

1 **OVERTURE 25** from Southeast Alabama Presbytery (to SJC)
2 "BCO 34-1 Request to Assume Original Jurisdiction over TE Greg Johnson"
3

4 **Whereas** Southeast Alabama Presbytery submitted a *BCO* 31-2 report (see Attachment A) to
5 Missouri Presbytery regarding Teaching Elder (TE) Greg Johnson, a member of
6 Missouri Presbytery, in August 2019; and
7

8 **Whereas** Southeast Alabama Presbytery alleges that TE Johnson conflates our confessional
9 categories of sin and misery in a way that contradicts our confession by teaching that
10 homosexual or "gay" orientation (at least some aspect of it) is non-sinful yet due to
11 the Fall; and
12

13 **Whereas** Southeast Alabama Presbytery alleges that TE Johnson conflates our confessional
14 categories of the state of sin and the state of grace in a way that contradicts our
15 confession by teaching that it is acceptable to identify as a "gay" or homosexual
16 Christian; and
17

18 **Whereas** Missouri Presbytery, at its July 21, 2020 stated meeting, found no strong presumption
19 of guilt in TE Johnson in spite of the clear doctrinal error he has been propagating
20 which violates the Word of God as confessed in the Westminster Standards; and
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22 **Whereas** *BCO* 34-1 states that two presbyteries may request that General Assembly take up
23 original jurisdiction of a case originally brought before another presbytery; and
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25 **Whereas** *RAO* 11 specifies that these presbyteries make this request by means of Overture to
26 the General Assembly; and
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28 **Whereas** *RAO* 15-4 and 17-2 would require such an overtured case to be referred to the
29 Standing Judicial Commission for action;
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31 **Therefore be it resolved** that Southeast Alabama Presbytery joins with Savannah River
32 Presbytery and Central Georgia Presbytery in requesting that the General Assembly
33 assume original jurisdiction in the case of the doctrinal error of Teaching Elder Greg
34 Johnson per *BCO* 34-1.
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36 *Approved by Southeast Alabama Presbytery at its stated meeting, August 11, 2020*

37 *Attested by TE Henry Lewis Smith, stated clerk*
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39 Attachments: A. Southeast Alabama Presbytery 2019 Report to Missouri Presbytery
40 B. Open Letter from Southeast Alabama Presbytery to Missouri Presbytery

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Attachment A
(Overture 25 to 48th General Assembly)

A Report to Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America
To Request Investigation of Teaching Elder Greg Johnson

In the name of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Southeast Alabama Presbytery of the PCA (in accordance with *BCO* 31-2) hereby requests an investigation by Missouri Presbytery into the allegations that Teaching Elder (TE) Greg Johnson understands homosexuality in a way that contradicts our confessional understanding of Scripture and is teaching this error. In this highly important and necessary process (*BCO* 27-3), we in Southeast Alabama Presbytery pray that God will be glorified, His Church purified, and that our brother, TE Johnson, be kept in the true faith and reclaimed from his sin (should such sin be revealed in this investigation).

The Judicial Basis for this Request:

BCO 31-2 reads as follows: “It is the duty of all church Sessions and Presbyteries to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports shall ask an investigation. If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the court shall institute process, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of the same congregation with the accused.”

Allegations Against TE Greg Johnson

1. Allegation #1: TE Greg Johnson conflates our confessional categories of *sin* and *misery* in a way that contradicts our confession by teaching that homosexual or “gay” orientation (at least some aspect of it) is non-sinful yet due to the Fall.
2. Allegation #2: TE Greg Johnson conflates our confessional categories of the *state of sin* and the *state of grace* in a way that contradicts our confession by teaching that it is acceptable to identify as a “gay” or homosexual Christian.

Specifications

Confessional Teaching on Sin and Misery (Regarding Allegation #1)

- 1) In speaking of the estate into which the Fall has brought mankind, the Westminster Standards make a categorical distinction between “sin” and “misery” (*WCF* 6.6; *WSC* 17; *WLC* 23).
 - While both are aspects of the Fall, “sin” is any lack of conformity to or transgression of the law of God (*WSC* 14; 1 John 3:4) and is therefore distinct from “all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal” (*WCF* 6.6).
 - While ultimately due to Adam’s sin (for which we are all held guilty), the misery of “sufferings,” “tribulations,” and “trials” can be the result of our own

- 1 personal sin *or the result of living in a fallen world* (Rom. 8:18; John 16:33;
2 James 1:2).
- 3 2) Examples of misery (suffering or trial) which are caused not by personal sin but simply
4 due to living in a fallen world are fallen biology/physiology (e.g. infertility, paraplegia,
5 or cancer) and fallen sociology/nurture (e.g. being sinned against in marriage).
- 6 • There is no sense in which infertility, paraplegia, cancer, or being sinned
7 against are one’s sin; these conditions fit under the category of misery (they
8 are non-sinful yet due to the Fall).
- 9 3) In contrast to those conditions, homosexuality is a violation of the seventh commandment
10 and is always and only portrayed in Scripture as sinful (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Gen.
11 18:20-19:11; Lev. 18:22 & 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; *WLC* 139). The term homosexuality
12 (or its cognates) is never used in Scripture or our confession to refer to a condition
13 which is non-sinful yet due to the Fall.
- 14 • In sharp contrast to infertility or paraplegia or cancer (or being sinned against),
15 homosexuality fits under the category of one’s sin rather than under the
16 category of misery. The Bible never says “neither paraplegics nor the infertile
17 nor the cancerous (nor those who have been sinned against) will inherit the
18 kingdom of God, and such were some of you.” However, it does say neither
19 “effeminate, nor homosexuals... will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were
20 some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NASB).

21
22 **TE Johnson on Sin and Misery (Regarding Allegation #1)**

- 23 1) In contradiction to our confessional understanding of Scripture, TE Johnson treats
24 “gayness” or homosexuality (at least some aspect of it) as fitting in the same category
25 as conditions such as paraplegia or infertility¹ or cancer or being sinned against in
26 marriage.² This is a categorical error that strikes at the vitals of religion.
- 27 • In an interview, TE Johnson states:
- 28 ○ That being “gay” or having a homosexual or “gay orientation” is a
29 “condition” which is distinct from homosexual lust, is a “fallen
30 condition,” and at least some aspect of it is not “sin.”
- 31 ○ That this fallen condition of homosexual orientation (at least some
32 aspect of it) is akin to or in the same category as “a really difficult,
33 empty feeling marriage” (being sinned against, fallen nurture) or “when
34 they have cancer” (fallen biology).
- 35 ○ That one may identify as a “gay” Christian because there is nothing
36 wrong with identifying as a “cancer survivor” Christian.³
- 37 • It appears that TE Johnson is assuming a premise such as the following:
- 38 ○ *Homosexual or “gay” orientation is a category which includes*
39 *homosexual lust (which is sinful and can lead to sinful actions) but is*

¹ See TE Greg Johnson’s sermon “Testimony of a Unicorn” at Memorial Presbyterian Church on May 19, 2019 (<http://www.memorialpca.org/mp3/2019/190519.mp3>) and his speech on the floor of the 47th PCA General Assembly on June 27, 2019 in Dallas, Texas (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkWdMBQyVkc>).

² See TE Johnson’s interview with Cross Politic on July 15, 2018 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb5yk2ldGpc>).

³ Ibid.

1 *broader than homosexual lust and includes “homosexual” biology,*
2 *“homosexual” sociology, and/or other non-sinful yet fallen*
3 *components of homosexuality.*

- 4 • However, this premise contradicts Scripture: Homosexuality is a term that is
5 never used in Scripture to refer to our broken, fallen biology or sociology or to
6 any other non-sinful aspect of our condition but is always and only used to
7 refer to sin. Even granting that one’s fallen biology and/or sociology can make
8 one more prone or more tempted toward homosexual desire (which is sin) or
9 homosexual behavior (which is sin), there is no biblical or confessional basis
10 for referring to this fallen biology/sociology as itself “homosexual.”
- 11 2) Whether this or some other line of reasoning leads TE Johnson to the conclusion that
12 homosexual orientation (at least some aspect of it) is akin to paraplegia or infertility
13 or cancer or being sinned against (something non-sinful but due to the Fall), this is a
14 categorical error that strikes at the vitals of religion.
- 15 3) TE Johnson’s conflation of the biblical, confessional categories of sin and misery is
16 likely the cause (or one of the causes) of his acceptance of identifying as a homosexual
17 Christian.⁴
 - 18 • It appears that TE Johnson is assuming an argument such as the following:
 - 19 ○ *Premise #1: Homosexual orientation is a category which includes*
20 *homosexual lust (which is sinful and can lead to sinful actions) but is*
21 *broader than homosexual lust and includes “homosexual” biology,*
22 *“homosexual” sociology, and/or other non-sinful yet fallen*
23 *components of homosexuality.*
 - 24 ○ *Premise #2: There is nothing wrong with identifying ourselves with*
25 *our fallen biology (e.g. I am a cancer-surviving Christian, I am an*
26 *autistic Christian) or our fallen sociology (e.g. I am a sex abuse*
27 *survivor Christian).*
 - 28 ○ *Conclusion: Therefore, there is nothing wrong with saying one is a*
29 *celibate “gay” Christian, assuming that by that we mean*
 - 30 ▪ *One is celibate (one is repentant of, fighting, and turning away*
31 *from homosexual lust and behavior);*
 - 32 ▪ *One is “gay”/homosexual (one has a “homosexual” biology*
33 *and/or sociology due to the Fall);*
 - 34 ▪ *One is a Christian.*
 - 35 • Where this argument falls apart is Premise #1 (which, as seen above,
36 contradicts our confessional understanding of Scripture).
- 37 4) Whether this or some other line of reasoning leads TE Johnson to his acceptance of
38 identifying as a celibate “gay” Christian, his conflation of sin and misery is a
39 categorical error that strikes at the vitals of religion.

⁴ See TE Johnson’s interview with Cross Politic on July 15, 2018; his sermon entitled “Testimony of a Unicorn” at Memorial Presbyterian Church on May 19, 2019; his article published by *Christianity Today* entitled “I Used to Hide My Shame. Now I Take Shelter Under the Gospel.” dated May 20, 2019 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/may-web-only/greg-johnson-hide-shame-shelter-gospel-gay-teenager.html>); and his speech on the floor of the 47th PCA General Assembly on June 27, 2019 in Dallas, Texas.

1 **Confessional Teaching on the State of Sin and the State of Grace (Regarding Allegation #2)**

- 2 1) The Westminster Standards also make a categorical distinction between the “state of
3 sin” and the “state of grace” (*WCF* 9.3-4). In fact, there are four different states: the
4 state of innocency, the state of sin, the state of grace, and the state of glory (*WCF* 9.2-5).
- 5 • In Paradise, Adam and Eve lived in the “state of innocency” in which mankind
6 had the ability to will and to do that which is good and well pleasing to God
7 (*WCF* 9.2).
 - 8 • Ever since the Fall, mankind is naturally in the “state of sin” in which we have
9 lost all ability to will and to do any spiritual good and are slaves to the penalty,
10 guilt, and power of sin (*WCF* 9.3). Therefore, in this state, our sin defines who
11 we are, and we can rightly conceive of ourselves and label ourselves as
12 fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, the
13 covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers (1 Cor. 6:9-10). In the state of sin,
14 that is how we are to consider ourselves and identify ourselves because we are
15 slaves to sin.
 - 16 • When the Holy Spirit works faith in us, uniting us to Christ in our effectual
17 calling, we are translated into the “state of grace” (*WCF* 9.4; *WSC* 30) and
18 partake of the benefits of justification, adoption, and sanctification (*WSC* 30-
19 32). In this state, while we do not perfectly or only will that which is good but
20 also that which is evil (due to our remaining corruption), we are freed from
21 bondage to sin and by grace are enabled freely to will and to do that which is
22 spiritually good (*WCF* 9.4).
- 23 2) The conversion from the state of sin to the state of grace is so dramatic and the
24 distinction between the two so vast that we no longer are to conceive of ourselves and
25 label ourselves as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves,
26 the covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. Scripture says such will not inherit
27 the kingdom of God, “and such *were* some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In the state of
28 grace, you no longer identify that way (e.g. as a fornicator, idolater, adulterer, etc.).
29 Why? “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of
30 the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Because of our
31 union with Christ, our specific sins no longer define who we are.
- 32 • Obviously, due to remaining corruption, we can still speak of ourselves as
33 sinners in the present tense (1 Tim. 1:12-16) as those who continue to
34 experience and battle with the presence and pollution of sin (Gal. 5:17; Rom.
35 7:14-25) and even at times feel as though we are enslaved to sin (Rom. 7:14).
 - 36 • However, the truth is that we are no longer slaves to sin, having been freed
37 from slavery to its guilt (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7), its penalty (Gal. 3:13), and its
38 power (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 6:6). For this reason, while of course we are (and
39 can say we are) sinners (1 Tim. 1:12-16), we are no longer to identify ourselves
40 with our specific sins. “Such *were* some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). “Though
41 *formerly* I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent... I received
42 mercy... in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:13-14).
 - 43 • Instead of considering ourselves as drunkards or adulterers or homosexuals,
44 we are commanded to have a different self-conception: “You must consider
45 yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). This
46 does not mean that Christians do not continue to struggle with sin all their life

1 long. It means that such a believer ought not *consider* himself a drunkard
2 Christian or an adulterer Christian or a homosexual Christian but rather a
3 Christian who struggles with the temptation to drunkenness, adultery, or
4 homosexuality (and who is repentant when he succumbs to such temptations).
5

6 **TE Johnson on the State of Sin and the State of Grace (Regarding Allegation #2)**

7 1) In contradiction to our confessional understanding of Scripture, TE Johnson teaches
8 that it is acceptable to identify as a (celibate) homosexual Christian.⁵ In other words,
9 while Scripture says, “Homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God, and such
10 *were* some of you”—TE Johnson seems to say “Homosexuals will not inherit the
11 kingdom of God, and such *are* some of you.” This is a conflation of the state of sin
12 and the state of grace.

13 • One of the likely causes of this conflation is that TE Johnson appears to be
14 more influenced by secular categories than biblical ones. For example, in the
15 interview (referred to above), TE Johnson:

- 16 ○ Resists using biblical categories (he refuses to say the Christian is no
17 longer a drunkard/alcoholic or a homosexual or a porn addict because
18 “such *were* some of you”).
- 19 ○ Uses secular categories (he prefers for a Christian to refer to himself as
20 an alcoholic Christian or a homosexual Christian or a porn addict
21 Christian who is “sober”).
- 22 ○ Insists on the use of the secular category of homosexual “orientation”
23 (which he admits is a “problematic concept”), while being unwilling to
24 place everything within such an “orientation” under the category of sin
25 or the sinful nature.⁶

26 2) Regardless of the cause, this conflation of the state of sin (when we could say we *are*
27 fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, the covetous,
28 drunkards, revilers, swindlers, etc.) and the state of grace (those who no longer view
29 ourselves that way but as washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord
30 Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God) strikes at the vitals of religion.
31

32 **The Remedy for the Allegations Against TE Johnson**

33 We request an investigation into the aforementioned allegations against TE Johnson. If the
34 investigation raises a strong presumption of guilt, Missouri Presbytery is obligated to institute
35 judicial process against TE Johnson in accordance with *BCO* 31-2. This request is made with
36 the conviction that this teaching error of TE Johnson strikes against the peace, unity and purity of
37 the Church, and the honor and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head thereof.
38

39 We request that when Missouri Presbytery concludes its investigation that it inform Southeast
40 Alabama Presbytery of its disposition and outcome.
41

⁵ See TE Johnson’s interview with Cross Politic on July 15, 2018; his sermon entitled “Testimony of a Unicorn” at Memorial Presbyterian Church on May 19, 2019; his article published by *Christianity Today* entitled “I Used to Hide My Shame: Now I Take Shelter Under the Gospel” dated May 20, 2019; and his speech on the floor of the 47th PCA General Assembly on June 27, 2019 in Dallas, Texas.

⁶ See TE Johnson’s interview with Cross Politic on July 15, 2018.

Attachment B
(Overture 25 to 48th General Assembly)

To Our Fathers and Brothers of Missouri Presbytery,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are thankful for you in Him, and we are filled with grateful joy that because of the redemptive work of His life, death, and resurrection, hell-deserving sinners like us have been saved, forgiven, and declared righteous in the sight of Almighty God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

In your letter to us, you stated: “We are thankful for both your concern for and commitment to protecting the peace and purity of the church by sharing concerns in a way that honors the relationship between us as fathers and brothers in Christ.” We wholeheartedly agree with you that this should be our goal, and likewise we are thankful to you for communicating with us in that manner as well. Speaking of the relationship of Missouri Presbytery (MOP) to Southeast Alabama Presbytery (SEAL) and other courts of the church, you have said: “We believe we need each other, and so we invite our brothers in these courts to work with us as we continue to think, pray, and reason together. We all need to do it with mutual trust...”⁷ We heartily agree with you on this, brothers. We love you. We need you. And we want to continue to think, pray, and reason together with you.

In that spirit, SEAL would like to respond to MOP’s communication to SEAL. To make it clear for those who may not know, in August 2019, SEAL sent a Report to MOP entitled, “A Report to Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America to Request Investigation of Teaching Elder Greg Johnson” (SEAL’s Report may be found in the Appendix to this letter). The reason for SEAL’s Report was to express its concern over the teaching of Pastor Greg Johnson, a teaching elder (TE) who is a member of MOP. In response to SEAL’s request, MOP has completed an investigation of TE Johnson and has found no strong presumption of guilt.⁸ Again, for those who may not know, according to the PCA *Book of Church Order*, this was not a trial. This was an investigation by MOP to determine whether or not it would institute process and undertake a trial. MOP has decided not to do so and has written to SEAL (as well as to three other courts who also sent letters requesting investigation). MOP’s response to SEAL is entitled, “Missouri Presbytery Ad Hoc Committee to Respond to Memorial Presbyterian Church: Report of Its *BCO* 31-2 Investigation of TE Greg Johnson.”

We know that MOP will join with SEAL in affirming that not all conflict among believers is inappropriate. In fact, faithfulness will sometimes require godly conflict. If a Christian observes teaching that is false, dangerous, and injurious to the peace and purity of the church, he has an obligation to speak up. Though some will undoubtedly misinterpret his intentions or disagree with him—and though this will bring him into a conflict of sorts—he has this responsibility nonetheless. This is true even when it means contradicting a dear brother in

⁷ “Missouri Presbytery Ad Hoc Committee to Respond to Memorial Presbyterian Church: Report of Its *BCO* 31-2 Investigation of TE Greg Johnson,” 4. Henceforth, MOP Report.

⁸ MOP Report, 90.

1 Christ with whom one would love to enjoy time of fellowship and breaking bread together.
2 TE Johnson is a dear brother in Christ—in fact, because he is such—we believe we have an
3 obligation to speak up for the peace and purity of the church.
4

5 Though we have sought to have this discussion privately between SEAL and MOP as
6 presbyteries, given that MOP is publishing its response to SEAL online, SEAL has decided to
7 make this an open letter.⁹
8

9 **Allegation #1: On Identifying as a “Gay” or Homosexual Christian or as a Homosexual**

10 In its Report to SEAL, MOP summarizes our first allegation in this way: “By Self-identifying
11 as a Same-Sex-Attracted Man TE Johnson Compromises and Dishonors His Identity in
12 Christ.”¹⁰ However, SEAL’s allegation was and is actually different than as interpreted by
13 MOP. As we stated in our Report: “TE Greg Johnson conflates our confessional categories
14 of the *state of sin* and the *state of grace* in a way that contradicts our confession **by teaching**
15 **that it is acceptable to** identify as a “gay” or homosexual Christian.” The point is simple:
16 We believe it is unbiblical and contrary to our confession for a believer to conceive of himself
17 as a “gay” or homosexual Christian or as a homosexual.
18

19 MOP does not dispute that TE Johnson does teach and preach that this is acceptable for
20 believers to do. What MOP disputes is that this teaching is unbiblical and unconfessional.
21 Therefore, in response to this allegation, MOP goes into extensive discussion about how
22 SEAL seems to assume that “identity” must be used in an “aspirational” sense to represent the
23 kind of person one aspires to be—and that that must be why we are against believers thinking
24 of themselves as homosexuals.¹¹ MOP states: “they [SEAL] see it as having only an
25 aspirational sense (i.e., as naming what am I aiming to be and who I love most, etc.)”¹²
26 However, SEAL does not argue along these lines. Where does SEAL say that those who think
27 of themselves as homosexuals are doing so because they aspire to be that kind of person? We
28 do not hold that position.
29

30 Furthermore, MOP says: “we do not believe that [the aspirational sense of ‘identity’] is how
31 the term ‘identity’ is always used in our time.”¹³ MOP continues: “*Great care should be*
32 *taken not to lay down precise rules for how the abstract English word ‘identity’ must be used*
33 *and must not be used by Christians...*” (emphasis original).¹⁴ However, SEAL’s argument is
34 not based on how the term “identity” is used in our time. We do not make appeals to “abstract”
35 notions of identity. Rather, our argument is based upon the concrete, clear teaching of
36 Scripture about how believers are to conceive of themselves and identify themselves.

⁹ SEAL privately sent its Report to MOP in August 2019, purposely making sure not to publish it online to give MOP time to read and respond to SEAL’s Report. Now, basically one year later (August 2020), MOP is responding to SEAL—but not in a similarly private way. Given that MOP has made its response public, SEAL is making this letter public.

¹⁰ MOP Report, 20.

¹¹ MOP Report, 21.

¹² MOP Report, 60.

¹³ MOP Report, 22.

¹⁴ MOP Report, 22.

1 As TE Johnson himself recognizes, there is a distinction between “building one’s identity on”
 2 something and “identifying as” something. He says: “In numerous reports making their way
 3 back to us, however, we are hearing a confusion of two different (but similar sounding)
 4 concepts. Building your identity on something is different from identifying with something.
 5 Many Revoice presenters identify as same-sex-attracted. They are not building their identity
 6 on same-sex attraction.”¹⁵ Like TE Johnson, we would make this distinction. The difference
 7 is that whereas he believes building one’s identity on homosexuality is not acceptable and the
 8 identifying as a homosexual is acceptable, SEAL’s argument is that both are unacceptable.

9
 10 One of TE Johnson’s recurring arguments for such a position is that people do the same with
 11 the sin of drunkenness. He says: “Even though drunkenness is a sin, a Christian who is 18
 12 years sober may still identify as an alcoholic, but his sobriety tells you he is not building his
 13 identity on alcohol or drunkenness. Quite the opposite. Alcoholism is just a label he uses for
 14 a weakness he experiences.”¹⁶ That is not the way Scripture speaks. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
 15 says: “⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do
 16 not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor
 17 homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will
 18 inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were
 19 sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our
 20 God” (NASB).

21
 22 Whereas TE Johnson says the believer who has not had a sip of alcohol for 18 years *is* a
 23 drunkard (what secular culture calls an “alcoholic”), the Bible says the Christian who has
 24 abstained all of those years (or even the believer who has struggled and given into temptation
 25 multiple times and has repented and borne fruit of repentance) *was* a drunkard. “Such *were*
 26 some of you.” For the Christian, that is not who you are anymore. While TE Johnson may
 27 appeal to the language of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in this regard, we are appealing to the
 28 language of Scripture. And we urge him to be biblical in his theological description of those
 29 who struggle with drunkenness but also of those who struggle with homosexuality.

30
 31 MOP seems to agree with SEAL in one respect: that 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (quoted above) is
 32 indeed about how Christians are to conceive of themselves. Explaining this text, MOP says
 33 that Paul is proclaiming to believers “their new status” and is saying the Christian “is to think
 34 of himself” that way.¹⁷ If one recognizes that is what Paul is teaching, then one should also
 35 recognize—given the contrast in the text—that he is telling us no longer to think of ourselves
 36 and conceive of ourselves as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves,
 37 drunkards, etc. Drunkards and homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God, “and such
 38 *were* some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name
 39 of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). It is clear in the text that
 40 we are not only to think of ourselves according to our new status (in Christ) but we also are
 41 to think of ourselves as no longer holding our old status (adulterers, drunkards, homosexuals,
 42 thieves, etc.). MOP admits this passage is speaking about what our self-conception *should*

¹⁵ MOP Report, 23.

¹⁶ MOP Report, 49.

¹⁷ MOP Report, 55.

1 be; but it is clear that it also tells us what our self-conception should *not* be. SEAL is simply
2 pointing out that Christians need to be consistent on this point. A believer must not have a
3 self-conception as a homosexual; he is to have a self-conception as one who is in Christ.

4
5 To the question of why a believer would self-identify or think of himself as a homosexual
6 Christian, MOP states: “In the interest of transparency. And transparency to what end? To
7 the end of being known in their weakness and not having to live secretly within the body
8 of Christ; but even more importantly, perhaps, to live transparently for the sake of others...”¹⁸
9 We want to be clear that SEAL’s objection most certainly is not to Christians going public
10 with their struggles or openly sharing their sins with others. We agree that it is good to be
11 known in one’s weakness and to not have to live secretly within the body of Christ. Our
12 contention is simply that we must be biblical and confessional in our theological description
13 of our struggles. Our objection is not to a believer sharing that struggle with homosexuality
14 but to a Christian identifying as a homosexual (or as a homosexual Christian).

15
16 In defense of his view, TE Johnson says: “Many a drunkard had found great freedom by
17 taking that first step and saying, ‘I’m an alcoholic.’”¹⁹ Most everyone knows where the world
18 teaches this (AA); but where does Scripture teach this? The apostle Paul seems to say the
19 opposite. The way forward is not to say, “I *am* a drunkard,” but to repent and trust in Christ
20 and realize ever more deeply: “I *was* a drunkard, but I was washed, I was sanctified, I was
21 justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. This sin need not have
22 dominion over me anymore, since I am not under law but under grace!”

23
24 MOP is very interested in restricting the application of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 only to outward
25 actions and not to inward sins. With reference to this passage, MOP says: “the context clearly
26 points to bad *behavior* [emphasis original]. *Those who are ‘unrighteous’ are not simply those*
27 *who are feeling the pull of their sinful flesh, the immoral bent of their own soul, but people*
28 *who are misbehaving in one way or another, as the list of nouns that follows demonstrates*
29 *(‘adulterers’ = those people who commit adultery) [emphasis original].”²⁰*

30
31 SEAL has no objection to consideration of this text as primarily about actions. However, a
32 few responses are in order. First, what about “the covetous” (1 Cor. 6:10)? While this
33 certainly could refer to those who engage in greedy behavior (and we have no problem with
34 that interpretation), is that absolutely clear from the text? Is it not also possible “the covetous”
35 refers to the internal sin of coveting or greed? Understanding this text to be speaking primarily
36 of behaviors is fine, but we do question why one should be so insistent that it must be.

37
38 Second, SEAL does not deny the technical meaning (of most if not all) of the words used for
39 the sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 does refer to bad *behaviors*: Fornication, idolatry,
40 adultery, homosexuality, thievery, drunkenness, etc. Technically, the word “drunkard” means
41 someone who engaged in the behavior of being habitually drunk; the word “effeminate”
42 means the passive partner in a homosexual act; the word “homosexual” means the active

¹⁸ MOP Report, 28.

¹⁹ MOP Report, 27.

²⁰ MOP Report, 53.

1 partner in a homosexual act. But this raises a question for TE Johnson’s position. He holds:
 2 (1) that a Christian who does not engage in the behavior of drunkenness is a drunkard
 3 (alcoholic) and (2) that a believer who does not engage in homosexual behavior can conceive
 4 of himself as a homosexual. But if we are going only with the most technical meaning and
 5 these words are exclusively about the act, how can who one has never engaged in such
 6 behavior (or is not currently engaging in such behavior) call himself those things? That
 7 Christian is not a drunkard or a homosexual or a thief or an adulterer or an idolater (because
 8 he is not engaging in the act, he only has the inward temptation or inner sin).
 9

10 Third, we must make a distinction between speaking purely in terms of God’s Law (apart from
 11 Christ) and speaking as a Christian (in Christ). *Speaking purely in terms of God’s Law*, if one
 12 has ever committed the act of murder or adultery or homosexuality or blasphemy or theft or
 13 has ever lied—even once—then he is a murderer, an adulterer, a homosexual, a blasphemer,
 14 a thief, or a liar. *Speaking purely in terms of God’s Law*, even if one has not committed the
 15 act but has ever committed the sin in his heart (even once)—or if he simply experiences
 16 unchosen desires to do so—before the Law of God, strictly speaking, that person too is a
 17 murderer, an adulterer, a homosexual, a blasphemer, a thief, or a liar. This of course means
 18 that *speaking purely in terms of God’s Law* (apart from Christ), everyone is condemned either
 19 as a murderer, a liar, a blasphemer, an adulterer, a homosexual, a thief, or so on and so forth.
 20 But there is a difference between *speaking purely in terms of God’s Law* and *speaking as a*
 21 *Christian* (as someone who is in Christ). And that is what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 6:9-
 22 11. He makes “the turn” to speak about who one is as a Christian, as someone who is in
 23 Christ. He is no longer to consider himself as a murderer, a liar, an adulterer, a homosexual,
 24 a thief, or a blasphemer. He is no longer to consider himself purely in terms of God’s Law
 25 apart from Christ. “Such *were* some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified,
 26 but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
 27

28 MOP says of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “The conclusion seems clear to us: Those things Paul lists
 29 here, things which will disqualify a person from inheriting the Kingdom of God when it comes
 30 in its fullness, are what the *WCF* VI.5 calls ‘actual sins,’ **sinful external acts** animated by the
 31 decision to give in to the inner impulses of what the Apostle Paul calls the sinful flesh
 32 (Galatians 5:13-26), or what the *WCF* VI.5 calls the (inner) ‘motions’ or dispositions of our
 33 ‘corrupted nature’ (*WCF* VI.3, 5)” (emphasis ours).²¹ Though they recognize that inner sins
 34 earn us damnation as well, MOP claims in this passage that Paul is teaching exclusively that
 35 sinful *behaviors* are what disqualify people from inheriting the kingdom. This seems to be a
 36 strained reading of the text. Making such a sharp distinction (to the degree that there is
 37 absolutely no application to the internal) does not appear to be Paul’s primary point.
 38

39 MOP states: “it is arbitrary to claim that Christians can only self-identify as sinners in general
 40 and not in a way that names any particular inclination toward sin.”²² Obviously, all sides
 41 agree that believers should name their particular inclinations toward sin. What MOP is
 42 referring to as “arbitrary” is our statement in SEAL’s Report: “For this reason, while of course
 43 we are (and can say we are) sinners (1 Tim. 1:12-16), we are no longer to identify ourselves

²¹ MOP Report, 53.

²² MOP Report, 62.

1 with our specific sins. ‘Such *were* some of you’ (1 Cor. 6:9-11). ‘Though formerly I was a
 2 blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent... I received mercy... in Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim.
 3 1:13-14).²³ Why is this arbitrary? If SEAL were randomly, haphazardly deciding how to
 4 conceive of ourselves, that would be arbitrary. But we do not believe that we get to decide
 5 our self-conception based on our own personal preferences or on what the culture says but
 6 rather based on what Scripture says (which is why we explicitly based everything we said on
 7 the Bible). What seems arbitrary to us is an unwillingness to recognize that two things can be
 8 true at one time: (1) The Bible clearly speaks of the *legitimacy* of believers self-identifying
 9 as chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:12-16); (2) the Bible just as clearly speaks of the *illegitimacy* of
 10 Christians having a self-conception as drunkards, homosexuals, thieves, etc. It seems clear to
 11 us that while we are (and can say we are) sinners, we are no longer to identify ourselves with
 12 our specific sins. SEAL does not believe one can pick and choose which passages he wants
 13 to follow; we must heed them all.

14
 15 We are puzzled by exactly whom MOP is arguing against when they say: “*Any suggestion*
 16 *that the past tense [in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11] implies that the desires, inclinations, and impulses*
 17 *that spawned the sinful behaviors they had abandoned were taken away by the Spirit of God*
 18 *upon their conversion is without grounds [emphasis original].”²⁴ Who is making that*
 19 *suggestion? SEAL does not believe that and has nowhere said that. MOP says one’s*
 20 *conversion long ago “does not imply at all that the Lord had delivered” that person “from their*
 21 *homosexual inclinations; such a conclusion is being read into the text, not out of it” (emphasis*
 22 *original).²⁵ Who is reading that into the text? SEAL does not claim that Christians are*
 23 *incapable of struggling with homosexual inclinations (or even the behavior for that matter).*

24
 25 But MOP goes on like this: “Galatians chapter 5 is proof positive that apostolic teaching
 26 acknowledged that the inclination toward sin (which Paul personifies as ‘the flesh’), that
 27 influence on us of our sin-infected, ‘corrupted nature’ (to use the language of our confessional
 28 Standards), remains with us till we die.”²⁶ Who is denying that? SEAL does not. MOP
 29 continues: “we do not see how Paul’s admonition [in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11] would forbid a
 30 justified, cleansed Christian from confessing *as his own* his struggles and inclinations, his
 31 warfare with sinful desires—that remain even now, on this side of conversion” (emphasis
 32 original).²⁷ Who is MOP arguing against here? Again, along these lines, MOP states: “Note
 33 the realism in what the Westminster Standards” says when it refers to how we are “wholly
 34 defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body”—and “Consider the realism in the
 35 Larger Catechism” when it says “The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from
 36 the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them.”²⁸ Who is not affirming that?

37
 38 We will simply close out this section by restating our first allegation and giving an extended
 39 quotation from our Report to MOP. The allegation is that TE Johnson conflates our

²³ “A Report to Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America to Request Investigation of Teaching Elder Greg Johnson” (henceforth, SEAL Report), 4.

²⁴ MOP Report, 54.

²⁵ MOP Report, 54.

²⁶ MOP Report, 54.

²⁷ MOP Report, 55.

²⁸ MOP Report, 60-61.

1 confessional categories of the *state of sin* and the *state of grace* in a way that contradicts our
2 confession by teaching that it is acceptable to identify as a “gay” or homosexual Christian.

3
4 The Westminster Standards also make a categorical distinction between the
5 “state of sin” and the “state of grace” (*WCF* 9.3-4)... Ever since the Fall,
6 mankind is naturally in the “state of sin” in which we have lost all ability to will
7 and to do any spiritual good and are slaves to the penalty, guilt, and power of
8 sin (*WCF* 9.3). Therefore, in this state, our sin defines who we are, and we can
9 rightly conceive of ourselves and label ourselves as fornicators, idolaters,
10 adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers,
11 and swindlers (1 Cor. 6:9-10). In the state of sin, that is how we are to consider
12 ourselves and identify ourselves because we are slaves to sin.

13
14 When the Holy Spirit works faith in us, uniting us to Christ in our effectual
15 calling, we are translated into the “state of grace” (*WCF* 9.4; *WSC* 30) and
16 partake of the benefits of justification, adoption, and sanctification (*WSC* 30-
17 32). In this state, while we do not perfectly or only will that which is good but
18 also that which is evil (due to our remaining corruption), we are freed from
19 bondage to sin and by grace are enabled freely to will and to do that which is
20 spiritually good (*WCF* 9.4).

21
22 The conversion from the state of sin to the state of grace is so dramatic and the
23 distinction between the two so vast that we no longer are to conceive of
24 ourselves and label ourselves as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate,
25 homosexuals, thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers.
26 Scripture says such will not inherit the kingdom of God, “and such *were* some
27 of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In the state of grace, you no longer identify that way
28 (e.g. as a fornicator, idolater, adulterer, etc.). Why? “But you were washed,
29 you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and
30 by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Because of our union with Christ,
31 our specific sins no longer define who we are.

32
33 Obviously, due to remaining corruption, we can still speak of ourselves as
34 sinners in the present tense (1 Tim. 1:12-16) as those who continue to
35 experience and battle with the presence and pollution of sin (Gal. 5:17; Rom.
36 7:14-25) and even at times feel as though we are enslaved to sin (Rom. 7:14).
37 However, the truth is that we are no longer slaves to sin, having been freed from
38 slavery to its guilt (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7), its penalty (Gal. 3:13), and its power
39 (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 6:6). For this reason, while of course we are (and can say
40 we are) sinners (1 Tim. 1:12-16), we are no longer to identify ourselves with
41 our specific sins. “Such *were* some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). “Though *formerly*
42 I *was* a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent... I received mercy... in
43 Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:13-14).

1 Instead of considering ourselves as drunkards or adulterers or homosexuals, we
 2 are commanded to have a different self-conception: “You must consider
 3 yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). This does
 4 not mean that Christians do not continue to struggle with sin all their life long.
 5 It means that such a believer ought not *consider* himself a drunkard Christian
 6 or an adulterer Christian or a homosexual Christian but rather a Christian who
 7 struggles with the temptation to drunkenness, adultery, or homosexuality (and
 8 who is repentant when he succumbs to such temptations).
 9

10 In contradiction to our confessional understanding of Scripture, TE Johnson
 11 teaches that it is acceptable to identify as a (celibate) homosexual Christian. In
 12 other words, while Scripture says, “Homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom
 13 of God, and such *were* some of you”—TE Johnson seems to say “Homosexuals
 14 will not inherit the kingdom of God, and such *are* some of you.” This is a
 15 conflation of the state of sin and the state of grace...this conflation of the state
 16 of sin (when we could say we *are* fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate,
 17 homosexuals, thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers, etc.) and the
 18 state of grace (those who no longer view ourselves that way but as washed,
 19 sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit
 20 of our God) strikes at the vitals of religion.²⁹
 21

22 **Allegation #2: On the Idea That at Least Some Aspect of “Gay” or Homosexual**
 23 **Orientation Is Non-sinful (Yet Due to the Fall)**
 24

25 MOP summarizes our second allegation in this way: “TE Johnson Denies That Same-Sex
 26 Attraction Is Sinful.”³⁰ For the record, this is most certainly *not* SEAL’s position. In another
 27 place, MOP summarizes our allegation by saying that SEAL has “alleged” that TE Johnson
 28 “reject[s] the claim that the fallen condition of living with homoerotic desire is ‘sin.’”³¹ Again,
 29 this is most emphatically *not* what SEAL is saying. Moreover, MOP says that SEAL claims
 30 TE Johnson denies that “the condition of living with enduring patterns of same-sex desire” is
 31 sinful.³² That is *not* our position. In the addendum to this letter, one can read our Report to
 32 MOP and will see that nowhere does SEAL claim that TE Johnson says same-sex attraction
 33 or homosexual desire or enduring patterns of homosexual desire is non-sinful. We are not at
 34 all surprised that MOP rejected *that* allegation because SEAL rejects it as well! However,
 35 that was *not* our allegation.
 36

37 So what was and is our claim? It is not about homosexual **desire** or **lust** being non-sinful (we
 38 recognize TE Johnson affirms those are sinful); rather, it is about there being ***at least some***
 39 ***aspect of*** homosexual **orientation** which is non-sinful. One can distinguish between
 40 homosexual *desire* and homosexual *orientation*—the latter being broader than the former. TE
 41 Johnson is fine with conceiving of homosexual **orientation** as inclusive of homosexual **desire**

²⁹ SEAL Report, 3-5.

³⁰ MOP Report, 8.

³¹ MOP Report, 10.

³² MOP Report, 9.

1 (which we recognize he affirms is sinful) but also as inclusive of “fallen biology” which, of
 2 course, is non-sinful yet due to the Fall.³³ That is the problem we are pointing out in this
 3 second allegation.

4
 5 SEAL has no issue recognizing—as TE Johnson says—that “fallen nature” (which he also
 6 refers to as “fallen biology”) and “fallen nurture” can make one more *tempted toward* certain
 7 sins.³⁴ It may be that this is the case with homosexuality (or as TE Johnson puts it,
 8 “homosexual orientation”). The problem comes when TE Johnson speaks of fallen biology
 9 not just as a hardship that creates *temptations to* homosexuality or homosexual orientation but
 10 as *an aspect of* homosexual orientation. TE Johnson believes it is legitimate to conceive of
 11 such “fallen biology” as a “partial aspect” of homosexual orientation.³⁵ According to TE
 12 Johnson, there may be “compelling evidence that partial aspects of orientation may be proved
 13 to be genetic and/or physiological.”³⁶ In this vein, he has publicly written that though he does
 14 not believe he was “born gay,” “homosexual orientation” can consist of a biological aspect:
 15 “According to twin studies, an inborn factor accounts **at most** 31-39% of homosexual
 16 orientation” (emphasis original).³⁷ It is our understanding that TE Johnson believes the
 17 following three points: (1) “Inborn”/ biological characteristics are non-sinful. (2) Such fallen
 18 biological characteristics can legitimately be considered an “aspect” of “homosexual
 19 orientation.” (3) Therefore, it can be said there is something non-sinful (yet fallen) about
 20 homosexual orientation.

21
 22 #1 is absolutely true: Fallen inborn or biological or genetic characteristics are not sinful. As
 23 TE Johnson puts it, fallen biology is “morally neutral, like a birth defect.”³⁸ But #2 is
 24 unbiblical. If true, it would mean there is something **non-sinful** yet fallen about homosexual
 25 orientation or homosexuality, but this violates Scripture and our confession. As we stated in
 26 our Report:

27 It appears that TE Johnson is assuming a premise such as the following:
 28 *Homosexual or “gay” orientation is a category which includes homosexual lust*
 29 *(which is sinful and can lead to sinful actions) but is broader than homosexual*
 30 *lust and includes “homosexual” biology, “homosexual” sociology, and/or*
 31 *other non-sinful yet fallen components of homosexuality.*

32
 33 However, this premise contradicts Scripture: Homosexuality is a term that is
 34 never used in Scripture to refer to our broken, fallen biology or sociology or to
 35 any other non-sinful aspect of our condition but is always and only used to refer
 36 to sin. Even granting that one’s fallen biology and/or sociology can make one
 37 more prone or more tempted toward homosexual desire (which is sin) or

³³ MOP Report, 50.

³⁴ MOP Report, 50.

³⁵ MOP Report, 50.

³⁶ MOP Report, 50.

³⁷ See this Patheos article which contains TE Johnson’s response at the bottom:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/troublerofrisrael/2019/07/why-are-presbyterians-fighting-over-celibate-gay-christians/>

³⁸ MOP Report, 50.

1 homosexual behavior (which is sin), there is no biblical or confessional basis
2 for referring to this fallen biology/sociology as itself “homosexual.”³⁹

3
4 Given that TE Johnson believes it is okay to conceive of homosexual orientation as inclusive
5 of fallen biology (something non-sinful yet due to the Fall), it is not surprising that he would
6 compare identifying as “gay” or as a homosexual with calling oneself a paraplegic or infertile
7 or a cancer survivor. Those are examples of fallen biology (something non-sinful yet due to
8 the Fall). That is not to say we know this was a factor that affected TE Johnson’s willingness
9 to compare homosexual orientation to paraplegia, infertility, or cancer, but that is not the point.
10 The fact is: Given his view, one would be absolutely free to say those are in the same category.
11 Unless, of course, his view is wrong (as we contend).

12
13 Furthermore, if—as TE Johnson believes—it is okay to conceive of homosexual orientation
14 as inclusive of fallen biology, then one cannot simply make a blanket statement that people
15 should repent of homosexual orientation. They can repent *of aspects of* homosexual
16 orientation (such as same-sex attraction or homosexual desire or homosexual lust), but one
17 cannot say wholesale that people must repent of homosexual orientation.

18
19 This brings us to TE Johnson’s CrossPolitic interview: In an interview which was specifically
20 about Christians who struggle with “same-sex attraction,” “homosexuality,” being “gay,” and
21 “gay” or homosexual “orientation,” the interviewers kept referring to those who fight such
22 battles as struggling with *sin*.⁴⁰ TE Johnson pushes back on precisely this point, saying: “One
23 thing—you keep saying sins. Now, you’re talking about—when you’re talking about
24 somebody who struggles with same-sex attraction... They have a condition. Same-sex
25 attraction is not the same as then actively lusting with their mind. It’s not the same obviously
26 as acting it out either... And the question for the Christian who struggles with same-sex
27 attraction is what term for non-straight are they allowed to use?—because that’s what they’re
28 talking about. They’re not talking about sin, they’re talking about fallenness.”⁴¹

29
30 Later in the interview, TE Johnson made other statements along these lines, saying: “Yea,
31 I’m just flabbergasted that somebody would actually say that the fallen condition itself is a
32 sin.”⁴² “When you tell somebody, when you tell them that they should be feeling, you know,
33 massive guilt and shame over their orientation and they need to repent of that—how do you
34 repent of an orientation?... Now, if it is fallen for you to find other women sexually
35 attractive—okay, I understand how you repent of lusting after them, I don’t understand how
36 you repent of being attracted to women other than your wife... what I’m hearing is you
37 judging brothers for not repenting of something that can’t be repented of. You can resist it.
38 You can flee it.”⁴³

³⁹ SEAL Report, 2-3.

⁴⁰ See TE Johnson’s interview with CrossPolitic on July 15, 2018
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb5yk2IdGpc>), 5:40-5:50, 6:18-18:11.

⁴¹ CrossPolitic interview, 19:00-23:12.

⁴² CrossPolitic interview, 19:00-23:12.

⁴³ CrossPolitic interview, 40:20-41:55, 50:40-50:55, 51:57-53:45.

1 At one point, the interviewer asks TE Johnson, “Let me ask you this way. You said you’re
2 asking us to repent of something, or asking them to repent of something, that they can’t repent
3 of. What is that? What is that?”—and “What can’t they repent of?”—to which TE Johnson
4 responds: “An attraction. You can repent of a lust, because that’s a choice, but can you repent
5 of an attraction?”⁴⁴

6
7 When the interviewer says that the Revoice Conference “is not clearly identifying this sin as
8 an abomination, a perversion, a vile affection, degrading passion, it’s not identifying the
9 shame of it clearly” and says that those at the Revoice Conference are wanting to be identified
10 with this sin, TE Johnson responds: “Because they’re distinguishing. They’re making
11 distinctions that you’re not making though. You know, when somebody talks about same-sex
12 attraction, they’re distinguishing that from a choice to lust... Well, they’re trying to separate
13 the act from the orientation.”⁴⁵

14
15 While TE Johnson should be very understanding toward those who come away from this
16 interview thinking that he *does* believe same-sex attraction is non-sinful, that is *not* the
17 position of SEAL. That is *not* what our Report to MOP says. But how does TE Johnson
18 explain what he said in the interview? Well, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* makes a
19 distinction between original sin and actual sin (*WCF* 6.4).⁴⁶ The *Confession* also makes a
20 distinction between general repentance and particular repentance (*WCF* 15.5). How does TE
21 Johnson account for what he said in the interview? He says that he was pointing out that
22 same-sex attraction is not “a sin” (i.e. it is not actual sin) but it is “sin” (i.e. it is original sin
23 or indwelling sin).⁴⁷ Furthermore, TE Johnson says he was pointing out that because
24 homosexual desire is not “a sin,” one cannot engage in “particular repentance” for it, but given
25 that it is “sin” one can engage in “general repentance” for it.⁴⁸

26
27 SEAL absolutely believes TE Johnson’s explanation that that is what he meant to say. In the
28 heat of the moment, any of us can misspeak. Unfortunately, what is described above is not
29 what TE Johnson said in the interview. Instead, he simply stated: It “can’t be repented of”
30 and “They’re not talking about sin, they’re talking about fallenness.” Though no one could

⁴⁴ CrossPolitic interview, 50:40-50:55, 51:57-53:45.

⁴⁵ CrossPolitic interview, 55:48-56:36.

⁴⁶ One can even distinguish this further as TE Johnson does into original sin, indwelling sin, and actual sin. According to the *Confession*, original sin is an “original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil” (*WCF* 6.4). Actual sins are all those “actual transgressions” which “proceed” from original sin (*WCF* 6.4). The *Confession* also states: “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, **and all the motions thereof**, are truly and properly sin” (*WCF* 6.5). TE Johnson refers to “the motions thereof” as indwelling sin. On page 11 of the MOP Report, TE Johnson states: “By desire, do we mean the potential within my heart to notice a good looking man and feel myself sexually attracted to him? That’s what *WCF* calls ‘original corruption’ (6.4).” “By desire, do we mean the internal temptation I feel to lust? My best understanding is that that’s what *WCF* 6 calls ‘the motions of’ our ‘corrupted nature’ (which is also sometimes called indwelling sin)—we might call it inner temptation.” “By desire, do we mean actually lusting, coveting or pining after someone, or storing their image in our minds for later retrieval? In other words, is this something volitional or intentional? These are what *WCF* 6.6 calls ‘actual’ sins.”

⁴⁷ MOP Report, 10.

⁴⁸ MOP Report, 15.

1 come away from that interview thinking TE Johnson believes same-sex attraction (or as MOP
 2 puts it, homosexual desire) is sinful and can be repented of, SEAL is completely willing to
 3 grant that what he meant was it *is* sin (original or indwelling), not just fallenness—and you
 4 can repent of it (in terms of general repentance).

5
 6 The problem that remains is that TE Johnson did not speak merely of same-sex attraction or
 7 homosexual desire (which we know from above he views as sinful in one way or another); he
 8 also spoke of homosexual orientation (which we know from above he believes can be
 9 inclusive of fallen biology). On the view of one such as TE Johnson who thinks it is legitimate
 10 to conceive of at least some aspect (e.g. fallen biology) of homosexual orientation as non-
 11 sinful yet fallen, what would be wrong about what he said in that interview? In that case, it
 12 would be perfectly legitimate to say: “When you tell somebody, when you tell them that they
 13 should be feeling, you know, massive guilt and shame over their orientation and they need to
 14 repent of that—how do you repent of an orientation?”—or, “They’re not talking about sin,
 15 they’re talking about fallenness.” If homosexual orientation is inclusive of fallen biology: (1)
 16 One is free to speak of one’s “gay” orientation as fallen yet non-sinful (if one is referring to
 17 the biological aspect of his orientation). (2) One is free to say he cannot repent of his
 18 homosexual orientation (if one is referring to the biological aspect of his orientation)—either
 19 with particular or general repentance. That is not to claim we know this was a factor that
 20 affected TE Johnson’s way of expressing himself in the interview, but that is not the point.
 21 The fact is: Given his view, one would be absolutely free to make such statements. Unless,
 22 of course, his view is wrong (as we contend).

23
 24 We will simply close out this section by restating our second allegation and giving an extended
 25 quotation from our Report to MOP. The allegation is that TE Johnson conflates our
 26 confessional categories of *sin* and *misery* in a way that contradicts our confession by teaching
 27 that homosexual or “gay” orientation (at least some aspect of it) is non-sinful yet due to the
 28 Fall.

29 In speaking of the estate into which the Fall has brought mankind, the
 30 Westminster Standards make a categorical distinction between “sin” and
 31 “misery” (*WCF* 6.6; *WSC* 17; *WLC* 23). While both are aspects of the Fall,
 32 “sin” is any lack of conformity to or transgression of the law of God (*WSC* 14;
 33 1 John 3:4) and is therefore distinct from “all miseries spiritual, temporal, and
 34 eternal” (*WCF* 6.6). While ultimately due to Adam’s sin (for which we are all
 35 held guilty), the misery of “sufferings,” “tribulations,” and “trials” can be the
 36 result of our own personal sin *or the result of living in a fallen world* (Rom.
 37 8:18; John 16:33; James 1:2).

38
 39 Examples of misery (suffering or trial) which are caused not by personal sin but
 40 simply due to living in a fallen world are fallen biology/physiology (e.g.
 41 infertility, paraplegia, or cancer) and fallen sociology/nurture (e.g. being sinned
 42 against in marriage). There is no sense in which infertility, paraplegia, cancer,
 43 or being sinned against are one’s sin; these conditions fit under the category of
 44 misery (they are non-sinful yet due to the Fall).

1 In contrast to those conditions, homosexuality is a violation of the seventh
2 commandment and is always and only portrayed in Scripture as sinful (1 Cor.
3 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Gen. 18:20-19:11; Lev. 18:22 & 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; *WLC*
4 139). The term homosexuality (or its cognates) is never used in Scripture or
5 our confession to refer to a condition which is non-sinful yet due to the Fall.

6 In sharp contrast to infertility or paraplegia or cancer (or being sinned against),
7 homosexuality fits under the category of one's sin rather than under the
8 category of misery. The Bible never says "neither paraplegics nor the infertile
9 nor the cancerous (nor those who have been sinned against) will inherit the
10 kingdom of God, and such were some of you." However, it does say neither
11 "effeminate, nor homosexuals... will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were
12 some of you" (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NASB).

13
14 In contradiction to our confessional understanding of Scripture, TE Johnson
15 treats "gayness" or homosexuality (at least some aspect of it) as fitting in the
16 same category as conditions such as paraplegia or infertility or cancer or being
17 sinned against in marriage. This is a categorical error that strikes at the vitals
18 of religion.

19
20 In an interview, TE Johnson states: [1] That being "gay" or having a
21 homosexual or "gay orientation" is a "condition" which is distinct from
22 homosexual lust, is a "fallen condition," and at least some aspect of it is not
23 "sin." [2] That this fallen condition of homosexual orientation (at least some
24 aspect of it) is akin to or in the same category as "a really difficult, empty feeling
25 marriage" (being sinned against, fallen nurture) or "when they have cancer"
26 (fallen biology). [3] That one may identify as a "gay" Christian because there
27 is nothing wrong with identifying as a "cancer survivor" Christian.

28
29 It appears that TE Johnson is assuming a premise such as the following:
30 *Homosexual or "gay" orientation is a category which includes homosexual lust*
31 *(which is sinful and can lead to sinful actions) but is broader than homosexual*
32 *lust and includes "homosexual" biology, "homosexual" sociology, and/or*
33 *other non-sinful yet fallen components of homosexuality.*

34
35 However, this premise contradicts Scripture: Homosexuality is a term that is
36 never used in Scripture to refer to our broken, fallen biology or sociology or to
37 any other non-sinful aspect of our condition but is always and only used to refer
38 to sin. Even granting that one's fallen biology and/or sociology can make one
39 more prone or more tempted toward homosexual desire (which is sin) or
40 homosexual behavior (which is sin), there is no biblical or confessional basis
41 for referring to this fallen biology/sociology as itself "homosexual"... his
42 conflation of sin and misery is a categorical error that strikes at the vitals of
43 religion.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ SEAL Report, 1-3.

1 Fathers and brothers of MOP, SEAL does not take any pleasure in disagreeing with our dear
2 brother TE Johnson. Nevertheless, because we believe these two teachings of TE Johnson
3 contradict God’s Word as confessed in the Westminster Standards and are injurious to the
4 peace and purity of the church, we must speak up. Indeed, if you believe that someone is in
5 that kind of error Scripturally speaking, it would be unloving if you did not point it out.
6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6).

7
8 We do not write to you out of any sense of superiority or any sense that we have “arrived” or
9 any sense that we are better than you. We know that you believe the same thing about yourself
10 when you have moments that you have to speak up. We are foul, wretched, rotten, evil sinners
11 who are redeemed by the blood of Christ. And so we close as we opened reaffirming that we
12 need each other. We invite you to work with us, to pray with us, and to reason together. We
13 call upon you, in brotherly love, to reconsider the teaching of TE Johnson as unbiblical and
14 unconfessional on the two specific points we have mentioned. We plead with you to not allow
15 TE Johnson to propagate these teachings and to urge him to change his views. Fathers and
16 brothers, we reach out to you because we are not your enemies; we are your friends. And real
17 friends speak the truth in love. As imperfect and defiled by sin as we are, “The aim of our
18 charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim.
19 1:14). We rejoice that in spite of our differences as family in Christ, we share this aim with
20 you and we look forward to fellowshiping you. May God grant His lavish blessing to
21 Missouri Presbytery, to the Presbyterian Church in America, and to His broader church in this
22 world.

23
24 In the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord,
25 Southeast Alabama Presbytery