

The Hermeneutical Spiral

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2 Peter 2:8

(NA 27 th ed.)	(NASB)
βλέμματι γὰρ καὶ ἀκοῇ	1 for by what he saw and heard
ὁ δίκαιος	2 <i>that</i> righteous man,
ἐγκατοικῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς	3 while living among them,
	4 felt <i>his</i> righteous soul
	5 tormented
ἡμέραν ἐξ ἡμέρας	6 day after day
ψυχὴν δικαίαν	7
ἀνόμοις ἔργοις	8 by <i>their</i> lawless deeds
ἐβασάνιζεν·	9

In NASB, italicized words have no corresponding Greek word. Line 4, “felt,” with line 5, relates to line 9. The rest of line 4 relates to line 7. “Because of what was seen and heard by the righteous man, while dwelling among them day after day, his righteous soul by lawless deeds was being tormented.” Whew.

The first word relates to *blepō*, “to see,” but is a noun, “what is seen.” *Akoē* is a noun from “to hear;” think “acoustics.” Line 2 is an adjective, “the righteous,” which in line 7 modifies *psuchē*, “soul.” *Nomos* means “law;” with the alpha privative is *a-nomos*, lawless. *Ergon* is “deeds;” think “erg” or “synergy.” *Basanizō*, “to torment,” is related to “testing.” “Basanite” was used to test gold. Whew.

To teach the hermeneutical spiral (google it), I have my class read Genesis 19. We meet Lot in the depraved city of Sodom. After a hellish night cowering in his house while degenerates threatened to gang-rape his guests, he was still reluctant to leave. Angels had to drag him out by the hand. Even then,

he wanted to stay in a nearby town. I ask the class how this portrays Lot's character. What sort of person chooses to live there? I also ask, what is the sin of Sodom? Of course, they say homosexuality.

We then spiral out to Isa 1:10 – 12, Jer 23:14, and Ezek 16:49. The prophets, looking at the same story, apparently considered “sodomy” to include social oppression, a corrupt court system, arrogance, and complacency to the plight of the needy. My students scratch their heads over this. So we spiral back in to Genesis and reconsider. What do we find?

Lot was a sojourner. Together with other vulnerable groups like the poor, the widow, and the orphan, sojourners in a just society should be especially protected. (This was an ethic even ancient pagans shared.) So Genesis shows how the powerless were treated in Sodom. Where were the lords of the city? Would no one restrain this evil? Who did they think they were to fear no reprisal? My class begins to see that the story treats weightier issues than what first grabs our attention. Insofar as sex goes, Jeremiah called them adulterers! (The type scene—see Josh 2:3, Jdg 19:25—suggests that the salient issue is intimidation and domination, rather than homosexual lust *per se*.)

Then we spiral out to 2 Pet 2:8. Lot was a righteous man? Tormented by their evil? Are you kidding? Did the author even read Genesis? Spiral in. Angels sought for the righteous and found Lot warding visitors in the square. He alone offered shelter and risked the reprobates' rage by barring their way and urging them to turn from evil. So—the New Testament has a point!

Then we spiral out to Luke 17:28ff. Jesus sees in Sodom a picture of the end of the world. What? Where is that in the text? Well, once more we spiral in,

and find Gen 19:31. Imagine looking down from a cave at smoke pluming from the ruin. Lot's daughter observed, "there is not a man on earth." Genesis 19 really does foreshadow the end of the world. So says Jesus.

Speaking of the final judgment, if those Sodomites had encountered Christ they would have been saved. They will rise up and condemn those who reject him. Ordinary religious people like the Jews of Capernaum, who have no desire for Jesus, are in more desperate spiritual peril than the men of Sodom were (Matt 11:23ff). So says Jesus.

How then would you preach the story? "Homosexuality is bad so don't do it" leaves strugglers hopeless and worse sinners than the rest. And the rest can ignore Genesis 19, since it isn't relevant to them. Right?

Wrong! We all are distressed by unrelenting proclivities. Has your sexuality ever spun out of control? How well do you bridle it? Sodom shows what happens with no restraint, calling us all to mortify pathologies like addiction to pornography, unrealistic expectations of our spouses, or escapist sexual fantasies. Even the righteous need supernatural help to be extricated from sources of temptation. Are we complacent and arrogant like Sodom? Do injustices bother us? Do we bully and intimidate to get our way? The text presents a challenge to constantly examine ourselves in many ways, and to live ethically and compassionately—like Lot—until the end.

Something to think about.