

THE GRAPES OF SODOM
AND
THE CLUSTERS OF GOMORRAH



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God's Creation

“Male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The recorded words of creation are not “man” and “woman,” but “male” and “female.” The designations “male” and “female” describe the sexual identity of these two persons at their creation.

“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’” (Gen. 1:28). How awesome! The Almighty Creator pronounces his richest benediction on the whole of the sexual relation between “male” and “female.” The wonder of it all! Acquaintance, attraction, acceptance, intimacy all enjoy God’s very personal blessing on these two objects of his special attention at creation.

Three times over God indicates the outworking of this creational blessing on male and female. Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth.

It may seem rather obvious to note that God does not create two males or two females. But the point is nonetheless well taken. Two males or two females would not be capable of realizing one of the major purposes of God’s creating sexual rather than asexual persons.

Later some recognition is given to a sexual relation between two males or two females:

With a male do not lie as with a female. It is an abomination (Lev. 18:22).

God warns his people that he will vomit them out of the land if they practice this kind of abomination (Lev. 18:28).

Jesus recalls the creational intention of God in designing “male” and “female” as the basis for the wondrous fusion of marriage: “Have you not read that The Creator from the beginning ‘male’ and ‘female’ made them?” (Matt. 19:4). The Lord uses the two specific Greek words for sexual identity that correspond to the Hebrew equivalent of creation’s narrative. “What therefore God has yoked together, let no man dare separate” (Matt. 19:6). Like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle designed to slot right into one another, so The Creator designs this male for this female, and this female for this male. What a wonder is the fusion of male and female, body and soul.

But this created intention for fruitfulness—Jesus has a special interest in it. The Father has promised him a multiple seed. From every tribe, kindred, language and people. More numerous than the stars, the sand, the particles of dust on the earth. He deserves far more. But that's what he wants. He wants them to be with him in glory (John 17:24). The prophecy promised him that “he will see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

So how does homosexuality serve this grand design of the Father and this grievous suffering of the Son?

It resists the grand design of The Creator. It denies the rightful heritage of the Son.

This is not a little thing. To resist the intent of your Creator in your sexual identity, to deny Jesus satisfaction for his suffering, is big.

Having children isn't the be-all and end-all of life. Some couples in the plans and purposes of God do not have children, and all to God's glory. God's word specifically provides for a rich life in singleness (1 Cor. 7:1, 7-9, 17, 32). But to deliberately choose a way that contradicts the designed order and moral standard of creation is to countermand the good purposes of The Creator and to deny the rightful heritage of The Redeemer.

Christ's Redemption

How great is the gospel of Jesus Christ! This "gospel," this "great news" is for all people on the face of the earth, for all time.

This gospel may be expressed in several ways. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). "God manifested his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

Whether you have lived without a knowledge of God's law, or have been taught from your youth what is right and wrong, this great news of the gospel of God is for you. All your sense of shame and guilt can be totally removed. You can be completely free from a condemning conscience.

What's more, you can be free from the power of darkness and evil in your life.

How so? By the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, and the energizing power of the Spirit of God enveloping your body and your soul.

But how can I get to that cleansing power of the blood of Christ? How can I access the energizing power of the Spirit of God?

By repenting and believing. Repent of all your sin and pollution right now as you stand in the presence of the holy God who is full of mercy. Repent of your wrong-doing, your wrong-thinking and your wrong-being. Then entrust your whole self, body and soul, to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Make your earnest appeal to him, the living Lord who has the nail-prints in his hands and feet.

Why did he have to die as a man cursed on the cross? Because as the innocent man he was willing to be cursed even to death and hell for people just like you and me who deserve the eternal death of separation from God for our sin.

How could the Holy Spirit of the one true God live inside you and me? By cleansing us of all our defilements, making us a new creation, and bringing us to new life by the power of the resurrected Christ who himself overcame death.

Today! Not tomorrow or next week or next year. Today is the day appointed for your salvation from sin with all its guilt and corruption. Don't wait another moment. Look to the Lord in humble trust and he will save you now. The sanctifying work of the Spirit will take a life-time. A newborn baby does not reach adulthood in a day. But once new life in Christ has begun, it will never fail. It will continue forever.

Attraction or Temptation?

Same-sex attraction or same-sex temptation? There's a big difference. What's the difference, and what difference does it make?

I. What's the Difference?

“Same-sex attraction” treats that which is contrary to creation as though it were a normal part of God's created order. The phrase “same-sex *attraction*” normalizes desires that do not belong to God's original order for sexual relations. It normalizes the abnormal.

“Hetero-sexual attraction,” sexual attraction toward a person of the opposite sex, can indeed be sinful. Yet it arises as a normal desire of a person's created nature. God by the wonder of creation planted in human beings a sexual desire for an intimate relationship toward someone of the opposite sex. “Hetero-sexual attraction” is a vital part of a human being's God-created constitution.

The phrase “same-sex *attraction*” normalizes a desire that contradicts the natural order of God's creation. It places desires that are contrary to God's creational order on the same level as “hetero-sexual attraction,” which conforms to God's original design for relationships among males and females.

For that basic reason, it is far more appropriate to speak of “same-sex *temptation*” rather than “same-sex *attraction*.” Desire for the intimacies of a sexual relationship with a person of the same sex should be regarded as the desire of a fallen nature into sin against God. “Same-sex temptation” is the self-luring of a person into a state of soul that violates the purity of God's holy will for humanity.

II. What Difference Does It Make?

What's the big deal? What difference does it make whether you speak of “same-sex *attraction*” or “same-sex *temptation*”?

The “big deal” is the health and well-being of your inmost self, your inner soul in its relation to God, to your neighbor and to yourself.

Thinking of your same-sex desire as though it were an *attraction* that is natural to your whole being results in an unhealthy state of your soul. Thinking of your same-sex desire as *temptation* can move you to repent, which in turn can bring you peace with God.

Imagine your deepest inner self as a fortress—one of those old walled castles prepared to repel all threatening invaders that might disturb your peace of soul. Think in terms of same-sex *attraction*, and you have already flung open those defensive doors of your inner self. You have received the enemy within, and treated it as a natural part of the God-ordered creation. You have willingly allowed an unnatural desire of your soul to make itself at home as though it were a proper member of the family of your natural desires. Only afterwards have you begun to determine whether this “unnatural desire,” this “same-sex attraction” will remain a welcome guest in your heart of hearts that should be gratified.

But regard a desire for intimacy with the same sex as a *temptation*. Then you will confront this alien desire by bolting shut those sturdy doors at the gate of your soul. “*Not welcome here,*” you pronounce. Rather than deciding to organize your resistance after the enemy has already gained welcome entrance to your soul as a “same-sex *attraction,*” you declare with Jesus to the “same-sex *temptation,*” “Get thee behind me, Satan!” (Matt. 16:23).

As a new creation in Christ, you have a renewed will. Just as truly as Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, you can rise to newness of life in Christ. More and more you can die to sin and live to righteousness. Your relationships to people of the same sex and of the opposite sex can be normalized. Your sexual instincts can be re-set by the indwelling power of the resurrected Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Despite ongoing temptation toward same-sex relations, you can be “more than conqueror” through the living Christ (2 Cor. 10:13, 1 Cor. 10:13, Rom 8:37).

The Faith that Transforms

She was crying. Crying in church. Why was she crying?

She grew up in a Muslim family. She already had been put out of her home. Now she was going to be baptized as a Christian!

But for some reason, the baptism had been delayed until a later date, and she was crushed. It was like the delay of a bride's wedding-day. She had been so eagerly anticipating that great moment of transition. No longer would she be plagued by that oppressive darkness of her former way of life. Once and for all, by her baptism into Christ she would live out the rest of her life in the glorious light of her new world.

Is that the way you view your baptism? Whether your life before Christ has been in the realm of homosexuality or in some other sin, baptism into Christ must mean more than simply an outward routine. You have been transferred into a new realm of existence. The "old you" has been buried with Christ, and the "new you" lives in Him every moment for the rest of your life. It cannot be otherwise. Or you have not been baptized into Christ. You have not been transformed, transferred from the old way of existence into the new life in Him. You cannot claim to be a Christian without this transformation. But some people suppose that they can.

Paul says he does not want you to be ignorant of this fact. "They all passed through the sea. They all were baptized into Moses...But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were 'brought to a catastrophe' in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:1, 2a; 5). They were baptized by passing through the Red Sea, to be sure. But they did not experience transformation of their essential identity. If slavery in Egypt symbolized slavery to sin, they remained enslaved despite the outer form of their deliverance.

What can we learn from their experience? "Let us not be living in sexual immorality as some of them, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell in a single day" (1 Cor. 10:8).

Whether being and continuing with the identity of a homosexual, or actually practicing homosexuality, this lifestyle embodies ongoing sexual immorality. It denies the re-creative work of the Holy Spirit and the transforming power of the resurrected Jesus Christ, if he lives in you.

These experiences of Israel in the Old Testament have been written down for our admonition on whom the end of the ages has come. So let the person who thinks he stands keep on the lookout so he does not fall, just as they fell in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:11, 12). No one should be fooled into thinking they can legitimately claim to be baptized into Christ without the radical change of personhood and transformation of lifestyle that dying and rising with Christ accomplishes. You cannot be baptized into Christ, and still identify yourself as a homosexual Christian. For "if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

By the Touch or By the Heart

Matthew 15:1-20

Is sin located in the touch or in the heart? Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating. It was the expected thing according to religious consensus. But Jesus locates sin, not in the act of eating or touching that might defile. Instead, he locates sin in the heart.

You can touch an apple. You can eat it. That's no sin. But if you have stolen the apple, eating it is sin, a sin that started in the heart.

See that young man? He has obviously been working out. Look at his bulging biceps. Is it OK to feel his biceps?

That's fine. No problem. Yep. Hard as a rock.

But if sexual desire is the motivation for the touch, it's sin even without the touch. As Jesus says, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts" (Matt. 15:19).

Jesus then lists six "evil thoughts," all of them plural in number. Isn't it true? Once your mind latches onto a certain subject, one thought tumbles right on top of another. If the lead thought contains sin, most likely the dozens of thoughts that follow will be just as polluted.

Jesus first lists "murders." He mentions "murderous thoughts" first because that's what was going on in the minds of the people who asked the question about "clean hands" rather than "clean hearts." His disciples said these people were "offended." But their offence was so strong that it prompted Jesus to "leave that place" and travel all the way to Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 15:21).

Next Jesus lists two sexual sins that are regularly prominent in the corrupted human heart: adulteries and fornications. These are the things that defile the heart, not unwashed hands.

To commend a person who identifies himself as an adulterer, a fornicator, or a homosexual because he says he never "practices" these things is to locate sin in the "touch" rather than in the heart. Yet ignoring the heart as the source of these sins leaves a person living perpetually in a state of defiling sin. If cancer is the issue, radical

surgery is regularly the solution, not simply more pills to deaden the pain caused by the cancer.

Jesus gladly receives all who will undergo the "radical surgery" of repentance for the defilements of the heart. But he will not accept simply "washed hands" that may not have yet done the defiling deed. He paid the price for full renewal of the heart and graciously sends his Spirit for the regenerating of the sinful soul. Having undergone the punishment people deserve for their sins, he will not be satisfied by dealing only with the symptoms of the sinful soul. But he delights in the renewal of the whole person.

Holy, Holy, Holy

These words. They are so memorable. Once you hear them, you will never forget them. You even sing them: “*Holy, holy, holy. Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our son shall rise to thee.*”

But what do these words mean? When were they first spoken? Who first spoke them?

These are words first spoken in heaven. By angels. Before God lifted up high on his glorious throne. Before him day and night the supernatural beings of heaven chant in overwhelming awesomeness, *Holy, Holy, Holy.*

Isaiah the prophet was the first person to hear these words in a vision of God. When did he hear them?

In the year that King Uzziah died he heard these words.

Who was King Uzziah? How did he die? Was he one of those wicked kings of Israel?

No. He was a good king of Judah.

He died a leper. He lived the last years of his life in a separate house under permanent quarantine because of an incurable case of leprosy. His benumbed fingers, his distorted face accompanied him to the grave.

Why did this good king live out the last years of his life in such a miserable state?

Because he violated the holiness of God.

He ventured to enter the Holy Place of God, where only the consecrated priests were allowed to enter. God struck him with leprosy. In his forehead for everyone to see. Right where the High Priest’s golden plate should have hung with its solemn inscription, *Holiness to the LORD.* Uzziah’s heart was lifted up in pride. He violated the holiness of God, and God brought him down.

And are we in our day daring to bring the defiled, the polluted, into the holy place of God? Are we to allow a person who describes himself as a homosexual into the sacred ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ? Not

simply that this person experiences same-sex attraction. Instead, he affirms himself to be, in his inmost being, in his heart of hearts, a homosexual. Indeed, he may declare that he is celibate, a non-practicing homosexual. But by his own self-description, he *is* a homosexual.

Paul by the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Holiness,” speaks of forgiving grace while upholding God’s standard of holiness. “Some of you *were*” homosexual, he says. “*But* ...you were washed, you were *made holy*, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). If being a homosexual is something that you were in the past, but you are now washed and made holy by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, then you are good to go. But if you continue to describe yourself as a homosexual in your essence, then your inner self can be washed and needs to be made holy before you can enter the holy service of the Lord. The fountain of Jesus’ cleansing blood is always available. By the work of the Holy Spirit, you can be made a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, come out
from the midst of them
and be separate,
says the Lord;
and anything that is defiled
do not even touch.

Then I will receive you
into myself,
and I shall be to you
a Father,
and you shall be to me
sons and daughters,
says the Lord-Creator of All.

Therefore, since we have these promises, beloved,
let us cleanse ourselves
from every defilement of flesh and spirit,
perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1).

God Made Me This Way

“God made me this way.”

A male human being with sexual desires for another male. I’m not to blame for who I am.

You may not be so bold as to say, “It’s God’s fault.” But you may rationalize and conclude, “There’s really nothing wrong with who I am, since God made me this way.”

Just a minute. That train of thought sounds vaguely familiar. Didn’t Satan say to the woman, “You certainly will not die, for God knows that in the day you eat of [the tree],...you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4, 5). Eve must have followed Satan’s reasoning: “God put the tree right in front of me. He knew all along what would happen if I should eat. So it must be ok for me to eat, even though He said I shouldn’t, and that I would die if I did.”

“God put this same-sex desire in me,” you say. So it must be ok for me to have these same-sex desires despite the fact that they contradict God’s creational order.

Hold on! God will not, he cannot contradict himself. “Let God be true, and every human being a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

Yes, you can say in one sense, “God made me this way.” He made everything.

But you can never make him blameworthy for any wrongdoing. His eyes are “so pure that they cannot even look on evil or gaze on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13).

You might cast the blame on our first parents, Adam and Eve. As God’s appointed head over all creation, Adam’s sin brought calamity and disorder on the whole of this world in which we live. Even until today, the whole universe groans as though it were a woman in the travails of childbirth (Rom. 8:22).

Yet you and I share the guilt that has brought all this disorder into the world. If you ever want to claim for yourself deliverance from sin and death by your personal connection to Christ, you must acknowledge

in yourself a full participation in the blame of Adam's sin as well as your own (Rom. 5:19a).

The devil tempts you to blame God for the disorder of your sexual inclinations, just as he tempted Eve. He encourages you to think, "God made me this way, so it must be ok."

But God must never be blamed for a disorder that contradicts his own creation. A thief must take the blame for his thievery, and a liar must accept personal responsibility for all his lies. The blame for every homosexual desire ultimately rests, not with God or society, but with the individual person.

So what is it that God has done? If God is never, ever to be blamed in the slightest way for the sin of homosexuality in someone's soul, how has God responded to this violation of his created order?

God has made it possible for you to be *in* his Son Jesus Christ just as much as you were *in* Adam. You sinned in Adam, and you died in Adam (Rom. 5:12). But exactly as you died to all righteousness in Adam, so you can be made alive to all righteousness in Christ. By repentance and faith in him you can be united with him in his death and resurrection. You can die to sin and come alive to righteousness in Christ.

Don't blame God. Blame yourself for all your sin, including your sexual sins of violating God's perfect creational order. Then claim by faith Christ's sacrificial death in your place and Christ's life-giving resurrection for your new life in him.

How freeing! How liberating! Become what you want to be by defining your identity in him. *Be* what you *are* by faith in Jesus' death and life for sinners just like you and me. Amen? Amen!

No Shame

A Korean biblical theologian was studying “Shame” in the Bible. Shame has great significance in Korean culture. He was looking especially at “shame” in the prophecy of Jeremiah. As the prophetic forerunner to the devastation of God’s people, Jeremiah repeats word for word this identical message

“Were they ashamed when they committed a shameful act? No, they had no shame. They did not even know how to blush. So they shall fall along with all the others who fall. When I punish them, they shall be totally devastated,” says the LORD. (Jer. 6:15)

These exact words Jeremiah repeats two chapters later (Jer. 8:12). Only if the people become ashamed and repent of their abominable sins can they expect God to deliver them from their calamity. But because they never felt shame for their sin, they were carried into exile.

The church in Corinth felt *no shame*. In fact, they were puffed up in pride (1 Cor. 5:2).

What were they so proud about? Because of their tolerant attitude toward a depraved sexual disorder in one of their members. This sexual disorder was so extreme that it was not even practiced among their heathen neighbors. This man was living in an ongoing sexual relationship with his father’s wife—his step-mother.

And the church was proud of itself! They showed so much accepting love toward this couple. They were all so welcoming to them. But Paul says,

“Put him out of the church! Turn his body over to Satan for its destruction so his soul may be saved” (1 Cor. 5:5, 13).

That was the Apostle’s reaction to this spirit of toleration toward sexual immorality among the fellowship of professing believers. Do this hard thing for the salvation of his soul and the protection of the entire church. Don’t you know that a little yeast placed in a lump of dough will

eventually permeate the whole lump? Unless you purge this abomination from your community of believers, every member may be infected.

Shall the church of today be proud when a person who serves as one of its gospel ministers describes himself as a homosexual? Indeed, he may indicate that he isn't practicing his homosexuality. But in his heart of hearts, he identifies himself as a homosexual. What then will be the effect of his modeling and his message as minister among the people of the church? Will not even a little yeast permeate the whole body of believers?

Paul says, We have a Passover feast to celebrate (1 Cor. 5:8). In Israel's celebration of the Passover, all leaven had to be removed from every house. Even today, a ritual ceremony of searching every cabinet and drawer in an Israelite's dwelling is a part of their Passover celebration. On the night of the original exodus from Egypt, the Israelites had no leisure to allow for yeast to rise in their dough. So today, Christians should have no time for the corruptions of the world to settle into their homes and churches.

So symbolically, "Let us keep the feast" with bread without yeast. Let us be thoroughly committed to expel every trace of carnality connected with our bondage to sin and its corruptions. Let us not allow pride to mislead us, whether it be "gay pride" or a mis-placed pride over how gracious and generous we are in accepting people who advocate or tolerate sexual immorality. We must live in such urgency to escape every corruption of sin that we cannot allow time or place for the yeast of our life's bread to rise. Christ our Passover Lamb has already been sacrificed, and the time has come for us to keep the feast. He has paid an awesome price for our deliverance, so let us flee the realm of our bondage to sin. Then it will be proper to say, "No Shame."

My Heroes

Between May 25 and June 3, 1886, which is not that long ago, 32 men, mostly between the ages of 14 and 26, were hacked to death, speared to death, dismembered and burned to death.¹ Knowing their appointed fate, not a single believer denied his faith. Within the span of a few weeks, the total number of martyrs reached to between 100 and 200.

Where and why? The country was Uganda, and the principal cause was the conversion to Christianity of young royal pages who persistently refused the solicitations and demands of new King Mwanga for homosexual relations. Every year on June 3, tens of thousands gather at Namugongo, one of the major martyrdom sites, to celebrate and honor these martyrs who gave their lives for the truth and the holiness of the Christian faith. Today 85% of Uganda's population are confessing Christians, consisting of almost 40 million individuals in this single African country--and the number continues to grow significantly. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

THESE ARE MY HEROES IN THE FAITH.

On June 10, 2022, three archbishops of the churches of Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda responded to a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury who rebuked them for refusing to attend the Lambeth conference of their denomination.

¹ Philip Jenkins. *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 44; J. F. Faupel, *African Holocaust. The Story of the Uganda Martyrs* (Africa: St. Paul Publications, 1984), 217. The precise number of victims differs slightly due to differing accounts of those troublous times.



Archbishops of the Churches of Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda

Their response, in part, reads as follows:

“We note your Grace’s statement that: ‘The Bible is at the heart of Christian life. Anglicans hold to scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of faith, as the church has down the centuries’. We believe that this fundamental fact should be applied to the rejection of homosexual lifestyle especially among Christians. The Church is an assembly of Believers who are “Called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:9); not a community that indulges unrepentant sinners. While Christians are sinners forgiven by grace, that grace must not be received in vain.”

“There is no doubt whatsoever that the Bible condemns homosexual behaviour. Consequently, standing with the Bible and correcting gay sex and same-sex relationships is not and should not be construed as discrimination against gay people. Insisting that the church of God adhere to the word of God in matters of human sexuality and marriage is not discriminatory by any stretch of imagination.”

THESE ARE ALSO MY HEROES IN THE FAITH.

I returned to the USA after twenty-seven years of being blessed as a missionary in Africa, including fourteen years in Uganda, the land of the Namugongo martyrs. I fondly hope to see my church standing alongside these African “heroes of the faith” with the same firm commitment to “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

Love, Love, Love, Love

Love, love, love, love. The gospel in a word is love. Love your neighbor as yourself, for God is love.

The **613** commandments of the Old Testament are distilled in the **ten**. Jesus summarized the **ten** commandments into **two**, and love is the **one** activating factor of those two all-encompassing commandments. Yes, the gospel in a word is love.

But love is a many-splendored thing, and comes to expression in many diverse ways.

Did Paul love the man who was living in sexual immorality with his father's wife by putting him out of the church? Was he really acting in love when he "pronounced judgment" on him even though the Apostle was over in Ephesus of Asia while the man lived in Corinth of Europe (1 Cor. 5:3)? Had he taken into account all the variables of cultural context that needed to be considered in this particular case?

Love? Did love motivate the Apostle to direct the Corinthian church to "deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5)? Would not love have come to expression in a softer, more gentle touch?

Let's get the whole picture well-settled in our minds and imaginations. What ultimate outcome was Paul looking for? He states it quite dramatically: "...so that his *spirit* may be saved in the DAY! the DAY OF THE LORD! the DAY OF THE LORD JESUS!" (1 Cor. 5:5). You know about the DAY OF THE LORD, but maybe you have forgotten. Or perhaps the reality of THAT GREAT DAY has been pushed to the back of your head as you go about buying and selling, laying waste your life. THAT DAY fills the pages of the Old Testament prophets. It's the DAY set by our sovereign Creator-God and Judge in which every person who has ever lived will give account for his every thought, word and deed. The scrolls will be opened, and one by one you will stand before your Maker to be judged by him who knows the deepest secrets of every human heart.

Paul weighs the polluted sexual pleasures of this man's flesh over against the eternal destiny of his spirit spending eternity in heaven or hell. As Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). He actually gains nothing and loses everything.

Have you forgotten? The flesh—it shall rot in the grave. But the spirit—it shall endure forever. Just because you may have lost faith in God's word about the eternity of your soul doesn't deny the reality of God's endowing man with an eternal soul at creation.

Which is more important—the ongoing gratification of the corrupted flesh, or the salvation of the eternal soul? Does Paul love this man when he screams at the church and says, Do everything you can to save his soul! So long as he lives in his sin unrepentant, he's lost. "Don't you know?...Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, neither passive nor active partners in consensual homosexual acts...will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9,10 ESVn).

What was the outcome of Paul's "tough love"?

The man was restored! He became deeply sorrowful for his sin. To keep him from being "submerged in sorrow," the church then needed to show great grace and offer comfort to him (2 Cor. 2:7).

This young church in Corinth was divided over the issue. Understandably. It was the "majority" that determined to exercise the discipline (2 Cor. 2:6). But Paul is now hoping that all of them will join in the joy of forgiving him and receiving him back. He begs them to "reaffirm their love for him" (2 Cor. 2:8).

Paul concludes this love-lesson with a second and rather intriguing reference to Satan. "His thoughts," he says. Satan has a mind, and with his mind he has thoughts? Indeed, Satan has thoughts in his mind. Along with his thoughts he also has words, and often he has his words written out.

What does Satan think about? Among other things, he thinks about love. He does his best to stay one step ahead of us as he thinks about love. He wants to have a more comprehensive understanding of love than we, so he can outwit us.

While someone lives in a specific immorality, Satan suggests, “Love them and leave them alone. Let them forfeit flesh and spirit for their bodily pleasures.” But if they repent and offer a humble plea to be received, Satan says, “Now is the time to show really tough love. Don’t receive them back. Make them do acts of penance over a long period of time. That’s what you should do.”

“But,” says the Apostle Paul, “we are not ignorant of Satan’s schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11c). He will try to trick us in every possible way. He will even operate under the camouflage of “love.”

Love them and leave them? Leave them alone in the morass of their lostness to immorality? No. Leave them alone in their sorrow for sin so they descend into self-incriminating remorse? No.

Love them; and then love them; and then love them again. For “God so loved the world” in all its corruption “that he gave up his only son” for “whosoever...” (John 3:16).

One of These Little Ones

These little ones—who are they (Matt. 18:5, 6)? They are little children believing in Jesus. They are covenant children, brought to church by their parents, baptized by an ordained minister of the gospel.

What's Jesus' concern? His concern is not first of all for the whole group of these "little ones." His first concern is for *one*—just a single *one* of these little ones. Jesus does not see these children as a faceless mob of nameless kids. He sees each and every one of them as a real person. His concern is for each one of them as a person who trusts in him.

Jesus' second concern relates to a cold, hard fact. Over and over this real concern of his will happen. It is inevitable. In every generation. In practically every group of people believing in him it will happen (Matt. 18:7).

What is this serious concern of Jesus that is sure to happen? Is it kidnapping? Child abuse? Nothing so dramatic.

Jesus' concern is that one, a single one of these children, will be led astray. Somebody will put something in their way, or will say something that will make them trip. It will be very bad for the child.

It will also be very bad for the person who makes them stumble. Woe, woe, woe to him, says Jesus. A woe like the woes of the ancient prophets he pronounces over anyone who makes one—just one—of these little ones who believes in him to stumble. It would be better for him that a millstone be tied about his neck and he be cast into the depths of the sea before he causes one of these little ones to stumble (Matt. 18:6b). But if you actually cause one of these little ones to stumble, you may be hurled, not into the sea, but into the eternal fire (Matt. 18:8).

So you think it's ok for a homosexual to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's not practicing his homosexuality, but in his heart of hearts he describes himself as a homosexual. Not that he *was* a homosexual, but that he *is* a homosexual.

He is your leader. He is the model for your children to follow. He stands in the pulpit and by personal word or by clear reputation he says,

“I am a homosexual. I do not practice my homosexuality, but that’s what I am.”

“Follow me,” he says to the little ones, to the youth of the church. To you as a parent he says, “Entrust your children to me. I will provide the leadership they need in this age of confused sexual identity.”

Some people might say, “That’s just what we need! We need someone who is capable of manifesting care not condemnation for the sexually confused. Since this man regularly experiences the challenges of homosexual desire, while exercising constant restraint on those desires, he possesses two advantages: (1) he can sympathize with your child who may experience these same desires; and (2) he has the perfect base for reaching out sympathetically to the non-Christian with this same life-style.

But notice carefully. This person is not just experiencing homosexual “attraction.” He is describing his deepest inner core as homosexual. He calls himself a “gay Christian.” He is not saying that he *was* of this sort in the past, but is so no more. As Paul says of some of the Corinthians, “And that is what some of you *were*” (1 Cor. 6:11a). You *were* of this sort. But you have been washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11b). As the Apostle subsequently says, “If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away; all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Only a new creature in Christ can lead the next generation into this new life in Christ. For only a new creature in Christ can say with the Apostle Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). But this person is saying by his teaching and by his example, “Be like me. Be a homosexual.”

Jesus seriously warns about misleading little ones. Let us be sure we are not leading even a single one of these little ones astray.

The Ultimate Oxymoron

Oxus: “sharp.” *Moros*: “dull.” The blade of a knife—sharp and dull at the same time? It’s not possible. It’s an oxymoron.

In the realm of relationship to God, a person cannot be a Christian and a homosexual at the same time. A “homosexual Christian,” a “gay Christian” is an oxymoron. It’s the ultimate oxymoron because it unites Christ in his perfections as Son of God with someone whose personhood contradicts the order God has created for humanity, which is that people reflect his likeness.

God in his glory as Creator exceeds all imaginations. Male and female he created quite differently but in a beautiful way so that they complement one another. Anyone who has experienced a sexual relation according to God’s ordering can only marvel at the wonder of the Creator’s genius.

The Apostle Paul wrote two letters inspired by God to a new Christian community being formed in the Greek city of Corinth. If the sister city of Athens was known for its intellectualism, Corinth was known for its divergence from normal sexual order. Prostitutes male and female served regularly at the pagan temple in Corinth. By addressing someone as a “Corinthian,” you were characterizing him as a sexually immoral person.

Paul addresses this situation with a series of words that describe the essential identity of a person rather than referring primarily to his behavior. Three nouns and an adjective define the state of these people’s basic identity. “*You know, do you not?*” he says. He speaks of circumstances obvious to everyone since these life-orientations contradict the very order of creation. He speaks of “*sexually immoral people,*” “*adulterers,*” “*male prostitutes,*” and “*homosexuals*” (1 Cor. 6:9b-10). Paul is not talking primarily about what these people are doing. He describes instead who they are as persons. These kinds of persons “*will not inherit God’s kingdom*” (1 Cor. 6:9a).

What can be done? What can be said? The “ultimate oxymoron” must not prevail, for there can be no such person as a “homosexual

Christian,” a “gay *Christian.*” A person can obviously “*say*” these words, putting “homosexual” and “Christian” together. But someone who describes himself as a “*Christian,*” one who is united body and soul to the “*Christ,*” cannot at the same time *be* a “homosexual.”

But God’s word does not leave it there. Paul’s further word must be heard:

“And such were some of you!” (1 Cor. 6:11a).

That’s right. Within and among the Christians in Corinth *were* some who *had been* homosexual. That’s what they *were*.

But! You were washed! Bathed in body and soul. You were made holy, totally cleansed from every remnant of defilement. You were justified, declared by God himself to be forgiven of all sin and clothed by grace in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ, God’s perfect son (1 Cor. 6:11b).

God in his marvelous, recreative grace replaces the “ultimate oxymoron” by re-making sons and daughters of God so that they *are* like his beloved Son. For: “*With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible*” (Matt. 19:26).

The Name, the Name, the Name

The name, the name, the name. Have you ever noticed how many times the Scriptures refer to “the name”? Everything hinges on “*the name.*”

“What is your name?” ask both Jacob and Moses (Gen. 32:29; Exod. 3:13). Shoes off, face buried in Sinai sand, warmed by the sun and the burning bush.

YHWH is my sacred name. You must not take the name of YHWH your God in vain. My name is Holy, Holy, Holy. Nothing must defile my name.

Now in the present day “Jesus Christ” is my holy name. You must revere my name. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Every tongue shall declare: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD. At all costs, you must maintain the holiness of my name. Nothing must corrupt my holy name.

You, my people, shall be called by my holy name: “CHRIST-IAN” “Homosexual CHRISTIAN?” “Gay CHRISTIAN?” Never! Like repelling magnets, the stronger the magnet, the firmer the repulsion. The strong name of CHRISTIAN repels every polar opposite. Any joining of these two opposites is purely and simply a corrupting syncretism.

Whatever you do, whatever you say, do not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. Do not merge for a single moment the holy with the unholy. Keep the holy name of Jesus Christ separate from all things unholy.

Give all glory to the mighty name of Jesus Christ. The Name, the Name, the Name. There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved from the corruptions of our souls (Acts 4:12).

The Grapes of Sodom and the Clusters of Gomorrah (I)

What are these? The Grapes of Sodom and the Clusters of Gomorrah?

These are Moses' prophesied fruits of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Living 500 years after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses foresaw the same fruit of destruction for the people who bore God's name (Deut. 32:32).

But what was the sin of the cities of the plain (cf. Gen. 18:20, 21; 19:1-5)? Some say it was the sin of failed hospitality. Because the customs of hospitality ran so deeply in the culture of the day, the failure of these cities to show hospitality led to their destruction by God.

But more significantly than the supposed culture of the day in understanding the sin of these cities is the consistent use by Scripture of the verb "to know." Adam "knew" Eve his wife (Gen. 4:1), and modern translations correctly interpret this phrase as describing the intimacy of relations as "Adam lay with his wife" (NIV). He had the intimacy of sexual relations with his wife. In an analogous situation much later in Israelite history, Amos reports on God's special relationship to Israel: "You only have I *known* of all the peoples of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Obviously God "knew" other peoples and nations of the world. In fact, he has always "known" all the nations of the world in one sense. But only the nation of Israel had he "known" in this intimate way of electing love.

When the young and the old men all gathered about Lot's door in Sodom, demanding that he send out the three strangers that they might "know" them, the problem was not a lack of hospitality. The problem was the sin of homosexuality, combined with the intent of mass rape. The "grapes of Sodom" and the "clusters of Gomorrah" were Moses' later prophetic anticipation of the fruit sin would inevitably bring when it became manifest in the life of God's people.

How patient is our God! How longsuffering he is in his manifestations of mercy! But eventually sin brings his judgment.

Seven hundred years after Moses, the prophet Isaiah once more displays the mercy of God even as he reports on the ongoing sin of God's own people. "Unless the LORD had left us a remnant, we would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isa. 1:9). Baal worship had brought cult prostitutes, both male and female, into the nation's worship practices as a means of assuring the people of God's blessing on their land. Eventually both the northern and the southern kingdoms of God's people experienced the judgment of God for their sin. Both kingdoms were exiled from the land of promise. They became *Lo-Ammi*, Not-My-People as a consequence of their sin.

The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. After many decades, even centuries, God finally judged his people by sending them into exile, just as Moses had anticipated almost 1000 years earlier.

Do you not know that the goodness of God is intended to lead you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4b). We must be careful not to "show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience" toward us (Rom. 2:4a NIV). Before God judges us, let us be serious about judging ourselves. Then we can enjoy the blessings of full restoration to our God.

The Grapes of Sodom and the Clusters of Gomorrah (II)

What will happen to your town, your country, this world 700 years from now? Is that any concern of yours? Is there anything you can do or not do that would impact the world that far ahead?

God told good King Hezekiah that his nation would be devastated by the Babylonian army. The citizens of his country would be dragged away into perpetual slavery as a consequence of their persistent sin.

“Well, at least it won’t happen in my lifetime,” responded the king (Isa. 39:8). Is that your attitude toward troubles that could come to the future generations of your world?

The “grapes of Sodom” and the “clusters of Gomorrah” keep coming up across the whole of redemptive history, from Genesis to Revelation. Scripture constantly attests to their ongoing significance. When one generation of God’s people produce the “grapes of Sodom” and the “clusters of Gomorrah,” many subsequent generations reap the bitter fruit. Consider the ongoing recurrence to Sodom and Gomorrah’s judgment in the records of Scripture:

In the days of Moses, around 1500 b. c.:

500 years after God’s judgment consumed Sodom and Gomorrah for their corrupt sin, Moses anticipates the same judgment of the LORD on his people Israel:

The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur-- nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. (Deut. 29:23-25 NIV)

In the days of Isaiah the prophet, about 700 b. c.

700 years after the warning of Moses, defiant, bald-faced absence of any shame for their sin, just like Sodom, mars the countenance of God's people. They bring down his judgment on themselves.

*For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. **For the look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.** Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves. (Isa 3:8-9 ESV)*

A lament by Jeremiah over the destruction of Jerusalem, about 586 b.c.

Almost 1000 years earlier, Moses had predicted the judgment of God on his people that would be like the destruction of Sodom. Now it has finally come on the very people favored across the centuries by the grace of the Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem with the accompanying horrors of exile in c. 586 b.c. are a fact of history that cannot be denied.

*How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed!
The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street...**For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her...**This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous. (Lam. 4:1, 6, 13 ESV).*

In the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, about 30-33 a. d.

2000 years after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sinful corruption, Jesus ushers a warning to every town or village where his disciples will be preaching the gospel. Their rejection of the message of God's grace will bring a final judgment on them worse than the experience of Sodom and Gomorrah.

*If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be **more bearable on the day of judgment for the***

land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. (Matt. 10:14, 15 ESV)

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, about 55 a. d.

The significance of Sodom and Gomorrah continues beyond the life and ministry of Jesus. Paul the Apostle to the nations explains the inclusion of people from all the nations alongside believers from Israel among the people of God by a prophecy from Isaiah concerning the remnant of the redeemed in Israel.

*Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, **we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.**" What shall we say, then? That the nations who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith. (Rom 9:27-30 ESV)*

The Apostle Peter writes to all the churches in about 65 a. d.

Approaching the end of his life, Peter reminds all believers, including us today, of the example of Sodom and Gomorrah. A sensuous life-style stands under the judgment of God.

If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)--if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh. (2 Pet. 2:6-10)

The Apostle John writes in the book of Revelation, in about 95 a. d.

The last book of the Bible brings up the symbolic significance of Sodom and Gomorrah one final time. From Genesis to Revelation, and in many places in between, the ongoing significance of the “grapes of Sodom” and the “clusters of Gomorrah” is made manifest.² John underscores the continuing contemporary significance of God’s judgment on these two cities for their depraved sinfulness by identifying “Sodom” with “the city where our Lord was crucified,” which would be Jerusalem. Wherever depraved behavior plays a major role in any society, that community may be identified with the biblical Sodom.

*I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth...When they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and **their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.** For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. (Rev 11:3, 7-10 ESV)*

Conclusion

What may be said of the significance of Sodom and Gomorrah in the progress of redemptive history? First, sins of sexual immorality, particularly the sin of homosexuality, will be brought under the judgment of God. Secondly, all other sins will also be brought under God’s righteous judgment. Thirdly, by the gracious and sovereign call of God and the response of repentance and faith, people can be delivered from both the guilt and the power of sin through the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ. Fourthly, the sin of Sodom, originally affecting a

² Other passages in Scripture referring to Sodom and Gomorrah include: Gen. 13:10-13; 14:2-24; 18:16-19:29; Deut. 32:32, 33; Isa. 1:9-31; 13:19; Jer. 23:9-15; 49:17-22; 50:35-46; Ezek. 16:46-63; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; Matt. 11:21-30; Luke 10:1-12; 17:26-37; Jude 1:3-8.

single city, extended its influence to include the old covenant people of God and contributed to the cause of their being driven into exile. Fifthly, as the end of this present age approaches, national and international powers will seek to develop intolerance even toward a person's speaking against these and similar sins. Sixthly, all people who are one with the holy and righteous Son of God must "purify themselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

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