

JEAN CALVIN (1509-1564), PROTESTANT REFORMER, THEOLOGIAN AND WRITER. Born in Noyon, France, Jean Calvin was the younger son of a canon lawyer. Both his family and one of his father's patrons and friends, the bishop of Noyon, prepared him early to take up an ecclesiastical career. He received an excellent education at the University of Paris, and at law institutes in Orléans and Bourges. Later, after his father's death in 1531, Calvin studied Greek and Hebrew in Paris, and began at this time to turn away from the Roman Catholicism of his childhood towards the new Protestant thinking, and specifically towards the ideas of Luther. After his involvement in the Parisian Protestant movement and religious unrest of 1533, Calvin left Paris, resigned all his Roman Catholic ecclesiastical offices and settled in Basle, Switzerland, the heartland of Protestantism. It was here that he wrote and published *Institutio Religionis Christianae* (1536). Later that year he arrived in Geneva, and was instrumental in spreading the Protestant message. Infighting with other Protestant sects, however, led him to retreat to Strassburgh, where he served as minister to a French Protestant congregation. Here, he published his commentary on Romans (1539/40) and a revised edition of the *Institutio* (1539). He married, and later was the spiritual and political leader of Geneva until his death in 1564.

#### EDITIONS:

- Calvin, Jean. 'The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians' and 'The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.' *Calvin's Commentaries*. Ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Trans. John W. Fraser, et. al. Vol. 10. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960-
- . 'Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis.' Vol. 1. Trans. John King. *Calvin's Commentaries*. 45 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999; rept. of Calvin Translation Society Edition, 1844-1856.

From A COMMENTARY OF JOHN CALVIN UPON THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES CALLED GENESIS (1<sup>st</sup> published, 1554)<sup>1</sup>

#### CHAPTER 19

[After reprinting Genesis 19.1-38, Calvin proceeds to comment verse by verse on the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, for Renaissance writers the paradigmatic tale of male same-sex sexual desire and its punishment by God. For the entire story, refer to the selections in the anthology's print edition].

[...]

- 4      *But before they went to bed, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round about, from the young to the old, all the people from all quarters.*

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Thomas Tymme in 1578. A Protestant minister and the author of devotional works and translations, mostly of theology, Tymme (d. 1620) also translated Pierre de la Ramée's history of the French civil wars.

5        *Who crying unto Lot, said unto him, “Where are the men which came to thee this night? Bring them out unto us that we may know them.”*

[...]

8        *“Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man: them will I bring out now unto you: and do to them as seemeth you good; only unto these men do nothing, for therefore are they come under the shadow of my roof.*

[...]

24       *Then the Lord rained upon Sodom, and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.*

[...]

4 [*But before they went to bed*] Here in one wicked fact Moses<sup>2</sup> setteth forth a lively image of Sodom. For hereby it doth evidently appear what a devilish consent was among them to all wickedness, in that they all conspired together to commit such horrible and detestable filthiness. How great their wickedness was, it doth hereby appear in that, as it were with an army, they besiege the house of Lot. How blind and beastly is their lust insomuch that like brute beasts, void of all shame, they run to and fro! How great is their fierceness and cruelty in threatening so shamefully the holy father,<sup>3</sup> and in assaying all extremities!<sup>4</sup> Hereby also we gather that they were not infected with one vice alone, but also that they were fallen to all boldness of sinning, insomuch that they were devoid of all shame. And Ezekiel (as we have said already)<sup>5</sup> doth notably declare from what beginnings and entrances of evils they fell to extreme filthiness. Hereunto also pertaineth the saying of Paul, how that God punisheth the ungodliness of men when he giveth them over into so great blindness that they fall into diverse lusts and defile their bodies.<sup>6</sup> But whenas shame being set aside the reins<sup>7</sup> are loosed to lust, filthy and beastly barbarousness must needs by and by<sup>8</sup> follow, and diverse kinds of wickednesses must of necessity be therewithal mingled that there may be more than a deformed confusion.

Wherefore, if so be<sup>9</sup> the vengeance of God fell upon the Sodomites, insomuch that being blinded with outrage they gave themselves to all kind[s] of wickedness, we shall be scarce more favourably dealt withal, whose impiety is by so much the less excusable, by how much the truth

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<sup>2</sup> *fact* deed, crime. Moses was traditionally believed the author of the Book of Genesis.

<sup>3</sup> *holy father* Lot.

<sup>4</sup> *assaying all extremities* i.e., attempting all enormous sins or crimes.

<sup>5</sup> In Chapter 18, Calvin says that “Sodom was full of all filthy corruptions and abominations,” but “the next chapter following expresseth the most filthy crime which reigned in Sodom” (i.e., male same-sex sexual desire and intercourse). He asserts that, according to Ezek. 16.49-50, this crime arises from “lechery, plenty, pride and cruelty” and “therefore, if so be we do abhor this extreme outrage, we must embrace temperance and sobriety.”

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 1.24-28.

<sup>7</sup> *reins* the kidneys, the ancient seat of the human passions in classical, medieval, and Renaissance physiology.

<sup>8</sup> *by and by* immediately.

<sup>9</sup> *If so be* i.e., If in this manner; If it is the case that

of God is more plainly revealed unto us.

[*From the young to the old*]. Moses concealeth many things which the reader may call to mind of himself, as this: that he maketh no mention by whom the multitude was stirred up, for it is very likely that there were certain provokers, but notwithstanding, we hereby perceive how willing and ready they were to commit wickedness, who, as it were with a watchword,<sup>10</sup> came by and by together. It also showeth that there was no manner of shame left in them, because neither gravity restrained the old men, nor that modesty the young men, which became<sup>11</sup> that age. To be short, he meaneth that all care of honesty was abolished and that the order of nature was perverted, when he sayeth that from the young to the old they came together from the furthest parts of the city.<sup>12</sup>

5 [*Where are the men*] Although they minded filthily to abuse the guests to preposterous<sup>13</sup> lust, yet notwithstanding, in word they pretend another thing. For as if Lot had offended in receiving strange men into the city, wherein he himself dwelt but as a foreigner, they command them to be brought forth before them. Some expound this word ‘know’ [as] ‘to have to do carnally,’ and so the Greek interpreters have translated it. But I think that this word was put in another sense, as if they should say, ‘We will know what manner of guests thou hast brought into our city.’ For the Scripture is wont modestly to note by this word a matter of shame. Therefore the Sodomites would have spoken more filthily of their detestable lying with those men; but to cover their wickedness, they quarrel with the holy man proudly, in that he durst presume to receive unknown men.

*Question.* Notwithstanding, here ariseth a question. For, if so be the Sodomites were wont thus to vex all strangers, what shall we say was done to others? For this was not the first time that Lot began to lodge strangers, and they<sup>14</sup> had been always given to filthy pleasure. Lot was ready to deliver his daughters to shame and reproach to set his guests free from the same. How oftentimes already was he constrained to offer them, if so be their madness could not be by any other remedy pleased, which required men with whom they might commit fornication? And now if Lot knew that such peril was at hand, he should rather have exhorted his guests to withdraw themselves in time.

*Answer.* In my judgement, although Lot knew the manners of the city, he nothing suspected that which happened, as that they would violently break upon his house, and it seemeth that they had never done this before. But indeed it was meet<sup>15</sup> that when the angels were sent to take a trial of that people, they should all break into this detestable fact.

Thus the wicked, after that they have a long time triumphed in their wickedness, devoid of care, at the last by rushing headlong furiously, they in a moment bring upon them their own destruction.

When God therefore called the Sodomites to judgement, he would have them to play the last part of a wicked life, and by the spirit of giddiness, he enforced them to abomination, the heinousness whereof would not suffer the destruction of the place to be deferred any longer. For

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<sup>10</sup> *watchword* secret password.

<sup>11</sup> *became* was appropriate or fitting [for].

<sup>12</sup> MARGINAL NOTE: Both young and old in Sodom were defiled.

<sup>13</sup> *preposterous* contrary to the order of nature, to reason, or to common sense; monstrous, perverse.

<sup>14</sup> *they* the Sodomites.

<sup>15</sup> *meet* fitting, appropriate.

as the hospitality of the holy man Lot was adorned with a notable reward, because unwittingly he received angels instead of men, and had them his guests at home at his house, even so God took vengeance with more grievous punishment upon the filthy lust of others, who going about to defile angels were not only injurious towards men, but also (so much as in them lay) they violated the heavenly glory of God with sacrilegious outrage.

[...]

8 [*Behold now, I have two daughters*] As the constancy of Lot serveth no small praise, in that he adventured his life for the defence of his guests, even so now Moses sheweth that there was a defect joined therewith, which somewhat blotted his so excellent a virtue. For he not knowing what to do (at which point men are at commonly in all doubtful matters) deviseth an unlawful remedy, for he letteth not<sup>16</sup> to offer his daughters to whoredom to pacify the outrageous madness of the people. But a thousand deaths ought rather to have been suffered than to have taken such a way. Notwithstanding, such almost are all the works of the saints, because nothing passeth from them so perfect which is not lame or maimed in some point.<sup>17</sup> Lot is urged with extreme necessity; and it is no marvel that he offereth his daughters to be made harlots, when he see'th that he hath to do with wild beasts. Yet nevertheless he seeketh without advisement<sup>18</sup> to remedy one evil with another. Whereas some excuse his fact, I mislike it not; yet nevertheless he serveth to be reprehended, because he heapeth one evil upon another [...] Othersome make another excuse for Lot: as that he knew that his daughters should not be desired. But I doubt not but that he seeking the first shift<sup>19</sup> that came next to hand erred from the right way. And this is without all doubt, that although the Sodomites professed not in plain words what a filthy desire they had, yet notwithstanding, Lot was fully certified of the same by their daily wickedness. If any man affirm it to be very absurd that the whole people should require two men to commit fornication with them, I answer, that because they imagined by custom and use that the same vice was lawful for them, a few setting the matter abroach, the whole multitude was stirred up. Even as it cometh to pass, where there is not any difference made between right and wrong. When Lot sayeth, 'That for this cause, they came under his roof,' the meaning is: that they were committed unto him of the Lord, and that he should be false unto them unless he sought to defend them.

[...]

24 [*Then the Lord rained upon Sodom*] Moses here very briefly toucheth the destruction of Sodom and of the other cities. The grievousness of the matter required a larger treatise, yea, a tragical discourse. But Moses simply, according to his manner, reciting the judgment of God, those things which he could not vehemently enough express with words, he leaveth to the consideration of the readers. Therefore it is our part to have a full consideration of that horrible vengeance, the which seeing it happened not without the wonderful shaking of heaven and earth, we ought to be afraid at the only naming of it, and therefore mention is so oftentimes made of the

<sup>16</sup> *he letteth not* i.e., he did not stop/hesitate.

<sup>17</sup> MARGINAL NOTE: The works of the saints are imperfect.

<sup>18</sup> *advisement* wisdom, due consideration.

<sup>19</sup> *shift* expedient, option.

same in the Scriptures. And the Lord would not have those cities to be swallowed up with an earthquake only; but to the end he might make a more notable example of his judgment, he cast fire and brimstone from heaven. [...] Moses commendeth here unto us the extraordinary work of God, to the end we may know that Sodom was not destroyed without a manifest miracle. [...] And whereas it was always wont to be demanded out of this place,<sup>20</sup> what the infants deserved which were destroyed together with their parents, the answer is easy to be made: that mankind is in the hand of God, insomuch that he appointeth to destruction whom he will, and upon whom he will he sheweth mercy. Also we ought to submit unto his secret judgment whatsoever we cannot comprehend within the compass of our understanding and reach. Last of all, all that seed<sup>21</sup> was accursed and execrable, insomuch that of right he spared not the least.

From A COMMENTARY UPON THE EPISTLE OF SAINT PAUL TO THE ROMANS (1<sup>st</sup> published, 1539/40; revised edition, 1550)<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER 1

[...]

- 24     *Wherefore also God gave them up to their hearts' lusts, unto uncleanness, to defile their own bodies between themselves.*
- 25     *Which turned the truth of God unto a lie, and worshiped and served the creature above the Creator, which is blessed forever, Amen.*
- 26     *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.*
- 27     *And likewise also the men left the natural use of the women and burned in their lust one toward another, and man with man wrought filthiness, and received in themselves such recompense of their error as was meet.<sup>23</sup>*
- 28     *For as they regarded not to know God, even so God delivered them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.<sup>24</sup>*
- 29     *Being full of unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, of murder, of debate, of deceit, taking all things in evil part [...]*

[...]

- 31     *Which men though they knew the Law of God, how that they which commit such things are worthy of death, yet not only do the same but also favor them that do them.*

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<sup>20</sup> *And whereas ... place* i.e., since it is commonly asked concerning this Biblical passage.

<sup>21</sup> *seed* line, lineage.

<sup>22</sup> Translated into English by Christopher Rosdell in 1583. We know only that Rosdell was a Protestant minister and preacher.

<sup>23</sup> *meet* See n15.

<sup>24</sup> *convenient* morally fitting, right.

[...]

26 [*For this cause God gave them up*] As though he had interposed a parenthesis, he returneth unto that which he had begun before, concerning the revengement of the Lord. And he bringeth the first example in the horrible sin of preposterous<sup>25</sup> lust. Whereby appeareth they were not only given over to beastly lusts, but also became worse than beasts when they overthrew the whole order of nature. Secondly, he reckoneth a great catalogue of vices which have both been extant in all ages, and at that time reigned everywhere most licentiously. Neither hindereth this one whit that everyone was not laden with such a heap of vices. For in reproving the general corruption of men, it is sufficient if everyone be compelled to acknowledge some mole or blemish.

Thus therefore it is to be taken that Paul doth here briefly touch those vices which both were common in all ages, and also were specially to be seen in that age. For it is marvelous how common that filthiness was, which the brute beasts abhor; as for the other vices they were vulgar.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, that he reciteth such a catalogue of vices as all mankind is comprehended in it. For although all men be not murderers, or thieves, or adulterers, yet there is no man that is not found to be polluted with some vice.<sup>27</sup>

[*unto vile affections*] He calleth those ‘vile affections’ which even in the opinion of men are most vile or shameful and serve to the dishonor of God.

[...]

28 [*... To do those things which are not convenient*] Because hitherto he hath mentioned only that one execrable example, which though it were common amongst many, yet it was not common unto all, he beginneth to reckon such vices as no man could be found to be free of. For albeit (as it is said) they appear not all at once in everyone, yet all men know themselves to be guilty of some of them, that every man for his own part might be reproved of manifest pravity.<sup>28</sup> First of all, whereas he calleth them ‘not convenient,’ understand that they abhorred from all judgment of reason, and were far from the duties of men. For he declareth the tokens of a confounded<sup>29</sup> mind, that without all difference men addicted themselves to those vices which common sense ought to have refused.

[...]

From A COMMENTARY UPON SAINT PAUL’S EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS (1<sup>st</sup> published, c. 1546)<sup>30</sup>

9     *Do ye not remember how that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: for neither fornicators, neither worshippers of Images, neither*

<sup>25</sup> *preposterous* See n13.

<sup>26</sup> *vulgar* common.

<sup>27</sup> MARGINAL NOTE: Though all men be not thieves or murderers, etc., yet every man is polluted with some vice.

<sup>28</sup> *pravity* depravity, corruption.

<sup>29</sup> *confounded* disordered, confused.

<sup>30</sup> Translated into English by Thomas Tymme in 1577. See n1. The following verses are from 1 Cor. 6.

- whoremongers, neither weaklings, neither abusers of themselves with mankind.*
- 10 *Neither thieves, neither the covetous, neither drunkards, neither cursed speakers, neither pilfers<sup>31</sup> shall inherit the kingdom of God.*
- 11 *And such were ye verily, but ye are washed: ye are sanctified, ye are justified, by the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.*

[...]

9 ... *Be not deceived* Taking occasion of one vice, he speaketh of many, and I think that he hath principally noted those vices which were among the Corinthians. He noteth the venerious<sup>32</sup> and filthy lusts of the Corinthians by three terms, which filthy lusts all histories testify reigned among them and abounded too generally. For Corinth was a city which flowed with riches, a notable town of mart and intercourse, whereunto merchants of many nations resorted. Luxury, the father of unshamefastness and of all lasciviousness followeth riches; furthermore, many other corruptions stirred up this people to ungodliness, being of themselves too libidinous and carnal. *For neither fornicators:* In what *fornicators* differ from adulterers, it is well enough known. By *weaklings* I understand those which although they do not commonly give themselves to lust, yet notwithstanding they do bewray<sup>33</sup> their impudency by unchaste and bawdy talk, by effeminate gesture, by their apparel, and by other delights. The fourth, of all the rest, is most detestable, being the very same monstrous filthiness which hath been too usual in Greece<sup>34</sup> [...] there is no poison more pernicious than those delights which confirm us in our sins. Let us then eschew the vices of wicked men not only as the alluring enticements of mermaids but also as the deadly stinging of Satan, when they turn the judgment of God and the reprehensions of sins unto a jest.

[...]

11 [*And such were ye*] [...] we must not construe that they all are so bound up in one faggot,<sup>35</sup> as though all these vices were in every one of them; but only his purpose is to show that no man is free from these evils until he be born again by the spirit. For we must thus account that the seed of all evils is included in the nature of man; and that other vices do reign and appear in others even as the Lord declareth the wickedness by the fruits of the flesh. Even so Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans gathereth many kinds of wickednesses and vices which spring from the ignorance of God, and from that ingratitude whereof he had made all the unbelievers guilty: not that any one infidel is infected with those vices in general, but because all men are subject unto them and there is no man pure from them all. For he which is not an adulterer sinneth in some other kind of sin. [...] before such time as we be reformed of God, one is given to cruelty, another to falsehood, another to filthy lusts, and another to deceit and fraud. Insomuch that there is none in whom there is not some show of common corruption, and we are every one of us by the inward and secret affection of the mind subject to all diseases in part, were

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<sup>31</sup> *pilfers* those who steal.

<sup>32</sup> *venerious* sexual.

<sup>33</sup> *bewray* betray, unintentionally reveal.

<sup>34</sup> MARGINAL NOTE: Sodomites.

<sup>35</sup> *faggot* bundle.

it not that the Lord doth inwardly repress them lest they should openly burst forth. Therefore, the simple sense is that before the grace of regeneration some of the Corinthians were covetous, some were adulterers, some robbers, some weaklings, and some cursed speakers; but now being delivered by Christ, they have left off to be such. And this is the purpose of the Apostle,<sup>36</sup> to humble them by the commemoration of their former state and also to stir them up to reknowledge<sup>37</sup> the grace of God toward them. For the greater that the misery is known to be, from whence we are delivered by the goodness of God, so much the more the bounty of his grace doth shine.

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<sup>36</sup> *the Apostle* Saint Paul.

<sup>37</sup> *reknowledge* acknowledge (a common 16<sup>th</sup>-century usage).