

Sin & generations

June 1, 2010

Those questions popped to mind when a good friend forwarded a link to a presidential [proclamation](#) declaring June as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month.

"I cannot believe we have lived long enough to see Sodom and Gomorrah re-invented!!" the person who started the e-mail string wrote. "We might as well turn out the lights," my friend added.

Really? Once upon a time—1776? 1860? 1954?—was our nation holier than now?

Long line of sin

As much as we revere our forebears, it's seriously difficult to believe God blessed our nation on account of its righteousness. In the earliest days, Christians of various persuasions beat, imprisoned and sometimes killed people—including other Christians—for not believing as they did. Our Baptist brethren were among the most persecuted, particularly in Massachusetts and Virginia.

For the first 250 years white people lived on this continent, many of them—our Baptist ancestors included—owned other human beings. They treated most of them as less than human. The Southern Baptist Convention was founded by slaveholders who got angry when Baptists in the North would not allow slaveowners to be missionaries.

Even when they no longer could own them, our predecessors in the South treated nonwhites maliciously and did everything they could to deny their basic rights.

And until about 100 years ago, women did not have full rights as citizens.

This is to say nothing of ongoing racial segregation, as well as systematic corruption and abuse of unskilled laborers, no matter their color.

When was sin "invented"?

Most Baptists and many other Christians cite the words of the Apostle Paul from the New Testament, whose straightforward interpretation declares homosexual activity to be sinful, and outside the will of God.

But no matter how you view homosexual practice, an honest reading of history reveals Americans did not invent sin in this generation.

We can take ironic comfort in closely observing human behavior throughout history. Go all the way back to Genesis and see not much has changed. A sad constant since Adam and Eve has been the strong human inclination to sin. Unfortunately, we sin both individually and corporately. Throughout time, people have committed sins against nature and sins against people. Both are sin, and both are practiced individually and corporately.

If you look closely, no generation has been particularly worse than others. But the manifestations of behavior been different. I don't know which grieved God worse—racial segregation or sexual immorality. Both violate God's plan for people.

Thank God for grace

So, we must not diminish the severity of our current moral climate. But neither should we diminish the moral failures of previous generations. We can take heart in the constancy of God's love. I tremble when I think of my own tendency to sin, which makes me enormously grateful for grace.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from

yourselves, it is the gift of God"