

The Risk of Sitting at the Gates of Sodom.
Genesis 19, Deuteronomy 6:4-6, Ephesians 4:17-23

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Someone recently asked how long it takes for me to write a Sunday sermon? A usual Sunday message takes anywhere from 12 to 20 hours to prepare before it is ready to be shared with you. However, today's message has been over 25 years in the making and is in answer to a question that I have asked myself for at least that long: ***How do I honorably live and raise a family while sitting at the Gates of Sodom?***

How I wish someone had shared this answer with me when my own children were young. How might their lives be different had I understood and applied this answer within my own family as much as I had instinctively followed it myself?

Now, the best I can do is share this answer with the few of you who are still raising your children and with the rest of us who can share it with our adult children in hopes that they will raise their children differently. All of us living in today's culture, whether or not we realize it, are once again sitting right there with Lot at the Gates of Sodom. And worse still, Sodom no longer stops at our front door, but has entered our homes through the popular media: the casual attitude towards morality as portrayed in most movies, even in "family" television shows, and even worse in the commercials, along with the amazing level of violence which is now treated as recreation in our video games.

How then can we now live and raise our children to live God-honoring, moral, and happy lives--where we live ?

Here is the answer so you can be thinking about it knowing that we will circle back to it at application time:

The answer is that the Ten Commandments were never meant to be just a poster hanging on the school house, or Sunday School wall, or as a magnet on your refrigerator. **God gave the Ten Commandments to direct not only every aspect of your daily living, and thinking—being the filter through which you interpret all that happens around you—but also to be your guide for raising God-honoring, moral, and happy Children.**

Honoring the Ten Commandments in yours and your family's life is the key to Godly Christian living; the practice of which is as difficult as you imagine it will be, and the ignorance of which has brought our culture to where it is today.

Jesus specifically declared that the moral code of the Ten Commandments would remain in full-force until the end of human history; that those who taught and honored the commandments would be honored in God's kingdom and those who ignored them

would be least. Jesus then went on to repeat and expand upon the Commandments in what we now call his "Sermon on the Mount."

Before his second recitation of the Ten Commandments to the People of Israel, Moses gave this summary and application of their use:

This is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe ... so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, ...

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Now known as the "Shema" (Hebrew for listen!), this is the most memorized, and repeated scripture in our entire Bible. It is spoken by Jewish believers when they go to bed at night and when they get up in the morning. This is also the passage of scripture that is written out on tiny scrolls that are then tucked into those little brass boxes (mazuzahs) which are then nailed on the doorframes of Jewish homes—in literal obedience to Moses' command.

Thus the Ten Commandments both in our honoring of them and in teaching the same to our children—according to both Moses and Jesus--serve as the central moral pivot of our entire Bible

Then when you realize that the primary teaching method of Moses' day was by "story telling" within the family circle, suddenly you will begin to see all of the stories of the Bible not just as historic records but more importantly as teaching aids to explain, illustrate, and pass along within the family circle, how keeping or not-keeping the Ten Commandments would impact our lives.

My point is that all the recorded Biblical stories were intended to be used by parents as instructional aids in passing along a living faith and God-honoring life to their children.

- Suddenly the story of Adam and Eve also becomes a morality lesson in what happens when you covet what is not yours.
- The story of the flood illustrates that holiness is a struggle which we should never take for granted—whether in the old world or the new.
- And the story of Joseph in Egypt becomes a lesson in why and how to keep oneself morally pure even in the worst of circumstances.
- The story of David and Bathsheba is a powerful lesson in the cost of adultery.
- Daniel in Babylon illustrates how to honor God alone, again, even in the worst of circumstances.
- And it very easy to compare the God faithfulness of foreigner Ruth with the faithlessness of privileged King Solomon and how this affected their lives as well as the lives of their children.

We can go on to treat just about every story in our Bible—Old and New Testaments this way, not just as history but also in teaching the benefits, or costs, of keeping or ignoring God’s Commandments. And this is what we have been ordered and advised to do, by no less than Moses, Jesus, and the Apostle Paul who would write of this to his Gentile converts!

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15.4:

Do you begin to see the point I am driving at?

If we are not “reciting these stories to our children” teaching and applying the Ten Commandments with our children over the breakfast and supper table, whether at home or abroad, what do you think Moses, Jesus, and Paul would say to us?

Let’s use today’s story of Lot to illustrate this principal of teaching the commandments.

Every time we read Genesis 19, if all we focus on is God’s destruction of a morally depraved people, then we are only catching half the lesson. **We also need to ask, why does this story circle particularly around Abraham’s nephew Lot? What are we**

supposed to be learning for ourselves—and teaching to our family—about the outcome of Lot’s life because the angels found him “sitting at the gates of Sodom?”

First, we need to note that our Bible describes Lot as a *righteous man who grieved his own soul by living amidst the licentious lawlessness of Sodom* (2 Peter 2:7-9).

And I am very glad to learn that people like Lot, and Abraham, and King David, were still counted as righteous people even as I have learned of their failures. And as I meditate on Jesus parable of the “Prodigal son,” I come to learn that when the righteous stumble, and they do stumble, God is still there ready to restore them; to restore me, to restore my children. This gives me continual hope both for myself and for my children’s futures.

But next, we need to ask ourselves and discuss with our family how a “righteous man” such a Lot ended up living where he did? And what might have been his better course of action?

- We know that Abraham was brought to this promised land but [apparently] was instructed to remain wandering in the wilderness because of the wickedness of the local cities (13:13-18).
- And we have already learned that while Abraham was following God, Lot was basically just following Abraham. So when these two father/leaders had to separate their large estates, Lot made what he thought was just a smart business decision in choosing land that was green and well-watered even though it brought him close to those forbidden cities. (Lot chose easy living over godly living).
- And whatever he was thinking about his ability to keep himself and his family separate from the moral depravity of a city such as Sodom, we can follow Lot’s progression from pitching his tents near the city, to living in the city, and finally to be found sitting at its gates (recognized as a leader in the town).
- Then most surprisingly, even after the attempted gang rape of both the angels and himself, even after he was ordered by angels to leave as fast as possible, that Lot remained “lingering” in town. Until, at daybreak, the angels had to forcefully take him and his family by the hand and drag them out of the town.
- And in the end, that righteous man whom the angels found sitting at the gates of Sodom lost everything: not only all his possessions, but also his family. Lot’s wife, looking back in regret immediately died. While Lot’s daughters—having now been raised in town—brought Sodom’s values with

them into exile. All because rather than following God through the wilderness, like his uncle Abraham, Lot chose to move his family close to Sodom.

What is the moral of this particular story that you need to share with your family? Someone has said, "*He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to.*"

- The choices we daily make will determine our ultimate path in life; our long-term destiny.
- The choices we daily make will determine our long-term enjoyment of life.
- The choices we daily make will determine the influence we have on others.
- The choices we daily make will determine what kind of walk we will have with the Lord.

Lot chose personal comfort over the harder God honoring life of Abraham. And "*once our direction is set, our destination is also determined, for it is now only a matter of time... Some decisions may not seem very significant, but they set a particular course for our lives. The decision may not seem very important, but its final outcome can be terrifying and tragic.*" (Pastor Bob Deffinbaugh)

This was the truth as Lot discovered—and now hopefully has taught to us—that day when the angels found him sitting at the gates of Sodom.

So the application is, what seemingly small choices are you making on a daily basis in accordance with or denial of the Ten Commandments that will affect not only where you end up in life, but also perhaps where your children will end up?

For a multitude of reasons, but including our failure to pass along these lessons to our children, the western Church has now circled back to its roots as an underground movement in a largely hostile culture. The age of Christendom has officially ended, and we who name ourselves as Christian now again find ourselves on the underside of cultural influence and power. I doubt they will be feeding us to the lions anytime soon; but it is easy to sense a similar attitude of disdain again circling in the very cultural air that we breathe. **The Ten Commandments did us no good hanging on the schoolhouse or courthouse wall, because we forgot to hang them by our kitchen table, and to serve them up with the breakfast pancakes.**

So now, how you are choosing to live? And equally important, what are you teaching? Your parental leadings, will determine more than anything else whether your children

will grow up Christian or not. It's not up to the Church, it's not up to the Sunday School program—it never really was—it has always been up to you—in your own home, at their most teachable moments—to shape the life and strength of your children's faith.

Friends, believe me, I share this message with you with as much personal regret in my own parenting of my own children. While God intervened directly in my life placing me in the midst of a dedicated Christian community, insuring my growth in faith, I in turn, while leading Churches, largely trusted the Christian upbringing of my own children more to the Sunday School than the supper table. How might their lives be different had I taken as much personal concern for my own children's understanding and honoring of the Ten Commandments in their lives ?

But neither you nor I are alone here. As friend and fellow Pastor Phillip Parker has noted, this is a mistake that many Christians have been making for a long time. Just as for 150 years we have trusted the public school system to educate our children, we have also trusted Sunday School to grow our children into mature Christians.

Sadly we have now discovered that Sunday School, and most of the Church youth groups have largely failed in passing on this living faith to our children. For whatever good that was taught there, if it was not evidenced, discussed, and reinforced in the home, soon evaporated from their minds. In this way we gave our children just enough of Christianity to inoculate them from ever catching a full blown case of faith. And that is why this last generation largely has left the church and never come back.

But friends also hear this. I do not share this message with you in a sense of defeat but in hope.

- First in the knowing hope that God is always out there waiting and watching for our prodigal's return.
- Secondly, because this is the place to which we, the Church, must return: on the underside of power, the outside of culture; driven from the public square to sit back down at our kitchen tables—where the Church has always been the most effective, the most alive. We may now drive electric cars and take digital pictures with our smart phones, but culturally humans have changed little since the days of the Greco/Roman empire when a handful of Christians working from the underside of society, conquered the world by sharing and proving the love of God with their neighbors—one neighbor at a time—living their faith daily and teaching the same in their homes to their children. That is the way it has always been best done.

That is why Paul's instructions to us today are as pertinent as they were when he first penned them:

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as non-believers live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

That is not the way you learned Christ!

For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Our life in Christ means we are expected to live in this world, not as its citizens but as God's ambassadors; and we are not to be controlled by this world but by God's spirit.

We may live near Sodom, but we don't have to sit in its gates. And now more than ever, it is up to us to make sure that our children don't end up there either.

Now that you know this how will it change the way you live—and parent?

Why don't we take a few moments to silently pray about how we might live and teach the Ten Commandments to our children.