

Pitching Away from Sodom: The Reformed Life of Antithesis (1)

When yet upon earth, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed to his father concerning his elect brethren, his church, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [which is in the world]” (John 17: 15). This was a final prayer on behalf of his people that they would live as he had taught them in his ministry. In his ministry, he commanded his disciples to watch earnestly for his return after his ascension, warning that the days before his coming would be “as it was in the days of Noe...as it was in the days of Lot... But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26a, 28a, 29). To keep his disciples from becoming so comfortable in the world—as Lot certainly did—that, in the day of God’s judgment, they would lament the loss of their earthly way of life, Christ gave the stern warning: “Remember Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:32). The history of Lot, Old Testament believer and nephew of Abraham, offers sharp lessons and warnings to the New Testament, Reformed believer today on how he is to live in the world. The Reformed believer, taking instruction and warning from the sin of Lot, earnestly desirous of living in spiritual separation from Sodom and of living in holiness toward God in the power of the risen Jesus Christ, will live the antithesis and repudiate with all his being the failed fiction of common grace as a bridge to allow Sodom into the church and his own life.

We begin with the sin of Lot. The sin of just and righteous Lot, for that is Scripture’s own testimony of Abraham’s nephew in II Peter 2:7, 8, “And [God, through judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah] delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds).” Lot was elect; this is the only possible explanation for Scripture’s description of him as just and righteous, in spite of his enormous sin. Lot was one of the select number of men whom God in eternity, of his good pleasure, took out of the “common mass of sinners”^[1] and gave to Jesus Christ, to be redeemed to the uttermost by Christ, justified by faith in Christ, and in Christ to have Jehovah God’s gracious covenant established with him. That Lot was just and righteous is emphasized in II Peter 2:7, 8 when the apostle says that Lot was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” and “with their [the men of Sodom’s] unlawful deeds.” The reprobate ungodly are not vexed with the filthy conversation of themselves or their fellow reprobates. So far are they from being vexed by their fellows’—and their own—unlawful deeds that Paul, in Romans 1:32 concludes, “Who [the reprobate] knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, *not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*” The reprobate, conscious of the imminent and

inevitable judgment of God, not only commit sin, but take the greatest delight in all iniquity—theirs and others—and especially in the sensual transgressions of fornication, adultery, and sodomy. It is especially with this last perversion that righteous Lot vexed his soul in the city of Sodom. In the vexing of his soul, Lot is shown to be righteous: the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ was at work in him to stir his soul to grief at the perversions of the Sodomites.

Nevertheless, we must address the shameful sin of Lot. The Scripture says that he “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12). In pitching toward Sodom, it is implied that Lot pitched *away from* something or someone else. Verse 11 says “Lot and Abram separated themselves [from each other],” Lot toward Sodom in the valley of Jordan and Abram toward the less fertile but more isolated plains of Canaan. In pitching toward Sodom, Lot pitched *away from* Abram. Abram’s family and household, with whom Lot was joined by both blood and faith, was the manifestation of Jehovah’s church of the Old Testament. Abram and Lot had been called by God out of the nation of Ur of the Chaldees to wander as pilgrims and strangers in the unknown wastes of Canaan (Gen. 11:31–12:5). Both Lot and Abraham were commanded to wander as pilgrims in a strange and evil land, looking “for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). That Abram’s family was chosen by God as his church of the Old Testament is made unmistakably clear in Genesis 17, where Jehovah God established his everlasting covenant with Abraham and with Abraham’s seed. Therefore, for Lot to separate himself from Abraham and pitch toward Sodom—and that for the purely carnal reason that the plain of Jordan in which Sodom lay was “well-watered everywhere...even as the garden of the Lord”—was for Lot to commit *schism* in the family of Abraham, the manifestation of the church.

Moreover, Lot knew that the men of Sodom were “wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (Gen. 13:13). From the actions of these men of Sodom we derive the term “sodomy,” which is that grossest perversion of God’s natural, created order so that “even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Romans 1:26, 27a). With this execrable transgression just Lot vexed his soul.

But the sin of just Lot in pitching toward Sodom and away from Abram developed. This is always the case with sin. One never stagnates or stands still; one always develops. Lot developed from pitching his tent *toward* Sodom to living in a permanent dwelling *within* Sodom itself. Lot became prominent in Sodom: he sat in the gates, a sign in the Old Testament of prominence in the society of men (Gen. 19:1). His daughters married reprobate men of the city (the “sons in law” of vs. 14), which men,

if they did not also practice sodomy themselves, were products of a culture where it was not only practiced, but advocated and glorified. God gave Lot's wife over to the luxuries and pleasures of the city, as is shown in her deliberate rejection of God's command "Look not behind thee" (vs. 17) as she and her husband and daughters fled from Sodom as God's judgment fell upon the city. Transgressing his duty to be a covenant father, Lot even offered to substitute his daughters to the mob that surrounded his house seeking for carnal relations with the two angels whom Lot was hosting for the night, saying to the mob, "Let me, I pray you, bring them [his two virgin daughters] out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes..." (vs. 8). Lot became so infatuated with the delightful position he had in Sodom that when the Lord sent his angels to deliver this one just man in all of Sodom from Jehovah's judgment with the men of Sodom, Lot "lingered" so that the angels "laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters...and they brought him forth and set him without the city" (vs. 16). When the angels then commanded Lot to "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountains lest thou be consumed," Lot whined and pleaded "Oh, not so, my Lord...I cannot escape to the mountains lest some evil take me and I die: Behold now this city [Zoar] is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live" (vs. 17–20).

Then, there is that grievous history of Genesis 19:30–38. Having departed from Zoar for the mountains, no doubt shaken by the Lord's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah and upon his own wife which he had witnessed, Lot was made drunk by his own two daughters in the cave where they had taken refuge. They then lay with him, so that the children they produced were Lot's sons as well as his grandsons. Oh, if such a man, whom the Scriptures—and therefore God himself—call just and righteous strayed so far off the path of holiness, how then are we, who confess with the apostle in I Timothy 1:15 "I am the chief of sinners," to live? I say, how then shall we live?

The answer to the question "How then shall we live" is: antithetically! This is exactly the demand of God's Word and of the Reformed Confessions.

The antithesis is the "spiritual separation and warfare that God himself has placed between his holy people and the unholy world of men and women outside of Jesus Christ."^[2] The antithesis is an institution of God, found in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." The antithesis—the warfare—between the two seeds springs, like waters from a fountain, out of God's eternal decree of sovereign election and sovereign reprobation. Predestination is the foundation of the antithesis. The Mother Promise grounds predestination—and therefore the antithesis—in Jesus Christ. God gave his mercy and grace to certain persons in Jesus Christ, electing those persons to salvation and faith in Christ. Likewise, he withheld

from other certain persons all mercy and grace in Christ, leaving them outside of all salvation and faith in his son. Between these two species of men, God instituted separation and warfare.

In the Old Testament, the antithesis was manifested in physical separation between Israel and the ungodly nations of Canaan. Moses instructed Old Testament Israel in his blessing of the people in Deuteronomy 33: 27, 28a, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee and shall say, ‘Destroy them.’ Israel then shall dwell in safety alone...” Through the total, physical destruction of the Canaanites, Israel would sanctify herself and experience God’s love and his blessing upon her.

In Genesis 13 and 19, just Lot rejected the antithesis for a time. For him, as a believer of the Old Testament, the antithesis was to be a physical separation from Sodom and Gomorrah. Rejecting the safety of separation, Lot rather pitched his tent toward Sodom and shortly moved into Sodom to make it his permanent dwelling. “The Lord being merciful unto him” (Gen. 19:16), Lot was saved only by fleeing away from Sodom and into the mountains of isolation, while God’s righteous fire and brimstone consumed the cities that had filled their cup of iniquity.

The safety of God’s elect in the New Testament is also in separation. This is not physical, in the form of world-flight. It is the stirring call of II Corinthians 6: 17, “Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you” and Revelation 18:4, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” This is the “spiritual separation and warfare” of the antithesis of the New Testament church. Next time, we shall begin to study the demands that the call “Come out of her [the world], my people” lays upon us as Reformed believers, especially as Reformed young people.