



FAITHFUL WITNESSES

A WESLEYAN-HOLINESS POSITION PAPER
ON GAY IDENTITY AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

with

RESPONSE BY REV. TIMOTHY CRUTCHER, PhD

The Ad Hoc Committee
on Entire Sanctification and Identity

Commissioned by: Love Wins.: LGBT
A ministry of Trinity Family Midtown Church of the Nazarene

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August 20, 2020

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CONTENTS

1	The Problem	22	The Chief Whataboutism
3	Some Important Considerations for the Reader	22	Eating the Elephant
4	How We Arrived Here	23	Isn't Identifying as Gay, In Essence, Identifying with Sin?
5	The Wesleyan-Holiness Debate on Identity	24	Doesn't Such an Identification Mean You Are Finding Your Core Identity In Something Other Than Christ?
7	Entire Sanctification: A Necessary Re-Orientaion	25	...Especially If You Profess The Experience Sanctification?
8	Squabbling Over Words	28	Responding to the Still Critical
9	Re-oriented? Yes, But Not Like That	29	But What If...?
11	Clarity Over Confusion	30	Defining Faithfulness for a New Generation
14	Entire Sanctification, Not Supernatural Conversaion Therapy	31	Witnesses in War Zones
17	The Work of Entire Sanctification, Defined for a New Generation	32	Appendix 1&2
18	Respond to the Smaller One. Speak to the Larger One. Do it Respectfully	33	Bibliography
19	Understanding Gay Identity	37	Response
21	The Redemptive Script		

“Don’t call yourself a gay Christian.”

“Your identity should be found ‘in Christ!’”

“Don’t you know that when you insist on using the phrase ‘gay Christian’ to describe yourself, you are putting your identity in being gay instead of finding your identity in Christ?”

“Hyphenated Christianity is a false Gospel!”

and the list goes on and on.

When one finds themselves to be gay,¹ Christian, and a member of an evangelical Church, they often find that they must become micro-theologians, ready to defend themselves against a barrage of well-intentioned statements, like the ones above, regarding the way they do just about anything — whether it be the way they act, dress, talk, live, or for the context of this paper, identify. If such an individual finds their Church home in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, they, unfortunately, must address further critiques, such as:

“You cannot profess entire sanctification and hold onto a gay identity.”

1 The term “gay” will be used throughout this paper to collectively refer to those that identify as same-sex attracted, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning yet hold to the historic Christian teaching on human sexuality.

“When you are entirely sanctified, your whole identity should be ‘in Christ.’”

“Entire sanctification should have removed your attraction to the same-sex.”

To be gay, Christian, and profess the experience of entire sanctification, in today’s Wesleyan-Holiness Church, is often to find oneself picked apart by the constant questioning of a community called to be known by its love for one another.² A problem, both theological and deeply personal, has emerged as a result, and faithfully committed Christians find themselves unable to understand each other in a battle where both sides stand firm on the truths of Scripture.

Thankfully, it does not have to be this way.

So, with prayer and hope in One bigger than us all, the writers of this paper invite you on a journey over the following pages to come and reason together³ to end the confusion, heal the Church, and develop a more faithful witness, to the ends of the earth⁴ and everywhere in between.

2 See John 13:35.

3 See Isaiah 1:18.

4 See Acts 1:8.



SOME IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE READER

Before undertaking the task of this paper, however, there are some essential doctrinal and terminological considerations that need to be addressed. First, the writers of this paper labored as an outpouring of an underlying affirmation of the doctrinal positions of the Church of the Nazarene, with specific emphasis on its historic positions related to entire sanctification and human sexuality as found in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*,⁵ as well as all statements related to the topics of entire sanctification and human sexuality issued from the Board of General Superintendents.

Stated clearly, the intent of the writers of this paper is not to change the stated and held beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene or like-minded Wesleyan-Holiness denominations, but rather, an attempt to help these denominations develop a deeper and more robust understanding of such held beliefs.⁶

Second, and in line with the stated beliefs mentioned above, all usage of the term *gay Christian* in the context of this paper will refer only to celibate, gay Christians.⁷ Additionally,

all usage of the term *gay* shall refer only to those that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, and same-sex attracted, as this paper will not speak to issues of gender.

Finally, the writers of this paper would like to speak to those who find themselves to be more liberal or conservative on the issues addressed in this paper.

To you...

We reaffirm our commitment to extend continued, non-judgmental love to you, and ask for grace and an open mind as you read and reflect on the issues discussed in this paper.

We further commit to the same with any rebuttal you may have to our work here, for it is crucial to all who contributed to this work to promote and maintain a spirit of Christian charity as we live with and love those who think differently on these issues than we do.

Only by loving each other as Christ loved us will we ever hope to be faithful witnesses of the One we have been called to present to the world.

With these considerations, we move forward with the task of this paper, which is not only essential but also extremely specific.

⁵ Twenty-ninth General Assembly. 2017. *Manual Church of the Nazarene*. 2017-2021. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House.

⁶ Board of General Superintendents. n.d. BGS Official Statements. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://nazarene.org/bgs-official-statements>.

⁷ This will be discussed further in later sections of this paper.



The conflict between those in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, etc. (LGBTQ+) community and those in the Church has always been present.

However, in recent years, a specific critique has emerged from those in the Church — and, in the case of this paper, those in Wesleyan-Holiness denominations — who have encountered individuals who consider themselves to be gay Christians yet hold beliefs that are in line with the historical teachings of the Church on issues of human sexuality.

The public discourse concerning such individuals came to the height of awareness in the summer of 2018 in response to the Revoice conference held in St. Louis, Missouri.

Revoice’s mission was, and is, to support and encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other same-sex attracted Christians—as well as those who love them—so that all in the Church might be empowered to live in gospel unity while observing the historic Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality.⁸ While such individuals have always been present throughout Church history, this conference brought a significantly increased awareness of their presence.

Seemingly unnoticed by most of the Church, significant work had been done prior to this conference, which aided in establishing the basis for it.

8 Revoice. 2020. Our Mission, Vision, and Values. Accessed July 20, 2020. <https://revoice.us/about/our-mission-and-vision/>.

These works included authors like: Wesley Hill, and his book *Washed and Waiting*;⁹ the blog *Spiritual Friendship*;¹⁰ *The Great Debate*¹¹ between Justin Lee and Ron Belgau; and Lee’s Gay Christian Network Conferences.¹²

However, Revoice, having been hosted by a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) congregation, brought about very public critiques from largely Calvinist and reformed authors, including Denny Burk,¹³ Albert Mohler,¹⁴ and Kevin DeYoung¹⁵ among others, both before and after the conference.

In essence, their critiques reflected the statements presented at the beginning of this paper.

Consider Albert Mohler’s critique:

The larger problem is the idea that any believer can claim identity with a pattern of sexual

9 Hill, Wesley. 2010. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

10 Authors, Multiple. 2012. *Spiritual Friendship: Musings on God, Sexuality, Relationships*. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://spiritualfriendship.org/>.

11 Belgau, Ron. n.d. *The Great Debate*. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://ronbelgau.com/great-debate/>.

12 Authors, Multiple. 2020. Q Christian Fellowship. July 9. Accessed July 22, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q_Christian_Fellowship.

13 Burk, Denny. 2018. Revoice is over. Now what? August 3. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.dennyburk.com/revoice-is-over-now-what/>.

14 Mohler, Albert. 2018. Torn Between Two Cultures? Revoice, LGBT Identity, and Biblical Christianity. August 2. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/02/torn-two-cultures-revoice-lgbt-identity-biblical-christianity>.

15 DeYoung, Kevin. 2018. Words, Labels, and ‘Sexual Minorities’. June 1. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/words-labels-sexual-minorities/>.

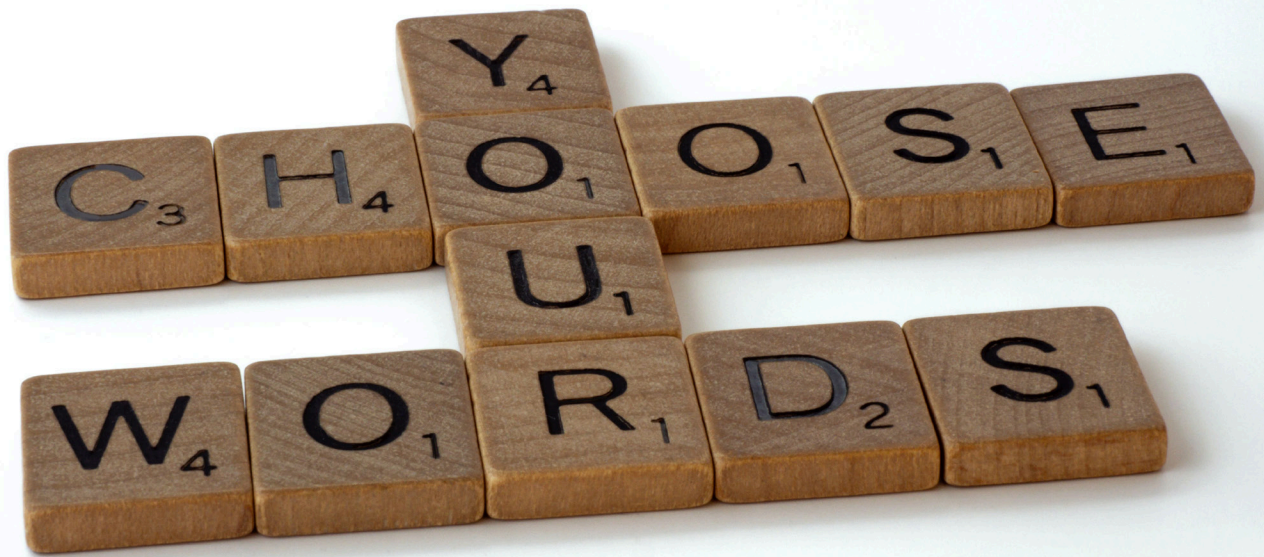
attraction that is itself sinful. The Apostle Paul answers this question definitively when he explains in 1 Corinthians 6:11, such were some of you. But, writes Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God.”¹⁶

The chief complaint was not whether Revoice agreed with historic Christian beliefs concerning human sexuality, as they do,¹⁷ but rather whether the words and phrases the participants of Revoice used to describe themselves — namely LGBTQ+ language — were in line with Scripture.

16 Mohler, Albert. 2018. Torn Between Two Cultures? Revoice, LGBT Identity, and Biblical Christianity. August 2. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/02/torn-two-cultures-revoice-lgbt-identity-biblical-christianity>.

17 Revoice. n.d. Statement on Sexual Ethics and Christian Obedience. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://revoice.us/about/our-beliefs/statements-of-conviction/statement-on-sexual-ethics-and-christian-obedience/>.





THE WESLEYAN-HOLINESS DEBATE ON IDENTITY

While Revoice and LGBTQ+ identity labels continue to evoke discussion and division in the PCA, the conversation has crossed denominational lines.

In the largest Wesleyan-Holiness denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, the issue of gay identity labels has become a matter of considerable debate within the last year, brought on most notably by the publication of the article, *Why I Cannot Identify as a Gay Christian*¹⁸ in an official denominational publication, *Holiness Today*, authored, surprisingly, by a same-sex attracted, Calvinist believer named Tim Stephansen.

The article, in line with the reformed authors mentioned above, advocated for the disuse of gay

identity labels in the lives of those committed to the historic Christian teachings on human sexuality, specifically in the author's own life.

As an example of his main arguments against such labels, Stephansen, using a questioning, inner-dialogue approach states,

If 'gay' encompasses sinful desires, does the 'gay Christian' label offer clarity or compromise? Is it truly a defining aspect of who I am or is it something that is part of the disordering of my Creator's plan? Are other sinful desires used as adjectives before 'Christian?' to qualify particular sins that a person may have struggled with or is currently tempted by?¹⁹

Interestingly, the only answers to Stephansen's questions, outside of himself, from official Nazarene publications, were in a letter to the editor in the precursor to *Holiness Today*, *Herald of Holiness*, in June 1987, when an individual wrote in to say, among other things, "There is only one description for homosexuality and that word is sin. There is no such thing as a Christian homosexual. Homosexuality is a state of sin, not a sickness."²⁰

Why mention a letter to the editor from 1987 and not another article, book, or resource, from an official Nazarene publication?

It is because not a single other official publication of the Church of the Nazarene, before or after Stephansen's article, addresses the use of gay identity labels in the lives

18 Stephansen, Tim. 2019. "Why I Cannot Identify as a Gay Christian." *Holiness Today*, November/December: 14-17.

19 Stephansen, Tim. 2019. "Why I Cannot Identify as a Gay Christian." *Holiness Today*, November/December: 16.

20 Cline, Harold. 1987. "Letters: Homosexuality is Sin." *Herald of Holiness*, June 15: 4, 20.

If 'gay' encompasses sinful desires, does the 'gay Christian' label offer clarity or compromise?

of those committed to the historic Christian tradition concerning homosexuality, in a negative light.

In fact, as far as the writers of this paper can tell, the only time the use of gay identity labels have been looked upon in a negative light in official Nazarene publications and statements is when they have been accompanied by the term “practicing,” as in the case of the document published by the Board of General Superintendents in 2010 entitled *Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality*.²¹ In it, they state that, “If a person says ‘practicing homosexual,’ then God and Scripture must bow to their sexual orientation, and this makes homosexuality an idolatrous identity. For the practicing homosexual their sexual identity

supersedes their identity in Christ. Anything above God is an idol.”²²

It is this statement that most clearly represents a proper Wesleyan-Holiness perspective on gay identity label usage, and gives a clear answer to the questions being asked within the on-going debate concerning sexual identity language among those committed to the historic Christian ethic concerning human sexuality.

In fact, the writers of this paper believe it is the proper introduction to the presentation of a convincing argument, which has yet to be found by those who share the sentiments of Stephansen, since he states, “I have never heard a convincing argument that reconciles the phrase ‘gay Christian’ with the Christianity that the Bible presents.”²³

21 Board of General Superintendents. 2010. *Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality*. Booklet, Kansas City: The Church of the Nazarene.

22 General Superintendents, *Pastoral Perspectives*.

23 Stephansen, Tim. 2019. “Why I Cannot Identify as a Gay Christian.” *Holiness Today*, November/December: 15.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION: A NECESSARY RE-ORIENTATION

Before any convincing argument can be presented to those with questions concerning the compatibility of gay identity labels with Wesleyan-Holiness doctrine, we must take the time and space necessary to explain how entire sanctification does, in one way, re-orient a person's life while also describing how, in another way, it does not.

The current *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* explains entire sanctification to be

that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service. Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness....²⁴

24 Twenty-ninth General Assembly. 2017. *Manual Church of the Nazarene*. 2017-2021, 31-32. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House.

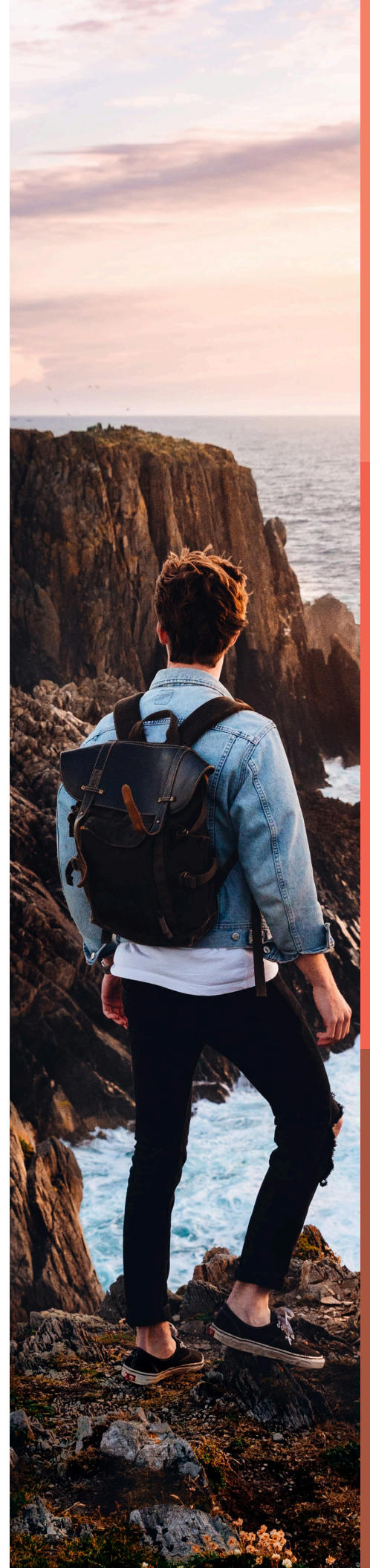
It further explains that such a work

...includes the divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality. Without such purposeful endeavor, one's witness may be impaired and the grace itself frustrated and ultimately lost...²⁵

However, entire sanctification, the distinctive doctrine of Wesleyan-Holiness Churches, has lost its footing in the very denominations formed to proclaim it. Not only has the Church failed to proclaim it but also given the results of the research the writers of this paper have been presented with,²⁶ its very definition and its experience seem to have been lost in translation along the way. Such loss has led to a decline in believers experiencing this definitive, necessary, second work of grace and has led to a squabble.

25 General Assembly. *Manual*, 32.

26 See Appendix 1.



SQUABBLING OVER WORDS

“When we are entirely sanctified, we are re-oriented. To say you continue to have a homo/bisexual orientation/identity after professing entire sanctification is tricky because the language you’re using doesn’t fit with what the Holiness Movement has always said about the work of entire sanctification.”²⁷

This statement is a paraphrase of a concern raised with one of the writers of this paper by a well-meaning, fellow Wesleyan-Holiness believer, but it best summarizes the concerns that have emerged in the conversations concerning gay identity labels within Wesleyan-Holiness denominations—especially among those that profess entire sanctification.

The underlying, pervasive belief is seemingly that if one did not give up specific terminological uses when one was justified (saved), then surely when one is entirely sanctified, the use of such language should cease, because the believer should be wholly re-oriented to Christ. Therefore, their sole identity should be found “in Christ.”

The problem for the gay believer is that when presented with this argument, they find themselves caught in the cross-hairs of a cross-cultural dilemma where, on the

one hand, the Church has failed to develop an understanding of the language of the world, and, on the other hand, the world has been unable to grasp a proper understanding of the terminology used by the Church. Such a dilemma leaves the believer to respond, “Yes,” to both the belief that one is re-oriented when they are entirely sanctified and to the conclusion that the word “gay” is still the word that best describes their continuing sexual attractions.

A language barrier has emerged. The Church finds itself unable to communicate with the world to whom She is called to represent Christ, and the world finds itself increasingly having no desire to be a part of a body that insists on using language that further alienates them.

The call of Christ to go into all the world²⁸ and the Apostle Paul’s example of becoming all things to all people that some might be saved²⁹ were given to the Church, not the world. When barriers emerge between the Gospel’s proclamation and the world receiving that proclamation, it is the Church’s responsibility to use whatever language is most useful to communicate the unchanging message of the Gospel to a world that sits utterly lost without it.

The static nature of parts of the Church concerning the terminology related to gay identity labels creates a barrier for those who use such labels, and it lacks understanding of and belief in the salvific work of Christ and the message of entire sanctification. We find ourselves engaging in the very thing the Apostle Paul warned the Church against when he sent word to them to stop squabbling over words.³⁰

It does not have to be this way.

An understanding of the meaning behind the language used on both sides needs to be addressed so the Church can re-orient itself to the call of the Gospel, to do what it takes to make Christlike disciples.

³⁰ See 2 Timothy 2:14.

²⁷ You’re: A plural reference to those who identify as gay, Christian, and committed to the historic Christian teachings on human sexuality.

²⁸ See Mark 16:15.

²⁹ See 1 Corinthians 9:22.



RE-ORIENTED? YES, BUT NOT LIKE THAT

When someone from the broader LGBTQ+ community³¹ refers to their orientation as homo/bisexual, there are several ways that they may be using such terminology. This is evidenced by the definition derived from research performed within the LGBTQ+ community by the Institute of Medicine Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health Issues and Research Gaps and Opportunities associated with the National Institutes of Health. The formal definition given by the committee stated, sexual orientation

Encompasses attraction, behavior, and identity. Most researchers studying sexual orientation have defined it operationally in terms of one or more of the following components. Defined in terms of behavior, sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of sexual or romantic activity with men, women, or both sexes. Defined in terms of attraction (or desire), it denotes an enduring pattern of experiencing sexual or romantic feelings for men, women, or both sexes. Identity encompasses both personal identity and social identity. Defined in terms of personal identity, sexual orientation refers to a conception of the [self-based] on one's enduring pattern of sexual and romantic

31 Referring to the global LGBTQ+ community which should not be confused with those that are the primary focus of this paper which are believers that identify as gay, Christian, and committed to the historic Christian teachings on human sexuality.

attractions and behaviors toward men, women, or both sexes. Defined in terms of social (or collective) identity, it refers to a sense of membership in a social group based on a shared sexual orientation and a linkage of one's self-esteem to that group.³²

As one can see, the definition of sexual orientation is lengthy, complex, and not easily reduced to one connotation.

When Wesleyan-Holiness adherents refer to being re-oriented when one is entirely sanctified, one would hope that what they mean is akin to what Mildred Bangs Wynkoop refers to in her ground-breaking book *A Theology of Love* when she states:

The meaning of sanctification, as understood by Wesley and those who follow him, could well be explained by the re-orientation of man's *agape* in which the antagonistic and feuding sectional gods tearing the human heart apart by contrary loves are cleansed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This happens as Christ is made the absolute Lord of all the heart, mind, soul, and strength.³³

32 Institute of Medicine Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health Issues and Research Gaps. 2011. Glossary - The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding. Accessed July 23, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64807/>

33 Wynkoop, Mildred Bangs. 1972. *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. Kindle Edition. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.

This, unlike the varied definitions used by the broader LGBTQ+ community when referring to a homo/bisexual orientation, can, in fact, be narrowed down to a primary connotation, for clarity's sake, by using the analogy of an inner bent/ yielding as Wynkoop further describes when she states:

The distinction in the Bible is an active spirit of 'yielding,' or dedication, to any center outside of God. Neutrality is impossible. Everyone is committed. Out of this commitment arise the kinds of actions which take their character from the source. The source is not impersonal but is the moral 'bent' for which every man is personally responsible because of the provision for all men made by Christ's offering and death. We do not need to serve sin; original sin is not 'deeper down and farther back' than our moral responsibility. It is not a thing, but a commitment of the self to a controlling center, always itself personal.³⁴

Thus, the re-orientation that happens in entire sanctification occurs when the bent/yielding is turned, not by one's own might, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, by total surrender in faith (consecration), from self to God, and one is empowered to fulfill the directive, originated in Scripture but proclaimed by Wesley, to:

34 Ibid.



'Desire not to live but to praise his name; let all your thoughts, words, and works tend to his glory.' 'Let your soul be filled with so entire a love to Him that you may love nothing but for his sake.' 'Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions.' For then, and not till then, is that 'mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus,' when in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue, in every work of our hands, we 'pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure;' when we too neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfil 'our own will, but the will of Him that sent us;' when, 'whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do,' we do it all 'to the glory of God.'³⁵

Given a proper usage and understanding of the language used by both sides, a gay Christian

could, in fact, say they have a gay orientation but that they, having taken hold of the experience of entire sanctification, have been re-oriented from the love of self to love of God and neighbor.

Hence, if we continue to use orientation language when referring to entire sanctification and homosexuality, the language becomes highly confusing and is thus not easily proclaimed to a world that is in desperate need of understanding and experiencing the power found in our distinctive doctrine.

It is in this place where the Church must take up its call to destroy the language barrier that exists in order to reach the world with the message of Christ properly proclaimed, and in so doing, live up to the example of the Apostle Paul when he states, as the *New Living Translation* so beautifully puts it, "...Yes, I try to find common ground [language] with everyone, doing everything I can to save some."³⁶

35 Wesley, John. 1872. "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection." In *The Works of John Wesley*, by John Wesley, edited by Thomas Jackson, 211. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

36 Tyndale House Foundation. 1996. "1 Corinthians 9:22b." In *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.

CLARITY OVER CONFUSION

Given that a language barrier exists between those in the broader LGBTQ+ community and the Wesleyan-Holiness Church, what should the Church do to tear down the barrier and reach God's loved ones with the message of not only salvation but also that second, definite work of grace that these ones do not even know exists, yet is available to all who seek in faith?

Frankly, it is time for the Church in the twenty-first century to update its language, without watering down the message, to speak clearly to the culture it finds itself within, so that all may be reached with the life-changing message of the Gospel.

Just as missionaries in a foreign country have a responsibility to learn a new language and contextualize their message to the culture, so must the local Church in a post-Christian world increasingly practice "cross-cultural" mission in their own country, engaging their secular culture with language and culture that will most effectively convey the Gospel message.

If the Church does not seek clarity over confusion, then the message will continue to be garbled, and the result will be a culture that continues to lack the knowledge and power of a life-saving relationship with Christ.

What exactly is the nature of this confusion? It is seen most clearly in the countless gay people who think they are disqualified from God's grace because they believe, "There is no such thing as a gay Christian." In distancing ourselves from those who

identify as gay Christians who adhere to the historic beliefs of the Church, and the descriptive language they use, we perpetuate a confusion that has eternal consequences.

Given this dilemma, it is imperative for us, the writers, to present what we believe to be a helpful way for the Church to explain the work of entire sanctification that speaks to the culture in an understandable way yet does not diminish the beliefs of the Church, equips all with the tools necessary to break down the language barrier, adequately explains what we mean when we talk about re-orientation as it relates to entire sanctification and homo/bisexual orientation, and reaches the world.

Therefore, we suggest the following:

Entire sanctification is that second work of grace whereby a believer's heart is freed from its natural bent towards selfishness to that of selflessness. Such freedom results in a believer fully empowered to love God and neighbor and to avoid that which is contrary to the law of Christ, which is so properly called sin. This work is preceded by the empowering of the Holy Spirit in response to the obedient faith of a believer as they seek to surrender their whole being to be used in service to God above all else.³⁷

As we hope one can see, using such a definition, while just one

example out of many that could be used to explain the work of entire sanctification in the life of a believer, avoids the pitfalls of re-orientation language historically used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This is beneficial to prevent it from being so easily confused and juxtaposed with the modern language associated with that of homo/bisexual orientation, while still maintaining a proper and thorough definition of the second work of grace.

We believe that such a definition promotes clarity over confusion and avoids compromise.

Having been presented with more unambiguous terminology one can use to describe the work of entire sanctification to today's culture in a way that brings clarity but avoids compromise, one must now come to an understanding of how such a work does not, necessarily, result in a re-orientation of one's sexuality and how that can be a good and useful thing resulting in the glorification of God.

³⁷ This, and further examples found throughout this paper, are examples of conversational statements one could use to explain denominational positions on entire sanctification to make it more understandable to an everyday audience.





ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION, NOT SUPERNATURAL CONVERSION THERAPY

In their book, *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community*, Mark Yarhouse and Olya Zaporozhets deliver a quote by a celibate, gay Christian that we believe best summarizes the experiences of those that are both homo/bisexually oriented and committed to the traditional teachings of the Church on human sexuality as they find themselves within Church communities that lack a proper understanding and language set surrounding a gay orientation as it relates to redemption in Christ.

In a way, it manages to obsess them and makes everything all about you all the time. You know, always makes me the broken one, I'm the one that needs fixing if I'm the one struggling with this. I can't love other people, I can't offer them anything, or I certainly can't serve them in Church or care for other people that might be struggling with divorce or a child abusing drugs or simply depression, and there's just kind of this mentality that keeps—it's like keeping a person on crutches to say that this isn't healed—this broken leg of yours isn't healed until you're straight.³⁸

For so long, the Church has perpetuated a narrative that God will change a person's sexuality from gay to straight if they are “really serious”

about wanting to change, or if they “really believe” or, in our theological stream, they experience the work of entire sanctification.

One of the problems with this narrative is that its claims have no grounding in data or fact. The scientific data available not only shows such a claim to be false, but also the lived experience of deeply committed Christians, ones that are both supportive and unsupportive of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), show this to be accurate as well.

For example, in their highly regarded, ground-breaking study on the ex-gay movement, Mark Yarhouse and Stanton Jones found that,

One could further insist that only Success: Conversion status [Participants who reported change to be successful by experiencing substantial reductions in homosexual attraction and substantial conversion to heterosexual attraction and functioning] represents a successful outcome rigorously construed. By these standards, only 9% of the sample attained success. On the one hand, this outcome refutes any putative claim that sexual orientation is not changeable; on the other hand, this is not an optimistic projection of likelihood of change for one considering that process.³⁹

38 Yarhouse, Mark, and Olya Zaporozhets. 2019. *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective.

39 Jones, Stanton, and Mark Yarhouse. 2011. “A Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously.” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 404–427.

This study ultimately led to the closure of the largest ex-gay ministry umbrella organization, Exodus International, in 2013 with the leader of the organization, Alan Chambers, stating that,

There were several years that I conveniently omitted my ongoing same-sex attractions. I was afraid to share them as readily and easily as I do today. They brought me tremendous shame and I hid them in the hopes they would go away. Looking back, it seems so odd that I thought I could do something to make them stop. Today, however, I accept these feelings as parts of my life that will likely always be there. The days of feeling shame over being human in that way are long over, and I feel free simply accepting myself as my wife and family does. As my friends do. As God does.⁴⁰

That is to say that the person who led the most significant ministry of its kind, promising that change from homosexuality to heterosexuality was possible,⁴¹ stated that after thirty-seven years of ministry and

40 Chambers, Alan. 2013. *I Am Sorry*. June 19. Accessed July 29, 2020. <http://exodusinternational.org/2013/06/i-am-sorry/>.

41 See Appendix 2 for just one example of the claims made by the organization.

experience, such a substantial change was, in fact, overwhelmingly not possible.

Ex-gay ministries did not produce Christians that were no longer gay. Instead, at their best, they produced Christians who no longer would mention their attractions, and at worst, people who were no longer Christian burned out by the unfulfilled promise of a misleading doctrine.

Even Wesleyan-Holiness denominational leaders have not been silent on this topic. For example, in their *Pastoral Perspectives* document we referenced earlier in this paper, the General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene state that, “While we embrace the optimism of grace to transform lives and encourage homosexuals to remain available to God’s transforming grace, the reality is that a transformed sexual orientation is not always the case.”⁴²

And if one thinks that such a stance/belief was “new” when the General Superintendents took it in 2010, one only needs to look back to the beginning of substantial denominational discussions

42 Board of General Superintendents. 2010. *Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality*. Booklet, Kansas City: The Church of the Nazarene.





published within the pages of its periodicals, which began in the 1970s, to an article published in the *Herald of Holiness* that spoke to the condition of what the writer of the article referred to as the “non-practicing homosexual” by stating, a bit harshly, “He may be cursed with a wrong preference for the rest of his life. But if God has forgiven him of his sin and he refrains from engaging in this sin, it is absolutely certain that God can save him, and this homosexual can be a born-again Christian...He is never ‘cured.’ But he can be released!”⁴³

Though it is true that throughout Church history, we find those who claim to have experienced a change in their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual (whose stories we do not deny because we affirm that God can do anything), overwhelming scientific evidence and lived experience of those with a homosexual orientation proves that such a change is rare and not to be expected by believers.

Now, necessary clarification must be made here.

Are we saying that *all* parts (attraction, behavior, and identity) of one’s sexual orientation, as defined above, will/should not evidence change as Christ transforms their

lives? By no means! This is not what we, nor anyone we have mentioned in this paper, is saying.

What we, and the sources mentioned above, are seeking to show is that one should not expect their base *attractions* to change, which is how the term sexual orientation is used in common parlance.⁴⁴

In light of this, are we saying that a gay person should not expect to experience a change in any aspect of their sexual orientation (attraction, behavior, or identity)?

By no means! On the contrary, we believe and preach a Gospel of radical, Spirit-empowered holiness that demands and makes possible a life of sexual integrity for all people—gay, straight, or bisexual.

A change of *behavior* of those homosexually, bisexually, or heterosexually oriented is called for multiple times throughout Scripture⁴⁵ and should be expected.

“But what about the identity portion of that definition?”

It is to this question that the rest of this paper will seek to address clearly.

43 German, Dale. 1979. “Not Gay and Not Right.” *Herald of Holiness*, March 1: 8-9.

44 Cambridge University Press. 2017. Sexual Orientation. April. Accessed July 29, 2020. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/sexual-orientation>.

45 See 1 Corinthians 6:18, Ephesians 5:3, and Colossians 3:5 for just a few examples of such a call.

THE WORK OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION, DEFINED FOR A NEW GENERATION

The writers of this paper suggest that, when speaking to the work of entire sanctification, a definition could be given such as the example below which we believe not only contextualizes and clarifies what is meant when the Church refers to the work of entire sanctification but which also, does so in a non-Scripturally compromising way and avoids the pitfalls of re-orientation language we have addressed in this paper.



Therefore, one could say,

Entire sanctification is that second work of grace whereby a believer's heart is freed from its natural bent towards selfishness to that of selflessness. Such freedom results in a believer fully empowered to love God and neighbor and to avoid that which is contrary to the law of Christ, which is so properly called sin. This work is preceded by the empowering of the Holy Spirit in response to the obedient faith of a believer as they seek to surrender their whole being to be used in service to God above all else.

However, such a work does not imply an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, mistake, or, as even evidenced in the life of Christ,⁴⁶ temptations.

In light of this definition, and given what we have presented thus far in this paper, we must now look at the core issue of the work of this paper which is gay identity label usage in the life of believers—specifically those professing the experience of entire sanctification—especially in response to the objections to such usage presented at the beginning of this paper.

⁴⁶ See Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:11-13, and Luke 4:1-14.



RESPOND TO THE SMALLER ONE. SPEAK TO THE LARGER ONE. DO IT RESPECTFULLY.

As we demonstrated in the introduction of this paper, there is a rising debate within the Church as to whether it is appropriate for a believer to identify as both gay⁴⁷ and Christian.

Within this broader debate, there has risen a much smaller debate among Wesleyan-Holiness adherents⁴⁸ as to whether one of the fruits of entire sanctification

⁴⁷ See footnote 1.

⁴⁸ While a definitive work on the issue within such circles has yet to be written, quite an uproar has been made on social media platforms related to the topic however, to maintain the privacy of such posters and to avoid the possibly of politicizing this paper, we are refraining from giving specific examples within the context of this work but stand ready to give such examples if needed after the release of this paper.

in the life of a believer should be the complete abandonment of such identity labels.

We now focus on the concerns found within this smaller debate, with the belief that by focusing on the more minor, the more significant will, in effect, be addressed.

However, as with any debate about identity, everyone that engages in such debates must remember that people who God profoundly loves, who are daily seeking out answers related to such issues of identity in their own lives, are influenced heavily by the way they see the Church engaged in such debate. It is to the Church that one must give the reminder to be gracious and

incarnational in such discussions; the way She speaks to such matters is often the context within which those in the broader LGBTQ+ community see the most significant examples of Christ— whether they be good examples or bad ones. As Preston Sprinkle states in his phenomenal work, *People to be Loved*, “Words have the power to heal and to hurt, to comfort and to kill, to push someone off the edge of a twenty-story building... Just ask your gay or lesbian friend if they’ve ever been hurt by words hurled at [spoken about] them by other people. And then ask them if those people were Christians.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sprinkle, Preston. 2015. *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.



UNDERSTANDING GAY IDENTITY

While the science is still out as to the causes of same-sex attraction,⁵⁰ one thing is clear, a person's attraction to the same or opposite sex is not a choice that one can make for themselves.

When one discovers, often at an early age, an attraction to members of their same-sex, it sends them on a journey of discovery to figure out what such an attraction means to them in relation to all other aspects of their lives. This process of understanding oneself in relation to all other facets of oneself is often referred to as sexual identity formation/development.⁵¹

Dr. Vivienne Cass further explains the process of sexual identity formation in her well-established book, *A Quick Guide to the Cass Theory of Lesbian & Gay Identity Formation*, when she states:

BOTH the objective and subjective aspects of lesbian and gay identity are developed through a complex process of identity formation. This development can be more

easily understood by tracking six phases or stages of change titled: *identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride* and *identity synthesis*... At each stage an individual may foreclose, or stop the process of identity formation from going any further.⁵²

This process is multifaceted and stressful for anyone undergoing it, but it is even more so for the Christian. For far too long, the Church has lacked the understanding and robust engagement needed with such issues by choosing a more favorable (to the heterosexual Christian) binary model of engagement where sexuality was, and in some parts still is, seen as a choice between two options: those being heterosexual and wrong.

This has resulted in an unnecessary dilemma faced by those navigating such questions of identity as it relates to their faith and, unfortunately, has resulted in many individuals leaving the Church altogether.⁵³ Instead of producing entirely sanctified

disciples, the Church has produced a Gospel overly focused on answering an extra-Biblical⁵⁴ question.

Even those charged with helping the Church understand such identity formation have,⁵⁵ until recently,⁵⁶ propagated such a binary belief system with the insistence that there is but one choice for the gay Christian: finding one's identity or "script"⁵⁷ in gayness or Christ.

Not only does the gay Christian, who somehow managed to not wind up as a statistic,⁵⁸ find themselves at the end of the spear of the Church's constant critiques, or suggestions as some might venture to call them, but also, they find that spear is propped up on years of a false dichotomy that cannot fit neatly into the multifaceted, redemptive story that God is faithfully at work writing in the lives of gay Christians committed to the historic Christian beliefs concerning human sexuality.

50 Whiteway, Eleanor, and Denis Alexander. 2015. "Understanding the Causes of Same-Sex Attraction." *Science & Christian Belief* 17-40.

51 For a further understanding of this see Cass' work referenced in footnote 52.

52 Cass, Vivienne. 2015. *A Quick Guide to the Cass Theory of Lesbian & Gay Identity Formation*. Kindle Edition. Bently: Brightfire Press.

53 Marin, Andrew. 2016. *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.

54 Referring to something found outside of Scripture.

55 Yarhouse, Mark. 2010. *Homosexuality and the Christian*. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers.

56 Yarhouse, Mark, and Olya Zaporozhets. 2019. *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective.

57 Yarhouse, *Homosexuality*, 48-52.

58 Marin, *Us Versus Us*.



THE REDEPTIVE SCRIPT

As the world has become increasingly connected through social media platforms and conferences like Revoice and The Gay Christian Network, numerous, strikingly similar stories have emerged of faithfully committed Christians who, being called by God to do so, have retained both their identity as gay *and* their identity as Christian.

What has emerged is what we shall call, using the terminology we discussed above, the Redemptive Script. These Christians, of which at least a few of the writers of this paper are, identify as gay Christians (often, for clarity's sake as celibate, gay Christians) to be witnesses of God's redemptive work in the world.

They stand as living testimonies of God's grafting abilities for God has a way of redeeming, then grafting in, those that the religious entities of the day find to be unacceptable.

The tax collector,⁵⁹ the demon-possessed,⁶⁰ the eunuch,⁶¹ the child,⁶²

59 See Mark 2:15-17.

60 See Mark 5:1-20.

61 See Matthew 19:12.

62 See Matthew 19:13-15.

the murderer,⁶³ the prostitute,⁶⁴ the one caught in adultery,⁶⁵ the poor,⁶⁶ the disabled,⁶⁷ the leper,⁶⁸ the sick,⁶⁹ the Samaritan,⁷⁰ etc. all stand as witnesses to a God who saves and welcomes in all that call upon God's name.

The Church, at the very least, ought to do the same.

Still, the experience of saved and sanctified gay Christians who are deeply committed to the historic teachings of the Church on the topic of human sexuality, speaks to a Church that is still choosing to exclude those they find unacceptable as they squabble over the words⁷¹ these faithful Christians use to describe themselves instead of showing them off to the world as examples of how God can save and transform lives!

63 See Acts 9:1-19.

64 See Joshua 2.

65 See John 8:1-11.

66 See Luke 6:20.

67 See Luke 14:13-14.

68 See Mark 1:40-45.

69 See Luke 8:43-48.

70 See John 4:4-26.

71 See 2 Timothy 2:14.

Church, why must we continue to turn the Cornerstone⁷² into a stumbling block⁷³ placed in the path of those God has redeemed by demanding they meet extra-Biblical criteria to be found acceptable?

It is time we start living up to the Apostle Paul's call to the Church.

It is time for the Church to "... stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall."⁷⁴

How do we live up to such a high calling?

It starts by making a firm commitment to always answer the question "But What About...?"⁷⁵ with the Scriptural answer "But God..."⁷⁶

72 See Matthew 21:42.

73 See Romans 14:13.

74 Tyndale House Foundation. 1996. "Romans 14:13." In *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.

75 Oxford Dictionary. 2020. *Whataboutism*. Accessed July 30, 2020. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/whataboutism>.

76 Tyndale House Foundation. 1996. "Ephesians 2:1-9." In *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.



THE CHIEF WHATABOUTISM

Spend some time listening to just about any sexual minority within the Church, that both holds to a traditional view of Scripture and publicly identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and you will find that the most common critiques⁷⁷ they hear from fellow Christians regarding their sexuality involve the words they are “allowed” to use to describe their experiences.

Whataboutisms regarding language usage are the ones with which gay Christians most often find themselves feeling compelled to respond, to prove their worthiness to be counted as faithful followers of Christ in the eyes of fellow believers.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For an example of such critiques see those mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

⁷⁸ See for example the sheer number of blogposts written in response to such questions at <https://spiritualfriendship.org/category/identity/>.

The basic refrain of such questions sounds strikingly similar to, “Isn’t identifying as gay, in essence, identifying with sin, and doesn’t such an identification mean you are finding your core identity in something other than Christ?” Those within Wesleyan-Holiness denominations are forced to jump through an added hoop to prove their worthiness: “...especially if you profess the experience of entire sanctification?”

This paper was produced to give a full and proper response to such a critique with the added Wesleyan-Holiness dimension.

EATING THE ELEPHANT

There is an African Proverb that says, “The best way to eat an elephant in your path is to cut him up into little pieces.” This is how we shall respond to the conglomerated critique, “Isn’t identifying as gay, in essence, identifying with sin, and doesn’t such an identification mean you are finding your core identity in something other than Christ especially if you profess the experience of entire sanctification?”

We will do this, we believe, most successfully by breaking the critique down into the following parts:

Part 1: “Isn’t identifying as gay, in essence, identifying with sin?”

Part 2: “Doesn’t such an identification mean you are finding your core identity in something other than Christ?”

Part 3: “...especially if you profess the experience of entire sanctification?”



ISN'T IDENTIFYING AS GAY, IN ESSENCE, IDENTIFYING WITH SIN?

To answer this critique, one must first be reminded of the Wesleyan-Holiness focus of this paper, for, as opposed to those from the reformed and Calvinist traditions who historically believe that unwilled attraction to the same-sex is, in and of itself, sinful⁷⁹ (i.e., concupiscence),⁸⁰ Wesleyans make a distinction between the concepts of sexuality and sensuality as H. Ray Dunning explains in his work *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*:

Sensuality, in the strictest sense, is seeking one's own gratification. The self-gratification brings it directly into connection with the basic sin of egocentricity. Since sexual lust is one of the most graphic instances of how egocentricity manifests itself in the form of self-gratification, it has been the preoccupation of Christian thinkers, and many have mistakenly identified sin with sexuality under the rubric of concupiscence.⁸¹

Therefore, as the General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene put it in their *Pastoral Perspectives* document:

We personally choose to sin and are responsible/accountable to God for the willful choices that we make. [We believe] Sexual orientation is not usually a willful choice. (Can the heterosexual point to a time they chose their sexual orientation?) It is amoral, neither moral nor immoral. Sexual behavior is a moral choice. Scripture clearly addresses homosexual behavior, but does not address homosexual orientation.⁸²

As a result, within a Wesleyan-Holiness framework, the answer to the question raised is, therefore, "No," because simply being attracted to members of one's own sex is not a sin, in and of itself, as such an attraction is not a willful violation of a known law of God.⁸³ As Wesley himself states concerning the nature of sin,

Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God. Therefore, every voluntary breach of the law of love is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly. To strain the matter farther is only to make way for Calvinism. There may be ten thousand wandering thoughts, and

forgetful intervals, without any breach of love, though not without transgressing the Adamic law. But Calvinists would fain confound these together. Let love fill your heart, and it is enough!⁸⁴

Sin begins when one responds to such an attraction in a way that is contrary to the will of God.

Historically, this concept has been a hard one to grasp for many in the Church because for so long the only way the Church has defined the term gay is by speaking not in terms of attraction and orientation but strictly in terms of assumed sexual behavior that one using such an identity label may or may not be engaged.

This is mostly because as the culture's definition of the term gay has evolved,⁸⁵ the Church's has not.

This has led, unfortunately, to some in the Church oversexualizing lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals to the point that they are no longer regarded, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as people to be loved but problems to be solved.⁸⁶

79 For further explanation see Bavinck, Herman. 2008. *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

80 Hipponensis, Augustinus. 1998. "Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans: Book XIV." In *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, edited by R. W. Dyson, 581-633. Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought.

81 Dunning, H. Ray. 1988. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*, 289. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press.

82 Board of General Superintendents. 2010. *Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality*. Booklet, Kansas City: The Church of the Nazarene.

83 Wesley, John. 1853. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 56. Edited by John Emory. Vol. 7. New York: Carlton & Phillips.

84 Wesley, John. 1853. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 56. Edited by John Emory. Vol. 7. New York: Carlton & Phillips.

85 Oxford University Press. 2008. *gay, adj., adv., and n.* June. Accessed June 5, 2020. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77207?rskey=1&isAdvanced=false&print>.

86 Sprinkle, Preston. 2015. *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

DOESN'T SUCH AN IDENTIFICATION MEAN YOU ARE FINDING YOUR CORE IDENTITY IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN CHRIST?

Once again, we see the Church, unfortunately, projecting their assumptions about a community on said community and then forcing that community to prove that its assumptions about them are incorrect.

While unfortunate, such counteracting proof can be found.

What some may find most fascinating about such proof is that even large-scale research performed among those who identify as gay, regardless of adherence to any religion, reveals that the usage of gay identity labels does not correlate with the placement of one's core identity.

For example, a Pew Research Center survey of 1,197 members of the gay community, found that the majority (62%) said that being LGBTQ+ was either not at all, or only somewhat, important to their overall identity.⁸⁷

Further, when looking specifically at those who are gay and Christian, yet hold to the traditional teachings concerning human sexuality, Yarhouse and Zaporozhets, who have conducted the most extensive study of its kind among celibate, gay, Christians state,

Based on our study and research among celibate gay Christians, we see some elements of the

predominant gay script...but we find they do not embrace all of it. Celibate gay Christians speak of deriving some benefit from incorporating aspects of the gay script into their sense of identity, while they clearly reject other elements that reflect sexual permissiveness.⁸⁸

As the Church engages with the gay Christian, She must answer the essential calls to love and listen found in Scripture.

These examples should signal to the reader that in lieu of blanket assumptions extended to those that identify as gay Christians, the Church should begin to become more intentional about listening to those who so publicly refer to both their identities to understand which label holds the most weight as the Church will surely find that more often than not blanket assumptions do not hold up under the weight of understanding.

Thankfully, even the General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene have come to understand such, as exemplified by their ruling concerning clergy candidates sent to districts within the denomination. In the letter, they state that, "...in the case of an individual with same-sex attraction, the primary focus [core identity] of the individual's life should be on their new creation in Christ, and not their sexual identity."⁸⁹

The way we move forward on such an issue is by listening to one another.

As the Church engages with the gay Christian, She must answer the essential calls to love⁹⁰ and listen⁹¹ found in Scripture. Then, and only then, can presuppositions be addressed and deep life-changing relationships formed, out of which often flows a deeper understanding of God's work in the world, leading to the further growth in grace for all parties involved.

One might even find that such gay identity language usage to be the direct result of an individual's entire sanctification experience.

87 Pew Research Center. 2013. *A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times*. Survey, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

88 Yarhouse, Mark, and Olya Zaporozhets. 2019. *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community*, 70. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective.

89 The Board of General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene. 2019. "Board of General Superintendents Ruling Providing Guidelines for Legislation on Human Sexuality." Ruling, Lenexa, 4.

90 See John 13:35.

91 See James 1:19-20.

... ESPECIALLY IF YOU PROFESS THE EXPERIENCE OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?

Beginning around the year 1998 with the work of Bridges Across the Divide,⁹² there has emerged the understanding that there are those within the gay Christian community who, while being deeply committed to the beliefs of the historic Christian tradition concerning human sexuality, desire to be honest with themselves, and those around them, about their on-going experience of attractions to members of their same-sex, while still desiring to emphasize that their commitment, above all else, is to Christ. Their way of doing so is by use of gay identity labels, or in some cases, the phrase same-sex attracted (SSA), when referring to themselves.

Their desire to do so is in no way meant to promote an understanding that they believe that same-sex sexual practice is in line with their Scriptural understanding. They simply desire to be honest.

Such honesty is refreshing, especially to those outside the Church's walls.

Honesty is not a threat to holiness; in fact, it is a mark of it!

Why the need to use such terminology, especially coupled with their identification as a Christian?

For most, it is due to their experience within orientation change

ministries that, as we have previously discussed, encouraged them to lie about their level of orientation change to portray a message to the Church that such a change was/is overwhelmingly possible, when the science, and lived experience, behind such change overwhelmingly states that such a change was/is highly unlikely. This was/is done primarily by asking those who participate(d) in such ministries to either identify as ex-gay Christians or to say they no longer use/used sexual orientation labels.

**Honesty is
not a threat to
holiness; in fact,
it is a mark of it!**

While the use of such terminology has always been known in certain circles of the Church, it has only been recently, with the rise and dramatic growth of the Revoice conference, that this knowledge has come to the forefront. We have already largely discussed such debate in a previous section of this paper, so we will avoid rehashing that debate here.⁹³

What we would like to show the reader is that, given certain circumstances, the use of such language should not be prohibited.

This requires nuance, not compromise.

First, we understand that some gay Christians choose not to use such language for various reasons, and it is not the goal of this paper to suggest they do otherwise, as all must do what they feel, per their Scriptural, doctrinal, and cultural-contextual understandings, is best for their particular situation.

Second, we have already shown that for a majority of those within the LGBTQ+ community, both inside and outside of the Church, the usage of such labels does not represent a statement about their core identity.⁹⁴ For those within the Church, this means that they still find the core of their identity to be "in Christ."⁹⁵

Third, we believe that the current tension and misunderstandings of the use of such language could be alleviated by the call to both love and listen to each other.

The question for those in Wesleyan-Holiness denominations is whether it is appropriate for those who profess the work of entire sanctification to continue to use such language.

We suspect the reason for such a debate is the on-going difference between understandings of whether

⁹² Heineman, Maggie. 1998. *Civility Across the Divide: Trying Not to Push Buttons*. July 1. Accessed July 30, 2020. <https://bridges-across.org/basics/civility-across-the-divide-trying-not-to-push-buttons/>.

⁹³ See footnotes 13-15.

⁹⁴ See footnote 87.

⁹⁵ Refer to Yarhouse, Mark, and Olya Zaporozhets. 2019. *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective.



the work of entire sanctification should eradicate a person's attraction to members of the same sex.

Therefore, the underlying question could be better understood as, "Shouldn't entire sanctification have removed your orientation (often used interchangeably with the terms temptation and attraction) to members of your same-sex?"

To this question, we respond with a resounding, "No."

As we have already shown, the problem here lies with one's lack of distinction between the concepts of sexuality and sensuality.⁹⁶

One way of further understanding such a distinction can be found within the writings of Diane LeClerc in her work *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* when she states

We must be careful to walk a fine line in what follows. On one side is the danger of claiming too much from the doctrine of sanctification and purity of heart. We should never imply that God's ability to purify our intentions reduces sexual temptation. Christ was the purest of all human beings, but he was tempted in every way we are, probably more than we are, for Satan knew his strength. Sexual temptation is complicated because it often produces a strong physiological reaction. The physiological

reaction itself is not sinful. It is only when we choose to act that sin is sin. And yet, on the other side, we do not want to claim too little, especially as Wesleyans. As has been shown throughout this book, we believe that the power of grace is greater than the power of sin. And we believe that God can purify us from guilt and shame and empower us to live righteously even during the greatest temptation. What do we claim then about temptation? Following Scripture, we believe that the Holy Spirit will always provide a way out. If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's power, we can know victory. At the same time, the idea of instantaneous victory over all temptation must be mediated by reality and by a needed discussion....⁹⁷

After reading this, we believe some may still deny it to be accurate and say something along the lines of, "Well, this kind of thinking is modern and not truly Wesleyan-Holiness!" To this statement, we offer evidence that such a belief finds its source within the historic Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.

In his book, *Temptations Peculiar to the Sanctified*, which was published just 20 years after the founding of the Church of the Nazarene, C.W. Ruth, a founding father of the Church of the Nazarene, stated that one of the temptations that the sanctified

96 See footnote 81.

97 LeClerc, Diane. 2010. *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness*. Kindle Edition. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press.

can still experience is that of sexual temptation. He states,

Physical appetites, which are God-given, and wholly innocent, may nevertheless become the avenue of temptation, and the occasion of sin, when indulged and gratified excessively. Hence, the body must be kept under, and every physical appetite be brought into subjection, lest the tempter gain an advantage over us. While eating necessary food is God-ordained and absolutely legitimate and necessary, nevertheless, eating that which is known to be injurious, or eating too much and thus becoming gluttonous, is to yield to temptation, and become guilty of sin. While there is no sin in the body – no sin in matter – the body may nevertheless become the occasion and the instrument of sin. “Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body’ (1 Cor. 6: 18). Thus the married, and the unmarried, may sin against the body by forbidden or excessive indulgence of fleshly appetites. Hence the injunction, ‘As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity into iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness’ (Rom. 6: 19).⁹⁸

98 Ruth, C.W. 1928. *Temptations Peculiar to the Sanctified*, 37-38. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House.

Even after this, we believe there will still be ones who say, “Well, this kind of thinking is certainly not Wesleyan!” To them, we give the words of Wesley himself from his question and answer section of his definitive work *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* when he responds to the question, “However, what you call temptation, I call the corruption of my heart. And how will you distinguish one from the other?”⁹⁹

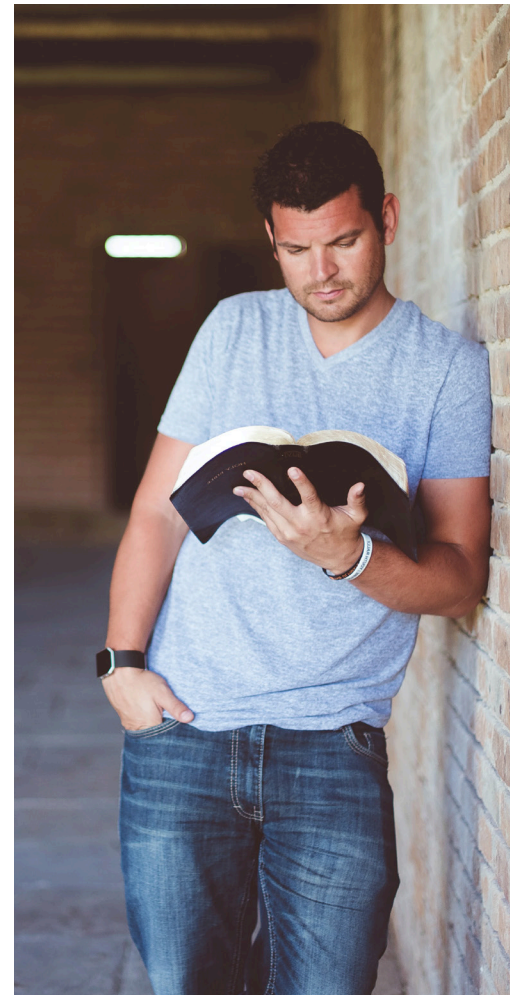
In some cases it is impossible to distinguish, without the direct witness of the Spirit. But in general one may distinguish thus: —One commends me. Here is a temptation to pride. But instantly my soul is humbled before God. And I feel no pride; of which I am as sure, as that pride is not humility. A man strikes me. Here is a temptation to anger. But my heart overflows with love. And I feel no anger at all; of which I can be as sure, as that love and anger are not the same. A woman solicits me. Here is a temptation to lust. But in the instant I shrink back. And I feel no desire or lust at all; of which I can be as sure, as that my hand is cold or hot. Thus it is, if I am tempted by a present object; and it is just the same, if; when it is absent, the devil recalls a commendation, an injury, or a woman, to my mind. In the instant the soul repels the temptation, and remains

99 Wesley, John. 1844. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 33. New York: G. Lane & P. P. Sandford

filled with pure love. And the difference is still plainer, when I compare my present state with my past, wherein I felt temptation and corruption too.¹⁰⁰

With that, we hope we have established for the reader that the work of entire sanctification does not release one from their humanness with its basic cravings, including in the context of this paper, sexual ones. Yet, it enables them to be victorious over temptations arising out of the appeals to such cravings from the enemy.

100 Wesley, *Plain Account*, 33.



By using precise terminology common to the culture and their Christianity, these ones are... providing hope to those who think there is no place for them in the kingdom of God.



We know, inevitably, that there will be those who, in light of all that we have written thus far, will still say, “Yes, but you still shouldn’t identify as a gay Christian when you are not only saved but also sanctified, because hyphenating your Christianity confuses people and makes them think you’re saying something you aren’t.”

To these, we simply offer an invitation to sit and listen to those who find themselves to be not only gay in sexual identity/orientation but Christian first and foremost, yet who also profoundly believe in the teachings of the historic Christian tradition concerning human sexuality.

When they do, we believe they will find what Yarhouse and Zaporozhets did when they studied the lives of these particular siblings in Christ and see, with them, the “Outward Witness to Contemporary Culture”¹⁰¹ that these ones embody, instead of the confusion some currently insist they portray.

The countercultural witness of the Christian faith has not been clear and evident in recent years. We raise this point to highlight the radical, countercultural nature of the commitment gay Christians make in living

celibate. As they embrace the path of costly obedience, their lives naturally attract attention and raise questions. Alex shared the following: ‘A major benefit [of gay Christian celibacy] is being a challenge to society. It’s just something that’s very radical. The fact that you’re not getting married, the fact that you’re not having sex . . . celibacy is a very countercultural thing. Living against the grain of culture.’ Charles, another interviewee, agreed: ‘I feel like our story can shout back to that world, like, ‘Actually, life isn’t about being happy. Life is about glorifying God and making much in him, and when we do that, we actually find a deep, deep joy which is way more powerful and way more satisfying than any sort of happiness.’ And also, ‘Christ is enough.’¹⁰²

By using precise terminology common to the culture and their Christianity, these ones are being the very witnesses they are called to be to the very ends of the earth¹⁰³ and providing hope to those who think there is no place for them in the kingdom of God.

¹⁰¹ Yarhouse, Mark, and Olya Zaporozhets. 2019. *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate, Gay Christian Community*, 202. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective.

¹⁰² Yarhouse. *Costly Obedience*, 202–203.

¹⁰³ See Acts 1:8

BUT WHAT IF...?

We know, however, that there will still be ones within Wesleyan-Holiness circles who will abandon doctrine, nix nuance, and say, “Well, I still believe it’s a sin, and the Bible says we shouldn’t identify with sin, so I don’t think it’s appropriate to identify like that!”

To these beloved siblings in Christ, we open the pages of Scripture and offer them the Apostle Paul as an example.

After writing multiple letters and towards the end of his life,¹⁰⁴ the Apostle sits down to write a letter to Timothy. In that letter, he says, “This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all.”¹⁰⁵

To this verse, the vast majority of those within Wesleyan-Holiness circles would surely agree that the Apostle, here, was in no way implying that he was, in fact, still a practicing sinner, although our siblings in the reformed and Calvinist traditions might.

Yet, Paul calls himself the chief among sinners!

Not an ex-sinner.

Not someone who has struggled with the temptation to sin.

Not even as a non-practicing sinner, but a sinner with no added

104 Blue Letter Bible. n.d. *Acts and the Epistles Chronology*. Accessed July 31, 2020. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/pnt/pnt02.cfm>.

105 Tyndale House Foundation. 1996. “1 Timothy 1:15.” In *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.

clarifying words attached to it.

Why did he do such a thing?

It was a statement of faith, intended to say to/show the Church, “If God can save even me, then God will certainly save you.” or to use the phrase we used earlier, “But God...!”

As David Ackerman puts it in the *New Beacon Bible Commentary*...

Curiously, Paul uses the present tense I am (*eimi ego*). Although he had experienced the mercy of Christ, he continued to live in humble dependence on Christ (1 Cor 15:9, Eph 3:5), Salvation was a present, on-going experience for him. He had no overwhelming sense of guilt. Nor did he continue to struggle with sin. But he possessed ‘an abiding sense of being a forgiven sinner’ (Mounce 2000, 56). ‘He recognized himself as always having the status of ‘sinner redeemed’ (Fee 1988, 53).¹⁰⁶

106 Ackerman, David. 2016. *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 88. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press.

The same man who wrote about our identity in Christ,¹⁰⁷ putting off the old self,¹⁰⁸ and how we are no longer Jew nor Greek in Christ Jesus¹⁰⁹ had no problem carrying the identity of a sinner to proclaim the continuing power of Christ in the present reality.

He was not hyphenating his Christianity.

He was not identifying with his former self to confuse people.

He was not finding the core of his identity in things other than Christ.

He was not even trying to make people believe he was still actively sinning.

He was faithful to the call of Christ to be a witness to even the very ends of the earth.¹¹⁰

Therefore, even if one does believe that someone identifying as gay is identifying with sin, they must at least stop to ask for what purpose the person uses such a label.

107 See Romans 8:17.

108 See Ephesians 4:22.

109 See Galatians 3:2.

110 See Acts 1:8.



Entire sanctification is that second work of grace whereby which a believer's heart is freed from its natural bent towards selfishness to that of selflessness.

So now we finish the task we started earlier in this work, that being the resourcing of the Wesleyan-Holiness Church to define the experience of entire sanctification as it relates to the usage of gay identity labels, by offering them a way of speaking that breaks down the language barrier that exists between itself and the world.

Therefore, we recommend,

Entire sanctification is that second work of grace whereby which a believer's heart is freed from its natural bent towards selfishness to that of selflessness. Such freedom results in a believer fully empowered to love God and neighbor and to avoid that which is contrary to the law of Christ, which is so properly called sin. This work is preceded by the empowering of the Holy Spirit in response to the obedient faith of a believer as they seek to surrender their whole

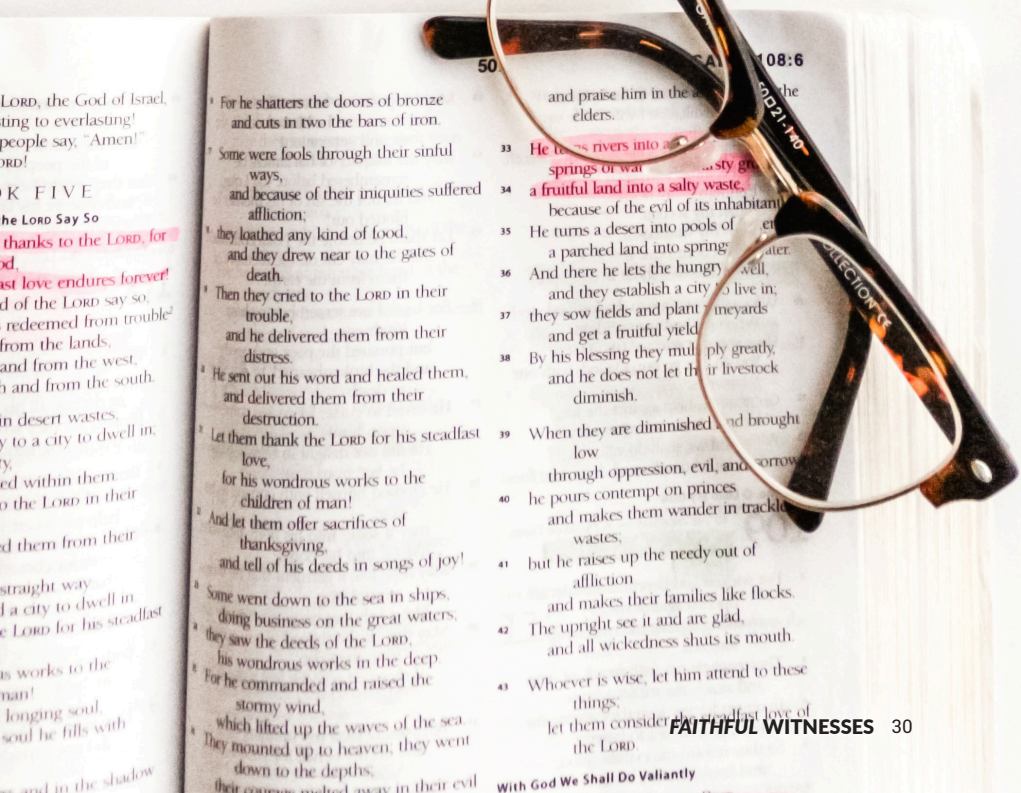
being to be used in service to God above all else.

However, such a work does not imply an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, mistake, or, as even evidenced in the life of Christ, temptations.

Therefore, an individual, regardless of their sexual orientation, should take care at every stage of their lives, lived under the rule and reign of Christ, to always be observant of the ways they speak of themselves, especially as it relates to their sexuality, in an effort to be both clear and faithful witnesses of their entire devotion to Christ and His kingdom.

If one is faithful to such a calling, then they will surely find that they will continually grow to, "Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands."¹¹¹

111 Tyndale House Foundation. 1996. "Deuteronomy 7:9." In *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.



WITNESSES IN WAR ZONES

For too long, the Church has looked like the culture around it: at war.

Such on-going battles have robbed the Church of its ability to witness to the availability of Christ's transforming work.

To be clear witnesses, She has trampled over Her own, falsely believing that they were the cause of Her diminished witness.

Such action was the pathway by which wider doors were erected not for people to come and see but go and leave, and they continue to leave at an alarming rate.¹¹²

What we, the writers, have sought to accomplish in this paper is not only to provide a particular case for the usage of gay identity labels among the entirely sanctified, but to offer the Church an understanding of what has gone wrong and how it can be fixed.

112 Barna Group Organization. 2020. *Tracking the Growth and Decline of Religious Segments: The Rise of Atheism*. January 14. Accessed August 1, 2020. <https://www.barna.com/rise-of-atheism/>.

We understand that some will walk away from this paper and see it as unhelpful and either too conservative or too liberal, and to them, and you, we offer nothing more than our unconditional and non-judgmental love.

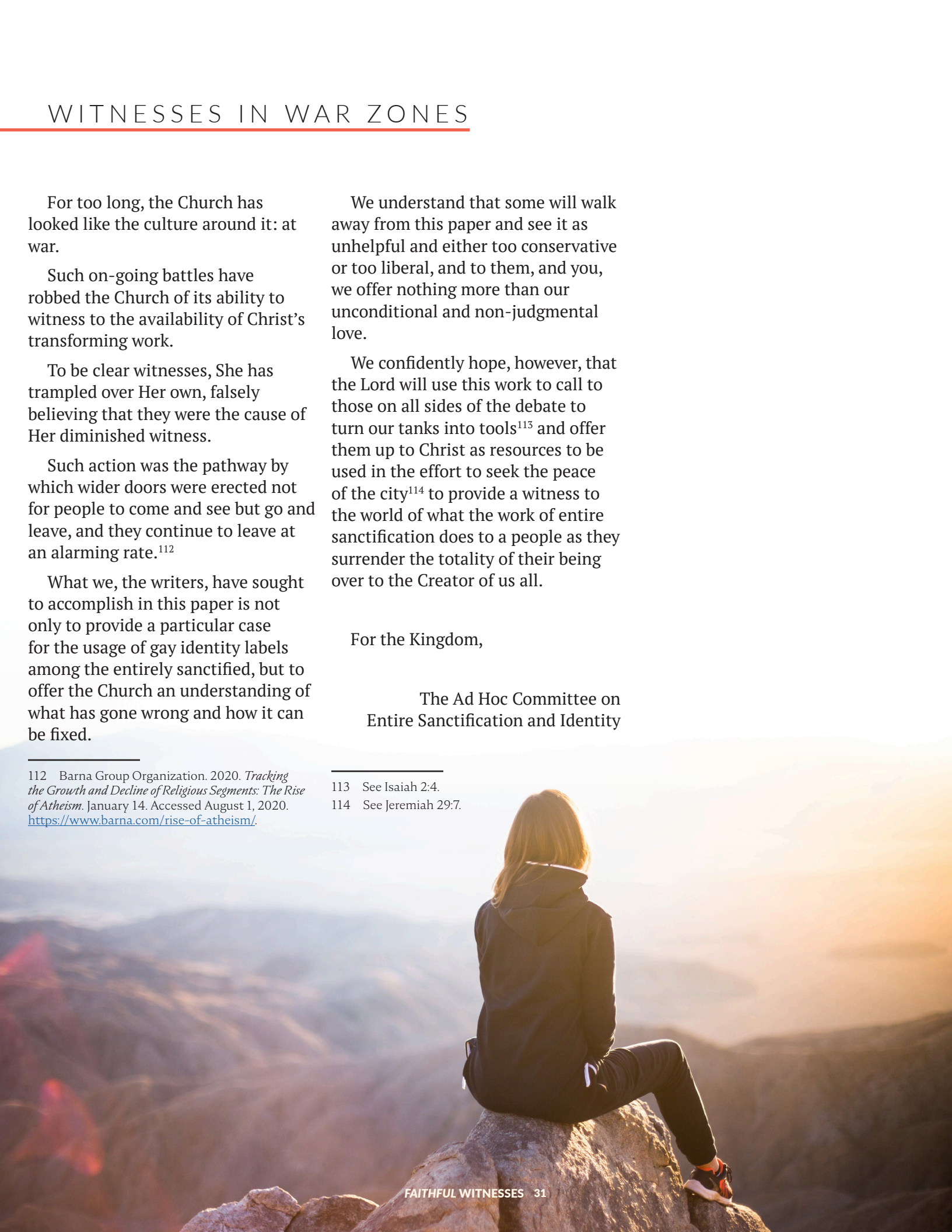
We confidently hope, however, that the Lord will use this work to call to those on all sides of the debate to turn our tanks into tools¹¹³ and offer them up to Christ as resources to be used in the effort to seek the peace of the city¹¹⁴ to provide a witness to the world of what the work of entire sanctification does to a people as they surrender the totality of their being over to the Creator of us all.

For the Kingdom,

The Ad Hoc Committee on
Entire Sanctification and Identity

113 See Isaiah 2:4.

114 See Jeremiah 29:7.



APPENDIX 1

The following is an amalgamated definition of Entire Sanctification as composed by non-Wesleyan adherents who had no working knowledge of the term before completing the work based on the survey responses of 400+ Global Church of the Nazarene members/regular attenders.

Entire Sanctification is a term used in the Wesleyan Christian tradition to describe the lifelong process that a

Christian goes through in which they are transformed by God, through the Holy Spirit, to become more and more Christlike in their love of God and neighbor. This is a second work of grace after salvation in which the individual has surrendered their life entirely to God's will and, as a result, no longer desires sin, although believers still choose to sin at times.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Mason, Bekah, and Laura Mascarenhas. 2020. *Entire Sanctification Language Survey*. Survey, Kansas City: SurveyMonkey.

APPENDIX 2



Finley, J. n.d. Associated Press. Our Eulogy for Exodus International.

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RESPONSE BY REV. TIMOTHY CRUTHER, PhD

Words matter. How we use words matters. Words alone do not change reality, but they are the handles we use with other people to take hold of reality in order to change it. They are also the handles we use to take hold of our identity and to articulate our place in that reality. They can evoke great emotion and stir us to action, and they can evoke great fear and leave us helpless. Words are some of the most powerful tools human beings have ever invented, which makes discussions about the use of words both extremely important and extremely difficult. Nowhere is that more true than in discussions about words related to sexual identity in the church.

“Faithful Witnesses: A Wesleyan-Holiness Position Paper on Gay Identity and Entire Sanctification” by The Ad Hoc Committee on Entire Sanctification and Identity, commissioned by Love Wins.: LGBT (a ministry of Trinity Family Midtown Church of the Nazarene in Kansas City, MO) is both an invitation to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and a challenge. The paper offers an invitation to think about how we use the word “gay” in reference to the LGBTQ+ tradition, but it also challenges the way most people within that tradition have used the word in the past. According to the authors of the paper, this challenge is designed to help the church pursue a broader understanding of the word “gay” that could then lead to a broader sense of mission toward those who self-identify with it.

To put it as briefly as possible, the paper explores whether the phrase “gay Christian” is—or can be—a meaningful identity expression for people who experience both same-sex attraction (SSA) and the saving power of Christ. The basic argument is that the word “gay” is—or can be—used as a synonym for the biological reality of SSA and need not imply either sexual activity or an identification with any cultural or political agenda. If that is so, then the phrase “gay Christian” can be used sensibly and helpfully by and for those who experience SSA without implying either sin or an identity that is irreconcilable with the pursuit of entire sanctification.

To begin with, the authors of the paper are scrupulously careful to configure their invitation and challenge within the explicit doctrinal and behavioral norms articulated by the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene and its subsequent interpretation by the Board of General Superintendents. The paper explores how we talk; it is not aimed at changing what we believe. Its goals are modest, reasonable, and articulated with an irenic spirit. Within a discussion that is so often driven by high emotions and prejudices from all sides, that is a refreshing change. Whether or not readers accept the proposals offered in the paper, they can appreciate the sincerity and charity with which the paper is offered.

Furthermore, it is a worthy goal to articulate the difference between sexual activity or sexual identity and

the biological realities that may drive them, a goal entirely in line with the *Pastoral Perspectives* document released by the Board of General Superintendents in 2010.¹ So often in the history of the church, confusions and conflicts arise because of the imprecise use of words, as evidenced by early discussions over the doctrine of Trinity or Reformation discussions about faith. Those who seek to help the church clarify its terminology—whether or not the church ends up accepting their proposals—have always helped the church think more clearly, speak more precisely, and act more coherently. This paper clearly aspires to that end.

The relationship between sexual identity and biology is still a matter of debate, but it is difficult to deny that there is some biological component to homosexuality, as the Board of General Superintendents themselves affirm.² Now, to the extent that discussions of homosexuality are discussions about biological realities, whatever they may be, they are not yet moral discussions. Biological statements are statements about physical facts, not transcendent values. Theoretically, then, there should be a way for someone who experiences any biological reality to articulate it to another person who has not experienced that reality in a way that does not immediately invoke judgment or condemnation. Most of us would recognize how uncharitable or rude it would be if someone were

to say, “I have cancer,” and another were to respond by saying, “Serves you right because you were sinning by smoking!” Or suppose someone says, “I have diabetes,” and our response is, “That’s what you get for being such a glutton!” In the same way, creating the terminological space for someone to say, “I am sexually attracted to those of the same sex as me,” without immediately invoking an accusation of sin is a worthy pastoral goal.

Biology is also an inescapable facet of identity. People with similar biology tend to experience the world in similar ways, and those realities do not often change even if entire sanctification radically reorients one’s life toward Christ. There are advantages and disadvantages to biological realities like height or right- or left-handedness, and people who share those things can easily feel a sense of connection with others who also share them, whether that means complaining about the lack of left-handed desks at school or sharing the satisfaction of being able to slam dunk a basketball. Similarly, two young men who experience SSA but are committed to sexual purity might sympathize with each other over how awkward church camp can be. God often allows even inconvenient biological realities to remain a part of a sanctified believer’s life because, as God told Paul concerning his “thorn in the flesh,” “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9, NRSV). Identifying and labeling those realities in ways that can be shared with others is important. The only question is whether or not the phrase “gay Christian” can do that effectively, given how the term would

be heard both by those inside and outside the church.

Throughout the paper, the phrase “gay Christian” is explicitly used as a short-hand for “celibate, gay Christian.” This introduces a connotation to the word “gay” that is not necessarily shared by all who would use that word. While one is always free to stipulate definitions in order to make arguments, it is another matter altogether how one’s words are heard by those who do not care for careful definitions. True, if the phrase “gay Christian” only implies “celibate Christian experiencing same-sex attraction,” then “gay Christian” is no more a contradiction than “left-handed Christian” or “diabetic Christian.” However, it is not clear that that is how the phrase would be heard either by those who believe homosexual activity is sinful or by those who wholeheartedly embrace a homosexual lifestyle. Saying that that is what the phrase *should* mean does not guarantee that people will hear it that way.

The claim of the paper—articulated by a careful definition from the Institute of Medicine Committee of the National Institutes of Health—is that the word “gay” is regularly used to refer to orientations and not just activity or identity. If the world is comfortable using the word that way, so the argument goes, the church should be, too. Since our moral discussions come in at the point of activity and identity, someone could identify as a “gay Christian,” meaning a Christian sexually attracted to members of the same sex, without implying that one was acting on

1 Board of General Superintendents. 2010. *Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality*. Booklet, Kansas City: The Church of the Nazarene.

2 Board of General Superintendents, *Pastoral Perspectives*.

that orientation or expressing solidarity with others who experience something similar.

The problem is that newspapers and churches and rallies and water-cooler conversations are not usually governed by the rules of careful definition. In any given context, one cannot know in advance whether one's hearers, be they inside or outside the church, are those who make careful distinctions between orientation, activity, and identity or those who lump all those things together. Since the goal of the paper is clarity over confusion, it would be counterproductive to encourage the use of the phrase "gay Christian" in all contexts when it might as easily create misunderstandings as bridges or connections. Can the phrase be used sensibly when contextualized the way it is in the paper? Yes. Will enough people inside and outside the church sufficiently understand that context so that the phrase is a useful one? That remains to be seen. That said, the most charitable response to this problem may be this: "Go ahead and try it and see if it works. If it creates bridges of understanding, so much the better. But if it creates confusion, perhaps you should seek clearer alternatives to articulate the realities that concern you."

There is an additional concern when using the phrase "gay Christian" without sufficient context, and that has to do with the relationship between identity and activity. On one level, we use adjectives along with the word "Christian" all the time. We may talk about an American Christian or an Evangelical Christian or a Black Christian. In these and other cases,

we understand such phrases to refer to "layered identities," with Christian being the core identity but the other descriptor saying something about an additional identity layered on top of the Christian identity. So long as the other identity does not encourage activities or offer behaviors that are in conflict with a Christian identity, we rarely fuss about this. However, when the identities do come into conflict, we need to find ways to articulate the primacy of Christian behaviors over "American behaviors" or "Evangelical behaviors." And so sincere, patriotic American Christians might have to say explicitly, "I'm a Christian first, and an American second, and if I have to choose, I will follow Jesus rather than Uncle Sam." Such identity conflicts may be painful and may even cause significant cognitive dissonance for some people, but there are clear ways to handle them.

Can the same be said for the phrase "gay Christian"? Are there activities encouraged or behaviors offered by the "gay" identity that are not in conflict with the Christian identity, at least if one accepts--as the authors of the paper explicitly do--that homosexual activity falls outside of the boundary lines around Christian activity? Identities that do not shape behavior are not identities at all, so one cannot say, "I'm gay, but that has no impact on what I do." If the layered identity "gay Christian" is to make sense, then those who own the label should be able to articulate the activities and behaviors that this identity offers that do not conflict with the core Christian identity. That articulation goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it nevertheless would

need to be a part of future discussions on the topic.

It might be possible to articulate a "gay" identity in ways that do not entail immoral sexual expression, and people who identify as "gay" may, indeed, feel those to be much more important than the sex of the person one is romantically attracted to. Even so, the "gay Christian" will have to recognize that--rightly or wrongly--the primary interpretation by heterosexuals of the identity "gay" layered on top of the identity "Christian" is going to be sexual in nature. However, if that interpretation is prejudicial or unfair, then perhaps using the phrase "gay Christian" would, indeed, open the door to better conversations about those layered identities in ways that would mutually inform those who identify as "gay" and those who do not of their different perspectives and experiences. Those are likely to be difficult and awkward conversations, but sometimes those are the kind of conversations we need most.

That conversation, however, is likely to be one internal to the church, but it is the external conversation that seems to drive this paper more. According to the authors of this paper, allowing the use of the phrase "gay Christian" would open the doors of the church to those who experience SSA without compromising the church's moral stands. After all, someone who experiences SSA but is told there is no such thing as a "gay Christian" is not going to feel welcome in church. That much is likely to be true. However, if a non-Christian who experiences SSA hears the phrase "gay Christian"

positively endorsed, he or she is also likely to hear that the church affirms the validity of his or her sexual activity. When they find out that this is false, whatever door the phrase opened is likely to be slammed shut. If mission is the central concern—and that is how it should be—then some deeper, more careful consideration should be given to making sure the phrase “gay Christian” is heard only in the senses that the authors of this paper intend.

To that extent, this paper represents a work in progress, a beginning much more than an ending—and that is entirely appropriate for anything that calls itself a “position paper.” More than anything else, this position paper is a plea to be heard from people in the church who often feel unheard. Whether we begin from a place of empathy or suspicion, it is always a loving thing to listen. Those who do not experience SSA cannot evaluate how well certain words articulate that experience any more than someone who is blind can evaluate

the effectiveness of words about color. If those who have committed themselves to Christ and are pursuing entire sanctification want to use the word “gay” to articulate their experience of SSA, then it seems charitable to listen to their experiments with that language.

The rest of us can raise questions and point out potential pitfalls about such language. We can be alert to confusions and ask for clarifications. We can filter back to our conversation partners what we heard to make sure that that is what was intended to say. All of this is how we play the role of good conversation partners, and that is now what this conversation needs. By listening and responding with clarity and charity, we cannot help but make progress in our understanding and show the world how followers of Christ solve their differences. And that in and of itself will contribute to the mission that drives this paper, whether or not we find the common ground that the paper seeks.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Entire Sanctification and Identity | Commissioned by: Love Wins. : LGBT, A ministry of Trinity Family Midtown Church of the Nazarene



FAITHFUL WITNESSES