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SINS

HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE LIGHT
OF GOD'S TRUTH

Scott I. Barefoot and Richard D. Starr

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INTRODUCTION

In 1983, when I first wrote a paper on the topic of homosexuality, I was a young pastor trying to start a home mission in northwest Columbus, Ohio. I had had my first encounter with an actively gay man who was interested in joining my mission church but was not interested in leaving the gay lifestyle. As I sought help for dealing with that particular situation, I found there was precious little in our circles written on the topic. In fact, there were very few written resources on the subject at all that were true to Scripture. Then I, together with about 250 other participants, attended a seminar on human sexuality at a local Lutheran seminary, hoping for some insight. An elderly African-American Baptist minister, an older Roman Catholic nun, and I were the only three participants at the seminar who stood up for what the Bible says on the subject of practicing homosexuality. I realized then that I was not going to get any help from outside sources.

I suggested to the steering committee of my pastoral conference that someone should write a paper on the subject of homosexuality. I reasoned that we hadn't had much instruction at the seminary on how to deal with those trapped in that sin, and it was painfully obvious to me that we were going to be dealing with that sin more and more. The committee assigned the paper to me.

After I delivered the paper at a meeting of the conference, my pastoral colleagues kindly suggested that it should be sent to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to be available in the library so that other pastors might benefit from it. They also resolved that the conference should send the paper to Northwestern Publishing House for consideration as a book.

Northwestern Publishing House requested that I expand the paper and write it for a general audience, not just for pastors. In 1987, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Homosexuality—A Biblical and Modern*

Perspective was published by Northwestern Publishing House. Eventually the book went out of print. However, over the years I continued to receive requests for a copy of the book or for advice on how to deal with a situation involving a gay parishioner, family member, or friend.

A few years ago, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Conference of Presidents requested that I write a Bible study on the topic of homosexuality. That Bible study, *Deadly Desires*, was published by Northwestern Publishing House in 2008. It includes student lessons, a leader's guide, and a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson, all on a CD. At the time of this writing, it is still available from Northwestern Publishing House.

During the time I was writing the Bible study, a young man from Virginia, Scott Barefoot, contacted me. He had been given a copy of *Speaking the Unspeakable* by a pastor, and after reading it, he wanted to thank me for helping him put so much of his life in perspective with God's Word. Through numerous telephone conversations and e-mails, Scott shared his life story with me.

As I completed each lesson of the Bible study *Deadly Desires*, I field-tested it at my own congregation in Bay City, Michigan, and also shared it with Scott. He was excited about the Bible study because he saw in it exactly what is needed for dealing with the sin of homosexuality (or any sin, for that matter). God's law is presented clearly and emphatically, leaving no room for "spin" by so-called gay Christians. God's gospel is presented with love and compassion, giving the motivation and the power for change. Eventually Scott himself presented that Bible study to a group of Christians in his area.

For some time, Northwestern Publishing House has wanted me to write an update of *Speaking the Unspeakable*. My long-suffering editor, Ray Schumacher, has had tremendous patience with me in completing the task. I had found the assignment difficult to carry out because I really didn't feel that there was anything new to be said on the subject. Yes, society and other Christian churches have become more tolerant, accepting, and supportive of homosexuality. However, the way to deal with that has not changed, because God's

Word does not change. Therefore, what I had written in *Speaking the Unspeakable* had not changed. I needed to find a new approach.

That is where my friend Scott Barefoot fulfilled a need. He was willing to share his life's journey into and out of the gay lifestyle. He would do so in six installments. Each installment would correspond to a chapter in the book. After each installment of Scott's journey, I would elaborate on a lesson from the Bible study *Deadly Desires* and apply the Word of God to that part of Scott's journey. In addition to teaching the Bible study in Virginia, Scott also made several presentations about his journey out of the gay lifestyle to pastors and lay leaders in Wisconsin and Michigan. Scott wrote a feature article on the subject for *Forward in Christ*, a monthly periodical of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. These were extremely courageous efforts on his part. The book you are holding in your hand is the result of our combined efforts.

It is our most sincere desire and prayer that if you are struggling with the temptation of practicing homosexuality, you will find Scott's journey inspiring as you receive power through the Word of God to overcome that temptation. If you are a relative, friend, or fellow church family member of someone struggling with or trapped in homosexuality, it is our most sincere desire and prayer that this book will help you find God-pleasing ways to help that person overcome the temptation or to leave the gay lifestyle.

Please note that while you will find very practical advice, both from someone who has personally lived through the struggle and from a parish pastor trained in the original languages of the Bible, you will not find a quick and easy cure-all, silver bullet, or magic formula to "cure" homosexuality. There is no cure for homosexuality other than the one cure for any and all sin: Holy Spirit-worked faith in the forgiveness of our Savior Jesus Christ.

God bless your use of this book.

—Pastor Richard D. Starr,
redeemed child of God

WHY A BOOK ON HOMOSEXUALITY?

SCOTT'S JOURNEY

Part 1: The Slippery Slope to “the Fall”

I grew up during the 1980s in what is considered rural northern Virginia, a place called Fauquier County. It's “horse country,” about 60 miles southwest of Washington, DC. While it is so close to the “big city,” to my way of thinking it was still pretty far removed from it and very much a small town. My family and I had to drive 30 to 40 minutes to get to church, the nearest shopping mall, movie theatres, etc.

By all accounts I had a very sheltered upbringing. I was baptized as an infant in a local Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation, and years later I was confirmed in the local Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod church. Back then there was no such thing as the Internet, or even affordable home personal computers. (In fact, I was one of the first proud owners of an Atari video game system.)

From as far back as I can remember, but especially in junior and senior high school, I was always in awe of the good-looking guys in my school. I consciously tried to befriend them, tried to emulate them, and spent most of my time and effort trying to get close to them. The odd thing was, while I was always a bit self-consciously awkward, I was considered by many girls to be a good catch with my blond hair, blue eyes, and decent looks. Back then there was no physical or sexual component to my feelings about other boys. There was just a desire to be part of the “in crowd” with the rest of the guys. At the outset, I don't think my feelings and desires were much different from those of other boys my age.

As I progressed through high school, I recognized that the other boys' attentions had begun to turn toward girls. It became a badge of honor

to date one cute girl or another. I remember that that wasn't as important to me. I continued to just enjoy and seek the companionship and friendship of the good-looking and popular guys, the ones I had always sought friendship with.

By the time I reached my junior, and especially my senior, year of high school, I began to sense that there was "trouble in River City." Most guys were either dating or actively seeking to date girls. GIRLS? I continued to have absolutely no physical attraction to girls. I found them to be great friends, but friends were all I had ever considered them to be. I never had any thoughts like, Wow, I'd really like to date or get to first base with that girl!

Instead I began to think such things as, What would it be like to get to first base with my friend Mike? However, there was never a conscious point at which I thought, I don't feel an attraction to girls. I'd rather be attracted to and pursue guys instead. That never occurred.

This is difficult for me to explain to male acquaintances who grew up feeling an automatic attraction to girls. It's not something they ever had to think about. It just was. It happened. It was second nature for them. That was never the case for me.

As I began to connect the dots about my sexuality, I knew my feelings and attractions were different from most and that they seemed to be more focused on other guys. I knew there were people who were said to be "gay." But other than hearing in church that being gay was a sin, I didn't know a whole lot about that subculture. Growing up out in the country as I did, about the only exposure I had to gay people was the news coverage about the annual gay pride events in Washington, DC. Of course, when it came to that sort of television coverage, I only saw pictures and images of the most outrageous looking and outrageously dressed people in gay pride parades. These were the guys dressed as women or wearing obnoxious outfits—barely clad, wearing leather gear, tattooed and pierced, etc.

Growing up in the WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), a church body that faithfully teaches and practices God's Word, I knew very well what God says about homosexuality. But I believed I couldn't resist having these sinful attractions and feelings.

In high school my feelings indirectly affected my social interactions. I immersed myself in extracurricular activities such as the marching band. At the age of 15, I volunteered for my hometown rescue squad. I attended night vocational classes and, by the time I was 16, obtained my emergency medical technician certification. Other kids my age were heavily into the high school social scene and were hanging out together after school, attending parties, dating, and so on. But I skipped all of that. Instead, most days after school and most Friday and Saturday nights, I'd head over to the rescue squad.

I think there were a couple of reasons for this. The first was that I knew I was different in my feelings and attractions and didn't really fit in with the regular high school social scene. Working was sort of an excuse for me. When invited to parties, to go to movies, to just hang out, etc., I had a ready-made and legitimate excuse not to participate: I had commitments at the rescue squad. Also, in the back of my mind, I knew my thoughts and attractions were not God-pleasing. So, with warped rationalization I believed I could balance out the bad by immersing myself in good, that is, volunteering my time to help my fellow man. What more noble and good activity could I have chosen to become involved in? I'm sure most parents of teenagers would love to have their teenager involved in such activities instead of becoming involved in some of the idle mischief that many teenagers get into.

Then it was off to college. I was accepted by and opted to attend George Mason University (GMU) in Fairfax, Virginia. Even though GMU wasn't more than a 40-minute drive from my home, I got my parents to agree to pay for me to live on campus. I very easily could have commuted to and from college classes, but I wanted to get the "full college experience." And probably even more important to me — some FREEDOM!

This was really where my slide into embracing the sin of homosexuality took off. I took advantage of the liberal college campus life to further investigate homosexuality. I remember that there was actually a Gay and Lesbian Student Alliance club that met regularly on campus in one of the student unions. While I never had the nerve to actually attend one of the meetings, I recall sort of casing the meetings. I would make a point to linger in the student union, in the vicinity of the meetings,

so I could get a glimpse of some of the folks who were attending. I was curious to see and possibly meet someone who was openly gay. To my disappointment, the group's meetings were sparsely attended (probably no more than five or six people attended—maybe five very masculine lesbians and one very oddly dressed and extremely effeminate guy). So I quickly gave up on that avenue.

As it turned out, I came into contact with an RA (dormitory resident advisor) named Eric, whose room was next to mine. He was a very handsome looking and masculine guy. Our paths happened to cross multiple times in the course of a typical week on campus. I remember he had piercing blue eyes that rivaled my own, and we often found ourselves maintaining eye contact for much longer than two straight guys normally would. Being an RA, he was an upperclassman, and I was, of course, a lowly freshman. One day when I was in the library, he made a point of coming over and sitting beside me at a table while I was studying. He introduced himself to me and started making small talk. I remember that my heart started racing and I was filled with an indescribable excitement. I couldn't begin to tell you what we talked about, but we both rambled on for hours. While the conversation itself was forgettable, I do remember that our eye contact never broke during this time. That seems to be where it began. For those of you who have never experienced homosexual tendencies, if you want to try to relate, just substitute one of your first high school or college "crushes" of the opposite sex for this guy, Eric. That was what it was like for me.

After that meeting Eric and I quickly became best friends. We'd always make a point of eating meals together and studying at the library together. These were typical friend activities, but all the while there was this distinctive and mutual below-the-surface physical attraction. I can't adequately describe it in words, but there was just a mutual feeling (as he'd later admit to me) that there was more between us than just a regular guy-guy friendship.

Allow me to interject a few words about what was going on in my spiritual life. From the time I entered college, I subconsciously began to distance myself from God and the church. One of the freedoms that I began to take advantage of was the freedom from parental control. I found convenient reasons for skipping church on a regular basis.

At the time, I saw God and church as something I was required to participate in by my parents while living at home. Of course, subconsciously, attending church and hearing God's Word were the source of my feelings of guilt when it came to my attractions to other guys. The less I attended church, the less "dirty" I felt about having these attractions.

This led to what eventually happened with Eric and me. After months of close friendship, he invited me to go home with him for a weekend when his parents were out of town. That was the point where our friendship progressed to physical intimacy. I found it both exhilarating and "dirty" at the same time. This is where I really have a tough time putting my experience into words, but I believe it is important. I've long felt and said that throughout the decade when I was living that sinful lifestyle, I always had a sense in the back of my mind that what I was doing was a sin. This first sexual experience with Eric was typical of every subsequent sexual encounter I'd have with other guys. There was this exhilaration and profound physical arousal leading up to the sexual act. But then after the climax, I couldn't help but feel an extreme letdown and sense of shame.

After that sexual experience with Eric, he and I distanced ourselves from each other. We went back to school and never again looked at each other in the same way. We never spoke of the incident.

Some would say, "Well, you did it once and it didn't turn out the way you thought, so it should have been easy at that point for you to stop." Well, that's easier said than done.

After college when I was truly out on my own—working a full-time job, living on my own, and supporting myself—I reached the point where those physical yearnings for other guys began to take over again. This time I started searching out places where adult gay people met and congregated. I searched for and found the hub of the gay community in Washington, DC. When I talk about the hub, I'm referring to the bars and restaurants where gay people meet and congregate in public.

There I found my eyes pleasantly opened. I've mentioned how turned-off I was at the sight of some of the people in the news coverage of the gay pride parades and other events. To my amazement, when I had

the courage to venture into the city to one of those gay bars, I found myself surrounded by hundreds of good-looking, run-of-the-mill, masculine-acting guys like myself! I was shocked that the extremely effeminate looking and acting guys actually made up a very small minority of the guys that I saw at this gay bar. Wow! Here were other gay guys that I could actually relate to! These were guys like myself. If I had seen them walking down the street or in a shopping mall, I would have had no clue they were gay. That was it for me; I was hooked. I became even more blown away when one of the guys I met at this gay bar invited me to visit his church, where other gay people went and where the pastor himself was gay! I was in utter shock and amazement. Was it possible that I had been duped all of those years growing up? Could it be that God really has no condemnation for homosexuality after all? Were these feelings of guilt I had experienced all those years completely misplaced?

A TIMELY TOPIC

“Why a book on homosexuality? Isn't it a cut-and-dried issue in the Scriptures? Besides, homosexuality deals with a very small portion of society. Certainly no one I know would ever be involved in such a thing!” said a longtime member of the church, uncomfortable with even discussing the topic.

“I need help with these desires I'm experiencing. For so long I've been sure that no other Christian has such feelings. For so long I've been sure that no other Christian would understand what I feel. For so long I've felt so alone, so confused, so dirty,” lamented a member of the church who for years, like Scott, had attended the church's Sunday school, elementary school, and youth group.

“I sure hope this study gives me the answers I need to change the views on homosexuality of my friend/relative/child/spouse. It just breaks my heart to know that he/she thinks being gay is okay. Yet every time I bring up the subject, I'm the one accused of being judgmental, unloving, and non-Christian. Help!” cry concerned Christians looking for answers but erroneously taking on themselves the work of the Holy Spirit.

You may be thinking some of these thoughts. At any rate, for some reason you've picked up this book and have started reading it. It may be out of simple curiosity. It may be that you're just looking for some information on a subject about which you know very little. It may be that you are greatly troubled because of your feelings and actions. Regardless of your motivation, let me ask you a question or two before going any further. Think about your answers carefully and be honest—you are the only one who will know how you answered, but you may not be the only one who will benefit from those answers or from this book.

What would you do if your son or daughter, nephew or niece, or even your spouse suddenly told you that he or she was gay? How would you respond to Scott, whom you just met in the opening pages of this book? Scott is a very real person who is sharing his true story with you. What if Scott were to move next door to you, come to you for counseling, or join your congregation? Would you recoil from him in revulsion, pretend he didn't exist, or even tell him to "get out and stay out" until he changed his ways? Is that what you would do with your son or daughter, nephew or niece, or even your spouse, who confessed to you that he or she was gay?

If you are at all aware of the world around you, you know that all of society is currently affected by homosexuality. There is a relentless full-court press on us not only to tolerate the practice of homosexuality but to accept it as a normal lifestyle. This pressure comes from the media, from unbelievers who want nothing to do with "right-wing Christian morality," and from those who claim to be Christian believers but who want to change God's Word to make it more palatable for our sinful natures, so as not to offend sinners. You can see that this was happening to Scott with disastrous results as he slid further and further down that slippery slope into accepting homosexuality as normal, natural, and acceptable for a practicing Christian. We Christians need to study God's Word to help keep us from becoming desensitized to the sin of practicing homosexuality. That is one of the purposes of this book.

Like Scott, you may be one of those who are struggling every day with desires you know are wrong. You may be tempted to believe all that you hear from society about those desires. You may give in

at times to those desires. But after you do, you realize your sin, repent, ask for forgiveness and strength, and receive those blessings. Yet the desires come back and you fall again . . . and again . . . and again. When will it ever end? You may ask, “Why doesn’t God take these desires away from me? Why doesn’t he help?” One of the purposes of this book is to help you see how God wants to help you every day.

You may be appalled, confused, and frustrated by a friend’s or relative’s desire to engage in homosexual activity. You may feel helpless, not knowing which way to turn but desperately wanting to help the person. You may think that if you just say the right words, your loved one will see the light and change his or her behavior. Remember that changing a person’s heart is the work of the Holy Spirit; we are not equipped to do that. However, there are ways to approach and help a person struggling with the sin of practicing homosexuality. One of the purposes of this book is to help you learn what you can do.

Of course, the church has always been a formidable force in keeping homosexuality in check. But that too is changing. This change is being led by seminary professors and the clergy. “I am a child of God, a man, a homosexual, a Christian, a Lutheran—in that order—and I am a husband committed to my wife, who knows I’m gay.” The author of this statement was a 33-year-old Lutheran minister serving a Midwestern parish. Although this pro-homosexual trend is currently changing for many Christians—including Lutherans—by God’s grace, such is not the case for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Homosexuality is a subject that demands the attention of every concerned Bible-believing person today. It won’t simply go away, and it would be wrong (although convenient) to ignore it. We all must be prepared to respond in an appropriate and Christian manner to the person, like Scott, caught in the sin of homosexuality.

DEFINING HOMOSEXUALITY

The dictionary defines *homosexual* in this way: “of, relating to, or exhibiting sexual desire toward a member of one’s own sex.” For

our purposes, we will add *behavior* in addition to *desire*. *Homosexuality* refers to overt sexual relations or emotional attachment involving sexual attraction between individuals—male or female—of the same sex. Certainly *homosexual* does not describe a person's physical appearance or mannerisms. Effeminate traits in a man or masculine traits in a woman do not identify either as homosexual. Scott explained how he was actually turned off by guys who displayed effeminate characteristics, but was greatly attracted to masculine guys who looked and acted straight. He was surprised and pleased to learn that there were gay guys, like him, who did not appear gay to others.

We know that God did not create Adam and Eve to be homosexual. God's plan is for human beings to be heterosexual. He created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. We read in Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." The sin of homosexuality has undoubtedly been present in this world for a very long time. It can be found in the history of almost every land and culture. While sin has been with us since the fall and the sin of homosexuality has been with us since early on—it was not from the very start of things. After his work of creation, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God does not consider homosexuality "very good."

In the following Bible passages, God tells us exactly how he feels about homosexuality. In Leviticus 18:22,24 God says, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled." Later in Leviticus 20:13 God says, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." The New Testament is just as clear and straightforward in its blanket condemnation of the sin of homosexuality. We read in Romans 1:26,27, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men

committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” This passage speaks explicitly against both lesbianism and homosexuality. Homosexuality is listed among other damning sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” In all these passages, God teaches us that homosexuality is a sin—and God hates all sin. He also warns, in very strong terms, that anyone who persists in the practice of homosexuality is under his condemnation. Of course, this is true of anyone who persists in any unrepented sin. This is the truth that must be proclaimed to every unrepentant sinner.

When you read Scott’s account of his fall into living the sinful lifestyle of a practicing homosexual, you can feel his conflict and anguish. He knew what he was doing was wrong. He was attracted to it and then repulsed by it. He didn’t understand the desires, but he knew they were there and he knew he had acted on them. The apostle Paul understood that conflict and anguish over sin. He wrote about his personal struggles with overcoming sin, both sinful desires and behavior:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:15-24)

St. Paul struggled mightily with conflicting desires because he was, as Luther was fond of saying, both sinner and saint. So is every Christian. Every Christian experiences the conflict between the desire to do God's will and the desire to satisfy his or her own flesh. The Christian who is struggling with homosexuality, like Scott, knows this struggle all too well. However, today that struggling Christian is being told, even by churches, that he or she does not need to struggle with the sin of homosexuality, that being gay is "natural" and "normal." Recall the church Scott was invited to attend, which was served by an openly gay pastor. Churches are telling gays that they can live a God-pleasing life and still practice homosexuality. As we have seen, this is in direct contradiction of God's clear Word.

In light of St. Paul's struggle with conflicting desires and our own struggles with the temptation to sin, we should offer loving counsel and support to the person who is struggling with homosexual desires. That does not mean we condone sin or offer excuses for it. However, far too often the church and Christians have offered only condemnation and rejection instead of help and support to brothers and sisters who struggle against and sometimes fall into the sin of homosexuality. This is due to the fact that for most people, homosexuality is an unnatural sin (Romans 1:26,27). For most people, this is a desire with which they cannot identify because they are not tempted by it. The sin of homosexuality is not "natural"; it is "unnatural." For that reason, many Christians are more repulsed by that sin than, for example, the sins of adultery and gossip; sins with which they have been tempted and for which they may feel more empathy.

You may not be tempted by the sin of homosexuality. Thank God for that blessing! But all sin damns, and as St. Paul stated so beautifully, there is only one solution for sin: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). St. Paul found strength for his struggle with conflicting desires in Jesus Christ our Lord. We, and all Christians struggling with deadly desires—including Scott—find our forgiveness, our comfort, and our strength only in our Savior Jesus Christ.