

THE DOCTRINE OF CONCUPISCENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

A Report by the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

2022

On 2 July 2021, the following resolution from the Standing Committee (dated 21 June 2021) was forwarded to the Doctrine Commission:

‘Standing Committee asks the Doctrine Commission to prepare a report on the doctrine of concupiscence and its relevance to the experience of same-sex attraction.’

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Standing Committee has asked the Diocesan Doctrine Commission to produce a report on the doctrine of concupiscence and to reflect on the relevance of the doctrine to the experience of same-sex attraction. We understand ‘same-sex attraction’ in this reference to mean the experience of same-sex *sexual* attraction, rather than the elemental human experience of enjoying non-sexual intimacy (e.g., friendship or companionship) with those of our own sex. For this reason, throughout this report we will use the extended phrase *same-sex sexual attraction* to avoid any misunderstanding.
- 1.2. The aim of this report is to provide greater clarity on what God has revealed about the nature and relationship of sin, temptation and desire that might assist in pastoral responses to one of the most contentious issues facing the Christian churches at this moment. How can Christians think and speak truthfully, clearly, and compassionately about desire and temptation in a way that does not condone or encourage sin? How can churches welcome people from all backgrounds and with all kinds of brokenness and introduce them to the Saviour who meets us where we are but loves us too much to leave us where we are? How does discipleship work in the context of a world that characterises all attempts to challenge sin as oppressive and cruel? In short, how do we address this topic in a way that demonstrates, in both matter and manner, the grace of the gospel and the goodness of God?
- 1.3. The Christian doctrine of concupiscence arises from the teaching of the Bible. The doctrine has been expounded and debated for much of Christian history and is the subject of one of the 39 Articles (Article 9). Like all doctrine, the doctrine of concupiscence is connected: to our understanding of God, human life as it was created, the tactics of the devil, the work of the Spirit, the impact of the cross and the resurrection life, and the intercession of Christ our high priest and advocate before the Father. By dealing with the doctrine first, to some degree in isolation from the context into which we hope to apply our conclusions, we will be more confident that what we bring to that context is actually well-grounded, and not simply a matter of personal or corporate preference.

- 1.4. As the Doctrine Commission we are acutely aware of the sensitivities surrounding this discussion. Godly men and women continue to struggle with same-sex sexual attraction, aware of the Bible's teaching against same-sex sexual activity, yet aware too that a desire for sexual intimacy with someone of the same sex is real and powerful in their lives. For those who choose not to define themselves by this desire nor to surrender to it, there is often great difficulty and distress. For this reason, moving too quickly from the first part of the Standing Committee's reference to the second risks riding roughshod over very significant pastoral issues. Yet not to move from theological reflection about desire, temptation, and sin to the application of this reflection to Christian discipleship in the confused moment in which we live, would likewise be irresponsible. On the one hand, our pastoral approaches must be theologically driven, rather than the other way around; on the other hand, our theology must be lived and liveable, which must mean allowing the God who gives and sustains life to direct our thinking.
- 1.5. We are very aware of the limits of our work as a Doctrine Commission. Our responsibility is to expound the theology upon which pastoral judgments will be made, not to attempt to provide pastoral guidelines or to canvas the myriad of specific circumstances. Determining how we walk faithfully at this moment is a collaborative exercise, involving the Doctrine Commission and other groups, such as the Social Issues Committee. Most important of all, it will involve the prayerful engagement of the local congregations.

2. The language and meaning of concupiscence

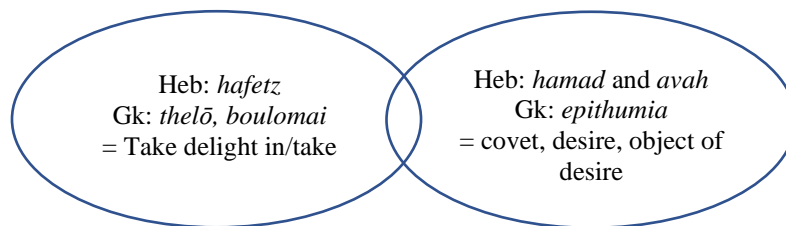
- 2.1. The language of *concupiscence* derives from the Latin *concupiscentia* (which is a compound of *con* = 'with,' *cupi(d)* = 'desiring,' and *escere* = 'the beginning of a process or state') and bears the general meaning of 'an ardent, usually sensual, longing.' So understood, it often had a morally neutral use in classical philosophy. In theological discussion, however, it has come to refer to the human inclination toward sin, which is part of the inheritance of original sin. Concupiscence, then, is that which gives rise to 'the passions of the flesh' or 'the desires of the body and the mind' (Eph 2:3).
- 2.2. Historically, concupiscence has been one way of translating the Greek word *epithumia*, which occurs 38 times in the New Testament. Consequently, *concupiscentia* appears many times in the Vulgate. In terms of English translations, there are nine occurrences of *concupiscence* in the Douay-Rheims Bible (Wis 4:12; Rom 7:7-8; Col 3:5; Jas 1:14-15; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 2:17) and three occurrences in the King James Bible (Rom 7:8; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:5). Contemporary versions routinely translate *epithumia* by 'passion' or 'desire.'

3. The biblical basis of the doctrine of concupiscence

- 3.1. The biblical data for an understanding of concupiscence is part of the teaching of Scripture on sin, its nature as rebellion against God, and its pervasiveness as understood by the terms *total depravity* and *original sin*. The focus in what follows will be on what the biblical material says about how desire relates to sin, and particularly if desire *is* sinful (concupiscence).

- 3.2. Before looking at some significant texts, it will be helpful to look more generally at the words used in Scripture to denote desire. The Bible uses two sets of word groups to describe two different senses of ‘desire’ – desire as a *disposition* (i.e., that which one finds desirable, that which is pleasing, that which one delights in) and desire as a *drive* (i.e., lust, passion, longing, greed, covetousness etc).
- 3.3. The key Hebrew root for the first word group is translated ‘delight in, take pleasure in,’ and is typically translated in the LXX with words from two stems, which both mean ‘to want, to wish, to will.’ It is occasionally translated ‘desire,’ in the sense of what is delighted in.¹
- 3.4. The two key Hebrew roots for the second word group are translated ‘covet, desire,’ and are typically translated in the LXX with words from a stem which is normally rendered ‘desire, covet, object of desire.’
- 3.5. While the two senses of desire can and should be distinguished from each other (because of the discrete terminology generally used for each), there is also a small degree of semantic overlap.² This can be represented by the following diagram:

DIAGRAM: TWO SENSES OF DESIRE:



- 3.6. Narrowing the scope of the investigation to the *epithumia* word group, we can observe the following. In the Greek Old Testament (the LXX), the word family is used more often positively or in a neutral way than negatively (e.g., Prov 21:20, Ps 106:24; Hos 9:16; Deut 21:21; 2 Chr 8:6; Ps 10:17, 21:2; 103:5). The negative uses, when they occur, are dependent upon context rather than the word alone (Num 11:4, Pss 78:39-40; 112:20, Jer 2:24). In the New Testament, the word is used more frequently in the negative sense, often exploring the corruption of desire due to sin and the nature of some desire as sinful. This suggests that in both testaments sinful desires can and do exist but not all that is labelled desire is necessarily sinful.³ As already noted, the New Testament tends to focus more on the negative uses and some significant examples of these will now be explored.

¹ In the ESV, the verb *hafetz* is translated ‘delight’ 34 times and ‘please/pleased/pleasure’ 17 times. There are only 7 instances (out of 73) in the ESV where it is translated ‘desire’ – 1 Kgs 9:1, Job 13:3, Job 21:14, Job 33:32, Ps 73:25, Jer 42:22, Hos 6:6.

² This small degree of semantic overlap can be seen when the Hebrew word normally translated ‘delight’ is translated with the Greek word for covet/desire (e.g., Isa 58:2) or occasions where the Hebrew words normally translated covet/desire are translated using words other than the Greek word translated covet/desire (Gen 3:6, Job 23:13).

³ In the Old Testament, positive and neutral uses include Prov 21:20, Ps 106:24; Hos 9:16; Deut 21:21; 2Chron 8:6; Ps 10:17, 21:2; 103:5 and negative uses include Num 11:4, Ps 78:39-40; 112:20, Jer 2:24. In the New Testament, positive and neutral uses include Phil 1:23; Lk 22:15, Mark 4:19, Rev 18:14 and negative uses include Gal 5:24, 1 Tim 6:9; 1 Pet 1:14.

Jesus' teaching

- 3.7. Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:28, that 'everyone who looks at a woman *with lustful intent* [*pros to epithumēsai*] has already committed adultery with her in his heart,' demonstrates that an internal desire can be sinful even without an external action. Jesus also explains that the evils that come out of a person's heart are what defile them (Mark 7:17-23). Paul reinforces this teaching in Romans 5–8.

Romans 5–8

- 3.8. In Romans 5–8, Paul explores the implications of the justifying work of Jesus Christ presented in chapters 1–4. In Romans 5:12-21, he asserts the surpassing greatness of Christ's action in the light of the catastrophic consequences of Adam's original transgression. In doing so, he shows that sin cannot simply be defined as individual voluntary acts. He explores humanity's descent into a universally pervasive sinful state as evidenced by the fact that all die (5:12). While the question of how exactly the one act affects the many remains a point of discussion, it is clear that humanity's inheritance from Adam includes both a propensity to sin and original guilt.
- 3.9. In Romans 6, Paul outlines the liberation the Christian person experiences with respect to sin because of their union with Christ, while also acknowledging the ongoing battle against sin and its effects via the exhortation to not let sin reign in your mortal body (Rom 6:12-13, 19).
- 3.10. In Romans 7, Paul seeks to dissuade a possible return to law-keeping to guarantee what has been given through faith in Christ. Paul asserts that the believer has been put to death in relation to the law through their union with Christ to live in the new way of the Spirit (vv 4-7). However, Paul labours to show that this is not because the law is sin (v 7). Rather, he defends the law's goodness by showing its important role in exposing sin, not causing it (vv 7-12). He uses the commandment regarding coveting as his example (v 7). Paul's point is that the law enabled him to know that his inner desire to possess was in fact a transgression of God's law. By using the only commandment that '*explicitly* refers to the desires of one's heart rather than merely to outward actions,'⁴ Paul (like Jesus) makes clear that the root of sin lies in the desire to do that which is contrary to God's will.
- 3.11. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul speaks of humanity's impotence with respect to sin. The fleshy 'I' vividly struggles yet is rendered powerless to understand its actions or control them in any way. The issues in establishing the identity of the 'I' in Romans 7:14-25 are well-known and complex. At its core, the debate revolves around whether Paul is describing regenerate Christian experience or some other experience (e.g., Israel under the law, unregenerate humanity). The issue is that if the I's identity is a believer, how could Paul be so pessimistic about the power of sin in their life? Are Christians simply powerless in the face of their desires, coveting and passions?
- 3.12. Recent work on Romans 7 in the context of chapters 5–8 suggests that Paul is describing a transfer of the believer from one dominion to another through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. At the same time, an ongoing

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 368. Emphasis original.

solidarity with Adam is also a reality to be reckoned with (cf. 6:12, 19). ‘The body is the place of ἐπιθυμῖαι [desires] and, therefore, remains a constant, willing ally of sin. And it is characterised as weak “flesh”, lacking the self-generative capacity for obedience.’⁵ Thus, Romans 7 establishes an anthropological phenomenon where believers lack the ability to fully carry out the new life in Christ because of their continuing solidarity with Adam (cf. 5:12-21). He explains: ‘The incongruity, a contrast between the condition *intrinsic* to believers and the new life possessed *extrinsically* in Christ, is the context in which we are able to situate ἐγώ’s [I’s] confession of this condition in Romans 7:14-25.’⁶ The passage is about the condition of all human beings, who experience this fleshiness, but this passage is told by a Christian. Thus, it is best understood as describing the Christian’s experience of being fallen. However, as Paul will go on to explain in Romans 8, this is not the whole of Christian experience.

- 3.13. In Romans 8:1-2, Paul declares, ‘Therefore, no condemnation *now* exists for those in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.’ Believers do participate in the new life in the Spirit *in the present*, even though they clearly will not fully participate in this until the resurrection and redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23). Until then, their Adamic nature will persist and continue to give rise to desires of the flesh. These desires are produced by sin and are counted as sin. They thus generate a tension in the believer and a call ‘to put to death the deeds of the body’ (Rom 8:13; cf. Gal 5:16-26).

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

- 3.14. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul explores the relationship between temptation and sin as he warns his readers not to provoke the Lord by participating in practices not pleasing to the Lord. Being a ‘desirer of evil’ (v 6) is at the heart of this.
- 3.15. In verses 1-10, examples are drawn from Israel’s history to illustrate. In response to the four blessings bestowed upon Israel, a general statement of God’s displeasure and consequent judgement ensues (vv 1-5) because the generation referred to desired evil things in the face of God’s blessing. This scenario is a warning to the Corinthian readers (v 6) not to fall prey to idolatry, sexual immorality, testing Christ, and grumbling (vv 7-10).
- 3.16. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul brings things to a head by warning his readers about spiritual overconfidence. Verse 13 then offers a note of comfort by pointing to the faithfulness of God who provides a way out in the context of temptation.
- 3.17. While the specific focus is idolatry, the preceding examples from Israel’s past broaden the range of temptations faced. The explanatory statement of verse 6 suggests an inward focus to temptation, springing from misplaced desire. However, the observation that God ‘will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear’ and the final verb in verse 13 (endure, bear up under – cf. 2 Tim 3:11;

⁵ Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the ‘I’ in Its Literary Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 202.

⁶ Timmins, *Romans 7*, 202.

1 Pet 2:19) suggest that there is also an external or situational dimension to the temptation.

- 3.18. Paul notes that not all the Israelites succumbed with evil desire to the various temptations mentioned ('most of them' in v 5; 'some' is repeated through vv 7-10), and so there are examples of those in Israel who were able to endure or were not tested beyond their strength in the circumstances where others succumbed.
- 3.19. Paul exhorts his readers to holiness by encouraging them with the faithfulness of God, who does not allow temptations to reach irresistible proportions, and also provides a way out for his people (vv 12-13).

James 1:13-16

- 3.20. James 1:13-16 raises the issue of the relationship between desire and sin. The passage occurs in the context of an exhortation to endure trials with the promise of a crown of life for those who love God (v 12). Verse 13 provides a transition to a related thought as James moves to discuss the nature of temptation. He does this by engaging in an imaginary dialogue with a person suggesting that God is tempting them. James emphatically denies this, on the basis of God's goodness and holiness.
- 3.21. In verse 14, James moves to consider temptation and sin from an anthropological perspective. In emphatic fashion, he traces the source of temptation back to the individual ('each,' 'one's own desire') and not to God or anyone else. Imagery is used from the activities of fishing and hunting that describe the manner in which desire operates; it hooks, drags, entices. These associations cast such a negative take on desire that the translation 'sinful desire' (e.g., NIV, CSB) is justified.
- 3.22. In verse 15, the thought continues using the imagery of conception and birth. These desires conceive, sin is born and in turn, brings forth death. The sequence is clear and there is a sense of inevitability in the metaphor.
- 3.23. The inference from James 1 – that temptation inevitably leads to sin – is in apparent tension with Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10, that temptation is not irresistible. However, this tension is resolved by recognising that James' key point is that God is not the source of any temptation (v 13). Verses 14-15 then give *one example* of non-divine temptation – the kind of temptation that arises from sinful desires within us. This example does not cover the field of all sources of temptation; for example, the source of temptation may be the devil (cf. Jas 4:7), or external circumstances. James' key point – that God is not the source of temptation – is not in any way in tension with Paul's key point, which is that God provides us with the means to resist temptation (cf. Jas 1:12). Furthermore, this reading of James and Paul together which recognises that temptation is not itself sin and can be resisted is also consistent with Hebrews 4:15, which tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, and yet was without sin.
- 3.24. While not an exhaustive examination, these passages point to the general New Testament picture where sinful desires are both the wellspring of sinful actions and also have the nature of sin themselves. These passages provided the source for theological reflection on the doctrine of concupiscence in the centuries that followed.

4. The Anglican doctrine of concupiscence

- 4.1. Roman Catholic theology argues that concupiscence arises from sin but is not in itself sinful. According to section 5 of the fifth session of The Council of Trent (1546), concupiscence is ‘of sin’ and ‘inclines to sin,’ but is not ‘properly sin.’
- 4.2. Protestants, by way of contrast, argue that concupiscence is not only of sin and inclines to sin but is sin itself. Behind this lies an understanding of the legacy of the Fall not so much as the forfeiting of a supernatural gift, but as the corrupting of human nature. Thus, according to Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83), concupiscence is ‘an inordinate desire or corrupt inclination, coveting those things which God has forbidden.’⁷ Protestants also stress that there is no aspect or faculty of the human person that is untouched by original sin.
- 4.3. The Thirty-nine Articles (1562) address the matter of concupiscence as part of its dealing with the larger doctrine of original sin in ‘Article IX. *Of Original or Birth Sin*’:

Original sin stands not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusts always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserves God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek *phronema sarkos* (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh), is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath itself the nature of sin.

- 4.4. Here Article IX argues that original sin (and the concupiscence that results from it) has corrupted every aspect of human nature. Concupiscence, therefore, is much more than sexual lust (specifically) or even lust (generally); it is an ‘infection of nature’ that inclines us to evil and refuses to be ‘subject to the law of God.’ As such, it is fully deserving of God’s wrath and damnation. The Article also identifies concupiscence as moral perversity whereby a man turns in on himself and sets himself entirely in opposition to God. As a consequence, ‘the flesh lusts always contrary to the spirit’ (Gal 5:17).
- 4.5. Article IX is clear that concupiscence remains even in the regenerate. Moreover, while this does not disturb the verdict of ‘no condemnation’ for those in Christ, it continues to be the case that ‘concupiscence and lust’ has ‘of itself the nature of sin.’ This explains why the Christian life is one of constant moral and spiritual conflict. It also explains the insistence of Article XVI, that ‘the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism.’ For the fact of the matter, as the Article goes on to explain, is that we who have received the Holy Spirit may

⁷ *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Second American Edition (Columbus: Scott & Bascom, 1852), 606.

both ‘depart from grace given and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again and amend our lives.’

- 4.6. As Thomas Cranmer further outlined in his *Homily of Salvation*, the believer’s ongoing battle with concupiscence highlights why the imputation of the righteousness of Christ is so essential for salvation. For our ‘great infirmity’ (Cranmer’s way of expressing the traditional concept of concupiscence) is such that it guarantees the continuing ‘imperfectness of our own works.’ Righteousness, therefore, is only and ever to be found by faith alone in Christ alone. Consequently, writes Cranmer,

we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues, of faith, hope, charity, and all our other virtues and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient and unperfect, to deserve remission of our sins, and our justification; and therefore we must trust only in God’s mercy.

5. The theological significance of concupiscence

- 5.1. The theological significance of concupiscence in relation to desire in general arises from what the Bible reveals about God’s character and activity as the One who created humanity. The Lord, as creator, does whatever he desires/delights in (Job 23:13; Ps 115:3; Isa 14:27). True to his character, he desires ‘justice and righteousness on the earth’ (Jer 9:24). As the God who makes promises, he desires Zion as his everlasting dwelling place with his people (Ps 68:16; cf. Ps 132:13-14). He delights in truth in the inner being of his people (Ps 51:6) and does not delight in wickedness (Ps 5:4) or in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23). More importantly, there is a perfect correlation between the Lord who delights in the Messiah (Isa 42:1) and the Messiah who ‘delights in the fear of the Lord’ (Isa 11:3). This provides a paradigm for the relationship between divine desire and human desire.
- 5.2. The mutual delight between the Lord and the Messiah is fulfilled in the Gospel accounts of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. Jesus is addressed by the Father at his baptism as ‘my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased’ (Matt 3:17; cf. Luke 3:22). Consequently, the Son responds, confident in the Father’s good pleasure, in praise of the Father for all that has been entrusted to him (Matt 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22). Especially in John’s Gospel we are given wonderful insights into God’s inner life and the way that life is incarnate for humanity in Jesus. The Father loves the Son and shares his honour with the Son (John 5:20, 23). The Son loves the Father and does what he commands (John 14:31). The Father grants to the Son to have life in himself as only he as Father can (John 5:26). The Father also glorifies his Name in the Son as he glorified it in the Exodus (John 12:27). Throughout the Gospel story this dynamic serves as the foundation for the unity and distinction between the desire of God and righteous desire in humanity.
- 5.3. The importance of that unity and distinction in the discussion of concupiscence is revealed as we focus on the experience of the Son in a fallen world. The Bible tells us that the Son came from the Father to us ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom 8:5). Hebrews explains this likeness in the following terms: ‘in every respect [he]

has been tempted as we are, yet without sin' (Heb 4:15). This means he was similarly tempted in all the ways that a member of the church might be. This similarity notwithstanding, he did not sin. While the writer makes a deliberate point of Christ's fellowship in our suffering, it is essential for his substitutionary role that he remains outside the experience of sin, even if he had personal knowledge of human weakness. In the power of the Spirit, the desires of the Son are directed toward the will of the Father, free from concupiscence. Thus, in the state of weakness, he offers up a sinless life in place of all those whose weaknesses led to sin.

- 5.4. Jesus' victory over sin and death creates an entirely new situation for those he has redeemed. As the apostle Paul put it, 'There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1). It is a decisive change: they have been brought from death to life (Eph 2:5). Enabled by the Spirit to confess that 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor 12:3) and to approach God in prayer as our 'Father' (Rom 8:15), they embark on a life of discipleship that is radically different from life outside of Christ. Disciples are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18) and follow in the footsteps of their master (John 10:27; 12:26). Eager to hear his words, they strive to put them into practice. In doing so, they might not avoid the storm, but they are not overwhelmed by it (Matt 7:24-25).
- 5.5. With Jesus, the end has broken into the middle, the last day into the present. Yet the present continues, and a tension between joy at our freedom and frustration at our weakness is a feature of life in this overlap of the ages. The New Testament speaks of a struggle between 'the desires of the flesh' and 'the desires of the Spirit' (Gal 5:17). Yet it is a struggle in which there is an expectation of victory: 'those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' (Gal 5:24). That struggle involves conscious effort, not as a condition of our redemption, but as a consequence of it. Since we are the Lord's redeemed people, we seek to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, 'for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil 2:12-13). We are called to 'put off' or 'put to death' those things which are contrary to the express will of God (Rom 8:13; Eph 4:22; Col 3:5, 9) and to 'put on' Christ and those attitudes, desires and actions that are consistent with him and his character (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27; Col 3:10, 12, 14). Yet this putting off and putting on, sometimes known as mortification and vivification, is not something we can effect on our own. It is the Spirit by whom we put to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).
- 5.6. Christians are therefore not to fall into either defeatism or triumphalism. We are not yet perfect, but we have not been abandoned in our imperfection. We realise that the Fall has impacted every faculty of our being (our minds, wills, affections, as well as our bodies) and that the Christian life is from beginning to end one of both faith and repentance. This infection of human nature is what the Articles describe as concupiscence.
- 5.7. The resurrected Christ stands as both the perfection of human nature in himself (Art. 4) and the promise of a perfected human nature that awaits all those who will be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:4-5; 1 Cor 15:20-23, 49). All of God's covenantal promises find their resounding yes in him (2 Cor 1:20). In the new creation, we will fully and finally live with the righteous fear of God in our hearts, such that we will never again turn from him (Jer 32:41; Ezek 11:19-20).

- 5.8. As those who will then dwell where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13), the concupiscent infection of our human nature will be no more. The old order of sin, death, mourning and pain will have passed away, and God will make everything – including us – new (Rev 21). Resurrected humanity will have a human nature that has been made perfect, just like that of our Saviour. Having been brought from death to eternal life, we shall neither sin nor desire to sin. Instead, we will know the true freedom of living as eschatologically embodied people whose desire, reason and actions have been harmoniously reassocated to God’s gracious will, even as we have been restored to the proper knowledge of him ourselves (Jer 31:33).
- 5.9. Our experience of concupiscence serves to fix our eyes on this grand eschatological horizon secured by Christ and guaranteed through the deposit of the Spirit (2 Cor 5:5). That is to say, the tragic sense of internal turmoil wrought upon us by our concupiscence (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17) is not rightly resolved by a denial of the infection’s existence or a diminishment of its extent but rather by the promise of its eschatological eradication. And so ‘our wish ought to be nothing less than the nonexistence of these very desires, even if the accomplishment of such a wish be not possible in the body of this death.’⁸
- 5.10. It is in recognising the true extent to which sin has corrupted our present human nature that we will all the more glorify Christ for his defeat of it on our behalf (Rom 4:24-25, 5:6-11, 8:1-4). For this reason, we groan all the more with the burden of this earthly body, longing for it to be swallowed up by life and our lowly bodies made like his glorious body (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:1-4; Phil 3:20-21).

6. Concupiscence and the experience of same-sex sexual attraction

- 6.1. As we begin to tease out the implications of the preceding sections of this report for the experience of same-sex sexual attraction, we first need to clarify that concupiscence is not to be particularly equated with sexual desire. As a theological term, it refers to the fallen human inclination toward sin. Furthermore, because this inclination is all-pervasive, concupiscence is a reality across the range of our desires. In that sense, the doctrine of concupiscence is a great leveller. No human being, except Jesus, has escaped the corruption of desire (i.e., concupiscence) that is part of the inheritance of original sin.
- 6.2. The desire which I extend towards a good thing is always corrupted in some way by my sinfulness, but that need not make the *exercise* of that desire sinful. So even though sin corrupts all my desires with selfish motives, it is still good to desire what God desires. In this sense we may speak of ‘good desires,’ not meaning that we desire perfectly, but that we direct our fallen desires appropriately. Wrongly directed desire is, however, always displeasing to God.
- 6.3. Accordingly, same-sex sexual desire is always sinful, inasmuch as it always expresses an inclination toward that which Scripture identifies as sin – i.e., sexual intimacy with a person of the same sex (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:25-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Jude 6-7). However, because many heterosexual desires also

⁸ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 1:30.

express an inclination toward sin (Matt 5:28; 15:19), the doctrine of concupiscence applies to both heterosexual and homosexual sexual desires.

- 6.4. The key distinction is that homosexual desires are *contrary to nature*, whereas heterosexual desires are *according to nature* (Rom 1:26-27). Again, this does not mean that all heterosexual desires are benign. What it does mean is that ‘there are godly ways of expressing heterosexual sexual desires. There are not godly ways of expressing homosexual sexual desires.’⁹ This means that all homosexual sexual desire (or same-sex sexual attraction) has the nature of sin.
- 6.5. Although same-sex sexual attraction is a result of the Fall and a manifestation of concupiscence (and so has the nature of sin), having a propensity for such attractions should not be equated with the commission of *actual sin*. Experiencing temptation is not itself sin – for Jesus, as we have seen, was tempted but did not sin (Heb 4:15). While our temptations (unlike his) often arise from our own fallenness, actual sin only occurs when we fail to resist temptation and allow ourselves to be enticed by our own desires (Jas 1:14-15). Therefore, while we are right to lament our fallen condition, we are not called to repent of temptation but to resist it. Repentance becomes necessary when we yield to temptation.
- 6.6. For this reason, the commonly asked question – Is same-sex sexual attraction sinful? – requires a careful response. The desire for same-sex sexual intimacy is an inclination toward evil, has of itself the nature of sin, and is deserving of God’s wrath (Art. IX). As a result, the Christian person who experiences such desire ought to wish ‘nothing less than the nonexistence of these very desires’ and ‘to assert [their] freedom against it.’¹⁰ However, the propensity to be sexually attracted to someone of the same-sex is not in and of itself *actual sin*. For such a propensity to become a sinful act, it would need to be expressed in actuality, either through lustful intent (Matt 5:28) or sexual activity.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. It has not been the purpose of this report to provide extensive pastoral guidelines for ministry to and among same-sex attracted persons. Nonetheless, the nuanced theological relationship between same-sex sexual attraction, concupiscence and sin outlined herein has a number of important pastoral implications with which we conclude.
- 7.2. Scripture is clear that same-sex sexual desire and same-sex sexual behaviour are contrary to God’s will and contrary to created nature. Given the corrupting effects of original sin, as well as the damage caused by actual sin (both our own and others’), it is not surprising that some of us experience such desires and are tempted to engage in such behaviours.
- 7.3. However, those who have a propensity to be sexually attracted to members of their own sex are not, by mere virtue of this, actively and consistently perpetuating sin

⁹ Sam Allberry, “The Christian Debate over Sexual Identity,” *Desiring God* (July 13, 2018), <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-christian-debate-over-sexual-identity>.

¹⁰ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 1:30; Oliver O’Donovan, “Chastity,” *The Furrow* 36, no. 12 (1985): 731.

in their lives. This propensity is not something that demands repentance but is something to be lamented and from which we seek to be liberated.

- 7.4. Finally, Scripture is clear that all human beings (Jesus excepting) are the recipients of both inherited condemnation and inherited corruption. Consequently, all of our desires, including our heterosexual desires, are affected by the reality of concupiscence. Therefore, no one can claim to be free from sin (Rom 3:10), not in the sexual realm or any other. For this reason, concupiscence, while clearly relevant to same-sex sexual attraction, is not uniquely or especially so. All Christians are called, by the grace of God, to put to death all desires that are contrary to his will and to bring to life the fruits of righteousness. This can only be done by the power of his Spirit who is at work in all believers to conform them to the image of Christ.

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