

# **The Signs Of Increased Wickedness**

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## **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

May I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you who make time to read regularly my newsletters and to share with me your comments. Rest assured that I do take time to read each one of your messages. Forgive me if my replies often are brief and terse, consisting of one or two sentences. This is the only way I can process between 100 to 200 messages a day.

Five subscribers asked to have their name removed after reading the section of the last newsletter where I clarify my position regarding the role of women in the church. Considering that the total number of subscribers is over 6500, the number of those who chose to register their disapproval by unsubscribing, is negligible. Yet I am concerned for these few fellow believers. The issue that I see is one of Christian maturity. As mature Christians we ought to be able to read studies which contain some ideas with which we do not agree.

Were I to refuse to read those books or articles with which I do not fully agree, then I am afraid my reading selection would be practically nil. In fact, I would have to throw away most of the books in my library. My experience has been that I have stimulated intellectually especially by those writers with whom I strongly disagree. They have caused me to do some rethinking, and in some instances to modify my positions. The point I am trying to make is that if now and then you find something unacceptable in my newsletters, do not overreact by canceling your subscription. It could be that the very next issue may contain a valuable Bible study for which you will be most grateful.

## **THE REDISCOVERY OF THE SABBATH BY MESSIANIC JEWS**

Our update report on the rediscovery of the Sabbath, this time focuses on the Messianic Jewish movement which has gained prominence during the past thirty years. During this time, hundreds of Messianic Jewish Congregations have been established across the United States and overseas. These congregations belong to one of two major organizations, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations or the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. Messianic Judaism is a fast-growing movement that is bringing the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to many Jews around the world.

During the past two years, I have invited a dozen Messianic Jewish Rabbis to speak at Sabbath conferences held in different parts of the country. Their presentations on the Sabbath have always been most enlightening. At some conferences, the Rabbis demonstrated how their families open and close the Sabbath with a special ceremony by sitting around the family table which, on these special occasions, becomes the family altar. Their ritual is largely adopted from the Jewish tradition with new Christian elements.

Learning how the Sabbath is conceptualized and experienced within the Messianic Jewish community, can be an educational experience for us Adventists. The Sabbath liturgy of Messianic Jews may provide a model that some Sabbatarians may wish to adopt with modifications and innovations. In my view, more needs to be done to develop a meaningful family tradition of Sabbathkeeping that can help to keep alive the significance and experience of the Sabbath.

The rediscovery of the Sabbath among Messianic Jews has been a gradual process. The Messianic Jewish Movement gained momentum in the early seventies, possibly influenced by the events that transpired during the six-days war of 1967. At

that time most of their members were Sundaykeepers. Rabbi Harvey Koelner of the Temple Aron Kodesh, a Messianic Jewish congregation in Lauderdale Lake, Florida, explained to me in a telephone conversation that initially his 500-member congregation had "a split personality." Some members attended Friday night services, as most Jews do today, but the rest attended Sunday services. Gradually, however, his whole congregation became Sabbathkeepers. I understand that the same thing has happened in over 95 percent of the Messianic Jewish congregations as they have come to observe exclusively the Sabbath.

**Recovering the Jewish Roots.** Most Messianic Jews were originally Sundaykeepers largely because their movement was originally sponsored by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches. Surprisingly, Sabbatarian churches have done very little to reach the Jews with the Gospel. I remember meeting with some Messianic Jewish congregations in Chicago in the early eighties in facilities offered them by evangelical churches. Since the mission to the Jews was launched by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches, it is not surprising that initially Messianic Jews were Sundaykeepers. This has also been the case with the Jews for Jesus Movement whose members today are still mostly Sundaykeepers.

What has led Messianic Jewish congregations to rediscover the Sabbath in recent times is their commitment to recover the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Some Messianic Jewish Rabbis have explained to me that in their search for their roots, they discovered that Jesus and the apostles were Jews who observed the law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular. They found that Christianity began as the continuation of Judaism, not as a radical break away from it. Consequently, they came to realize that the acceptance of Jesus as their expected Messiah did not necessitate for them to reject such an important aspect of their Jewish heritage as Sabbathkeeping.

An important lesson can be learned from the Messianic Jews. Christians also need to reexamine the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Judaism and Christianity, law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday. For too long Christians have been taught to view the Cross as the line of demarcation between these sets of contrasts. In recent years, however, numerous scholars have exposed the fallacies of this artificial theological construct. They have come to recognize that the earliest Christians were believing Jews who were "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20).

For believing Jews in New Testament times, it would have been unthinkable to abandon one of the chief precepts of the law, the Sabbath commandment. If Paul had dared to do so, they would have fiercely condemned his temerity, as they did in the case of circumcision. The absence of any echo of controversy regarding the Sabbath is a compelling indication of the continuity of its observance. We can only hope that Dispensationalists and "New Covenant" Christians gradually will come to recognize this historical reality and abandon the artificial distinction they have fabricated between the Old and New Covenant, Judaism and Christianity, Law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday.

Reaching Jews with the Gospel is one of the greatest challenge facing our Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Until now our evangelistic outreach to the Jews has been decidedly unsuccessful, partly because we expect the Jews to renounce their Jewish religious heritage and become part of mainstream Adventism. But there is no reason for Jews to have to abandon their religious heritage. After all Jesus and the apostles were Jews who worshipped in the synagogue according to the custom of the times. The thousand of Jews who responded on the day of Pentecost and afterwards to the messianic proclamation, did not abandon their Jewish heritage, but became believing Jewish.

The Messianic Jewish Movement recognizes the Jewish roots of Christianity and believes that the acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as their expected Messiah, does not necessitate the renouncement of their Jewish religious heritage. Thus, they invite fellow

Jews, not to abandon their religious traditions, but to enrich them through the acceptance of Christ as their Messiah.

I believe that this is an important factor our SDA church needs to consider in developing an outreach strategy to the Jews. We need to be prepared to allow Jews to retain their Jewish heritage, while accepting our SDA fundamental beliefs. This may mean that "Adventist Jews" may conduct their religious services in accordance to the liturgy of the synagogue service, which includes, among other things, several readings from the TORAH (Pentateuch), sharing devotional thoughts, and greater congregational participation.

## THE ENDTIME SIGNS OF INCREASED WICKEDNESS

This is the third and last installment dealing with the endtime signs of opposition to God. In the newsletters 17 and 20 we examined the contemporary fulfillment of four significant signs of opposition to God, namely, (1) Messianic Pretenders, (2) The Antichrist, (3) The Apostasy, and (4) The Evildoer. This newsletter will complete the study of this topic by focusing on three other significant signs of opposition to God which are finding an unprecedented fulfillment today: (1) Increased wickedness, (2) the Age of Appetite, (3) the Age of Sex. We will give some attention to the growing problem of homosexuality in the SDA church.

### 1. Increased Wickedness

**Christ's Prediction.** In His Olivet Discourse, Christ predicted that social wickedness would increase prior to His Return: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matt 24:12, NIV).<sup>37</sup> In the same discourse Jesus exemplified the pre-Advent social wickedness by referring to two periods of Old Testament history, namely, the "days of Noah" and "the days of Lot."

"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. 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. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30; NIV; cf. Matt 24:37-39).

The two examples of Noah's and Lot's times are used by Christ to stress two points. First, the wicked will be overtaken by the sudden and unexpected judgment of His Advent in the same way as the Flood and the destruction of Sodom overtook the people of Noah's and Lot's times. Second, people will act "in the days" before His Second Coming very much the same way as they did "in the days" of Noah and of Lot.

The latter is indicated by the use of the plural form "days of the Son of Man," which denotes the age preceding His Return, as "the days" of Noah and Lot refer to the age before the Flood and the destruction of Sodom. The parallelism is evident. Note that the singular form is used ("on the day"-Luke 17:30) to designate the actual day of Christ's Coming. In other words, by these two examples Jesus illustrates not only the sudden judgment that will come upon impenitent mankind "on the day" of His Return, but also the social conditions that will prevail "in the days" before His Coming.

**Godlessness and Wickedness.** The social conditions of Noah's and Lot's times are described by a series of verbs (imperfect tense) expressing customary actions: they "were eating, drinking, marrying . . . buying and selling, planting and building." None of these activities are wrong in themselves. What is wrong is that the people in those days lived only to satisfy their appetites and material desires. God and godliness had no place in their lives.

In the mad search for pleasure and prosperity, mankind sank into such great depravity that, the Scripture says, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5; cf. 18:20-21). Jesus referred to the godlessness and wickedness of these ancient times to illustrate the alarming social conditions that would prevail before His Return.

**Paul's Prediction.** The importance of this Advent sign was recognized by New Testament believers. Paul, for example, warns Timothy about the godlessness of the last days, saying: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim 3:1-5, NIV).

This shocking prediction of the social wickedness of the last days reads like an accurate description of our time. Obviously Paul already saw the incipient fulfillment of this sign in his time. He mentions in 2 Thessalonians that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (2:7), and warns Timothy to "have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim 3:5), that is, with the evil people just described.

**Intensification.** Though Paul recognized that lawlessness already prevailed, he foresaw an intensification of it before Christ's Return. In 2 Thessalonians he speaks of a pre-Advent climactic apostasy and of the appearance of the Evil Doer. Here in 2 Timothy, Paul predicts that in the last days "there will be terrible times" because "people will be lovers of themselves, . . . rather than lovers of God" (3:1-2, 4, NIV).

The consistent use of the future tense suggests that Paul foresaw a deterioration of social conditions before the End. He indicates this also in verse 13 where he says: "evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." It is in this setting that the prediction of Christ and Paul about increased wickedness in "the last days" takes on added meaning for our time. To appreciate the timeliness of this Advent sign, we shall briefly look into some aspects of the wickedness of our time.

**Surge in World Crime.** A significant fulfillment of "the increase of wickedness" (Matt 24:12, NIV) predicted by Christ can be seen in today's surge in crime in many countries. Among the reasons given by Paul for the "terrible times" to come "in the last days" are that people will be "without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:3-4, NIV). The fulfillment of this prediction is unparalleled today as crime, for example, is skyrocketing out of control throughout the world.

In a report filed by correspondents from several world capitals, US NEWS & WORLD REPORT writes: "Just as in the United States, crime is on the rise in almost every country around the world . . . From London to Moscow to Johannesburg, crime is fast becoming a major menace that is changing the way in which many people live . . . Crime is becoming more violent. More criminals are using firearms, even in nations where gun control is strict." The report continues by surveying the crime problem in various countries of the world. All countries which publish statistical reports show a frightening increase in killings, assaults, rapes, robberies, and burglaries.

**Surge in American Crime.** The United States leads the world not only in science and technology, but, sadly to say, also in violence, crime, and delinquency. Figures released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the year 1980 indicate that in that year 23,000 persons were murdered, 82,000 women were raped, more than 500,000 persons were robbed, and 650,000 plus were assaulted.

Violent crimes have quadrupled in America during the last thirty years. To bring home the intensity of violent crime in America today, US NEWS & WORLD REPORT gives the following "Clock Ticks" statistics: "A murder occurs every 23 minutes; a forcible

rape occurs every 6 minutes; a robbery occurs every 58 seconds; an aggravated assault occurs every 48 seconds; a motor vehicle is stolen every 28 seconds; a burglary occurs every 8 seconds."

The unprecedented rise of violent crimes in America is reflected in the population explosion of State and Federal prisons. From about 200,000 in 1970, the inmate population has grown to almost two millions today. This alarming increase of violent crime is causing a paralyzing fear in the American society. "Fear, pure and simple, is behind the new advocacy of the death penalty," writes TIME.

**Conclusion.** The escalation of various forms of crime, which is causing a paralyzing fear in many parts of the world, represents in our view a significant fulfillment of Christ's prediction regarding the increased wickedness before His Return. Many persons today, as Christ predicted, are "fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:26). The frightening increase in wickedness points to the impending judgment which Christ will soon execute upon evildoers at His Coming.

## **(2) The Age of Appetite**

Another important social condition given by Christ as a characteristic sign of the age preceding His Second Coming is the indulgence in appetite, gluttony, and drunkenness. "Eating and drinking" as if there was no tomorrow was characteristic of the days of Noah and Lot, and, according to Christ, so "will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). Paul confirms Christ's prediction when he says: "in the last days . . . men will be lovers of self, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:2-4).

In every age there have been pleasure-seekers whose main goal in life has been to satisfy their appetites. Today, however, this hedonistic trend has greatly increased because, as a result of scientific and technological advancements, many persons, especially in developed countries, enjoy more leisure time and economic prosperity than at any other period of history.

A generation ago most people had to work so much for so little that little money, time and energy were left for pleasure-seeking. Today the situation has drastically changed as more and more people can enjoy increased personal income and more free time, which are often spent in eating, drinking, and pleasure-seeking.

**Indulgence in Eating.** The paradox of our time is that while lack of food decimates millions of persons in poor countries, too much eating devastates the health of millions in affluent societies. According to the American Medical Association, 40 percent of the American population is overweight. The stored fat of adult Americans is estimated by anthropologist George Armelagos of the University of Massachusetts at 2.3 trillion pounds-about 14.3 pounds of fat for every person in America 18 and over. Armelagos estimates that such an amount of fat could provide "enough energy to fuel 900,000 automobiles for 12,000 miles for one year."

Millions of overeaters today are worried by the health hazards of their overweight, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart and kidney diseases and emotional trauma. To shed the excess weight, billions of dollars are spent each year on diet pills, books, weight-control programs, and in some cases, surgery.

Weight-control programs have become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Weight Watchers International, for example, according to U.S. New & World Report" conducts 17,000 lectures a week for more than 550,000 dieters in the U.S. and 28 other countries." Another organization, Overeaters Anonymous, "has more than 100,000 members in 5,600 groups in the U.S. and in 54 countries." Its aim is to help people "stop compulsive overeating."

**Food Consumption.** Eating and drinking have become today both the pastime and the problem of the rich minority of the world. North Americans, Europeans, and

Japanese devour an unfair share of the world's available food. Americans, for example, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, consume annually 1,463 pounds of food per person of which 624 pounds are animal products. This represents five times the annual food consumption per person in developing countries.

The difference between rich and poor countries is even more glaring when one compares the per capita meat consumption. For example, the per capita annual meat consumption is 259 pound in Australia, 245 in the United States, 237 in Argentina, 207 in Canada. In developing countries, however, meat consumption is minimal if not totally absent.

Considering that it takes seven to ten pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef, countries with high meat consumption indirectly consume a much larger quantity of food. The livestock of the rich countries, according to a report of the United Nations, eats as much grain as do all the people of India and China. This means that to satisfy the craving of rich nations for meat, millions of tons of grain, which could feed the hungry, are fed to livestock. This fact brings home the timeliness of Jesus' prediction that before His Coming many would be obsessed with "eating and drinking."

**Indulgence in Drinking.** Drinking must have been a problem in Noah's time, because soon after the Flood Noah himself got drunk—a hint perhaps of the influence his age left on him. Jesus said, "so will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). That drinking is a major social problem needs no demonstration. The news media confront us every day with the tragic consequences of drinking. Most people, however, may not be aware of the extent of the problem.

A Global Problem. Generally, it is assumed that drinking is a problem primarily in industrialized nations. This assumption, however, is not correct. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that "alcohol-related problems constitute an important obstacle to the socioeconomic development of a large number of developing countries and, in addition, are likely to overwhelm their health resources unless appropriate measures are taken."

The increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages in recent years has been staggering in most countries of the world. According to the WHO report, "In 25 countries with fairly complete statistics, annual per capita consumption of alcohol increased by between 30 and 500 percent." The report lists among the major alcohol-related problems, "crime, traffic accidents, absenteeism and, as a consequence, low productivity." Alcohol is implicated "in 13 to 50 percent of rapes, 24 to 72 percent of assaults and 28 to 86 percent of homicides."

Statistics hardly convey the human anguish and misery cause by drinking. Millions of lives and homes around the world are affected. In America, for example, alcoholism victimizes over ten million persons and "is a chief contributing factor to 75 percent of the divorces, 60 percent of the fatal automobile accidents, 50 percent of the homicides, and one-third of the suicides." About 30,000 persons are killed every year by drunk drivers, which is far more than those killed in all other forms of accidents.

Drunk driving, according to NEWSWEEK, has become "a national epidemic, . . . a socially accepted form of murder. More Americans have died at the hands of drunk drivers during the past two years than were killed in Vietnam; on average, about three Americans are killed and 80 are injured by drunk drivers every hour of the day. The drunken slaughter over the past decade is a staggering one-quarter of a million Americans—the entire population of Rochester, New York. Safety experts say that one out of two Americans will be victimized by a drunk driver in his lifetime.

**Conclusion.** The excessive eating and drinking of our time, which are causing untold human suffering and deaths, represent a unique endtime sign. They tell us that we are living at the time predicted by Christ, when, as in the days of Noah, many are abandoning any self-restraint in their search for self-gratification. They show us that we

are living "in the last days" predicted by Paul when many would be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:4).

### **(3) The Age of Sex**

**Sexual Indulgence.** Jesus characterized the days of Noah not only as an age of appetite ("eating and drinking") but also as an age of sex: they were "marrying and being given in marriage" (Luke 17:27, NIV). To marry and be married (the passive in the case of the woman) are perfectly moral acts. Marriage is a divine institution. The problem in the day of Noah and of Lot was the abuse of marriage. The Greek imperfect tense "they were marrying" suggests repeated marriages by the same person.

Possibly Jesus implies not only disregard for God's order of monogamy but also sexual indulgence in general. This is suggested by the description of the age of Noah as the time when "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen 6:2, KJV). The text suggests indiscriminate marrying of several "wives" merely to satisfy lustful desires.

What was true in the days of Noah was even more true in the days of Lot. Genesis records that all the men of Sodom, "both young and old," surrounded Lot's house and shouted "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them" (Gen 19:5, NIV). It is shocking to read that not only the "old" but also the "young" were practicing homosexuality. Jude reminds us of God's punishment upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because they "acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust" (Jude 7).

**The Sexual Revolution.** Jesus pointed to the sexual sins and moral depravity of the days of Noah and Lot to characterize the age preceding His Return. Similarly Paul predicted that "in the last day" many will be "without natural affection, . . . incontinent" (2 Tim 3:3 KJV). Our generation is witnessing the fulfillment of this endtime sign in an unprecedented way. The sexual revolution of our time has no parallel in history.

Today sex is idolized and marketed through films, television, pop songs, pornographic magazines, and advertisements. The "sexual appeal" has become an important factor influencing the production and sale of goods, whether they be cars or clothes. To look "sexy" has become a prevailing aspiration. For the first time in history, sexual organs and intercourse are displayed for public enjoyment in pornographic magazines and books sold in public newsstands.

Sex shows are included today among the tourist attractions of major European cities. Sexual services are also openly advertised in many countries where prostitution is legal. In America, prostitution is illegal but "full services" are provided in new-style body shops and massage parlors with exotic names such as "Ecstasy," "Erotica," and "Velvet Touch." "Adult" bookstores, sex shows and nudity on stage are fast spreading across the country.

**The Impact of the Sexual Revolution.** The total impact of the sexual revolution on our permissive society is hard to estimate. Marital relationships are being undermined as more and more husbands and wives seek for extra sexual experiences by engaging in extramarital sex.

In 1974 The REDBOOK Magazine conducted what is alleged to be one of the most thorough investigations of the American female. The survey of over 100,000 women, supervised by sociologist Robert Bell of Temple University, indicates that "about one third of all married women who took part in the survey report having sexual relations with men other than their husbands." The percentage increases to almost half (47%) among wage-earning wives. Considering that men have always been more promiscuous than women, we can safely assume that the percentage of American married men having extramarital relations is even higher.

A natural consequence of marital infidelities is the shocking rise of the divorce rate not only in America but in many other countries. Even though the United States does not lead the world in divorces (Sweden is ahead), it is distressing to note that the rate of divorce has increased to about 50 per cent of marriages. In some parts of California the rate is one divorce for every marriage.

What this means is that approximately 50 percent of American marriages contracted today terminate in divorce. Truly, as Paul predicted, many today have become "lovers of self, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:2, 3). When their marital partner fails to satisfy their social, financial, emotional, or sexual expectations, they prefer to simply scissor rather than to mend their marital relationship.

**Marriage Aberrations.** To maintain sexual freedom and avoid the trauma of a divorce, there are some who enter into "open marriages" which allow them the freedom to have sexual intimacy with other persons. Others engage in mate swapping, that is husband and wife agree to exchange partners with another couple for the purpose of having sexual relations. The REDBOOK survey indicates that 4 percent of the wives who responded to the survey had tried mate swapping. Some sociologists estimate that 2.5 million couples in America exchange partners on a regular basis. Still others join "free-love" communes that espouse free sex. Others engage in "group sex."

**Incest.** Perhaps the most appalling form of sexual gratification is that which victimizes children. Sometimes the child molester is a stranger; in many cases, however, he is a member of the family. The latter case is known as incest. Reliable statistics on the incidence of sexual abuse of children are not available. Most authorities agree, however, that what is being reported is only the tip of the iceberg. In a college survey, 20 percent of the women and 9 percent of the men reported that they had been sexually victimized, many of them by their parents. "In the past year or two," write NEWSWEEK, "therapists and sociologists have concluded that incest verges on an epidemic . . . 'We are talking about a major public-health problem on the same scale as diabetes,' says Judith Lewis Herman, a Massachusetts psychiatrist."

**Homosexuality.** Another important form of sexual perversion common in our time is homosexuality. The first mention of this sin is found in Genesis 19:5 where we are told that the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded him by force to hand over to them two male visitors that had arrived at his house so that they could "have sex with them." The name of the city became descriptive of male prostitution ("sin of sodomy"), which is condemned by the prophets, Jesus, and the authors of the NT ( Deut 23:17; 2 Kings 23:7; Is 1:10; Ezek 16:46; Matt 11:23; Rev 11:8; Jude 7). Sodom and Gomorrah became the byword for male prostitution and and serve as examples of God's wrath on such sin.

The Biblical condemnation of homosexuality as sin and perversion of God's intended function of sex, is vigorously attacked by aggressive organizations such as the Gay Liberation Movement. These organizations have come out of their closets and turned their former shames into militant aggression. With much skill and determination they have succeeded in promoting homosexuality as simply another legitimate form of sexual relations. It is not surprising that they should have succeeded in our sex-obsessed society in winning considerable professional and popular approval. No amount of rationalization, however, can legitimize what God unequivocally condemns as "abomination."

It is difficult to estimate how widespread homosexuality and lesbianism are in our society, because many are still afraid to come out into the open for fear of harming their job security and receiving social rejection. The renowned Kinsey's study of American sexuality, published forty years ago, reports that 37 percent of male and 13 percent of females had had at least one orgasmic homosexual experience. This study has come under considerable criticism because of its formulation, implementation, and interpretation.



Kinsey researchers have double-checked their findings in several different ways and concluded that, if anything, their 37 percent estimate was too low, since possibly as many as one half of the adult male population had had at least one homosexual experience. Obviously, the percentage of habitual homosexuals is much smaller.

Whatever the exact percentage of homosexuals might be, their presence and influence is unquestionably increasing. NEWSWEEK reports that in the United States "hundreds of gay groups operate on campuses around the country, providing everything from housing advice to incoming gay freshmen, to an emerging old-boy network to place gay graduates. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, gay events are as commonplace as the homecoming football game. Perhaps 1,000 gays and lesbians live openly on the 40,000-student campus.

The prevailing climate of tolerance in colleges and communities encourages this kind of experimentation. When some politicians, sport, and film stars openly profess to be homosexual, it is not surprising that some young people want to experiment, too.

Some may reason that if even ordained ministers are homosexual and if gay "churches" are springing up, then homosexuality must not be sinful after all. This reasoning is obviously fallacious because no amount of social tolerance and approval can remove God's condemnation and final judgment upon those who indulge "in unnatural lust" (Jude 7). Jude reminds us that the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah "serve as an example" of the punishment that awaits those who act likewise (Jude 7).

**Homosexuality in the SDA Church.** Our own SDA church is not immune from the influence of homosexuals and lesbians. The 1998 winter issue of SCANNER, a newsletter published by the young adults of the Glendale City SDA Church, in Glendale, California, claims that "going by conservative estimates, there are at least 5,000 gay Adventist in Southern California" (p. 9). Though this figure may be inflated, it does suggest that the number of "gay Adventist" may be much larger than most people would have imagined.

The growing influence of homosexuals in the Adventist church, is evident even in Adventist discussion groups in the Internet, where some gay "Adventists" are making a determined effort to explain away as cultural conditioned the Biblical indictments of homosexuality. A national magazine called "SDA Kinship" is published by so-called "Adventist" homosexuals and lesbians. The magazine announces special events such as gay campmeeting and gay marriages.

The 1998 Winter issue of SCANNER carries an "eye opening" interview with Donald Freedman, who is an active member of the Glendale City SDA Church and belongs "to an increasing number of Adventists who are open about being gay. A gay Adventist" (p. 9). This statement caught me by surprise because I never knew that it is possible to be a gay and an Adventist at the same time. If by being "being gay" SCANNER means living with a male partner, then I do not see how the Glendale City SDA Church can retain as a member someone who commits "shameless acts with men" (Rom 1:27) which the Bible clearly condemns as "abomination" (Lev 18:22; 20:13).

The interview does not explain whether or not Mr. Freedman is a practicing homosexual. But the attempt made to prove that the Bible does not necessary condemn "the loving relationship between two people of the same sex," suggests that Mr. Freedman may still be involved in a sexual relationship with a male partner. A look at the rationale used to explain away the Biblical indictment of homosexuality is instructive.

The reasoning is that the Biblical condemnation of homosexuality is culturally conditioned. "Scripture comes to us laden with the culture of the time it was written in. We have to understand those culture in order to understand how to properly interpret the text" (p. 11). The implication is that if the Bible was re-written today when our culture has come to accept homosexuality as a "variant" lifestyle, then the Biblical texts in question would be condoning rather than condemning homosexuality.

Is this possible? Obviously not! This reasoning fails to recognize that homosexuality was prevalent and socially accepted in Bible times. We have examples of male prostitution, not only in Sodom and Gomorrah where both young and old engaged in it, but also within the precincts of the Temple. We are told that King Josiah "broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes which were in the house of the Lord" (2 King 22:7). This means that what God did in destroying with fire Sodom and Gomorrah and making them "an example" for future generations because they "indulged in unnatural lust" (Jude 7), can hardly be explained in the light of the culture of the time which tolerated homosexuality.

The moral principles that God has established to govern functional and sexual distinctions between men and women are not conditioned by culture. God does not condemn homosexuality as an "abomination" in one culture, and then condone it as "variant life-style" in a later culture. Were this true, then God Himself would be culturally conditioned. The truth is that culture conditions people but not God's moral principles.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Freeman correlates homosexuality with women's role in the church. He writes: "In our more recent times the issue of women within the church has been an issue that has been hotly debated. That is almost laughable in Adventism, where our own prophet was a woman who spoke from the pulpit very frequently and was involved in many areas of church life. I see the same kind of things used with respect to people who are gay. People really have to strain to find passages in Scripture that put down gay people" (p. 11).

There are two major fallacies in this argument. First, the role of Ellen White as a prophet does not imply that she served in a male headship role in her home or the church. While her husband, James, was alive she always deferred to him the privilege of preaching on Sabbath morning. Furthermore, the role of a prophet is different from that of a priest/elder/pastor. A prophet is a communicator of God's will, and God communicates His will through men and women irrespective of gender. On the other hand, a priest or pastor serves in a headship, representative role. This explains why in Bible times women served as prophetesses, but not as priests in the OT or elders in the NT.

Second, it is not true that people have to strain the Bible to find condemnations of homosexuality. I find the following passages self-explanatory: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev 18:22). "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, and their blood is upon them" (Lev 20:15). "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. . . . The men gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their errors" (Rom 1:26). "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7). One wonder if the Bible could have condemned homosexuality with a stronger language.

The attempt by a "gay Adventist" to correlate homosexuality with women's ordination is significant, because it proves the truthfulness of what I wrote 12 years ago in **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**, namely: "THE REJECTION OF THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN OPENS THE DOOR FOR THE REJECTION OF THE SEXUAL ROLE DISTINCTIONS."

Some people who read this statement 12 years ago accused me of using scare tactics by correlating women's ordination with homosexuality. Some readers of my last newsletter have told me the same thing. Such an accusation is totally untrue. My intent is not to scare anyone, but to alert people as to what has happened in those churches that pioneered the ordination of women. It was not long before some of these churches began accepting and ordaining homosexuals. The very fact that now "gay Adventists" appeal to the women's ordination to legitimize their lifestyle and acceptance in the church, only

serves to prove that what has happened in other churches is gradually making inroads in our SDA church as well. This development validates what I wrote 12 years ago.

**Abortion.** Perhaps the most tragic consequence of the sexual obsession and permissiveness of our society is the appalling number of unborn babies being aborted in every country of the world. The increase has been facilitated by the legalization of abortion in many countries. In Denmark and Sweden, even minors can have abortions on request-without parental approval.

The number of legal abortions performed in the United States is about 1.5 million per year. These constitute one fourth of all the pregnancies. In other words, in the United States, one of every four unborn babies is deliberately eliminated. Statistics from many countries are difficult to obtain, but the ongoing abortion debate in the world press indicates that abortion is becoming a serious problem in many countries.

This incredible suppression of unborn children raises a disturbing question: How can such a thing happen in Christian countries such as the United States? An important answer is to be found in the prostitution of the divine gift of sex: a gift God gave to humanity to procreate and to enable marital partners to become symbolically one by expressing and experiencing total, exclusive, and mutual commitment in self-giving of themselves to one another.

The sexual revolution has attacked this divine purpose for sex, promoting it instead as a means for self-gratification. Sexual partners, whether of the same or the opposite sex, whether adult or innocent children, are viewed as disposable objects needed to achieve momentary satisfaction. This "free love" philosophy has greatly influenced especially young people, many of whom have come to regard sexual intercourse as a socially accepted way to have fun.

The shocking increase in premarital and extramarital intercourse has several tragic consequences. First, there is the terrible loss of the sacred meaning of the sexual act, a beautiful symbol of the total, unreserved self-giving and commitment of husband and wife to one another. This beautiful, sacred meaning is lost in promiscuous sexual relations.

Second, there is the human anguish and misery of those who experience unwanted pregnancies. Over 1.1 million American teenagers become pregnant every year, causing them either to have abortions or to interrupt their education and to become a burden to their parents and society.

Third, there is the tragedy of over 1.5 million unborn American babies killed every year, one third of whom are babies of teenagers. When one adds to this figure the many more million unborn babies aborted every year around the world, it is mind-boggling to think what price potential babies are paying for the irresponsible sexual conduct of millions of persons. It is evident that not all abortions represent irresponsible sexual behavior. There are cases such as incest, rape, or health which may make abortion the only viable solution.

How long, one wonders, will God allow this evil to continue? The Scripture reminds us that there is a limit to God's mercy (Gen 15:16). As the Lord brought judgment upon the wicked generations of Noah's and Lot's times, the signs of increasing wickedness just surveyed in this Bible study give us reason to believe that soon He will come again to execute judgment upon the evildoers and to restore order, peace, love, and justice upon this earth.

**A REMINDER:** If you have found this newsletter informative, be sure to tell your friends that they also can receive it free of charge. As a result of your promotional efforts, over 6500 persons have already subscribed to this newsletter.

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