

The Roots Of Sodom In Our Midst

Ezekiel 16:49-50

by Phillip G. Kayser at DCC 7-6-2008

This past Friday we celebrated the birthday of our nation in both Lincoln and Omaha. And during the ceremony in Lincoln, we had the rare treat of hearing numerous youth take turns reciting the entire Declaration of Independence from memory. I dare say that it was probably the first time that some of the guests had ever heard most of those words. And I hope that they were challenged with the number of modern issues that were addressed in the Declaration of Independence (and which they were outraged over). But it is easy to become jaded about any sin that we become overexposed to. The things that used to outrage us maybe no longer do.

I read a book some years ago that made me feel physically ill for hours. It was a book describing the practices of not all, but a majority homosexuals, based on numerous polls that had been taken. And at that time I thought that if Americans were aware of these behaviors, they would not stand for the influence they have exerted. But what I have come to realize since then is that sin increasingly hardens people's sensitivities. I have talked to Christians who at one time were revolted by certain practices and years later found themselves engaging in those very abominations. One man in particular that I know was a police officer who initially went out of his way to make life difficult for homosexuals. The thought of homosexuality revolted him. But after years of falling further and further into heterosexual sins, he found himself fully involved in the homosexual lifestyle. He had embraced what once revolted him, and it was because he earlier embraced other sins that should have revolted him. And God says that the roots of Sodom are an abomination to Him not because they lead to homosexuality, but because they are rebellion against God in their own right.

Before we look at this passage in Ezekiel 16, I want you to turn to Romans. I will make three points from Romans 1-2 that will help to explain our passage. The first point is that sin becomes increasingly worse when it is not checked, homosexuality being the final stage of being given up by God. Let's read Romans 1:18-24a

Romans 1:18 ¶ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Romans 1:19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.

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Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

Romans 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Romans 1:23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:24 ¶ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness

It was because of perseverance in earlier sins that He gives them up to this downward slide into perversion.

The second point is that most of the sins that these homosexuals are condemned for are not sexual sins. Instead, they are the root as well as the fruit of this sin. Look at Romans 1, and reading verses 29-32:

being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

The third point is that Paul has been deliberately painting the picture of these homosexuals in such a way that covenant members who are revolted by the picture and are quick to condemn will not be able to escape his application in their lives in chapter 2. In chapter 1 Paul has been using the third person, he or they, but in chapter 2 he points the finger at those to whom he is writing who believe in God. He uses the second person, “you.” Chapter 2 says, **Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge** [and many of them would have been quick to judge those in chapter 1], **for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?**

These Jews prided themselves in not being evil in that outward gross sort of way, but Paul points out that they have the same root of sin that Sodom had. The roots of Sodom were already present in their lives.

And that is precisely the application that Ezekiel makes in the passage we will be looking at. Turn to Ezekiel 16. Sodom's fate was not sealed when they became a homosexual city. It was sealed when it failed to deal with four sins: pride, gluttony, laziness and lack of compassion. "Who woulda thunk?" I wouldn't have thought that. Look at verse 49: **Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.** These sins were the slippery slope to eventual abomination in verse 50: **And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.**

I don't know if that puts the fear of God into you, but it does into me. These are respectable sins. Sodom was judged for pride, gluttony, laziness, and lack of compassion. And even when the abomination is mentioned in verse 50, pride or haughtiness comes first (once again). Over the last two millennia those constituted four of the seven deadly sins. They are deadly because they destroy people. Yet they are all fashionable, politically correct sins. Let me list what has always been called the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth or laziness.

And pride is at the top of the list. Pride was the first sin of Satan and out of it has flowed every other sin.

Steve Gallagher, the founder of Pure Life Ministries, which is a very successful ministry to homosexuals and other addicts says, "The one thing that all sexual addicts have in common is lack of self-control... The other root of sexual sin is pride." And you guessed it: elsewhere in the book he isolated laziness and selfishness as being two other common elements. Those four things are what eventually led Sodom to its abominations.

I. Pride (v. 49a)

Let's deal with the first sin, pride. I was talking with a counseling pastor of another church (Steve Peterson), and he said that he believes pride is the root of all sin. And I believe Scripture shows him right. There are many Christians who detest sodomy, and rightly so, but we must remember that God also detests the root sin of sodomy, pride. Prov. 16:5 says, **The LORD detests all the proud of heart.** You might think, but I'm a Christian. God doesn't detest me. He is always close to His own. Turn to Psalm 138:6. This Scripture shows that pride alienates God from us. Even though we are His children, there is a distancing or estrangement that happens. It says, **Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.** That word for "knows" is *yada*, often having the meaning of to love, as in Adam knew his wife and she conceived,

etc. This verse is saying that God stills loves the proud believer, but that love has pain in it. It is from afar. There is estrangement even though God's love perseveres.

Turn to James 4. This is a passage addressed to the church. And it deals with the same four sins. James 4:1-6. **Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'** James says that where pride is present, God resists us. David says that God loves us, but He loves us from afar off. There is estrangement. Now if God is far from the proud and He actively resists the proud, it is no wonder then that Christians who refuse to deal with their pride find themselves falling into sins they wouldn't have dreamed of, including the abomination of Sodom. In the last four years two prominent pastors as well as some lesser known pastors have gone from pride to Sodomy. Why?

In his own victory with homosexuality and in helping numerous sexual addicts through Pure Life Ministries, Steve Gallagher says that pride is at the heart of the addiction and the relapses. He says, "The other root of sexual sin is pride... It seems that the more pride a person has, the more difficult overcoming sexual sin becomes. Pride is nothing more than being filled with self, and a sense of one's own importance. This attitude too must be seriously dealt with, if a person will hope to overcome self (and the sexual sin that is the result of it)."

But there are other reasons why pride is the start down the slippery slope of sin. Pride tends to be self-protective and makes it very difficult for the sinner to be vulnerable before others. Isn't that the way it works? If you have a problem with pornography, you are too ashamed to let the pastor or anyone else know, and so you deprive yourself of help. If you are a wife who abuses your husband, you don't want to admit that and seek prayer and accountability. Pride is defensive and easily offended. And what is the result? This pride isolates him from the very people who could have helped him. His well-crafted façade of spirituality keeps him from being properly

discipled by others and loved by others and prayed for by others. Pride keeps us from help.

So pride 1) alienates from God, 2) opens the door to other sins, 3) and insulates us from other Christians. But it does other damage too. Let me read Proverbs 9:7-9. **He who reproves a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets himself a blemish.** [Let me stop there for a sec. The prideful person will turn the tables and put the blame right back on you. He is so skilled at avoiding guilt that you are guaranteed at looking bad if you rebuke him. So Solomon says in verse 8:] **Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you, give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.** So a fourth problem with pride is that it is unlikely that anyone *will* be able to help you. In fact, God says, “Don’t even bother.” Do you see that? Vulnerable people who are willing to receive correction are the ones who grow. Those who in their pride have to save face will never conquer their foolish ways.

Are you unapproachable when others want to help? Are you more concerned about protecting your pride than you are about growing in Christ? Usually our fears of being humiliated are way overblown, but even if they were true, humiliation is not such a bad thing. Thomas a Kempis said, “It is good that we be sometimes contradicted, and that there be a ... lessening conceit had of us; and this, although we do and intend well. These things help often to the attaining of humility.” If we want to flee from the roots of Sodom, then we must be willing to be vulnerable and open with each other. There are some of you who have never sinned in the nine years I have been here. Or at least that is the way it seems. In the previous church I had at least four visitors say that they felt uncomfortable there because everyone seemed so perfect and put together and they felt out of place. I was quick to tell them that some of us just hide our imperfections better than others, but we are all sinners growing in Christ. But think about that. If you have never told a soul about your sinfulness, is it pride that is keeping you from true body life - from letting other people minister to you? James 5:16 says, **“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”** He said that such openness should be a normal part of our Christian walk, and yet it often isn’t.

Part of the problem is that people often don’t recognize their pride. They are blinded to their own sins. They have never asked God, “Lord, reveal the real pride of my heart.” One person said that pride is like bad breath. Often, you are the only person who doesn’t know that you have it.

Another problem with pride is that pride disguises itself in so many ways, sometimes masquerading as spirituality. It's like the fictional lady who came to the pastor's study saying she felt that she needed to confess her sin of pride. He said, "OK. What is it?" She said, "I have to confess that I often can't resist the temptation to admire my beauty in the mirror for long periods of time." He took a second look at her and said, "Lady, it's not the sin of pride you need to confess, but the sin of imagination!" You can imagine her hurt feelings because she did have bucketfuls of pride and was only going to the pastor to be reaffirmed in her beauty. And when he deliberately questioned her beauty her real pride came to the surface. But pride is so clever and subtle of an adversary.

It's also hard to kill. C.H. Spurgeon once said,

"Pride is so natural to fallen man that it springs up in his heart like weeds in a watered garden, or rushes by a flowing broom. It is an all-pervading sin, and smothers all things like dust in the roads, or flour in the mill. Its every touch is evil. You may hunt down this fox, and think you have destroyed it, and lo! your very exultation is pride. None have more pride than those who dream that they have none. Pride is a sin with a thousand lives; it seems impossible to kill it."

Another kind of pride is know-it-all pride, an unwillingness to admit that he doesn't know the answer to his problem, or that he needs to seek help. It is so hard for some people to seek guidance. Paul says, "**Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.**" Calvin comments on this saying, "Here he puts his finger upon the true sore, as the whole mischief originated in this - that they were wise in their own conceit." They wouldn't have had to fall into those sins if they had been willing to consider themselves fools in need of advice.

Another form of pride is unsubmitive pride. It is no accident that rebellion against authority in the 60's was accompanied with every form of sin. God has given authority structures for our sanctification, and when people are unwilling to come for or submit to the Biblical counsel of the elders, they leave themselves open to attack. Hebrews 13:17 says, **Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.** Now that does not come naturally. It is a work of grace that can produce that kind of glad accountability.

Another kind of pride is spiritual pride. It is a person who acts like a spiritual giant. He doesn't recognize his sin. Christ didn't get on the case of the Pharisees because they were sinners, but because they couldn't see their own sin. I think part of the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to

show the Pharisees the sinfulness of their hearts and that they hadn't even gotten to first base yet. They saw clearly the sins and the pride of others, but were oblivious to their own. C.S. Lewis said,

“The more pride one has, the more one dislikes the pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are -- the easiest way is to ask yourself, ‘How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or patronize me, or show off? The point is that each person’s pride is in competition with every one else’s pride. Pride is competitive by nature.’”

But I think that first phrase is important. He said, “The more pride one has, the more one dislikes the pride in others.” The fact that you hate pride may not be an indication that you are humble at all. It may simply be that you have a great deal of pride.

As I have already said, pride was the first sin of Lucifer and it flowed into every imaginable kind of abomination. And we will never have success in ministry, we will never have success in overcoming our besetting sins, we will never have success in sanctification until we address this monster. The Puritan William Gurnall said that pride will make us worthless in ministry.

“Pride was the sin that turned Satan, a blessed angel, into a cursed devil. Satan knows better than anyone the damning power of pride. Is it any wonder, then, that he so often uses it to poison the saints? His design is made easier in that man’s heart shows a natural fondness for it. Pride, like liquor, is intoxicating. A swallow or two usually leaves a man worthless to God.”

Martin Luther agreed. He said, “God created the world out of nothing, and so long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.” Luther had no use for the self-esteem movement, which feeds pride until it grows into a monster. He said, “so long as we are *nothing*, He can make something out of us.” There must be more humbling of ourselves before God and man.

Andrew Murray said,

“This is the true self-denial to which our Savior calls us -- the acknowledgment that self has nothing good in it except as an empty vessel which God must fill. It is simply the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for God to be all.”

If we come to God like that, not only will He lift us up, but also we will have all the strength that we need to overcome other sins. You can see why this is a critical step in sanctification.

Andrew Murray again:

“Brethren, here is the path to the higher life. Down, lower down! ... Seek not, ask not for exaltation; that is God’s work. See to it that you abase and humble yourselves, and take no place before God or man but that of a servant. That is your work, and let that also be your one purpose and prayer. God is faithful. Just as water always seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds men abased and empty, His glory and power flow in to exalt and to bless.”

II. Gluttony (v. 49b)

I have spent the most time on that point because it is the sin from which everything else flows. But let’s look at gluttony next, or what Ezekiel calls **fullness of bread**. One translation has “overfed,” another has “gluttony.” But verse 49 is clear that it is a sin.

Ezekiel says that this too was at the root of their abomination. Why does he say that?

Because lack of self-control in gluttony is no different than lack of self-control with drink or with sex or with drugs, or with TV or with the credit card. In fact, almost invariably, lack of self-control in one area will bleed over into other areas. And this is why AA is so ungodly and disastrous. It gives the illusion of righteousness when there has been no change. They are right when they say that they have not recovered; that they are still alcoholics. They have never dealt with the root issue of the heart and many of them are headed toward hell as sober drunkards. All they have done is avoid alcohol and therefore there is no occasion for the sin, but the root of the sin is still present. And what happens is the same root evil manifests itself in other areas. They become preoccupied with sex, tobacco or with food.

Steve Gallagher, the founder of Pure Life Ministries, has ministered to the sexually addicted for many, many years. And unlike many counseling methods, which never bring homosexuals fully out of their sin, his ministry has been tremendously successful. And the Lord has used this ministry to bring Biblical wholeness not only to homosexuals but also to many others who have lived under the grip of their sins. And he says that the whole spiritual life has to be addressed to conquer sexual addictions. Gluttony is one of the issues that always has to go. And a person doesn’t have to be overweight to lack self-control with food. He was extremely thin. Yet he says that when he starts pigging out on sweets, he finds his other carnal desires being aroused. Eating sweets in moderation does not negatively affect him, but when he starts having too much, the fullness of food has a direct bearing on keeping himself pure.

But it isn't just fullness of food. Any lack of self-control in one area will bleed over into another area. Gallagher says in another place,

The one thing that all sexual addicts have in common is lack of self-control... I have found that most people who are addicted to one thing have other areas of their lives out of control. Overeating is very common among sexual addicts. Others run up credit cards with complete disregard to the inevitable consequences. Still others over-indulge in sports, entertainment, or any number of other pursuits. It is very common for a person to have more than one area out of control because the underlying problem isn't sexual addiction, but a self-centered lack of control, restraint and discipline. One of the keys to overcoming an addiction is to learn restraint in every area of life; not just the area of the addiction." (p. 53).

And so he has his counselees learn the discipline of fasting. Fasting deliberately puts the body in a position of making demands which we systematically say "No" to until the spirit is in control of the body rather than vice versa. Sometime read Isaiah 58:6-12 and you will see the powerful connection that fasting has with overcoming these four sins.

III. Laziness (v. 49c)

Let's look at that issue of zeal versus laziness. Ezekiel 16 says that the iniquity of Sodom was **abundance of idleness**. Notice he doesn't say that idleness is always wrong. Scripture after all does command us to sleep. But it is *abundance* of idleness. And those of you who are pleasure seekers, those of you who spend hours in front of the T.V., those of you who read romance novels hour after hour, day after day, those of you spend hours at play or vegging - you need to notice that this is sin, pure and simple. And not only is it sin, but it is a most heinous sin - what Ezekiel calls the iniquity of Sodom. How many productive kingdom hours have been wasted in front of the T.V. set? How many productive kingdom hours have been wasted reading fiction? I think reading fiction and watching video can be Biblically justified by the Biblical principle of entertainment. But there is no way that the number of hours Americans watch T.V. can be justified. We live in a pleasure oriented society, not a work-ethic society and it is no wonder then that the abominations of Sodom are becoming more prevalent. It was idleness (a failure to be on the battlefield) that made David let his guard down with Bathsheba. Christ called his disciples to rest, and he shows that vacations are appropriate. I preached about that last week. God loves to delight us in this way. There needs to be planned, moderate idleness, not

abundance of idleness. But preoccupation with idleness will arouse the desires of the flesh.

Turn to 1 Peter 5:8. This is another passage where the four sins of Sodom are grouped together. In verses 1-4 we have the lack of compassion addressed. In verses 5-7 we have various forms of pride addressed. In verse 2 we have greed and lack of self-control addressed. But look at the call to zeal in verses 8-9: **Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...** Notice that phrase, “be vigilant.” Here’s how Webster’s defines the opposite of vigilance, which is passivity. “Not active, but acted upon; affected by outside force or agency. Receiving or enduring without resistance or emotional reaction; submissive.”

This is what has happened to the church in America. We have become so enslaved to comfort that we have become spiritually lethargic. Rather than aggressively attacking the strongholds of Satan, we give in to the least resistance. Rather than affecting the culture, we have allowed the culture to affect us. Rather than getting involved in politics, we write it off. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 calls us to hardship as a soldier. How many of you have really experienced hardship? We admire the Christians of India who share the gospel publically even after having been beaten numerous times, but the idleness of our culture has so gripped us that we cannot face such lack of comfort. Everything is measured in terms of comfort. How many times have I heard the phrase, “I don’t feel like it.” Our feelings have nothing to do with it. The issue is what are we responsible to do? What has God commanded you to do? Many Christians have hit the snooze alarm for every area of their lives and they wonder why they occasionally don’t get up spiritually.

Counselors of sexual addicts discover time after time that when there has been a relapse into sin it is often following a period of laziness - something as simple as vegging out, or reading novels or watching T.V. It is almost an axiom with them that idle hands are the devil’s workshop.

Steve Gallagher has all the people he works with heavily involved in Christian service. He says that it does three things: 1) It keeps them too busy to let their mind dwell on enticing thoughts. 2) It gets their minds on others instead of self. 3) Their ministry provides added incentive to try harder.

But whether you have already succumbed to Sodom’s sexual license, or whether that is nowhere in your mind, laziness must be licked; abundance of idleness must be put away if we are to please God.

IV. Lack of Compassion (v. 49d)

The last issue is lack of compassion. Reading verse 49 again: **Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.** I want you to notice first that this is a sin of omission. It is a sin that many people ignore because they are not actively doing anything. But God says that this inaction, when there is a need for compassion will eventually lead a society to abomination. What has happened in America? Intercessors for America asks the rhetorical question, “Can an administration refuse to ban late-term abortion, allow militant sodomites and lesbians into high offices, engage with 15,000 voodoo priests in Haiti, compromise the gospel of Christ, practice and preach new age syncretism, call for the toleration of Islam and stubbornly refuse to stand and work against the persecution and martyrdom of Christians around the world, and be so spiritually naive as not to think that death will enter its own camp?” No culture has spoken of compassion more than America and shown it less. More babies have been slaughtered in America than have been killed in all other American wars. We have systematically ignored the pleas of human rights violations against Christians in China, Tibet, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt and numerous other countries. And yet we went to war against Iraq, a country that had the best liberties for Christianity of any other Islamic country. But anyway, government handouts is not personal compassion.

One commentator said,

“The final sin of Sodom was that they did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. They became callous, uncaring, and indifferent to the needs of people around them, because they were so absorbed in themselves. They were no longer concerned with the needs of others... [This led to] a bravado, a freedom to express and manifest openly their impure and perverted desires

“Whenever a society is so weak that those who are perverted in their nature feel a bravery to expose themselves publicly, to make public demands, and become aggressive, then you have a society that is ready for the judgment of God.”

We need to pray that the church in America would turn from its pride, its self-indulgence, laziness and lack of compassion. July 4 celebrates the exact opposite virtues. Our country showed humility as they cried out to God and acknowledged God in their endeavors. The First Great Awakening so humbled Americans that they were prepared for that great war.

Instead of self-indulgence we see the founders pledging their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. And many of them did lose everything, but it was worth it to gain liberties for their children. They were self-sacrificing instead of self-indulgent.

Instead of laziness we saw an amazing Protestant work ethic among our founding fathers. In fact, laziness was quite foreign to them; it was abominable.

Instead of lack of compassion, we see a sacrificial care for the poor. America has a reputation for compassion because the government gives billions of dollars to the rulers of poor countries, but rarely does much of that trickle down to the poor. But in Colonial America this was a virtue that every American was expected to have. They cared for the poor, the widow and the orphan. But they did it with real compassion, not with government funds. They would have been outraged with the thinking that socialism is compassion. Socialism subtly robs people of true compassion because people think that the government is responsible for the poor and needy.

So we have lost those four virtues in America. Instead, we have become characterized with the roots of Sodom. It's no wonder that Sodomy and every other sexual abomination are flourishing in this nation. But in large part, we have the church to blame.

It was precisely because Lot no longer was acting as salt and light in his city, that judgment came. God had said that even the presence of one church - of ten righteous men, would have kept the city from judgment. But since judgment begins at the house of God, we need to pray that God would purge these sins from our own hearts, from the presence of our local congregation, and from the bride of Christ at large. We cannot have an effective witness against our perverted culture unless the church repents of the roots of Sodom. Amen.

God's grace was designed not just to rescue us from the gross sins of Sodom, but also from its roots. Children of God, I charge you to put off the sins of pride, gluttony, abundance of idleness and lack of compassion to the needy.