

**NOTE:** This material was first published in a series of 5 articles and published in the August, September, October, December, and January, 1983 and 1984 issues of **The Apostolic Messenger** when I was living in Jackson, MS. — Walton Weaver

## **Homosexuality And The Bible**

### **Response To Gay Advocates**

#### **Part One**

by Walton Weaver

The liberal press seems to think that its role in modern times is to espouse whatever cause is the most unorthodox. Somehow the mind set of our age is to reject whatever has been believed by the common people in years gone by. The liberals believe we should have long ago outgrown the foggy ideas about morals and religion which were devoutly believed in by our forefathers. But for those of us who believe that truth is absolute and are happy to hold to the same high views of yesteryears because they are just as true today as then, what is considered improvement by the modern liberal mind is viewed by us as bordering on the sacrilegious. What one calls the new morality, the other calls the old immorality.

Who would ever have thought thirty years ago that today we would have churches on the brink of dividing over the question of whether homosexuals should be accepted in full fellowship of the churches? Yet, some of the major denominational churches of today have serious problems over this issue. No major splits as yet, but intense controversy is mounting.

Homosexuality is so widespread that since most churches are to this point unwilling to accept homosexuals into their fellowship, some preachers (some homosexuals among them) are helping form churches in the major cities of this count with the specific purpose of accepting people of different sexual orientations. That's right. Churches are being formed for the specific purpose of receiving homosexuals into their fellowship. And that's not all. The people behind this movement actually argue that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as a sin! Passages which have traditionally been understood as condemning homosexuality are explained away and an effort is made to show that the Bible actually approves such practice.

### **A Case in Point**

In a recent issue (June 5, 1983) of the *Clarion Ledger*, a local morning paper published in Jackson, Mississippi, almost a full page was given to this subject. It is an

example of the kind of liberal coverage of this subject which is found in a lot of leading newspaper today. Although the article by Cullen Clark, "Church for Gays Would Fill Needed Role, Supporters Say," does not come right out in favor of a church for homosexuals, the tone of the article is clearly supportive of such a move. There also appeared on this page an exchange feature article between two preachers on the question of whether it is possible to be homosexual and still be a Christian. This article gave a more balanced presentation of the issues involved, but the article by each participant was brief, and it did not appear that they had the advantage of seeing the other person's article before their own was printed. Had they been allowed to see each other's article, no doubt the person who held the negative position (that homosexuality is not condoned in the scripture) would have responded directly to the way the person in the affirmative treated the passages of scripture dealing with the subject.

Since that was not done, it is our purpose now to review the arguments advanced by Ken Martin, himself a homosexual, a native Mississippian, and the preacher of the Metropolitan Community Church in the Valley in North Hollywood, California. We will first respond to Martin's interpretation of key passages of scripture, and then we will give some attention to positive arguments made in defense of homosexuality.

## **Key Passages on Homosexuality**

### *Argument No. 1, Genesis 19*

I know that Christianity has traditionally condemned homosexuality and has assumed there was a Biblical basis for doing so. However, in recent years informed biblical scholarship has shown conclusively that there is no biblical condemnation for the person who is homosexually oriented. First, in the case of the destruction of Sodom, one need only to allow the Bible to interpret itself! In more than 15 instances the Bible states specifically why Sodom was destroyed. These include a number of social justice issues and adultery but there is no mention of homosexuality. See Ezekiel 16:48-49. Jesus obviously believed that Sodom was destroyed because of inhospitality to God's messengers; Matthew 10: 14-15; Luke 10: 10-12.

**1. Scholarship and the Bible.** Experience has shown me through the years that scholars are just as subject to prejudice as anyone else. I am for scholarship, but scholarship without a love for the truth will lead one into error just as much as the lack of scholarship without a love for the truth will. I remember a case in the New Testament where Mark tells us that "the common people heard him gladly," then in the very next verse Jesus warns against the scribes who desired long robes, salutations, and chief seats in the synagogues and at the feasts (Mk. 12:37-40). The scribes were the scholars, but their scholarship did not lead them into the truth because they did not have a love for the truth. They loved the things Jesus rebuked them for: long robes, praise of men, and positions of authority. The common people on the other hand were not scholars, but they understood

Jesus' teaching and gladly received Him. They understood because they were seeking the truth above anything else. Their love for the truth made the difference.

But we are not in the position of holding a view on Genesis 19 which all scholars reject. From Martin's statement about "informed biblical scholarship" you would be made to believe that all who disagree with him and his homosexual friends on Genesis 19 are either not informed or they are not scholars, or they are neither informed nor scholars! But that's the way most sophisticated liberals (or should I say unsophisticated) feel toward those who disagree with them. They look down their noses at them and speak of them as ignorant and unscholarly. For Martin to go further and say that this informed biblical scholarship "has shown conclusively" that Genesis 19 does not condemn homosexuality only points out more clearly his own ignorance and lack of scholarship on the subject.

To my knowledge D. S. Bailey, **Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition**, written in the mid-fifties, was the first of any consequence to advocate that Genesis 19 does not condemn homosexuality. Bailey argued on verse five that "the demand to 'know' the visitors whom Lot had entertained may well have implied some serious breach of the rules of hospitality." Of all the uses of the verb "to know" (over 900 of them), he argued, only ten speak of sexual intercourse, and all of these refer to heterosexual acts, not homosexual acts. Thus Bailey believes that the word "know" in Genesis 19:5 does not have a sexual meaning; it refers to the desire of the men of Sodom to practice hospitality toward the two angels in the story. He believes this meaning is supported by the other Old Testament references to Sodom and Gomorrah which, he says, condemn her for adultery, lying, and an unwillingness to repent (Jer. 23:14), as well as for pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease (Ezek. 16:49-50), but not for homosexuality. I assume that Martin has in mind Derrick Bailey when he says that "in recent years informed biblical scholarship has shown conclusively that there is no biblical condemnation for the person who is homosexually oriented."

Other advocating homosexual scholars, however, have questioned Bailey's interpretation of Genesis 19. J. McNeill, for example, in his book, *The Church and the Homosexual*, admits that Bailey may have overstated his case. Then down goes Mr. Martin's claim that recent scholars have "shown conclusively" what he believes about homosexuality is true! How can a thing be shown conclusively when two of the leading advocating homosexual scholars cannot agree on what Genesis 19 is saying! R. Treese, another gay advocate, admits that whether Bailey's views will gain wide-spread acceptance is problematical. How could it be if in recent years "informed biblical scholarship has shown conclusively that there is no biblical condemnation for the person who is homosexually oriented," as Martin claims. How can a thing be shown conclusively and not be conclusive? But if even advocating homosexual scholars hold that Bailey's position is both overstated and problematical how have the gay scholars

shown anything conclusively?

**2. The Meaning of the Verb “to know” in Genesis 19.** Although Martin himself does not make an argument on the meaning of the verb “to know” in Genesis 19:5, I want to make a few remarks about this point raised by Bailey since Martin also believes the passage is dealing with the subject of hospitality and not homosexuality. At least three faults may be noted in Bailey’s argument.

First, the context of the word “know” in verse five is against the view that the word means to be hospitable toward. It makes the word have different meanings in the space of four verses. In verse eight the same word obviously means to have intercourse with someone. The word does not mean to become acquainted with in verse five and then to have intercourse with in verse eight. How many times the word may mean to get acquainted with means nothing; the context determines its meaning.

Second, it makes Lot’s response to their request senseless. I do not understand why he offered the men his daughter that they may “know” her instead of the two angels, but if the request is to only have opportunity to be hospitable to the angels in verse five, why does Lot offer his daughter that they may have intercourse with her in verse eight? Third, Bailey’s position makes the outcry against Sodom and its destruction incredulous, and McNeill admits that this is the case. Sodom was not overthrown for failing to show hospitality. Don Williams points out that “if Lot kept the angels from fulfilling the demand of hospitality by going out to the men of Sodom, it is he who should have been judged, not them.”

**3. The Bible Its Own Interpreter.** Ken Martin says all we need to do to know that Sodom was not condemned for homosexuality is to let the Bible interpret itself. All Bible students should be willing to do that if they are seeking the truth, and we accept his suggestion since that always has been our practice anyway. We shall see if that in fact is what he has done on this subject.

Of the more than 15 instances where the Bible tells us why Sodom was destroyed, he says, “There is no mention of homosexuality” He cites Ezekiel 16:48-49, as well as Jesus’ words in Matthew 10: 14-15 and Luke 10:10-12 as examples. Of course, we have already shown that the Genesis account of Sodom’s overthrow gives homosexuality as the reason in spite of the efforts of the gay advocates to deny this fact. If there were no other places in Scripture where homosexuality is cited as the reason, the case would still stand from the Genesis account.

But how do we explain the cases in Scripture where other reasons besides homosexuality are given for the destruction of Sodom? Simply by acknowledging the fact that Sodom was not destroyed for the sin of homosexuality alone. There were other reasons in addition to this particular sin. Ezekiel names such things as pride, fulness of

bread, prosperous ease, and failure to help the needy (Ezek. 16: 49). It is altogether possible however that Ezekiel does not completely ignore the sin of homosexuality in what he says. In verse 50 he said, “And they were haughty and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.” Some see the terrible sin of homosexuality included in the word “abomination” in this verse. But what if Ezekiel says nothing at all about this sin? What can be made of it? Nothing at all. It would simply mean that Ezekiel, like other prophets of his time, did not face this sin. He addressed the things that were problems of his day and used Sodom as an example of warning on the things he faced because she was condemned for those sins as well.

Matthew Henry believed that Sodom’s most flagrant wickedness of going after strange flesh (Jude 7) was not mentioned by Ezekiel “because notoriously known; but those sins which did not look so black, but opened the door to these more enormous crimes, and began to fill that measure of her sins which was filled up at length by their unnatural filthiness.” Whatever the reason, Ezekiel’s failure to mention the sin is no argument against homosexuality being a reason for Sodom’s destruction as the account in Genesis teaches.

What has been said of the prophets may also be said of Jesus. The sin of homosexuality was not a problem for Palestinian Jews who were not influenced by the Hellenistic culture of their day. But the startling fact is that when Jesus refers to Sodom and Gomorrah in Matthew 10: 14-15 and Luke 10: 10-12, He does not name any sin at all which brought about the overthrow of these cities. His point is not on what brought about their destruction, but His point is on the judgment which God brought upon them. When Ken Martin says that “Jesus obviously believed that Sodom was destroyed because of inhospitality to God’s messengers” and then cites these two passages, he has grossly misrepresented what these passages say - and yet he is the one giving us advice on how we ought to let the Bible interpret itself!

Yes, Jesus does discuss how some will not receive His apostles when they take the message of the kingdom to them, and He tells them how they are to go on to others who will perhaps be more receptive. But His point is not on how they will be treated inhospitably, and He said nothing at all on this point when he spoke of Sodom. His point was on privilege and responsibility. When those to whom the apostles went rejected the message of the kingdom, they wilfully rejected their great opportunities of becoming citizens in God’s kingdom and their judgment will be more severe than that of Sodom who never had such opportunities. That was Jesus’ point. For whatever reason Sodom was destroyed (and Jesus gave no reason in these passages), the city that rejects the kingdom of God when the kingdom is offered to it will receive a greater judgment than Sodom because Sodom did not have equal opportunities.

One is made to wonder why Martin did not deal with 2 Peter 2:6 and Jude 7-8.

According to his claim not one passage on Sodom's destruction mentions homosexuality, yet he passes over in complete silence Jude's reference to "going after strange flesh". What does Jude mean by this phrase? If we are going to let the Bible interpret itself on this subject we must know the answer to this question. Martin cited two examples where homosexuality is not specified, and we explained why that was the case, but what about Jude 7? "Going after strange flesh" doesn't sound much like the mere violation of hospitality, does it? Sounds more like (to use the words of another writer) "a haughty defiance of- God-given morality, demonstrating a vivid sexual distortion."

"Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals ' ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9,10, NASB).