

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES: Segment 8

Homosexuality, Part 3: A Commentary

by Ildefonso J. Rubrico

Good evening, and welcome to **Biblical Perspectives**, your TV commentary on today's relevant social issues brought under the lens of biblical truth. This is your host, **Nene Rubrico**, who will be with you for the next 30 minutes in this channel.

Introduction

One of the modest aims of this program is to make people aware that religion can serve the greater good of the community; that one's faith can be a powerful incentive to individual and societal reform. The Rev. Dudley Rose, Assistant Dean for Ministerial Studies at the Harvard Divinity School, citing liberal theologian Paul Tillich, claims that it's wrong to uncritically apply biblical truths to contemporary, secular, situations, the so-called "kerygmatic approach"¹. His article appears to support the November 2003 ruling of the Massachusetts supreme court that declared same-sex marriage to be constitutionally-valid. Rev. Rose, who is also Senior Pastor at North Congregational Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts and has oversight over 200 parishes, echoes the *Post-Modern* stance of the Social Constructionists in that marriage is merely a "social construction" and not an "essential construction." He gives as an example intermarriage between blacks and whites, a *socially-constructed* category. Same-sex marriages, he declares, should also be viewed as a socially-constructed category and rejects the view that it is essentially prohibited in the Bible. The same view should likewise be held for homosexuality, he further claims.

First of all, it's hard to grasp the logic of Rose' assertion that one cannot apply the lessons of holy

Scripture to the contemporary situation. Why? The Christian bible's *didactic* intent is abundantly clear, as in 2Timothy 3:16:

"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

So there you are, my esteemed viewers. Unless Christians ground themselves in the teachings of Scripture, they will always be in danger of losing their sense of what's "right" or what's "wrong" as regards complex social issues like homosexuality.

Last time, we began our talk on an interesting and quite-contentious topic, homosexuality. For tonight, we shall continue our talk about the biblical ramifications of homosexuality, and why the Church, as a whole, considers homosexuality as contrary to its teachings. Of all the controversies surrounding homosexuality, the religious issue seem to be the most difficult to resolve. We will shortly know the reasons why.

The Church on Homosexuality

The Roman Catholic view on homosexuality is expressed as follows:²

"The Catholic Church thus teaches: "Basing itself on sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that *homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered* [italics mine]. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2357)."

The Catholic faithful are advised that "we must reject sin including homosexual behavior—that is, acts intended to arouse or stimulate a sexual response regarding a person of the same sex... such acts are always violations of divine and natural law.".. "Homosexual desires, however, are not in themselves sinful. People are subject to a wide variety of sinful desires over which they have little direct control, *but these do not become sinful until a person acts upon them...*To the Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality is "an intrinsic moral evil."³

BeliefNet, a multi-faith e-community publishing in the internet⁴ also summarizes the official stands of the other Christian church denominations on homosexuality, as follows:

1. **Conservative Protestant** (This is an umbrella term for Protestant denominations, or churches within denominations which are Bible-centered, traditionalist, orthodox, fundamentalist, or evangelical.) - *Homosexuality is wrong.*

2. **Eastern Orthodox Christians** (The Eastern Orthodox Church includes the Church of Greece, the Church of Cyprus, and the Russian Orthodox Church)-
"Homosexuality is a sin."

3. **Latter-day Saints(Mormons)** - *"Homosexuality is wrong, and homosexual rights vehemently opposed."*

4. **Liberal Protestants** (Also This is an umbrella term for Protestant denominations, or churches within denominations that are sometimes referred to as secular, modern, or humanistic). - *"Many are accepting of homosexuality and gay rights."*

Aside from most Christian churches, homosexuality is also prohibited in other faiths such as Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Conservative Judaism, and - to a lesser extent - Buddhism and Hinduism.

Based on an article written by Joseph Gudel, PhD, for the Christian Research Institute, "very few churches today come right out and affirm homosexuality as official church teaching.⁵ There are a few, though, which do affirm homosexuality. Foremost among these is the Metropolitan Community Church, founded by Troy Perry in 1968, largely for practicing homosexuals."⁶

At this point, please allow me to quote Dr. Gudel extensively in what follows. Dr. Gudel claims that the United Church of Christ (UCC) in America is the only mainline denomination that has actually called for affirming and fully accepting homosexuals. In 1983 the UCC General Synod passed a resolution stating that "a person's sexual orientation is not a moral issue."⁷ Finally, in 1991 the UCC General Synod approved the call for its congregations to "boldly affirm, celebrate, and embrace the gifts for ministry of lesbians, gays, and bisexual persons."⁸

Many other, liberal-minded, denominations are close to the UCC view. Some, such as the Episcopal Church, have openly-practicing homosexual clergy, with the full knowledge of their church's governing bodies. Others, such as the United Methodist Church (UMC), have officially rejected homosexual practice as incompatible with the Christian faith. However, at least 44 UMC congregations "have formally opened their doors to homosexuals" and called on their bishops to bless "same-sex union ceremonies."⁹ Similarly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's 1991 study guide on sexuality affirms that "no absolutistic judgments can be drawn" concerning homosexuality.¹⁰ However, the guide then goes on to promote "committed" homosexual relationships.¹¹ A new gay magazine which describes itself as a "journal for gay and lesbian Christians" has a 10-page listing of "Christian" churches and organizations that "welcome gays and lesbians into full membership and participation."

The creeping liberalism of the churches in America has curiously resulted in a reverse reaction among the public. For instance, a combined USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll released July 28, 2001 shows that 49 percent of Americans do not consider homosexuality "an acceptable alternative lifestyle" and that 57 percent are opposed to homosexual civil unions, as reported¹² in crosswalk.com. This poll of 1,006 adults reverses the trends from recent years. It also goes against cultural trends showing an ever-increasing *promotion* of homosexuality in the media and in education circles. Peter LaBarbera, senior policy analyst with the Culture and Family Institute in Washington, told Baptist Press the poll may indicate that "people are getting sick and tired of the media and Hollywood shoving homosexuality in their face at every turn."

Homosexuality in Scripture

Finally, we have arrived at the question: What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Actually, it depends on whether you are a Christian conservative or a Christian liberal, according to the website¹³. Conservative and liberal Christians interpret the Bible in very different ways. "This leads to two distinct and contradictory sets of beliefs within Christianity on just about every conceivable topic. Homosexuality is no exception," according to the author of the website article, B.A. Robinson who is based in Ontario, the Canadian Province that incidentally allows same-sex marriages today.

For our purposes, and to set the record straight, we shall avoid, insofar as it is possible, the labels "conservative" or "liberal" and instead concentrate on the **biblical pronouncements** themselves of "this-or-that" person writing or speaking in, in defense of, or, against, homosexuality. These are literally hundreds of them to be found mostly in the Internet, although I

have attempted to be judicious in selecting only those websites that tried to state their cases in a "fair and balanced" way.

Many who defend homosexuals or their lifestyles charge that "gay-bashing" has taken on an ideological flavor¹⁴, an anti-religious sentiment, if you may. Typical of their reaction is the following statement:

"How can anyone dare to speak out against another person's lifestyle? Especially within the church, are not Christians called to be loving and inclusive? Does not the Bible itself tell us that we are to reach out to people instead of being judgmental and self-righteous?" They appeal to *Luke 6:37* - "*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.*"

Why speak out on homosexuality, indeed? We shall attempt to answer that question through the arguments put forward by many concerned Christians.

Among them is Dr. Joseph Gudel who is a Lutheran minister and long-time contributor of the *Christian Research Journal*. Gudel points out that over the past 20 years or so there has been a growing *gay rights movement* within America. This movement has been militantly demanding not just the homosexuals' right to do whatever they wish to do behind closed doors, but, more importantly, that society *fully accept their lifestyle as both healthy and normal*, even demanding special rights and legislation as an "oppressed minority."

Concerning the demands of the gay rights movement, gay spokesperson Jeff Levi in a 1987 speech to the National Press Club in Washington stated: "We are no longer seeking just a right to privacy and a protection from wrong. We also have a right – as heterosexual Americans already have – to see government and society affirm our lives."¹⁵

In his article entitled "What the Bible says about sodomy, homosexuality and sin," Gudel said:

"Questions like these come up whenever the Christian or the church takes a stand on a moral issue, especially homosexuality. I realize that it is not 'politically correct' to speak critically concerning any person or group. Nonetheless, true Christian love does not ignore immorality and the lives ruined by it, but speaks out in the hope of helping those individuals.

This is particularly true when militant pro-homosexual groups, both within society and the church, have attacked the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of this important issue. Thus this article is written, not as an attack on homosexuals, but in defense of the biblical teaching on this topic and to help those ensnared in this lifestyle."¹⁶

Indeed, it is the "politics" of homosexuality and the issue of "gay and lesbian rights" that prevent most people from openly discussing this sensitive topic. The fear of being "politically-incorrect" in this increasingly post-modern and secular world thwarts most Christians from taking a stronger moral stand on homosexuality.

The Correct Biblical Framework of Homosexuality

Dr. Ben Witherington III, who holds an M.A. in Divinity (Summa cum Laude) and a PhD from Oxford, is a regular contributor to www.beliefnet.com. His article entitled "Was Sodom into Sodomy?: What the Bible says about sodomy, homosexuality and sin" originally appeared as a lecture. In this commentary I will adopt many of his views particularly because he offers a novel framework of the Bible upon which to evaluate homosexuality. In his own words:

"The discussion of homosexuality in the Bible usually focuses on texts *prohibiting certain types of behavior*. I would suggest one should rather look at the framework--the storied world in which such prohibitions are offered. **That larger framework is the Biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption.**"

Thus the creation story begins with the *affirmations*, not prohibitions. Genesis 1-2 says the male was incomplete without the female: "It was not good for man to be alone." The woman was created to be a suitable companion for the man. Indeed, as the rabbis were to say later, the woman is seen as the crown of creation--that which not merely completes creation, but prompts the benediction that now finally all was *tov m'od*--'very good.' Following this there is what has been called the *creation order mandate*--"Fill the earth and subdue it." This mandate could only be fulfilled by a complementary pair of creatures, male and female. Both were required for the propagation of the species, as well as for the assembling of enough humans to eventually subdue the earth.

Witherington continues with his thesis:

Christian theology demands that we distinguish God's *original* design for *creation* [that is, man and woman complementing each other] from the effects of the *fall* [which, among other things, mean having a homosexual relationship]. As Witherington emphasizes, we can't assume that "whatever is, is right." Not all forms of sexual sharing, even between consenting adults, can be affirmed as either good or "normal", however "natural" certain desires may seem. Consider the following assertion from a website that declares itself neutral on the issue of homosexual relations:¹⁷

"A marriage consisting of one man and one woman certainly is the "natural" arrangement to a heterosexual couple. But a marriage of two women is

"natural" for two lesbians, as a marriage of two men is "natural" for two gays."

But, "when nature is out of joint, it can not serve as a clear barometer of what is good," warns Dr. Witherington. This, to me, is a clear answer to those who would claim that theirs is a "loving, committed, monogamous homosexual relationships." However one looks at this so-called 'relationship,' it cannot be part of God's creation plan! Homosexuality is seen as one of many manifestations of mankind's sinful nature which are a direct result of Adam and Eve's activities in the Garden of Eden. In other words, homosexuality can only be properly viewed as part-and-parcel of the biblical fall.

What about Sodomy?

During the Middle Ages the term "sodomy" first came into use to describe homosexual love. It originated from Medieval Latin around 1180 as a designation for "crime against nature." The abstract noun *sodomia* (for the sin) originated from *sodomita* (for the sinner) which was first used with reference to an inhabitant of the city of Sodom.¹⁸

In June 2003 the U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark ruling on the case "Texas versus Lawrence" which declared *unconstitutional* the Texas anti-sodomy law and similar laws in over a dozen other states. The Court based its decision on the concept of personal privacy of individuals in their homes¹⁹

It has become fashionable to suggest that the famous story of Sodom, found in Genesis 19:4-8, and its close parallel in Judges 19:22-24, have no direct relevance to homosexuality. The sin of Sodom, it is said, was lack of *hospitality* for strangers, even to the extreme of seeking to rape them.

This reading is possible, though the earliest interpreters of these texts around the turn of the first century A.D. - from the author of Jude 7 to the Jewish historian Josephus - did not seem to think so, and it is not certain that these texts can justify it. Jude 7 wrote: "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion." Josephus, who was considered a traitor by the Jews for having allied himself with the Romans, wrote unflattering comments about Sodom in his *Antiquities*, considered an accurate account of Jewish history by most modern historians.

The verb *yada* "to know" is used to mean sexual sharing in the Sodom story, when Lot offers his daughters for them "to know" (i.e. have sexual intercourse with). It's probable that it means the same thing earlier, when the citizens of Sodom ask Lot to bring out his guests so they may "know" them. Lot accuses them of acting wickedly--an odd charge if all they meant is that they wanted to interrogate them to discover if they were spies, as some gay writers claim.

The biblical echoes of the Sodom story, furthermore, all clearly refer to *sexual sin*. Jeremiah 49:18 ("Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown"-NIV) criticizes Jerusalem for its sexual sin, and says it is like Sodom. Ezekiel 16:49 is sometimes cited to prove that the sin of Sodom was only inhospitality ("Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."-NIV). But the next verse (v. 50) says the residents of Sodom were destroyed because they did "detestable things before me." Detestable, is the very term Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 uses to criticize homosexual intercourse. (18:22-"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable;" and, 20:13-"If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.").

These passages in Leviticus are part of the so-called Holiness Code. Both clearly speak of an adult male lying with a man as with a woman, and both texts call this "detestable" (KJV - 'an abomination.'). The revisionist argument by many gay writers is that this behavior is objected to because of a concern for *ritual purity*, not immorality, but the supposed dichotomy between ritual and moral purity doesn't hold up. The Holiness Code concerns itself with such central moral subjects as adultery.

Other Bible Verses

Other references to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah/God's terrifying judgment are the following:²⁰

-Deut.29:23 - "It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger."

-Isa.1:9- "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

-Isa.13:19 - "Babylon..will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah."

-Amos 4:11a-"I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."

-Zeph.2:9a-"Surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah."

-Jer.49:18 - "As Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown..so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it."

-Jer.50:40 - "As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah..so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it."

-Exek.16:56-58 - "You would not even mention your sister Sodom in the day of your pride, before your

wickedness was uncovered..You will bear the consequences of your lewdness and your detestable practices, declares the Lord."

-Matt.10:15 - "I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."

-Luke 17:29 - "But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all."

-Rom.9:29 - "It is just as Isaiah said previously: Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

-2Pet.2:6 - "If he [God] 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."

In addition, the twin cities have become "symbols of shameless immorality or unbridled sin in general," as in Isa. 3:9 ("they parade their sin like Sodom"), Lamentation 4:6 ("the punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment"), and Ezekiel 16:46-47 ("Your younger sister..Sodom..you copied their detestable practices").

The doomed cities likewise became symbols of "impotent rebellion" against God or man's lack of responsiveness, as expressed in:

-Jer.23:14c-"They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah."

-Deut.32:32 - "Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness."

-Matt. 11:23 - "And you, Capernaum..will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day."

-Lk.10:12 - "I tell you, it will be more than bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town." [that rejects the ministry of Jesus and His apostles].

-Rev.11:8 - "Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."

Summary and Conclusion

So far, Witherington has developed his unique biblical framework supporting the notion of homosexuality falling within the ambit of the story of creation and fall. The redemptorical aspect comes later in the final commentary when we take up how homosexuals are being helped by parents, relatives and professional counseling groups.

We have barely scratched the surface on discussions of religious beliefs about homosexuality and what constitutes what is "acceptable" or even, "right" in the biblical sense. The opposing camps - most Christians on one side and gay-rights advocates on the other side - with their allies in their respective churches, the academe, in government, civil-liberties associations, the intellectuals - have been engaged in an on-and-off debate with each other on this issue.

The long-standing debate between the defenders of the homosexual lifestyle and their opponents who say that it is biblically wrong is a battle that has long since been joined. And this is nowhere more noticeable than in the internet, that vast storage of knowledge available to us in this Age of Information. The internet has more than 500,000 entries on the topic "homosexuality, the church, and the bible."

Next time we will tackle more-fully the New Testament pronouncements of Jesus and the NT writers. Hopefully, we will hear from you your comments. Don't forget! We are now broadcasting also in Cebuano, on an alternate basis with the English version of the commentary like this one. Please tell your friends.

Once again, valued viewers, this is **Nene Rubrico** reminding you, that:

"A nation can save itself from perishing if its people have vision."
(Proverbs 29:18a)

Till next time. God bless, and, Good night!

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Notes and References

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