

Check Your Culture

Lot's Righteousness

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The apostle Peter describes Lot, Abraham's nephew, as "righteous" (II Peter 2:7). We have probably scratched our heads over this a time or two, wondering what was so righteous about Lot. Few, if any, of his actions in his story, as told in Genesis 13, 14, and 19, seem to come up to a godly standard of righteousness.

We know his story. In Genesis 13, he greedily takes what he considers the best of the land over his uncle's choice (which he gave him)—he took the well-watered plain of Jordan, described as so verdant it was "like the garden of the LORD." It also contained the vile cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet Lot decided to "pitch his tent even as far as Sodom."

In Genesis 14, we find Lot now dwelling *in* Sodom. He has actually moved into the city, and he is getting mixed up in Sodom's politics and war with the kings of Mesopotamia. Abram and his household servants had to rescue him. You would have thought that with that experience, Lot would get out of there. But no, Lot decided to *stay* in Sodom.

Then comes Genesis 19, in which God has determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. Abraham has dutifully and righteously negotiated for Lot's life and livelihood, but God could not find even ten righteous men in that city. So, the two angels that God sends down to Sodom to rescue Lot find him in the city gate, an indication that he had risen in the city's hierarchy, so that no he was one of the city's elders. He was an important man, and a wealthy one. He was entwined in the city's business and culture.

Lot extends hospitality to the two angels, made them a feast, and entertained them. When the homosexual mob demands that he send out the angels for their pleasure, Lot valiantly refuses. We must understand that, in the culture of that day, the custom of hospitality was sacrosanct, and a person could lose his reputation and much more if he failed to live up to what the custom demanded. Lot seems to have followed this cultural practice religiously.

He even offers to send out his virgin daughters to the mob instead. What righteous man does this? What loving father would send his teenage daughters to a mob, where they were certainly going to be raped and probably killed? It just boggles the mind. Perhaps Lot knew they would refuse him, being homosexual men. I don't know. But even so, it was a terrible, wicked risk to even make the offer. Thankfully, the angels intervene at this point.

The angels urge him to get his family together and leave as soon as possible. But Lot dithers and lingers, hems and haws, until the angels must literally take him by the hand and lead him out of the city. They have to grab him and shove him down the street. "Lot, we HAVE to GO!"

I think they probably had to drag Lot, his wife, and their two daughters from the house and down the street, while they were clinging to fond memories, missed opportunities, and their comfortable lifestyle that they had in Sodom. After leaving the city, his wife could not leave it behind, and disobeying God's command about looking back, did indeed look back, and she then stood as a pillar of salt as a memorial of what happened there.

Then, of course, Lot and his daughters—sans the wife now—get to Zoar, then flee into the mountains. The daughters get Lot so roaring drunk that he does not know what is happening to him, and they both commit incest with him. The daughters clearly have taken Sodom with them, with all its perverted sexual practices, and Lot—the last we see of him in his story—is their inebriated partner.

Did you see much righteousness in that story? It is difficult. Peter is not wrong, but Lot's righteousness appears to have been made of the flimsiest stuff that ever existed. Perhaps Peter was thinking of Lot when he wrote in I Peter 4:18, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

This may be encouraging to some of us—that God goes out of His way to save even the least righteous of His people. I think it can give us a kind of hope and encouragement that maybe our sins won't send us the other way, but think of Lot as an example of a failure, the kind Jude writes about in Jude 23, who have to be saved "with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." Or perhaps he is like the one Paul writes of in I Corinthians 3:15, whose work is burned but he himself saved, yet through fire by the skin of his teeth, as we would say.

Lot's problem was that he was worldly, enmeshed in the sinful culture of his day up to his eyeballs. He was so entwined in that culture that he didn't want to leave. He was sunk so deep in it rather than the righteous life of God. You hardly see the righteous life of God there. He considered, we could say, the cultural standard of hospitality to be more important than God's way of life, choosing to uphold a cultural standard over the sexual purity of his daughters, which is a commandment of God—the seventh.

Let's bring this to the present. My question is, "Do we secretly value our American culture over God's righteousness?" How enmeshed in this culture are we? Are we enmeshed in it as much as Lot was in the culture of Sodom? Do we rally to flag, political principles, and tradition rather than God's revealed way of life?

Do we forget—frequently, maybe even purposefully—that our citizenship is in heaven? Do we prioritize our physical loyalties and our physical origins over our spiritual ones?

Do we place the U.S. Constitution before the Ten Commandments? Are we truly, *evidently*, purposefully busy transforming ourselves from Americans into true Christians—into sons and daughters of God?

Despite Peter's description of him as righteous, we do not want to be like Lot. God wants us to reflect the righteous character of Jesus Christ, who was perfectly righteous. So, to twist and appropriate a common cultural phrase, "Check your culture."