

Sodom—Inhospitality or Homosexuality?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The social forces behind the present-day “politically correct” agenda have been significantly successful in reversing the historically universal rejection by American civilization of the legality, political legitimacy, and social propriety of homosexuality. As a result of changing social norms and the pressure of an emerging politically active “gay” community in the United States, in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality from its official listing of mental disorders, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (see *American Psychiatric Association*..., 2002). The American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975 (Herek, 2002). In the midst of this reshaping of societal sensibilities, those who wish to retain some “attachment” to the Bible insist that the Good Book itself shares their viewpoint that same-sex relations are not inherently sinful. They argue that the Bible, in fact, approves of homosexuality in the same way and to the same extent that it approves of heterosexuality.

In order to sustain this treatment of Scripture, several passages have been reinterpreted and given new explanations. One classic passage that has received a “revisionist interpretation” is the account of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, recorded in Genesis 19. Traditionally, this passage has been understood to represent a denunciation of homosexuality. This understanding has been so universal, in fact, that the word “sodomy” was incorporated into English vernacular as referring to “any of various forms of sexual intercourse held to be unnatural or abnormal, especially anal intercourse or bestiality” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000, p. 1651). How may the Sodom account be reinterpreted to place same-sex relations in a favorable light? Two explanations have been offered in an attempt to confer biblical legitimacy on homosexuality.

INHOSPITALITY OR HOMOSEXUALITY?

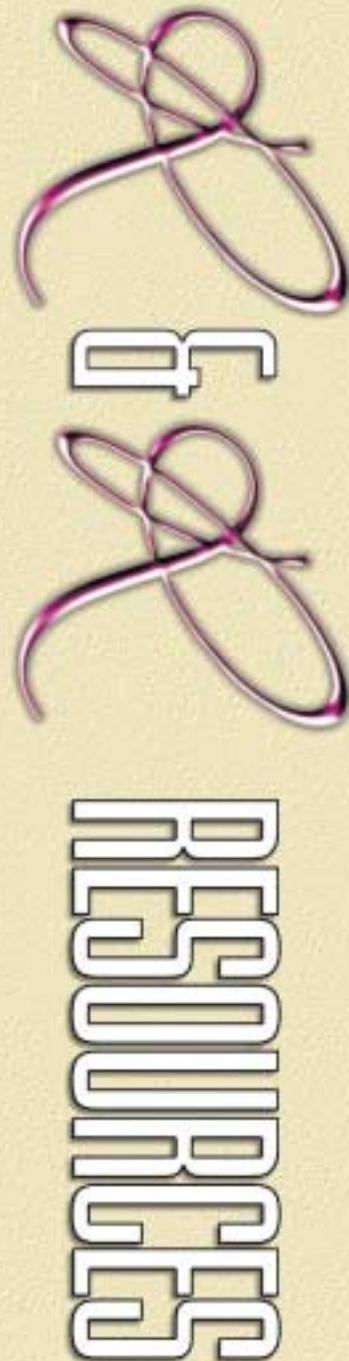
The first claim maintains that the men of Sodom were guilty simply of inhospitality. The text says that the men of Sodom insisted on Lot bringing the angelic visitors out to them, “that we may know them” (Genesis 19:5). It is suggested that “know” refers to their intention to meet, greet, get to know, or become acquainted with the visitors. However, contextual indicators exclude the feasibility of this interpretation.

First, the Hebrew verb translated as “know” (*yada*) does indeed possess a wide range of meanings, including “to get to know, to become acquainted.” For the most part, the nuances of the

Hebrew verb parallel the corresponding English verb. However, Hebrew, in common with other ancient languages, also used “know” as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Genesis 4:1; 19:8). Other Semitic euphemisms similarly used include “lie with” (2 Samuel 11:4), “uncover the nakedness of” (Leviticus 18), “go in unto” (Genesis 16:2; 38:2) and “touch” (Genesis 20:6; Proverbs 6:29; 1 Corinthians 7:1). Ancient languages that shared this figurative use of “know” included Egyptian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic (Botterweck, 1986, 5:455-456,460), as well as Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Greek (Gesenius, 1979, p. 334). When Hebrew scholars define “know” as used in Genesis 19:5, they use terminology like “sexual perversion” (Harris, et al., 1980, p. 366), “homosexual intercourse” (Botterweck, 5:464), and “crimes against nature” (Gesenius, p. 334).

Second, if “know” means simply “to get acquainted,” why does the Bible repeatedly use forms of the word “wicked” to refer to the actions of the Sodomites? Lot pleaded, “Do not do so **wickedly!**” (Genesis 19:7, emp. added). Moses, by inspiration, already had given God’s assessment: “But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13); “their sin is very grievous” (Genesis 18:20). Peter referred to the “filthy conduct of the wicked” and their “lawless deeds” (2 Peter 2:7-8). But “getting acquainted” is not “wicked”! In fact, if the men of Sodom were nothing more than a group of friendly, civic-minded neighbors who sought to make the visitors welcome to their city, God surely would have **commended** them—not **condemned** them!

Third, if “know” simply means “to get to know,” why did Lot offer his daughters to the men? He would not have offered his daughters for the purpose of the men “getting to know” or “become acquainted” with them. The daughters already were residents of Sodom, and thus would have been “known” to the men. Lot was offering his daughters to the men as **sexual** alternatives. Lot said, “I have two daughters who have not known a man” (Genesis 19:8). “Known” is another reference to sexual intercourse. Lot referred to their sexual status for the very reason that these men were interested in **sexual** impropriety. As astonishing and objectionable to us as it may seem for a father to sacrifice his own daughters in such a fashion, it verifies the fact that the unnatural lust of homosexuality was considered far more repugnant than even illicit heterosexuality. In addition, scholars have further noted that in antiquity, a host was to protect his guests at the cost of his own life (Whitelaw, 1950, 1:253).



Fourth, the men of Sodom threatened Lot with the words, “we will deal worse with you than with them” (Genesis 19:9). If their intention was simply to “get to know” the visitors, what would “dealing worse” with Lot entail? Did their threat imply that they would become so thoroughly acquainted with Lot that they perpetually would remain in his presence and make a pest of themselves? Maybe they intended to impose on Lot’s hospitality to the point that they monopolized his house, ate his snack foods, and refused to vacate his home at a courteous hour?

In a further effort to achieve sanction for homosexuality, attention has been directed to the words of Jesus in His commissioning of the Seventy. He instructed them, in their evangelistic travels, to enter into those cities that would receive them, and to feel free to partake of the hospitality they offered (Luke 10:7-8). However, should a city fail to receive them, they were to shake the dust off their feet against the city (vs. 10-11). Jesus then declared: “It will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city” (vs. 12). Defenders and practitioners of same-sex relations claim that Jesus simply was drawing a comparison between the **inhospitality** of the cities that the disciples would encounter, and the ancient city of Sodom. They claim that the inhospitality of a city that would reject Christ’s own emissaries would be a greater evil than Sodom’s inhospitable treatment of the angelic visitors.

As previously noted, if “hospitality” were the issue at stake in Sodom, the Sodomites should have been commended, since they only wanted to “get to know” and be hospitable to the visitors. In fact, Lot should have been the one condemned since he attempted to deter the hospitable overtures of the “Welcome Wagon.” In reality, the words of Jesus in Luke 10 were not directed against the cities’ refusal to be hospitable toward the disciples. Rather, He condemned them for their refusal to accept the **teaching** of the disciples. Jesus pinpointed their task when He declared, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me” (Luke 10:16). Jesus placed Sodom at the top of the list of the most notoriously wicked cities of antiquity. He stressed the fact that as the New Testament era was about to explode into history, and Palestinian peoples were soon to be the recipients of the greatest message ever divulged to the world, to reject Christ and the Gospel would be a far greater offense than what the most wicked city in human history ever did! What the inhabitants of Sodom did was repulsive, repugnant, incredibly depraved, and disgusting. But to reject the antidote to sin is the ultimate insult, and represents the final infraction against God.

Yet another argument marshaled in an effort to justify homosexuality concerns the allusions in the prophets to Sodom. Isaiah (3:9), Jeremiah (23:14), and Ezekiel (16:49) all referred to the sinfulness of Sodom, but none explicitly mentioned homosexuality as the problem. In fact, Ezekiel pinpointed the specific sins of “pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness,” and Sodom’s unwillingness to aid the poor and needy. In response, we would suggest that we hardly should be surprised that a city that was guilty of sexual perversion likewise would be guilty of additional violations of God’s will.

As a matter of fact, Isaiah did not specify a particular sin, but merely noted how brazen and open the Sodomites were with their sin: “The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it.” Interestingly, this depiction is very apropos of the “in-your-face” attitude of those who seek to advance the homosexual agenda in our day. Jeremiah made essentially the same point in his comparison between Judah and Sodom when he wrote: “No one turns back from his wickedness.” He, too, was noting the blatant, unbending, determined intention to proceed with their sin. Ezekiel, though mentioning the additional sins listed above, nevertheless referred repeatedly to Sodom’s “abomination” (16:50; cf., vs. 43,47,51,52,58). Moses connected “abomination” with homosexual activity (Leviticus 18:22).

HOMOSEXUAL RAPE?

The second explanation offered to justify homosexual relations is that the men of Sodom were not condemned for their homosexuality, but for their inhospitable intention to engage in homosexual rape. Proponents of this position suggest that rape, being non-consensual, is wrong and worthy of condemnation—whether homosexual or heterosexual. However, this extension of the inhospitality quibble is likewise contextually indefensible. First, if gang rape were the issue, why did Lot offer his daughters in exchange for the visitors? Rape would have been at stake in both cases. Lot’s offer of his daughters indicated his concern over gender and same-sex relations. Second, the men of Sodom were declared wicked and guilty of “very grievous” sin—before the visitors ever came to town (Genesis 18:20)!

Third, Jude cinched the matter in his allusion to the sin of Sodom. He said that Sodom and her sister cities had “given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh” (Jude 7). “Given themselves over to sexual immorality” is a translation of the compound word *ekporneusasai*, which combines the verb *porneuo* (to commit illicit sexual intercourse) with the preposition *ek* (out of). The attachment of the prepositional prefix indicates intensification, i.e., that

the men of Sodom possessed “a lust that gluts itself” (Thayer, 1977, p. 199). Their sexual appetites had been permitted to take them beyond the range of normal sexual activity. The idea of force or coercion is not inherent in the word. “Strange” refers to “one not of the same nature, form, class, kind” (Thayer, p. 254), and so pertains to the indulgence of passions that are “contrary to nature” (Barnes, 1949, p. 393)—“a departure from the laws of nature in the impurities practiced” (Salmond, 1950, 22:7). The frequent allusion to “nature” by scholars is interesting in view of the fact that Scripture elsewhere links same-sex relations with that which is “against nature” (Romans 1:26-27) or unnatural, i.e., out of harmony with the original arrangement of nature by God (e.g., Genesis 1:27; 2:22; Matthew 19:4-6). Summarizing, Jude asserted that the sin of Sodom was homosexual **relations**—not homosexual **rape**.

Fourth, homosexuality itself is condemned in Scripture. Under the Law of Moses, for example, God made homosexuality a capital crime that evoked the death penalty. He stipulated that **both** parties to the illicit sexual activity were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:13). God would not have required the innocent victim of homosexual rape to be executed along with the rapist.

Current culture may well reach the point where the majority approves of homosexuality as acceptable behavior. Those who disapprove may well be accused of being “politically incorrect,” intolerant, or “judgmental” (even as Lot was!—Genesis 18:9). However, the objective, unbiased reader of the Bible is forced to conclude that God destroyed the men of Sodom on account of their sinful practice of homosexuality.

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RESOURCES

Q Is “Jane Roe,” the woman involved in the renowned *Roe v. Wade* abortion case before the Supreme Court, still pro-abortion?

A Although she recanted her views about abortion seven years ago, relatively few people know that “Jane Roe,” the pseudonym that Norma McCorvey assumed as the lead plaintiff in the infamous *Roe v. Wade* case, no longer supports abortion. In fact, she now adamantly opposes the slaughtering of innocent babies. Not long ago, just twenty minutes from our offices at Apologetics Press, Ms. McCorvey discussed her “conversion” before a crowd of 350 people. McCorvey informed her listeners that after more than twenty years of supporting the pro-abortion platform, she finally saw the error of her ways. What did it take? McCorvey indicated the “straw that broke the camel’s back” came as she was working in an abortion clinic and was told to enter the room where aborted fetuses were kept. Her assignment was to count the various body parts of an infant who had just been “aborted,” to make sure the doctor had retrieved the entire baby from the mother’s womb. McCorvey, who had worked in at least four abortion clinics, stated, “I went back to the ‘parts room,’ and I looked at this tiny little infant, and I freaked” (as quoted in McGrew, 2002).

The one female who symbolized a woman’s right to have an abortion now sees abortion as the heinous sin that it really is—the shedding of innocent blood (see Proverbs 6:17). She now understands how barbaric it is to tear an infant from his (or her) mother’s womb, literally shredding the child into “parts.” McCorvey not only has seen the error of her ways, but currently spends much of her time helping women save babies, rather than encouraging them to murder them (“Who is Jane?...,” 1998). If more pro-abortionists saw what Norma McCorvey witnessed, perhaps they, too, would “swap sides.”

If “Jane Roe,” the onetime leading spokeswoman for abortion, can change the error of her ways, then undoubtedly our elected representatives and Supreme Court justices can, too. Let us pray to the Almighty regarding this matter, and encourage our government officials to uphold the value of human life by one day reversing the ungodly 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

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Eric Lyons

IN THE NEWS

On Thursday, September 26, 2002, the Cobb County (Georgia) school board unanimously adopted a policy that would allow teachers to discuss alternative scientific views of origins. Board chairman Curt Johnston made it clear to those in attendance that the decision was not a matter of bringing religion into the classroom. In a 1987 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court barred states from requiring the teaching of creationism in public schools. Thus, in a carefully worded six-paragraph statement, Johnston said: “We expect teachers to continue to teach the theory of evolution. We do not expect teachers to teach creationism.” The new policy, however, does open the door to alternative views regarding the origin and development of life, and also promotes discussion in the classroom—something practically unheard of before now. The exact wording of the policy is as follows:

The Cobb County School District believes that discussion of disputed views of academic subjects is a necessary element of providing a balanced education, including the study of the origin of the species. This subject remains an area of intense interest, research, and discussion among scholars. As a result, the study of this subject shall be handled in accordance with this policy and with objectivity and good judgment on the part of teachers, taking into account the

age and maturity level of their students. The purpose of this policy is to foster critical thinking among students, to allow academic freedom consistent with legal requirements, to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity of opinion, and to ensure a posture of neutrality toward religion.

With these objectives in mind, why is it that evolutionists object to this ruling? Why did the president of the National Academy of Sciences, Bruce Alberts, mail “A Request to Help Counter the Cobb County, Ga., School Board’s Actions on the Teaching of Evolution in Public Schools”? Why did biology professors at several universities in Georgia, as well as the National Science Teachers Association, inform the Cobb County school board that it would be a serious mistake to approve such a resolution. Why are these individuals so enraged over a policy that fosters critical thinking and promotes academic freedom? Why? Maybe it’s because they realize that their cherished theory of evolution eventually will be discarded by students who are allowed to study **all** of the scientific evidence. Perhaps they know all too well that an “alternative view” fits the available evidence better than their godless, humanistic, atheistic theory of evolution.

Brad Harrub