

SAME-SEX INTERCOURSE AND THE BIBLE - WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN? (continued)

Today we continue with our examination of the Biblical texts dealing with same-sex intercourse. And I hope you can see the significance of the last part of the title of this teaching. As in our last study, the important phrase is, "*What Do the Texts Say and What Do they Mean?*"

There is little argument with what these texts say. There is not a single passage in the entire Bible that speaks positively about same-sex intercourse. Everyone *knows* that. But there are many who still insist that the Bible must not be taken to *mean* all homosexual relationships are prohibited. Those texts that *seem* to condemn same-sex intercourse only condemn the act *separated* from an authentic same-sex *orientation*. And because the Biblical writers didn't *understand* the inward issue of genuine same-sex orientation it is only same-sex intercourse *separated* from such a genuine orientation that is condemned.

That is a brief overview of where we were two weeks ago when we studied the Biblical texts in **Genesis 2** and **Leviticus 18** and **20**. And my argument was and is the condemnation of same-sex intercourse in the Scriptures is made with the awareness that the desires *behind* those acts are often deeply rooted in an individual's orientation. We saw this clearly in the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus pressed *behind* the outward sins of murder and adultery to the *inward passions* driving those actions. The actions didn't become acceptable on the grounds that there were strong inward inclinations (orientations?) behind them. The inward desire only exposed how deeply disorientated we all are by the fall and the ongoing effect of original sin.

What's more, these Biblical condemnations of same-sex intercourse are made with the awareness that same-sex acts are often loving and consensual. And finally, I also argued, and am arguing, that the consistent condemnation of same-sex intercourse in the Bible is based on the divinely ordered *creational foundation* that all sexual relations are to be between one man and one woman within the divine institution of marriage.

That's where we were in our last study. In our next study we're going to move into the New Testament. We're going to examine some of the clear statements from the Apostle Paul in **Romans 1:24-27**, **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, and **1 Timothy 1:9-11**.

But there's another account we need to consider first:

1) HOMOSEXUAL SIN AND GOD'S JUDGMENT ON SODOM AND GOMORRAH - DO WE HAVE THE FACTS STRAIGHT?

Perhaps the most famous passage in the Bible relating to same-sex intercourse is the story of God's judgment of the cities of **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** in **Genesis 19:1-29**. In fact, this is the historic account from which the act of same-sex intercourse once was named - "*Sodomy*." The text is long. We'll focus our study tonight on **Genesis 19:1-13**.

Genesis 19:1-13 - "The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth [2] and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." [3] But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. [4] But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. [5] And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." [6] Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, [7] and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. [8] Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." [9] But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. [10] But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. [11] And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door. [12] Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the

place. [13] **For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.**

Remember the title of this teaching - ***“What Do the Texts Say and What Do they Mean?”*** And the reason for that double emphasis is there are ways the more thoughtful in the gay community have proposed to relativize the blanket condemnation of these texts. These texts don't **mean** what we think they **say**. And that is nowhere more pronounced than in this text we are studying tonight.

The story of God's judgment on Sodom (and Gomorrah) ranks right up there in fame with the flood, Daniel and the lion's den, and David and Goliath. It is examined later in history by many of the other Biblical authors. And one such reference frequently turned to by the gay community is **Ezekiel 16:49-50** - ***“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. [50] They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.”***

This is a very significant text. The prophet Ezekiel sites Judah's greed and economic injustice as at least one of the reasons for God's judgment. The gay community considers the tracing of divine judgment to same-sex intercourse as simply a mistake - a red herring. The real cause of God's wrath was the neglect and abuse of the poor and needy - not homosexual relations.

So what do they do with the account we read in **Genesis 19**? The sin committed at Lot's house, so they say, was the sin of a violent gang rape. The sin was the **forced** and **abusive** nature of the sexual encounter and would have applied the same way whether the encounter was homosexual or heterosexual. It was not a judgment specifically against **same-sex** intercourse. So the argument goes.

What should we say to this? We need to dig deeply into this account. There are big questions that need a response. **First**, why does Ezekiel say the sin of Sodom was economic injustice and greed? **Second**, does Ezekiel say this economic greed was the **only** cause of divine judgment? **Third**, was the sin committed at Lot's house the more general sin of gang rape? Or was it a **particular kind** of gang rape? And **fourth**, are there any clues from other passages that say more about the nature of the sin God judged in Sodom and Gomorrah? We need to take the time to consider each of these questions in turn.

First, why does Ezekiel say the sin of Sodom was economic injustice and greed? And the immediate answer to that question is the easiest of the four. Economic injustice and neglect of the poor was the sin Ezekiel was confronting **in Judah** at the time of Ezekiel's ministry. Like any of us, Ezekiel applies the truth of God's Word that was being **neglected** as he ministered. After all, Ezekiel was not preaching God's coming judgment on **Sodom** or **Gomorrah**. He was speaking and applying God's Word to **Judah** at a particular time and point of her rebellion. So when Ezekiel referenced the account of Sodom while confronting the disobedience of Judah it's not at all surprising he would emphasize the sins they **both** had in common.

Second, does Ezekiel say this sin of economic injustice was the only cause of divine judgment? And the clear answer to that question has to be **no**. Look again at the prophet's words - **Ezekiel 16:49-50** - ***“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. [50] They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.”***

This is a difficult text. **Verse 49** says the people did not ***“...aid the poor and needy.”*** And then **verse 50** says they ***“...did an abomination before me. So I removed them when I saw it.”*** Is Ezekiel describing **one** sin or **two**? Did the people neglect the poor and then commit **another** abomination that God saw? Or did they neglect the poor and then Ezekiel merely **expands** on that one sin saying God judged them for it? In other words, is there a **break** between **verses 49 and 50** listing **more than one sin**, or are they merely **two verses** covering **one thought**?

The honest truth is scholars don't agree. We just don't know from the way the text is worded. But that's not the stopping place in the examination. We aren't left in the dark quite as much as some may like to think. And that leads us into question number three.

Third, was the sin committed at Lot's house gang rape? Or was it a particular kind of gang rape? And if you don't think the text tells us, you need to look at the account again - carefully:

Genesis 19:1-8 - "The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth [2] and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." [3] But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. [4] But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. [5] And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." [6] Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, [7] and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. [8] Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."

You have to stay with me here. As far as we can tell from the text itself (speculation abounds without the text) no one knows anything about these "men." No one in the entire account considers them *angels*. Their identity is only more clearly sited a chapter earlier in **Genesis 18**. Next, the "men of the city" (4) - only the men - come out to have sex with Lot's guests. At least this much we all know for sure from the account.

From these facts many in the gay religious community have deduced that the sin for which Sodom was judged must be the sin of *economic injustice* mentioned by Ezekiel because the sin committed at Lot's house was the sin of *violent gang rape*, which, while wicked, happened in various places in the Old Testament without fire falling from heaven.

Their logic goes further. Because the sin at Lot's house was the more general sin of *forced violence of gang rape* it is a sin that applies equally to *heterosexual* and *homosexual* individuals. After all, it's wrong for *anyone* to violently rape another. And this removes the Genesis 19 text from any consideration of same-sex intercourse. Genesis 19 condemns the sin of *violent gang rape* and has nothing to say whatsoever to loving, oriented, same-sex relationships.

And I want to go on record saying this can't possibly be all that this Genesis 19 text is saying. That any kind of *gang rape* is wicked beyond telling isn't in question. But it's *not* all Genesis 19 is dealing with. And it's not all that God judged in Sodom that fateful day. How can we be sure of this? Look once again at the text - carefully:

Genesis 19:5-8 - "And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." [6] Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, [7] and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. [8] Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."

Naturally we all shudder at the blindness and callousness of heart that would allow a father to betray his own daughters as Lot did his. I can't make sense of his coldness and cruelty to his own family. Yet it's precisely in his dark remarks that we find a key to understanding something else in this account.

Lot's dark words remove the mystery of the sin the town men wanted to commit. The text says Lot sees something incredibly "wicked" in the demands of the townsmen - **Genesis 19:6-7** - "Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, [7] and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly...."

Lot was there. We were not. How did *he* assess the request from the townsmen? Was the wickedness Lot imagined the wickedness of *violent gang rape* - whether homosexual or heterosexual? Is that the best understanding of the sin being proposed?

It doesn't seem possible to me. In what sense does Lot offering his virgin daughters *solve* the dilemma and remove the sin of a *violent gang rape*? This borders on the ridiculous. Would these daughters somehow *not* be victims of both violence and rape?

And yet somehow Lot surely *does* consider his vile recommendation a *solution* to the kind of "wickedness" the townsmen were requesting. And there is no way to make sense of this unless the wickedness Lot loathed in Genesis 19 was the specific wickedness of *same-sex* relations. It was the town's *men* wanting same-sex intercourse with the "men" in Lot's house.

Fourth, are there any clues from other passages that say more about the nature of the sin God judged in Sodom and Gomorrah? And the answer is, yes there are. Let's close considering just one:

Jude 3-7 - "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. [4] For certain people have crept in

unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. [5] Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. [6] And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— [7] just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Jude makes it clear that, while not the **only** sin committed in Sodom, sexual immorality was **one** of the causes of God's immediate judgment. Ezekiel's rebuke for economic injustice still stands. But it doesn't stand alone.

The specific **nature** of the sexual immorality is described by Jude as pursuing "**unnatural desire**"(7). The **NASB** defines the term with very difficult literalness as the pursuit of "**strange flesh**." So the sexual sin these men of Sodom pursued was "**unnatural**," or "**strange**" in the sense that it obliterated the **complimentary created order** and substituted another **man** for the place of a **woman**.

Jude then goes on, rather bluntly for today's tastes, to say the outpouring of fire was a visible reminder of God's willingness, contrary to what many in the church think, to judge unrepentant sinners with an "**eternal fire**" (Jude's words) yet in the future - **Jude 7** - "**...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.**"

This is why it is never a loving act to keep the truth from any sinner. Telling the truth is not much of a virtue in the church today. It will be even less in the future. We have come to embrace **tolerance** and **political correctness** far above Scriptural fidelity. And the price we pay for that is an incapacity to be genuinely, savingly loving to those Jesus died to redeem.

Sin deceives so extremely that the people who **need** God's truth and grace don't always **want** it. It cost Jesus His very life to bring life to the lost. Increasingly it will cost the church the same.