

## Chapter 3: Homosexuality

*“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”*

Leviticus 20:13

*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”*

1 Corinthians 6:10-12

## INTRODUCTION

Few Christians would have even considered researching the material contained in this chapter in 1920, 1820, 1720, 1620, or 1520. Yet it is necessary because the sin of homosexual behavior is commended almost everywhere. It is displayed on the front page of the newspaper. Primetime television broadcasts flash homosexual scenes for public viewing (at least in America). Jonathan Edwards would have been horrified. Charles Spurgeon would have thought he had awoken in Sodom. Martin Luther was embarrassed to even mention the sin in his commentary on Genesis.

In most of the apostate Christian world today, the homosexual lobby is ubiquitous and powerful. Pressures mount on the civil magistrate to persecute Christians who refuse to commend homosexual behavior. Who would have thought that Sodomites would be initiating the persecution of Christians in these once Christian nations? Will Christians be safer in pagan nations like Uganda or Zambia than in apostate nations like England or Canada over the next few decades?

It is our hope that this historical study will help us to better understand the times (1 Chron. 12:32), and assist Christian churches to maintain wise and careful church discipline with these sorts of sins. There is a marked difference, however, between the ancient Roman world and our world. During the first 1,000 years of the church, pagans were turning

into Christians. But now, Christians are turning into pagans. We are facing a post-Christian age. Hosts of Christians are continuing to apostatize with ever-increasing resistance to the truth, as they have for centuries. They will line their apologists up to justify their religious synthesis by re-interpreting Scriptural passages by new paradigms. They will use every interpretive device to force Scripture to condone the worst possible sins and false doctrines. This is where church history proves an invaluable aid. When somebody like Matthew Vines,<sup>1</sup> a homosexual apologist, stands against 2,000 years of the greatest Christian teachers from the Eastern to the Western churches, we must conclude that Vines is aberrant. Vines must represent another new cult. Vines has departed from a long line of orthodoxy. He stands condemned in his heterodoxy.

### THE EARLY FATHERS

The Christian apologists found that some of the strongest arguments against paganism would take on the moral decay prevalent in the day. Christians today would do well to learn from them. Justin Martyr, for example, spoke strongly against infanticide, prostituting of children, and other sexual perversions of the day in this extended quote:

“But as for us, we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men; and this we have been taught lest we should do any

1. see Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014).

one an injury, and lest we should sin against God, first, because we see that almost all so exposed (not only the girls, but also the males) are brought up to prostitution. And as the ancients are said to have reared herds of oxen, or goats, or sheep, or grazing horses, so now we see you rear children only for this shameful use; and for this pollution a multitude of females and hermaphrodites, and those who commit unmentionable iniquities, are found in every nation. And you receive the hire of these, and duty and taxes from them, whom you ought to exterminate from your realm. And any one who uses such persons, besides the godless and infamous and impure intercourse, may possibly be having intercourse with his own child, or relative, or brother. And there are some who prostitute even their own children and wives, and some are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy. . . Indeed, the things which you do openly and with applause, as if the divine light were overturned and extinguished, these you lay to our charge. . .”<sup>2</sup>

According to Justin, the sexual confusion of the pagan world was so advanced that incest was not uncommon. He chided the Roman authorities for countenancing these vices (including child prostitution) by taxing it, and then he recommended they exterminate male and female prostitutes from the land.

Even before concerning themselves with the problem

2. Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:172.

of homosexuality, the church fathers addressed effeminacy in Greco-Roman society. No doubt, their perspectives were rooted in the Apostle's reference to effeminacy in 1 Corinthians 6:9,

“Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.”

The word Paul chose for effeminate was “mulakoi,” that may be translated as “soft clothing.” These are men that prefer the feminine bearing or accoutrements. Clement of Alexandria excoriates men who pluck their beard hairs to look womanly...“Out of effeminate desire they enwreath their latches and fringes with leaves of gold... For God wished women to be smooth; but has ordained man, like the lions...”<sup>3</sup> Clement found androgyny a horrendous assault on nature and morality, “Men play the part of women, and women that of men, contrary to nature... Oh miserable spectacle! horrible conduct!”<sup>4</sup> He further commended ancient Roman civil laws that addressed these “crimes.” “I admire the ancient legislators of the Romans: these detested effeminacy of conduct; and the giving of the body to feminine purposes, contrary to the law of nature, they judged worthy of the extremest penalty according to the righteousness of

3. Clement of Alexandria, “The Instructor,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:275.

4. *Ibid.*, 2:276.

the land.”<sup>5</sup> This church father may have allowed for a shave now and then, but the plucking of beard hairs he deemed “unlawful,” and rejected clothes for men that were feminine “in feel and dye.”<sup>6</sup>

There is a certain shame associated with speaking of these things which make it to the front page of the newspaper almost every day in our world. As with many other church fathers, Clement discouraged speaking in any detail concerning sexual sin:

“In accordance with these remarks, conversation about deeds of wickedness is appropriately termed filthy [shameful] speaking, as talk about adultery and pederasty and the like.”<sup>7</sup>

Clement also considered the temporal punishment of homosexuality essential to the maintenance of a temperate, stable society:

“The fate of the Sodomites was judgment to those who had done wrong, instruction to those who hear. The Sodomites having, through much luxury, fallen into uncleanness, practicing adultery shamelessly, and burning with insane love for boys; the All-seeing Word, whose notice those who commit impieties cannot escape, cast his eye on them. Nor did the sleepless guard of humanity observe their licentiousness in silence; but dissuading us from the imitation of them, and training us up to his

5. *Ibid.*, 2:277.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 2:251.

own temperance, and falling on some sinners, lest lust being unavenged, should break loose from all the restraints of fear, ordered Sodom to be burned, pouring forth a little of the sagacious fire on licentiousness; lest lust, through want of punishment, should throw wide the gates to those that were rushing into voluptuousness. Accordingly, the just punishment of the Sodomites became to men an image of the salvation which is well calculated for men. For those who have not committed like sins with those who are punished, will never receive a like punishment.”<sup>8</sup>

Then, Clement quoted directly from Leviticus 18:22, taking the Law as ethically directive.

“The Word, too, commands emphatically, through Moses: ‘Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind, for it is an abomination.’”<sup>9</sup>

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* condemned sodomy and bestiality in no uncertain terms. “For the sin of Sodom is contrary to nature, as is also that with brute beasts.”<sup>10</sup> While this early church directory carefully delineated the discontinuities of Old Testament laws touching Sabbaths, circumcision, sacrifices, cleanliness laws, and food laws, it just as firmly endorsed the civil laws affecting homosexuality and adultery,

“For thus saith the oracles: ‘Thou shalt not lie with

8. *Ibid.*, 2:282.

9. *Ibid.*, 2:259-263.

10. “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:463.

mankind as with womankind.' 'For such a one is accursed, and ye shall stone them with stones: they have wrought abominations.' 'Every one that lieth with a beast, slay ye him: he has wrought wickedness in his people.' 'And if any one defile a married woman, slay ye them both: they have wrought wickedness; they are guilty; let them die.' And afterwards: 'There shall not be a fornicator among the children of Israel, and there shall not be an whore among the daughters of Israel. Thou shalt not offer the hire of an harlot to the Lord thy God upon the altar, nor the price of a dog' 'For the vows arising from the hire of an harlot are not clean.' These things the laws have forbidden; but they have honoured marriage, and have called it blessed. . ."<sup>11</sup>

A number of the church fathers equated homosexuality with a form of frenzy or insanity, and this we find in the teaching of Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 253).

"Turn your looks to the abominations, not less to be deplored, of another kind of spectacle... Men are emasculated, and all the pride and vigor of their sex is effeminated in the disgrace of their enervated body; and he is more pleasing there who has most completely broken down the man into the woman. He grows into praise by virtue of his crime; and the more he is degraded, the more skillful he is considered to be. Such a one is looked upon—oh shame!—and looked upon with pleasure... Nor is

11. Ibid.



there wanting authority for the enticing abomination... that Jupiter of theirs [is] not more supreme in dominion than in vice, inflamed with earthly love in the midst of his own thunders... now breaking forth by the help of birds to violate the purity of boys. And now put the question: Can he who looks upon such things be healthy-minded or modest? Men imitate the gods whom they adore, and to such miserable beings their crimes become their religion.”<sup>12</sup>

No doubt, the church fathers would be arrested today, if they were caught using such inflammatory language for these sexual sins. Cyprian goes so far as to call it a crime to witness the crime of homosexuality: “Oh, if placed on that lofty watchtower, you could gaze into the secret places—if you could open the closed doors of sleeping chambers and recall their dark recesses to the perception of sight—you would behold things done by immodest persons which no chaste eye could look upon; you would see what even to see is a crime; you would see what people embruted with the madness of vice deny that they have done, and yet hasten to do—men with frenzied lusts rushing upon men, doing things which afford no gratification even to those who do them.”<sup>13</sup>

## AUGUSTINE

Augustine condemned sodomy, and endorsed a civil

12. Cyprian, “Epistle 1,” <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050601.htm>

13. *Ibid.*

penalty for the crime in the *Confessions*,

“Therefore those offences which be contrary to nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished; such were those of the Sodomites, which should all nations commit, they should all be held guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which hath not so made men that they should in that way abuse one another.”<sup>14</sup>

He referred to Sodom in *The City of God*, in which he writes,

“After this promise Lot was delivered out of Sodom, and a fiery rain from heaven turned into ashes that whole region of the impious city, where custom had made sodomy as prevalent as laws have elsewhere made other kinds of wickedness.”<sup>15</sup>

In his instructions to the community of women in the convents, Augustine warned of inappropriate sexual relationships between women, “The love between you...ought not to be earthly but spiritual, for the things which shameless women do even to other women are to be avoided.”<sup>16</sup>

14. Augustine, “The Confessions of Saint Augustine,” *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, 1:65.

15. Augustine, “The City of God,” *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, 2:328.

16. Augustine, “Letter 211,” *The Fathers of the Church: St. Augustine, Letters 204-270*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1956), 50.

## JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The church fathers were well aware of the depravity of the classical Greek world, and they did not shy away from attacking it in their sermons. Here, John Chrysostom addresses the wicked practices of some elements within the church (as late as A.D. 391).

“Certain men in church come in gazing about at the beauty of women; others curious about the blooming youth of boys. After this, do you not marvel that lightning bolts are not launched from heaven, and all these things are not plucked up from their foundations? For worthy both of thunderbolts and hell are the things that are done; but God, who is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forbears awhile his wrath, calling you to repentance and amendment.”<sup>17</sup>

Speaking of Romans 1:26-27, Chrysostom declared,

“All of these affections were vile, but chiefly the mad lust after males; for the soul is more the sufferer in sins, and more dishonored than the body in diseases...The men have done an insult to nature itself. And a yet more disgraceful thing than these is it, when even the women seek after these intercourses, who ought to have more shame than men...And sundry other books of the philosophers one may see full of this disease. But we do not therefore say that the thing was made lawful, but that they who received this law were pitiable,

17. John Chrysostom, “Homily LXXIII,” *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, 10:443.

and objects for many tears. For these are treated in the same way as women that play the whore. Or rather their plight is more miserable. For in the case of the one the intercourse, even if lawless, is yet according to nature; but this is contrary both to law and nature. For even if there were no hell, and no punishment had been threatened, this would be worse than any punishment.”<sup>18</sup>

## THE CHURCH COUNCILS AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The early church councils give some insight into the sort of church discipline issues confronting the church in the pagan Roman world. The modern church would do well to take into account the wisdom afforded here, given that our pagan world is not all that much different from the pre-Christian pagan world. Of course, every true church that must discipline is interested in working towards restoration of the sinner. For better or worse, the early church developed a recipe-approach towards restoration. While conscientious church leaders would never restore without genuine signs of repentance (requiring some time period), the church councils assigned set probationary periods for various sinful behaviors. Most biblical churches today would restore based on fruits of repentance, genuineness of confessions, transparency and trust, and willingness to be accountable. Thus, we would find varying lengths of time required for restoration to communion depend-

18. John Chrysostom, “Homily IV,” *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, 11:355.

ing on many factors. Nonetheless, church history does provide helpful wisdom concerning discipline and relative degrees of malignancy.

The Council of Elvira assembled 19 bishops (teaching elders) and 24 presbyters (ruling elders) in A.D. 305. The assembly condemned homosexual activity with boys, assigning the most severe church censure of excommunication for life to those who succumb to it.

Canon 71. “Those who sexually abuse boys may not commune even when death approaches.”<sup>19</sup>

For comparison sake, the most egregious sins treated by the Council of Elvira, for which the church would delay communicant status until death included only murder by sorcery (6), serial unrepentant fornication (7), unlawful divorce and remarriage (8), parents who prostitute their children (12), marrying a daughter to a pagan priest (17), sexual immorality for bishops and elders (18), abortion (63, 68), incest (67), homosexuality (71), and false accusations made against bishops, elders, or deacons (77).<sup>20</sup>

The Council of Ancyra in Turkey (A.D. 314) relaxed the earlier sanctions somewhat. Bestial (irrational) sin which would have included homosexuality and bestiality required fifteen years of probation for those who committed the crime under twenty years of age, then

19. “Canons of the Council of Elvira,” <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/Canon%20Law/ElviraCanons.htm>

20. Ibid.

a probation of thirty years for those older than twenty years of age, and life probation for those who committed the crime while over fifty years of age (Canon 16). The sanctions also specified ten years for abortion (Canon 21), seven years for adultery, and life probation for murderers (Canon 22).<sup>21</sup>

Basil the Great equated the sin of adultery to the sin of homosexuality in reference to church censures: “He who is guilty of unseemliness with males will be under discipline for the same time as adulterers.”<sup>22</sup>

Here is helpful counsel for the modern church that must address the same discipline issues that faced the ancient church which was surrounded by the pagan Roman world. While I would not recommend a recipe-driven approach to church discipline, it is instructive that the church fathers did not allow much laxness in the moral behavior of the 3rd century church. The weakening of any community of believers will be evident by the poor decisions made by the leadership concerning church discipline.

As Christianity penetrated the pagan lands, the church was pressed to deal with the sin of homosexuality. The Synod of the Grove of Victory (A.D. 550) reduced the penance to four years, probably due to the pagan backgrounds from which the Irish converts were taken.

21. “Canons of the Council of Ancyra,” <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3802.htm>

22. Basil, “Letter 217 to Amphilochius,” <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202217.htm>

“Whoever commits the male crime as the Sodomites [shall do penance] for four years...”<sup>23</sup>

## MIDDLE AGES

Hincmar, the 9<sup>th</sup> century Archbishop of Reims quoted Ambrose, Gregory, and Isidore in condemnation of homosexuality. Using the strongest possible language, this key church leader condemned both incest and homosexuality in the same breath,

“These things are collected for the enlarging of the crime, so that hence is collected, how evil incest of brother with sister is and also with male sodomitical lying together, if perhaps the case is this, which both, perpetrated on their own are punished in the Heptateuch by death, at the Lord’s order... Whence it agrees that, just as the same Apostle says to the Romans, it is uncleanness when males work shamefulness in males, or women in women, or males in women, or whoever by themselves in whatever way works shamefulness, which separates the one doing it from the kingdom of God and plunges into the infernal regions, just as the same Apostle says: ‘Every fornicator or unclean one does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God.’”<sup>24</sup>

23. quoted in Peter Damian, *The Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh-Century Treatise Against Clerical Homosexual Practices*, trans. Pierre J. Payer (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 29.

24. Hincmar, “Response 12: Sodomy and Lesbian Nuns,” trans. Hincmar Collaborative Project, <http://hincmar.blogspot.com/2007/09/respon-sio-12b-sodomy-and-lesbian-nuns.html>

*The Penitential of Egbert* (A.D. 732-736), includes the following censures for the sin of sodomy: “If anyone has sinned as the Sodomites, some say ten years penance; if he is in the habit, more must be added; if he has ecclesiastical rank, he is to be degraded and do penance as a lay person.”<sup>25</sup> The Penitential of Columban (A.D. 600) required that a monk “who had committed the sin of murder or sodomy do penance for ten years.”<sup>26</sup> The Penitential of Cummean and Finnian required something similar, sometimes distinguishing between forms of homosexuality and the habitual nature of it. One modern scholar identified thirty-one penitentials dating from A.D. 500 to A.D. 1100 addressing male homosexuality as sin, and fourteen addressing lesbianism.<sup>27</sup>

The Diocesan regulations passed to priests from the 800s through the 1000s considered homosexuality as an alarming problem:

“Because of homosexuality kingdoms are destroyed and delivered into the hands of pagans. Every Christian should guard himself against this crime and those not polluted by it should beware lest they fall.”<sup>28</sup>

In his famous treatise that was intended as an appeal

25. Damian, *The Book of Gomorrah*, 50.

26. *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), 97.

27. Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 155.

28. Damian, *The Book of Gomorrah*, 9.



to Pope Leo IX (ca. A.D. 1051), Peter Damian spoke of homosexuality as a vice “never to be compared with any other vice because it surpasses the enormity of all vices.”<sup>29</sup> The homosexual, said Damian, “is confounded by the authority of the whole church, condemned by the judgment of all the holy fathers.”<sup>30</sup> He is “subject to the iron rule of diabolical tyranny” and “possessed by a diabolical spirit,”<sup>31</sup> (words that would be echoed in Martin Luther's treatment of the sin 500 years later).<sup>32</sup>

Although the role of the state was barely noted in Damian's sixty-page treatise, it is clear that these churchmen were primarily concerned with the eternal souls of men and their repentance and restoration with the church, this side of eternity. Damian warned the homosexual, “How miserable it is that the present satisfaction of one organ's pleasure, afterwards the whole body together with the soul will be tortured forever by the most atrocious, flaming fire. . . Those who are now troubled by the ardour of sodomite lust afterwards will also burn along with the author of all iniquity in the flames of perpetual burning.”<sup>33</sup> He instructed the sinner to cry out for the mercy of God, repent, and “establish an unremitting contest against the flesh; with weapons always ready, [to] stand against the importunate madness of lust.”<sup>34</sup>

29. *Ibid.*, 63.

30. *Ibid.*, 65.

31. *Ibid.*, 60.

32. *Ibid.*, 41.

33. *Ibid.*, 80, 83.

34. *Ibid.*, 82.

Damian distinguished four associated sins in order of increasing rank of severity, beginning with self-stimulation (considered a more mild form of homosexuality) up to the act of sodomy. Could it be that the massive rise in pornography use among young men who access internet pornography and self-gratification over the last thirty years have contributed to the huge rise in more egregious forms of homosexuality?

Commenting on Pope Gregory's instructions to Passivus, Damian agreed that by the Old Testament civil law, homosexuality is "surely to be punished by death."<sup>35</sup> On this basis, he argued that a sin of this magnitude must permanently disqualify a man from ecclesiastical rank:

"Surely, it is clear that a person who has been degraded by a crime deserving death is not reformed so as to receive an order of ecclesiastical rank by any sort of subsequent religious life."<sup>36</sup>

To promote such a person, says Damian, would be "entirely against the norm of sacred law."<sup>37</sup>

In a letter responding to Damian's work, Leo essentially agreed with the recommendation: "There may be no hope of recovering their rank for those who are tainted with either of the two types of sin you have described—alone or with others—for a long time or

35. *Ibid.*, 33.

36. *Ibid.*, 34.

37. *Ibid.*

with many men even for a short time, or—what is horrible to mention as well as to hear—who have fallen into the act of sodomy.”<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the Third Lateran Council (A.D. 1179) borrowed language from the earlier Council of Paris calling for permanent removal from office for clergy and excommunication for laity:

[Those] “who are found guilty of that unnatural vice for which the wrath of God came down upon the sons of disobedience and destroyed the five cities with fire, if they are clerics be expelled from the clergy or confined in monasteries to do penance; if they are laymen they are to incur excommunication and be completely separated from the society of the faithful.”<sup>39</sup>

The Fourth Lateran Council (A.D. 1215), similarly called for suspension of a priest for unchastity, “especially sodomy.”<sup>40</sup>

## THE REFORMERS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Referring to the Sodom story, Martin Luther wrote,

“I for my part do not enjoy dealing with this passage, because so far the ears of the Germans are innocent of and uncontaminated by this monstrous depravity; for even though disgrace, like other sins, has crept in through an ungodly soldier and a lewd

38. *Ibid.*, 96.

39. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/LATERAN3.HTM>

40. <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>

merchant, still the rest of the people are unaware of what is being done in secret. The Carthusian monks deserve to be hated because they were the first to bring this terrible pollution into Germany from the monasteries of Italy.”<sup>41</sup>

He further stated that the heinous conduct of the people of Sodom was,

“extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.”<sup>42</sup>

John Calvin excoriated the pagan nations that tolerated these “crimes” in his commentary on Leviticus 20:13-15,

“God had hitherto taught what was right, in order to restrain the people from sin, not only from fear of punishment, but for conscience’ sake. But whereas all do not voluntarily dispose themselves to obedience, he awards severe punishments to those wicked despisers in whom there is no effort to be religious. And it is astonishing that almost all the Gentiles have so sunk into stupid and brutal

41. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis*, Chapters 15-20, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 251-252.

42. *Ibid.*, 255.

folly that they have tolerated with little less than impunity unnatural crimes, detestable in their very name.

“I admit that even the wickedest of them were ashamed to justify so gross a crime; but although it was practiced with impunity, it was a common reproach to make even against the very public tribunals, that it ought to be more severely punished than other crimes, which they did not spare.”<sup>43</sup>

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9, Calvin described the sin of effeminacy for men as “blandishments of speech, lightness of gesture and apparel. . .” He described homosexuality as that “crime of the most abominable of all—that monstrous pollution which was but too prevalent in Greece.”<sup>44</sup>

The Anabaptist Menno Simons was particularly bothered by the sodomy that was apparently common within the Roman Catholic Church at that time.

“Put away from among you, all offence, abominations and idolatry, masses, altars, infant baptism, the idolatrous bread, or supper (I mean such as is used by the world), images, confessions, the wanton sodomy, unchastity of the papistic priests and monks; destroy and root up all accused heathen disgrace; such as brothels...”<sup>45</sup>

43. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 3:106-108.

44. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 20:209.

45. Menno Simons, *A Foundation and Plain Instruction of the Saving Doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, trans. I. Daniel Rupp (Lancaster: Elias Barr & Co., 1863), 202.

When it comes to the worst of sexual crimes, Simons' pacifism moderated somewhat. In another place, he wrote,

“If we come to the priests or monks, there we find such insatiable avarice. . . Besides, the greater part of them live in such whoredom and sodomy that the angels are astonished and blush; they defile one woman after another, also one virgin after another; they defraud and corrupt the whole world... I do not know how they could make it worse; nevertheless, those unblushing, abominable men, who according to the law of Moses, would have been stoned, and who according to the Scriptures must be eternally cursed and condemned, unless they repent, alas, are called the pastors and teachers of this poor, rude people. Behold, thus the world is corrupted.”<sup>46</sup>

John Cotton in his “Abstract of the Laws of New England,” included under the heading of crimes “of such as deserve capital punishment, or cutting off from a man’s people, whether by death or banishment” the following:

“Adultery, which is the defiling of the marriage bed, to be punished with death.

“Incest, which is the defiling of any near of kin, within the degrees prohibited in Leviticus, to be punished with death.

“Unnatural filthiness to be punished with death,

46. Menno Simons, *The Complete Works of Menno Simons*, 161.

whether sodomy, which is a carnal fellowship of man with man, or woman with woman, or buggery... ”<sup>47</sup>

In what is probably the most popular Bible commentary of all time, Matthew Henry equates homosexuality to “sodomy” and classifies the sin as the very worst of all human behavior. Commenting on Leviticus 20:13,

“A law against unnatural lusts, sodomy and bestiality, sins not to be named nor thought of without the utmost abhorrence imaginable... Other sins level men with the beasts, but these sink them much lower. That ever there should have been occasion for the making of these laws, and that since they are published they should ever have been broken, is the perpetual reproach and scandal of human nature... ”<sup>48</sup>

## LATER CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

John Wesley condemned Onan's actions on multiple accounts, beyond that of refusing to raise up seed for his brother. According to Wesley, Onan abused his own body, as well as his wife and the memory of his brother.

“Onan, though he consented to marry the widow, yet to the great abuse of his own body, of the wife

47. John Cotton, “An Abstract of Laws of New England, 1641” [http://www.reformed.org/ethics/index.html?mainframe=/ethics/laws\\_of\\_new\\_england.html](http://www.reformed.org/ethics/index.html?mainframe=/ethics/laws_of_new_england.html)

48. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 1:405.

he had married and the memory of his brother that was gone, refused to raise up seed unto the brother. Those sins that dishonour the body are very displeasing to God, and the evidence of vile affections. Observe, the thing which he did displeased the Lord—And it is to be feared, thousands, especially single persons, by this very thing, still displease the Lord, and destroy their own souls.”<sup>49</sup>

We rarely find historical Christian leaders speaking directly to the matter of sexual self-gratification, since most of them thought this to be too shameful a subject to discuss publicly. When it is mentioned, there is nothing but disapprobation for it. This is a far cry from the loose treatment of the subject on the part of many “Christian” psychologists today.

## CIVIL CRIMES

Unlike most Christian leaders in the post-Christian church, the early church fathers did not hesitate to call for civil penalties in the case of sexual crimes like adultery and homosexuality. In his second apology, Justin quoted another Christian named Lucius, who asked a Roman prefect, “Why have you punished this man, not as an adulterer, nor fornicator, nor murderer, nor thief, nor robber, nor convicted of any crime at all, but who has only confessed that he is called by the name of Christian?”<sup>50</sup> Evidently, the Roman authorities were

49. John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, Genesis 38.

50. Justin Martyr, “The Second Apology of Justin,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:189.



persecuting Christians, whereas according to Lucius they should have been busy prosecuting adulterers, fornicators, and murderers.

Elsewhere, Justin Martyr wrote of female and male prostitutes who “commit unmentionable iniquities,” who “are found in every nation.” He accused the Roman authorities of receiving “the hire of these, and duty and taxes from them, whom you ought to exterminate from your realm.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, it is clear that the earliest Apostolic Fathers recognized the role of the civil magistrate in curtailing public sexual sins that might include prostitution, the public sale of pornography, etc.

Clement of Alexandria clearly endorsed Old Testament law assigning the death penalty to adultery (but with a New Testament nuance). In his second *Stromata*, he introduced the Old Testament civil code in this manner,

“What, then, is the law? In order to check the impetuosity of the passions, it commands the adulteress to be put to death, on being convicted of this; and if of priestly family, to be committed to the flames. And the adulterer also is stoned to death, but not in the same place, that not even their death may be in common.”<sup>52</sup>

51. Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:172.

52. Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:374.

Following the reference to the civil code, Clement clearly endorsed a unity and continuity between Law and Gospel: “The law is not at variance with the Gospel, but agrees with it. How should it be otherwise, one Lord being the author of both?”<sup>53</sup> The church fathers maintained a strong ideal of unity in biblical revelation.

However, Clement still allowed for a measure of discontinuity. He distinguished between the woman who lives in sin and is dead to the commandments, and the woman “who has repented, being as it were born again by the change in her life. . . the old harlot being dead, and she who has been regenerated by repentance having come back to life.” Thus in the New Testament era, these church fathers apparently saw true repentance as a means of averting the civil penalty. Then, Clement quoted Ezekiel 33:11, “I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn.” But what to do about the woman who will not repent? Clement continued, “Now they are stoned to death; as through hardness of heart dead to the law which they believed not. But in the case of a priestess the punishment is increased because to whom much is given, from him shall more be required (Luke 12:48).”<sup>54</sup>

Interacting with Plato's approval of homosexuality, the church father, Eusebius (A.D. 320), argued his case by

53. Ibid.

54. Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:379.

referencing Mosaic civil legislation,

“Thus spoke Plato, but not Moses, who decreed expressly the contrary, proclaiming with a loud voice the penalty for pederasty: ‘If a man lies with another man as one lies with a woman, both have committed an abomination: they shall be put to death: their blood shall be upon them.’”<sup>55</sup>

As already mentioned, Augustine categorized the sin of Sodom as that which ought to be punished “everywhere and always” in his *Confessions*.

With the Theodosian Code of the 4th century and the Justinian Code of the 5th century, Western civilization maintained the civil penalty for homosexuality for over a thousand years. Prior to the Christian era, homosexuality and pederasty were practiced for almost a thousand years in Greco-Roman society. The Theodosian Code assigned “death by sword” to “man coupling like a woman.”<sup>56</sup> Homosexual actions were declared “contrary to nature” and punishable by death under the Justinian Code.

In a carefully nuanced section of his *Treatise Concerning the Corruption of the Donatists*, Augustine explained the necessity of civil penalties for adultery and “impiety” or what we would call persecution of Christians or human sacrifice or the like.

55. quoted in Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization*, 117.

56. Theodosian Code 9.7.3, Latin Version available at <http://ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/theod/liber09.htm#7>.

“But as to the argument of those men who are unwilling that their impious deeds should be checked by the enactment of righteous laws, when they say the Apostles never sought such measures from the kings of the earth, they do not consider the different character of that age, and that everything comes in its own season. For what emperor has yet believed in Christ, so as to serve Him in the cause of piety by enacting laws against impiety, when as yet the declaration of the prophet was only in the course of its fulfillment, ‘Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?...’

“Seeing, then, that the kings of the earth were not yet serving the Lord in the time of the apostles, but were still imagining vain things against the Lord and against His Anointed, that all might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, it must be granted that at that time acts of impiety could not possibly be prevented by the laws, but were rather performed under their sanction...

“For why when free-will is given by God to man, should adulteries be punished by the laws and sacrilege allowed? Is it a lighter matter that a soul should not keep faith with God, than that a woman should be faithless to her husband? Or if those faults which are committed not in contempt but in ignorance of religious truth are to be visited with lighter punishment, are they therefore to be neglected altogether?”<sup>57</sup>

57. Augustine, “A Treatise Concerning the Correction of the Donatists,” *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, 4:640-641.

Thus, we find Augustine legitimizing civil penalties for pagan practices as is appropriate to the “character of the age.”

The Theodosian Code, issued in A.D. 390 did refer to the Mosaic Law in its treatment of homosexuality.

“Moses says: If anyone hath intercourse with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination. Let them both die: they are guilty. . . This is indeed the law [of Rome]. But a constitution of the Emperor Theodosius followed to the full the spirit of the Mosaic Law.”<sup>58</sup>

Later, Pope Gregory (A.D. 590-605) appealed to what he called “the rule of sacred law” in a letter to a certain pastor Passivus in regards to qualifications for subdeacons and monks: “If no faults are found in him which stand in the way as it was punishable by death under the rule of sacred law, let him be ordained by you as either a monk or a subdeacon.”<sup>59</sup>

The Council of Toledo's 3rd Canon (A.D. 693) affirmed castration for homosexuality. The Council of Paris (A.D. 829) directed itself more to the civil magistrate's duties, and influenced governance thereafter. Convener of the Council, Bishop Wala announced his intentions to “make diligent inquiry into the way in which the rulers and the faithful were observing the law of God.” Canon 34 endorsed Old Testament law

58. “Of Debauchers,” *Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio: A Comparison of Mosaic and Roman Laws* (De Stupratoribus).

59. quoted in Damian, *The Book of Gomorrah*, 33.

and recognized Paul's respect for the law in Romans 1:32 as follows,

“Moreover, the Lord in his law commands that any who commit this infamous crime be punished with death (Lev. 20:13), and the Apostle adds that they are “worthy of death (Rom. 1:32).”

### CHRISTIAN JURISPRUDENCE

King Alfred the Great (A.D. 849-899) was the first king of the Anglo-Saxons and he is known for his rejection of pagan law in favor of Christian law. His law code served as the seminal foundations of English common law. Significantly, Alfred drew directly from the Mosaic laws. While homosexuality was not mentioned, the death penalty for bestiality was affirmed. Fines were imposed for adultery and pre-marital fornication.

Law 29 - “If any one deceive an unbetrothed woman and sleep with her let him pay for her and have her afterwards to wife. But if the father of the woman will not give her let him render money according to her dowry.”

Law 31 - “And let him who lieth with cattle perish by death.”<sup>60</sup>

After listing forty-eight laws (most of which refer to Exodus 20-22), Alfred explained his rationale for applying Old Testament law (or “dooms”) in his code:

60. *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (His Majesty Commission, 1840), 53.

“These are the dooms which the Almighty God himself spake unto Moses and commanded him to keep and after the only begotten son of the Lord our God that is our Saviour Christ came on earth he said that he came not to break nor to forbid these commandments but with all good to increase them and mercy and humility he taught. Then after his Passion before his Apostles were dispersed throughout all the earth teaching, and while they were yet together many heathen nations they turned to God. When they were all assembled they sent messengers to Antioch and to Syria to teach the law of Christ. But when they understood that it speeded them not, then sent they a letter unto them. Now this is the letter which all the Apostles sent to Antioch and to Syria and to Cilicia which now from heathen nations are turned to Christ. [Following, Alfred quotes the Apostles’ letter included in Acts 15].<sup>61</sup>

Yet, King Alfred would not impose the death penalty in the case of adultery.

“If a man lie with the wife of a twelve hynde man let make bot (payment) to the husband with one hundred and twenty. To a six hynde man let him make bot (payment) with one shillings. To a ceorlish man let him make bot (payment) forty shillings...”<sup>62</sup>

The Anglo-Saxon King Cnut (A.D. 985 – 1035) served

61. Ibid. 59.

62. Ibid. 69.

as King of England, Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden. He further strengthens the law against adultery, although stopped short of the death penalty.

“If during her husband's life a woman lie with another man and it become public let her afterwards be for a worldly shame as regards herself and let her lawful husband have all that she possessed and let her then forfeit both nose and ears and if it be a prosecution and the lad fail let the bishop use his power and doom severely.”<sup>63</sup>

Martin Bucer, a German Reformer that aided strongly in the Reformation is perhaps best known for his book written for the benefit of King Edward VI, *De Regno Christi* (The Kingdom of Christ).

Bucer instructed the king, “Accordingly, in every state sanctified to God capital punishment must be ordered for all... who have committed bloodshed (Ex. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Deut. 19:11-13), adultery (Lev. 20:10), rape (Deut. 22:20-25)...”<sup>64</sup> And again, “In every commonwealth consecrated to Christ the Lord, there should be the penalty of capital punishment for the everyone apprehended in violating the Sixth and Ninth Commandments (Ex. 20:13 and 16), by bloodshed, or false testimony, or calumnious accusation, either personally or through others; or the Seventh Commandment by the ravishing of anyone’s wife,

63. *Ibid.*, 407.

64. Martin Bucer, “De Regno Christi,” *Melanchon and Bucer*, 378-379.



fiancee, or daughter (Ex. 20:14)...”<sup>65</sup> An entire chapter was dedicated to the subject of adultery, and entitled, “Adultery Must Be Punished by Death.”<sup>66</sup>

Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish Presbyterian and arguably the most influential in the development of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, wrote concerning civil punishments,

“That which is morall, and cannot be determined by the wisdome and will of man, must be determined by the revealed will of God in his word; but the punishment of a seducing Prophet... is morall and cannot be determined by the wisdome and will of man: *Ergo*, such a punishing of a seducing Prophet, must be by the revealed will of God in his word. The Proposition is proved 1. Because God only, not *Moses*, nor any other law-giver under him, taketh on him to determine death to be the adulterer’s punishment, Levit. 20. 10. And the same he determineth to be the punishment of willful murther [murder], Exod. 21. 12. *of smiting of the Father or Mother*, v. 15. *of Man-stealing*, vers. 16. *of Sorcery*, Exod. 22. 18. *of Bestiality*. 19. *Of sacrificing to a strange God*, vers. 10. And upon the same reason, God only, not any mortal man, must determine the punishment due to such as seduce soules

65. *Ibid.*, 380-381.

66. *Ibid.*, 330.

to eternal perdition...”<sup>67</sup>

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Archbishop, James Ussher, lists just punishments for sexual crimes in his *Body of Divinity*, including: “whipping for fornication, death for adultery, and other unlawful mixtures” (Lev. 20:10).<sup>68</sup>

In his famous commentary, published as late as 1710, Matthew Henry affirmed the Old Testament civil law on homosexuality in these words:

“The unnatural lusts of sodomy and bestiality (sins not to be mentioned without horror), were to be punished with death, as they are at this day by our law.”<sup>69</sup>

A secular historian not at all favorable to the biblical position, sums up the historical Christian church position on homosexuality this way:

“If we consider such ordinances together with Paul’s vehemence in Romans, Clement’s fulminations, Augustine’s view of sodomy as a kind of treason against the Creator, and the endorsement of the death penalty by such fathers of the church as Tertullian, Eusebius, and John Chrysostom, together with the theologically inspired codes of Justinian and the Visigoths, it is difficult—in fact,

67. Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London: Printed by R. I. For Andrew Crook, 1649), 298. Pages 310 to 333 of this book are headed: “Judicial Laws in their morality oblige Christians.”

68. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1841), 342.

69. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 1:413.

impossible—to accept the view set forth by John Boswell that ‘the peculiar horror which has been associated with male homosexuality in Western culture and the correspondingly violent condemnation of it were products of the twelfth century.’ Here, long before the twelfth century, the most important body of law promulgated in Europe in the early medieval period allowed for the ultimate penalty to be visited on homosexuals.”<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work is not to recommend a specific civil penalty for the sin of homosexuality in any particular state or nation. It is rather to point out that the Gospel of Christ was never meant to dismiss the ethical force of God’s laws and thereby to invalidate the death of Christ for sin (or the transgression of the law). I believe that we have established beyond any doubt the following propositions:

1. Not a single pastor, bishop, elder, abbot, or other leader in the Christian church of any repute in 2000 years has ever approved of the sin of homosexuality.
2. In both Old and New Testaments, and throughout church history, the sin of homosexuality is universally condemned as the very grossest violation of God's law. Therefore, every church pastor and leader must cry out

70. Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization*, 160. see R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 92.

for men and women to repent of this sin and others. The person that gives way to this sin is truly in danger of hell fire (which is far more serious than capital punishment at the hands of the state.)

3. God's law presented in moral and civil form in both Old and New Testament, remains the ethical (or, "the generally equitable") standard by which we may judge the condition of an individual, a family, a church, and a state. No Christian leader who fears God would dare to question the equitableness of God's revealed law in the Scripture.

When large segments of society, political states, and once Christian churches in this world endorse and promote this sin that brought the judgment to the small city-state of Sodom, one wonders if this marks a turning point in human history. If God is still God, and if the Christian faith has represented the truth at the most basic level over two thousand years, is judgment inevitable for these Western nations? And who will escape the city this time? Those who will escape will be those who keep the faith of Christ and the Word of God.