
A Review of Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-sex Attraction*. Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013. 88 pp. \$7.99.

Chris Sarver

*National Director for CRU Leadership Development, Great Lakes Region
Indianapolis, Indiana*

On college campuses across the nation, the number of believing eighteen to twenty-three year olds who have confided with their friends, pastors, and campus ministers that they struggle with same-sex attraction (SSA) is on the rise. For instance, on a 2013 summer missions project, nearly one in five male and female college students anonymously indicated that they had in the past engaged in “some sort of sexual activity with a person of the same gender.” Likewise, over the course of the last decade, I have seen a distinct rise in the number of students who have cyber-sexed with others of the same gender or viewed homosexual-themed pornography.

Though anecdotal, these aforementioned trends reaffirm the fact that our culture is experiencing a widespread moral change. Nowhere is this more acute than in America’s high schools and colleges. Young Christians today have serious questions about the Bible’s teaching on sexuality in general and homosexuality and gay marriage in particular. The church has struggled to answer these questions clearly, compassionately, and compellingly for the younger generation, and therefore the community called to herald the truth has stumbled in extending its pastoral care to those who profess Christ yet battle against same-sex attraction. Enter Sam Allberry’s new book.

Sam Allberry’s short (88 pages) new book, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-sex Attraction*, is a timely and helpful resource for clergy, lay-leaders, and campus missionaries laboring in this new context. Allberry is a pastor in Great Britain who battles SSA. His personal experience, exegetical and theological reflection, as well as years of pastoral ministry make this work sensitive, theologically satisfying, and practical.

He briefly shares his journey and struggles with SSA in the introduction. The first chapter examines what the Bible says about sexuality and marriage. In the next Allberry considers a number of biblical texts that address homosexuality. He provides concise interpretations that support a traditional understanding of the text, while also interacting with interpretations that condone homosexuality. Chapter three is written to aid believers struggling with SSA and contains both practical and helpful advice. The fourth chapter discusses ways the church can bless and encourage those battling SSA. In the final chapter, Allberry provides some specific ways Christians can begin to reach out to gay individuals in order to effectively engage them with the gospel. In addition to these helpful chapters, this work has five brief “sidebars” that answers questions like “But Jesus never mentions homosexuality, so how can it be wrong?” And “Aren’t we just picking and choosing which Old Testament laws apply?”

While there has been much praise and appreciation for *Is God Anti-Gay?*, some within the evangelical community have been critical. Some negative reactions center on the prospect of damage to congregations by the admission of pastors who personally struggle with SSA (though how such disclosures might harm a local church is not entirely made clear). In view of that, one individual asserts, “This struggle should be private—between the writer and God.” While such confessions ought not to be gratuitous (and Allberry is certainly not), such public admissions are consistent with Scriptural teaching on the importance of the body of believers in individual sanctification (see Gal 6:1–5; James 5:16). This is something often missed in the highly individualized American church.

Furthermore, far from being damaging, such

careful and thoughtful disclosures can actually benefit believers. It has been my experience that when leaders like Allberry or Vaughn Roberts or local pastors acknowledge these struggles, those within the church battling SSA are emboldened to pursue righteousness. In addition, fellow believers become more effective in their efforts to “to stir up one another to love and good works” as they begin to understand the nature of SSA.

Other critical responses contend that Allberry and others wrongly view SSA as an amoral problem when in fact it is a moral matter that might even disqualify one from pastoral ministry. The problem in this critique is to confuse lust, a sin that requires an act of the will, with an attraction like SSA, a predisposition that does not cohere with God’s created design. To be sure SSA is unnatural (unlike heterosexual attraction), and Allberry is clear to make that point. However, moral culpability seems to be present only when one seeks to grow that attraction or acts on it in some fashion.

Applied to the church then, there seems to be a place for elders who fight SSA with the promises of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. Since the New Testament’s requirements for the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) emphasize one’s conduct, SSA by itself would not seem to be an immediate disqualifier. In other words, elder qualification is based more on an individual’s response to SSA. Those who battle SSA and identify themselves with Christ should be encouraged to use their gifts in the church.

In the end, I commend Allberry’s short book. *Is God Anti-Gay?* is a gospel-grounded, Christ-centered work that seeks to equip the saints for holiness and ministry. It is a clear and concise treatment of the subject, and while it is not a resource to be given to non-believers, it will serve as a profitable introduction for the church. It will help Christians of all ages care for believers with SSA and engage the LGBT community with the gospel. I plan to purchase this volume for many of my colleagues and those college students whom I lead.