

**HOPE'S
GAYS
AND
GAYS'
HOPES**

**RALPH
BLAIR**

By Dr. Ralph Blair copyright ©1983

HOPE'S GAYS AND GAYS' HOPES

This morning, at the end of my flight from New York City to Grand Rapids, the flight attendant said, in her best commercial airlines: "We hope you have an enjoyable stay in Grand Rapids, or wherever your final destination may be." Without getting too eschatological about it, let me say that of course I was not staying in Grand Rapids, (a sign of the times, perhaps). My "final destination" for *this* weekend at least seemed to me to be both geographically and theologically somewhat to the *left* of Grand Rapids. It is therefore appropriate that at least for now, my appreciation for a most gracious invitation to share my "leftward leaning" thoughts on homosexuality should be due to you here in Holland. There may yet be hope for Calvin.

John Newton, the man who wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace," once reflected: "I have been thirty years forming my own views, and in the course of this time some of my hills have been sinking, and some of my valleys have risen; but how unreasonable would it be to expect all this should take place in another person, and that in the course of a year or two." (1) I might paraphrase Newton with my own experience and say that I have been thirty years forming my own views on homosexuality and Christianity and in the course of this time some of my hills have been sinking and some of my valleys have risen; but how unreasonable would it be to expect all this should take place in you, and that in the course of an hour or so.

While preserving our integrity, we should, in humility, be willing at least to consider disturbing our seemingly settled ideas and our too-neat systems, for as Newton also reminds us, "an attachment to a rigid system is dangerous. Luther once turned out the epistle of St. James, because it disturbed his system. Dr. Owen will be ashamed of his wisdom and clearness, five minutes after he has been in heaven. I shall preach, perhaps, very usefully upon two opposite texts, while kept apart; but if I attempt nicely to reconcile them, it is ten to one if I don't begin to bungle." (2) We Christians are quick to have something neatly to conclude about homosexuality in *theory* but it is in integrating it with the *reality* of living in the everyday world that we might have trouble. By the way, in fairness to Luther in this his 500th birthday year, we should note that he, too, admitted that "In our sad condition, our only consolation is the expectancy of another life. Here below all is incomprehensible." You may wish to quote this same appeal at the bottom of your next blue book!

Surely homosexuality seems to be part of that "all" which Luther called "incomprehensible" here below. No wonder. It's so unexpected, so unprepared for, there are so many myths surrounding it, and there is so much stigma attached to even discussion of it, not to mention involvement in it or acceptance of it.

Well what is "it?" What is homosexuality? What is a homosexual? To try to define homosexuality we cannot do much better, I think, than to use phrasing of Judd Marmor, Professor of Psychiatry at the USC School of Medicine and past president of the American Psychiatric Association. As he puts it, homosexuality is "a distinct psychosexual phenomenon"

that implies “the same kind of strong and spontaneous capacity to be erotically aroused by a member of one’s own sex as heterosexuality implies in relation to members of the opposite sex.” He characterizes the homosexual person, therefore, as one “who is motivated in adult life by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually (but not necessarily) engages in overt sexual relations with them.” (3) Now we must understand the use of the term “erotic” to include *romantic* attraction, the ability or tendency to “fall in love” as we say, to form sexual pair-bondings of reciprocal matching, as the sexologists say, and not only an ability to achieve genital arousal. That is why Marmor and other sexologists rightly exclude the incidental same-sex experimentation of adolescents as well as the situational same-sex behavior of heterosexually- deprived heterosexuals—in prison, for example. Notice, though, he in no way excludes those who desire homosexual relations but do not see their way clear to behave in terms of these desires. They are homosexuals nonetheless.

If you are heterosexual, that is, if you are attracted sexually to members of the other sex, you’ll remember that you didn’t have to sit up all night praying to be turned on to members of the other sex, though maybe you did or do sit up praying that they will be turned on to you. You didn’t have to be seduced to know you were very interested in them. It came as really no surprise to you, nothing to be explained or explained away. To know what the homosexual experiences in terms of erotic or romantic attraction, just consider your own experience as a boy or a girl, a young man or a young woman. It’s the same sort of *internal* arousal experience for the lesbian as for the heterosexual woman; the same *internal* arousal experience for the gay young man as for the straight young man. The *gender* of those to whom you’re involuntarily attracted is what is different. You can imagine something of the fear, the shame, confusion and distress that many homosexuals go through, though, if you stop to think about how much hostility surrounds homosexuality.

Incidentally, aside from the gender of those to whom homosexuals are attracted, they do not differ from heterosexuals nor do they resemble each other. Homosexuality carries with it no particular political point of view, aesthetic, temperament, value system, and so on.

Before looking into what homosexuals try to do with their homosexual desires, let’s get a sense of how many people are faced with having to do something. There are the homosexuals who have to do something about their own homosexuality and that of others but there are also the heterosexuals who have to do something about the homosexuality of others, i.e., a son’s or daughter’s, a mother’s or father’s, a sister’s or brother’s, a student’s or a teacher’s, an associate’s, a neighbor’s. If we were to invite only all of the homosexuals of Hope College to meet here in this auditorium this evening—and if they could all see their way clear to come, which they couldn’t—how many seats do you think would be occupied? Any guesses?

Applying the most thorough and extensive surveys done to date, those of the Kinsey Institute, we would have to conclude that *all* the seats would be occupied, and some would still be standing in the aisles.

Conservatively, 10% of the general population—and therefore of Hope College—is basically homosexual, and as Marmor and other researchers have said, the figure could be higher by twice that number (in which case we'd need two sittings in here). But those of you who *are* here, who know you already number among these homosexuals, comprise only part of those of you here who have a stake in what we're thinking about this afternoon. As we've said, in addition to those in the Hope College family who are themselves homosexual there are those of you who are heterosexual who are trying to date closeted homosexuals, looking forward to heterosexual marriage with homosexuals, will one day find out that your son or daughter is homosexual. As citizens you'll be asked to vote on gay rights issues. In the work place you'll face questions concerning gay employers or gay employees.

I'd like to say a word or two about causes of homosexuality before moving on to the options or hopes gay people have. Actually, nobody knows what causes homosexuality. Nobody knows what causes heterosexuality. We can say, though, that sexual orientation does not seem to be a matter only of nurture or only of nature. Probably one is neither only *born* a homosexual or heterosexual or only *made* a homosexual or heterosexual. Sexual orientation is most likely the product of the confluence of both heredity and environment, of biological predisposition as well as learning. *Experientially however*, and here is where our counseling or pastoral concern for individual gay people must be focused, experientially, all this takes place so *early* and so *passively* that it is *as though* one were born a homosexual just as it is *as though* one were born a heterosexual.

Now, what are the options—the hopes—that seem to be available as one who is involuntarily attracted romantically only to members of the same sex begins to try to handle the attractions? We can look at these as three divisions of options and two of these have sub-divisions.

I label the first of these three major option divisions: “Change!” The homosexual says to self: “I *hope* I can change. I have to change because homosexuality is wrong, it's sinful, it's unnatural, it's sick. I could never be happy this way.” Gay people begin to try to change by ignoring or denying the homosexuality. They hope it will simply disappear one day. They wait for it to go away. And they wait. Then they try to use will power to get rid of it. They distract themselves into busying themselves with their school work, church activities, drugs. They hope it goes away but it just doesn't go away, and like the old Scottish proverb says, these “hoppers go to hell.”

I've seen tracts and other articles published by Christian organizations which promise “hope for the homosexual.” On close examination such hope turns out to be cruel hoax instead of credible hope. This college is called Hope College. But it was not named for an unfounded wish, a “let's pretend.” This isn't Wish College. It was named Hope because it was founded in the steadfast anchorage of God. The large anchor out here on the lawn is a reminder of that. That's what biblical hope is and it is different from humanly-contrived hope. It is based in the promise of God, and God keeps promises. No preacher, parent or anyone else has the right to promise a so-called hope for the homosexual which has as its basis an ignorant wishful thinking and has as its

goal the elimination of homosexuality. That's humanly-contrived hope. Biblical hope rests with God's being God. Biblical hope is a firm and steadfast anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19) anchored in God who keeps promises and cannot lie. Humanly-contrived hope rests with human beings being human, in a fallen world. Human beings, being human, have a talent for self-deception and the deception of others. This is well-documented from social psychological research in Dave Myers excellent book, *The Inflated Self*. We have a way of sort of believing what we want to believe and we can even "fulfill our own prophecy" through denial, lies, and the maintenance of a phantom hope. Hope outside of the biblical sense is often merely an illusion, —at worst a miserably unrealistic desire and at best an expectation, the fulfillment of which is a variable probability or possibility. Disappointment is directly related to the trustworthiness of the *basis* of hope. Humanly-contrived hope is, at best, a maybe. Even Robert Schuller is now admitting that not everything is possible, a conclusion I had reached about his possibility thinking when I discovered, after sending him several letters about his negativity on homosexuality, that it was not possible to get a response on it from him.

Another subdivision of this category, "Change!," involves psychotherapy, behavior therapy, medical resources, etc. "See a doctor!," homosexuals have been told. But so far as change in sexual orientation is concerned, it's useless to see a doctor.

There is a big, fat book called *Changing Homosexuality in the Male* written by psychiatrist Lawrence J. Hatterer, a neighbor of mine. Hatterer and I have done joint lecture sessions at New York University Medical School and though we don't see eye to eye on homosexuality, he's referred patients to me, saying that I offered "an importantly-needed community service." (4) Nonetheless, Hatterer wrote this book which purports to speak of "changing homosexuality." He writes of 710 gay men who were given diagnostic evaluation interviews from 1951 to 1969. He reports eventual "recovery" of 49 patients and "partial recovery" of 18 patients, whereas 76 "remained homosexual," even after up to 22 months or 375 hours of costly treatment. It is important to note that the remaining 567 were not considered good treatment potential or did not enter therapy for other reasons. Hatterer has a long list of hundreds of multiple treatability factors which must be examined to avoid what he deems poor treatment risks. Also, it should be said that even among the 49 patients who are said to have "recovered" only 17 married heterosexually and some of these reported having recurrent homosexual fantasies during up to the 15 years of follow-up investigation. None of the 18 "partially recovered" men married in the up to 15 years of follow-up. In fact, at termination, none of these was free of his homosexual desires or behaviors, although 5 of them had dated women. No wonder the proverb: "Hopers go to hell."

According to behavior therapy practitioners and archivists Gerald Davison and G. T. Wilson, writing in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, aversion therapy is both inappropriate and ineffective if the goal is change in sexual orientation. (5) Of his own clinical experience with behavior therapy and homosexuality, Arnold Lazarus, a pioneer in behavior modification techniques, admits that "I have had no enduring success with any of the methods. ... In the heyday of my behavioristic zeal, I succeeded in temporarily blocking all sexual outlets for some

bewildered or ambivalent homosexuals who were subsequently overjoyed to ‘relapse’ into active and gratifying homosexuality.” (6) Humanly-contrived hoppers “go to hell.”

Another subdivision of “Change!” involves prayer, faith-healing, exorcism, “dying to self,” and “name it - claim it” schools of the so-called “ex-gay” route. But insofar as sexual orientation change is the expected outcome, the “ex-gay” route is a depressing hoax. Hoopla surrounding what was publicized through the evangelical media as the definitive proof that “homosexuals CAN change” (as *Christianity Today* bannered it), has proven to be just one more disappointment for those looking for real change. Close examination of the evidence in an article heralded as the best evidence shows the following: Only 3 of 11 so-called “cures” out of an original 300 who came looking for a “cure” at the Melodyland Hotline “ex-gay” service claim to have no current homosexual dreams, fantasies, or impulses and one of these 3 is listed by the authors themselves as being still incidentally homosexual. According to their own testimony, that reduces the “ex-gays” in this “best evidence” argument to 2 men out of 300. Even the founders of this “ex-gay” ministry have “returned” to homosexual lifestyles, following in the footsteps of several ex-“ex-gay” leaders. After hearing my critique of his report on these “ex-gays” at a meeting of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies in Atlanta in April, 1982, the reporter, psychiatrist E. Mansell Pattison loudly objected to my criticism that his “ex-gays” still fantasized about gay sex. He angrily exclaimed, “Who doesn’t have homosexual fantasies, especially after a fight with his wife!” He went on to admit that he would *not* “be surprised” if some of those 11 return to homosexual lifestyles.” No wonder such “hoppers go to hell.”

Well if change is no real hope, what is? The second major hope for gays faced with their continued homosexual desires is suicide. That’s right. They can’t take their unacceptable desires any longer and so they kill themselves. After hearing Fuller Seminary president David Hubbard speak on his radio program about how homosexuality and bestiality and all were unbiblical and sinful, a young man from a very Fundamentalist background wrote to the radio program for help. He told of his continued inability to change and of his deep loneliness. Back came the reply of “how grateful I am to be able to offer you, on the assurance of God’s own word, that His power and strength have been made available for your need.” A copy of the anti-gay radio sermon by Hubbard was enclosed and this young man passed it on to me, together with his letter and the Hubbard reply. Then, in the early pre-dawn hours of a lonely Sunday morning in New York City, this young man stepped out in front of an on-rushing subway train and was crushed to death. Both he and Hubbard believed the same thing, but he was homosexual and Hubbard is not.

With failure to change and no future in suicide, what hope is left to the homosexual? Obviously, the third option is “Acceptance!” But there are five subdivisions here. Only the fifth, according to my own personal, clinical and theoretical experience, is viable. But let’s look quickly at the first four ways of “acceptance” before getting to the fifth.

The first way one might think that he or she can hope to “live with it” is to *put up with it, to settle* for the fact that change isn’t possible, suicide is no answer, so “let’s just try to grit our teeth and

make the best of a horrible lot in life. Let's try to live with the continued desires, the daily and hourly longings, but let's not act upon those desires in any physical acts. Let's not yield to the temptations." In short, the homosexual is told to live a life-long enforced celibacy. But there is no hope here either. That conservative Protestants are so ready to believe every nasty joke about priests and nuns "doing it" in the cloisters says to me that they don't put a lot of stock in the possibility of celibacy—no matter what the priests and nuns may or may not be doing. After all, if we take the Bible seriously, celibacy is a sacred gift, a calling, not something to be enforced on one because of homosexual desires. That makes a farce of biblical celibacy. Are we to believe that every homosexual has the gift of celibacy? Heterosexuals, in their best "Golden Rule" etiquette, though, issue orders from the comfort of their own lives of intimacy, demanding that homosexuals maintain celibacy. On the contrary, we read in Ecclesiastes (7:16) that we are not to "destroy ourselves" with "over-righteousness" and Paul urges that we refuse to submit to the legalistic regulations of those who demand that we "Do not handle! Do not touch!" (Col 2:21) even though such regulations for "harsh treatment of the body" have the *appearance* of wisdom, worship, and humility. C. I. Scofield called such regulations "fleshly exercises." (7) Such misuse of ascetic practices are, in the words of Cassian, the early Christian monk, "instigated by the devil himself" and thus, effect nothing but "useless fatigue of body, and worse, a fatigue which would harm the spirit." (8) John Newton once tried such a period of enforced asceticism, trying as he put it, to do "everything that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own," and Newton, too, found that "it was a poor religion; it left me in many respects under the power of sin; and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsocial, and useless." (9) No wonder these "hoppers go to hell."

Other levels of "Acceptance!" include the acknowledgement that the gay desires are there but that they won't be physically acted upon and so the gay person gets heterosexually married. In my clinical experience, I've never known any such arrangement to be successful. The misery of one person now becomes the misery of two. Divorce is eventually the almost invariable and unhappy way out. Before divorce, though, there can be another level of "Acceptance!" in which the gay person tries the make-shift solution of homosexual genitalizing with strangers on the outside, with or without* the spouse's knowledge. This doesn't work for long, if it works at all. Some try to have the "best of both worlds," so to speak, and get more deeply involved with someone of the same sex. A parallel relation develops along with the heterosexual marriage but this arrangement soon turns out to be the "worst of both worlds." A fourth level of acceptance is to get out of the marriage, (or never get into one) and act on the homosexual desires promiscuously. This hope that tries to short-cut to intimacy is an utterly vain hope that leaves one more lonely and less likely ever to be able to integrate romantic and familiar intimacy with genital sex. Promiscuity is Russian roulette—physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

The only hope that is based in reality and is thus a hope for human need fulfillment that can come true is hope through acceptance of one's homosexual desires in a disciplined, responsible,

and intelligent integration of the homosexuality in a committed, monogamous relationship with someone of the same sex, where shared values and genital sex are successfully integrated with mutuality, familiarity, and closeness over time. This is not a description of an unreachable ideal but of a realistic gay lifestyle. Some persons are achieving it, in spite of the stupidities of churches and society and gay liberationism that throw obstacles in the way.

In order to gain this only viable hope, one must identify beliefs, challenge them, and, if erroneous, change them, seeing a way that makes more biblical sense (for Christians) and more interpersonal sense (for any person). This takes time and work but it's worth it for this is the only viable way for a gay person to meet his or her needs for sexual or romantic intimacy, and then to get on with the living of the rest of life as well. It's *real* and *honest* hope for the homosexual.

In the Bible, hope is connected with faith and lovingkindness (I Thess 1:3; 5:8; Gal 5:5f; I Cor 13:13; Heb 6:10ff; I Pet 1:21f) and together these three sum up the abiding Christian life. The security of hope allows unselfish lovingkindness to be shown to others (to our homosexual neighbors, partners, etc.). This is a biblical principle that can be demonstrated even in secular or psychological terms. We can afford to love—to seek another's welfare—when we first experience the security of being loved. What is strange is that so many people who claim to know they're loved by God—and by others—seem so unable to afford to be channels through whom that love can extend to homosexuals. I'm reminded of something D. L. Moody's friend, Henry Drummond, said many years ago: "God's love for poor sinners is very wonderful, but God's patience with ill-natured saints is a deeper mystery." Drummond also said that "The greatest thing a [person] can do for his [or her] heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children." Martin Luther put it this way, that "love, like warmth, should beam forth on every side, and bend to every necessity of our brethren." Faith is a verb for trust. Hope is the confidence that trust is well-placed. Love flows from such hope, for our homosexual neighbors and our homosexual partner.

Toward the end of his ministry at Boston's old First Church, the famous pastor, Rufus Ellis, got news of the death of Martha Cochran, a woman whom he had first met at his first parish over 30 years before when he was still a green graduate of the Harvard Divinity School. It is with embarrassment over his own immaturity and gratitude for her patience, that he remembers the presence of "this large-minded, large-hearted" older woman of his congregation. He writes: "How much must such an one hear which seems to her crude and insignificant! How patiently must such an one wait until experiences are multiplied, and common-sense has got the better of abstractions and sentimentalities!" He says that "A young man goes from the place of training to the place of duty but slenderly furnished, for the most part, for what is before him." (10)

It is my hope that so far as our subject for today is concerned, we all be as "large-minded and large-hearted" as Martha Cochran was in the face of "abstractions and sentimentalities" of rigid but inexperienced know-it-alls—whether preachers or gay liberationists—who lack the

perspective of maturity and Christian charity. The price for a careless grasp of our subject today is paid with the lives of gay people.

REFERENCES

1. *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt, 1831) p. 61.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
3. Judd Karmor, (ed.) *Homosexual Behavior: A modern reappraisal* (New York; Basic Books, 1980) p. 5.
4. Lawrence J. Hatterer, *Changing Homosexuality in the Male: Treatment for men troubled by homosexuality* (New York; McGraw-Hill, 1970) and personal correspondence from Hatterer to Blair, dated February 28, 1972.
5. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 83, 1974, pp. 396-198.
6. *Professional Psychology*, 2, 1971, pp. 349-353.
7. Ella E. Pohle, (ed.) *Dr. C. I. Scofield's Question Box* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, n.d.) p. 87.
8. Quoted by Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981) p. 141.
9. Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
10. *Memoir of Rufus Ellis* (Boston: William B. Clarke, 1891), p. 220.