

# CONVERSION THERAPY AND THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

## INTRODUCTION

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- Conversion therapy has been on the fringe of society for over 100 years. Most people cannot define it or even really understand what it is.
- With over a dozen states and several countries banning the practice, we need to have an understanding of what conversion therapy is, how it aligns or contrasts with what the Bible says and why we should be concerned.
- Homosexuality and transgenderism have been misunderstood over the years, believing that it was a psychological problem, a physiological problem and some going all the way to demon possession. There has been no shortage of ideas on how to “cure” those who are infected with this disease.
- We want to sort out the truth from the fiction and confidently stand on what God’s Word says.
- It is important that we have a Biblical understanding of what this issue is so that we know exactly how God desires us to deal with it.

## WHAT IS CONVERSION THERAPY? HOW DOES THE WORLD VIEW IT?

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- In 1899, a German psychiatrist electrified the audience at a conference on hypnosis with a bold claim: He had turned a gay man straight. All it took was 45 hypnosis sessions and a few trips to a brothel, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing bragged. Through hypnosis, he claimed, he had manipulated the man’s sexual impulses, diverting them from his interest in men to a lasting desire for women.<sup>1</sup>
- This was the first “conversion therapy” which publicly took place and inadvertently started a landslide of various techniques to *get the gay out of people*.
- Normally, when people hear *conversion therapy* or *reparative therapy*, they automatically jump to electroshock treatment, exorcisms, painful cutting and a whole host of other treatments that we would not be in favor of as Christians.
- "Reparative" or "conversion" therapy is a dangerous practice that targets LGBTQ youth and seeks to change their sexual or gender identities. So-called “conversion therapy,” sometimes known as “reparative therapy,” is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Such practices have been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/gay-conversion-therapy-origins-19th-century>

health organization for decades, but due to continuing discrimination and societal bias against LGBTQ people, some practitioners continue to conduct conversion therapy.<sup>2</sup>

- It can range from psychotherapy to medical and faith-based methods that can be emotional or physical.<sup>3</sup>
  - Psychotherapy: essentially this is talk therapy where one tries to talk someone else out of being a homosexual. Depending on the therapist, some use drugs or other devices to make the person become physically ill when they think about the same sex.
  - Medical: hormones, steroids, surgeries, etc.
  - Faith-Based: calling the practice evil, using anti-gay slogans or slurs, prayers, beating, shackling, food deprivation and sometimes exorcism.

## **Where is our country now?**

- Some right-wing religious groups promote the concept that an individual can change their sexual orientation or gender identity, either through prayer or other religious efforts, or through so-called "reparative" or "conversion" therapy. The research on such efforts has disproven their efficacy, and also has indicated that they are affirmatively harmful. Beyond studies focused solely on reparative therapy, broader research clearly demonstrates the significant harm that societal prejudice and family rejection has on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, particularly youth. Furthermore, there is significant anecdotal evidence of harm to LGBTQ people resulting from attempts to change their sexual orientation and gender identity. Based on this body of evidence, every major medical and mental health organization in the United States has issued a statement condemning the use of conversion therapy.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed "gender identity disorder" from its diagnostic manual. The APA now refers to conversion therapy techniques as "sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE)" or "gender identity change efforts (GICE)." It's coined the terms to differentiate from evidence-based forms of therapy. But providers, usually unlicensed, can often disguise the terms they use to avoid being found.<sup>5</sup>
- Half of the states have either passed laws or have executive orders that make it illegal to tell a minor (under 18 years old) that they are not who they want to be.
  - In Michigan, this is an executive order (not a law) that anyone who is licensed and receives funding from the State, cannot seek to change one's gender or sexual orientation. This was signed by our current governor on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
- Instead of looking at this issue as a sin issue, here is what liberal churches affirm:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/what-is-conversion-therapy>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/what-is-conversion-therapy>

- Speaking of **Romans 1:26–27**
  - “The passage does seem to say that all same-sex relationships are unnatural. But then we have to remember that Paul and the world Paul lived in did not understand gender the same way that we do today, and also that Paul is using that example to lead up to his argument against worshipping idols.”<sup>6</sup>
- Needless to say, the vast majority of our country would agree that barbaric means to try and convert homosexuals or transgenders should be outlawed.

### **What are the perceived harms caused by *worldly* conversion therapy?**<sup>7</sup>

- Conversion therapy techniques can lead to feeling “less than” or “damaged,” impacting self-esteem. This can take a significant toll on your emotional and physical health. A number of medical and mental health organizations have issued public statements rejecting the use of conversion therapy because of this.
- And many providers who claim to be qualified to provide conversion therapy are often not licensed mental health practitioners or medical experts.
- One study found that LGBTQ people who are rejected or discriminated against are:
  - 8 times more likely to report having attempted suicide
  - Almost 6 times more likely to report high levels of depression
  - More than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs
  - 3 times more likely to be at high risk of HIV and other STDs
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), with LGBTQ youth being four times more likely to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for suicide, and to attempt suicide than their peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020). Understanding the number of LGBTQ youth who seriously consider and attempt suicide, as well as how often suicide risk occurs, improves our ability to serve and advocate for LGBTQ youth.<sup>8</sup>
- 27% of LGBTQ youth who have attempted suicide did so after receiving conversion therapy.<sup>9</sup>
  - This is something that should disturb us all. It is unfortunate that faith-based methods are lumped in with all conversion therapy, but the fact remains that in 2020, the youth were killing themselves at an alarming rate.
  - Also, for the record, to be considered a youth by the CDC or other governmental agencies, the age range is 13–24 years old.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2015/08/the\\_7\\_bible\\_verses\\_on\\_homosexu.html](https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2015/08/the_7_bible_verses_on_homosexu.html) ; Kelly Murphy, Central Michigan University Faculty, Religious Studies.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/what-is-conversion-therapy>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/estimate-of-how-often-lgbtq-youth-attempt-suicide-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1053024/lgbtq-youth-in-us-attempted-suicide-conversion-therapy-experience/>

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH RESPOND?

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- First and foremost, we are certainly not in favor of anything that would do harm to anyone. Because we do not view this as a physiological or psychological issue, we are not using the world's means.
- As we will come to see, this is a sin issue that cannot be dealt with by the use of worldly wisdom.
- To be clear, we do want conversion, but it is spiritual conversion, not a change of behavior.
- As with anything, we need to firstly make sure that our response to such matters is Biblically grounded and not based upon either our own emotional tendencies or the emotional response from our culture.
- The reason that this issue is such a hot button topic is because it attacks the very identity of people.
- How do we know? Take other sins and call people out on them. We know that murder is wrong, so we do not allow people to walk about murdering because *they were born that way*.
- People are looking for acceptance, identity and peace. The irony of this issue is that with the more freedom people are given to choose what they want to be, the more enslaved they are to their own sinful desires.
- No man is free, one is either enslaved to sin or to God.
- The two main issues that people who are in this lifestyle struggle with are Anthropology and Theology proper. People struggle with knowing who man really is and who God is.

### Homosexuality and Transgenderism: A Theology Proper Issue

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- In order to know man, we must know God. God was actively involved in creating man and woman.
- **Genesis 1:26a** “Then God said ‘Let us make man in our image...’”
  - God intentionally was active in the creation of man and woman. He did not leave something up for chance or change.
- **Genesis 1:27** “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”
  - We know that God created man and woman and their genders are fixed.
    - If one attempts to “change” their gender, they are going against what God has sovereignly designed and no longer glorifying God.
  - God did not create men who can become women or women who can become men.
  - In fact, God's design is absolutely amazing!
    - Although you'll have to wait to find out what color to paint the nursery, **your baby's gender will be determined at the moment of fertilization.** Out of the 46 chromosomes that make up a baby's genetic material, only two — one from the sperm and one from the egg — determine the baby's sex. These are known as the sex chromosomes. Every egg has an X sex chromosome; a sperm can have either an X or a Y sex chromosome. If the sperm that

fertilizes your egg has an X chromosome, you'll have a girl; if it has a Y chromosome, your baby will be a boy.<sup>10</sup>

- **Psalm 139:13–15** “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth...”
  - David here is finding comfort in the fact that God knows him. God was the one who put him together and God knows all that is in David.
- Since God is the one who has created all things, He is the one that gets to set all the rules.
- This is one of the many fundamental problems with an evolutionary worldview. Because things just happen by chance, God has been taken out of the equation and replaced with man’s own ideology.
- God is holy and will not excuse sin in anyone’s life. God has given His commands for sexual purity between a man and woman and does not make exceptions for anyone.
- When we live against the laws of God, we are going to be in a constant state of stress.
  - **Psalm 32:3–4** “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.”
  - Listen to the toll that unconfessed sin takes on a person. When you have that stress of sin on you and then add the stress of life on top of that, there is no way a child can handle that pressure.

### **Homosexuality and Transgenderism: An Anthropological Issue**

- The chief difference between Biblical and man-centered anthropology is who we believe has the authority to determine what is true about man.
- We must know man in relation to God, not in relation to himself and to the world.
- Since man is not a blank slate (we are born with a sinful nature), we are not able to properly assess ourselves. When we do, we assign worth to ourselves that is faulty and empty. This is why people are continually looking for something to give them value.
- People today are confused about some key issues:
  - **Their overall purpose.** Far too many people are living their life for what they desire, not for the glory of God. Since we have a faulty view of purpose, we will struggle to fill that void.
  - **Their understanding of worth.** It is precisely because man finds his worth is in worthless things that he feels so worthless. Because we do not take care of our souls, we are weak and unable to handle what life throws at us.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/week2.html>

- **They are confused about the remedy.** Mankind certainly sees the problem. When diagnosing what the problem is, most of the world would come to the same conclusion. The issue is that the world does not know the remedy that is needed for alleviation of those problems.
- People do not believe that they are sinful by nature and that all they can do is think sinfully.
  - **Genesis 6:5** “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
  - This is one of the most insightful passages regarding mankind in the whole Bible. There was no one who was not thinking or doing evil.
  - The only reason that Noah was spared was because of God’s grace upon him, it was not because Noah was such a good guy that God spared him (Gen. 6:8).
- **Ephesians 2:1, 3** “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”
  - This word for *nature* carries with it also *birth or physical origin*. This means that from birth, we were children of wrath. We only indulged in the desires of our flesh and mind.
- When the world makes decisions based upon what they think of man, those decisions are going to be based on faulty information.
- We know that God made all of mankind as His image bearers (Gen. 1:27). While we know that the fall affected that image, post-fall man still bears the image of God.
  - **James 3:9** “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God...” (see Gen. 9:6).
- Knowing that we have been made in God’s image, gives us worth and value that is outside of us *and* something that is valuable.
- To reduce man to an evolutionary accident has put him at the same level as animals who do not bear the image of God. Man is unique.
- Being created in the image of God means that man can enjoy relationships and can carry out their God ordained design for them. They do not need to search out purpose or worth, it is there’s from God.
- Because the image of God was marred by the fall, we need God to act upon us for our minds to know Him and our hearts to be made from stone to flesh.
- Man cannot find God on his own and man cannot make unfoolish decisions with God opening His mind.
- Since man thinks he is doing right in his own eyes, he is never going to be able to find the way that the Lord has for him.

- **Romans 1:18–19** “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”
- Men know something but they are actively suppressing it in favor of unrighteousness. They are denying their own consciences in favor of following their own logic.
- **Romans 1:22** “Professing to be wise, they became fools.”
- Man thinks there are multiple genders and that homosexual relationships can sustain a society. These are some of the most foolish things one can believe, but some of the most brilliant people are pushing these thoughts.
- **Romans 1:28** “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper...”
- Probably the saddest part is that God gives them over to their depraved minds. God’s judgment is withdrawing from them so that they can live how they want to, according to their sinful nature. That is what we see today, man trying to live without God...failing miserably.

### **The Proper Response from the Church and Christians**

- It is important to understand that no one goes to heaven *because* they are a heterosexual or because they accept their gender they were born with.
- We must come to the conclusion that these things are sinful and need to be repented of by those people who are committing these acts.
- All of this means that we must not attempt to “convert” people from their sinful lifestyle to a more acceptable lifestyle *before* giving them the gospel. It is only the gospel that is going to save them and bring them to their senses before God.
- It is the gospel that saves and then, after salvation, the Word of God is the means by which the Lord changes people from a lifestyle of sin.
- **1 Corinthians 6:9–11** “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither **fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **effeminate**, nor **homosexuals**, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. **Such were some of you**; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
- Look, Paul is not denying that many in the church (especially the Corinthian church) were just like the people we see today.
  - But what did he tell them? It was not that they became heterosexual, but that they were saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Responding to the Pronoun debate

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- One issue that is plaguing Christians is whether or not they should call men *her, she, it...* and call women *she, her*. There are a host of other pronouns to choose from as well.
- As far as finding something in the Bible, there is nothing that says *here is how pronouns work*. Obviously, the Bible calls men and women by their proper pronouns and there is an expectation that we are going to do the same. But it does not call the opposite sinful.
- However, Christians need to be careful and respectful, respect cannot extend to endorsing ideas that the Bible calls false. Whatever choice a Christian makes with respect to preferred pronouns, ***it's important that they not give the appearance of endorsing sin or self-deception***. At the same time, believers ought to tread lightly on any issue that touches on sensitive emotions.<sup>11</sup>
  - **Romans 1:32** "...and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, **but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.**"
  - We do not want to be complicit in someone else's sin and have them think that we agree with them.
  - Christians should be known for standing on the truth but doing so in a loving and caring matter.
- There are caveats to this that will need to be addressed in very specific situations.
  - State sponsored counselling is not allowed to call someone by a pronoun they have not chosen.
  - Some corporations have put policies in place for coworkers to choose their pronouns.
  - Within the public school system, teachers at some schools are not allowed to use any gender bias pronouns when addressing children for fear of offending them.
- Each of these situations (and a host more) will need to be navigated with care and love, but never forsaking the truth of God's Word.

## WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

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- There is a very real possibility that this will not only be for minors but also enacted to include adults.
- In the scope of all the laws is therapy regarding minors. But we have to ask ourselves what is next.
- Furthermore, these state laws only include state funded therapies or state licensed therapists. None, as of now, have religious organizations that are unlicensed in their wording.
  - But the door is wide open for faith-based organizations to be put into the language of any of these laws. As of now, most want to include faith-based organizations, but they are struggling to get around the freedom of religion that we have in our country.
- In Canada, Bill C4 was enacted in January of 2022.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/transgender-pronouns.html>



- This is not designed for minors but for anyone who is part of the transgender/homosexual community. They define conversion therapy as “a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual, or to change a person’s gender identity to cisgender.”
- That means that if you teach or speak the Bible and call any of that a sin, you are breaking the law.
- In the UK, they are still debating on whether religious groups should be lumped into those who are not allowed to practice conversion therapy.
  - They have the same issue we do here, religious liberty.
  - The attorneys for religious freedom are fighting for religious conversion therapy, praying, sharing the gospel, etc. But are also against all the physical and psychological abuses.
- In 2017, the Church of England (Anglican and Episcopal) said that all conversion therapy was “unethical” and that “the church didn’t view homosexuality as a crime.”<sup>12</sup>
- As with any sin that is made legal, the church is going to have to take stance against such things.
- The uniqueness of this law is that it will not only affect churches, but also Bible believing Christians. If any “anti-homosexual” or “anti-transgender” talk is put under the “hate-speech” banner, then each person is going to have to make a choice.
- You will have to follow God and face the consequences from the State or follow the State and face the consequences from God.
- Lastly, in West Lafayette, Indiana, proposed Ordinance 31-21 prohibits unlicensed persons from practicing “conversion therapy” with children under the age of 18, with the penalty of up to \$1,000 per day for violators. It defines conversion therapy as “any practices or treatments that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings towards individuals of the same gender.”<sup>13</sup>
  - This was the first of its kind to try and stop those who are not licensed by the state from conversion therapy. This was specifically aimed at the church and was thankfully shot down.
- This was just the first, be assured there are going to be many more. This bill was put together in haste, disregarding the Constitution.

## **We care because we love those who are created in the image of God.**

- **Matthew 9:36** “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.”
- Christ saw the people were wayward, without any meaning or purpose. They were sheep that did not have a shepherd over their soul.

<sup>12</sup> <https://theconversation.com/why-the-ban-on-conversion-therapy-has-to-include-religious-groups-160896>

<sup>13</sup> <https://wng.org/roundups/conversion-therapy-ban-threatens-indiana-church-ministry-1642524571>

- Interestingly, after seeing the people and having compassion on them, Jesus said in verses **37–38** “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”
- When Christ saw these people, perhaps some of these would even be there in Jerusalem yelling for His crucifixion, he did not harden His heart against them. Rather, Christ expressed their greatest need, to have someone tell them the gospel.
- Our responsibility is not how people respond to the gospel, but that we are faithful to share with them what the Lord has proclaimed.
- God cared enough to send Christ and someone cared enough about you to share with you, we must have that same attitude towards others as well.