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A FATHER WHO FAILED

Genesis 19:30-38

By

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Genesis Lesson 41

A Father Who Failed Genesis 19:30-38

A few years ago, I read of a pastor who left his wife to marry his secretary, who left her husband. That's bad enough, but then they both murdered their former mates! The pastor, disguised as a robber, shot his lover's husband with her help in full view of the man's children! To top it off, the pastor and his new wife were planning to move to another state and set up a counseling ministry!

Whenever you hear of professing Christians who have fallen into gross sin, you ask yourself, "How did they ever get to this low level?" If the people involved had made no claim of being Christians, it would be one thing. But when they claim to know God and then commit the worst kind of sins imaginable, you wonder what's going on.

Lot's story is like that. If Lot were not a believer, you would say, "That's the way this evil world is." But Peter emphasizes that Lot was a righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7-8). So when you read about his two daughters getting him drunk and committing incest with him, you wonder how a believer could get to that low point.

Lot's terrible sin should make us realize that just being a believer isn't enough. Christians can fall into sins that are just as bad as those committed by unbelievers. Though Lot was a believer, he failed miserably with God and as a father. I want to examine why, so that none of us will fail the Lord and our families as Lot did.

The reason Lot failed is illustrated by an event that happened on June 5, 1976. On that day, under clear skies, without warning, the massive Teton Dam in southeastern Idaho collapsed, sending a torrent of water surging into the Snake River basin. There was extensive property damage and loss of life. It seemed to happen so quickly. Some workers on the dam barely had time to run for their lives.

But it really didn't happen suddenly. Beneath the water line, a hidden fault had been gradually weakening the entire structure. It

started with just a tiny bit of erosion. But by the time it was detected, it was too late. No one had seen the little flaw; no one got hurt by it. But everyone saw the big collapse, and many were hurt (adapted from Luis Palau, *Heart After God* [Multnomah Press], p. 68).

That's what happened to Lot. He allowed little sins in his life to go unchecked. They weren't major, shocking kinds of sins--just "little" sins. But they were steadily eroding his moral character, until finally the sordid incident recorded here burst the dam. It teaches us that,

A father fails his family when he allows little sins
to go unchecked until they result in big sins.

I'm using the words "little" and "big" from the human perspective. By little sins I mean sins that people don't consider serious, sins that we all tend to tolerate. By big sins, I mean sins like murder, adultery, homosexuality, rape, incest, child abuse, etc., sins that raise eyebrows and make us recoil in shock, sins that destroy families and reputations, leaving a trail of destruction. By the way, the problem of incest (which occurs in our text in a reverse way, with the daughters initiating it) is a major hidden, but devastating problem, in many professing Christian homes. How do such big sins ever happen?

1. Big sins always begin with little compromises.

Lot's downward path began with the choice to take the best land for himself (Gen. 13:1-13). It was a choice based on selfishness and greed, with no regard for Abraham or for the will of God. It resulted in Lot moving his tents near the wicked city of Sodom. In making this move, Lot was acting on the same goals as those in the world: he was trying to get ahead financially, with no concern for furthering God's purpose.

About this time, the Lord gave Lot a warning which should have jarred him into re-thinking his priorities. Four kings from the east swept into Sodom and captured everyone, including Lot, his family, and all his possessions. He should have gotten the message, that to pursue the things of this world is to chase a soap bubble. But he didn't listen. As soon as Abraham rescued him and (to Lot's shock) refused all the spoils of Sodom, Lot moved back to Sodom.

We next find him sitting in the gate and living in a house in Sodom (Gen. 19:1, 2). Things have gone well for Lot; he's achieving his financial goals. He has provided a comfortable lifestyle for his family. But we also find that his moral standards have become blurred, as he offers his two daughters to the perverted men of the city, in an attempt to protect his two angelic visitors. Because he had invested in Sodom, Lot was hesitant to leave, even when the angels warned that he would be swept away in the judgment of the city.

But the angels dragged him and his family out of the city and urged him to flee to the mountains. Even then Lot wanted to preserve as much of the old life as he could, bartering with the angels about fleeing to a small city nearby, even as the brimstone was about to fall from heaven. His wife, who could not quite pull herself away from the things she left behind, perished. Lot and his two daughters fled, first to Zoar, then to a cave in the mountains. Everything he had lived for in Sodom was gone.

So Lot's final degradation with his daughters was really just the cumulative result of many little compromises with the world that he had been making for years. Greed had led him to Sodom and kept him there in spite of God's warning. In the Bible, greed is often mentioned next to sexual immorality, because it's a sin of desiring the things of the flesh. So Lot's children readily learned the greed and sexual sins of Sodom.

Lot had always been a passive man, who made his choices based on what looked good (Gen. 13:10). He just went with the flow of the world, rather than making hard choices based on the will of God. So his debauched final scene, where his daughters get him drunk and then get themselves pregnant by him without his awareness, fits the pattern of his whole life: Go with the flow. Why not have a little more wine? Why not have sex?

Two observations: *First, note the connection between alcohol and sexual immorality.* If Lot had refused the wine, he probably would have refused the immorality. Isn't it interesting that even though the family had just lost everything, they managed to have plenty of wine! People enslaved to alcohol may not have rent money, but they manage to buy their booze! If you choose to drink, you need to know that you're playing with a dangerous weapon, which Satan

has used repeatedly to destroy people. Nobody chooses up front to become addicted to alcohol. They begin by drinking a little; it helps them relax. They would never have a problem if they didn't start in the first place.

Second, *note that when a father is passive, his family members often get frustrated and move in to take the leadership he should have been exercising.* Often they go in a wrong direction. Lot's daughters were frustrated because, due to their father's passivity and sin, they found themselves sitting in a cave with no prospects for marriage in sight. So they decided on this shameful method of having children. If you are a passive father, just letting your own and your family's spiritual life drift, you are creating frustration in them that is likely to result in them taking charge of the situation and moving in the wrong direction. So big sins always begin with little compromises.

2. Big sins always follow previously unconfessed sins.

At first glance, when Lot moves from Zoar to the mountains, you might think he was obeying God. The angels had first told him to flee to the mountains, but he got them to agree not to destroy Zoar, where he fled. But here we read that he moved to the mountains. Was he now obeying God? I don't think so. While I cannot be dogmatic, it seems that Lot was continuing his pattern of disobedience and refusal to confess his sins. In fact, it is likely that by going to the mountains at this point, Lot was deliberately refusing to confess his sins.

You have to ask, Why didn't Lot return to Abraham? He no longer had too many livestock to live near Abraham; all his possessions had been wiped out in the destruction of Sodom. When the angels told him to flee to the mountains, it is likely that they would have pointed in the direction of the mountains to the west, where they had just come from their visit with Abraham. That was the land God had promised to give to Abraham. Lot had lived there before. Abraham would be a good spiritual influence on Lot.

But we read that Lot's daughters named their sons Moab and Ben-Ammi, because they were the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites (19:37, 38). If we assume that Lot was living in a cave in the mountains of the region that later would be the territory of Moab and Ammon, then it means that he had gone to the east of

Zoar, not to the west. He had moved deliberately in the opposite direction from which the angels had told him to go, in the opposite direction from where Abraham lived.

Why did Lot do that? Because if he returned to Abraham, he would have to confess his sin and face up to the wrong choices he had made over the last 15 or 20 years. He would have to humble his pride and receive help from Abraham. Lot would rather live destitute in a cave, without admitting his sin, than to confess his sin and dwell with Abraham's abundance.

A lot of people refuse to come to God for salvation for the same reason. They don't want to humble themselves and confess their sin. If they would do that, they could enjoy all the abundance Christ offers, just as Lot could have feasted at Abraham's table. But like Lot, they go in the opposite direction and live in a cave, destitute and fearful, but clinging to their pride.

When you keep a little bit of sin in your life and refuse to obey God, fear results. There is no security or peace or rest, when your trust is in this world. Lot probably was afraid that Zoar would be destroyed for its sins, just as Sodom had been. He didn't have to fear that, because he had the angels' promise that he would be safe there. But when you don't confess your sins, you can't trust God, so you are hounded by fears of your own making. As Isaiah 57:21 says, "'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'"

If Lot had just confessed his sins, he would have been safe in Abraham's company, not cowering in fear in a cave in the mountains of Moab. His refusal to confess his sins led directly to the gross sins which culminate his sordid story. It's so much better to confess your sins. Proverbs 28:13 states, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

Big sins always begin with little compromises and they always follow previously unconfessed sins.

3. Big sins are often rationalized away.

Lot's daughters dishonor their father by making him drunk and then add the sin of immorality through incest. It wasn't accidental; they carefully planned their strategy. And it wasn't enough that one would sin in this manner; they collaborated together and

both committed this terrible sin. But note how they not only justify their sin (19:31-32), but they repeat their reason before the second sister commits her sin (19:34), to convince themselves that it's okay.

First they create a false crisis, a worst case scenario: "There aren't any men on earth we can marry!" It shouldn't have been all that difficult to match the caliber of the men in Sodom! But they're pushing the panic button. Then they add a noble reason to make it sound spiritual: "We need to preserve our family line." But they're just rationalizing gross sin.

Of course they had learned that trick from their father. He had engaged his daughters to men of Sodom. "Where else will I find husbands for them?" he probably asked. He was ready to give his daughters to be raped by the evil Sodomites to spare his guests from the same fate. It was a noble cause, and besides, what else could he do? He disobeyed God by bartering with the angels to stay in Zoar with the excuse that he would die if he fled to the mountains. Never mind that God said he would be safe there. And besides, Zoar was just a little town; its sins wouldn't be too bad. Lot had a pattern of rationalizing his sin. His daughters had learned well.

It never occurred to them that they could pray and wait on God to provide them the husbands they desired. They never mention the Lord. They had never seen their father seek the Lord for anything. They had never seen him wait on God in prayer. He hadn't sought the Lord about the decision to move to Sodom or, more recently, to the mountains. He never sought the Lord for any decisions in his life. So his daughters learned from him how to make up excuses for doing what you want to do, and to make it sound spiritual in the process.

A few years ago a well-known author and Bible teacher left his wife and moved in with a younger woman, whom he subsequently married. A speaker at our men's retreat said that he had seen this man, whom he knew, at a taping of a television show. When he spoke to the man about his sin, the man said that everyone has an area of weakness, and his just happened to be women. And, the other man shouldn't judge him, since he had his own areas of weakness, too! He was rationalizing his sin!

Big sins begin with little compromises; they follow previous unconfessed sins; they are often rationalized away.

4. Big sins always spread and persist.

Lot's sin spread to his daughters. So did his fears. He feared staying in Zoar; they feared that they wouldn't find husbands. But isn't it interesting that *nobody feared the Lord*, in spite of what they had just witnessed with regard to Sodom! The older daughter, who should have been an example, instead led her younger sister into sin (19:31). The result was Moab and Ammon, two perpetual enemies of Israel. Moab's king would later hire Balaam who counseled them to seduce Israelite men with their women (Numbers 25). The Ammonites worshiped a god named "Molech." Part of their religious devotion involved sacrificing their children to their god by throwing them into a raging fire. Israel itself was judged by God for following this detestable practice. Unconfessed sins spread and persist, sometimes for generations.

If you're not continually confronting your life, beginning with your thoughts, by the holy standard of God's Word, you begin to evaluate your behavior as Lot's daughters did, "after the manner of the earth" (19:31). Compared to what they were used to seeing in Sodom, drunkenness and incest were no big deal, especially if it served a noble purpose! By degrees, a culture that is living after "the manner of the earth" degenerates into increasingly abhorrent corruption, but it doesn't regard it as bad!

When I grew up, my parents would not allow me to attend movies or go to school dances, because they thought these activities were opposed to Christian standards. If you know anything about the movies from the 1950's and early '60's, you know that now you can find far worse language, sexual perversion, nudity, violence, and evil plots on network TV any night of the week than those movies contained. Hollywood keeps pushing the limits of corruption. Just when you think things couldn't get any worse, they introduce something "new," like cannibalism or incest or child molestation.

Three years ago, it was reported that a San Francisco State psychology professor serves as an advisor to a Dutch journal that advocates pedophilia. He told *Newsweek* [11/1/93] that pedophilia

is “not intrinsically” wrong and that U.S. views are skewed by cases of adults preying on children: “Are we going to let the sickos run society? Are we going to deny children, and adults, freedom to enjoy in life what could benefit them?” He said that his interest in the journal is “purely academic.” If you throw out God’s standards, who is to say that the man is wrong?

Little sins that are not dealt with spread into big sins. Big sins spread to others and persist for years. Lot’s daughters succeeded all too well in “preserving their family” through their father. They not only preserved their father’s family, but also their father’s sins!

Conclusion

If you want to honor God and avoid the failures that ruined Lot and his family, you’ve got to confront your sin on the thought level. Concerning lust, Jesus said that if your eye “makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29)! Those are extreme words! He’s saying that we must get radical in judging our sin, starting on the thought level. Unjudged sins like lust, pride, bitterness, and greed are like cracks below the water line in the dam. You can put up a good front for a long time, but you’re heading for a major disaster, both personally and with your family. As Paul put it, we must take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Luis Palau writes,

Immorality begins with tiny habits sown in your youth. Little things, little attitudes, little habits. Maybe some casual petting on a date, maybe some pornography that fell into your hands, maybe a fascination with sensual novels and stories. Little things. Yet if you don’t crucify them--if you don’t bring them to judgment--if you don’t face up to them for what they are--SIN--they can destroy you. They can blur your moral judgment at a critical, irreversible juncture in life....

Nobody falls into sex sin by chance. Nobody commits fornication, adultery, or homosexuality out of one sudden blast hitting him from somewhere. It builds slowly, slowly, slowly. Falling is just the effect of the cumulative bundle of tempta-

tion and passion that has been piling up and has not been crucified. (*ibid.*, pp. 68-69.)

So my word to all, but especially to fathers, is: Deal with the little sins, the ones nobody else can see, before they result in big sins which everyone sees, sins which destroy you and your family. Repair the cracks beneath the surface before the dam bursts!

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that nobody falls into major sin suddenly? Why/why not?
2. Is it possible to be blind to certain sins that could be eroding one's spiritual life? How can we keep blind spots from leading to our downfall by surprising us?
3. What elements are involved in confessing our sin? Must we feel sorry for our sins?
4. How would you answer someone who said, "God isn't fair to make children suffer for their parents' sins"? How can children recover from the sin and abuse of their parents?

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