

# Choose This Day: The Real Lesson of Sodom & Gomorrah

(A Cautionary Illustration of Living the *Principle of Social Proof*)

“Whether the question is what to do with an empty popcorn box in a movie theater, how fast to drive on a certain stretch of highway, or how to eat the chicken at a dinner party, the actions of those around us will be important in defining the answer.” Psychologist Robert Cialdini

Social Proof is a shortcut to decide how to act . . . Clearly, others affect our behavior. One reason for this is that we live in a complex world. We use the decisions of others as a heuristic, or mental shortcut, to navigate our lives. English philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead once said, “Civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform **without thinking about them**.” Psychology Today

An illustration of Social Proof → [https://youtu.be/k2F\\_7B\\_-FI4?t=155](https://youtu.be/k2F_7B_-FI4?t=155)

And Whitehead is certainly correct that we need to implement helpful habits and routines to do “without thinking about them” as it saves our thinking for what is important – it is easy and dangerous, however, to look to Social Proof for even important areas of Life, not effectively thinking at any level.

Social Proof operates the same in the stock market, real estate and religion – the crowd is almost always universally wrong and potentially deadly to follow! In fact, if you Google Social Proof you will see most of the interest in it is by those using it in marketing, manipulating others to buy their products.

We are not told much about Sodom & Gomorrah in the *Bible* but they were likely much like many other cities in that era, indeed throughout history. It would be hard to believe they “had anything on us.” As we have recently observed in many ways, what is generally considered an aberration and wicked can quickly become acceptable, “normal” and then good. Those not as quickly accepting and adapting to a new paradigm will, for a time, resist the change with the view and feeling:

The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men. Ps 12:8

And then, seemingly overnight, the *Principle of Social Proof* takes hold overwhelming resistance. Interestingly and surprisingly, history (including the *Bible*) shows the eras of tolerance (the cycle of a liberalizing *Social Proof*) more often than not result in greater, not less, religion. The *Biblical* record documents this in the narrative of Israel’s kings – some of the most wicked kings/times were the most religious because religion can be very comforting in the face of sin, especially personal sin. Sodom and Gomorrah were likely very religious cities.

When looking around today, we see the great (and increasing) majority of religious people having a theoretical religion and, based on Social Proof, who are we to resist this? The prevailing religious people in the U.S. shows an 80 (religious)/20 (not) split with the great majority having a form of godliness unrelated to any religious book – the *Bible (Old or New Testament)*, *Book of Mormon*, *Koran* . . . We no longer think it strange that people claim a religion while denying the historical writings and precepts of that religion – they can form their own sub-religion, under the umbrella of Christian, Jew, Muslim . . . and no one thinks much of it.

American Religious Identification		
	2016	2017
	%	%
Protestant/Other Christian	48.9	48.5
Catholic	23.0	22.7
Mormon	1.8	1.8
Jewish	2.1	2.1
Muslim	0.8	0.8
Other non-Christian religion	2.5	2.9
No religious identity	20.8	21.3
GALLUP		

2017 Update on Americans and Religion

If we are not reading the *Bible* we are very likely unaware of this great issue and “pull.” Simply recognizing the great moral decline as Fox News/CNN do and lament (Fox) or applauds as progress (CNN) is not enough, we must know the personal dangers and what to do about them.

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Ps 11:3

First, we need to make sure we know what the Judge delineates as righteous and then ensure our primary focus in Life is in meeting these requirements! “I don’t like to read” . . . “I was busy” . . . “Everybody else seemed unconcerned and self-assured” . . . are going to sound very foolish when we die and Eternity becomes a reality! And all the Time, before then we left God’s Word (His Words of Hope, Help, Grace, Faith . . .) untouched because Social Proof indicated “No problem!” At what point do we start seriously thinking about Eternity and, as such and in evidence we are earnest, making it our first priority as has been God’s *First Commandment* requirement for thousands of years (and as reconfirmed by Jesus early in His ministry)?

“You shall have no other gods before me.” Ex 20:3

“Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (everything we need for this short earthly Life) will be given to you as well.” Mt 6:33

“Seeking first” may be done hypocritically (it does not ensure we are righteous – there are defined Grace signs and proofs associated with true and authentic seeking God). But on the other hand, it is doubtful (in light of all the *Bible* says to us) that we should expect to be righteous apart from considering the “Kingdom of God” important enough to make it our first priority and seek it first, especially in light of Jesus’ promise to give us everything we need as this is our goal. For those truly seeking God the *Bible* is very great comfort, offering much (the only!) hope, while for those not doing so it details simple warnings that will not be circumvented by glib excuses or tearful pleas at the final trial.

The following *Bible* warning (like so many others in the *Bible*) sounds like it was written today, not 2,000 years ago!

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 2Ti 3:1-5

And even if the “last days” of the world are not imminent, they certainly are for all living today.

The prevailing religion 500 years before Jesus was dominated by exactly the same liberal/conservative voices of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, to which God says and warns:

You have wearied the LORD with your words.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them” [there is no shorter or better summation of today’s Social Proof liberal message] or “Where is the God of justice?” [today and yesterday’s conservative self-righteous message – under the minority Social Proof paradigm]. <sup>Mal 2:17</sup>

And we see the exact same model in Jesus’ time – the majority liberal religionists and the conservative minority who agreed on only one issue, that Jesus was a heretic requiring elimination.

If it has to choose who is to be crucified, the crowd [blinded and controlled by Social Proof] will always save Barabbas. <sup>Jean Cocteau</sup>

Today we face the same dilemma of every age – not basing our salvation beliefs and efforts on the prevailing Social Proof, **without thinking about it**. For if we do, we can be sure we are on the wrong, deadly, path for it is a universal *Bible* warning for all times (and how much more today when we are at a low point in history’s religious cycle?). For the meanie, killjoy, Jesus tells us:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” <sup>Mt 7:13-14</sup>

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” <sup>Mt 24:36-42</sup>

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’” <sup>Lk 13:22-25</sup>

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” <sup>Lk 17:28-30</sup>

Social Proof is both an historical and universal disease we must all be wary of! The only safety and security?

Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but **whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe**. <sup>Pr 29:25</sup>

Or as others (some not known as shining lights of righteousness) have observed and warned:

A child-like man is not a man whose development has been arrested; on the contrary, he is a man who has given himself a chance of continuing to develop long after most adults have muffled themselves in the cocoon of middle-aged habit and convention [being led, ruled and controlled by Social Proof]. Aldous Huxley

What sometimes goes on in all sorts of [professing, not real] Christian institutions is not formation of people in the character of Christ; it's teaching of outward conformity [Social Proof]. You don't get in trouble for not having the character of Christ, but you do if you don't obey the laws. Dallas Willard

The fellow that can only see a week ahead is always the popular fellow, for he is looking with the crowd [a Social Proof leader]. But the one that can see years ahead, he has a telescope but he can't make anybody believe that he has it. Will Rogers

Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others. Jonathan Swift

Yes, we have the same option and responsibility as Joshua:

“If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River [the god of Social Proof], or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Jos 24:15

And the eternal consequences are certainly infinitely greater than any life or death earthly decision we will ever make! So:

“It’s better to walk alone [outside Social Proof] than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.” Gandhi

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” Mark Twain

“A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back on the crowd.” Max Lucado

So, a good (maybe the only) antidote to being Social Proofed to death? Starting at the key verse of the following song link (be patient – it may take 30 seconds or so to load):

<https://youtu.be/ssWzBMVdyc4?t=164> (the video will probably be preceded by an ad you can skip after 5 seconds)

“No matter what the doubters tell you, no matter what the devil says, no matter what anybody else does, just keep trusting Jesus, you’ll see – it won’t be long, God is right and the doubters are wrong!”

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power **miracles!**. Have nothing to do with them. 2Ti 3:1-5

For if we aren’t seeing personal miracles we are not seeing the power of God. While to some it may sound like the words of a crazy Pentecostal preacher, it is actually Jesus who promises:

“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” Jn 3:21

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Jn 14:12

“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Jn 7:16-17

And the surest and purest place to find these teachings – in the *New Testament*!

Good sermons are great, but we have a personal responsibility to test and prove sermons through our personal reading of the *Bible*, and we will certainly fail if we follow the normal Social Proof paradigm of trying to test and prove the *Bible* based on sermons. In other words, the *Bible* supersedes any and all word of any man – all men! And we will certainly be found guilty of “**not thinking about it**” if we neglect reading the *Bible*!

A major reason for our poor educational system is certainly the overriding Social Proof influence (basing and defining success as “getting an A”), leading those who are talented and capable of achieving far more than an A being satisfied with this artificial achievement rather than pushing to the limits of their capabilities. As just one example, in practical terms there are far fewer Michael Jordans than possible because many have given up at the level of “beating” others rather than understanding the next levels are going to require far more that they must be striving for now, not being self-satisfied with the Social Proof definition of success.

Look around, see virtually everyone is seemingly unconcerned about what they see around them. And we are either comforted by this Social Proof or alarmed. If the latter, we should then consider that striving for any point and level short of Jesus Christ Himself is unacceptable no matter how strong the surrounding Social Proof leads and pulls.

Social Proof, at its heart, loves what man loves and hates what man hates. It demonstrates why reading the *Bible* every day (with an attitude of “thinking about it,” versus living the Social Proof life of “**not thinking about it**”) is so vital. Grace (God-empowered, miraculous) reading of the *Bible* is vital to exposing the futility of living by Social Proof – showing what it is and telling us what we must do if we don't want to be devastated by it. Rather, the *Bible* destroys Social Proof in us by providing hope in and through the promises, provisions and protection of Jesus Christ who shows us the importance and necessity of anti-Social Proof, that which is worth pursuing both now and eternally:

“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Mt 10:22

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” Jn 12:25-26

Jesus’ first and life-long guiding words are clear, comforting and appropriate here:

“Repent [of Social Proof and all its misleading ways], for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Mt 4:17