

Jesus and the Six Homosexuals:

(Formerly titled “Jesus and Marriage Equality”)

The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus

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BIBLE VERSIONS CITED OR MENTIONED

AB	Amplified Bible
ASV	American Standard Version
AV	Authorized Version
Darby	Darby Bible
Douay	Douay Rhiems
KJV	King James Version
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Peterson	The Message
Phillips	New Testament in Modern English
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

Raymond Portillos Leon
1987 – 2010
Activist

PREFACE

This book is based on the premise that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” (II Timothy 3:16, KJV). It is also based on the premise that every generation must take the truths of scripture and make them their own. Much good teaching comes down to us from the past, and we must be like the Bereans, who were “examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so,” (Acts 17:11, KJV). Paul commands us to “Test everything. Hold on to the good,” (I Thessalonians 5:21, NIV).

I was studying the scriptures to see if the anti-homosexual teaching that dominates much of the church was accurate or valid. I was studying the invalidation of the Law, Paul's purpose in writing Romans 1, and the Christian's authority to forgive sins when I ran across Luke 17:34-36 in the King James Version. I was stunned by what I read.

Until this discovery I had blithely accepted the consensus of people on both sides of the homosexuality debate that Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. I was surprised to see that Jesus used three same-sex couples to illustrate a lesson on judgment in what may be a

key moment in Biblical eschatology. I was unwilling to settle for a superficial understanding of the passage, and dug into its Biblical background. This book is the fruit of that research.

Jesus and the Six Homosexuals consists of five chapters. In the first chapter I discuss the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus, that is, three verses in Luke 17. I look carefully at the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate my thesis and to avoid any idea that I am reading into Christ's words meanings which are not there, meanings that would not have been understood by Jesus' audience. In support of my thesis I also present elementary linguistic evidence from four ancient languages: Sumerian, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

After examining the three verses of the triptych in isolation, I discuss them in the context of Luke. It is a truism that when you study a Bible passage, you have to take it in context. Chapter two, "Parables of Resentment and Class Solidarity," explores Jesus' understanding of what motivates religious people as individuals and in groups through the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16). Chapter three, "Jesus and the Bible Bullies," focuses on Luke 17 itself, where Jesus talked about religious sin as a cause of stumbling (verses 1-10), with an illustration from Galatians. In chapter four, "Bible Bigotry and Biological Heretics," I demonstrate 1) that the ostracism of lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals was commanded by the Bible, 2) that what these three groups share in common is biological difference, and 3) that Jesus repudiated such Bible-mandated bigotry. Finally, chapter five deals with repentance.

Having listened to preachers like Chuck Smith and John R. MacArthur on the radio for many years, I developed a real appreciation for expository preaching. So if this book reads like a sermon in places, please understand. As I delved into the context of *Jesus and the Six Homosexuals* I was delighted to discover how the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus brought important spiritual themes into sharp focus. I am happy to say that there is much more here than debating material. I hope you are edified as much by the reading as I was in the writing. To grow into the “stature of the fulness of Christ,” we need to understand what Christ did and taught, and expose ourselves to the whole counsel of God.

On two counts I must emphasize the book's narrow focus. First, I focus on the meaning and background of three verses in Luke, the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. I only mention the Slam Passages in brief asides. So, as you read, if your mind wanders to Leviticus 18 and 20 or Romans 1, please realize I won't be discussing those chapters. I do not thereby yield the field regarding those passages. Hebrews 1:2 says that “in these last days God has spoken to us through his Son.” God Incarnate must be heard. Accordingly, this book focuses on Luke 17:34-36. Second, my focus is on three verses that discuss gays and lesbians, so I do not discuss transgender, bisexual, or intersex persons. Nevertheless, oppression is damaging for these people as well as gays and lesbians, and each of us must reject injustice against anyone, no matter what the excuse.

A word is in order regarding my decision to re-name the book.

The original title, *Jesus and Marriage Equality*, distracted from the actual Biblical focus of the book. While “Luke’s Gay Apocalypse” certainly has implications for the vital campaign for human rights of all people, the book does not deal primarily with Marriage Equality. This book deals with Christ’s attitude toward gays and lesbians, and his total refusal to yield to the bigotry of religious people—no matter how much Biblical support they had for their ostracism of groups like lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals..

I want to thank my daughter Lissette and my brother Noel for reading sections of the manuscript and making invaluable suggestions. I also want to thank my son Jonathan and my daughter Melanie for their enthusiastic support for the project. Special thanks go to Jonathan Zimmer and Gregg DesElms for their valuable criticisms at crucial moments. I am also grateful to my United Methodist pastor, Andy Welch, for bringing his considerable knowledge of Hebrew and English to bear on chapter one. He helped me avoid more than one questionable statement. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague from PFLAG, Mark Thompson, for bringing his valuable editing skills to the project. The book is clearer because of his assistance. But, as they say, any errors or shortcomings are my own.

Many introductions end with thanks to one’s partner. And they really do deserve it, at least mine does. This book robbed time and energy from my wife, which she truly deserved and needed. I got pretty grumpy sometimes, and without her love and patient endurance, this book would not exist. Her input on late drafts was crucial, and her

enthusiasm for the book was gratifying. This book, quite literally, would not exist if it weren't for her. Thank you so much, Diane.

Ronald W. Goetz

June 10, 2010

THE SAME-SEX TRIPTYCH OF JESUS

When discussing what the Bible says about homosexuality, people on both sides of the debate generally believe that Jesus never mentioned same-sex relationships. Discussions are normally limited to passages in Leviticus, Romans, I Corinthians, and sometimes I Timothy and Jude, although the Creation accounts in Genesis have recently been deployed as well. The gospels have seemed quite silent. As it turns out, Jesus actually does refer to gay and lesbian relationships, three in fact. Obviously he doesn't talk about "homosexuals" in the abstract. He does, however, use the six homosexuals as concrete examples. The three same-sex couples appear in what I call "The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus" (Luke 17:34-36). Jesus' Same-Sex Triptych is the climax of Luke's "Gay Apocalypse" (Luke 17:22-36). Matthew 24:37-41 contains the material that is parallel to the Gay Apocalypse (Matthew 24:37-41), but all the material that gives Luke 17 its specific gay theme is conspicuously absent. The Same-Sex Triptych, plus the overall design of Luke's Gay Apocalypse demonstrate that we were meant to understand that Jesus accepted gays and lesbians just as he accepted heterosexuals.

Jesus discusses the same-sex couples in a completely neutral fashion. He doesn't criticize them, he doesn't laud them. He mentions them in a teaching on judgment, but does not judge them. Gay and lesbian relationships are neither good nor bad, just as heterosexual relationships carry no moral stigma or commendation in and of themselves. Jesus mentions the three couples, two gay and one lesbian, in a way that is deceptively casual. The three gay couples are mentioned in a passage often cited to support what is called The Rapture.

I tell you, in that night
there shall be two men in one bed;
 the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.
Two women shall be grinding together;
 the one shall be taken, and the other left.
Two men shall be in the field;
 the one shall be taken, and the other left.
(Luke 17:34-36, KJV)

The low-key way Jesus refers to the three same-sex couples, and the fact that one member of each couple is acceptable to God and the other is not acceptable, demonstrate that Jesus did not consider homosexual behavior a determining factor in a person's acceptability to God. The fact that sexual orientation is a total non-issue for Jesus is the distinctive moral content in the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. Jesus Christ doesn't care whether you're gay or straight.

This is a startling claim, and will seem preposterous to many. Some will find portions of the following discussion uncomfortable or offensive, which is completely understandable. But we cannot allow

our sometimes un-Biblical sense of decency and propriety to keep us from seeing that Jesus specifically, deliberately 1) discussed gay and lesbian couples 2) using culturally decent language 3) in a neutral fashion. We will see that Jesus accepted gay and lesbian unions as equivalent to heterosexual relationships. While he would not have used this language in first-century Israel, Jesus accepted what we call Marriage Equality. He doesn't argue for it, he simply assumes it, much as Genesis 1:1 assumes the existence of God, and does not present a theoretical argument for God's existence.

WHAT IS A “TRIPTYCH”?

A word regarding the label given these three verses is in order, the word *trptych*. In the history of religious art, a triptych is a set of three connected images designed to help believers meditate on important individuals and events, usually taken from the Bible. The goal is to encourage thoughtful reflection on the Biblical subjects portrayed in the three images. Although carved ivory triptychs exist, most triptychs consist of three painted wood panels connected with hinges. While they are best known for their use as sanctuary altarpieces, smaller triptychs for personal devotions in the home were made during the Renaissance, and remain popular to this day. Similar to the triptychs are diptychs (two panels), and polyptychs (multiple panels). Triptych titles include “The Crucifixion,” “The Burning Bush,” “The Hidden Years,” “The Garden of Earthly Delights,” and “The Nativity of Christ.” One Renaissance triptych, for example, Rogier van der

Weyden's "The Crucifixion," portrays the day Jesus died. The central panel illustrates Christ on the cross surrounded by two male and two female followers, while the two side panels each contain one female mourner. The devotional use of such three-panel triptychs assumes that believers will profit from fresh contemplation of even very familiar episodes from the Bible.

While it has primary application in the world of art, the word "triptych" has been applied to several key sections of Luke's writing. In Luke's prologue to the birth of Christ, there is a triptych consisting of the Angelic Announcement to Mary, the Angelic Announcement to Zachariah, and the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Then, immediately after his baptism and before he begins his public ministry, there is the account of the Three Temptations of Christ (Luke 4:1-13). Then there are three events that are foundational for the history of the early church. These events have been called "The Easter Triptych": Christ's Resurrection, his Ascension, and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit. These vivid events are portrayed in the book of Acts, which is generally attributed to Luke. Triptychs are typical in Lucan writing.

The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus, therefore, has a comfortable home in the gospel of Luke. The triptych consists of three panels, and the images are all nocturnal. Panel one portrays two gay men sleeping in one bed when one is taken. Panel two, the central panel, portrays two lesbians grinding together when one is taken. Panel three portrays two gay men in a field when one is taken. One could hope for a tasteful three-panel rendering of that night by a twenty-first century

Hieronymous Bosch or Gustave Doré. Historically, the central panel of a triptych was usually the largest, since the side panels were designed to close neatly in front of it. As it turns out, the central panel of the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus gets more treatment here than the flanking panels by virtue of the central panel's more controversial content.

OBJECTIONS TO SIX GAYS AND LESBIANS and the KING JAMES BIBLE

The thesis of this chapter is simple. Jesus discusses three same-sex couples (referred to here as the “Couples Material”) in the King James version of Luke 17:34-36. The first thing to notice is that everything they do takes place at night. Secondly, Jesus politely lets us know that at least two of the couples are making love, first by alluding to the Old Testament and second by using a euphemism that is common in both Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Being “taken” or “left” refers to being rescued out of judgment or being left to face judgment. The six people are gays and lesbians, and three of the six are rescued out of judgment. The fact that three homosexuals are rescued out of judgment means that the God’s criteria have nothing to do with their sexual orientation.

Actual objections run something like this. “No, not right. First of all, the word ‘men’ doesn’t even appear in verse 34. It *can* refer to two men, but probably refers to a married couple. Even if it does refer to two men, it was common for men to sleep together when traveling. Second, the two women ‘grinding’ are grinding grain in their hand mills. From Proverbs 31 we know it was common for the virtuous wife

to work long into the night to provide for her family, and grinding wheat was something women often did together. Third, verse 36 doesn't even belong there; it was borrowed from the parallel account in Matthew 24, so there isn't even anything like a 'triptych.' Finally, the main point of the passage is to exhort us to always be prepared for Christ's second coming since we don't know when it will occur. So, there is no proof that they are all same-sex couples, there is no triptych, and you've missed the main point. You have no case." The standard anti-homosexuality argument quickly resumes, citing verses from Leviticus, Romans, etc.¹ That fairly states the objections to the thesis, and each of these objections will be answered.

The present thesis is most clearly visible in the King James Bible. The King James Version is believed by many people to be one of the less reliable translations because the translators did not have access to some important manuscripts, although "King James Only" Christians venerate it above all other translations. It must be emphasized that the argument put forward in this book is not dependent upon the use of the KJV, but is nevertheless most clearly seen in the KJV rendering of the passage. Objections based on the use of the King James Version might be legitimate if the present argument were completely dependent on the English version known as the King James Bible, which it is not. The case is most easily seen in the King James version, but it is not dependent upon it.

A CLOSER EXAMINATION

In this chapter we will examine four phrases in Luke 17:34-36 and the implications of a fifth, the triptych's Neutrality Chorus.

- In that night
- Two men in one bed
- Two women shall be grinding together
- Two men shall be in the field
- One shall be taken, the other left

First, notice that Jesus mentions three same-sex couples and that all the action occurs at night. Second, there are Old Testament passages in the background of the three same-sex relationships which will confirm that the verses feature same-sex couples. The first Old Testament allusion is to “two men in one bed,” which echoes the discussion of male homosexuals in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The Old Testament background for “grinding together” is the word “grind” itself, which is a common euphemism for sex. The *grinding* metaphor occurs in Job 31, Isaiah 47, Lamentations 5, and Judges 16). The Old Testament background for “two men in the field” are the circumstances under which an engaged woman cannot be found guilty of fornication, which we will discuss later. Finally, the Neutrality Chorus (“one shall be taken, the other left”) alludes to Lot and to “Lot's wife.” In the Genesis account of the destruction of Sodom, Lot was “taken” (delivered from judgment), but his wife was “left behind” as a pillar of salt.

IN THAT NIGHT

In Luke 17 a signal that something unusual is afoot is the phrase “in that night.” In English translations the phrase “in that *day*” is far more common, occurring over 130 times. The phrase “in that *night*” occurs only three times in the English Old Testament,ⁱⁱ and four times in the Greek New Testament (Mark 14:30; Matthew 26:34; Acts 27:23; and Luke 17:34). The word “night” itself occurs over 400 times. The Bible mentions a number of things that normally occur at night, including sleeplessness, dreaming, and, of course, sex. The phrase “in that *night*” is used in two gospels when Christ predicts Peter's betrayal, and when Paul predicts the outcome of a dramatic stormy night at sea. Jesus underscores the fact that the action of these three same-sex couples occurs at *night*.

Traditional English poetry is characterized by rhyme, rhythm, and accent. When poets want to give special emphasis to a word or idea in a poem, they frequently disrupt the expected rhyme, rhythm, or accent as a signal. Before Jesus' Same-Sex Triptych, the words *day* and *days* appear ten times in ten verses: “The *days* will come,” “the *days* of the Son of Man” (two times), “in His *day*,” “the *days* of Noah,” “the *day* that Noah entered the ark,” “the *days* of Lot,” “the *day* that Lot went out from Sodom,” “the *day* that the Son of Man is revealed,” and “on that *day*.” Then, quite abruptly, this phrase appears: “in that *night*.” This phrase alerts the reader to the presence of something unusual.

The phrases “two men in one bed,” “two women shall be grinding together,” and “two men shall be in the field” allude to important passages in the Hebrew Bible. An allusion is a reference to a source outside the immediate context, that is usually familiar to the audience. For example, when Jesus is hanging on the cross he cries out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” By quoting the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus called to mind whole layers of prophetic meaning, unspoken from the cross, but laid out in the psalm. Similarly, each image in Luke’s Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus alluded to scriptures that were familiar to many of Luke’s readers.

Notice what we have. Two men in the same bed, at night. Two women grinding together, at night. Two men in the field, at night. One of the most striking things about these three couples is that we are not told exactly what they were doing. Are the two men in bed sleeping? We don't know. Are the two women grinding grain? We don't know. And what business do two men have alone in the fields at night? Luke himself doesn't say. It is fortunate that we are not left to speculate or assume. Comparing scripture with scripture, we have a clear understanding of what these three couples were doing.

TWO MEN IN ONE BED

The triptych's first panel consists of the image of “two men in one bed.” In context this clearly alludes to the Levitical prohibitions against a man sleeping with a man as he would with a woman. The immediate context of “two men in one bed” consists of what can be

called the “Sodom Details.” Luke 17:28-32 includes considerable detail the destruction of Sodom, referring to fire and brimstone, Lot, and “Lot's wife.” The short passage flows thusly:

- Lot (v 28)
- Sodom (v 29)
- fire and brimstone (v 29)
- Lot's wife (v 32)
- two men in one bed (v 34)

Two men in one bed, at night, continues the theme of homosexuality begun in the preceding verses. The story of the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19) is juxtaposed with the image from Leviticus 20:13: “If a man also lie with mankind, as he with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them,” (KJV).

Context must not be ignored. The immediate context of verse 34 is the story of Sodom, where the theme of man-on-man sex dominates the popular mind, and “two men in one bed” was intended to be understood sexually. The sexual implications of “two men in one bed” have been obvious to generations of preachers and expositors, so obvious that anyone discussing the phrase must deny the obvious meaning, the intended contextual meaning. In countless sermons on the Rapture, ministers inevitably insist that two men sleeping in one bed does not have sexual connotations, that it was common for men traveling together to sleep in the same bed. Frequently they describe how they themselves shared the same bed with friends and brothers in the past with nothing sexual transpiring. This is a textbook example

of allowing one's personal experience to determine one's interpretation of scripture.

The fact that this disavowal is offered in virtually every discussion of the Luke passage is proof in itself that the sexual content is inherent in the material, and not something read into it. If the material was not inherently sexual, the repeated denial of the sexual implications would not have been necessary all these years. These disavowals are automatic and spontaneous, and are necessary because of the successful design of the passage. We were *meant* to understand this passage sexually, but that understanding is impossible to square with anti-homosexual theology. The present thesis has always been intrinsic to the text itself, but no one was making the case. The thesis has been preemptively refuted, as if to say, “Don't *even* go there.” Why was this preemptive refutation necessary? To avoid the task of explaining how one gay male could be delivered out of judgment during the very moment of “transgression,” since “everybody knows that homosexuals are going to hell.” The message of the text is, for many people, actually *unthinkable*.

Again, notice that many of these denials of the clear meaning of the text are based on personal experience and contemporary anecdotal evidence, not on exegesis (careful interpretation) of the entire passage. As we have seen, the immediate context of the passage is that of violent sexual dominance and God's judgment. Breezy references to sleepovers and camping trips cannot be allowed to take precedence over exegesis of the verse in context.

Once we seriously consider the passage, the only way to continue to deny the sexual content of verse 34 is to actually deny the importance of its context, which is a violation of a key rule of exegesis. The common accusation, “You’re taking the verse out of context,” is evidence that the importance of context is commonly understood. Even if the verse is read out of context the meaning is clear. The sexual content is obvious, and we know this precisely because of the knee-jerk denials in every discussion of the phrase “there shall be two men in one bed.”

To understand the phrase “two men in one bed” sexually is confirmed by three principals. First, it is consistent with the principal of looking at its Old Testament parallels or antecedents (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13). Second, it is consistent with looking at its immediate context (Luke 17:28-32). Third, it is consistent with the principal of accepting the plain meaning of the passage as much as possible. Finally, to ignore these three foundational principals of Bible exegesis, and refute the plain meaning of the words with references to personal anecdotal experience reaches the height of subjectivity and sloppy exegesis, if it merits being called exegesis at all.

There is some debate about the lack of the word “men” in the original Greek. It needs to be pointed out that in verses 34 to 36, neither the word “men” nor the word “women” appear in the Greek text. All are included, as it were, in brackets. In verse 34, the imprecision of masculinist grammar allows either understanding, two men, or a man and a woman, to be possible. In other words, *if context*

meant nothing, it could legitimately be translated “two men” or “two people.” As we will see in the discussion of verse 36, one ancient scribe understood verse 34 to mean “men.” Numerous English translations include the word “men” in Luke 17:34, including the New English Bible, the Amplified Bible, the American Standard Version, Young’s Literal Translation, J.B. Phillips, and Darby. In contrast, The Message, which otherwise has some brilliant renderings, inexplicably reads “two men will be in the same boat fishing,” which effectively prevents modern readers from understanding the significance of two men in one bed together at night.

TWO WOMEN GRINDING TOGETHER

The second mention of same sex-couples is “two women grinding together.” A literal translation is “two [women] grinding on the same [place].” While the word “women” does not appear in the passage, we know that it is women who are grinding because the Greek word *grinding* (alEthousai) is a feminine participle.

“There shall be two women grinding together.” In the Hebrew Bible, the word *grind* as an acceptable euphemism for sexual activity appears in at least three places: Job 31:10, Judges 16:21, and Lamentations 5:13. Job uses the word *grind* as a polite euphemism for sexual activity when he defends himself against his pious accuser-friends. To understand the Job reference clearly, a little understanding of Hebrew poetry is necessary. The books of Job, Psalms, Song of Songs, and Proverbs are written as Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is

not characterized by rhyming, but by couplets that are usually parallel thoughts. This explains the familiar pairing of words and repetition of ideas. Job contains these couplets:

If mine heart have been deceived by a woman,
or if I have laid wait at my neighbor's door;
then let my wife grind unto another,
and let others bow down upon her. (Job 31: 9-10, KJV)

The second line of verse 10, “let others bow down upon her” is an acknowledged euphemism for sex. Here it sounds something like serial polygamy or prostitution. For the first line, “let my wife grind unto another,” some translations supply an allegedly missing word like “grain.” Many translations leave the euphemism relatively opaque, rendered simply as *grinding* (NASB, NRSV, NAB, NJB), while others forsake literalism for a dynamic equivalence rendering, referring not to the sexual imagery but our own polite euphemism (e.g., “let my wife belong to another man,” NLT). The 1611 King James Version offers the literal “let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her,” while the 1535 Coverdale Bible reads, “O then let my wife be another man's harlot, and let others lye with her,” which is less literal and less opaque. The Talmud understood this instance of *grind* in the book of Job in a sexual sense.ⁱⁱⁱ

This look at the different renderings of Job 31:9-10 illustrates the enduring difficulty Bible translators have in deciding how to handle sexual language in the face of the church’s culture-based desire for decency and propriety in the sacred scriptures. In the culture of

Biblical times, *grinding* was a polite, acceptable euphemism, just as *making love* is acceptable for us today.

SAMSON GRINDING IN PRISON

The Bible uses *grind* literally in reference to flour, gold, and teeth, and figuratively when referring to the faces of the poor. A second figurative reference to grinding in the sexual sense appears in the story of the Bible's least pious "Hero of the Faith," Samson. Samson was a powerful warrior and a notorious womanizer. After Delilah's betrayal and his resulting capture, Samson was made a slave by the Philistines. Near the end of his life, the scripture says, "the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did *grind* in the prison house," (Judges 16:21, KJV). The Jewish Talmud understood the word *grind* here to be sexual, here as well as in Job. Then Samson was "put out to stud" for the wives of Philistine nobles who wanted offspring who would inherit Samson's amazing strength. Once more we see that using the word *grinding* to refer to intercourse was neither lewd nor obscene. It was the ordinary way that ordinary human beings spoke. It was the language of the common (*koine*) people. Jesus' statement that "in that night...two women will be grinding together" is clearly a polite, thoroughly Biblical euphemism.

A third Old Testament example of *grind* as a euphemism for sexual activity is in the book of Lamentations. Lamentations is a book that expresses Israel's horror and despair over being conquered by the

Babylonians. The book mentions, for example, mothers boiling and eating their own children during the siege (Lamentations 4:10; 2:20). Lamentations 5 describes the brutality of Babylon's conquering soldiers. "Our enemies rape the women in Jerusalem and the young girls in all the towns of Judah. Our princes are being hanged by their thumbs, and our elders are treated with contempt," (5:11-12, NLT). The devastation is completed in verse 14: "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood," (KJV). Young men and children are raped.

There seems to be a common unwillingness on the part of Protestant translators to clearly render the obvious sexual violation here. Catholic translators of the Douay Rhiems version, on the other hand, made the meaning more accessible: "They abused the young men indecently: and the children fell under the wood." One English paraphrase sadly renders the verse: "Strapping young men were put to women's work, mere boys forced to do men's work," as though young men doing "women's work" was, in Jeremiah's mind, somehow equivalent to the rape and torture of verses 11 and 12. One possible reason for the muddled rendering of the Message is to preserve a PG-rating for Sunday school classes. In the competitive Bible market, our Bibles must be suitable for presenting to children when they are promoted a grade in Sunday School. The phrase "boys stagger under loads of wood" (Lamentations 5:13a) does not refer to literal wood. Even in English, the word "wood" refers to an erection. "Taking young men to grind" refers to the rape of the young male population, which

was a humiliation often inflicted on defeated enemies and had nothing to do with sexual orientation. Man-on-man rape is a well-documented, if little discussed, phenomenon in the history of military conquest.

Jesus said, “Two women shall be grinding together.” This reference to love-making will undoubtedly cause consternation for some people. It seems shocking that Jesus would use what sounds to us today like gutter language when referring to lesbian love-making. Some will say, “After all, Paul says, ‘it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret,’” (Ephesians 5:12, KJV). The idea of Jesus uttering the words “women grinding together” can be exceedingly uncomfortable, until one remembers that there is earthy language throughout the Bible.^{iv} What sounds like earthy language today is, generally speaking, only polite Biblical euphemism. For example, Biblical euphemisms for sexual intercourse include “to know,” “to lie with,” “to uncover nakedness,” and “to humble.” A woman’s monthly period has been rendered “the separation of her uncleanness.” Solomon’s love poem, the Song of Songs, is well known for its graphic descriptions of romantic love. First century Israel did not have the clinical, scientific nomenclature for sexual matters that we have today, but they did have acceptable ways to discuss these things among adults. No, Jesus Christ was not using gutter language when he mentions “two women grinding together.” The Old Testament books of Job, Judges, and Lamentations contain the religious use of the metaphorical *grind*. Jesus used the ordinary, polite language of his day to refer to lesbian love-making.

GRINDING ON THE THRESHING FLOORS

There were countless threshing floors on the high hills of Israel. All the farmers and merchants knew the locations of the threshing floors close to their towns. For several reasons, these harvest-time threshing floors were inevitably linked with sexual activity in the popular mind. For example, when the prophet Hosea (8th century BCE) wrote of Israel's failure, it was in terms of prostitution on the threshing floors:

Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!
For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.
You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor.
(Hosea 9:1, NASB)

The seduction scene in the book of Ruth takes place on a threshing floor. The Israelite Naomi tells her widowed Moabite daughter-in-law how to find a new husband. She instructs Ruth to wash and perfume herself and to put on her best clothes. She will find the wealthy gentleman, Boaz, threshing grain on the threshing floor outside town, and she is to wait until he has finished eating and drinking and is asleep before approaching him. Naomi tells her, "When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." She follows Naomi's instructions, and "in the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!" After a brief conversation Boaz says to Ruth, "The LORD bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor," (Ruth 3:1-10, NIV). "So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize

another; and he said, ‘Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor,’” (NASB). Boaz was addressing the other men who had slept on the threshing floor with him, urging them to keep her visit a secret.

One could hardly want a better depiction of a young widow’s prenuptial seduction of a wealthy older man. She bathes, perfumes herself, puts on her best outfit, then lies down next to him while he sleeps. The only thing requiring explanation is Naomi’s instruction to “uncover his feet.” This is not some strange, ancient ritual. The word “feet” was a common euphemism for both male and female genitals. Ezekiel, for example, says to Israel, “You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you *spread your legs* to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry,” (Ezekiel 16:25, NASB). The King James reads more literally: “hast *opened thy feet* to everyone that passed by.” Elsewhere, among the prophetic curses on Israel that appear in the Law, God promises to lay siege to their cities. During such a siege, the refined woman will become hostile to everyone, even “toward her afterbirth which issues *from between her legs* and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns,” (Deuteronomy 28:57, NASB). Once again, the word *legs* is literally *feet*. Naomi’s instructions to uncover Boaz’s “feet” and to do whatever he tells her to do are certainly intended to bring to pass an intended union. In these contexts, *feet* is much like our English word “privates”

or “private parts,” the language parents teach their children to use. Thus, what we are reading in these passages is the polite language that parents taught their children was acceptable.

It doesn't take much imagination to get a general understanding of what Boaz means when he says, “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier.” Nor does it take much imagination to figure out what startled the old man awake in the darkness of that night. When Boaz asks his compatriots to keep Ruth's visit a secret, it is clear that there was only one reason why a woman would go to the threshing floor during the harvest at night.

There is a lot in the long history of grinding on the threshing floors of Israel that contributes to the persistent linguistic connections between agricultural grinding and sexual grinding. Threshing floors like the one where the widow Ruth seduced Boaz were the flattest, firmest ground in the countryside. To this day travelers know this, and sometimes make camp at a threshing floor as evening approaches since the floor is more comfortable than a rutted road or a stony field. The threshing floors thus served as motels.

The threshing floors were built at the tops of high hills to take advantage of the strong winds (Psalm 1:4; Hosea 13:3; Daniel 2:35). As the grain was beaten, the husk was stripped away, leaving the bare, life-giving grain. The wind blew away the useless chaff. Before Israel's invasion of the Promised Land, these threshing floors had been the scene of Canaanite fertility rites, which explains the persistent economic, religious, and recreational popularity of the sites.

David purchased a threshing floor in order to build an altar (II Samuel 24:18-24), indicating a long-term cultural connection between religion and the threshing floors, which in the Hebrew Bible are more often referred to as “high places.” The winds in the high places are specifically mentioned in Jeremiah 4:11 and 14:6. The high places varied in how elaborately they were developed. Some included a network of small stone buildings and flat altars. Symbolic stone pillars and wooden poles were usually erected, dedicated to Baal and Asherah. Phallic objects could be decorated with carved snakes, while the Asherah resembled the buxom goddess of fertility.

High places were built not only in rural areas, but also near city gates, which suggests a possible trend away from their purely agricultural origins. In the Bible, most references to high places mention idolatry, sexual fertility rites, child sacrifice, etc. In the historical books of Kings and Chronicles the consistent religious measure used to evaluate the kings of Israel and Judah is whether or not they tolerated the people’s high places. It is, therefore, easy to see that references to threshing floors and to grinding, including grinding meal, have distinctly sexual overtones.

GRIND: A EUPHEMISM FOR SEXUAL ACTIVITY IN ANCIENT LANGUAGES

In many ancient languages *grind* was a euphemism for sexual activity, just as it is in modern languages the world over. In English, for example, we have the phrase “bump and grind,” often used with

reference to dancing, which suggests the motions of sex. In ancient Sumerian, the several meanings of the word *mú* illustrate an interesting set of relationships, which in turn show how words can evolve. The Sumerian word *mú* has four closely related meanings: 1) to mill or grind, 2) well-formed, beautiful, plump; 3) shout, scream, roar; and finally 4) woman, female. The linguistic relationships among the meanings of *mú* are not hard to see. Each of the meanings is related to women and/or sexual activity. Linguists have demonstrated that words pertaining to the activities of women frequently become sexualized. One Greek word, *mello*, demonstrates such development. *Mello*, meaning “to have sexual intercourse,” had *grind* as its original meaning.

GRIND AND MILL: SEXUAL EUPHEMISMS IN LATIN

There is another example of *grind* and *mill* as sexual euphemisms, this one in Latin. The Roman poet Horace (65 to 8 BCE) used *grind* in his pragmatic endorsement of brothels. Writing in Latin just decades before the birth of Christ, Horace said of brothels that “young men, when their veins are full of gross lust, should drop in there, rather than grind some husband's private mill.” Notice that both *grind* and *mill* are used euphemistically here. Horace's use of both *grind* and *mill* shows that even the presence of the word *mill* does not preclude a sexual meaning for the word *grind*. Here we have evidence of the sexual use of *grind* in Latin, just a few decades before the birth of Christ.

One of the most intriguing pieces of linguistic evidence is the Greek word itself used in Luke for grind, *aletho*. The word breaks down into a prefix and the root: *a-letho*. The prefix *a-* means *not* or *the opposite of*. The word *letho* (or *lanthano*) means unseen, hidden, concealed. Thus, *aletheia* means something *not* concealed, *not* hidden. *Aletheia* means totally visible, which is a fairly normal condition during sex. *Aletheia* in its usual rendering as *truth*, refers to the “full or real state of affairs.” *Letho* means forgetfulness or oblivion, the opposite of which (*aletheia*) would be total and complete awareness, which could be another way of understanding love-making. The grinding of grain involves removing the thin shell that covers the useful, life-giving kernel. It is easy to see a development that moves from the concrete to the abstract, from grind, to unconcealed and totally visible, to truth, with the idea of intercourse emerging somewhere along the line.

One last bit of evidence regarding *aletho* will firm up the Hebrew background of the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, was produced between 300 BCE and 200 BCE. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *grind* in Samson’s prison story as *alethon*. Again, “in that night...two women shall be grinding together” clearly refers to lesbian love-making.

THE GRIND METAPHOR IN FIRST CENTURY GREEK: PLUTARCH

While the evidence from Hebrew and Latin is quite persuasive, there is an example in classical Greek where “grinding the mill” refers to sex. The example from secular Greek, *written at the same time as the gospel of Luke*, proves that *grind* and *mill* were used as sexual euphemisms at the same time as the writing of Luke.

Plutarch (ca AD 45 to 120) was born in Greece near Delphi, and was a contemporary of Luke. Plutarch was a biographer, essayist, and historian, and wrote primarily in Greek. All his works, except for *Lives*, are known collectively as *Moralia*, which consists of 78 different essays and speeches. One of the essays is “The Banquet of Seven Wise Men,” an imaginative retelling of a conversation among seven luminaries who lived around 650 BCE. The dinner conversation turns to the topic of food preparation and eating. After a brief lull in the conversation, Thales of Miletus speaks:

This remark arrested the attention of the whole company, and Thales said jestingly.... "when I was at Lesbos, I heard my landlady, as she was very busy at her handmill, singing as she used to go at her work:

Grind, mill, grind;
For even Pittacus^v *grinds,*
King of great Mytilene.”^{vi}

Seven historic figures are talking during a banquet when one of them tells an amusing story that takes place on the Island of Lesbos. The woman with whom Thales once lived used to sing rhythmically as she

used a small handmill, similar to a mortar and pestle. Keeping time with her literal grinding she sang a bawdy little ditty: “Grind, mill, grind; For even Pittacus grinds, King of great Mytilene.”

Plutarch, historian and moralist, wrote this story roughly 700 years after the fictitious meal, after the reputation of Sappho and her native Lesbos was firmly established and widespread. Simply put, Plutarch portrayed Thales telling the boys a lesbian joke, a joke so clear that it required no elaboration except for the signal that the story was told “jestingly.”

Plutarch wrote *Moralia* some time between AD 75 and 100. These years overlap the estimated years of the writing of the gospel of Luke, which range from the early 60s to sometime in the second century. The little ditty he documents undoubtedly predates Plutarch, and could easily date back to the seventh century BCE. But whether or not the ditty is that old, what is clear is that the double entendre was amusing and needed no explanation to Plutarch's first-century Greek audience. The sexual meanings of both words, *grind* and *mill*, were common in Greek society when Luke was being composed, and were likely in common usage for as long as 700 years prior to that. There is no room for quibbling over whether or not both words, *grind* and *mill*, were used sexually in the Greek language of the first century. This double meaning would have been obvious to the author of Luke 17:35, especially considering the deliberate elimination of the word “mill,” which is present in Matthew's parallel account.

The evidence adduced thus far proves that the sexual use of grind and mill in Hebrew literature dates from the eighth century BCE and later, if we accept the usual dating of Judges, Job, and Lamentations. When we consider these three Old Testament references in Hebrew, Plutarch's "grind, mill, grind" in Greek, and Horace's "grind some husband's private mill" in Latin,^{vii} we are probably looking at a nearly universal metaphor for sexual relations, including lesbian love-making.

As we will see, the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus shows signs of deliberate construction. The parallelism, the thrice-repeated Neutrality Chorus, and chapter seventeen's homosexuality theme are all evidence of careful literary craftsmanship. The double meaning of verse 35 is deliberate. Scribal copyists were intelligent, well-educated people who would not have missed this double meaning. In Biblical literature the presence of various kinds of double meanings is intentional; they are part of the poetry and creativity of the language. The scriptures are filled with such double entendres, dual meanings which are usually impossible to express in translation, are only occasionally referenced in Bible footnotes, but whose presence delights translators. The double meaning of *grind* is so universal that it is present in English, nearly two thousand years later.

“TWO WOMEN GRINDING TOGETHER” AND MATTHEW’S MILL

Before moving on to the third and final panel in the triptych, we must

look at the gospel parallel in Matthew. These parallel accounts of the Coming of the Son of Man in Luke and Matthew contain overlapping “Couples Material.” Matthew's material actually contains the word *mill*, which is frequently supplied to English translations of the Lucan account. The presence of Matthew's mill is used to argue against understanding *grind* metaphorically in Luke's gospel.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill;
the one shall be taken, and the other left.
(Matthew 24:41, KJV)

Matthew actually uses the Greek word for mill – *muloni*. This explains why some translators of Luke feel comfortable inserting the word mill, or associated words like grain, flour, or corn.

To force Luke's account to conform with Matthew's account by inserting *mill* or *corn* for “clarification” is an error in judgment. To illustrate, Jesus' major ethical teaching is known in Luke as “The Sermon on the Plain,” and in Matthew as “The Sermon on the Mount.” There is a well-known difference between the two versions. Matthew reads, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” (Matthew 5:3), whereas Luke reads, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven,” (Luke 6:20). The difference between “poor” and “poor in spirit” is major, and reflects Luke's concern about class differences. Luke's version emphasizes an economic reality, whereas Matthew's reflects an easier to swallow “spiritual” emphasis.

If a Bible translation was published with the words “in spirit” added to Luke's Sermon on the Plain, it would raise an outcry that

wouldn't die down until a subsequent edition of that translation removed the offending words. The two phrases, while related, do not mean the same thing, even though Matthew's more "spiritual" version has frequently been more palatable because of the socioeconomic stratification of congregational life (see James 2:1-9). In the same way, adding words like mill, grain, flour, or corn to Luke's version does violence to the gospel writer's work. The NASB, sometimes criticized as being overly literal, renders this phrase in Luke 17:35 as, "two women grinding at the same place."

A second way the various gospel accounts can differ is the context in which sayings or stories are placed in the gospel. For example, each of the four gospels contains an account often called "The Cleansing of the Temple," in which Jesus takes a whip, overturns tables covered with money, and "drives out the moneychangers" who have turned God's house of prayer into "a den of thieves." The problem is that the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) place this episode at the end of Jesus' ministry, while John puts it at the beginning.

Many explanations have been offered to explain this "discrepancy." A few have argued that Jesus cleansed the temple twice, but most scholars agree that John had theological reasons for placing this violent episode at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And no argument has ever gained traction that would move John's account toward the end of his gospel for "clarification," to make it conform to the other three. John had a theological point to make when he differed

from the other gospels, just as Luke had a theological point to make when he wrote “Blessed are the poor” instead of “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*.” In Luke 17, he did not include the word “mill,” which has considerable theological implications. It is a small detail, which is not absolutely essential to the present argument, but is telling nonetheless in that it confirms the distinctive theological message of Luke's Gay Apocalypse as a whole, as will be seen later.

We must allow each of the gospels to contribute its own unique testimony to the message of Jesus Christ. To force a reconciliation of the four accounts of Christ's ministry and message does violence to the integrity of the scripture and of the gospel writers. We must respect the integrity of the Bible as it has come down to us, and we must respect the unique contributions of the men and women God used to record and craft its message. We must not casually make amendments to the Bible, adding mills and meal where we want, or transforming beds into boats.

OBJECTION: “WHAT'S WITH THIS PREOCCUPATION WITH SEX?”

Objections have already been raised against the present argument. “What's with this preoccupation with sex? Isn't this going just a little overboard? This is just reading into the text meanings that aren't there. You're seeing sex where there isn't any. You've got sex on the brain!”

This is a truly ironic criticism. It seems that half of Christendom is focused on what they believe is deviant sexual

behavior. They fill campaign coffers full of anti-homosexual money. They venerate aging spokespeople who attack an imaginary army of alleged perverts who want to seduce all their school-age children. They put sexually laden attack words together in long strings: “adulterers, fornicators, pedophiles, rapists, and homosexuals” along with the sins of “bestiality, sodomy, polygamy, and incest.” But when it comes to a serious look at what Jesus had to say on the topic of gay and lesbian couples, charges are made that a dissident voice is preoccupied with sex. Those who would prosecute a campaign of discrimination against gays and lesbians are free to quote their favorite proof texts against their targets, but if you disagree, and argue a case based on the Bible, you are accused of being preoccupied with sex. This is patently absurd.

In this discussion of what the Bible says about human sexuality, one side has dominated quite long enough. It is time to have an actual *discussion* among God's people as to what the Bible says about human sexuality. Anti-homosexual voices have drowned out other voices in the church for far too long. There is a positive Biblical case that supports gay and lesbian believers, and that case must be made. For far too long the only people who have felt uncomfortable (read: hopeless and despairing) during Biblical “discussions” of sexuality have been gay and lesbian believers. That time is at an end.

This is not a case of “turnabout is fair play.” In this case our discomfort results from a necessary discussion of what Jesus said about the acceptability of gays and lesbians. Very frankly, this author

found the passage “two women shall be grinding together” very uncomfortable, experiencing bewilderment for several days. It was very difficult to imagine Jesus using this *grinding* metaphor. But to uncover what he had to say requires us to look at actual Biblical and linguistic evidence that deals with the sexual language of Jesus' day. For some reason, the idea that Jesus could have discussed homosexual couples, using colloquial language, seems to be more than we can cope with. Some people seem to assume that while Jesus could speak about every other common aspect of life, he didn't speak in concrete terms about gays and lesbians. There is an old tongue-in-cheek saying, “God's forgotten more about sex than the devil ever knew.” Jesus was a careful student of human beings, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. To be offended at Jesus speaking in normal human language about an oppressed population betrays a very low Christology.

Those who have taken charge of prosecuting the campaign against gay and lesbian believers do not have the moral high ground, nor do they occupy the Biblical high ground. We must put our own personal squeamishness aside. In a Christian conversation regarding human sexuality, it is possible and necessary to engage the Biblical materials without charges of being preoccupied with sex. Given the encyclopedic breadth of sexual “deviance” listed by anti-homosexual Christians, this seems to be a classic case of projection.

TWO MEN IN A FIELD

The third and final panel in the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus is “two men in a field.” Considering the poetic parallelism of Luke 17:34-36, what two men are doing in a field at night might be fairly obvious. But we are not left with mere inference or speculation. What goes on in fields between adults also has background in the Hebrew Bible, although anyone raised in farm country doesn't require a treatise on the subject. Much of the action in the Hebrew Bible refers to isolated places in the countryside. Cain's murder of Abel, seen only by God, occurred in a field (Genesis 4:8). Another thing that occurred in fields far from the villages was rape. While fornication was punishable by death for both parties, if a heterosexual encounter occurred in the fields, the woman was presumed innocent of fornication. It was rape.

But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die. But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death.... For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her. (Deuteronomy 22:25-27, KJV).

If an alleged rape occurred in the city, where someone could hear the woman scream, but no scream was heard, she was assumed to be guilty of consent and would die with the man (John 7:53--8:11 notwithstanding). The woman was presumed innocent if the sexual violation occurred "in the field," where no one could hear her call out for help. Regarding the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus, this demonstrates that Jews in first century Palestine were aware of what goes on “in the

field” away from the prying eyes of town folk.

THE DECISION OF AN UNKNOWN REDACTOR

There is a question about the inclusion of verse 36 (“two men in the field”) in Luke 17. The textual evidence for its presence in Luke is weak, and many translations omit the verse or include it in brackets, italics, or a footnote. It was probably lifted from Matthew 24:40 by an unknown scripture copyist and included in Luke. Its likely absence from the original manuscript of Luke does not have a negative bearing on Jesus’ acceptance of gay and lesbian couples, however. In fact, its adoption from Matthew 24 actually strengthens the thesis that Jesus was discussing same-sex couples in verses 34 and 35. The fact that it was “two *men* in one bed” is probably what prompted an unknown redactor (scripture copyist-editor) to take the “two *men* in the field” from Matthew 24 and add them to the end of Luke 17 in the first place. The redactor saw the same-sex pairs that are obvious from a plain reading of the text. The scribal redactor knew that verse 34 did not refer to man and a woman, but understood from its context that it referred to two men in one bed. Next he saw two women grinding together, then added the material from Matthew 24 to make sure all three same-sex couples appeared in the same place. The inclusion of verse 36 is evidence that a person in the early church understood that verse 34 referred to “two men.”

Even without verse 36, when we see the undeniable background of the Hebrew Bible in the phrases “two men in one bed” and “two women shall be grinding together” the case remains firm. When we realize that *grind* is a polite euphemism for sexual intercourse--appearing in the Hebrew Bible at least three times, as well as in Latin and Greek in the time of Luke, the astonishing idea that Jesus was referring to same-sex couples in Luke 17:34-36 is nearly undeniable. And when Jesus tells us that these three couples are sleeping together, grinding together, and alone in fields together, at night, only one conclusion seems possible or likely. Jesus was specifically discussing gays and lesbians in sexual relationships.

A LESSON ON JUDGMENT USING GAYS AND LESBIANS

Jesus used gays and lesbians to illustrate a lesson on judgment. If Jesus had any reservations about same-sex relationships, Luke 17 would have been the place to weigh in on the side of condemnation or, if not condemnation, with a caution to “go and sin no more.” But he didn't voice condemnation, caution, or correction, at least nothing aimed at homosexuals in particular. We can conclude that gay and lesbian relationships are entirely acceptable to God, in a position of equality with heterosexual relationships, according to Jesus. This is not an argument from silence. Jesus was not silent on the topic of gay and lesbian relationships. He specifically uses three homosexual couples in an eschatological context of judgment, where a word of judgment

would have been expected and appropriate—if Jesus actually rejected practicing homosexuals or homosexuality. Jesus taught on God's judgment using same-sex couples, and didn't utter a single word of caution against being gay, not a single word against being a practicing homosexual.

In fact, Luke 17:22-36 was specifically designed to teach one central lesson: gays and lesbians are not subject to God's judgment based on their sexual orientation or practice. The fact that three of the six homosexuals are delivered out of judgment runs counter to our expectation. In the context of Sodom, we would be justified in expecting a word of condemnation. Instead, we are told that gays and lesbians are as acceptable, or unacceptable, as everyone else.

EVIDENCE OF INTELLIGENT DESIGN: MATTHEW'S “BE PREPARED” VS THE GAY APOCALYPSE OF LUKE

A person might prefer randomness, ignoring the evidence from Old Testament backgrounds, hoping that the sexual use of *grind* in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek were simply accidents that are somehow irrelevant to this passage, that the author of Luke had no “homosexual theme” in mind at all. Such a denial of the evidence, however, is impossible to sustain in the face of conclusive evidence of a plan, an intelligent design. This intelligent design becomes clear when we compare the Couples Material in the Son of Man passages in Luke 17 and Matthew 24.

In the section leading up to the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus, Luke includes a total of four details that give the Couples Material its homosexual theme. These four details are the “Sodom Details.” The Sodom Details are not present in Matthew. The Sodom Details are strong indicators of deliberate, intelligent design. While both gospels refer to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37 and Luke 17:26), it is Luke who adds the reference to “the days of Lot.”

- As it was in the days of Noah (v 26)
- Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot (v 28)

The second Sodom detail Luke adds is Sodom itself. The name Sodom brings to mind the images of man-on-man rape that strongly adhere to the account of that city's destruction. The third Sodom detail is the phrase “fire and brimstone.” The fourth Sodom detail, which lays the foundation for the Neutrality Chorus, is the imperative, “Remember Lot's wife!” These added Sodom Details clearly fix in the reader's mind the entire story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and are not present in Matthew. Thus, it is completely appropriate to speak of *Luke's Gay Apocalypse* and a homosexual theme.

It would be very strange indeed for us to deny the force of this homosexual theme in the immediate presence of “two men in one bed” when the very phrase “Sodom and Gomorrah” is routinely invoked as a short-hand reminder of the so-called abomination of homosexual sex. It is unquestionably ironic that the scripture invokes the Sodom episode in a passage that asserts the equal acceptability of gays and non-gays. This would not, however, be the first time that Jesus taught

something that was contrary to both the Bible and the expectations of his audience. To insist that the reference to “two men in one bed” is not sexual is to deny the emotional power which adheres to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The burden of proof rests with those who arbitrarily deny the relevance of context as they prosecute the anti-homosexual case.

The unfolding homosexual theme is clearly of Lucan design. A fifth detail in Luke, “in that night.” is also lacking from Matthew's parallel. Only Luke has the nocturnal signal so helpful to perceiving the triptych. The five details that introduce Luke's homosexual theme are the four Sodom details (Sodom, fire and brimstone, Lot, and Lot's wife) and “in that night.” The last major difference between Luke and Matthew in this discussion is not an addition, but an elimination. “Matthew's Mill” has been eliminated by Luke, allowing the double meaning of *grinding* to be perceived with greater clarity. Luke's homosexual theme is shown to be intelligently designed by the presence of five “homosexual clues” that are absent from Matthew.

Another important difference between the Couples Materials is where they have been placed in Matthew and Luke, their distinct locations. They have been given different *contexts*. The Couples Material in Matthew (two men in the field and two women grinding a hand mill) is in chapter 24, almost lost in Matthew's Major Apocalypse. But in Luke the Couples Material is not part of Luke's Major Apocalypse (chapter 21), but is the climax of Luke's shorter Gay Apocalypse. The Couple's Material in Luke in chapter 17,

separate from the Major Apocalypse which is four chapters later. And just as John's placement of the Cleansing of the Temple has serious theological intent, so the placement of Luke's Gay Apocalypse and the Couples Material (17:22-36) has serious theological importance. The Couples Material we've been studying were placed in very different contexts in the two gospels. In Matthew the Couples Material is a minor detail in an apocalypse over 50 verses long. In Luke the Couples Material is part of the elegantly constructed climax of an apocalypse only 17 verses long. In Luke, the Couples Material is in a separately constructed and smaller apocalypse, a Gay Apocalypse. While Matthew includes Couples Material as a relatively insignificant detail, Luke virtually showcases his Couples Material, using the same-sex element of the material to make a statement with strong theological, ethical, and personal significance. In Luke, the Couples Material is in a separately constructed apocalypse, a Gay Apocalypse. Luke gives the Couples Material a distinct location as a distinct apocalypse with a distinct theme.

Embedded in his Major Apocalypse, Matthew's theme for the Couples Material is to be spiritually prepared since we know neither the day nor the hour of the Lord's return. Immediately following the men in the field and the women grinding at their mills, Matthew explicitly says, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will return," (Matthew 24:42). In Luke, on the other hand, in its own separate location, far from his Major Apocalypse, the Couples Material says nothing about keeping watch

or knowing neither the day nor the hour of his return. Immediately following the couples, the men in one bed, the women grinding at the same place, and the men in the field, Luke says not once but three times, “One shall be taken, and the other left.” Luke's theme is not spiritual preparation for the Lord's return, but rather, “God is entirely neutral regarding sexual orientation.” His theme could also be stated, “The important fact of your life is your spirituality, *not your sexuality*.”

To say that the meaning of Luke 17:34-36 is to always be prepared because we know neither the day nor the hour of the Lord's return is to confuse Luke with Matthew. While spiritual preparation is decidedly important, it is quite clearly *not* the central theme of Luke 17. Spiritual preparation can certainly be inferred from the example of Lot's wife, but the overt lesson of the passage is not to be inferred, but simply understood from the thrice-repeated refrain. Gays and lesbians do not suffer any blanket condemnation due to their sexual orientation as some insist. Jesus said some are taken and some are left.

The suggestion that sexually active homosexuals are as acceptable to God as sexually active heterosexuals may seem outlandish until we remember that the content differences between the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke consist precisely of Luke's additional Sodom details (Lot, Sodom, fire-and-brimstone, and Lot's wife), one elimination (Matthew's Mill), and two-men-in-one-bed (prohibited in Leviticus). It seems that the only reason for the seven concrete details which focus on homosexuality (seven details in eight

verses) is to give Luke 17:22-36 its distinct homosexual theme, thereby justifying the name given to it here, Luke's Gay Apocalypse.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

It is essential to interpret verses in context. A verse out of context can be interpreted to mean almost anything. There are four contextual details from the story of Sodom in verses 29 to 32. These Sodom details *are* the *immediate* context of the two-men-in-one-bed of verse 34. The references to Lot, Sodom, fire and brimstone, and Lot's wife immediately preceding the triptych should put to rest the notion that two verses later, in verse 34, the “two” refers to a man and wife or to a non-sexual sharing of the same bed. The details of the Sodom and Gomorrah story firmly establish the subject of man-on-man sexual relations in the mind of the reader, and are *immediately* followed by a transgression of the Levitical prohibition against men lying with men at any time of day, let alone at night. It is absurd to insist that the two people in one bed are a heterosexual couple. If interpreting a passage in context applies anywhere, it absolutely applies here.

THE SAME-SEX TRYPTICH AND MESSIAH'S NEUTRALITY CHORUS

The most significant fact about the Same-Sex Triptych is that the sexual orientations of the six people are absolutely unrelated to how they are treated. For the past few hundred years Luke 17:34-36 has

been understood by some to refer to an eschatological event called the Rapture. “The Rapture” refers to the belief that at the Second Coming of Christ Christians will be taken to meet him in the air.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.
And so we will be with the Lord forever.
(I Thessalonians 4:17, NIV)

The passage may or may not refer to a Rapture, but it is clear that in the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus being taken or left has nothing to do with the fact that you are gay. The first two couples are obviously not celibate, so being sexually active or celibate is not the issue. The chief significance of Messiah's Neutrality Chorus is that these sexually active, same-gender couples are not evaluated on the basis of sexual orientation, either individually or as couples. As practicing homosexuals they are neither evil nor righteous. Whatever measure is used to separate those who are taken from those who are left, that measure is certainly not being sexually involved with a member of the same sex.

If homosexual activity were sinful and worthy of God's wrath, then all six of the individuals would have received the same treatment. If Jesus considered homosexual behavior a sin, then all three couples would have been on the receiving end of God's wrath. The Neutrality Chorus, “one shall be taken, and the other shall be left” is so important that it is repeated, nearly verbatim, three times. This repetition is not merely a mnemonic device. Messiah's Neutrality Chorus underscores this key truth: God is entirely neutral about sexual orientation.

Someone will undoubtedly ask, “But isn't all sexual sin condemned by God? Isn't immorality still immorality, no matter what you call it or who's doing it?” That question assumes that gay and lesbian sex is sinful. If Jesus accepts half the gays and lesbians without reference to their sexual orientation, then we need to take the hint. It is wrong to assume that gay and lesbian sex is in a special category, an intrinsically sinful category, different from heterosexual sex. If Jesus has pronounced something acceptable, let no man say it is unacceptable. Let God be true and every man a liar. With repetition as a rhetorical device, the Neutrality Chorus underscores an important truth which apparently bears repeating. When people say that “gay Christian” is an oxymoron, that there is no such thing as a Christian homosexual, we simply need to sing the Messiah's Neutrality Chorus:

- One gay is taken, the other is left.
- One lesbian's taken, the other is left.
- One shall be taken, the other is left.

Sexual orientation and practice are non-issues for God when it comes to the acceptability of gays and lesbians.

BIBLE BIGOTRY AND BIOLOGICAL HERETICS (LUKE 17:11-19)

Until now we have looked at the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus in virtual isolation from the rest of the Bible. Now we will explore its context. The present chapter will examine the episode that immediately precedes the triptych, the story of The Grateful Samaritan Leper. This story is one of Luke's unique contributions to our understanding of Jesus. A detailed look at the historical background of lepers and Samaritans will shed valuable light on the roots of social bigotry. We will find that the background of bigotry against lepers and Samaritans in Jesus' day is in many ways identical to bigotry against gays and lesbians in our own. What we will see is 1) the strong biological component in bigotry, 2) a diabolical universality of social divisions, and 3) the role of Scripture as an ideological excuse for sin. Lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals all appear in Luke 17. In the present chapter we will be looking at the Biblical background of social attitudes toward lepers and Samaritans.

First a word about Scripture as an ideological excuse for sin. It is only because we are examining our own context, a religious context, that those ideological grounds are Biblical. Other periods of history have produced a variety of ideological grounds for ostracism and the

restriction of freedom. The twentieth century showed us repeatedly that this terrible combination—biological difference, ideology, and hierarchical power—is a breeding ground for our darkest impulses. And we know that no one person and no one group has a monopoly on destructive impulses. This fact humbles us all.

Just before Luke's *Gay Apocalypse* (vv 22-37) there is a major narrative, *The Grateful Samaritan Leper*. On his final walk to Jerusalem, the pinnacle of hierarchical religious power in Israel, Jesus passed between Samaria and Galilee. Outside a border village a group of ten lepers stood at a respectful distance from Jesus and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" He commanded them to show themselves to the priest, and as they walked to the priests they were healed of their leprosy. Of the ten lepers only the Samaritan returned to thank Jesus. Jesus asked where the other nine were, and said to his disciples "Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this 'foreigner'?"

If you went to Sunday School, you were probably told that this story teaches us that nice people are supposed to be grateful, that it is bad to be ungrateful, and that we need to feel grateful to people who help us, especially our parents, our teachers, and our pastor. This is not what Luke's Jewish-Christian readers would have walked away with, however. The most significant thing about the account of the Grateful Samaritan Leper is how Jesus said a really bad person was better than all the nice religious guys. Once again Jesus deliberately made one of those hated, half-breed heretics the hero. If we were to retell the

Samaritan stories to give them equivalent impact for a contemporary Christian audience, we would have to find an “emotional substitute”^{viii} for the Samaritan. For most evangelicals, a good substitute would be a Mormon, a Jehovah’s Witness, or a homosexual believer, someone who is considered half right and half wrong. Of those three, the gay believer is probably the better choice because of the visceral biological element at work. Make a homosexual the hero of your re-telling of a parable and see how it plays. But think it over first.

The ten lepers were all social outcasts. Nine were from the lower class district of Galilee, and one was from Samaria, that forbidden zone. Jews used to take long detours to avoid walking through Samaria. The ten lepers formed an identifiable subgroup that overlapped Jews and Samaritans in your Venn diagram, rejected by their home communities to form a third, distinct group. This group is similar to the Gay Christian Network (GCN)^{ix} since it is largely composed of church discards, people rejected by their faith communities (Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostals, Mormons, etc.). Many are unwelcome, embarrassing pariahs in their home fellowships, and they gather together as the GCN to survive, and even flourish.

LEPERS: BIBLE-MANDATED OUTCASTS

Lepers were ostracized for at least two reasons. First they were ostracized because of a biological condition. The Levitical category labeled “leprosy” covered a variety of skin rashes and diseases which could be contracted because of poor hygiene or infection, but people

with actual leprosy made no decision to contract the disease, nor was their biological condition curable. Lepers were feared and ostracized through no fault of their own. Second, lepers were ostracized by the command of sacred scripture. A medical quarantine may have been appropriate when dealing with a communicable disease with no cure, but social ostracism is inappropriate when there is no disease and nothing blameworthy.

The Jews didn't ostracize lepers on a whim. They were commanded by the Bible to put lepers outside the camp. The Bible said they were not fit for decent company.

He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp, (Leviticus 13:46, NASB).

Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. (Numbers 5:2, NASB).

King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land. (II Chronicles 26:21, NASB)

In the official version of Joab's summary execution of Abner the Spy, David pronounces a curse on the House of Joab that includes the perpetual presence of leprosy:

May it fall on the head of Joab and on all his father's house;
and may there not fail from the house of Joab one who has a
discharge, or who is a leper, or who takes hold of a distaff, or
who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.
(II Samuel 3:29, NASB)

The history books record that the stigma of leprosy even attached itself to royalty. King Azariah of Judah was a good king, but scripture says that God nevertheless struck him with leprosy because he tolerated the high places.

The high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. The LORD struck the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death. And he lived in a separate house, while Jotham the king's son was over the household, judging the people of the land. (II Kings 15: 3-5, NASB)

The book of Chronicles adds that Uzziah “was cut off from the house of the LORD.” Popular opinion weighed in, forbidding him proper royal burial because he was a leper (II Chronicles 26:21, 23).

Four factors combined to make the leper's life a living hell. First, many people experience fear and revulsion in the presence of open sores and deformity. Second, ideological and religious sanctions gave some non-lepers the justification they needed to bully people around and wield power over them. Third, many people are extremely submissive and timid, and are unable to resist the peer pressure of religious authorities and cruel crowds of Good Boys and Girls. Finally, there is one particular, diabolical characteristic that seems to be universal for social groups. That characteristic is the sinful and worldly need they have to define themselves by who's an insider and

who's an outsider. Combine these four factors and you have a deadly mix for society's rejects, the Outsiders.

The lepers, until they contracted leprosy, were ordinary Jews. They read Torah in the synagogue, presented sacrifices in the Temple, and bore children. They were like everybody else until their leprosy was discovered. Then personal revulsion, worldly social groups, and ideological justification create a nightmare for the doomed citizens.

Lepers differed from Samaritans. Samaritans were a fully established society, with the typical groups that provide support for their members. Lepers, on the other hand, were a tiny group which grew slowly. New members were added one by one as their leprosy became apparent. Gays and lesbians are like lepers in many regards. Individual lepers and gays began their journeys with an inkling that there was something wrong, trying to ignore it or hide it, hoping it would go away. Once their leprous white spots became obvious, friends and family members would be afraid to touch them, fearing that it was somehow "catching." Eventually they left, relocating to either a leper colony outside the city or to Jerusalem's version of the Castro or Hillcrest.

It is in the interest of the ruling class to have a powerless group at the bottom of the social hierarchy to absorb the frustrations of the group just above them. Near the bottom of the social hierarchy in the deep South was so-called "Poor White Trash," and below them were the "Negroes," the daughters and sons of slaves and sharecroppers. Every society has its version of "Trickle-Down

Cruelty.” Isolated and defenseless, the leper community was the perfect vessel to carry the frustrations of the class just above them.

It is these personal frustrations that generate much of the heat in social and political crusades. Rather than addressing real problems, leaders know how to harness our personal frustrations and resentments and focus them outward. Instead of doing the difficult inner work of forgiveness, healing, and sanctification, our anger and frustrations are poured out on the most convenient targets of opportunity, the very people God calls us to serve and love. What some people call “hate” is this misdirected anger and frustration.

Not everyone is motivated by anger and frustration, however. Some people simply accept what they are taught, believing what all their friends, families, and leaders believe. These people don't hate anyone, and they legitimately resent being called haters. The Scripture warns us, however, about the dangers of accepting everything we're told, no matter who is doing the talking. Religious people in particular were warned against this by the prophet Jeremiah:

How can you say, “We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord,” when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? (Jeremiah 8:8, NIV)

And it is not only our leaders who deal falsely with us.

Beware of your friends, do not trust your brothers.
For every brother is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer.
(Jeremiah 9:4, NIV)

Jesus is our example here. He refused to buy into the popular disdain toward lepers and Samaritans. The remarkable thing is that the Jewish

people seemed to have full Biblical encouragement to reject lepers and Samaritans. Just as some Christians feel they have full Biblical justification to reject even the possibility of gay and lesbian believers, so too first century Jews felt they were justified in their popular prejudice against lepers and Samaritans. Jesus loved and accepted lepers and Samaritans totally disregarding the teaching of Scripture regarding their uncleanness. He had to virtually ignore Leviticus 13 and 14 (lepers) and Ezra 9 and 10 (“Samaritans”) in order to institute his sweeping changes. Jesus' relationship with his heavenly Father was all he needed. He didn't need to bolster his ego by feeling quietly superior to this group or that.

SAMARITANS: BIBLE-MANDATED OUTCASTS

First-century Jews had a totally scriptural rationale for bigoted attitudes toward both lepers and Samaritans. This prejudice wasn't some arbitrary notion they pulled out of a hat. Cultures and groups have a perverse, seemingly universal need for scapegoats, duly-appointed Outsiders to dump on. It seems that none of us can rest until we have someone we can push around physically, politically, or at least feel superior to in our private social fantasies. It helps when our ideological center provides the victims. The Bible is one such ideological center, and the victims it served up included Samaritans. The temple in the Samaritan city of Shechem was a major offense to the Jews. The Samaritans were widely regarded as the heretical

offspring of mixed marriages, and the Jews had complete disdain for the false worship that took place in Shechem.

The theme of taking foreign wives as a prelude to worshipping their gods is a slender thread stitched through the books of Exodus, Judges, I Kings, and Jeremiah, coming to a massive historical knot in the post-Exilic books of Nehemiah and Ezra. According to Exodus 34:16, Moses, displaying a priestly concern, warns the Israelites against intermarriage with non-Jews. “You will accept their daughters, who sacrifice to other gods, as wives for your sons. And they will seduce your sons to commit adultery against me by worshipping other gods,” (NLT). The book of Judges mentions how Israelite men “took [gentile] daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods,” (Judges 3:6, NASB). Solomon’s reign was historically tarnished because his foreign wives seduced him into idolatry, which diverted valuable revenues away from the priesthood.

For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been....

Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. (I Kings 11:4, 8, NASB)

In comparison, there is more Biblical support for ostracizing lepers and Samaritans than there is for the elimination of gay men. Two full chapters of Ezra are devoted to the divorce and deportation of gentile wives and their children, and two full chapters are devoted to lepers in Leviticus, but only two verses specifically condemning male homosexual transgressors, found in Leviticus.

When the Babylonians took the Israelite nobility captive some 600 years before Christ, they left the surviving lower-class Jews in Israel. These Jews intermarried with local gentile tribes, and the Samaritans were widely viewed as their polluted “half-breed” offspring. Sixty years after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they allowed those Jews who wished to return to their homeland to do so. The return from exile was a dark watershed in Israel’s history. Ezra and Nehemiah are the official record of the return.

One of the outstanding events of the return of the upper classes was the mass divorce ordered by the Israelite nobility. Ezra commanded that all the men who had taken foreign wives must divorce them and send them packing, along with their children. In our day there have been mass weddings conducted by Rev. Sun Moon, head of the Unification Church. These mass weddings have ranged from 1,500 couples to 20,000, and are always newsworthy in their strangeness to Americans. But this is a case of mass divorce, the tearing apart of families by the supposed command of Scripture. The qualifier “supposed” is appropriate because, while there is amazingly little testimony in the Torah against intermarriage, the Biblical basis for Ezra requiring divorce and banishment of gentile wives and mixed-race children is non-existent. There was no command such as, “You shall cut off your strange wives and their unclean children, and send them back to the peoples of the land from where they came.” The leaders had no Biblical basis for breaking up families.

There are some interesting social parallels between the experiences of the gay and lesbian community and the Samaritans. Samaritans were mixed “race,” half-Jew and half-gentile.^x There was nothing Samaritan children could do about their biological inheritance. Even though Gentiles could convert and become Jews, Samaritans could not. Thus, Samaritan teenagers were lower than Gentiles, lower than dogs. The fact that Samaritans alone were not allowed to convert is equivalent to the belief of many evangelicals that a sexually active homosexual cannot be a Christian. Many straight Christians say, “The phrase 'gay Christian' is an oxymoron. You cannot be homosexual and Christian.”

JESUS AND BIBLE-MANDATED OUTCASTS

Jesus steadfastly refused to acknowledge social distinctions like leper and non-leper, half-breed Samaritan and pure Jew, no matter how much Biblical support there was for the vile social distinctions. The Bible commanded the Jews to ostracize lepers. Jesus did not ostracize lepers. The Bible commanded Jews to shun their own mixed-race offspring, the Samaritans. Jesus did not shun Samaritans. The Bible commanded the Jews to execute men having sex. Jesus did not condemn men having sex. The Bible warns us to not be deceived, that bad company corrupts good morals, yet Jesus ate and drank with Scribes and Pharisees despite the danger of their corrupting influence. Nevertheless, the only people God the Messiah publicly rebuked and

consistently called to repentance, as a distinct class, were religious leaders, who as a class routinely practiced judgment, condemnation, and ostracism precisely because they knew these were demanded by the Bible. They not only practiced these, but gave their hearty approval to everyone else who judged, condemned, and ostracized.

The mind boggles at the suggestion that Jesus would join with today's coalition in their crusade against gays and lesbians. Fortunately, it is now clear from scripture that Jesus accepted gay couples as a normal part of life. He did not condemn any of the six gays and lesbians mentioned in the Same-Sex Triptych on the basis of their sexual orientation, because there was nothing to condemn, nothing to forgive. Jesus loved the religious sinners he knew, and since they did have something to forgive, he forgave them, although he didn't seem to go easy on them. One of the terrific thing about the God we worship: our God sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. This should come as a great relief to all of us since, when it comes to being unjust, judgmental, and bigoted, we all take turns.

LEPERS, SAMARITANS, AND HOMOSEXUALS: BIBLE-MANDATED BIGOTRY

The Bible commanded sanctions against lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals, yet Jesus was untouched by the Bible-mandated bigotry of his time and culture. Out of principle and rightness, he completely embraced lepers and Samaritans. The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus has

the perfect context in Luke. The triptych immediately follows the account of the Grateful Samaritan Leper, thus bringing together lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals on the same page for the first time. Paul may have grouped homosexual offenders with fornicators and idolaters, but Luke grouped gays and lesbians with lepers and Samaritans. The three gay and lesbian couples in Luke 17:34-36 were yet another group that is ostracized or marked for death because the Bible required it.

Luke specifically focuses on social bigotry, which is evident from the fact that of the four Gospels, it is Luke and Luke alone that records the episode of the Grateful Samaritan Leper and the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke's placement of the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus immediate following the unique account of the Grateful Samaritan Leper is no accident. Homosexuals, like lepers and Samaritans, were are a persecuted minority.

SAMARITANS: REMINDERS OF ISRAEL'S PERSONAL AND POLITICAL FAILURE

History can be a valuable political tool in the present, and the realm of politics is always the realm of power, the power to make people do what you want them to do. The ancient list of Israel's failures in the original conquest of the Promised Land augmented to include the failure of the lower classes when they polluted Israel's bloodline through intermarriage with the gentile peoples. When the upper classes returned, they chastised the lower classes like naughty children for

misbehaving while they were gone, for intermarrying with the gentiles. Later on, when the masses were discontent, the upper classes were able to say, "It's your own fault for marrying those bad gentiles." Later on the lower classes could take pride in their prejudice. "I may not tithe or avoid uncleanness, but I'm a good Jew, not like those bad Jews who married gentiles and made the Samaritans. At least I hate Samaritans!" Bragging about bigotry becomes a membership badge.

When Israel's ruling classes returned from Babylon, they needed to re-establish their authority in the region. They had been deprived of all political influence in their rightful territory, and they inflicted a brutal shock treatment to announce their return to power. To make clear to the Israelites and to all the gentile nations that "the boys are back in town," the ruling class ordered a mass divorce. This divorce by government mandate repudiated all the family-to-family marriage contracts that had been negotiated in their absence. The restored leadership showed utter contempt for the surrounding peoples, and brought terrible shame upon the ex-wives and children sent back to their bewildered families. There are no custody battles on record for these divorce proceedings.

We assume that the forcible break up hundreds of families would have been a terrible sacrifice for most decent men. It would, however, have been politically effective for the leadership in two ways. In the future, Jews would be disinclined to ever marry gentile filth, fearing a forcible family separation and an overpowering social stigma. Second, the surrounding gentile communities would refuse to

marry Jews for generations to come, remembering how their daughters and grandchildren had been so brutally tossed back to them like so much trash. The sacrifice of the Jewish men would not have lessened their loyalty to the new leadership, but actually increased their loyalty. When it comes to tribal loyalty, the greater the sacrifice you make to remain part of the tribe, the greater your drive to preserve and strengthen tribal bonds. To question tribal demands once the damage had been done would have forced individuals to take responsibility for inflicting damage on their own loved ones. To remain part of their tribe, they had to cut off a part of themselves emotionally.

Many parents force their gay and lesbian children out of their homes, even when they are celibate. Some Christian ministries urge parents not to accept their homosexual children. Despite protests to the contrary, the forcible destruction of families is required by the logic of refusing to accept gay and lesbian children. This destruction of families is similar to the family destruction in Ezra and Nehemiah. This campaign lacks any semblance of decency, morality, or common sense. Nevertheless, any organization with the “moral” authority to convince mothers and fathers to drive their children into a wilderness of despair, self-destructive behavior, and suicide can take a measure of pride in its social power.

Samaritans were constant, irritating reminders of two failures of the Israelite people. And as symbols of national failure, they could be conjured up by the leadership when needed to manipulate the lower classes. Failure One: the sheer existence of Samaritans. The

Samaritans were a half-breed race that resulted from intermarriage forbidden in the Bible. Samaritans existed because of the failure of the Jews to maintain their standards of sexual purity. Failure Two: family ties with local gentile tribes undermined Israel's ability to wage war against them. It is complicated to wage war against your own relatives. If the Jews had maintained their standards and forbidden their sons and daughters to marry Ammonites, Edomites, and Philistines, they would have remained pure and uncompromised. As it was, the Samaritans were constant reminders of Israel's failure to uphold moral standards and of their personal responsibility for Israel's failure to maintain political ascendancy.

Intermarriage created personal ties to other tribes, whose language, values, and culture were alien and, worse than simply alien, uncontrollable. The upper class was expert at guiding the affairs of their own people. They could draw upon the shared values and shared history to give direction to the people. But the living presence of alien values, represented by actual people, living representatives of those alien tribes, only and always promised to complicate their task of effective governance. The task of effective governance was difficult even in the best of times, so the presence of foreign wives in their towns and villages always spelled trouble.

Likewise, the presence of gay and lesbian Christians in the congregations feels like an alien presence to pastors and parachurch leaders. They are an unknown factor, different. And when it comes to leading groups of people, the more differences there are, the more

difficult the task becomes. The more homogeneous a group is, the easier it is to lead. The toleration of gays and lesbians is not so much a question of fear as it is of the real difficulties of adapting to difference. Where there is fear, it is likely a fear of what will happen in a transition to a congregational life that includes gays and lesbians. After all, we've all seen how "this gay issue" can split congregations and denominations. So the fear can be a doubt regarding one's own abilities to manage congregational change of that magnitude. Often it simply becomes a question of avoidance; it is easier to just ignore the problem than do anything. Unfortunately, when you ignore the "problem" you are probably ignoring a flesh and blood member of your congregation, usually a "little one" you have trained to be dependent on the nurture and instruction you provide. Pretty tough for the "problem," it seems.

The persistent survival of Gentiles in the Promised Land was one of those issues, both irritating and useful, that never went away. The book of Joshua is filled with explanations for Israel's failure to drive out this or that gentile tribe despite God's promise to give the land exclusively to the Jews. The accounts of some particularly humiliating military-political failures were given considerable attention, like the Battle of Ai and the Gibeonite Deception (Joshua 7 & 9). Israel's military-political failure was so troubling that an interesting prophetic explanation appears in the book of Exodus, an explanation that excuses Israel and God from responsibility for Israel's failure to gain unassailable political ascendancy.

But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.
(Exodus 23:29-30, NIV)

With every inevitable conflict between later generations of Jews and gentiles, Israelites must have rued the failure of their ancestors to secure exclusive possession of the Promised Land.

HOMOSEXUALS: REMINDERS OF PERSONAL AND POLITICAL FAILURE

Just as the Samaritans reminded the Jews of their sexual and political failures, so also homosexuals remind certain evangelicals of their own sexual and political struggles. Many people are caught in a struggle between their ideals of sexual purity and their sexual desire. In such a situation, anyone perceived as having sexual freedom can easily be resented and envied. In the current religious and political debate over marriage between two gay men or two lesbians, where issues of sexuality are so central, the role of sexual jealousy must not be underestimated. Not that straight men envy gay men their male partners, but rather that some straight males envy gays their alleged or perceived sexual liberty. In the imaginations of straight males, gays and lesbians are promiscuous, having an ability to disregard the sexual restraints that trouble so many Christian conservatives. This caricature is based on gossipy generalizations. Nevertheless, this reputation is the basis for an unspoken, and probably unconscious, envy. Given the

pervasiveness of sexual desire in general, the envy factor must not be discounted when considering the motives and the heat behind the anti-homosexual campaign.

Gays and lesbians are indirect reminders of the failure of many (but not all) religious conservatives to maintain personal and social standards of purity and virtue. There are a host of social phenomena that can trigger impure thoughts and masturbation, and sometimes lead to fornication and infidelity. And while conservatives have the same right to influence society as others, influence is different from control. They have no control over how women dress, over the sexy images advertisers use to hawk their merchandise, or the images that saturate television, movies, and cable. They can't prevent their adult children from living together, and they have lost the ability and right to enforce sodomy laws. Personally, socially, and politically the power to enforce their standards on others has been slipping away for decades.

There is, however, one thing they can do, right now, to protest this erosion of standards. They can prohibit gays and lesbians from marrying. They can invest huge sums of discretionary cash in campaigns against sexual minorities. They are unable to perfectly control their own sexual impulses, but they can control how they vote. They have failed to control the behavior of people in their own families and churches. Having failed to accomplish what they feel is their mission within their own tribe, they want to force their will on people outside their tribe through the coercive power of the state.

Jesus seriously complicated the moral situation for conservative Christian males. Jesus internalized sexual sin and made virtually all males guilty of adultery—adultery in their hearts as experienced in lust (Matthew 5:27-28). Christian men should have realized that their own sexual struggles require them to forgive others for their problematical sexual impulses as well (John 8:7-9). Unfortunately, when Jesus internalized sexual sin, he instilled in many decent Christian men a chronic sense of frustration, failure, and condemnation.

THE CHURCH'S TOLERANCE OF “TECHNICAL ADULTERY”

Lust is a sin of the mind, a category of sin which seems unavoidable. Such unavoidable sins are not restricted to men who are adulterers in their hearts because of what Jesus said. The twenty-odd sins of the worthless, debased mind (Romans 1:29-31) include similar, easy-to-conceal sins like covetousness, maliciousness, envy, debate, deceit, pride, implacability, and mercilessness. So many of our actions have these debased motives, yet we are quite good at masking these motivations from everyone, including ourselves. For good reasons and for bad, we routinely tolerate such sin in ourselves and in others. There is, however, a specific sin the churches tolerate, and with good reason. There is in another saying in Luke's gospel on the topic of adultery, this one located just before the Parable of Wealthy Man. It describes another situation involving adultery which cannot be remedied, a kind of adultery that is quite relevant to the issue of the church's acceptance

or non-acceptance of sexually active gay and lesbian believers.

Jesus said, “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery,” (Luke 16:18, NASB, cf. Matthew 5:32). According to this saying, anyone who is divorced and remarried is guilty of adultery, and there is no remedy for it. Such people are practicing, habitual adulterers, and there is nothing they can do about it. To remedy the situation with a second divorce in order to remarry the first spouse is forbidden in the Law (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). No repentance is possible. Even though the sin of divorce and remarriage are in the past, the fact of being divorced and remarried persist into the present, and a state of “technical adultery” persists indefinitely. Thus believers, loved by God and legitimately accepted by other believers, sit in the pews Sunday after Sunday, guilty of a state of “technical adultery” for which there is no solution, only forgiveness.

Divorce used to carry a huge stigma, and the church has gone through decades of theological and practical discussion before it arrived at a general policy of forgiveness and acceptance of divorced and remarried people. The stigma and shame that used to adhere to divorced and remarried people have diminished considerably, despite the fact that such people are, following the logic of Jesus, practicing, habitual adulterers.

The point here is definitely not to heap condemnation on the heads of divorced and remarried Christians. The point is this: if a Christian is unalterably convinced that homosexuality is a sin, then the

same non-judgmental understanding and acceptance we routinely express toward divorced and remarried believers should be extended to gay and lesbian believers as well. Luke says they're adulterers, yet we manage to love and accept them. To accept and embrace one group of "sexual sinners" while rejecting and ostracizing a different group of "sexual sinners" is unjust, and justice should be a top priority for God's people. It is unjust to discriminate between people like this. James asks, "Doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?" (James 2:4, NLT).

James mentions the role of motives in discrimination. Evangelicals don't use the word "discrimination" when promoting their anti-homosexual agenda, but discrimination is certainly an appropriate label. We legitimately discriminate all the time. In hiring we discriminate between people who have experience and those who do not. In dating, we discriminate between those who share our interests and those who do not. Some forms of discrimination are legitimate, and others are not. Jesus discriminated: he talked differently with tax collectors and prostitutes than he did when he addressed scribes and Pharisees. We assume that his motives in discriminating this way were not evil. But evil motives are possible.

ONE PARTICULAR MOTIVE BEHIND THE ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL CAMPAIGN

A motive is the actual cause of an action. A motive is the *actual* force behind an action, not the excuse or rationalization that is offered up as

a justification. In some ideal world hidden motives would not fuel men's judgments, but they do. *Men* are deliberately specified because a particular motive behind intolerance seems common among men who strongly support the anti-homosexual campaign. Many Christian men have said, “Okay, suppose I say being homosexual is okay, that we should unconditionally accept them. What’s to keep me from saying that being unfaithful to my wife is okay, too? My attractions are natural, too. I was born that way. What’s the difference?”

The difference is simple. Jesus said same-sex attractions are acceptable to God. Gay and lesbian sex is not intrinsically sinful. The sexual practices of homosexuals are, in themselves, irrelevant to the standing of a person in God's sight. The question “What's the difference?” assumes that homosexual sex is inherently sinful, which it is not. The words of Jesus trump the Torah. Violating the Sabbath was among the death penalty offenses. One man gathering sticks on the Sabbath was executed (Numbers 15:32ff). The words of Jesus Christ trump anything recorded in the Torah. Jesus' disciples prepared snack food the Sabbath (Luke 6:1ff); Jesus said it was okay. Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1ff); Jesus said it was okay. God delivers three practicing gays and lesbians out of judgment (Luke 17:34ff); Jesus said it was okay.

Based on a faulty understanding of homosexuality, many Christian men equate acceptance of homosexuality with the acceptance of adultery. It seems that for many Christian men, the desire to control the sexual behavior of gays and lesbians (e.g., prison

for sodomy, forbidding marriage, mandated celibacy) is proportional to their personal struggles to control their sexual behavior. Some men are frustrated by their inability to control their own sexual impulses, which can lead to a desire to control and lord it over others. In the current anti-homosexual campaign, some people's personal struggle with sexual temptations is a major motive for people's drive to regulate other people's sex life.

Society's increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians and its increasing recognition of heterosexual and homosexual equality are signs of political and cultural failure to many conservative Christians. They are told they were asleep at the switch during the postwar decades when social mores began to change. A long list of society's sins is often recited, a litany of defeats for which the church is responsible: Bible reading in public schools, school prayer, abortion on demand, gay marriage, etc. The "guilt" for these past "failures" is then channeled into the current anti-homosexual campaign.

Because conservative leaders understand that change is incremental, that many small "losses" (e.g., legal precedents, policy changes, etc.) can culminate in massive legal changes, they have resolved to fight every incremental change to fend off further large scale changes. This is how some evangelical leaders have come to understand Christian ministry as fundamentally political, and how the fight against Marriage Equality has come to absorb so much of their time and emotional energy. But time, energy, and money are limited, and vital ministries are neglected.

Jesus accepted gay and lesbian relationships as equivalent to heterosexual ones, despite the fact that there was Biblical support for an anti-homosexual campaign in the Bible. Jesus repudiated discrimination against lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals no matter how much Biblical justification there was for discrimination. Christian discrimination is a fact, and there is no longer any excuse for it.

We must not allow our caricatures of gay and lesbian promiscuity to justify pursuing government-enforced oppression. We must not allow personal revulsion at the idea of gay and lesbian love-making to energize campaigns that can only be experienced as hateful by those against whom they are directed. We must forsake the institutional need for officially designated scapegoats (who are often our own children) to carry our frustrations and personal demons into the wilderness, no matter who urges us to reject them. We must not interpret acceptance of our gay and lesbian children as a slippery-slope to accepting our personal temptations to infidelity. Jesus said being a practicing homosexual was not a punishable offense.

These are a few of the insights to be gained from an Old Testament look at the groups represented in the account of the Grateful Samaritan Leper. The fact that this episode occurs immediately before Luke's Gay Apocalypse seems designed to focus our attention on persecuted minority groups. This design could be attributable to Jesus, to Luke, or to a scribe. Whether these materials appear together in chapter 17 because Jesus was prompted to discuss gays and lesbians after his encounter with the lepers and Samaritans, or because Luke

chose to group these materials together for thematic reasons makes no difference to us. What matters is that we have lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals in the same chapter. What matters is that three groups that were subject to Biblically justifiable popular prejudice are in immediate proximity to one another. Just as the mention of Lot, Sodom, fire and brimstone, and Lot's wife was designed to bring to mind Levitical homosexuality in 17:34, so this account of the Grateful Samaritan Leper was designed to bring to mind the theme of persecuted minorities.

All this talk about persecution and minorities is not the result of importing a bunch of alien liberal ideas into the Bible. The concern for persecuted minorities, for the bigotry of social groups, for the motivations behind prejudice and ostracism are all intrinsic to the gospel of Luke. The language and concepts used here only sound foreign to some of our ears because these themes and gospel concerns have been excluded from our preaching and teaching for so long. Whether the exclusion of these issues has been deliberate or because of ignorance and a lack of careful study is not important. What is important is that we see those issues as legitimate concerns for Christians from now on.

The next chapter explores two of Jesus' parables recorded in the gospel of Luke, continuing our look at the context of the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. What we will find from these parables is that Jesus had an active interest in the motivations behind religious meanness and our ability to close our eyes and hearts to the sufferings of others.

PARABLES OF RESENTMENT AND CLASS SOLIDARITY (LUKE 15 & 16)

The gospel of Luke makes a distinctive theological contribution to our understanding of Christ which is seen in its unique elements. We saw such elements in the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus and in Luke's Gay Apocalypse. In order to understand Luke's unique Samaritan elements we looked into the Old Testament sanctions against lepers and Samaritans. Now we will look at two more unique Lucan contributions to the gospels, the Parable of the Angry Son and the Story of Wealthy Man and Lazarus.^{xi} Both of these stories deal with status and wealth, and each of them illustrates how people with status and wealth have no genuine concern for the poor. In the Parable of the Angry Son Jesus gives us an example of how our attitudes toward the poor can be formed in our families of origin. In Wealthy Man and Lazarus Jesus shows us an example of class solidarity. He teaches us that the wealthy class, exemplified by Wealthy Man and his five brothers, is able to disregard the suffering of the poor and only express concern for them when there is some advantage to be derived from expressing concern.

These parables, unique to Luke, demonstrate his concern for oppressed groups in Jesus' ministry. The poor, the chronically ill, and foreigners are all of special concern in Luke's gospel. This theme is

consistent with the homosexual theme in Luke 17, and for labeling Luke 17: 22-36 “Luke's Gay Apocalypse.” The Same-Sex Triptych is perfectly consistent with Luke’s theme of overcoming prejudices that still tarnish our understanding of the gospel and stymie our attempts to live in the love and spirit of Christ. The two parables that precede chapter 17, The Angry Son and the Wealthy Man and Lazarus, underscore how groups ostracize Others, and demonstrate total disregard for the welfare of those Others.

A PARABLE OF JEALOUSY AND RESENTMENT

The Parable of the Angry Son teaches that the main motivation of religious people to reject and ostracize non-religious people is jealousy and resentment. The clergy's traditional focus is on the “bad” son, the lost son. The focus of the parable itself, judging by who gets the “lecture,” is the so-called “good” son. The “good” son is the one who gets an attitude adjustment at the end of the story. He manifests the jealousy and resentment that compliant religious people sometimes feel toward siblings whom they regard as undisciplined, self-indulgent pleasure seekers.

When the younger brother returns from his ill-fated trip to the big city, his father is jubilant. He orders his servants to bring the robe, the ring, and a pair of shoes for him. The excited father orders his servants to throw a welcome home party. The older son refuses to celebrate. He is resentful and jealous. He has been dutiful and obedient

his entire life. He understands delayed gratification, exercises sexual restraint, and will not rejoice at the return of his brother.

The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on *prostitutes*, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!" (Luke 15:28-30, NLT).

The focus of religious folks is on the "bad son," and the text is often used to urge those wandering in moral error to return to their forgiving father and get reincorporated into the religious community. But Jesus puts the emphasis on the angry, privileged son, the good son. The parable's climax does not emphasize the good sense of repentant sinners, but emphasizes the difference between the heart of a loving God and the heart of God's bitter people.

The two sons are typical of two classes of people. The first class of people is socially unacceptable, the second is socially acceptable. The first class of people includes the ones who don't follow the prescribed path, who defy social expectations, and impatiently strike out on their own. The second class includes those who never deviate, but always do what is expected, and retain society's approval. While there are two sets of values in the parable, the values are *not* embodied by the two sons. Ultimately, the two brothers share a single set of values, the *same* values: the values of society.^{xiii} In contrast, the father has the values of "ultimate reality," the

values of God. According to the values of God, both sons are completely accepted by a father who loves and cherishes the sons without distinction, whether they “play by the rules” or not. The father loves both sons. How society rates them is totally distinct from God's total acceptance. The parable is relatively narrow in scope. It isn't asking for the kind of cross-cultural leap required to accept Samaritans, but simply asks us to love and accept “our own kind” despite our differences and what seem to be bad decisions. The sons, however, do not share the father’s perspective. Both sons feel that the younger son is unworthy of his father’s love and acceptance.

There is a single factor that looms large for the older brother, that stands between him and the brother who has suffered so much. The older, responsible son has only one specific complaint about his younger sibling. In his anger he tells his father that his brother wasted his money on *prostitutes*. Let's look at this complaint for a moment, since it is key to understanding our contemporary difficulties.

The older brother hasn't seen the younger sibling for a long time. And he refuses to talk with his brother upon his return. For years the family has had to make do with half the base wealth, losing any “economy of scale” they might have had. All this time the older brother has shouldered the responsibilities of being the only son at home—tied down, stuck. And his brother? Having fun, without a care, carousing with prostitutes. Prostitutes! When he thinks of his younger brother, all he can think of is sex, illicit sex with prostitutes—in the plural. In the heat of this moment all the older brother can do is express his irritation

at his younger brother's unrestrained sexual indulgence. Jesus highlights the older brother's envy of his sibling's sexual indulgence. The younger son hasn't milked the goats or shorn the sheep, hasn't been around for spring planting or the harvest, hasn't gone to town for supplies. There are lots of things the older son could have complained about, but his first thought was about his little brother and the prostitutes. And the older brother was angry and jealous.

ENVY OF SEXUAL FREEDOM: ONE SOURCE OF THE HEAT

In the light of this parable, it is fair to emphasize the role of envy of other people's apparent sexual freedom as one of the persistent sources of the heat in anti-homosexual campaigns. This is not to disparage self-control in matters of sexuality. Every culture on the planet has means by which it restrains the sexual behavior of its members and encourages self-control. Our sexual passions require social controls to make life safe.

No, the problem is not in self-discipline in sexual matters. The problem regards the inevitable frustrations that result from self-discipline. In discussing the Parable of the Angry Son, it would be “making the parable walk on all fours” (demanding too much of the parable in its every detail) and being a little too Freudian to suggest that the angry son is sublimating frustrated sexual desires with his devotion to the family farm and a restricted social life. But frustrated sexual energies do find other channels in which to flow. Luke's Parable

of the Angry Son clearly illustrates that anger and resentment are aroused by the sexual freedom of others. According to Jesus, this anger and resentment fuels rejection, exclusion, and ostracism directed at people perceived as sexual offenders. The good people who are doing the rejecting, excluding, and ostracizing feel quite justified in their attitudes. There are people who refuse to allow certain people in the fellowship, who ostracize others, and Jesus suggests that these people are not in touch with the generous acceptance and extravagant love of God. This is Jesus' message in this parable.

THE SO-CALLED “HOMOSEXUAL LIFESTYLE”

Envy of the apparent freedom of gays and lesbians could be called “freedom envy.” The role of freedom envy in the anti-homosexual crusade is confirmed by the repeated and emphatic reference to “the homosexual lifestyle.” This is left as a vague generality, as though it were something everyone already understands. The so-called “homosexual lifestyle” is associated with various images. One historical memory dominates America's current picture of homosexuality. It dates back to the beginning years of the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Lurid stories of 20 and 30 sexual encounters in a single night in San Francisco bath houses boosted newspaper sales. Such homosexual orgies became the dominant image in the minds of a generation of Americans. Another image is actually a phrase, “the bar scene.” Such dimly lit venues for meeting people are used by gays and

straights alike. And guess what—bars are viewed as an unsatisfactory way to meet people by gays and straights alike. It is as common to hear the bar scene disparaged among gays and lesbians as it is among heterosexuals. Indeed, more and more gays and lesbians are attending their local Metropolitan Community Church^{xiii} as a way to meet believing partners. A third image demonstrates people's “pick-and-choose” habits of mind. Images from Pride Parades are off-putting for many people. Scantly clad young men, outlandish costumes, and flamboyant drag queens trigger anti-homosexual responses. It is interesting that images of Mardi Gras do not trigger an anti-heterosexual response in people.

There is no such thing as a “homosexual lifestyle,” just as there is no such a thing as a “heterosexual lifestyle.” Heterosexuals live on a “lifestyle” continuum, just as homosexuals do. The continuum includes people in decades-long monogamous relationships, people who live in social isolation, people who are into the bar scene, people who move from relationship to relationship, all of it. Let's put to rest this silliness about a “homosexual lifestyle” once and for all. As a phrase it is pure propaganda, a gossipy generalization, and completely unworthy of a Christian who, following the counsel in Proverbs, seeks understanding and insight into life and people. People who parrot the phrase obviously have not given the matter much thought, or actually have given the matter thought and have no qualms about spreading propaganda and gossip.

Propaganda and gossip have the effect of creating knee-jerk

reactions to certain individuals and groups. Propaganda and gossip are useful for leaders who want followers to follow without thinking: to believe what they're taught, to rally against the same enemies, and to vote as instructed in their voter's guide. And this is true of all groups in society. It is true of Democrats and Republicans, evangelicals and liberals, religious and irreligious. Christ did not die in order to recruit an army of compliant puppets who salivate on command.

As Christians we have to decide if we are going to partake of the divisive “party spirit” that racked the church at Corinth, or follow Christ as discerning, attentive disciples—attentive to the scripture and to the still small voice. The Spirit of Jesus Christ will not lead you to ostracize and reject anyone simply because “everyone else is doing it.” If we are followers of Christ we will share his concern for people ostracized by society.

If it were left up to the socially acceptable son, the Other son would have no place in the home or in the church, and would remain the marginalized Outsider. The fact that translators and publishers have labeled this “The Parable of the Lost Son” instead of “The Parable of the Angry Son” or “The Parable of the Loving Father” demonstrates the church’s traditional preoccupation with bad children while ignoring the sin of religious people, the people Jesus actually wanted to get “the moral of the story.” The Angry Son, the responsible one, shows his total and complete disregard for the suffering of his younger brother. He is exclusively concerned about himself and the tremendous sacrifices he has made to remain morally good. He sacrificed his social

life and opportunities for sex to remain in society's good graces. In another gospel Jesus said on this very topic, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent," (Matthew 12:7, NIV). The responsible Angry Brother sacrificed his own opportunities for self-indulgence and pleasure, and condemned the Irresponsible Brother out of envy.

The Father loves and accepts both sons completely, no matter what the sons think of themselves or each other. The Parable of the Angry Son would have been different if the Father had died while the bad brother was away. There would have been no gracious and joyous reunion. The good brother would not have loved and accepted the bad brother the way his Father did. He was destined to control his Father's property, but despite this fact he did not understand or share his Father's values. The fact that the older, responsible son experienced his father's prodigal, generous love was no guarantee that the older son would turn around and extend that abundant love and generosity to others, especially to a badly behaved sibling.

Some people feel unable to extend prodigal love toward a gay or lesbian family member. Some congregations and parachurch organizations strongly urge parents not to accept their daughters and sons if they are homosexual. They are firmly instructed to send their children for counseling and to ranches for so-called reparative therapy.^{xiv} These parents are following their church's teaching against homosexuality. They are told not to accept their gay and lesbian children in their "choice" of the so-called "homosexual lifestyle," as

though their 14- or 15-year-old had “chosen a lifestyle.”

Remember that in the Parable of the Angry Son Jesus says that “His father came out and begged him” to come accept his brother. Parents who are fighting their impulse to love and accept their gay and lesbian children are not only fighting their parental instincts, they are fighting God. God begs them to accept all their children completely and without distinction, the way the Father begged the angry son to love and accept his brother.

The individuals in Christ’s parables are not just individuals, but entire classes of people. Without limiting his relevance to other groups, the Angry Brother mainly represents religious folks, or the Religious Class, and the Prodigal Son represents people who don't conform to social expectations. The characters in the parables, from the Good Samaritan to Wealthy Man, are examples of their classes and reflect class values. If it were left up to the socially acceptable classes (Priests and Levites, Angry Sons, Wealthy Man and his Brothers), the unacceptable classes would remain on the fringes of society for all eternity, unless it served their purposes.

A PARABLE OF CLASS SOLIDARITY

The next parable, the Parable of Wealthy Man and Lazarus, illustrates how the comfortably wealthy are 1) only concerned about themselves and people like them, 2) only express concern for “worthless” classes of people when such demonstrations of concern enhance their own survival, and 3) already know better than to treat “worthless” classes

with disdain. The original theme of this parable seems to have been that God does not show favoritism, that God does not esteem the wealthy above the poor, but the application of the parable veers away from wealth and poverty, first to a commentary on Scripture and the religious heart, and then to the resurrection. In this parable, the well-off man was pious and religious (using the phrase “Father Abraham”). Two things are highlighted: first, the great disparity in wealth between Wealthy Man and Lazarus, and second, Wealthy Man's ability to insulate himself from the sufferings of Lazarus.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

(Luke 16:19-21, KJV)

In Hades Wealthy Man requests that Lazarus be sent to warn his five privileged brothers of their fate. Father Abraham replies, “If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead,” (Luke 16:31, NLT).

The question arises: listen to Moses and the prophets about what? The Law and the prophets both discuss the treatment of the poor as a group, *as a class*. Moses said, “Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do,” (Deuteronomy 15:10, NLT). Zechariah the prophet includes the poor on his list of protected classes or categories: “Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, or the poor,” (Zechariah 7:10, NLT).

Despite their religious pretenses, the well-off group of six men ignored the clear teaching of Scripture. This parable emphasizes the ability of classes and social groups to compromise the spirituality of their individual members and limit the inclination of individuals to obey God. In other words, the group you belong to can keep you from doing the right thing. In this parable, the individuals in the wealthy class are safely anonymous. Lazarus is named, but the influential man and his brothers are not, despite the fact that Wealthy Man's voice is heard but the voice of Lazarus is not. The poor suffer as individuals, isolated and alone, while the influential operate as a class and look out for one another's interests. Apparently God is more concerned about people who are suffering in isolation and less about groups of people who have the contacts, the networks, the families, and the influence to look out for themselves.

Echoing the classical idea of “Every Man,” this parable could be called “Wealthy Man.” Only Wealthy Man has a voice, but he is anonymous. He and his brothers are all anonymously nestled within their class. Wealthy Man expresses no concern for the poor individuals remaining alive, but only for the influential “brothers” of his own class: “I have five brothers. Let [Lazarus] warn them.” That way the brothers can take care of the poor, not because their conscience is at work, but to avoid the eternal consequences of their behavior.

The pressures and temptations of their class allow these religious men to ignore the oppression of those on Zechariah's list of protected classes. The wealthy, influential class was preoccupied with

its own security and prestige, which prevented any one of them from individually heeding the scripture or the still small voice. Either scripture or conscience would have given this respected, religious, materially comfortable group of men concern for Zechariah's oppressed classes—had their hearts been right with God. It is unfortunate for the widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor that members of the wealthy class are not motivated by conscience and integrity, but only by their shared interests.

For the sake of personal righteousness and social justice, a person of influence must be willing to break ranks with the group and risk the loss of that influence. This is the chief lesson of the Incarnation, and this is what God the Messiah expects from *his* Family. According to Jesus, the Wealthy Class demonstrates total and complete disregard for the suffering of the poor. Wealthy Man is exclusively concerned about himself and people like him. In this parable, their only motive for doing good is to ensure their survival.

Concerns about social class are not alien to the teachings of Christ. These two parables, the Parable of the Angry Son and the Parable of Wealthy Man, emphasize that as individuals and as groups, wealthy and powerful people are concerned about threats, real and perceived, to their 1) material comfort, 2) entitlement to power, 3) sexual restraint, 4) social dominance, and 5) survival as a class. These parables contrast the socially powerful with the socially powerless.

There is a difference between the powerless characters in the

two parables. In the Parable of the Angry Son, the powerless character actually did bring about his own descent to powerlessness, while in the Parable of Wealthy Man we don't know the cause of Lazarus' situation. The parables suggest that the cause of an individual's poverty or misfortune doesn't matter. Angry Brother tell us that even when people are responsible for their misfortune, love and acceptance are still the godly response. Some of us believe that people who are responsible for their own predicaments are none of our concern. We say, "They brought it on themselves. Anyone who wants to can make something of themselves." The scripture warns us, "He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker," (Proverbs 17:5, NIV).

What we have in the two parables are two ways of viewing oppression. Angry Brother gives us a personal, family-of-origin look at the roots of our ability to disregard the suffering of others. A responsible, well-behaved sibling resents the sibling who "always gets away with it." Later in life this childhood category of "the one who gets away with it" become generalized, still characterized by a childish inability to see the big picture, which is God's perspective. Wealthy Man allows us to examine people's disregard for the suffering of others from a broad social perspective. The Parable of Wealthy Man is easily understood as the big picture that belongs to God.

Although we hear about the suicides of young gays and lesbians, it seems very easy for us to ignore the excruciating conflicts inherent in suicidal struggle. We say, "Suicide is never a solution to life's problems. It only passes them on to loved ones." We are blithely

unaware of how our anti-gay rhetoric drives gay and lesbian young people to despair. Some despair of living, others despair of ever having a relationship with God. They believe the shallow doctrine parroted from the pulpit and from friends that there is no such thing as a Christian homosexual. You can't imagine how many times Christian gays and lesbians receive the same, identical email: a cut-and-paste of Romans 1:18-27. As though they hadn't spent hours weeping over the passage in their own study Bibles.

It is one thing to be insensitive to the sufferings of others. It is something else again to be the cause of those sufferings. That step, from being insensitive to suffering to being the cause of suffering, is only a small step.

JESUS & THE BIBLE BULLIES (LUKE 17:1-10)

Following the Parables of Resentment and Solidarity, in which Jesus describes the jealousy and selfishness that motivate religious leaders and followers, comes Luke 17. The overall theme of Luke 17 is Jesus' Assault on Bible-Mandated Bigotry, with a special emphasis on homosexuals. The first section of the chapter deals with religious sin and repentance, and illustrates the difficulty of dealing with religious sin using conventional terms. The second section deals with two ostracized groups: lepers and Samaritans. The final section is Luke's Gay Apocalypse, where he adds homosexuals to the triad of ostracized groups of his day. In this present chapter we will be looking at the convoluted first ten verses.

Luke 17:1-10 is a whirlwind of sin, repentance and radical forgiveness; the disciples' cry for faith; and Jesus' teaching on humble obedience. Verses 1 to 4 are like a violent storm, with an updraft and a downdraft combining to create a tornado. The common element is sin, with the updraft consisting of religious sin, and the downdraft consisting of sin

more commonly experienced. This distinction is important because this passage combines these two kinds of sin rather confusingly. The commonplace understanding of sin deals with various infractions committed by individuals, like swearing, lying, losing one's temper, fornication (in all its forms), stealing, gossiping, etc.

RELIGIOUS SIN

Religious sin differs from commonplace sin in several ways. First, since religious sin is practiced by religious people, it has become cloaked in Biblical rationalizations developed over the centuries. Those guilty of religious sin are the very same religious experts to whom so much of the Bible is addressed. Those guilty of religious sin are the very same people who control how the Bible is officially interpreted. If religious leaders do not label a behavior or attitude as sin, it goes undetected (at least officially). Churches are self-perpetuating hierarchies and under normal circumstances are not accountable to anyone but themselves. Add to this the homespun phenomenon of “The Emperor's New Clothes” and you have an idea of our capacity for self-deception.

Some people may object to making a distinction between religious sin and “conventional,” saying “Sin is sin, there's no difference from God's point of view.” Be that as it may, there are different kinds of sin. For example, in discussions of homosexuality, judgment, and forgiveness, some people say, “Sexual sin is different from other kinds of sin.” By this they mean that tolerating an

unrepentant, habitual gossip in the congregation is different from tolerating, as they see it, an unrepentant, practicing homosexual in the congregation. It is entirely appropriate to state that there is a difference between religious sin and conventional sin.

To illustrate the difference, let's compare two sins. Which is easier to hide, stealing a loaf of bread or hypocrisy? Stealing is easy to spot, harder to hide. You either paid for the bread or you didn't. But hypocrisy is an internal sin, a more subjective sort of sin. No matter that hypocrisy is more damaging to the church than bread theft. One is easy to see, and must not be tolerated. As a result, a new category has emerged which is distinct from the sins of the depraved mind (which are subjective and subject to judgment calls). This new category is “*blatant sin.*”^{xv} Christians apparently can't be expected to discern the twenty-one sins of the depraved mind listed in Romans 1:28-32.^{xvi} No matter that the church routinely tolerates sins of the depraved mind in its members. Ignore and excuse gossip, mercilessness, stubbornness, ruthlessness, and pride as you will, but you'd sure better be alert to that one blatant sin that seems to top the others—homosexuality—and stand firmly against it.

In the first four verses of Luke 17, two winds are whipping individual debris streams into the air. Interpretive difficulty arises when we attempt to discuss repentance from religious sin using language related to commonplace sin. Jesus usually deals with religious sin through parables and prophetic denunciation rather than overtly didactic instruction like Paul's.

He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

Be on your guard!

If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”
(Luke 17:1-4, NASB)

This is one of three passages in Luke's gospel that refer to stumbling. In all these Lucan references, “stumbling” refers to a person's relationship with God. Stumbling is not stumbling *into* sin, but rather stumbling *away from God*. Jesus said, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me,” (Luke 7:23, TNIV). Other renderings of the word “stumble” include “fall away,” “lose faith,” “take offense,” and “turn away.” In Luke 7, the people who stumbled, fell away, lost faith, and took offense were religious people who thought they had this Messiah thing all figured out, but when Jesus didn't resemble the Messiah as they imagined him, these religious people rejected Jesus in favor of their imaginary Messiah.

In Luke 17, however, it is not religious people who are stumbling, but “these little ones.”

It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown

into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

Two kinds of people are in view here: people who stumble, and those who cause them to stumble. Those who stumble are called “little ones,” suggesting that they are young and dependent. We're talking about people who believe what they're told, people dependent on others for their spiritual nourishment. These are not people equipped or able to feed themselves from Scripture or find out the truth for themselves. At least not yet. They are children, children of the Church.

And who is causing these children of the Church to stumble, fall away, lose faith, take offense, and turn away? By whom do these stumbling blocks come? These stumbling blocks come from “Good Boys and Girls,” the angry, dutiful children who resent their self-indulgent siblings, the clerics who define the Bible's meaning. Two questions remain. What does this stumbling away from God look like, and why does it occur?

BIBLE BULLIES AND THEIR STUMBLING VICTIMS

It seems that these little ones had faith in Jesus at some point. They “lose faith,” which assumes they had faith at some point. Or they “fall away,” implying that they were in a place from which they could fall. “Turn away” suggests that they were originally facing in the right direction. Second, it says they “take offense.” Something occurs that offends them. Some religious folk, upon hearing that someone is

“offended,” automatically say, “I can't help it if the Bible offends someone. God said it, I just preach it.” It must be noted that the text contains a cautionary “woe”: “Offenses will certainly come, but *woe* to the one they come through!” To cause young, dependent believers to be offended and turn away from the faith through faulty teaching and preaching cannot be excused. To say “I was only preaching what the Bible says” will not avert the “woe” Jesus pronounced.

Along with the divine origin of the churches, they are also powerful social voices. When people say, “Society says,” they are often referring to the churches. “Society says” does not always refer to television or Hollywood. When a social institution called a church speaks to its members, especially to its youngest members, it speaks with a divine voice. Sometimes the church speaks in the name of God and ministers rejection and condemnation to its little ones. For the little one, it is not like a movie or a friend that makes fun of you. The church's rejection and condemnation is, for these little ones, the same as God discarding you, telling you that you're worthless, that you're a lost cause.

These social discards, discarded by their churches, have to choose between two competing “truths,” confusing truths since they both say that God loves you. The discards can either believe the condemnation they hear from their pastors and families, or they can believe that Jesus' message of love and acceptance is truth. When all the evidence says you are a lost cause, and all you have is what they tell you is a false hope, it is easy to trade the truth of God for a lie, the

lie that so many religious folks are peddling. Those who cause God's little ones to stumble and fall into despair are the ones setting false examples of religious piety. They acknowledge Father Abraham, the Word of God, staking out the high ground of official belief, "but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm," (I Timothy 1:7, NIV).

Our capacity for self-deception as followers of God is vast, in large part because we justify our delusions from the Bible. Religious leaders, for example, were among Jesus' most dedicated and consistent "followers," perversely following him around, hanging on his every word, not to learn, but watching and listening for some violation of scripture. The religious leaders set a false example of what it meant to know and follow God, to be a godly person. False examples and false teaching are the causes of the stumbling to which Jesus referred. In Luke, stumbling does not refer to lighting up another cigarette, opening a box of chocolates, cursing a driver on the freeway, or stealing a loaf of bread. Stumbling is to lose faith in Jesus.

Religious leaders still stumble today, but with one big difference. When today's religious people are faced with a Jesus who says things that don't correspond with what they all agree is true, they interpret what Jesus said to match their imaginary Jesus. They say to themselves, "Jesus didn't really expect his disciples to sell all their possessions, not really. He didn't really expect his disciples to give to everyone who asked of them, not really. He didn't really expect his disciples to love their enemies, not really. Turn the other cheek? Not

really. Treat gay and lesbian couples the same way you treat straight couples? No, not really.”

When people are unable to accept what Jesus Christ says, they stumble. The difference between then and now is that then we had to crucify the Messenger, we had to kill him. Now we simply crucify the message, his message of love from a Father who sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. God may bless the unrighteous in tangible ways, but I sure as heck won't. But when we religious folks crucify the message, we kill Jesus just as dead as we did the first time, and no one's the wiser. As scripture says, “If they shall fall away, [it is impossible] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame,” (Hebrews 6:6, KJV).

Jesus pronounced woe upon anyone who “would cause one of these little ones to stumble.” He warned people not to use the Bible as a platform to shore up their own sense of correctness or to secure their self interest. Woe to us when we use the Bible to establish our sense of personal righteousness at the expense of people who fell on hard times, who made bad choices when they were young, or were born biological heretics. This is the Otherhood of Convenient Targets. There's a word for people who pick on the weak, those ideal targets who can't fight back, the isolated, defenseless, and vulnerable. People who pick on the weak are called bullies. And if they invoke the Bible, they're Bible Bullies.

STUMBLING, BROKEN TO PIECES, AND CRUSHED

Luke's third and final use of "stumble" appears in Luke 20, his conclusion of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. This parable describes how a group of wicked sharecroppers (religious leaders) abuse the messengers (prophets) sent by the absentee landlord (God) to collect his rents, and how the sharecroppers murder the last messenger, the absentee landlord's son (Jesus). Jesus says that the absentee landlord "will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others." Then Jesus quotes a Messianic prophecy:

The stone that the builders rejected has now become the
cornerstone.

Everyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to
pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on.

Luke explains that

The teachers of religious law and the leading priests wanted to arrest Jesus immediately because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the people's reaction.
(Luke 20:16-19, NLT)

To reject Jesus Christ by rejecting his teaching (that gay and lesbian relationships are as acceptable as heterosexual relationships, for example) is to stumble. Jesus made a promise to crush religious leaders who reject him. He promised to break the Brotherhood of Wealthy Man to pieces. It may be time to think through the implications of "Standing on the Promises of God."

REBUKING THE RELIGIOUS: PAUL VS PETER

In that first section of Luke 17, after his stern warning against causing little ones to stumble, Jesus issues another warning. “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him,” (Luke 17:3). The sin in this immediate context is the sin of causing someone to stumble. It is the sin of religious people, guilty of practicing a false piety that causes others to follow their false example. Comparing scripture with scripture, Galatians contains an example of a religious person being publicly rebuked for setting such a false example.

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, “Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?” (Galatians 2:11-14, NLT).

Peter feared the powerful, change-resistant Torah lobby. They were members of a group that probably included respectable Messianic Pharisees like Nicodemus, whose presence in the Jerusalem church

could have been reassuring for other Christians. To incur the disapproval of these powerful men could damage Peter's reputation and standing in the Jerusalem church.

Here we have Paul rebuking Peter. Peter was afraid of losing the approval of Christian Pharisees, a group that gave the Messianic community some respectability in Jewish community. He had not quite mastered the lesson of fearlessness that Christ taught by example. It was Peter who had received a revelation from God that contradicted the scripture, that revelatory white sheet filled with unclean animals that descended from heaven which by implication was God's declaration that gentiles were "clean." Peter was the apostle who saw gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which contradicted Jewish expectations regarding gentiles. Then the Apostle Peter stopped hanging out with the gentile believers, and because of his prestige, "other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy." They began acting as though they were too good to associate with the gentile Christians. Picture a whole crowd stumbling over one another like dominoes, stumbling away from God.

ADJUSTING TO A "NEW" BIBLE TRUTH

Peter and the "other Jewish Christians" had a hard lesson to learn. How do you allow the implications of a relatively new truth (God's acceptance of the gentiles) to permeate every area of your life and belief system? The equality of Jews and gentiles was no small thing. Many rules existed to ensure their separation. A huge set of practices,

beliefs, and attitudes had evolved that affected every aspect of their lives. Questioning God's rejection of the gentiles was to question the Jewish understanding of sin, of holiness, and the myriad rules and habits that was their culture. The acceptability of gentiles brought into question Israel's very existence as a People.

The acceptability of gays and lesbians poses similar questions for Christians, although not as severe. A similar web of interconnected attitudes, beliefs, and practices exists in the churches. It is fortunate that Christian acceptance of homosexuals is not equivalent to first-century acceptance of gentiles. The foundation of the Christian church was never built on the exclusion of gays and lesbians in the same way that Israel's identity was bound to the exclusion of gentiles. This is not to say that questioning the anti-gay, anti-Marriage Equality plank will not reverberate through the structure of Christendom. It will. It already has. Many beliefs regarding sin and holiness will need to be adjusted.

We must underscore the fact that re-examining the status of homosexuality as sin is absolutely *not* occurring because we are disregarding the word of God. It is in fact *because* of the word of God, Luke 17:22-36, that we must revise our doctrine and practice. Christians must always be prepared to change their beliefs and practices to bring them into conformity with God's will. To assume that our faith and understanding of the mind of God is perfect, in no need of revision, is foolhardy and arrogant.

To refuse to change in response to the Bible is to unmask a delusion, that one's beliefs are based on scripture. It is the Word of

God Incarnate who requires us to re-examine our faulty understanding of gay and lesbian unions in order to bring us into harmony with the teachings of the One we call Lord. If we refuse, we are merely paying lip service to Christ as Lord. If we hear the words of Jesus but fail to build our lives upon them, then we deceive ourselves, our houses are built on a foundation of shifting sand, and we follow a Jesus conjured up from our own imaginations. If we contradict Christ, and insist that a person cannot be Christian and homosexual, then we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our religious brothers who crucified Jesus Christ by enlisting the power of the state to enforce their religious goals.

REBUKING THE RELIGIOUS: LUKE'S GOSPEL

Regarding “taking offense” and “stumbling” in the beginning of Luke 17: it is religious people who are stumbling blocks, preventing others from having a relationship with the Messiah. Jesus warns us against unbelieving churchgoers and church leaders when he says, “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him,” (17:3, NASB). Peter was Paul’s brother in Christ, and Peter’s hypocrisy, his sin, was causing other believers to follow his example of hypocrisy. His sin? Conforming to the old, hateful distinctions between Jews and gentiles. Had it gone unchallenged, Peter’s hypocrisy would have perpetuated a church culture in which gentiles had the same approval rating as dogs. Peter’s fear of the change-resistant Jerusalem Christians would have resulted in two classes of

Christians, the circumcised Jewish class and the uncircumcised gentile class, with gentiles living as second-class citizens in a socially polluted kingdom of man.

Then, in verse 4, Jesus deepens the command, as he does elsewhere, teaching us to forgive people as often as they repent. “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him,” (17:4, NASB). We must ask ourselves what this unlimited willingness to forgive and to ask forgiveness would look like for us, individually and institutionally. There are, after all, entire organizations whose mission statements commit their members to campaign to reduce entire classes of people to second-class citizens. When it looks like discrimination, sounds like discrimination, and smells like discrimination—you know what it is.

When the churches organize for oppression,^{xvii} that discrimination certainly qualifies as religious sin. So many ignoble purposes have been deliberately cultivated by our leaders, so many base motives have been appealed to, that clearing this garden of weeds will take some time. The roots of religious sin run deep under normal circumstances, let alone when that sin has been carefully nurtured to produce a campaign of oppression and discrimination. This religious sin can lay dormant, but, being deep-rooted, can sprout up whenever the conditions are right. And every generation brings forth a fresh, vigorous strains of religious seed. God help us.

The question of repentance raises all sorts of issues. “How sincere can a person’s repentance be if they repeat the offense seven

times a day? Wouldn't a person be embarrassed to keep returning to apologize? Certainly there has to be a limit to this!" The discussion becomes more complicated when we consider that the sin we're discussing is the shared sin of entire religious communities. Communities generally strive for unity, but unity and public rebuke do not comfortably coexist.

This was Jesus' situation. His most determined opponents were members of three powerful religious groups who refused to repent of their pretenses of godliness.^{xviii} We saw the Apostle Paul publicly rebuke Peter for his man-fearing hypocrisy, and can only assume that Peter eventually repented, though perhaps not immediately. From the gospels and Acts 15:5 we know that a handful of religious leaders like Nicodemus repented in response to Jesus' rebukes. But most of the religious hierarchy wasn't about to respond to a rabble-rousing messiah-wannabe. There was for them no question of repentance. But Jesus did not ease up or ignore them on that account. He continued his public drumbeat of scolding, criticism, and rebuke. Jesus never went after anyone the way he went after religious leaders, not tax collectors and sinners, not women taken in adultery, not women of ill-repute at Samaritan wells out in the noonday sun, no one. Anyone who wants a Christ-like ministry will have far more to say to the pastors, priests, and bishops of the church than she will have to say to convenient targets of opportunity like the suicidal gay kid sitting quietly in the back pew.

FORGIVENESS AND CLASS

Individuals often represent groups in Jesus' parables. The repentant son looks like other sadder-but-wiser non-conformists, and his angry brother looks like resentful conformists. The brother who sins against you seven times a day easily represents a social class that sins against you many times daily. In the deep South, for example, a particular white Christian might sin against a particular black man seven times in a day, but the entire white-run system sinned against the entire black community and every black individual not seven times, but seventy times seven times, every hour, moment-by-moment, in ways that some white Christians would never fathom. Some people suffer from structural oppression, others only feel oppressed, but everyone catches rhetorical blame from someone: liberals, men, conservatives, majorities, minorities, homosexuals, heterosexuals, fundamentalists, universalists, women—everybody. The universality of scapegoating and sin, however, is no justification for tolerating these sins in yourself or your tribe. “From them to whom much has been given shall much be required,” (Luke 12:48).

Christendom does much good in the world, in ways that will never be appreciated nor understood, not by the world, not even by Christendom itself. Likewise, Christendom sins against the world, against God, and against its own adherents in ways it will never know. Anyone who has given much thought to the churches or the Christian life knows the truths Solomon discovered, that “with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief,” and that

“What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted,” (Ecclesiastes 1:18,15, NASB). The more you understand about individuals and about institutions, the more you realize that our “wicked problems” cannot be fixed. You realize that Christendom will, for better and for worse, both save and sin so long as we all shall live. Our insoluble sinful existence prompted Peter to exhort us to, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins,” (I Peter 4:8, NASB). Likewise Paul encouraged us to “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you,” (Ephesians 4:32, NASB). This can feel impossible when we see other Christians, individually and in groups, vigorously exacerbating the problems we feel so keenly.

So we’re busy being tender-hearted and forgiving, covering a multitude of sins with our love, whether or not we hear those seventy-times-seven apologies a day. This is precisely what Jesus demands from his followers, that they forgive people who continually say “I’m sorry” but show no inclination to really change—just the way God forgives you. Perhaps nowhere is this spirit of forgiveness more apparent than among gay and lesbian believers who have been ostracized by their church families. Many of them have been mistreated and maligned, yet they bear no grudges. Like Christ they pray, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Their forbearance and goodwill is quite astonishing. Many of them forgive, with malice toward none, despite the lies and caricatures they have

endured, despite the well-meaning recitations of Romans 1 they have heard so often, and the accusation that they “believe a lie.”

And that is how it should be for all of us. No matter how many times they sin against you, you forgive them. In the face of an apparently impossible demand, we must have faith that meeting the demand is actually possible. In that first section of Luke 17 the apostles cried out, “Increase our faith!” The faith they cried for was the faith to change, to no longer care how they were abused, to not care if they were defrauded or maligned. They cried out to Jesus for the faith to forgive.

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you. (Luke 17:5-6, NASB)

That would be quite a trick, tossing trees into the ocean by faith. But if this absurd, telekinetic faith that can command a shrubbery to fly into the sea seems irrelevant or useless to you, perhaps you should try something easier, like simply forgiving people who, in your opinion, don’t deserve to be forgiven. Be like the Jesus you worship—forgive them since they know not what they do. Die to your sense of entitlement the way Jesus died for us, while we were still sinners—before we were even thinking about change. Give up this opportunity to prove that you are right and they are wrong. Let his lordship actually mean something.

Admittedly, this is an absurdly one-sided approach to relationships and interpersonal conflicts. Personal and organizational

problem-solving do not yield to such a one-dimensional approach. Correction, plain speaking, even confrontation and rebuke—these are sometimes necessary, as we saw when Paul publicly confronted Peter for his hypocrisy. But some situations demand the stripped-down, forgive-everything-every-time approach, or else Jesus would not have commanded it. Most of us, however, do not err on the side of forgiving too often or too much. Disregard Jesus' command to forgive at your own peril. Self-deception is far too easy.

One thing is for sure—the challenge we face is not how to reach out to marginalized groups and bring them back into the fold for Christ. It's not a question of bringing wandering, self-indulgent prodigals into conformity with social norms and make them good boys and girls. The task before us is not helping rebellious, worldly sinners to see the error of their ways. No. The enduring problem is how to deal with *ourselves* as nice, religious, good girls and boys, and our sinful sense of being more acceptable to God than other people. The sternest words of Jesus were directed to respectable, god-fearing folk. Jesus was rebuking us.

We seem to think that a simple denial that we think we're better than other people is sufficient. “It's not that we are intrinsically better, oh no. It's just that we have admitted that we're bad. We play by the rules now. We said sorry.” For many, playing by the rules boils down to this: it means we feel really bad when we sin, and they don't. Some of us have always played by the rules. Others of us have lived like the prodigal then returned to the family and don't misbehave any

more—but we can't forgive and accept people until they've learned their lesson, have decided to behave, and feel ashamed when they're bad. Right?

Wrong. God forgave you before you had even begun to think of inclining your heart toward him, before you repented. In these matters of forgiveness and confrontation Jesus says you and I are slaves working for a master. He expects us to forgive people when they offend our sensibilities, even when we don't feel like it, and to confront the religious when we don't feel like it. It's what we do. We forgive people who to us seem undeserving even though it's not fair that they don't get punished.

And we confront the powerful, even if it means getting in trouble. Paul vs Peter. It's our job. In Luke 17:7-10, after his discussion of religious sin and his command to forgive, Jesus asked

Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come immediately and sit down to eat"? But will he not say to him, "Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink"? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done." (Luke 17:7-10, NLT)

The slave in this illustration has several tasks demanded of him: plowing, tending sheep, and food preparation. In the context of Luke 17, the tasks required of Jesus' disciples include 1) setting an example of Christ-like embrace of society's discards, 2) the public scolding of

play-acting hypocrites, and 3) forgiving those who offend our sensibilities until we are stretched beyond our natural limits. Don't expect adulation and thanks for a Christ-like ministry, unless you correctly understand that flogging and crucifixion are normative and Biblical expressions of gratitude from religious people.

Jesus asks, "Are you really my servant?" If you are, then it doesn't matter how difficult your day has been or how challenging your life is. If God tells you to forgive someone who offends your sensibilities, then you'll do it. Period. You are a slave. You don't have the luxury of choosing between whom you will and will not forgive. How many times you will forgive before you refuse to forgive is not your decision. Forgiveness is a policy. If you are unwilling to even consider this demand, unwilling to try to ignore all the real and imagined slights against you and your belief system, shame on you. Think of the countless slights—*all real*—that you have inflicted on God and on people God takes care of. There are people out there whom you hold in contempt—you know who they are. If you want to be acceptable to God in spite of the multitude of offenses you have committed, then you need to learn to extend that same godly acceptance to those who offend you and your sensibilities. "Forgive us our offenses as we forgive those who offend us."

The tone of these last couple of paragraphs is problematical. First, there are people with tender consciences who are very forgiving and uncritical and will absorb condemnation. There are others (sometimes called codependent) who are unable to establish firm

boundaries. Unfortunately, people who do need to hear it, who are busy measuring and scrutinizing their brothers and sisters with the unforgiving edge of scripture—they've already thrown up their excuses for why Jesus' exhortation to forgive doesn't apply to them, doesn't apply in this situation, doesn't apply right now. God, forgive them. Forgive us all.

Second, one reason Jesus was able to confront religious sinners is because he had kept himself uncontaminated by the demands of worldly religious systems. Because his ministry wasn't contingent upon the approval of religious colleagues, Jesus was able to address the scribes and Pharisees not only with a clear conscience, but from a position of uncontaminated credibility. He was able to issue a non-nonsense call to repentance. Jesus' confrontational approach to Bible Bullies was perfectly forgiving and perfectly confrontational because he had successfully resisted the motivational and institutional temptations of the devil (Luke 4:1-12). How Jesus interacted with scribes and Pharisees is one of the central features Jesus' ministry as portrayed in the gospels. It is possible to forgive and rebuke simultaneously, to not condemn yet be able to issue a warning with necessary firmness.

We strive to live life without condemning others, which must include not condemning our rigid and sometimes embarrassing Christian brothers and sisters. Frankly, the Bible has different advice for different people. Some people need to heed Jesus' caution to not cast their pearls before swine, lest they trample your input in the dust

and turn on you. We need to avoid name-calling, and no person should be considered a swine at all times, in all places, and with all people. But Jesus' advice is good in certain circumstances. In contrast, Paul wrote that "love is kind." J.B. Phillips' pragmatic rendering says that love "looks for a way of being constructive." We must all attempt to avoid knee-jerk rhetoric and name-calling when we encounter ideological adversaries. Lumping homosexuals in with murderers and rapists is as offensive to us as being called a homophobe or a hater is for our acquaintances and relatives. Quite simply, some people don't know any better.

Sinful religion is complicated, deceptive, and on occasion practiced in ignorance. Children learn religious sin in the family, dignify it in adulthood, and perfect it in church. Parables are vague enough that the religious sinner has recourse to plausible deniability (seeing, they do not see, hearing, they do not understand), so Jesus discusses religious sinners, how they damage the vulnerable and bedevil the fellowship. But Jesus loves religious sinners as much as he loves their victims, so he lovingly unmask them.

REPENTANCE & THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (LUKE 17:20-21)

The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus is the climax of Luke's Gay Apocalypse (Luke 17:22-37). But between the episode of the The Grateful Samaritan and the Gay Apocalypse is a popular saying of Jesus, "The kingdom of God is within you." This discussion of the kingdom of God is another one of Luke's unique contributions to Christ's teachings. Jesus tells the Pharisees that the kingdom of God is *enton*. The word *enton* is variously translated "in your midst," "among you," "within your grasp," and "within you."

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21, NIV).

While many people's favorite rendering is "the kingdom of God is within you," how you translate it doesn't change the implications inherent in every rendering. What really mattered was that the kingdom of God was already present, real, and immediately accessible to the Pharisees. Whatever the kingdom

of God represents was already available, whether knowledge, truth, God's presence, reign, reality, or empowerment. These religious men could not plead ignorance, as though they were helpless to do anything or to commit to something until God somehow intervened and clarified everything. What was true then regarding the kingdom of God is true now.

Likewise, you already know everything necessary to move forward—right now. You already have everything you need to begin living your life the way you should—right now. You may not have a complete road map, but the first step is to talk with God about it, honestly and frankly. And since God is already aware of the truth about you, the real difficulty is being honest with yourself. Pride interferes with spiritual maturation. Don't be afraid.

There is a thread that links “the kingdom of God is within you” to Wealthy Man. The Pharisees were looking for a sign of the kingdom, as though something was missing that prevented them from living the kind of life they knew they were not living. Wealthy Man asked for Lazarus to be sent from the dead to warn the five brothers, as though they didn't know everything they needed to do the right thing: accept the outcast and risk their “insider status.” James wrote, “They who know to do right, but do it not, to them it is sin,” (James 4:17). Whether you know because of your conscience or the Bible doesn't matter. Whether the kingdom is among you (Christ and his direct influence), or within your grasp (with nothing further needed than to simply take it), or within you (closer even than God Incarnate looking

you in the eye), Jesus says, “You have everything you need. Quit stalling.” God not only sees the heart, but as far as you’re concerned, that’s the only thing he’s concerned about—your heart. He wants you acting from your heart, not because of some external demand that you can pretend is true for you. Be who you really are. If who you really are embarrasses you, then repent. Change direction. Be consistent. Act according to who you are and what you say you believe. This is the immediate Lucan context of the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. Nothing more do you require.

A few words about the contents of Luke 17. The topics covered so far have been 1) religious sin, stumbling, and repentance, 2) Bible Bullies, 3) forgiveness and confrontation, 4) despised minorities (lepers and Samaritans), 5) the accessibility of kingdom reality to Pharisees, 6) God's judgment, and 7) the equal acceptability of a third despised minority. If we assume that their placement together in one chapter is not random, then it is logical to look for the connections among them. Only two groups of people are discussed here, privileged religious leaders and despised biological minorities. It is religious leaders, here represented by Bible Bullies and Pharisees, who designate acceptable targets for people's ire. A host of attitudes and actions (sin, stumbling, repentance, forgiveness, confrontation, and judgment) come into play where these two groups interface. God seems to hold religious leaders more responsible than others since their opinions and pronouncements have greater effect on people than the words of others. Jesus says that religious leaders know everything

they need with reference to despised minorities, that kingdom living is *enton*, immediately accessible to them, so that in a sense they are without excuse. And all this is in close proximity to the coming of the Son of Man, a day of judgment.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus is the climax of Jesus' description of the Day of the Son of Man, Luke's Gay Apocalypse. The Day of the Son of Man is a day of judgment, and is compared to the judgment in the days of Noah and especially the days of Lot. Yes, it is a time of judgment, but it is not filled with dramatic events—no bowls or seals or trumpets here. Luke emphasizes how the Son of Man will come in the midst of normal living. What is clear in this context is that God is not so much watching and measuring you in the extraordinary moments of life, but in your average moments. In the days of Noah “they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage.” In the days of Lot “they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building,” (Luke 17:27, 28, NASB). Yes, there was wickedness in the land that God judged, but Luke does not emphasize wickedness. Luke does not mention a single thing worthy of judgment in his description of the days of Noah and the days of Lot, but emphasizes how God's evaluation comes in the middle of ordinary life. At this very moment, for instance. God is looking at your everyday, normal life, as you read this line of text. “It will be just the same on the day that the Son of

Man is revealed,” (Luke 17:30, NASB). This is consistent with Jesus’ neutral treatment of the same-sex couples. Everybody is just living their everyday lives. In this context, the sexual activity of the triptych couples is as normal as marriage in Noah's day (17:27). God is watching you in your average moments. In the context of Luke 17, the major thing God is watching is your attitude toward despised minorities. In Jesus' day these Outsiders were lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals. For many people, that list still includes homosexuals.

Luke's examples from Bible history include a handful of people who escape judgment, people unafraid to leave all their worldly attachments behind in order to flee God’s strict judgment.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-27, NIV)

There is no mention here of the reason for God's judgment. Even the original account speaks in generalities about the reason.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5, KJV)

Luke's description of the destruction of Sodom also lacks specifics regarding the reason for God's judgment.

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:28-29, NIV)

The reason for destroying Sodom with fire and brimstone is not

mentioned at all. No mention of man-on-man rape, no mention of violating the rules requiring hospitality to strangers. We have no reason for Sodom's destruction. To bring this into the present, when we think of judgment, we are not encouraged to dwell on the sin of all the wicked people around us. In this passage, it seems that what God does with others is none of our business. All we know is that people are busy leading their normal lives. We are told nothing about God's dealings with others. Whether God accepts others or not is between them and God.

It would seem that on such an important topic we would be told about God's criteria for dividing humanity into those who are delivered from judgment and those who are not. This seems like a question of cosmic proportions, one of the most significant questions possible to discuss and understand. And perhaps it is. But at the moment, and in Luke 17, it is not your concern. It's none of your business what God is going to do with billions of other human beings. What should concern you is whether you will be destroyed by God in the very process of your rescue from destruction, which is what happened to Lot's wife. Are you looking back the way Lot's wife did? This is not a question you want to fudge on, because God can spot fudging from across the galaxy. It's odd how we want to meddle in cosmic questions when we should be examining our own souls.

“Remember Lot's wife!” With the Genesis story of Sodom we want to prove the existence of angels. We want to remember the crowd of would-be rapists pounding on the door. We want to remember a

father pimping his daughters. But we are *exhorted* to remember Lot's wife. We are *commanded* to meditate on the fact that a person who, in the process of deliverance from destruction, looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. The question we need to ask ourselves is the question the disciples asked Jesus, "Is it I, Lord? Is that me?"

The person we are to consider is someone in the process of being delivered. The question posed for us is, "What could interfere with my salvation, preventing me from being delivered from judgment? How might I, in the very process of being delivered, find myself subject to God's judgment?" We need to look inward to know whether we are "looking back" at an old way of life, whatever that may be for each of us individually. You are not encouraged to consider the judgment of billions of people, but the judgment of a particular individual with whom you are intimately acquainted. In Luke, the question of why a sea of sinners is destroyed is irrelevant. Lot's wife represents the only individual for whom you are directly responsible.

Two questions emerge from Luke's bland description of life in the days of Lot. The first we just looked at: "Can I quit my preoccupation with God's judgment of others and examine my own soul?" The second question deals with my attitude towards gays and lesbians. Despite the fact that Luke mentions nothing blameworthy in his brief history of Sodom, our minds automatically go to the topic of homosexuality. It seems logical to expect that if God judged a region for homosexuality once, then it will happen again. That would be our expectation. But that's not what happens, not here. In the Same-Sex

Triptych of Jesus, the six gays and lesbians are not destroyed en masse as Sodom was destroyed.

The six gays and lesbians are to be viewed through the lens of Lot's wife, not the lens of Sodom. God does not enact a blanket destruction of the homosexuals in Luke 17:34-36, but deals with them individually, the way Lot and his family were dealt with. Just as God distinguished between the individuals in Lot's party, so also God will distinguish between individuals when the Son of Man returns. Two gays and one lesbian are "left behind" like pillars of salt, and three are delivered, and it has nothing to do with their sexual orientation.

In Luke, the Sodom details direct our thoughts toward same-gender sexual violations in a context of blanket judgment. Then a shift occurs. Our attention remains focused on same-gender relationships, but *not* in the context of blanket judgment. Now we are faced with the fact that half the homosexuals escape judgment, contrary to expectation. Again, no explanation is offered as to specifically why they are delivered, although we correctly assume that God sees the heart, and that it has something to do with looking back.

We expect to read of the destruction of homosexuals, but are left to ponder why half the gays and lesbians in the triptych are delivered from judgment, against our expectations. That expectation of judgment on homosexuals is so pervasive that we engage in a spontaneous, anti-exegetical de-homosexualization of Luke 17: 34-36. We are eager to imagine the destruction of this mass of sexual sinners, yet God says we should be looking at ourselves.

The story of Lot's wife underscores our unreflective attachment to hum-drum social arrangements, and guides our attention to our unreflective attitudes toward homosexuality, critical attitudes which seem as natural and right to us as the air we breathe.

It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything.

Remember Lot's wife!

Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (Luke 17:30-33, NIV)

Let go of every worldly attachment, especially your prejudice and bigotry. It seems that only people who are unafraid to leave behind the security of all their social ties will be delivered from God's wrath. We don't know what was going through the mind of Lot's wife when she looked back. Whether she was thinking about her friends or her neighborhood, we don't know. What we do know is that when God calls us to do the right thing, we must be prepared to leave everything behind. God calls us to make a break with our past, not seeking to preserve anything of our old way of life. Often we make this break when we first become Christians. It is not unusual for Christians to face turning points later in life, crises where they must forsake faulty attitudes and beliefs whose deficiencies were not previously known. Christians whose relationships with God are deepening must forsake ignoble purposes and continue with Christ wherever he leads.

THREE GAYS AND LESBIANS

At some point three gays and lesbians decided to follow God and, as the saying goes, they never looked back—unlike Lot's wife. They were not afraid to lose all their possessions and attainments. Like everyone else, these three gays and lesbians were “married and given in marriage,” that is, they were in long-term, committed relationships. God did not require celibacy of them. Neither did God require celibacy of “Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, [or] his wife and the wives of his three sons,” (Genesis 7:13, NIV).

Nor did God require celibacy for Lot and his wife, but this heterosexual pair is the quintessential Biblical example of two people, a couple, who have different destinies. The gay and lesbian couples are like Lot and his wife, the couple from Sodom. One person is delivered from judgment, the one who wisely leaves a doomed social system, but the other is left, the one who is unable to leave that familiar network of comfortable belonging. “Remember Lot's wife!”

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Taken in context, people who are “left behind”—gay or straight—are those who are unable to make a complete break with their comfortable social network of friends and family, who haven't sense enough to leave a doomed social system behind in order to follow God. The call is to leave, no matter how strong your concern for those who remain behind in a system under God's judgment. And let's be clear on this:

any human system or organization that ignores the scripture and God's still small voice and persists in ostracizing people whom God has declared acceptable and clean in his eyes is under God's judgment. These human organizations include congregations, denominations, and parachurch non-profits.

WHY NOT BE CLEARER ABOUT IT?

This apparently innocuous passage, The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus, is part of a passage which Luke gives a distinctive homosexual theme, Luke's Gay Apocalypse. The broader context deals with eschatological judgment and has a strong sub theme regarding Pharisees and their religious sin.

I tell you, in that night
there shall be two men in one bed;
 the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.
Two women shall be grinding together;
 the one shall be taken, and the other left.
Two men shall be in the field;
 the one shall be taken, and the other left.

If Luke 17:34-36 really is Jesus' Magna Carta for gays and lesbians, why would such an important passage be squirreled away in such an obscure corner of the Bible? Why would such a liberating key be merely hinted at instead of boldly announced? After all, Jesus *could* have said,

Ye have heard it said, "If a man lie with man, as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination." But I say unto you, there is neither slave nor free, male nor female,

gay nor straight, all are one in me.

He could have, but he didn't. If Jesus had been this clear, Matthew could have used this "but I say unto you" saying in his gospel, too. Just as some truth waited for apostolic articulation, so also some truth waited, and waits, for later clarification.

SLAVERY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Why didn't Jesus make his acceptance of gay and lesbian couples unmistakably clear? Probably for the same reason that he didn't voice a condemnation of slavery. Jesus did not say, "Thou shalt own neither man nor woman, because all are free in me." But Jesus *did* say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth," (John 16:12-13, KJV).

The slowness of American churches to act on the issue of slavery is parallel to the rejection of Marriage Equality by American churches today. Just as Negroes didn't have equality with Caucasians, homosexuals don't have equality with heterosexuals. American churches were slow to respond to Christian Abolitionists calling for equality and an end to oppression. Why? For a reason which would be very important to Bible believers. Because there was no condemnation of slavery anywhere in Scripture. In fact, every major section of the Bible condoned slavery. There is not a single Scriptural condemnation of slavery in the Bible, not in the Law, the Writings, the Historical Books, in Wisdom Literature, the Major or Minor Prophets, in

Apocalyptic Literature, the Gospels, or the Epistles. The entire Bible simply acknowledged slavery as a social fact. Moses and Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul—they all gave the nod to slavery. There is no clear command to free all slaves, no clear statement that ownership of other human beings is wrong. If all the Christians in antebellum America had waited for a clear Scriptural mandate to act against slavery, you might be mulling over which slaves to leave to which of your children.

So, were Christians wrong to support the abolition of slavery? Did they believe a lie in order to reject slavery? Did the church adopt the values of the world in order to fit in and avoid conflict, instead of defending the unchanging truth of the Bible that owning slaves, while needing regulation, was basically okay with God? The anti-slavery case from the Bible is meager at best. Aside from glittering generalities about God's love for all human beings and that "the Negro" was, theoretically at least, created in the *Imago Dei*, the anti-slavery case hung on three slender threads: 1) Paul's statement that in God's eyes there is neither slave nor free (Galatians 3:28), 2) the situation of Onesimus the slave in Paul's letter to his owner Philemon, 3) and the Pauline prohibition against slave trading (I Timothy). References to proclaiming liberty to the captives can be comfortably spiritualized to refer only to people's spiritual bondage, leaving actual social relationships (slaves and slave owners) untouched.

The convictions of liberal Abolitionists eventually carried the day in United States, but long after the rest of the English-speaking

world had outlawed slavery. Even then, it took 113 and 130 years respectively for the Mormons and the Southern Baptists to issue major policy statements regarding their human rights record. In 1978 Spencer W. Kimball announced the opening of the Mormon priesthood to African-Americans. Nearly 20 years later, in 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention followed the Mormon's example and specifically referred to slavery in a tardy disavowal of its racist history.

Self-serving historical renunciations have some institutional value, but they really are sad. In a twisted bit of irony, some contemporary crusaders against Marriage Equality claim to walk in the steps of social reformers like Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King, people who risked prison and death as they fought for equality. Anti-homosexual crusaders erect these verbal monuments of praise in their brazen, unprincipled, and transparent attempt to steal a mantle of heroic courage. Jesus was not amused by such leaders in his day either.

What sorrow awaits you! For you build monuments for the prophets your own ancestors killed long ago. But in fact, you stand as witnesses who agree with what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you join in their crime by building the monuments! (Luke 11:47-48, NLT)

Their predecessors, the religious ruling class, persecuted and killed the prophet-critics for the sake of their status and power. Heirs of this same religious ruling class built monuments to the prophet-critics (now safely dead) for the sake of their status and power. The crime? Abandoning truth for the sake of status and power.

WE LAG BEHIND THE “CHRISTIANIZED” SOCIETY WE HELPED CREATE

Look how long it took Christianized society to end slavery, yet we still battle racism. Look how long it took Christianized society to grant women the vote, and how many churches lag far behind the society they helped create. And look at how Christianized society is beginning to accept the full humanity and equality of gays and lesbians, and how stridently many churches battle Marriage Equality.

We learn so slowly. We rarely gain meaningful self-awareness as individuals, and Christian institutions are populated with Wealthy Brothers. We are unable to forsake our apparent need to oppress without ceasing. We formally apologize for things like slavery just in time to join yet another crusade (this one against Marriage Equality for lesbians and gays), to deny social acceptance and full humanity to yet another group. It is difficult to know the most useful label for this tragic necessity to oppress one group after another, whether to call it blindness or hypocrisy, or to simply marvel at our unlimited capacity for self-deception. It can be hard to wrap one’s mind around this. What is it in our perverse social nature that makes the existence of ostracized outsiders as vital to us as oxygen? Having labels like “Scapegoats” and “Groupthink” reduces the bewilderment, but our ability to dehumanize whole classes of people is still stunning.

There are some questions we need to ask ourselves. If Jesus accepted all classes of people, including gays and lesbians, then why don’t we? If Jesus accepted loving relationships between same-sex

partners as equal to heterosexual relationships, then why don't we? There is a lot of theological and biblical work for us to do to bring our "social attitudes" into sync with the attitudes of Christ, but we did it with slavery and women's suffrage, and we can do it again. Is it too fundamentalist or literalist to expect people to actually take the teachings of Jesus seriously? "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock," (Matthew 7:24, NIV).

If there is some absolute necessity for the ubiquitous existence of "insiders" and "outsiders," then there is for some of us but one conclusion. If our survival as individuals, or the survival of our tribe, depends on inflicting suffering on others, depends on scapegoating and oppression, then we must follow the example of Jesus. If you take Jesus seriously at all, you know there are more important things in this life than ethnic and religious survival. If our comfort and privilege can only be built on the suffering and despair of others, we must be prepared to sacrifice comfort and privilege. If ostracism, scapegoating, and groupthink are diabolically necessary in the old order of things, then they are by definition worldly, and among the sinful phenomena we are required by our new life in Christ to repent of. On a practical and personal level this means that we do not demonize Mormons, Southern Baptists, and Catholics, transforming them into the Other. Repentance means we do not demonize gays and lesbians, making their visible presence among us a harbinger of the collapse of western civilization. Repentance means we embrace our human solidarity

with people like Fred Phelps, realizing that we all take turns denying the full humanity of some group or other, if only in the recesses of our minds.

JESUS' HERMENEUTICAL KEY: RELEVANCE VS IRRELEVANCE

Looking at the context of the Same-Sex Triptych requires a look at the final verse, Luke 17:37. Following Jesus' Magna Carta of Marriage Equality, there is a brief exchange between Jesus and his disciples which shows that Jesus considers at least some of our theological questions to be quite irrelevant, especially our detail-oriented eschatological questions. After the three pairs of gays and lesbians are split up, with three homosexuals delivered out of judgment and three left, the disciples want eschatological details on their destinations. They ask, "Where, Lord?" Where are they taken? In one of his many non-sequiturs, Jesus replies, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather," (NIV). The fact that Jesus gave a seemingly irrelevant reply to their theological question is an important hermeneutical key. In chapter 17, Jesus tells *both* the Pharisees and his own disciples that their eschatological questions are irrelevant. To the Pharisees inquiry about the Kingdom of God he replies, "What you really need is within your grasp. Look inside yourselves for the truth." The Pharisees and his own disciples were looking for signs of the times, for tidbits to fill in their countdowns to Armageddon, when what Jesus wanted them to see was the moral and spiritual content of

what he had just told them. The significance of Luke 17 does not rest in its description of the final days. The continual significance of Luke 17 has always been its exhortation to look within, to reject popular victimization of Outsiders, and get past your own need to run with the herd. Its twenty-first century application is focused on the acceptability of gay and lesbian relationships to Christ.

When Jesus ignored their question, it is possible that Jesus simply stated a fact. When he wandered the hills, Jesus had seen vultures circling in the sky, fussing around corpses, tearing flesh from bodies. It was only a matter of days or weeks before his own fragrant corpse would be attracting vultures. Crucifixion had been standard Roman policy for dealing with the problem of Jewish messiahs for years. There were always Roman soldiers and other well wishers on the ground at those mass executions, and hungry committees of vultures circling overhead. Jesus was probably more concerned about his own, quite literal, “final days” than with idle questions about the final days of the cosmos.

If his comments about vultures and the corpse reflects a preoccupation with the consequences that flowed naturally from his devotion to justice, then we see the relative values of discipleship and eschatological speculation. Most of Luke's readers would have witnessed crucifixions and have seen first hand circling vultures, and the story of the crucifixion would have been well known before receipt of the written gospel. This oblique reference to a distasteful aspect of crucifixion would have been a poignant foreshadowing for both

Gentile and Jewish readers of what was coming in the gospel, and the ironic contrast between the concerns of the disciples and Jesus would have communicated quite powerfully to the reader.

Jesus' non-sequitur is an important hermeneutical key. The disciples were concerned with where people were taken, with eschatological questions, but that's not what Jesus thought was important. Hermeneutically, the importance of Luke 17:34-36 rests in the six people themselves, what happens to them, and the rationale for that treatment: 1) the people are gays and lesbians, 2) a divine distinction is made between the partners in each couple, and 3) that distinction is not based on sexual orientation or activity. Their activities are as normal as marrying and being given in marriage and just as undeserving of judgment.

WHAT REPENTANCE LOOKS LIKE

Contextually, we know that God's distinction is based on their willingness to completely give up a doomed set of social values. What we are calling social values are intimately connected with being what the Bible calls a "man pleaser." Paul asked the Christians in Galatia:

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10, NIV)

Only as individuals can we begin to judge whether our own beliefs and inaction are based on fear of people's opinions. Our churches and denominations place ordained clergy in the untenable position of fearing to act or speak out because they fear people's disapproval and

the various kinds of power these people can exercise against employees or subordinates who displease them. For some people, repentance will involve a serious look at resisting social values that oppose the values of Christ, and an acknowledgment of personal compromise. What passes for “accountability” is actually a diabolical mislabeling of “pleasing men,” which Paul places in direct opposition to being a servant of Christ.

In the triptych, the distinction between those delivered from judgment and those left is not based on sexual orientation. Jesus totally accepted the relationships of the three same-gender couples or he would have said otherwise in this passage, dealing as it does with the God's judgment. This is the bottom line: according to Jesus one sexually active lesbian and two sexually active gay males were acceptable. An individual's sexual orientation is a non-issue for God. The only time sexual orientation is an issue for God is when it becomes the basis for discrimination and oppression.

Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Many Christians will find it personally difficult to accept gays and lesbians, but that is no excuse. We must be doers of the word, not hearers only. This is repentance. On this subject of gay and lesbian relationships, there are various mental habits, various misconceptions regarding Bible teaching, and some sheer disinformation that will have to be unlearned. Many gossipy generalizations about the so-called “homosexual lifestyle” will need to be debunked. Some of us will have

to overcome our physical repulsion at the idea of sexual activity between two men or two women, realizing that what goes on in other people's bedrooms is none of our business.

In addition to making necessary personal changes, there are necessary institutional changes to make. There are many sanctions in place that will prevent Christians from deviating from the “party line” of their anti-homosexual congregations and denominations. Such sanctions are especially relevant to ordained ministers and clergy. And there are, of course, institutional rules forbidding gays and lesbians from membership, let alone official church leadership (e.g., ordination). For some people, the cost to build their houses on the rock will be very high. For many more, learning to accept same-gender couples the way Jesus did will simply take a long time. This process of repentance will be both individual and corporate.

Corporate sin is an alien concept for some people. Their understanding of sin is exclusively personal. They may acknowledge that in extreme times in the past churches may have needed to repent of social sin, as in the case of slavery and racism, but believe that nothing like that exists in their churches today. Likewise, for large segments of the church, the word *oppression* is an archaic word that only liberals use, despite its frequent use in the Bible. The concept of corporate sin, however, is clear in both testaments. In Leviticus corporate sin can be unintentional.

If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. When

they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting. (Leviticus 4:13-14, NIV)

Israel is instructed to deal with the unintentional sin the way they deal with any other sin. After a description of the sacrifice, they are told, “In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven,” (Leviticus 4:20, NIV). Likewise, Christians should deal with unintentional sin the way they deal with any other sin. Genuine repentance requires the transgressors to cease the sinful practice. While repentance is generally individual in Paul's epistles, repentance is clearly corporate in the Book of the Revelation. Jesus himself commands four of the churches of Asia Minor to repent. Ephesus: “Repent!” Pergamum: “Repent!” Sardis: “Repent!” Laodicea: “Repent!”

What will it take for the churches to repent of the sin of discrimination and oppression? Serious repentance is more than simply taking a vote at a meeting, although those will be necessary for some. Meaningful repentance requires that people who are able to see the sinfulness of the anti-homosexual campaign will need to become aware of how their own attitudes contributed to the problem. This calls for introspection and humility. Scripture says, “The purposes of the human heart are deep waters, but those who have insight draw them out,” (Proverbs 20:5). Examining our own purposes and motives is essential. This is where we start. If we are going to bring change to other individuals in our congregations we must, according to Jesus, take those logs out of our own eyes first. If we don't understand our

own personal need for oppression, scapegoating, ostracism, caricature, and groupthink, then we won't get much further than name-calling. During “No Name-Calling Week,” consider giving up the words “Haters” and “Homophobia” (and its derivatives), as well as “Fag Enablers,” and “That's so gay.” Let's see if we can *all* give it a rest.

Second, people who feel convicted for their participation in campaigns against homosexuals will simply need to stop participating. At its core, repentance simply means to change direction, to stop doing one thing and start doing another. You may need to prepare yourself to give an answer to anyone who asks you about your change of position regarding gays and lesbians. They will find it strange that you don't run with them anymore. Some may even question your salvation, thinking that you've “gone soft on sin.” That may seem shocking, but it happens.

Third, the people with whom God shares this burden need to take the issue out of the abstract and make it concrete. They need to make conscious and deliberate choices to go where they will meet gays and lesbians. This is one way homosexuals will cease being mere caricatures, composite images derived from sitcoms and movies, and become real live people. One place to start is to go online and search for a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a chapter of Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), or a PRIDE organization near you. And of course you can ask a gay or lesbian co-worker out for coffee. One suggestion to keep in mind: leave Leviticus and Romans out of the conversation.

But the question was how churches would repent. The last few suggestions have been steps individuals can take as part of their repentance. Sorry to have to repeat a truism, but there is no one-size-fit-all answer. Some denominations have a process for becoming a certified Open and Affirming congregation. If a denomination doesn't have such a process, then a person can make books and DVDs available to their friends at church for personal use or use in a small group fellowship. Some congregations and denominations will repent, and some will not. Again, forgive the truism, but repentance is a process. Your role in your church's repentance will depend on 1) your gift package, 2) your role in your congregation, 3) your region of the country, and 4) God's gracious action in your midst. It could depend on a friend of yours coming out of the closet. Or it could depend on you coming out.

Churches can either begin the process of repentance now, and make a real difference to thousands of their gay and lesbian children despairing of life, or, like the Mormons and the Southern Baptists, they can wait a century. We will choose, like it or not. We either choose to repent, or we choose to “wait.” Will we repent of our attachment to a social system doomed for destruction and experience God's deliverance from judgment, or will we suffer the fate of Lot's wife and see our congregation turned into a lifeless pillar of salt? Many congregations and individuals will repent. They will change direction, listening to both the still small voice and the voice of Christ. They will

pay the cost of discipleship. Fewer and fewer of our children will be offered to die on an altar to an imaginary god.

The living and true God is at work in the world, judging and destroying arrangements that oppress humanity and distort the *Imago Dei*. Dictatorship is judged and anyone looking back is destroyed. The exploitation of children is judged and exploiters were destroyed. The ownership of human beings is judged and those who fight to keep their slaves are destroyed. Today there are those who campaign to oppress and discriminate against gays and lesbians. Some would have them executed. The time has come for all Christians to forsake their attachment to social arrangements and crusades that are destined for God's judgment, and we must never look back.

CONCLUSION

Several simple conclusions emerge from the Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus. First, Jesus specifically discusses same-sex couples in Luke 17. Second, at least two of the couples were making love at the time of the taking and leaving. Third, the basis for distinguishing between the partners had nothing to do with sexual orientation or sexual activity. Based on these three conclusions, follows one final conclusion that is logical, but not simple. Jesus accepted gay and lesbian relationships, without censure, as normal.

There has been a consensus on both sides of the homosexuality debate that Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. It is gratifying that he not only mentions gays and lesbians in a completely neutral fashion, but accepts their sexuality. Some have demanded a scripture passage that accepts homosexuality as normal or good, and we have those verses. Gay and lesbian relationships are good, as good as heterosexual marrying and being given in marriage. This comes from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself.

Initially one might think that the immediate context of the Same-Sex Triptych in Luke would be problematical, with Jesus talking about judgment, and about Lot's wife, fire and sulfur, and Sodom, considering all the traditional associations that story has. But the Triptych and its context are not only consistent, but intelligently designed to give Luke 17 its homosexual theme. The Lucan concern for despised, biological outcasts was perfectly congruent with Jesus' treatment of the three couples, putting the same-gender couples in a distinct class: homosexuals.

I tell you, in that night

there shall be **two men** in one bed;

the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

Two women shall be grinding together;

the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two men shall be in the field;

the one shall be taken, and the other left.

It should come as no surprise that Jesus accepted same-gender couples. He graciously accepted everyone that religious society looked down on: women, Roman military officers, Samaritan sex-workers, children, lepers, Jewish collaborators, etc. But his specific acceptance of gay and lesbian couples is nevertheless surprising, given the general consensus that Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. His acceptance, however, seems undeniable when we examine the Triptych in the context of the Old Testament, the gospel of Luke, and ancient languages. Jesus talked about same-sex couples in a totally neutral

fashion, removing the stigma from homosexuals that the Jews, and later the Christians, accepted from the Bible. He illustrated a lesson about judgment using six gays and lesbians, without uttering a single word of caution or correction regard same-sex relationships.

Comparing the accounts in Luke and Matthew of the coming of the Son of Man, we saw that four additions (references to Sodom, Lot, Lot's wife, Leviticus, and the night) and one deletion (the mill) demonstrate the deliberate development of the homosexual theme. Add to these five differences between Luke and Matthew the careful construction of the Triptych, with its parallelism and its two- or three-fold refrain, and the development of the theme of biological heretics (lepers, Samaritans, and homosexuals), two conclusions emerge. First, the theme of homosexuality is not imposed on the text of Luke but is intrinsic to it. Second, Luke's "Gay Apocalypse" expresses God's acceptance of gay and lesbian unions.

THE SOLACE AND COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a nearly universal feature of all human cultures. Those of us who are married know how much those marriages mean to us in terms of companionship, personal growth, family, and pleasure. Many older gay men live alone. When they were growing up, it was dangerous to be a homosexual. A sexually active homosexual could be sentenced to prison. In decades past, neither the government nor the military had a place for homosexuals and their partners. Legal

discrimination forced homosexuals to hide their orientation. The lying and secrecy that the law made necessary created a culture of shame. Now the government, the military, and private industry are understanding that there is no shame in being gay or lesbian. They are beginning to refuse to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

And where are the churches in all this? Well, the churches are in different places. Those with the greatest access to money and media are lining up against homosexuals, fighting the equality of gays and lesbians at every turn. They've stopped bemoaning the repeal of anti-sodomy laws (that's a losing battle), and they've long ago given up the campaign to fire homosexual elementary school teachers (Briggs Initiative, 1978). They have moved on to fight against Marriage Equality. They want to deny gays and lesbians the solace and companionship marriage, a relationship straight Christians take for granted. Their crusade of cruelty would have multitudes of gay and lesbian believers die alone, hiding in shame, despairing of a relationship with God, for the crime of wanting a relationship which Jesus accepts as equal with heterosexual relationships. Conservative figures suggest that between 3 and 4 percent of America's population is gay. This comes to more than 12 million people. If the Christians who are anti-homosexual had their way, over 12 million Americans would continue to be denied the comfort and solace of marriage. Some of us are busy discussing who is acceptable to God and who is not, who is destined for heaven and who is consigned to hell, and we want our subjective religious opinions (which are not universally agreed

upon, even within Christendom) imposed on everyone else by force of law.

FORBIDDING MARRIAGE

Since Jesus accepted relationships between gays and lesbians, it is logical to assume that Christians who want to obey the teachings of Christ would support Marriage Equality. Unfortunately, many of the most vocal, wealthy, and high-profile ministries and segments of the church continue to align themselves against gays and lesbians. Despite the clarity of Jesus' words, In 2150 there will undoubtedly be tardy apologies for prejudice against gays and lesbians.

Since Jesus expressed his personal approval for gay and lesbian sexual relationships as equivalent to heterosexual relationships, it seems ludicrous to think that he would have denied homosexuals social approval for such relationships, the chief sign of which is marriage. One can only imagine the tortured logic a person would have to employ to acknowledge that Jesus accepted gays and lesbians in active sexual relationships, yet would deny them marriage. Even Paul discusses people who would forbid marriage in the end times..

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage. (I Timothy 4:1-3)

Paul includes forbidding marriage among the “doctrines of demons.” Are the people who presently campaign against Marriage Equality

necessarily inspired by demons? Hardly. But the results of the campaign would certainly please anyone inhabiting the demonic realm. When California's Proposition 8 passed, many gay and lesbian believers across the United States wept and said, "They really do hate us." It also seems inappropriate to insist that people who vote against Marriage Equality are hypocritical liars whose consciences are completely insensitive—seared as with a branding iron. Paul's statement about demonic doctrines does, however, force a second look at a teaching that would forbid marriage to gays and lesbians.

The Same-Sex Triptych of Jesus puts to rest one of the liveliest debates regarding homosexuality, which is whether people are born homosexual or choose to engage in homosexual behaviors. Jesus accepted gay and lesbian relationships as equivalent to heterosexual ones—no matter what the "cause." He did not raise the issue of whether someone is born gay, becomes gay, or chooses to be gay. To Jesus that simply wasn't an issue. People are interested in causality only if there is a problem, only if they are want to assign blame. You don't need to assign blame if there is nothing blameworthy to explain.

WARNING AGAINST MEDDLING

The Bible warns the church not to meddle in the personal lives of people outside the church. The Apostle Paul tells us it is none of our business, judging those outside the church. Here is I Corinthians 5:12 in several translations:

- “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?”
- “For what have I to do with judging outsiders?”
- “It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders.”

Peter commands us to not suffer because we have interfered in other people's lives. Look at these renderings of I Peter 4:15.

- “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler in other men's matters.”
- “If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs.”
- “Suppose you suffer. Then it shouldn't be because you...poke your nose into other people's business.”
- “None of you should suffer as one who...tries to be the boss of other peoples' lives.”

The gospel of Christ suffers because the church meddles in other men’s matters, pokes its nose into other people’s business, and tries to be the boss of other people’s lives. The church and individual Christians suffer because they disobey the word of God (I Corinthians 5:12; I Peter 4:15). If we can suffer as individuals for meddling in other people’s lives, how much more do you think the congregations will suffer because major segments of the church are busy meddling in the lives of people outside the church? It is one thing to fight to free slaves, to abolish child labor, and gain the vote for women, but quite another to wage a thirty-year crusade for discrimination.

GOD'S CONDITIONAL PROMISE TO THE PEOPLE WHO BEARS HIS NAME

God made a promise: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land,” (II Chronicles 7:14, NIV). As Christians we believe we are called by his name, the name of Christ. And the actions in II Chronicles are not necessarily sequential. As we respond to God, we humble ourselves, which includes the capacity to admit at least the possibility that we are wrong. When Jesus said one of them would betray him, the disciples each asked Jesus, “Lord, is it I?” Likewise, our humble prayer is to ask, “God, have I been wrong about this?” Seeking his face includes living in the actual presence of God, the kingdom of God that is *enton*. And in this process of repentance, we turn from our wicked ways.

Our wicked ways include rejecting people Jesus accepted. Our wicked ways include ostracizing people on the basis of gossip and untruth. Our wicked ways include attacking popular targets to increase excitement and revenue in our congregations. Our wicked ways include allowing our personal discomfort with gay and lesbian couples to fuel an unrighteous crusade against people Jesus loves and accepts. Our wicked ways cause people whom God loves to despair of that love and acceptance. Our wicked ways turn gay and lesbian believers away from God and toward self-destructive behavior, including suicide.

To turn from our wicked ways is at the center of repentance. For many it will take great courage to repent, to make this complete turnabout in attitude and belief. Yet this complete turnabout in attitude and belief is nothing more than Christ and his Bride ask of anyone. This sanctification will likely take years to reach our individual roots, and Wealthy Man will only “repent” when it serves his own interests. Of course many of our Christian friends will find it strange and surprising when we no longer run with them in their reckless condemnation of gay and lesbian believers. They will continue to give their hearty approval to people who judge and condemn, although they know from scripture that such people deserve God’s just punishment. And such were some of you. Jesus, however, has overcome the world, and gives us that same ability to overcome.

I want to hear from you.

You can contact me at:

radical_discipleship@hotmail.com

i The “Clobber Passages” are Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-27; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10; and Jude 1:7. Also called “Slam Passages,” they are called “Clobber” and “Slam” passages because they are used to clobber and slam gays and lesbians in arguments and debates. In discussion threads and blogs it is quite common to see that someone has cut-and-paste Romans 1:18-17 in its entirety into the “discussion,” as though the readers had never read the passage before. These Romans 1 block quotes literally resemble sledge hammers on the screen. They are used against disputants in the forlorn hope that they will somehow win an argument, as opposed to bringing any understanding or insight. The only thing such parroting of Scripture accomplishes is to drive people away from those who lamely wield the hammers.

There is a near-magical belief that the sheer act of quoting Bible verses has effectiveness beyond the wisdom of the speaker. This hope is based on this statement in the book of Isaiah:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:
it shall not return unto me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please,
and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:11, KJV)

This passage is balanced by wisdom found in the book of Proverbs.

A proverb in the mouth of a fool is useless as a paralyzed leg.
A proverb in the mouth of a fool is like a thorny branch
brandished by a drunk. (Proverbs 26: 27, 29, NLT).

Proverbs teaches that Scripture in the mouth of a fool is worse than useless, it damages both the speaker and the audience. There is a genuine irony in the juxtaposition of the Isaiah and Proverbs passages.

ii Three places in the Bible where “in that night” occurs include Passover (Exodus 12:8), Solomon’s prayer for wisdom (II Chronicles 1:7), and Belshazzar’s death (Daniel 5:30), each of which is a dramatic moment of judgment or choice.

iii In the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Johanan Ben Nappaha said regarding the Judges passage, “ ‘Grind’ means nothing else than [sexual] transgression, and thus it is stated: Then let my wife grind unto another. It teaches that everyone brought his wife to him in the prison that she might bear a child by him [who would be as strong as he was].” R. Johanan understood “grinding” in both Judges and Job as sexual. (BT Sotah 10a). <http://www.come-and->

hear.com/sotah/sotah_10.html

iv Bible translators respect the church's demand for an inoffensive translation, pains are sometimes taken to avoid comprehensible renderings that some church people would find objectionable.

v King Pittacus (ca 640 to 568 BCE), a native of Lesbos, was given supreme power by his native city of Mytilene after a victorious battle which ended Athenian rule. After ten years of effective government, he voluntarily gave up his absolute authority. He is considered by some to be the ideal combination of warrior, philosopher, and king.

vi Συμπόσιον τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Dinner_of_the_Seven*.html

vii One cannot help but remember the crucifixion of Christ and the sign placed above the Lord's head: "And a superscription also was written over him in letters of *Greek*, and *Latin*, and *Hebrew*, 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS,'" (Luke 23:38, KJV).

viii This "emotional equivalence" is commonly called "dynamic equivalence," and is a current though controversial philosophy of translation. Dynamic equivalence does not attempt word-for-word literalism, nor does it seek a useful paraphrase. Dynamic equivalence looks for words that produce a similar emotional response in the reader/hearer as did the original words. The Message is a recent example of a dynamic equivalence version.

ix You can contact the Gay Christian Network at www.gaychristian.net.

x The gay and lesbian community has, as first-century Samaritans had, a long and troubled history with the rejecting dominant groups. Samaritans shared the Torah and the sacrificial system (if not the location) with the Jews. Most gay and lesbian believers were born and raised in Christian homes, and share the same values and beliefs as their families. They have had the same experiences of salvation, baptism, and repentance as other believers. The Samaritans offered to assist with the building of Jerusalem ca 538 BCE, and were sternly rebuffed by Israel. Similarly, many gay and lesbian believers who wish to minister in any capacity in the church are sternly rebuffed.

“Thanks, but no thanks. We don’t need you. You are not straight. You are not a part of the body.” Returning the favor, some gays and lesbians have become actively hostile to their former spiritual homes. After the Jewish rebuff of their offer to help, the Samaritans became active opponents to the rebuilding and re-population effort. This ancient rancor continued for centuries, until the Day of God’s Incarnation.

xi There is debate in some circles about whether or not the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus is a parable or an actual event. It is not the purpose of anything written here to take a position on that subject. For the purposes of this chapter, its historicity or non-historicity makes little difference. The main concern of those arguing for its literal historicity is its value in proving the physical reality of hell, not the moral value of its teaching.

xii All societies have multiple sets of values, representing different groups. When people say, “Society says...” they seem to think that society speaks with a single voice, when in fact it speaks with multiple voices. There are today, as there have always been, multiple “voices” in society. The military speaks with a certain voice, the universities speak with a different voice, and the church speaks with yet another voice. And even these major institutions have multiple voices. When people say, “Society says...” it is inevitably negative, and refers to a particular voice in society with which they disagree and from which they wish to distance themselves.

xiii The Metropolitan Community Church is a church primarily founded to meet the spiritual needs of gay and lesbian believers. Many leaders in MCC churches are pastors ejected from their conservative churches for being gay. The first MCC congregation was founded in Los Angeles in 1968, and has since expanded nationwide and to over twenty countries overseas.

xiv In other contexts, similar “ranches” have been called “Re-Education Camps.”

xv As this argument has penetrated individual evangelicals, the fact that the sins of the depraved mind are just as sinful in the eyes of God as they allege homosexuality to be, a new category for sin has emerged. The distinction between homosexuality and the sins of the depraved mind is that homosexuality is “*blatant* sin.” They say, “Yes, all sin is equally bad in the eyes of God, and we should preach against all sin. And yes, we tolerate the sins of the depraved mind, because they are more difficult to discern. But that’s no excuse to tolerate *blatant* sin like homosexuality.”

xvi Here are the sins of the depraved mind (also called worthless or debased) listed in Romans 1. These sins are common among all of us, believers and unbelievers alike.

wickedness	evil	faithless	heartless
greed	depravity	envy	murder
strife	deceit	malice	gossips
slanderers	God-haters	insolent	arrogant
invent ways of doing evil		boastful	ruthless
lacking common sense		disobedient to parents	

xvii The churches have been vocal, active participants in oppressive campaigns directed against the gay and lesbian minority for over thirty years. Proposition 6, known as the Briggs Initiative (1978) would have required homosexual teachers and their supporters to be fired. Proposition 8 (2008) forbade gay and lesbian couples to marry. Individual Christians insist that they do not hate homosexuals, but it is no wonder that many gays and lesbians feel hated, and believe the political actions of Christians speak louder than their words.

xviii According to the gospels, these three groups (priests, Pharisees, and scribes) represented different interests, but cooperated, especially when it came to a unified civil policy in response to the Roman occupation. Today, in a fascinating display, we see a similar unity against homosexuality among religious groups that rarely cooperate, at least publicly: the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical churches and organizations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons), and Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church (the “Moonies”).