

False Bay? – God’s Love & The Rising Tide of Same Sex Orientation

I remember when we first moved to the Cape, how it took a while to get familiar with our new surroundings. Even though I could get around Johannesburg and Pretoria without GPS with regular ease, the same was not true of the Cape. There were many things I had to learn about our new home. For starters, I learned that we are actually living in an area called “False Bay,” and that it is a massive area stretching all the way from Hang Clip to around Simon’s Town, and embracing many towns in between. But I kept wondering about the origin of its name. Interestingly, False Bay owes its name to a case of mistaken identity. Sailors who thought they had reached Table Bay, only to find out that they didn’t, gave False Bay its *real* name. There are many humorous examples like this to be found all over South Africa. Like False Bay, this is also the story of the little Free State town of Verkeerde Vlei or “wrong marsh.” Apparently the name was born when some of the first pioneers noticed the stream was flowing from east to west instead of the usual west to east, which was the norm for the district.

Spiritually speaking though, it is to be lamented that our country has become a type of “false bay” and a “wrong marsh” as it involves the *sexual orientations* of people. “Mistaken identities” and “upstream,” unbiblical living seem to abound, especially here in Cape Town, which boasts its own annual “gay-pride parade,” rendering it South Africa’s very own “San Francisco.” There are a good representation of people living here who either identify with one or more of the letters in the acronym LGBTQ (not knowing where it will stop), or who identify with and defend the people who represent these letters—or both! And sadly, the church, or the *so-called representatives of Christ* are *setting the pace* for the normalising of something which, scripturally speaking, is still described as sinful.

In March, for instance, the big news was that the Dutch Reformed Church was charged in court to reverse their decision in 2016 which prohibits the ordination of gay and lesbian ministers. Laurie Guam who was interviewed by 702’s Joanne Joseph’s about the March court result, commented on the development saying: *“I think [the denomination] should be thankful for this ruling and welcome it because we are also blessed with secular institutions that sometimes help us to move forward, especially when we are blindsided. We need to be stretched somewhat and re-think our positions and what we have believed forever.”* In addition to this he told her, *“It is high time. We need to embrace each other, this is the love of God which is all encompassing.”*

So here’s a look at the love of God in light of the rising tide of LGBTQ in South Africa, and the world in general. First of all, let me say that if there ever were a group of people who should know about the love of God then it should be

Christians. This is the very reason for their being in a relationship with God in the first place. For God so loved the world that He gave his Son, so that those who believe in his Son could be saved (Jn. 3:16-17). This is true. But is the love of God so inclusive that it will embrace anyone without having some requirement on their lives? The answer is a resounding “no!” If we change the love of God to assume that it will just indiscriminately embrace all without a *change* of life, then we not only misrepresent his love, but we also misrepresent the message of Scripture as a whole, and the one who wrote it in the first place (2 Tim. 3:16-17). So here follow some principles of God’s love:

a. God Acted in Love According to his Grace

It should be no mystery that it was the love of God that planned the way of salvation. This marvellous reality is illustrated in many passages of Scripture, not the least John 3:16. Take for instance, the many Old Testament prophecies of how God would be merciful toward Israel, in spite of their sin. Ezekiel prophesied about God’s benevolence toward Israel all for the sake of his holy name, to be sure—yet love would be the vehicle. In Ezekiel 36:24-27 it says:

“²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

Right here, amidst high handed sinning on the part of Israel, we find the Lord promising graciousness and love toward Israel. There is the promise of a land to dwell in (v. 24). The Mosaic Law dictates that if there was high handed disobedience on the part of Israel, that they would forfeit the Promised Land (Deut. 28:33-36), which was already past tense from the point of Ezekiel’s prophesy. However, the Lord was promising a restoration for believing Israel here, and this was something that He was about to do for them, and unaided by them. For this reason there is the promise of a righteous life (v. 25). This finds itself in harmony with the fact that there can be no fellowship with God in the absence of holiness (Lev. 11:44; Heb. 12:14). This is followed by the promise of regeneration (v. 26), or a “new heart” that will be able to beat for God and actually keep his commandments. All of this is possible only because of the promise of the Holy Spirit who will actually cause them to follow God’s commandments. God promised here to virtually place his Spirit within them, and so doing, “cause them” to react rightly to his laws. All of these which God promises for Israel would be His doing, and by reading this no one can doubt that fact.

The New Testament has the same message about God’s unmerited love for sinners. God certainly does not desire for a single sinner to go lost, but to understand the truth about him (1 Tim. 2:4). The cross of Christ was indeed

miserable and agonising enough to pay the price for the sins of us all (1 John 2:2), yet, as certain as it is that He is gracious and loving, it is just as certain that He is motivated by his holiness.

As illustrated in Ezekiel 36, God has indeed chosen to be loving toward Israel by giving them the ability to please him in future (from our perspective), however, this is never devoid of the main motivation behind it, which is to ensure the holy living of those who bear his name. And this brings us to the *second principle* with regards to God's love. *It acted in accordance with the holiness of God.*

b. God Acted in Love According to His Holiness

The same passage above illustrates this point so brilliantly. The reason for God's choosing to be loving toward Israel is governed by his holiness and his glory. You see, the results of God's kind acts toward Israel, when He eventually restores them in future, "*when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn*" (Zech. 12:10), will not only be a testimony to his glory and holiness—but its actual result. Listen what Ezekiel says again right at the beginning of this passage:

"²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes" (Ez. 36:22-23).

Clearly we can deduct from these verses that the main motivation behind God's gracious acts is his nature. Although it is his nature to be gracious (Num. 15:18a), it is also his nature to be morally upright and flawless (Num. 15:18b). For this reason, no person unaided by his grace can attempt to be in a relationship with him, if not for his very specific saving grace. Many passages indicate that God is perfect in every way and so demands perfection from people. But, at least as we are told in Ezekiel, God chose to save unbelieving Israel and to restore them one day, as He was motivated by his "holy name." As the verses which follows this showed, this salvation would involve the reshaping of Israel into a people who not only has *the ability* to do what pleases God, but also *the desire* to do what pleases him.

What is undeniable though, as the foregoing chapters of Ezekiel make plain, was that Israel was going to be in need of serious spiritual *surgery*: "...they rebelled against [God] and were not willing to listen [to him]. "...None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, Nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt" (Ez. 20:8). For this high-handed sin God would have been left with no other course of action than to judge them. Why? Because He is zealous for his holy name, and when those who bear his name profane it, He

will not deal lightly with it. But by his grace, God even reaches out to those who profane his name (which He didn't have to do) and He changes them all for his glory. When He does so, He acts "for the sake of [his] holy name" (verse 22).

This has implications for the testimony of those who claim the name of Christ: "And the nations will know that I am the Lord...when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes" (verse 23b). In other words, what God revealed here through Ezekiel was that He would be glorified as Israelites are saved based on his grace, which is no less than *transforming*. When God chooses to be loving and gracious to sinners who profane the name of God it becomes visible in their lives. Israel who only knew how to erect false idols and worship them instead of God would eventually undergo a spiritual surgery that would affect the entire person. This is so wonderfully illustrated in the words in verse 26: "And I will give you a *new* heart...And I will *remove* the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a *heart of flesh*."

But this will not only be true of Israel. It will also be true of the Church, the true Church, that is. If people have truly been changed and saved by the grace of God, transformation will follow. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7 about someone who confesses his name and their life: "18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." Or to paraphrase: True Christians cannot habitually live their lives contrary to the Word of God, nor can the unsaved habitually live their lives in harmony with the Word of God. Every person who does not live according to God's Word will go to hell. So you will recognise them by their commitment to the Word.

If someone truly belongs to God, then the signs will be visible. As Jesus said, the fruit will start to show and it will remain. They will be totally committed to the Word of God as they are totally committed to the One who saved them. As Paul also pointed out, as a result of the new life in Christ, no one who claims the name of Christ can just continue on in the same sins as before. To the Romans he said:

"¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Paul helps us to understand here that we cannot just stand back and submit to sin, like helpless people in the hands of an evil tyrant (verse 12). This means that we cannot just avail our bodies to its demands, succumbing to its allure. When we do so, we do not behave as victors in Christ. Sin *used* (past tense) to be our master. But once saved, once the light breaks through (1 Pet. 2:9), Christ becomes our master. That's why Paul can say so unapologetically "present yourselves to God as those who have been *brought from death to life*"

(verse 13). When someone has woken to life, their bodies will follow. They will no longer *give* themselves to sin, but instead to God and the obeying of his commands. And this is something that the dispensation of grace demands. Sin can have no authoritarian rule over a believer, because grace produces the transformation it requires (verse 14). Paul again says something similar in chapter 12 when he says: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

Sadly, the LGBTQ community in our country (and the world) is encouraging a different and godless kind of transformation. They won’t agree with the need for “heart surgery” as required in Ezekiel 36, but they might encourage some other form of surgery. Not only are transgenders, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the questionings (perhaps the reason for the “Q”) being told that God’s love will not damn them one day in eternity, but they are simultaneously being cheered on to go and be the best L, G, B, T, or Q that they can possibly be, in spite of the clear scriptural warnings against such tendencies (Gen. 19; Lev. 18 and 20; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-10). This begs the rehashing of one last principle that pertains to the love of God—it produces repentance.

c. God Acted in Love that People Might Repent and Believe

Interestingly, even in probably the most quoted verse of the entire Bible, John 3:16, the love of God requires a response: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, *that whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life.”

Even in a John 3:16 sense, the love of God requires us to respond to it rightly. God does not just blindly save people based on this love. This is not a general rule that applies to everyone who ever lived. No, only those who believe will not perish and receive eternal life. Maybe it can be illustrated in this way: When I was in seminary in the States, at my amazement, some generous donor blessed all the first-year students with a check of a thousand dollars. But this check was hidden inside my little post box. I was the one who had to retrieve it. It was not magically going to land in my wallet.

The love of God requires action. And the action that God requires is faith and repentance. *Faith* believes that the work has been accomplished on the cross and it remains neatly nestled in Christ as we receive forgiveness for sin (Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16; Heb. 11:6; 2 Pet. 1:1). *Repentance* on the other hand renounces and rejects all things vile (sinful) in us and admits guilt before the holy God (Matt. 3:8; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 5:32; Ac. 13:24; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10). This is how someone is saved, but it also becomes a way of life, humbly believing in Christ and repenting from sin.

For those who are pushing the LGBTQ agenda in our denominations, this message cannot be more urgent. What is clear is that they are habitually living in a way that God has clearly called taboo. This casts serious doubt on their

salvation, in the least (1 Cor. 6:9). It is not possible to be saved and habitually continue on in a homosexual lifestyle (1 Jn. 3;3-6), let alone be the one to promote it in the name of Jesus. What Love would have them do is to turn from their sin and for the first time embrace the cross, that requires us to change.

As a final warning, no one who belongs to Christ remains unchanged by him. A changed life becomes the truest reflection of a genuine love for him. He urged his disciples that if they truly loved him, they would keep his commandments (Jn. 14:15). The two stand side by side. Love for Christ = obedience. This should lead us, the church, to be purposeful and gospel-centred in our interaction with the Christ-claiming LGBTQ. They need to be shown that God is indeed gracious. Actually, this they know already, and have falsely convinced themselves that it has no claim on their sexuality. But the grace of God can do no other than move sinners to repentance and change. We must be diligent to warn them that although God is loving and gracious, it is his holiness and righteousness that requires them to surrender their most cherished and coveted sin.