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Can Homosexuals Really Change? A Christian Response to Dan Savage

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Dan Savage, no stranger to controversy, thinks he has found a “clincher” argument on the question of homosexuality. Writing in Friday’s edition of *The New York Times*, Savage mentions the lead characters in the movie, *Brokeback Mountain*. Savage’s argument is that evangelical Christians should abandon the idea that homosexual men can “go straight” and assume normal heterosexual identities. His argument makes slight mention of actor Chad Allen and the controversy over his role in the film, *End of the Spear*, but that angle is very indirect.

Instead, his main concern is to undermine the belief that homosexuals can change their sexuality. His “clincher” argument is that not even evangelicals would want their daughters to marry an “ex-gay.” His argument deserves close attention:

This “movement” demands more from gay men than simply playing straight. Once a man can really pass as ex-gay — once he’s got some Dockers, an expired gym membership and a bad haircut — he’s supposed to become, in effect, an ex-gay missionary, reaching out to the hostile gay tribes in such inhospitable places as Chelsea and West Hollywood.

What should really trouble evangelicals, however, is this: even if every gay man became ex-gay tomorrow, there still wouldn’t be an ex-lesbian tomboy out there for every ex-gay cowboy. Instead, millions of straight women would wake up one morning to discover that they had married a Jack or an Ennis. Restaurant hostesses and receptionists at hair salons would be especially vulnerable.

Sometimes I wonder if evangelicals really believe that gay men can go straight. . . . And if anyone reading this believes that gay men can actually become ex-gay men, I have just one question for you: Would you want your daughter to marry one?

Evangelical Christians seem sincere in their desire to help build healthy, lasting marriages. Well, if that’s their goal, encouraging gay men to enter into straight marriages is a peculiar strategy. Every straight marriage that includes a gay husband is one Web-browser-history check away from an ugly divorce.

If anything, supporters of traditional marriage should want gay men out of the heterosexual marriage market entirely. And the best way to do that is to see that we’re safely married off — to each other; not to your daughters.

Now, no one should argue that changing one’s sexual desires is an easy matter. Christians are the people who are supposed to understand this — who know that sexuality is a deeply-rooted part of the human person, including dimensions and desires that are both conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary, chosen and discovered. Sin has corrupted human sexuality just as the Fall corrupted every other aspect of our being. And everyone’s sexuality is fallen — not just that of homosexuals.

Every person comes to discover and know a sexual profile that includes everything from arousal to activity. At some level, this remains a mystery to us all. Christians must understand that those who come to perceive homosexual desires almost surely did not ask for that pattern of sexual interest, though they may well have fueled it at some point in their lives (even very early). We sin against homosexuals when we argue carelessly that this pattern of sexual interest and desire is

simply chosen as an act of the will.

Of course, advocates for the normalization of homosexuality argue for a biological basis of sexual orientation and for the recognition that homosexual desires are normal for a certain percentage of the population. There is no proof of such a biological basis, and studies attempting to claim this have been debunked. Yet, there is something going on here that is deeper than many Christians are willing to admit.

Savage argues that sexual orientation is simply fixed — set at birth or early in life and not subject to change. According to this view, forcing homosexuals to change is a form of abuse, flying in the face of an unchangeable fact of nature. When society forces Jack and Ennis into sham and tragic heterosexual marriages, it simply compounds the problem and spreads the pain.

Dan Savage has done us a favor by writing this article, and The New York Times has helped us by publishing it. We need the reminder that sin is just as sinful as it looks — and more. We need to remember the deceitfulness of sin, and its ability to imprison us. We need to be reminded that this is true for all humanity, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike.

We need to be reminded that sexual desires (call them an orientation, profile, or whatever) are deeply rooted in our own sexual selves, with some parts consciously known to us and other parts unknown. We need to be reminded that the sin of homosexuality seems especially (though not uniquely) prone to hold its victims in bondage.

But, beyond all this, we really need to be reminded that we really *do* believe that the Gospel can and will completely transform sinners, and that the Holy Spirit does perform His work of sanctification within the life of the believer. And this means that we really do believe that homosexuals *can* come out of the sin of homosexuality by God's power.

This does not mean that they may not struggle with homosexual desires and temptations. The same is also true for those who come out of other patterns of bondage to sin. But we do believe that they can be made whole in Christ.

We do not underestimate the power of sexual sin or the bondage of unbiblical sexual "lifestyles." Indeed, we acknowledge the incredible power of these enslavements and desires. In fact, we know of only *one* power greater — and that is the redeeming and transforming grace of our Lord.

Take it from the Apostle Paul: *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* [1 Corinthians 6:9-11]

Thanks Dan, we needed this reminder.

