

The Christian Listlessly Escaping Sin

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“But while he lingered, the men seized him and . . . brought him forth . . . outside the city and left him there.” Gen. 19:16, Amplified Bible

The Old Testament saints, looking forward to Christ, were by that fact and in that sense Christians. Lot, too, was a Christian. Although nowhere listed in the faith-heroes Hall of Fame, he was, nevertheless, a child of God. He is often referred to as a backslider. In a certain sense he was that. Since a backslider is one who has slidden back from a forward position, many, properly, may not be named as backsliders, simply because they never had been spiritually anywhere forward or up front. Lot had; but he drifted back. Still, the King James word “backslider” is not the most accurate term. It is not found in the New Testament, and the idea of the English word “slide” is not in the Old. In Hosea 4:16 we read, “Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer.” This could be better translated, “Israel is stubborn as a stubborn heifer.” Any minister who has ever served the church in farm lands or cattle country soon learns a little of what it’s like to load heifers on a truck. Pigs may raise a racket about it, but are loaded without too much difficulty. Sheep probably present the least difficulty in directing their movements. But heifers are usually stubborn. They have to be pushed.

Don't you often have to be pushed or hurried? Father, or mother, calls you to come, or to go somewhere. Your usual or frequent response is, “In a minute!” But when mother calls you to come, she does not intend that you act “in a minute.” She wants you to come immediately: you understand the meaning of that underscored word. Why not learn to be bi-lingual on the point? Learn the word in Dutch. Ask around about it.

Well, Lot had to be pushed, for he was continually holding back. He had procrastinated to such an extent that he had to be hurried along. Gen. 19:15. Yet he lingered (v. 16); he loitered until the men (angels) seized him, his wife and his daughters, brought them out, and put them outside the city. Why didn't he flee with all haste the place where his daughters' purity was not safe, where his sons-in-law were daily exposed to vile corruptions and his guests to shocking violence? Amazing that Lot had to be hurried and dragged out of Sodom! What should you learn from this? That there is no safety in or near sin, but only in fleeing it! Wasn't Lot foolish to think himself saved while he lingered in the place of destruction? May you think that you are a Christian while you conduct yourself in any way of sin? By nature, we are likely to wish we could be saved in our sins. But it doesn't work that way. We must be saved from our sins.

Amazing? It was incredible that Lot not only lagged along the way, but even argued with his rescuers! In water-rescue training one learns that a drowning man can be dangerous, a threat to his own and his rescuer's safety. One learns to protect oneself with skill, not brute force, in performing the rescue technique. But now, suppose the Mall were all aflame: surely you would not dilly-dally over a slot machine or argue with police and firemen for waving or even shoving you out!

But Lot prayed, “Oh, not so, my Lord!” For a long time already Lot had been praying just such a prayer. He had been praying, “Not Thy will, but mine be done.” Is that what you pray? at least down in the depths of your heart? Even when it was evident that the Lord was being merciful to him (v.16), Lot still went on refusing to have anything but his own way. Remember the Babel-builders? They would stop at nothing to get themselves a name and fame, to get their own way. And Lot even went so far as to oppose, every step of the way, the Lord's rear-guard

rescue action. That is like jumping up the only fire-escape with storage, then locking it and throwing the key away. But isn't that just the way we are by nature? According to the flesh, we are bond slaves to King Sin down in his dark dungeon of Death; and we just love to have it so (Jer. 5:31). We love our slimy pit; we love our heavy chains and our griping shackles; we love being locked in, want no disturbance, such as efforts to free us. So you see once again that if we were not saved by God's sovereign, free and mighty will, we just never would be saved.

But Lot goes on to do worse. He speaks rather piously, yet at the same time, complainingly about the grace and mercy of God then saving his wasted life. He has the gall to complain that his rescue, right then being affected, would only imperil his life. Strange, isn't it, that prayer like Abraham's self-effacing petition is rare, while the egotistical prayer of Lot is multiplied throughout the earth! But do we not ourselves sometimes pray simultaneously, piously and complainingly? We piously bow in prayer at table thanking the Lord for our food, only the next moment to complain because there is no dessert or because we don't like broccoli.

One of Lot's rescuers earnestly urged him, "Escape for your life! . . . Escape to the mountain, lest you be swept away!" (v. 17). Yet Lot could hardly bring himself to do this. His response was, "Look! This town is near enough to flee to, and it is small. Please! Let me escape to it, isn't it small to save my life!" (v. 20, New Berkeley Version). Many professed Christians will not give up Sodom. Others, realizing that one cannot be a Christian and remain in Sodom, then want to substitute Zoar for Sodom. But what is the world of Zoar against the world of Sodom, though it be but a shred of the world; it is still the world, the wicked world! It is upright to relinquish a great Sodom while holding in reserve a little Zoar?

"Is it not a little one?" Lot does not cease to amaze us. Now he whimpers as he drags his feet. He carries on in a quavering tone, like a stubborn child with a whining voice. He was getting to be a pest. Abraham certainly knew that God could do more for him than he could do for himself. See especially Gen. 22. But Lot had not learned this, for he went on nagging for his little Zoar. But aren't we rather like Lot? Are we willing to give up our Sodoms without begging God or at least expecting Him to leave us a little corner corn-patch under our own control? Knowing what the converted Ephesians did with their occult books of magic, Acts 19:19, will Christian young people addicted to Rock "music" even approach that commendable action by ridding themselves of a tithe to their collection? There goes a "Rock" devotee: he has his little battered Zoar in his pocket and plugged into his muddled little head. Everywhere he goes he carries around with him his own incessant, clanging, crashing hell.

Lot was granted his request, v. 21. Was that an answer of mercy, merely, or was it chastisement, delivering him over to his desires, as in Psalm 106:15? Evidently the latter. Lot chose his own way. The Lord's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace. Lot's paths did not end in peace, but in tragedy and gloom. Lot was not drawn by the joys of heaven, but driven by the sorrows of earth. He was not able to say, "I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." We have so much. We have the Heavenly Manna, the Water of Life from the Rock, the Pillar of Cloud sheltering us, the Pillar of Fire separating us from our foes. What more do we need? Yet we have more: we have the Cross on Mt. Calvary, our eternal refuge. Then shall we yammer for the fish and garlic of Egypt? Shall we slink off to a little Zoar where we hope to conceal under a veneer of religiosity a giant Sodom-size worldliness? Lot did. But his ardor for it soon cooled and froze to uncontrollable dread. Then quickly enough he deserted that place for the refuge of the mountains. He did through fear what he could not do by faith. He finally became spiritually unhinged. He learned to his sorrow that the world's Sodoms and Zoars are all alike. In them there is no peace, safety, satisfaction or rest. The pall

and dread of judgment hangs over them all. Judgment, too, lingers. Don't forget that. Yet mercy flies with the speed of a falcon. Good for us, too, that it is so, or judgment would sweep us all away.

Lot's angel rescuers understood that he was one of the elect, yet they did not omit their many exhortations to him. He was predestinated unto life, but not apart from means. The Lord ordains His own means as well as the glorious end He has for us. A mere word to the wise is sufficient to inform them of their danger and to start them on the way of blessed escape from judgment. But are we not so exasperatingly unwise? We have to be warned, urged and persuaded repeatedly. Sometimes we need to be troubled into thoughtfulness. Cp. Luke 18:5.

Learn from Lot's history that sin must be given up. Jer. 4:1. You can't do that but in the Holy Spirit's strength. But you must do it. To cling to sin is to cling to destruction. Flee youthful lusts! Not "in a minute". Immediately!

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