

The city of Sodom is one of the most infamous of all the cities mentioned in the Bible. It is repeatedly used in various books of the Bible as both an example of an evil people and an example of God's judgment. Genesis 13:13 tells us that the people of Sodom were extremely wicked and sinful. Genesis 19 records the events involving two angels sent to Sodom. The men of Sodom, thinking that the two angels are just men visiting the city, tried unsuccessfully to rape them. The account ends with the Lord raining down burning sulfur and completely destroying Sodom because of the wickedness of the people living there.

Because of the strong desire of the men of Sodom to have sex with the angels sent to Sodom, many people have concluded that homosexual sex must have been the sin that God was judging in Sodom. So strongly has this belief been held that the word sodomy was created to refer to homosexual sex. However, nowhere in the Genesis account of Sodom are the sins God was judging explicitly identified. Even though the Genesis account is vague, we have not been left entirely in the dark as to why God judged Sodom. In a prophecy of judgment against Jerusalem that God gave to Ezekiel, God said the following: "This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were proud, had abundance of food, and enjoyed carefree ease, but they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and committed abominable crimes before me. So, when I saw it, I removed them." (Ezekiel 16:49-50, NET)

We can only speculate as to what the abominable crimes were. It seems likely that there was a lot of sin of many types happening in Sodom. In the context of scripture, it is reasonable to assume that homosexual sex may have been part of the sin that God was judging when he destroyed Sodom. However, the only sins that God chooses to specifically mention to Ezekiel as being sins of Sodom are pride and having abundant food and carefree ease without giving help to the poor and needy. This does not mean that sins not mentioned are not important or were not present in Sodom. However, this passage gives an interesting insight into God's priorities.

It is hard to imagine that there has ever been a society where the abundance of food and the enjoyment of carefree ease have been more commonplace than they are in the Western world today. These two things have become defining features of the Western world. Although abundant time and material resources are available to most people in wealthy, Western nations, almost no one in these nations makes caring for the poor and needy a higher priority than his or her own luxury and comfort. Vast amounts of time and money are poured by all segments of Western society into many things which are far less important than the desperate needs of the poor and needy of the world. Some specific examples are entertainment systems, big houses, expensive clothes, the latest fashions, unnecessary books and magazines, movies, junk food, music, fancy

furniture, cable and satellite television, jewelry, cosmetics, expensive vehicles, electronic gadgets, sports, recreational vehicles, hobbies, expensive food, decorations, pets, eating out and unnecessary travel. This list, although far from complete, gives a broad sample of unimportant things that are almost always given priority over the basic needs of other people.

Although many people do give some money and occasionally even some time to help the poor and needy of the world, this giving is almost never the result of significant sacrifice that has involved either the giving up of comfort or the giving up of all luxury. Regardless of how much money and time you give to help the poor and needy, if you choose to use your resources for your own comfort and luxury then you demonstrate that, like the people of Sodom, your concern for the poor and needy is less than your concern for your own abundance and carefree ease. The idea of a person who lives in abundance and carefree ease but claims to be genuinely concerned about the poor is as farcical as the idea of a doctor who claims to be genuinely concerned about others but drives by a serious accident on his way to play golf and justifies not stopping because he has already helped people that day. Choosing not to meet serious needs when we are able to do so is undeniable evidence of indifference to them.

Sadly, this selfish indifference to the needs of others has not only become a defining characteristic in our society but it has become a defining

characteristic among those who claim to be committed followers of Jesus. To varying extents, this way of life is accepted as normal and is even expected in the vast majority of churches in the Western world. However, such an attitude is completely contrary to the message of Jesus and the teaching of scripture. Jesus taught that the second of the two greatest commands of God is to love your neighbor as you love yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). A significant portion of our neighbors around the world have needs that cause suffering beyond what most of us can imagine. Despite the many opportunities we have to help, the majority of people in the Western world who consider themselves genuine followers of Jesus prove by how they use their resources that they love themselves far more than their needy neighbors around the world. In 1 John 3:17, John asks how the love of God can even be in such a person.

If God was willing to so dramatically judge the people of Sodom, in large part because of their selfish indifference to the needs of the poor and needy, how can we hope to please God and escape his judgment if we live by the same priorities that he condemned Sodom for? God has made his priorities in regards to possessions clear in commands such as “sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Luke 12:33, NET). In the context of counting the costs of discipleship, Jesus said “In the same way therefore not one of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33, NET).

The self-serving attitude towards resources that exists within the Western church is entirely contrary to God’s will. The God who destroyed Sodom is the same God who said “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven—only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23, NET). This passage makes it clear that no matter how emphatically we call Jesus Lord and even if we do great things in his name, if we choose to live in rebellion to God, our eternal fate will be the same as the fate of the people of Sodom.

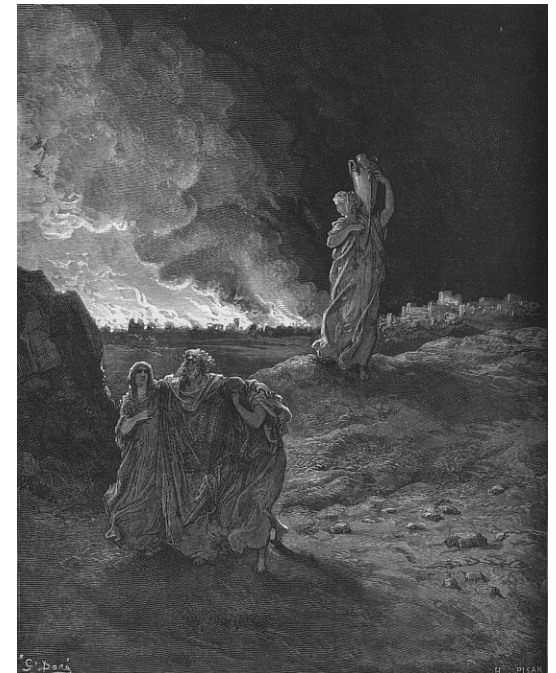
Scripture quotations are from the New English Translation ([www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org)).

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## The Sin Of Sodom Is The Sin Of The Western Church



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