Church in 2018. As a result of the original 2018 Revoice Conference, concerns from individuals, sessions, and presbyteries throughout the PCA poured into Missouri Presbytery. In response, Missouri Presbytery investigated allegations against TE Johnson. In 2020, the Presbytery declined to find strong presumption of guilt on each

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of four allegations against Johnson (allegations listed below). According to the PCA Book of Church Order 31-2 (p. 109)², if a strong presumption of guilt is determined, a prosecutor is appointed “to prepare the indictment to conduct the case,” and the formal judicial process proceeds.

A teaching elder in Missouri Presbytery filed a complaint against this decision:

“TE Johnson did not adequately answer some questions posed to him, and what he did answer provides sufficient evidence to raise a strong presumption of guilt that his views are not in conformity with the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards and, therefore, warrant institution of judicial process.”

A Presbytery judicial committee and Missouri Presbytery denied the complaint. The complaint was then appealed to the PCA’s SJC which held a hearing on the complaint in 2021. A complete record of this case before the SJC is available in the 2022 PCA Minutes, Part II (pp. 730-822)³.

Allegations Against Greg Johnson

There were four allegations against Johnson in the 2021 case before the PCA SJC:

1. TE Johnson denies that same-sex attraction is sinful and thereby fails to properly distinguish misery from the sin which give rise to it.
2. TE Johnson compromised and dishonors his identity in Christ by self-identifying as a same-sex attracted man.
3. TE Johnson denies God’s purpose and power to sanctify SSA believers by minimizing the pursuit of orientation change from homosexual to heterosexual.
4. TE Johnson cannot meet the biblical “above reproach” qualification for the eldership since (a) homosexual inclinations are sin proper and are more heinous for being “against nature,” and since (b) TE Johnson identifies as a homosexually inclined man. (Minutes, 737).

After an SJC investigation provided Johnson opportunity to answer questions in writing, the SJC issued the following decision: “Based on the Record, there was no reversible error in the decisions reached by Missouri Presbytery regarding the four allegations. It was not unreasonable for Presbytery to judge that TE Johnson’s ‘explanations’ on the four allegations were ‘satisfactory.’” (Minutes, 767). The SJC did not find evidence that “Presbytery committed clear error in their procedures” or that “Presbytery clearly erred in its exercise of judgment when it declined to commence formal judicial process.” (Minutes, 746).

The vote in the SJC decision that affirmed Missouri Presbytery’s finding that there was not a strong presumption of guilt was 16 in favor and 7 opposed. Was this a vindication of Johnson’s position and an endorsement of his views? Far from it. In fact, in addition to the 7 who voted in

the minority (who believed there was strong presumption of guilt on Johnson's part), 8 of the 16 who voted in the majority filed a "Concurring Opinion" to clarify their position:

"... the SJC's Reasoning in support of its Judgment should not be read as a defense or vindication of TE Johnson or any of his statements or views. This is because defending or vindicating TE Johnson is not the role of the appellate court." (Minutes, 786).

Ongoing Concerns about Johnson's Views

The Concurring Opinion declared: "... we wish for the sake of conscience and for the good of the broader church, to register concerns raised by certain statements of TE Johnson that appear in the record." Below are three examples offered by the 8 signers of the Concurring Opinion:

1. "TE Johnson has spoken of his same-sex attraction and identity in ways that have unsettled and alarmed the church. In a public address reflecting on his life before and after his conversion, Johnson states, 'it's not my sexual orientation that's changed; it's my life orientation, because Jesus rescued me, a sinner ... ' (ROC 555). In the same address, he refers to himself in the present as 'gay' – 'gay people excel in every field, driven by a never-ending need to accomplish enough, be successful enough ... ' 556). Similarly, in a 2019 article for Christianity Today, TE Johnson states, 'Jesus hasn't made me straight. But he covers over my shame. Jesus really loves gay people' (ROC 904)." (Minutes, 787).

"The Record therefore not only indicates that TE Johnson speaks of himself in ways that have troubled and disturbed the church but also evidences a tone-deafness on the part of TE Johnson about how his public self-descriptions are being understood and received within the Church." A footnote adds: "But the effect of using these terms [same-sex attraction and identity] in such a way is inevitably to shock and disturb Christian audiences." (Minutes, 788).

2. "TE Johnson has drawn an analogy between same-sex attraction and physical illness in such a way as to unsettle and alarm the church." (Minutes, 788).
3. "The way in which TE Johnson has spoken of change in the Christian life has needlessly troubled the broader Church. In response to a concern raised by Central Georgia Presbytery alleging TE Johnson's belief "that those who experience same-sex temptations are not normally delivered from these, and are not normally changed in nature by the LORD" (ROC 801; compare the letter of Grace and Peace PCA, Anna, TX, ROC 653-5), TE Johnson told his own Presbytery, "God can do anything. He can do miracles. But the normal pattern in this fallen world is that this is a lifelong struggle." (ROC 943). (Minutes, 789).

“But this emphasis upon the alleged rarity of orientation change has troubled the broader Church. Whether or not TE Johnson is correct in his assessment of orientation change is not our concern here. Our concern, rather, is that the vehemence of TE Johnson’s denials of orientation change has rendered the broader Church unsettled and uncertain with respect to TE Johnson’s commitment to progressive sanctification, particularly the mortification of indwelling sin.” (Minutes, 790).

It is noteworthy that half of the 16 affirmative votes in the 2021 SJC decision (5 TEs and 3 REs) expressed significant concerns about Johnson’s views and repeatedly asserted that Johnson had “troubled the broader church.”

SSA Disqualifies from Ordained Office

In addition to the Concurring Opinion with concerns about Johnson’s views, there was a Dissenting Opinion signed by 7 (5 REs and 2 TEs) who voted in the negative on the SJC decision. The Dissenting Opinion asserted: “That the substantive conclusions reached by Presbytery and confirmed by the SJC do not follow from the facts in the Record of the case.” Below are excerpts from the supporting rationale for the dissent:

“The ROC [record of the case] is clear that TE Johnson identifies himself as a ‘same-sex attracted man’ Johnson provides enough evidence from his own statements to make it obvious that this characteristic is so core to his being and so central to his personal narrative that it disqualifies him from ordained service.” (Minutes, 802)

“TE Johnson’s testimony establishes that he has seen himself as same-sex attracted since he was 11 years old He says that his public ministry as a same-sex attracted man is intended to help others who are suffering and ashamed about their own same-sex attraction, and in his 2019 General Assembly speech, he claimed that Article 7 of the Nashville Statement ‘hurt’ because it asserts that it is a sin to adopt a homosexual self-conception.” (Minutes, 802). The Nashville Statement⁴ was adopted by the PCA in 2019.

“TE Johnson’s self-identification per se, then, is not a disputable issue; the real question is whether this identification ‘compromises and dishonors’ his identity in Christ, and there is good reason to conclude that it does, because TE Johnson consistently palliates the sin of same-sex attraction such that he dishonors God. For example, he first appeals to the universality of sin to make the argument that same-sex attraction is just like any other sin, while the Constitution’s exposition of Scripture asserts that some sins are more heinous than others (with homosexuality ‘more heinous’ than even inappropriate heterosexual activity by virtue of it being against nature).” (Minutes, 803).

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“While it is true that all people are sinners, it is not true that all sins alike are equal. If they were, then every argument advanced by TE Johnson with respect to same-sex attraction would have to apply equally to every kind of sin. The sin of pedophilia would have to be considered no worse than anger; the sin of bestiality no worse than drunkenness.” (Minutes, 803).

“The ROC demonstrates that TE Johnson is capable of formulating an orthodox view of sanctification, but it also demonstrates that he minimizes the possibility of change for people suffering from sexual dysphoria He contends strongly — on the basis of his research and experience — that orientation change practically never happens, citing statistics that establish that only 3.5% to 4% of people will ever experience any change from same-sex attraction to natural attraction.” (Minutes, 803, 804).

“In his arguments TE Johnson ... has clearly convinced many that his understanding of how God interacts with same-sex attracted people is the right one: God’s ability to change people affected by this particular sin is only a remote possibility and should not be held out as a realistic hope for Christians; it would be extremely rare that they might change. There cannot be a more succinct denial of God’s power to sanctify.” (Minutes, 804).

“... he claims that all sin is alike and SSA is no different from any other sin in order to establish that it cannot be a disqualifying factor for ordination. He subsequently says that while all sin is alike, and all people are sinners, sins related to sexual dysphoria are utterly different in that God hardly ever acts to change people from them and therefore those sins need to be accepted as an ontological phenomenon — they are part of being. By that line of reasoning any other sexual sin must also be accepted as a condition of being, whatever the perversion.” (Minutes, 804).

“Johnson both claims the power of sanctification in his life and denies it, particularly when he speaks about his sexual appetites, which continue unabated: ‘I share about once a year from the pulpit that I’m a porn addict. I haven’t actually looked at pornography for 15 years, but when I did, I was all in and that pull is still as strong as it was. I’ve mortified this for 15 years and it still, you know, I see a computer terminal unmonitored and immediately my mind thinks, I want to look at porn. Fifteen years of strangling this thing, and it doesn’t die, it doesn’t go away.’ [ROC 453]” (Minutes, 804).

“By these beliefs and descriptions of his own experience, TE Johnson minimizes God’s purposes and power in sanctification, while at the same time demonstrating

the grip by which his sin holds him. In his testimony [ROC 610], his sermons [ROC 606], his public speeches [ROC 556] and his writings [ROC 812-830], TE Johnson has made his homosexuality central to his self-perception, his self-presentation, and to his ministry. He has become a public figure as a result, and it is clear from the record that he is regarded as an authority on the subject — one who expressly teaches and intends to teach his version of ‘truth’ as it relates to SSA.” (Minutes, 805).

“While the ROC and his public utterances demonstrate great facility with language and theological nuance and sometimes serve to obfuscate clear issues, TE Johnson’s fundamental argument for serving as an ordained minister of the gospel is that he is now — and has always been — chaste, making him immune to disciplinary action for sexual misconduct.” (Minutes, 806).

“By this standard no sexual predilection is disqualifying so long as it doesn’t materialize in an act. Therefore, the pedophile who suffers in the way TE Johnson does — that is, one who had no hope of change or no resistance to a single look at a child ... is eligible for ordination. The same would also clearly be true of someone who struggled with illicit heterosexual attractions under the same conditions, yet it is unimaginable that a man would be called as a minister of the gospel who said, “I struggle with lust for women to the point that I don’t expect change, and I’m also an addict who is one look away from complete immersion in pornography — but don’t worry, I only think about it. I’m not currently doing it.” (Minutes, 806).

“Despite the many excellent points made by TE Johnson about the difficulties faced by Christians who experience SSA or sexual dysphoria, and despite much good advice on how to minister to ‘sexual minorities,’ these arguments cannot be applied without distinction to ordained service.” (Minutes, 806).

In summary, it is noteworthy that 7 SJC members voted against the 2021 SJC decision (5 REs and 2 REs). They contended that Johnson identifies himself as a “same-sex attracted man” which “disqualifies him from ordained service.” This judgment parallels the assertion of another 8 SJC members who signed the Concurring Opinion, declaring that Johnson has “spoken of his same-sex attraction and identity in ways that have unsettled and alarmed the church.” Thus, two-thirds (15 of 23) of the SJC members believed the record of the case demonstrated that Johnson does indeed claim to be same-sex attracted and one-third of the SJC believed that this self-identity disqualifies him from ordained ministry.

The PCA record of this case does not indicate a judgment that Greg Johnson is orthodox. Far from it. In fact, the record of the case points to Johnson’s duplicity and his resolute assertion that

he is a gay man with a fixed homosexual orientation with no expectation that Christ will heal him. Is this someone qualified for ordination in the EPC? The obvious answer is NO!

The Aftermath of the Johnson Case

After the 2021 SJC case concluded, Johnson's views continued to unsettle, alarm, and trouble the PCA. By March of 2022, the second SJC case addressing theological concerns about Revoice was decided (see 2022 PCA Minutes, Part II, pp. 826-864). Also in the spring of 2022, two PCA presbyteries requested that the General Assembly assume original jurisdiction over TE Johnson⁵. The overture from both presbyteries included an attachment citing 10 examples of "public comments from TE Greg Johnson either contradicting or offering confusion to his affirmations to Missouri Presbytery's BCO 31-2 investigation." The overture from South Alabama Presbytery stated:

"... **Whereas** since the record of the case of the original Missouri Presbytery investigation of him (July 21, 2020), and even subsequent to the Standing Judicial Commission judicial case 2020-12 (October 21, 2021), TE Greg Johnson has made numerous public comments that appear to either contradict or at least offer confusion to his previous affirmations in these matters (see examples in the attached addendum) ...

Whereas TE Greg Johnson uses the same confusing and misleading terminology as Revoice 18 throughout his book, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church's Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 12/7/21) ["homosexual Christian" p. 25, "gay believer" pp. 8, 14, "homosexual believers" p. 9, 116, "sexual minorities" pp. 33, 221, 230]

Therefore be it resolved that Southeast Alabama Presbytery requests that the General Assembly assume original jurisdiction in the case of the doctrinal error of Teaching Elder Greg Johnson per BCO 34-1."

The Southeast Alabama Presbytery overture along with an almost identical one from Grace Presbytery⁶ were referred to the SJC. In the midst of the SJC's deliberations, Memorial voted to withdraw from the PCA and TE Johnson (and two other TEs) requested that their names be removed from the membership rolls of Missouri Presbytery. The Presbytery had recently begun another investigation of Johnson which they decided not to conduct after Johnson's name was removed from the Missouri Presbytery rolls. By his departure from the PCA, TE Johnson became a fugitive from ecclesiastical discipline to which he had promised submission in ordination vows.

Conclusion

With the obvious turmoil that Greg Johnson's views produced in the PCA, it was a mystery to many why the EPC's Mid-America Presbytery would not have swiftly rejected a request from Johnson and Memorial Church to enter the EPC. This is especially the case given that the ninth ordination vow states, "Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the gospel and *the peace and unity of the Church*, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?" (emphasis mine).

When this situation became known, it initially distressed many across our denomination. Now that questions related to same-sex attraction and ordination have been referred to an Ad Interim Committee, this has given the EPC an opportunity to definitely clarify and affirm that only heterosexuals qualify for church office in the EPC. We trust the Ad Interim Committee will provide solid biblical and confessional answers which will anchor the EPC firmly within historic orthodox Christian views on homosexuality.

¹ See <https://1ar.s3.amazonaws.com/2021/10/SJC-2020-12-Speck-Decision-on-Complaint-10.21.2021.pdf>

² See <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/BCO-2024-Jump-Links.pdf>

³ See https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/49th_pcaga_2022.pdf

⁴ See <https://cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Nashville-Statement.pdf>

⁵ See <https://theaquilareport.com/pca-southeast-alabama-presbytery-sends-request-to-ga-to-assume-original-jurisdiction-over-te-greg-johnson/>

⁶ See <https://theaquilareport.com/pca-grace-presbytery-sends-request-to-ga-to-assume-original-jurisdiction-over-te-greg-johnson/>

Life on Side B

*By David Weber
TE, New River Presbytery*

Let's take a moment to look down the road. Imagine what the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) will look like ten years from now if we choose to embrace and ordain leaders who identify with the Side B movement. What will our presbyteries look like? What will shape the spiritual life of our churches? Whose voices will influence our young people?

Make no mistake: if we ordain a prominent thought leader in the Side B movement like Greg Johnson, it will do more than acknowledge a single minister's struggles. Rather, it will open the door to an entire subculture that redefines sin, identity, and repentance.

Side B theology claims to uphold biblical sexual ethics by rejecting homosexual behavior while affirming same-sex attraction as an unchangeable and identity forming characteristic. That might appear safe and gracious on paper. But the Side B culture drifts far beyond the boundaries of historic, orthodox, Reformed, and biblical doctrine. A culture is the lived-out spirit and community life that accompanies and flows from one's theology. What Greg Johnson and others of his ilk articulate in carefully worded statements and polished books is often worlds apart from what is being said and celebrated on the ground.

By way of example, spend a few hours listening to the Life on Side B podcast¹ and the reality of Side B culture becomes clear. This is one of the movement's prominent voices. Here you will see that there is a crucial difference between Side B's official theological claims and its actual cultural expressions.

Celibate Civil "Marriage"

In one episode, you will hear arguments in favor of civil marriage for celibate same-sex couples. The claim is that such "marriages" would allow same-sex couples to access legal and tax benefits. One speaker argues throughout the episode that there's nothing wrong with two gay Christians getting legally married for the sake of things like taxes, hospital visitation, and benefits, so long as they remain celibate.²

This argument redefines marriage not as a covenant between one man and one woman before God, but as a pragmatic civil contract detached from its creational meaning. Yet God's Word is clear. Marriage is rooted in creation as the covenantal union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). Any redefinition, however well-intentioned, undermines God's design. What does this say to our young people about the nature of marriage if we open the door to this line

of thinking within our churches? Do we want the example of “married” men as an acceptable practice?

Transgenderism Championed

In another episode you will hear arguments in favor of transgenderism. Many in the Side B culture accept and champion gender fluidity as legitimate. Hosts and guests routinely share preferred pronouns like she/him/they. One speaker even said, “Rejecting transgender identities outright because of Genesis 1–2 is lazy theology.” Another claimed, “If Jesus were here today, I 100-percent know He would be at the rallies, sitting with trans youth and adults.”³

But transgenderism is a rejection of the very foundation of biblical anthropology. Scripture teaches that “Male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27), and that God’s creation is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). When we tamper with created identity, we do not simply express compassion. Rather we commit rebellion against the Creator.

But transgenderism naturally flows from the underlying anthropology of Side B. It is a predictable cultural expression. In this view, the fixed order of objective reality gives way to a theology of subjective experience. Once feelings override creational reality, we will be hard-pressed to hold any firm biblical line. If we open the door to this movement, our denomination will struggle not just with gender or sexuality, but with the very nature of human identity itself.

Repent Slowly?

On another episode that focused on sin and pastoral care, the hosts explained that those in homosexual relationships shouldn’t be expected to repent immediately. One host claims that it’s not always pastorally wise to ask someone to leave a same-sex relationship immediately. Instead, it is sometimes better to walk with them over time toward repentance. It was argued that in the church, homosexual behavior is expected to end immediately. But that with every other sin we accept a gradual growth away from sin.⁴ I can think of many behaviors that I would pastorally tell someone to stop immediately — theft, spousal abuse, adultery. I wouldn’t encourage anyone to wean themselves off such behavior.

The Scriptures are plain: “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). We are not told to accommodate it gradually, but to abandon it decisively. Jesus Himself declared, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away” (Matthew 5:30). This is not the language of therapeutic delay. It is the call to radical repentance.

Is this the way we want to deal with sin in our churches? Do we want to foster an environment in which repentance is replaced with a therapeutic view of sanctification? Do we really want a culture that encourages a gradual end to abomination in our lives?

Paul warns us, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). When we immerse ourselves in environments that celebrate sin, we are not being missional. Rather we are being conformed to the world. Our affections, sensibilities, and imaginations will inevitably be shaped by the world unless we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

Familiar Terminology, Divergent Theology

This is the culture Side B fosters. They talk about reading Bavinck and Augustine. They might even say they are Reformed. They know how to speak Evangelical language. But underneath the familiar theological terms is a radically different anthropology, soteriology, and doctrine of sanctification.

T.S. Eliot once observed that culture is the incarnation of religion.⁵ And as Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). A confession of faith without corresponding fruit is barren. When the culture of a movement celebrates identity in sin, minimizes repentance, and reframes biblical ethics, it will reshape our churches far more than the footnotes in a theological position paper.

This has happened before. In the early 20th century, theological liberals claimed to affirm such doctrines as the resurrection and divinity of Christ. But they redefined those doctrines into empty symbols. The forms remained, but the substance was gone. And entire denominations collapsed under the weight of compromised conviction. “Holding to a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

That same pattern is at work in Side B. Already today, the Side B subculture is producing:

- Advocacy for civil same-sex unions among Christians.
- Affirmation of transgender identities within the church.
- Softened calls to repentance from sexual sin.
- The shift from a transformational gospel to a therapeutic gospel.

Greg Johnson himself may not explicitly affirm every extreme I have described. But he is not merely part of the movement. He is one of its most prominent spokesmen. To ordain him would not just affirm a man. It would legitimize the entire movement he represents. We cannot affirm the label and reject its consequences. We cannot sow seeds and pretend there will be no harvest.

Some will argue that ordaining Side B ministers shows compassion to those struggling with same-sex attraction. But true compassion does not affirm fallen identity. It calls sinners to be made new in Christ.

Paul writes: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral ... nor men who practice homosexuality ... will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed ... sanctified ... justified” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

He does not say, “such are some of you.” He says, “such were ...” Their identity has been changed because they have been united to Christ.

Side B culture says, “This is who I am.” The gospel says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Dying to Self Optional

If we embrace Side B, we will disciple a generation that learns to celebrate their temptations, reimagine their sins, and redefine their sanctification. We will disciple a generation that believes dying to self is optional.

If you doubt where this movement is headed, don’t take my word for it. Listen to the Life on Side B podcast for yourself. Watch clips from Revoice conferences. Read the blog posts and social media of those most active in the movement. You will not find a culture marked by repentance, self-denial, and joyful conformity to Christ. You will find the celebration of queer identity, affirmation of transgender experience, and soft-pedaling of the biblical call to flee from sin. We are not guessing where this road leads. We can already see the destination.

The EPC stands at a fork in the road. One path holds fast to the sufficiency of Scripture, the clarity of our Confession, and the renewing power of the Spirit. The other leads into a fog where identity is governed by feelings, repentance is postponed indefinitely, and sin is rebranded as sanctified struggle.

Let us not take that path. Rather let us love our brothers and sisters with same-sex attraction enough to tell them the truth. Let us remind them that in Christ, they are not defined by their temptations, but by their adoption. Let us say with clarity and grace Side B is not biblical and therefore is not a part of our fellowship.

For the sake of the gospel, for the purity of Christ’s church, and for the eternal souls we are called to shepherd, let us reject Side B theology — *and the culture it inevitably brings*.

¹ <https://www.lifeonsideb.com>

² Life on Side B, “The Case for Civil Marriage in Celibate Partnerships: A Side B Collective” Life on Side B, audio podcast, February 12, 2024. Available at <https://www.lifeonsideb.com/episodes/episode/1cf9042a/the-case-for-civil-marriage-in-celibate-partnerships-a-side-b-collective>

³ Life on Side B, “S6E12 | Taylor, Kris, and Remi on Trans Dignity and Advocacy (with Josh and Elizabeth),” Life on Side B, audio podcast, April 22, 2024. Available at <https://www.lifeonsideb.com/episodes/episode/1dc13569/s6e12-or-taylor-kris-and-remi-on-trans-dignity-and-advocacy-with-josh-and-elizabeth>

⁴ Life on Side B, “S5E6 | Jacob, Bekah, and Josh on Sin,” Life on Side B, audio podcast, June 23, 2023. Available at <https://www.lifeonsideb.com/episodes/episode/1f69cd0f/s5e6-or-jacob-bekah-and-josh-on-sin>

⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), 28.

The Benefits of Psalm Singing

*By D. Bryan Rhodes
TE, Gulf South Presbytery*

Back in 2011, I packed my bags and moved to Scotland to pursue graduate work at the University of Edinburgh. While there, I joined a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland. At that time, the Free Kirk practiced *exclusive psalmody*, a term I had never heard of. It was quite the transition! I went from the Trinity Hymnal and Indelible Grace arrangements to singing about Baals, bull's flesh, and broken teeth. It felt strange, nearly like trying to sing in a foreign language. But funnily enough, by the time I came back home to Louisiana, *I loved it* and was sad to leave it behind.

The Psalter is a glorious tome, perfect for recitation, memorization, and preaching. But it was *made to be sung*. Paul explicitly commands us to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. While we tend to think of these as three categories of stylistic options (i.e., psalms, selections from the Trinity Hymnal, and praise songs), I remain convinced that these are actually three categories found within the Psalter itself.¹ While this interpretation does not necessarily demand “exclusive psalmody,” it does affirm what I like to call “inclusive psalmody” — the good work of singing psalms and everything that sounds like psalms.

For the last few years, our congregation has been incorporating “metrical psalms” (psalms arranged like hymns) into our worship. The benefits have been numerous, and I share some of them below. My hope is that you might consider including singing whole psalms in the public worship of God in your congregation, even as I admit that’s a bit like saying you should consider including sugar in a recipe for simple syrup. There are at least three benefits for singing the Psalms today: their rootedness in the Word, our security in singing, and our hope in working.

Rooting God’s Word in Our Hearts

The Psalmist sings, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (119:11 ESV). This is one of the clearest statements of the *power of God’s words* in the Bible. It sings of something different than reading or hearing God’s word, blessed as that is. This is *possessing* God’s words, or rather, *being possessed by them*. That’s why Christians have historically emphasized memorizing Scripture. The Sword of the Lord’s Word does us limited good if we do not have it at the ready when the prowling lion comes hunting for us.

While there are many methods and techniques for Scripture memory, nothing helps us to memorize quite like singing. Years from now, my children will probably remember precious little from my sermons. But they will know by heart the songs they grew up singing. As a pastor,

I have visited dementia patients who can scarcely recall my name. But they have no trouble singing along with their favorite hymns. God *calls us to sing*, and Christians — as a tribe — love to sing. Wherever Christians gather, you will find bread, wine, water, preaching, and songs (and probably not a small amount of good food and coffee). We should weaponize our love for singing and learn to sing *God's own songs*. The Gettys have written some real winners, but you could hardly ask for a better singer/songwriter than the Ancient of Days.

You've probably also noticed how we use our songs for comfort and wisdom. It could be a praise song we love, or it could be the latest pop-trash from a lavender-scented boyband. When pain comes, we flee to our songs, and we encourage each other with our songs, even if paraphrased.

"It's been hard, but I just keep remembering *Be still my soul, the Lord is on your side.*"

"Yes, I've been sad, but I also try to *count my blessings.*"

"It's been a discouraging few months, but when *I get knocked down, I get up again.*"

Only the children of the 90s will get that last reference, but the examples above still help make the point. Our songs (for better or worse) are the words that come spilling out of us when we seek to reassure ourselves or others. You can see this throughout Paul's letters. He is constantly quoting the Psalms to argue his points and encourage his readers. Why? Not just because those are God's words, but because *that's what he grew up singing*. When Paul got pressed, Psalms came spilling out. If that was true of Paul, why should it not be true of us?

Security in Our Singing

Have you ever had the experience of singing a song during a worship service, and you unexpectedly "trip over" some goofy line? One moment it all sounds biblical, and then the next moment you're trying to figure out whether it's right to call God's love "reckless," or what a "sloppy wet kiss" has to do with redemption. This trouble is not avoided by hymnals, either. Did the Son really empty himself of *all but love*? With all love for Charles Wesley (God bless history's most Reformed Arminian), that's a bit overstated — however sweet the sentiment.

I am not saying that once you start singing the Psalms, you will never again "trip over" a line or lyric. Belting out ballads about the bulls of Bashan will make even the most "Truly Reformed" among us squint for a moment. I am saying that if you're singing a Psalm and you start tripping over the words, you can rest assured that the problem *is with you* and not with the lyrics. This Songwriter has *perfect theology*. There is great freedom in coming to a befuddling clause in a song, and getting to quickly say "Lord, the problem is me! Correct this in me!" and then keep on singing merrily.

Along the same lines, the Psalms are a strong comfort because they contain the full spectrum of human emotion *in the context of various circumstances*. If you don't know how to articulate your experience, God has given you words to sing. Has God rescued you out of some great trouble or difficulty? How shall you thank Him? There's a psalm for that (Psalm 124). Are you going through suffering or sorrow or trial that seems to have no end? There's a psalm for that (13). Is your soul troubled, and in need of God's comfort? There's a psalm for that (23). Have you been deeply wronged and sinned against, maybe even abused? Take heart. The Lord hears your cries. And if you don't know what to pray, there's a psalm for that, too (5).

Hope in Our Working

Our cultural moment is thoroughly cynical and pessimistic. The reasons are numerous, and they range from sobering to silly. Sadly, that cynical pessimism dominates, even in churches. We believe that God is good, but if we watch the news for too long we are tempted to conclude that He might be disinterested. Indeed, some of us have resigned to throwing up our hands and muttering, "Well, I suppose that the gates of hell won't prevail," forgetting that gates do not advance, and those words from Christ are an offensive (not defensive) encouragement.

It is very difficult to be a pessimistic Psalm Singer. It would be far easier to find a trustworthy politician or a humorous late-night host. The Psalms are absolutely bursting with hope and optimism. Even as plenty of them descend "into the pit," almost all of them refuse to stay there. They *look up* and conclude with a strong note of trusting in the Lord and His goodness to His people.² Dogs bark. Snakes slither. Psalms look up. It's what they do *by design*. For that reason, reclaiming Psalm-singing is a move to reclaim hope and restore sanctified optimism to our hearts and lips.

Conclusion

If you are not familiar with the long and glorious tradition of Psalm Singing, I heartily recommend that you start learning the Songs of God. If you're looking for a good place to start, I would recommend the Trinity Psalter Hymnal³ (published by the OPC and URCNA), which contains musical settings for all 150 Psalms as well as some of the greatest hymns of Christianity. I might also recommend The Book of Psalms for Worship⁴ (Crown & Covenant), which is a Psalter-only volume that tends to favor the most familiar hymn tunes⁵. Both of these volumes boast their own smartphone apps as well, which is a great help to familiarization and family worship.

¹ See <https://purelypresbyterian.com/2016/10/09/psalms-hymns-and-spiritual-songs/>

² I recognize that Psalm 88 is the exception to this pattern. Psalm 88 begins in darkness *and it stays there*. Its presence in the Psalter is a reminder that God still has words for us to pray and sing even when we can't find the

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words to be hopeful. However, the fact that 149 out of 150 Psalms *do find the strength* to look up is its own kind of encouragement and admonition for us as we walk through difficult times.

³ See <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org>

⁴ See <https://crownandcovenant.com/collections/the-book-of-psalms-for-worship/products/the-book-of-psalms-for-worship>

⁵ See <https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0467/3627/7653/files/BOPFWFamiliarTunesIndex.pdf>

A Moderator's Meanderings

By Gordon Miller
Moderator, 34th General Assembly

“Meanderings” definition: Rambling or passing from one topic to another.

I hope you find the following collection of articles, quotes, quips, and Scripture to be informative, edifying, and thought-provoking. This information is not as thorough or detailed as the other articles in the Plumb Line. But I hope to stimulate honest and open debate on a variety of topics and challenges facing the church — especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. With cultural changes coming at ever-increasing speed, all of us on the Plumb Line Editorial Board desire that believers will stand firm, rooted in Scripture. I pray that you read this content in the spirit intended: love for Christ and for each other.

Note: The views and opinions expressed here are mine alone, and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the full Editorial Board of the Plumb Line.

Books You Might Enjoy

Daily Doctrine: A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2024.

You probably have more than one devotional in your library that you can pull off the shelf to get your day started off on the right foot. Those who need a shot of theology to get you going need look no further than *Daily Doctrine*. DeYoung uses the typical devotional layout to give you a concise, one-page dose of theology for each day. Put the days together and he covers broad themes, e.g., Covenant Theology, Christology, Soteriology, etc.

The vast majority of reviews I’ve read give DeYoung high marks for his entry into the devotional world. Having received *Daily Doctrine* as a gift, I can attest to the deep yet not overly academic content.

The Psychology of Money: Timeless Lessons on Wealth, Greed, and Happiness by Morgan Housel. Harriman House, Barnes and Noble edition 2022.

I would rather eat dirt than read anything about economics. I attempted an economics class in college. It didn’t take. Yet here I am urging you to read such a book. I promise that if you start to read Housel’s book — even if you feel about economics as I do — you’ll thank me. My son recommended this book with the “you won’t be able to put it down” scam. Wanting to be the good dad I told him I’d give it a try. He was right! This book is absolutely a joy to read.

Did you know \$81.5 billion of Warren Buffett's \$84.5 billion net worth came after his 65th birthday? There's still hope for me! No theology here, just a great read when you need to cleanse your palate.

Article of Interest

“‘Side B’ Christianity: An insidious, neutered gospel that has infiltrated the church”

Daren Mehl

“The Christian Post” April 20, 2025

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/side-b-christianity-an-insidious-gospel-infiltrating-the-church.html>

Written by a man once in bondage to the homosexual lifestyle, this is a powerful article about God's redemptive powers and the dangers presented by Side B Christianity. The author points out the compassion often expressed for those struggling with same-sex attraction is misplaced when believers attempt to transfer this compassion to the Side B movement. Read this article!

“Restoring American Culture”

Roger Kimball

“Imprimus” February 2025

<https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/restoring-american-culture/>

Is common sense still common? What can be done to recover common sense and bring restoration to a culture where common sense once was common? Kimball suggests we first need to acknowledge the state of decay for what it is. Next, we need to revive and celebrate the ideas that brought us example after example of cultural achievement. Mixing political observations with cultural critique, Kimball invites you to look deeply into recent cultural trends he believes must be reversed.

“How Abortion Lost Its Cool”

by Carmel Richardson

“First Things” May 2025

<https://firstthings.com/how-abortion-lost-its-cool/>

Has the abortion issue lost some of its political pull? Political junkies who recognize the evil inherent in abortion will find Richardson enlightening.

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Citing recent polling, abortion statistics, and the 2024 election, Richardson offers a nuanced look at what may be developing on both sides of the abortion issue.

“Truth Trumps Love”

Helen Louise Herndon

“The Aquila Report” February 1, 2025

<https://theaquilareport.com/truth-trumps-love/>

In this article, Herndon acknowledges the balance of truth and love, but then argues that God’s truth trumps misguided love when it comes to the serious sin of homosexuality. She makes it clear from Scripture that Godly love cannot exist apart from, be ignored by, or separated from God’s Truth. This obvious truth needs to be applied when we discuss biblical issues surrounding homosexuality. Our compassion cannot rewrite Scripture.

Herndon is a member of Central Presbyterian Church (EPC) in St. Louis, Missouri. She is a freelance writer and served as a missionary to the Arab/Muslim world in France and North Africa.

“A Discussion of Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination”

Wes Vander Lugt and Don Fortson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwj9c1HdiUE>

TEs Wes Vander Lugt and Don Fortson gave short presentations on “same-sex attraction and ordination” to the EPC’s Presbytery of the Central Carolinas on January 25, 2025. In this 54-minute audio recording, Wes and Don share differing biblical viewpoints on the issue of ordaining a celibate same-sex-attracted person. Vander Lugt argues in favor and Fortson argues against.

Quotes

“The American elite is almost beyond redemption ... Moral relativism has set in so deeply that the gilded classes have become incapable of discerning right from wrong. Everything can be explained away, especially by journalists. Life is one great moral mush — sophistry washed down with Chardonnay.”

—Charles Dickens

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“It’s a mess, ain’t it Sheriff?” Sheriff: “If it ain’t, it’ll do ’til the mess gets here.”

—Scene from “No Country for Old Men” where they investigate the site of drug-related murders.

Humor

“I remember the time I was kidnapped and they sent a piece of my finger to my father. He said he wanted more proof.”

—Rodney Dangerfield

“I married your mother because I wanted children. Imagine my disappointment when you arrived.”

—Groucho Marx

(Remember when humor did not need to be connected to profanity?)

Book Review: 'Dangerous Affirmation'

M.D. Perkins, *Dangerous Affirmation: The Threat of "Gay Christianity"* (Tupelo, MS: American Family Association, 2022). 243 pages.

For the past two thousand years, Christians have all agreed that homosexuality is a sin. However, things have changed since the 1960s. Over the past 60 years there has been a growing movement of professing Christians seeking to affirm homosexuality by reconciling the Christian faith with homosexuality. Author M.D. Perkins calls this movement, "gay Christianity."

Perkins argues in his book *Dangerous Affirmation: The Threat of "Gay Christianity"* that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible. Perkins' aim is to help the average Christian understand and respond biblically to the gay Christian movement. Perkins warns of the danger of affirming what God denies. Though Scripture is the primary focus, Perkins does not shy away from "controversial topics like homophobia, LGBT suicide rates, conversion therapy laws, and the rise of 'gay celibate Christianity'" (p. 4). The tip of the spear of the gay Christian movement is a five-pronged attempt to change the church: change by "rethinking" about the church's theology, Bible, the nature of the church, and Christian identity.

Perkins observes that in canvassing the theological literature, there are three gay theologies:

- Affirming theology (revisionist).
- Queer theology.
- Gay Celibate theology.

Affirming Theology

Affirming theology is an attempt to reconcile the Christian faith with homosexual behavior and relationships, all by watering down the biblical imperatives against homosexuality. To do this, biblical texts must be reinterpreted and/or the sufficiency of Scripture must be rejected.

Regarding the former, proof texts used to condemn homosexuality are reinterpreted to condemn not all facets of homosexuality but certain aspects of said behavior. Some of these foundational texts Perkins outlines are Genesis 1:2; Genesis 18:19; Leviticus 18; 1 Samuel 1:20; and Romans 1:26-27. These and others, like Matthew 19 regarding eunuchs and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 regarding effeminacy, are addressed to show a full-orbed biblical theology that deals seriously with sodomy and not merely a handful of cherry-picked, obscured teachings which imply that homosexuality is a tangential topic hinted at in the Scriptures (pp. 39-91).

However, the Affirming proponents attempt to reinterpret Scripture to make space for certain aspects of homosexuality. Cases in point, the things condemned about homosexuality are deviant

aspects of homosexuality: homosexual rape, pederasty, and idolatry (temple prostitution). This aspectual approach to homosexual behavior distinguishes and contrasts the concomitant vice with an attendant virtue: that is, monogamous love in a committed relationship between same-sex couples (p. 12). Regarding the latter, the sufficiency of Scripture is called into question. The argument is not that the Bible is wrong about sodomy; it's just that the Scriptures are insufficient because "homosexual orientation" is a 19th century phenomenon unknown to ancient man. Ergo, Scripture must be supplemented with notions from modern science.

Queer Theology

If Affirming theology is a mean between the extremes on the theological spectrum, then the far left of this spectrum is Queer theology. Perkins notes that Queer theology is more politically active and iconoclastic. That is, Queer theology is "a total destruction of orthodoxy" (p. 21). Unlike Affirming theology, Perkins says Queer theology does not attempt to articulate the truth because "... truth is basically irrelevant" (p. 21). There is no pretense to clarity; "... doubts, ambiguities, pluralities, and complexities" are weaponized against Scripture (p. 22).

Gay Celibate Theology

On the far right of the spectrum is Gay Celibate theology, aka Side B. For many proponents, Gay Celibate Christianity is a middle-ground in the culture wars (p. 152).

Gay Celibate theology's basic tenet is that though homosexual *behavior* is sinful, homosexual *desires and attraction* are not. Sodomy of the heart is not something the Christian needs to repent of or feel shame about. The point is to cultivate a homosexual identity, one that is innate, inborn, and natural (pp. 127-128). Some will go so far to say that homosexual passions are not dishonorable passions, but an aspect of being "fearfully and wonderfully made" (p. 153).

Cultivating this same-sex identity along with one's personal faith is what it means to be a "gay Christian." The burden of unfulfilled same-sex desires is a "unique burden," a thorn in the flesh (so to speak) that one must personally steward along with assistance from the church. One's sexual orientation is immutable, an important aspect of who they are. One's homosexual desires do not need to be fixed or cured or redeemed in this age, just as physical disabilities do not need to be fixed or cured in this age for a Christian to live a faithful and full life of authenticity. Same-sex attraction is not a concern. The primary concern is same-sex behavior. What the gay Christian needs is pastoral care and support from the church. Proponents say, "Christians should stop expecting gay people to change ..." (p. 26).

Redefining the Mission; Redefining the Church

The purpose of these theologies is to redefine the visible church so as to normalize "queerness" within the church (p. 106). One of the ways to redefine the church is to redefine her mission. A

“queer goal” requires a “queer mission.” That goal is greater homosexual representation within the church (p. 95).

The method is multipronged. First, there is representation and visibility. Representation is including more homosexuals in the church, giving them a safe space to feel normal and accepted. Visibility is making “straight people” feel more comfortable with the homosexual lifestyle (p. 96). The second method is changing the language from being exclusive to inclusive of homosexuality, to make homosexuality seem normal (p. 101). The third is to recast the language of Scripture by “queer reading” (p. 106). This recasting reads homosexuality into Scripture, a sort of erotic eisegesis. The last method is to simply slander Bible-believing Christians for being mean spirited and homophobic (p. 111). This is all an attempt to replace the shame of homosexuality with the status of victimhood — all an attempt to change the church and create LGBT activists within the church (p. 179).

In conclusion, Perkins does a fine job explaining this movement. He offers a summary critique each time before he moves on to the next chapter or topic. This I find to be one of his strengths — along with simple and straightforward explanations. His writing is easy to understand and very clear. He offers concise critiques as he moves forward, not waiting until the end but evaluating while the material is still fresh in his reader’s mind.

Perkins notes that the purpose of theology is to know God and to conform our thoughts and experiences, etc., to the standards of God’s Word. He argues that “gay Christianity” gets this backward. Gay Affirming theology revises the canon of Scriptural truth to conform to the canon of human experience. Queer theology deconstructs the canon of Scripture by dashing it to pieces on the anvil of “defiant transgression” (p. 35). The Side B of Gay Celibate theology essentializes sodomy and sodomite lust as a work left “untouched by the Holy Spirit” (p. 35). Identity markers — such as “sexual minority,” “gay Christian,” or “same-sex attracted Christian” — are morally and psychologically valid. Anyone (including conservative Christians) resisting this is seen as “homophobic.”

In this reviewer’s judgment, this is a work of great value for pastors, and especially for the laity. Perkins exhorts us to stay alert and remain faithful, not to shrink back and be destroyed by such dangerous affirmation.

Dangerous Affirmation was published by the American Family Association (Tupelo, Miss.) in 2022. Perkins is research fellow of church and culture for the American Family Association.

Carl Moore
TE, Presbytery of the Alleghenies

Interim Committee on SSA and Ordination Reports to the 45th General Assembly

In response to the host of overtures before the 44th General Assembly asking whether admitting gay minister Greg Johnson to the EPC is biblically defensible, the 44th General Assembly appointed an Ad Interim Committee to study Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms on related questions. The committee was charged to bring clarity to the EPC on the following issues:

1. ***Theological anthropology***, with respect to human sexuality as it pertains to contemporary usage of the sexual self-conception and how such language comports with Scripture and the Westminster standards;
2. ***Progressive Sanctification*** and how it informs the Reformed understanding of the mortification of sin and the doctrine of repentance;
3. ***Concupiscence*** as it relates to a Reformed conception of the Christian's new nature in Christ and when homosexual temptation, like other temptations disqualifies one from ordained office;
4. ***The Christian hope*** for those who experience and flee sexual temptation, especially homosexual temptation; and
5. ***How the answers to these questions*** might inform standards for officers who have struggled in these areas but have mortified such temptation and desire.

The Committee was also asked to review EPC Position Papers, Pastoral Letters, and the Book of Order for any recommended potential changes to these sources. The General Assembly directed the committee to make an interim report to the 45th General Assembly, with a final report and recommendations to come before the 46th General Assembly.

Those registered for the 45th General Assembly will receive a copy of the preliminary report in the Commissioner's Handbook available by the end of May. There will be a Network Lunch at General Assembly on Wednesday, June 18, hosted by the Ad Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination where commissioners can hear an update on the committee's work and its provisional recommendations. There will be a time for commissioners to give feedback and questions on the preliminary report.

National Leadership Team Offers Response to Presbytery

As reported previously in the Plumb Line¹, New River Presbytery (NRP) wrote a letter to the National Leadership Team (NLT) in August 2024 seeking reconciliation after the prejudicial handling by leaders of the EPC of the NRP's unanimously passed overture. The NLT met with representatives of the NRP in January 2025 and listened to their complaints. The NRP leadership report that they voiced the following theological concerns at the January meeting:

“At the January meeting between the NLT and the Leadership Team of NRP the Presbyters from New River were clear about three broad points. First, that sexual ethical downgrade in the EPC would present an existential crisis for the denomination. Second, that Side B cannot be held by Christians of good conscience. Third, that some of the arguments deployed against the 2024 NRP overture were condescending, ahistorical, and nonsensical ...

In January, the delegation from NRP argued that Side B is heresy and not error. Primarily this is built on the fact that abstinence from vice is not the embodiment of virtue. That someone has yet to kill anyone does not mean that they embody Christian love of neighbor. Claims of celibacy are not license to adopt an anti-biblical understanding of human sexuality. In the view of the NRP this was one of the most problematic parts of the Stated Clerk's Guidance of December 2022 ... Side B, while presenting a veneer of doctrinal orthodoxy, advocates the embrace of spiritual and cultural forms of gay identity. The embrace of such identities will inevitably lead to moral and theological downgrade.

The third point made by the Elders of New River was that some arguments against the 2024 overture were problematic. Specifically, they pointed out that when sin becomes a matter of 'interpretation' controversy always follows. They pointed to the theological assertions of the Auburn Affirmation, (published in May 1924) which did so much damage to the northern Presbyterian Church. The Auburn Affirmation sought to elevate liberty of conscience over the Bible and the Westminster Standards in the name of freedom of interpretation within the bounds of 'evangelical Christianity.' Because unity and freedom are highly commended, the right of a General Assembly to address a matter of controversy or speak authoritatively on a doctrinal issue is denied. Some of the PJC's most contested rulings last year skated extremely close to adopting such a position.”

In a late March 2025 letter of reply from the NLT chairman to NRP leadership, he offered this perspective on the January meeting:

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“I found the conversation to be both productive and enlightening, providing us with a clearer understanding of the concerns raised by the New River Presbytery Please rest assured that the EPC remains steadfast in its commitment to Biblical Orthodoxy and our foundational ethos, just as it has since its inception.”

While this letter from the chairman did not address leadership concerns, the NRP reaction to the chairman’s letter was as follows:

“What became clear in the letter to NRP from the chair of the NLT was that there is broad agreement about the importance, urgency, and peril in the issues presented by Side B and its potential place in the EPC. Importantly, the conversation at the January meeting was characterized as productive and enlightening. The officers and members of the New River Presbytery have good reason to rest assured that the EPC remains steadfast in its commitment to biblical orthodoxy and to its founding ethos. Under God’s good providence our shared commitment to biblical truth and confessional clarity will continue to be the foundation of our peace as the EPC.”

¹ <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/presbytery-shares-complaints-with-national-leadership-team/>

New Mexico Church Votes to Leave EPC

Convinced that the EPC is no longer compatible with their beliefs, members of First Artesia Church in New Mexico voted May 4 to leave the denomination. The Letter of Racial Lament and the issue of homosexuality were key issues that caused the church to break away from the EPC, according to Pastor Scott Pettus.

“I spent 25 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and fought in two foreign wars,” said Pettus. “I see a war coming in the EPC over a number of issues. At this time, for our little church, we want to focus our time and funds on other things and not on these battles.”

When Pettus arrived at the Artesia church four years ago, it was a dying congregation with eight people attending worship. Since that time, worship attendance has grown to 50 and is expected to double again this year. Located in a rural community in southeast New Mexico, the church has attracted farmers, ranchers, and young families involved in homeschooling and 4-H. Artesia is the only Reformed church within a 100-mile radius and was one of only three EPC churches in New Mexico.

“They’re looking for reverence and tradition,” said Pettus. “They want liturgical worship, and in-depth preaching and teaching of Scripture. They want to see a Confession that is meaningful and something that has practical application.”

According to Pettus, the first issue that caused alarm in the church was the Letter of Racial Lament. When the General Assembly approved a committee to draft the letter, some of his ruling elders wanted to leave the EPC immediately, without waiting to see the outcome. When the first draft of the letter was published, Pettus said it confirmed their fears that the EPC is embracing a woke worldview.

“It was DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) cloaked in Christian language,” said Pettus. “I believe the first version of the letter showed the real intent, and then the second version was an attempt to smooth it over. Most people I had met in the EPC were quite conservative, so I didn’t understand this issue coming up.”

The Artesia church also was alarmed when the General Assembly approved a committee to study the issue of whether a person who identifies as homosexual but claims to be celibate can be ordained as a church leader. One such pastor, Greg Johnson, is currently seeking to unite with the EPC after his church left the PCA.

“With Greg Johnson, the answer should be an immediate and adamant ‘no,’” said Pettus. “We believe this issue needs no further study or examination. Why do we need a committee to figure out what we believe on this?”

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In recent years, the Artesia church has adopted a patriarchal view of Scripture and church government. This, along with the issues of race and homosexuality, caused the congregation to realize that they no longer fit in the EPC and needed to exit.

According to Pettus, the Letter of Racial Lament and homosexuality are only symptoms of a deeper, underlying problem in the EPC.

“What I find to be problematic is the ethos of the EPC,” said Pettus. “I think the original intent was to welcome egalitarian and charismatic churches. However, now that ethos is so ingrained that there is a willingness to consider all things. It’s the idea that we should straddle the fence on as many things as possible.”

Pettus and his Session worked with the Presbytery of the West to fulfill the Book of Order requirements for leaving the EPC, which include two congregational meetings. Although the Book of Order does not require churches to disclose their reasons for leaving, Pettus and one of his elders met with representatives of Presbytery to explain why they were leaving. The congregation experienced no opposition or resistance from the Presbytery.

“There has been no vitriol, no argument, no fight,” said Pettus.

The Artesia church was established in 1903. Pettus said that his wife’s family have belonged to the church since 1907, and that his children are the fifth generation to worship there.

“That’s why I came here,” said Pettus. “I didn’t want to see this church die. I felt that we could do something to reinvigorate it and move in a new direction. What I’ve found is that men in this community want a mission. That’s been my message. We want to see Christ in every corner of this town and be the light of Christ in those places.”