

“Colorado Defies the Supreme Court, Renews Persecution of a Christian Baker” by David French, *National Review*, August 15, 2018. “Identifying the Sin of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49-50” by Brian Neal Peterson, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, June 2018.

I na Duley Ogdon was disappointed when plans for her speaking at Christian conferences were thwarted by the need to care for her invalid father and a young son. She turned her disappointment into a poem on ever-present ministry: “Here for all your talent you may surely find a need, here reflect the bright and Morning Star; Even from your humble hand, the Bread of Life may feed, Brighten the corner where you are.” Set to music, it was a favorite at Billy Sunday revivals and an oft-recorded pop song of useful kindness.

Long before she wrote her words, Another’s words were written down: “Give to those who ask. Don’t turn them away. You’ve heard it said, ‘Love your neighbors, hate your enemies’, but I say to you, love your enemies, too”. Jesus cited the misuse of religious texts so as to move his hearers to the truth. He also urged them: “Go the second mile”.

But, those who should know better, taught a Christian cake baker, Jack Phillips, that, to “love enemies”, to “go the second mile”, to use his talent for a gay wedding cake, would be a sin, even though “second mile” kindness would be no more an approval of gay marriage than Jesus’ “second mile” lesson approved of whatever a centurion was up to.

Other bakers were available. But LGBT bullies demanded that this Christian baker violate his conscience or be sued into financial ruin. Violating conscience – even if it’s misinformed – is painful, and it can be psychologically and spiritually harmful. Sadly, Phillips didn’t realize that, in just such a tight spot, Jesus’ hospitality hits the spot.

David French was born and reared in a recently desegregated state and attended a college that was “biblically” segregated by race when it was founded. The misused “proof texts” back then, are still in the Bible, but usually they’re no longer misused. Yet, when French and his wife lovingly adopted a black daughter from Ethiopia, the alt-right self-righteously ridiculed them as “Cuckservatives”.

Even since the Supreme Court decided, by a 7 to 2 margin, to uphold Phillips’ rights, the Colorado Civil Rights Division continues to act as Justice Kennedy said it had acted – with religious animus. Harvard Law-trained, French observes: “With its [recent] probable-cause finding, the Colorado Civil Rights Division demonstrates it’s as foolish as it is malicious”, and that, it’s latest legal assault against Phillips “is based on nothing more than a bad-faith complaint from an angry troll” who’s demanding cakes with dildos, transgender symbols and Satan-worship. “It hasn’t cured its devotion to double standards. And by seeking to punish Phillips when the expressive message of the proposed cake is crystal clear, the Division has only strengthened his First Amendment claim.”

Brian Peterson teaches at another Christian school that had been, “biblically”, racially segregated. And rival Christians of that day saw its basic theology as “heretical”. Today, Peterson says that Christians who affirm “homosexual lifestyles”, his words, are heretical “self-professed ‘evangelicals’”. Misrepresenting them further, he calls their approach, “the non-sexual interpretation of Genesis 19”, as if they deny that any rapes were intended. He argues, too, that he, but not they, see a “sexual component” in Ezekiel 16.

His school’s affiliation is said to be America’s “oldest Pentecostal denomination”, but even its 1886 founding is rather late in Christian history. And, it, too, has had its splits – including over snake handling. Flux is nothing new in Christian history. And neither is the progressive revelation that spans the Scriptures and continues through yet more light.

In this ETS essay, Peterson rummages Ezekiel, looking for what is today’s same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage phenomena and he “finds” what he seeks in the vile attempted rapes at Sodom. But, no less solid a biblical scholar than a former president of the ETS, repeatedly confirmed: “There is nothing in the Old Testament that corresponds to homosexuality as we understand it today.” I cited this eminent scholar and his fellow scholars’ agreement in my prior criticism of Peterson’s attempt to make his anti-gay case in a previous issue of the ETS journal. Cf. *Review*, Summer 2016

Peterson claims that the “affirming” scholars on Sodom’s sin – exhibited in Genesis 19 and condemned in Ezekiel 16 – are “contextually, rhetorically, and exegetically flawed”. But, what’s flawed is his 21st-Century projection of “homosexuals” into the mob in Genesis 19 and his failure to recognize today’s version of “strangers” whose welfare is the concern of the invective in Ezekiel 16. His “gay” mob is anachronistic but Sodom’s hatred of “the other” is not. Peterson’s deposited “takeaway” is “contextually, rhetorically, and exegetically flawed”. It’s the opposite of exegesis. He imposes today’s same-sex orientation and same-sex relationship into that mob and he misses what’s still seen today as hateful prejudice against “the other”. He does this for rhetorical purposes. How much longer will it take for today’s abusers of the Sodom story to stop abusing what they call today’s “Sodomites” to see that the intended violence by means of gang-raping the male aliens at the door of another alien was to shame and dominate? It was not to find a date or to marry.

Instead of wrestling with arguments against his anachronism, he distorts the Sodom story into a matter of anatomical parts by which the animosity was to be inflicted. By reductionism and extrapolation, he links it with any and all same-sex couples today.

He complains that, “affirming” scholars “have missed the focus of Ezekiel which centers on both the social and the sexual nature of Sodom’s sin”. They haven’t. But, he misses the “sexual nature of Sodom’s sin”. It’s not homosexual orientation or marriage. There’s a “heterosexual component” to most rapes, but he wouldn’t zero in on that. He’d zero in on the evil of rape, itself.

If Peterson and ETS editors weren’t so bent on an antigay agenda, they’d buck their ecclesiastical systems’ economic and social consequences. But, in 2018, to do so is still too expensive. Yet it’s the same challenge their forebears were up against in debates over slavery, interracial marriage, segregation, women’s rights, etc. A few showed Christian courage and paid a big price. But, most didn’t push back until it was politically, economically, and socially, safe to do so. Still, the ever-uphill climb of our call under God’s amazing grace is a gracious welcome without self-righteousness.

