Long ago human beings learned to dodge full responsibility for their behavior by claiming it was inherited. One will say, “I come from a long line of alcoholics.” Or, “Obesity has been a problem in our family for generations.” Or, “Our family members have been known for at least a hundred years for being impatient and quarrelsome.” But while such confessions may reflect long-term realities, others view them as copouts and not as good excuses for repeating hurtful behavior. Christians especially are expected, through the power of God, to break the cycle.

But today homosexual advocacy groups boldly claim that science supports the genetic origin of that orientation, and the futility of seeking to change it. That claim cannot be lightly brushed aside by Christians who believe what the Bible teaches about homosexual behavior(1). If homosexual acts no longer deserve the “abomination” label (Leviticus 18:22), then they should be erased from everyone’s list of sins.

**Epigenetics**

The current debate swirls around whether or not good science supports the homosexuality-is-genetic claim. Genetics is a hugely complex science, but let’s take a brief look.
A relative newcomer to the field is epigenetics. “Epigenetics literally means ‘above’ or ‘on top of’ genetics. It refers to external modifications to DNA that turn genes ‘on’ or ‘off.’ These modifications do not change the DNA sequence, but instead, they affect how cells ‘read’ genes”(2). “Epigenetics is the expression of genes controlled by short-term transitions known as epi-marks. . . . Epi-marks act as another layer of information fused to our genes that control their expression. Essentially, genes hold the directions, while epi-marks instruct how they are put into motion and completed. . . . To date, no gene for homosexuality has been found”(3).

A little over a year ago three well-known researchers reported that their findings suggest that homosexuality arises on account of epigenetic processes rather than genetic ones(4). That report spawned widespread excitement among homosexual advocacy groups who were quick to claim that science had at last found a genetic explanation for homosexuality. All this, even while the researchers made it clear that they were presenting only a theory. One of the researchers, William R. Rice, said, “We have not figured out how homosexuality occurs, but we’ve figured out a feasible mechanism that can be easily tested”(5).

There is another aspect of this discussion often ignored by those eager to find a heritable base for homosexuality. “Lifestyle and environmental factors can expose a person to chemical tags that change the epigenome. In other words, your epigenome may change based on what you eat and drink, whether you smoke, what medicines you take, what pollutants you encounter and even how quickly your body ages. There is also some evidence from animal and human studies indicating that what a female eats and drinks during pregnancy may change the epigenome of her offspring”(6).

An article in Discover magazine gives support to that hypothesis.

According to the new insights of behavioral epigenetics, traumatic experiences in our past, or in our recent ancestors’ past, leave molecular scars adhering to our DNA. . . .
Like silt deposited on the cogs of a finely tuned machine after the seawater of a tsunami recedes, our experiences, and those of our forebears, are never gone, even if they have been forgotten. They become a part of us, a molecular residue holding fast to our genetic scaffolding. The DNA remains the same, but psychological and behavioral tendencies are inherited. . . . The mechanisms of behavioral epigenetics underlie not only deficits and weaknesses but strengths and resiliencies, too(7).

So, if epigenetic studies point to adverse environmental and lifestyle factors in shaping who we are, and if we allow that that could include a predisposition toward sexual orientation, why can we not assume the opposite to be true? Why couldn’t significant positive changes—physically, mentally, and spiritually—help keep our sexual orientation where God intended it to be, or change it in the direction it ought to go? The articles above referenced support that possibility.

Before we proceed in our discussion, consider the following from Jeremy Yoder, an evolutionary biologist.

Available data suggests that sexual orientation has some inborn, probably genetic basis. But it’s hard to reconcile that with the fact that gay men and lesbians aren’t by definition, particularly interested in doing what it takes to pass on any genes that might have contributed to creating their orientation(8).

Now, that’s the kind of logic that even a non-scientist like myself can appreciate. Excuse me for repeating the obvious, but if homosexuality were wholly genetic, it would long ago have disappeared, since homosexuals cannot reproduce each other.

Who will be next in line?

Twenty-five years ago I could not see the connection between women’s ordination and the acceptance of practicing homosexuals into church fellowship. I knew it was happening in other denominations, but the logic of it escaped me. Today it is clear. It’s all about “equality.” Since all of us have our shortcomings, why do we establish rules for members and
non-members.? All are children of God and are to be accepted just as they are and given all the rights and privileges of church membership.

Unfortunately, it is the nature of evil to spread. When the door to gambling is opened, drunkenness and prostitution follow. When homosexuality is allowed as an acceptable alternative, that encourages other forms of sexual deviancy to seek acceptance. And those people are already lining up at the door labeled genetics. And why not?

For instance, think of someone who finds homosexuality wholly repugnant, but when it comes to adultery, resisting the desire to have sex with virtually any willing partner is a huge battle. So is God justified in giving the homosexual a genetic pass while demanding complete victory, even over every thought, of the adulterer---someone who might also claim that his or her behavior is driven by an “inherited” weakness?

A federal judge recently ruled that Utah laws criminalizing polygamy are unconstitutional(9). So, at least in the state of Utah, one who in the past might have felt condemned and guilt-ridden for practicing adultery, can now begin courting additional wives. Perhaps best of all, someone who heretofore may have felt that the urge to have sex with more than one woman was somehow deeply rooted in his genes, now has civil law to support his “genetic” profile.

And what about pedophilia? The dictionary calls it the “abnormal sexual desire in an adult for children.” Believe it or not, pedophiles have also organized themselves into advocacy groups and are promoting the idea that they, too, have genetic factors which give them their sexual orientation. They, too, argue that their orientation is not abnormal, and are asking for acceptance and accommodation similar to that granted to homosexuals. I know we have now moved from the unbelievable to the ridiculous, but where do we get off this merry-go-round?
Who we really are

The homosexual’s supposedly unanswerable argument is “That’s who I am.” My answer is, but for the grace of God, that’s who we all are. Let’s look now at the defensibility of using genetics to endorse or excuse any human behavior which the Bible calls sinful. In fact, if genetics can be used as an excuse, all except Adam and Eve are off the hook.

In the biblical view of the human condition, we all have what has long been labeled a carnal (fleshly) nature. Paul says of himself that, apart from Christ, he is “carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). The Psalmist says, “There is none that does good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:3). This deeply-embedded carnality is manifest in “sins of the flesh” (Colossians 2:11). Romans 1: 26, 27 make it very clear that homosexual practices are among those sins.

So when it comes to our identity as sinful human beings, who can claim an advantage? Family, education, environment, church affiliation—all might help us in the battle with sin and self, but when the dust settles, there is something we still hold in common with every other human who has ever lived: a sinful nature. The seeds of rebellion have been planted and are ready to spring up, and will spring up, if Satan is given the least advantage. Basically, when it comes to developing a character fit for heaven, the obstacles presented by one person’s carnality are little different from anyone else’s. We all need just as much grace and divine power to overcome as the next person.

Practice matters

I find it a curious thing that the term “practicing homosexual” has been invented to separate those who have the predisposition from those who actually adopt the lifestyle. Does God separate “practicing adulterers” from those who do not go beyond lustful thoughts? “Practicing thieves” from those who do no more than covet? “Practicing murderers” from those who do not carry out their murderous plans?

Of course, in the human arena practice does make a difference. Would anyone genetically predisposed to alcoholism become an alcoholic if they never in their life tasted
beverage alcohol? Would anyone become obese who never took in more calories than they burned? Would any home have been broken by unfaithfulness to the marriage vows if both spouses had always kept those vows?

This brings us to the focus of our discussion: How many “practicing homosexuals” would there be if those experiencing same-sex attractions never engaged in the act? Somewhere, sometime, a clear choice has to be made to cross a barrier that God and nature itself has erected, and put into practice the urgings of the carnal nature. Practice matters.

I believe the philosophy and rationale undergirding and protecting homosexuality (and virtually every other sinful choice) is rooted in spiritualism. Listen for that seductive voice in the following:

Spiritualism asserts that men are un-fallen demigods; that ‘each mind will judge itself’; that ‘true knowledge places men above all law’; that ‘all sins committed are innocent’; for ‘whatever is, is right,’ and ‘God doth not condemn.’ The basest of human beings it represents as in heaven, and highly exalted there. Thus it declares to all men, ‘It matters not what you do; live as you please, heaven is your home.’ Multitudes are thus led to believe that desire is the highest law, that license is liberty, and that man is accountable only to himself.

With such teaching given at the very outset of life, when impulse is strongest, and the demand for self-restraint and purity is most urgent, where are the safeguards of virtue? What is to prevent the world from becoming a second Sodom? (Education, pp. 227, 228).

The homosexuality-is-genetic defense is indefensible. Trying to put a DNA marker on our sinful behavior is futile. A sinner is a sinner is a sinner. We are all “saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Let’s not use genetics to excuse our sinful conduct. It is a gross affront to the sacrifice of Christ and the pardon and power He offers. Instead, let’s thank God “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).
The weakest generation

Through the successive generations since the fall, the tendency has been continually downward. Disease has been transmitted from parents to children, generation after generation. Even infants in the cradle suffer from afflictions caused by the sins of their parents (*Counsels on Health*, p. 19).

After six thousand years of such degradation, it’s a wonder we aren’t all a bunching of maniacs foraging in the jungle. But it is God’s plan that in the weakest generation ever to live upon the earth should also be seen the greatest demonstration of His power to save. We are that generation. Our gene pool has been contaminated by the genetic mutations of scores of generations. Our physical, mental, and spiritual faculties have been severely compromised. And yet, it is in us and through us that God will show the forces of hell that “He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (*Hebrews* 7:25).

To do that, He has given us the greatest light ever given to any generation. We have a broader and deeper understanding of the Bible than any before us. “The Bible has accumulated and bound up together its treasures for this last generation” (*Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 339). We also have the Spirit of Prophecy. “All who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White and has given her a message will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days” (*Last Day Events*, p. 44). God has also made available to us the greatest power ever given to earth’s inhabitants.

But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain’” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55).

We can overcome.
We are without excuse. “We can overcome. Yes; fully, entirely. Jesus died to make a way of escape for us, that we might overcome every fault, resist every temptation, and sit down at last with Him in His throne” (Our High Calling, p. 353). “God has not left us to battle with evil in our own finite strength. Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart” (Ministry of Healing, p. 175).

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The hour is late. We cannot afford to allow ourselves to be sidetracked and divided on issues to which God has clearly spoken.

Through indulgence in sin, the world is becoming as corrupt as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah . . . The very sins that brought upon Sodom the fire of destruction are practiced today, and are fast ripening the world for the day of final doom. Indulgence in intoxicating liquor and in licentious practices, is common in all our cities and villages, and the last great day is hastening upon the world (Review and Herald, May 1, 1894).

And believe me, I’m talking to myself when I say, neither can we afford to be unsympathetic with those whose struggles are different from our own. We must learn to show compassion without compromise. None of us dare forget Jesus’ warning that, in the judgment, it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for Capernaum (Matthew 11:23, 24), more tolerable for those who have, through no fault of their own, lived their lives in darkness, than for Seventh-day Adventists who have ready access to such an immense treasury of light.

Let us, with all love and kindness, point others to those resources and look forward to joining our voices with theirs in singing the song of victory.
ENDNOTES


BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Lee Roy Holmes has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the North Pacific Union as Bible teacher, pastor, and school administrator for over forty years. Most recently he served as pastor for the Kettle Falls, Washington district. He has co-authored two Bible textbooks used in our academies, and written the book, *The Church that Does Not Fall*. He has three sons who are active in their local churches.