

We think of God, especially the God of the Old Testament, as being hard and inflexible. There is a sharp dividing line between Good and Evil, but God's grace covers the distance between us when we fall short. This could be considered evidence of a certain elasticity in the nature of God.

The account of the time Abraham negotiated with God about Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33) illustrates the fact that God can be flexible with us. God knew of Abraham's concern for his nephew Lot, who had chosen the best land for his home. Abraham had already rescued him and the other inhabitants once from invaders, but this time the cities were not to be spared.

God decided to share what He was about to do with Abraham, and Abraham's worry about Lot resurfaced. He began to plead with God to hold back His wrath on Sodom if there were just a few righteous people there. He started with fifty righteous, and negotiated God down to only ten. I figure Abraham counted Lot and Lot's family, and thought there would surely be a handful more that would prove to be godly people.

Note that there was no criteria for "righteousness" established between God and Abraham. Abraham negotiated to an area where he either felt safe or that he had pushed it as far as he could go. Whatever the criteria, Abraham was working on what he thought was the basic level of weakness for these people. But as we know, the city did not measure up, and God finalized his plan of destruction.

In these negotiations we see that God shows some flexibility in His dealings with man. Most of us don't realize that Lot went even further with God in this negotiation process. When the angels told Lot to get out of town fast and don't look back, they specifically ordered him to take his family to the mountains. Besides getting out of the evil city of Sodom (even here Lot hesitated and had to be pulled away from the city), there were two orders given to Lot that represented potential physical and spiritual weaknesses.

One command was to go to the mountains. The other, the more famous instruction, was to not look back. Lot, in considering these commands, decided to negotiate with God (not even knowing about Abraham's success in this area) on the first one. He pled with the angel to let them stop at the little town of Zoar, for he perceived their physical weakness to be their greatest problem.

God responded to Lot, and allowed Lot and his party to stop before he made it to the mountains. Notice the language, "I will grant this request too!" But the important thing here is that Lot did not understand the real nature of their human weakness; he made the wrong choice. He should have asked for God to allow them to look back at the destruction, for that was the weakness that caused him to lose his wife. Even now, when we think about it, we think about how severe God was to turn her permanently into a pillar of salt. But the lesson for us is that we don't have the proper perspective of the magnitude of our spiritual weakness, and this is what leads us into real trouble. Thank God for the flexibility of His Grace.