

Message #11
Abraham: A Model of Faith

Kurt Hedlund
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ABRAHAM AND INTEGRITY GENESIS 20

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We will start this morning with a current events quiz. (PROJECTOR ON--- W.B. AND C.M.) Does anyone recognize these two men? (Warren Buffett and Charlie Munger) Warren Buffett is the long time chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, one of the most successful investment companies in the US. The other guy is Charlie Munger, who has served as vice chairman of the company for many years.

Charlie Munger passed away on November 28. He was 34 days short of his hundredth birthday. He had been active in business right up to the time of his death. Charlie was a very wealthy guy. But he hardly fit the image of the greedy capitalist. He was convinced that capitalism had much to offer society. But he was a generous guy. It is estimated that he gave away about \$500 million to various charitable institutions. He lived in the same modest house for seventy years, He came from Michigan and went to the University of Michigan but lived most of his life in Pasadena.

Charlie Munger spoke often about wise investment strategies. He wrote a couple of books about it. One of his wiser statements was this: (CHARLES MUNGER QUOTATION) **“Remember that reputation and integrity are your most valuable assets--- and can be lost in a heartbeat.”** (*The Epoch Times*, 1/3-9/2024) Reputation and integrity.

On the world and national political stage there seems to be a deficit in those areas. Observers find much to criticize about the present and former president. In a recent debate between two of the Republican candidates much of the time was spent calling each other liars. It seems disheartening to many of us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Even in the realm of Christian ministry, which should be marked by reputation and integrity, there are too many shortfalls. There are all too many reports about pastors and ministry leaders who are messing up.

It is perhaps also true that if people could probe the inner recesses of all of our lives and thoughts, as the Lord can, the reputation and integrity of all of us might be in doubt. The Bible indeed says that all of us are sinners. Is there any hope?

There was a lawyer in Chicago years ago who was known as Easy Eddie. (PROJECTOR ON--- EASY EDDIE) Eddie originally came from St. Louis. He was a smart guy who was able to go to college and law school. After law school he got a job working for the Greyhound Racing Association. He did work on the side for the head of that group. It was a lucrative job.

His business dealings brought Easy Eddie to Chicago. There he made the acquaintance of another business guy. He was also a rich man. But this Chicago businessman had some rather questionable business dealings. His name was Al Capone. Easy Eddie was such a good lawyer that he was able to keep Al Capone out of jail for a long time. Eddie in turn was paid very well. He had a large mansion. In fact his estate occupied an entire Chicago city block. At first Eddie tried to ignore the chaos and crime that surrounded his boss.

Eddie was divorced, but he spent a fair amount of time thinking about his son. He wanted to be a good father, and he wanted to see his son turn out well. He realized that his own lack of integrity could give him lots of money, but not a good name. He decided that he needed to do something about it. So in 1930 he went to the IRS. He told the IRS what he knew about Al Capone's business dealings. Partly because of his testimony Al Capone went to prison for tax evasion. What would all of the effects of this be on Easy Eddie's son? (PROJECTOR OFF)

Abraham was also concerned about his son. At this point in the story of his life, Abraham did not yet have his special son. The Lord in #18 of Genesis had promised Abraham that he would have a special son through his wife Sarah in the next year. This son would be involved in the fulfillment of great promises which God had made to Abraham. The legacy which Abraham would leave might adversely be affected by the events described in the chapter before us.

We left off last time in #19 with Sodom and Gomorrah having been destroyed and Abraham's nephew Lot having degenerated into a state of despair. God rescued Lot and his two daughters from Sodom, but Lot suffered severe consequences for the bad choices that he made. He learned that volitional deterioration leads to moral deterioration, which leads to spiritual deterioration, which leads to emotional deterioration.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. ABRAHAM'S FAILURE OF INTEGRITY) So today in the first two verses of #20 we learn about ABRAHAM'S FAILURE OF INTEGRITY. According to v. 1, "**From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.**" Gerar is about 60 miles southwest of Hebron. (GERAR MAP) Why Abraham moved there we are not told.

The land to which he and his clan moved was occupied by the Philistines, or their forerunners. In #21 this area is called the land of the Philistines. Many scholars don't believe that the Philistines showed up from the Greek islands until centuries later. There is, however, archaeological evidence from Abraham's day that people living here were said to be from Caphtor, which is a reference to Crete, which was within the realm of Greek influence for many centuries.

Centuries later the Hebrews would be engaged in regular warfare with the Philistines. Here the two groups seem to get along. The Philistine king is called Abimelech, which

literally means “my father is king.” It is probably a title rather than a proper name. In the later time of King David he would refer in Psalm 34 to the king of Gath in the land of the Philistines as being Abimelech.

In v. 2 of our passage we read, **“And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She is my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.”** Abraham was 99 or 100 years old. He had experienced major triumphs of faith. He had defeated a much larger alliance of northern city-states. He had come to believe that God would provide him with a son in his old age. He had recently spoken with the Son of God Himself. Yet now he lies about his wife. In #19 Lot offered two daughters to placate potential enemies. Now in #20 Abraham offers his wife to placate potential enemies. (PROJECTOR OFF)

About 25 years earlier Abraham had pulled this stunt in Egypt. According to #12 he lied about Sarah being his wife, and pharaoh took her into his harem. God intervened, and Pharaoh kicked Abraham out of the country. We would have hoped that Abraham had learned his lesson, and that his faith would have been strong enough to respond appropriately to this situation now.

Liberal critics have suggested that the best explanation is that we have two different accounts of the same incident. There are some similarities, but there are also significant differences. The locations are different. The pharaoh is an idolater, and Abimelech is a man who fears God. The pharaoh kicks Abraham out of the country, whereas Abimelech gives him the choice of where he wants to live. Pharaoh was attracted to Sarah by her beauty. Twenty-five years later no mention is made of Sarah’s beauty. The text of Genesis tells us that she lived to be 127 years old. Perhaps she still was a beautiful woman. She was simply beyond the age of usually being able to bear children. The Philistine king’s interest in Sarah may also stem from a desire to make an alliance with Abraham’s desert tribe. Marrying Abraham’s sister might be a nice way to cement the deal.

Whatever the reason was for Abimelech’s interest in Sarah, he took her and brought her into his harem. Behind the scene there is a spiritual battle going on. The Lord had just promised Abraham and Sarah that they were going to have a son within one year. Satan is always seeking to thwart God’s program and God’s promises. If he can keep Sarah in Abimelech’s harem and she is not yet pregnant, she won’t be able to have the promised son by Abraham. Abraham’s lack of faith and integrity has been exploited, and God’s program and promise is threatened. How could Abraham screw up so badly?

II.

Verses 3-7 describe GOD’S INTERVENTION OF GRACE. (PROJECTOR ON--- GOD’S INTERVENTION OF GRACE) The Lord appears to Abimelech in a dream and, according to v. 3, says to the Philistine, **“Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”** Notice that God brings Abimelech to account not because he is threatening the fulfillment of particular promises to Abraham and Sarah but rather because he is involved with a married woman. Verse 4 makes clear that Abimelech’s whole tribe is in danger of judgment. Abraham was to

be a blessing to the other nations of the world. But now his failure of integrity threatens to bring a curse upon the Philistines.

So Abimelech appeals to the justice of God, just as Abraham did in #18 when he was pleading for the people of Sodom. Abimelech says in v. 5 that he has taken Sarah into his harem **“in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands.”** Abimelech did not know that Sarah was married. In fact Abraham indicated that she was not married.

In #17 v. 1 the Lord used the same word for “integrity” when He instructed Abraham, **“Walk before me and be blameless (or ‘show integrity’).”** Sadly it is Abimelech--- the foreigner, the Gentile--- who is showing integrity here while the man of God has blown it.

In v. 6 the Lord says that He knows that the king was unaware that Sarah was married. But He adds, **“and it was I who kept you from sinning against me.”** God graciously intervened to ensure that His promises were fulfilled.

So God tells Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham and to ask Abraham to pray for him that he may live. Abraham is called a prophet in v. 7, the first time in the Bible that this term is used. One of the jobs of the Old Testament prophets was to intercede for others in prayer. Even though Abraham has sinned and hurt his integrity, he is still the object of God’s covenant. So he is called upon to pray for Abimelech. Abimelech’s sin has been one of ignorance. But it still must be dealt with promptly, or judgment from God will come.

III.

In vv. 8-18 we encounter ABIMELECH’S RESPONSE OF OBEDIENCE. (III. ABIMELECH’S RESPONSE OF OBEDIENCE) The king calls in his advisors and tells them what happened. According to v. 8 they **“were very much afraid.”** They respected this God who appeared to Abimelech. Abraham is called in, and the king says to this prophet in v. 10, **“What did you see, that you did this thing?”** “Abraham, how is it that you could do such a bad thing?”

In vv. 11-13 Abraham gives four rationalizations for his behavior. **First**, he says that he was afraid that there would be no fear of God in this place. Therefore there would be no respect for personal rights. As to why Abraham might be killed if it is known that Sarah is his wife, the text is not clear. The point is that Abraham was again buying into the philosophy that the end justifies the means. “I might be killed. So I will lie to keep that from happening.” Abraham failed to trust God. He did not expect great things from God. It was a stain upon his integrity.

Secondly, in v. 12 Abraham tells Abimelech that Sarah actually is his sister. She is his half sister. But that is only a half truth, and Abraham’s intention was to deceive the king about the nature of their true relationship.

Thirdly, in v. 13 Abraham throws a little blame at God. After all it was God who caused him to wander in the desert in the first place. If he had not brought him to Canaan, this would not have happened. So it is partly God's fault.

Fourthly, in v. 13 Abraham also says that this strategy to pass Sarah off as his sister was developed a long time ago when they first left Ur. This was a long standing agreement. Tradition is on my side, and Sarah agreed to it. So it is partly her fault.

Despite these lame excuses Abimelech is prompt and generous to Abraham. He gives Abraham animals and servants and money. Then Abimelech tells him to settle within his land wherever he desires. This king's integrity is greater here than that of Abraham.

Abraham, despite his unworthiness, does proceed to pray for Abimelech and his people. While his own wife has been unable to bear children, his prayer for the Philistines results in their return to fruitfulness. Apparently God had used some kind of disease or condition as a divine warning to the king that God was upset with him and to keep him from getting together with Sarah.

IV. A.

(IV. THE APPLICATIONS) Let's consider then THE APPLICATIONS that can be made from this story. The first lesson which I find here is that A FAILURE OF INTEGRITY HAS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES. (IV. THE APPLICATIONS A. A FAILURE OF) Abraham failed to expect great things from God. He lacked faith. So he lied to protect himself. Satan tempted him in a weak area. It is possible for believers to still struggle with particular sins and temptations.

Abraham had done a similar thing 25 years earlier. Perhaps he had tried to pass Sarah off as his sister on other occasions. What Abraham says in v. 13 makes it sound like this was a long standing arrangement that he had with Sarah. Abraham had not really dealt with this failure of faith which resulted in deceptions. I wonder how it made Sarah feel when Abraham would not stand up for her as her husband.

There were negative consequences for these deceptions. Others were hurt. Sarah was put into a position of commitment to another man. Abimelech was unknowingly put into a situation of potential judgment from God. His people were put in danger of judgment. The text traces the barrenness of the women of Abimelech's people to this deception by Abraham and God's response to it.

Then also God's program was threatened. Sarah could not become pregnant with Abraham's child if she was living in Abimelech's harem. On one level Abraham's lack of faith threatened the fulfillment of God's promises.

A lack of integrity has negative consequences upon our society as a whole. Many of our nation's social problems, such as drugs and crime and suicide and depression and divorce, have a source in, or at least are exacerbated by a lack of integrity in marriage.

At the same time our society's humanistic philosophy would have us to believe that there are few if any negative consequences to the decisions that we make.

Allen Bloom was a University of Chicago philosophy professor. He created something of a stir in the academic realm when he wrote a book entitled *The Closing of the American Mind*. This Jewish scholar was a product of a humanistic American education. Yet he recognized problems with the values behind it. At one point he wrote, **"Now when we--- meaning society--- speak of the right to choice, we mean that there are no necessary consequences, that disapproval is only prejudice and guilt only a neurosis.... America has no-fault automobile accidents, no-fault divorces, and it is moving with the aid of modern philosophy toward no-fault choices."**

The Bible and real life teach us that our choices do have consequences and that there are no such things as victimless crimes. Integrity is important. Our failures of integrity affect others. They may threaten God's program for us. They also affect ourselves. They threaten our reputation and hurt our character. Abraham in our passage has lower standards than does Abimelech. The man of God, the subject of God's covenant, is rebuked by a foreign king. How humiliating that must have been! What lousy testimony!

His failure of integrity would eventually have a negative effect upon his own son. If you turn ahead a few chapters, you will come to Genesis #26. There we find out that Abraham's son Isaac later visited Gerar and the Philistines. In v. 7 we read, **"When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah' because she was attractive in appearance."** Where did he learn this behavior?

Abraham bore the name of YHWH. He was called the friend of God. He ought not to have done what he did. Those of us who have trusted in Christ as our Savior call ourselves Christians. We bear the name of Christ. We ought to strive for integrity.

B.

Our passage teaches us not only that a failure of integrity has negative consequences but also that GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES EVEN WHEN WE BLOW IT. (IV. THE APPLICATIONS A. B. GOD IS FAITHFUL...) We saw last week in #19 that Lot tried to give his daughters away to the lust-filled men of the city. He ended up getting drunk in a cave and having incest with his daughters. Yet God followed through on his promise to rescue Lot from Sodom.

God had promised to make of Abraham a great nation. In #15 the Lord made an unconditional covenant with him repeating that promise. Fulfillment of that promise was not dependent upon Abraham. It was going to happen because God said that it would happen. A short time before the events of #20 took place, God promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a son within one year. Abraham's deceit placed the fulfillment of that promise in danger. But because God is always faithful to His word, He intervened.

God is faithful to His promises even when we sin. He has not promised us that we will not experience negative consequences when we blow it. But He has promised us that if we have trusted Christ as our Savior, that we are going to be in heaven one day. He has promised us that we will always be part of His family. He has promised us that we always have His forgiveness available to us. And He has promised us that He will never forsake us. God may discipline us, but He won't give up on us.

(2 TIMOTHY 2:13) In 2 Timothy #2 v. 13 the Apostle Paul writes, **"...if we are faithless, he remains faithful--- for he cannot deny himself."** God is faithful to His promises even when we sin. It is much easier for us, though, when we are careful to preserve our integrity.

C.

The third lesson is that WE SHOULD CONFESS OUR FAILURES OF INTEGRITY. (IV. A. B. C. WE SHOULD CONFESS...) We need to turn from our pattern of being unfaithful to a course of being faithful to God. The text does not specifically say that Abraham repented, but v. 17 says that Abraham prayed to God for Abimelech. Also we do not see in the Biblical text where Abraham ever tries to do this thing again. Hopefully he learned his lesson. He appears to grow in faith. The Book of Hebrews later refers to him as a great example of faith. We know that he was not flawless. But there is hope that he learned from his mistakes, and that God's grace covered his mess-ups. That is our hope and confidence as well--- that God's grace covers our mess-ups we confess them to Him.

D.

This leads to our fourth lesson. WE NEED TO BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE. (IV. A. B. C. D. WE NEED TO BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE) Our best efforts to have a good reputation and to be people of integrity do not earn God's acceptance. We can never be good enough to do that. The basis for our acceptance is Christ's death for us on the cross.

In Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9 (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) the Apostle Paul wrote, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."** We need to trust in His continuing grace to deal with our lapses of integrity.

Easy Eddie (EASY EDDIE) recognized his failure of integrity. His concern for his only son and how he would turn out prompted him to go to the authorities with the information he had about Al Capone. He knew that it was a dangerous thing to do, but it was the right thing to do, and he hoped that it would have a positive impact upon his son Butch. Easy Eddie's change of heart did prove to be costly. For he was shot and killed by Al Capone's gunmen in 1939.

Police removed from Eddie's pockets a rosary, a crucifix, a religious medallion, and a poem clipped from a magazine. The poem read, **"The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early**

hour. Now is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will. Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still.”

Easy Eddie's changed life seemed to have a positive impact on Butch. Butch had a love of flying. He was also a smart guy. He went to the US Naval Academy and ended up becoming a navy pilot. He turned out to be an honorable guy with great integrity. When World War II broke out, Butch was assigned to an aircraft carrier. (BUTCH O'HARE)

On February 20, 1942, he and one other fighter pilot had the only two fighter planes available to fight off an attack from Japanese planes. Butch was credited with shooting three of the planes down and damaging three others. The enemy planes did not get through to the American carrier. Butch became a flying ace, and for his action in the Pacific in this incident he became the first naval pilot to receive the Medal of Honor. (BUTCH O'HARE MEDAL OF HONOR) President Roosevelt awarded him that medal with his wife being present. Reporters described Butch O'Hare as **“modest, inarticulate, humorous, terribly nice and more than a little embarrassed by the whole thing.”** (*Aviation History*, November 1995)

Butch became a lieutenant commander and had a duty assignment of training other pilots in Hawaii. In 1943 he was put back into action in the Pacific as the Commander of an Air Group on the *USS Enterprise*. Later that year he led the first Navy nighttime fighter attack from an aircraft carrier. During that action he was shot down apparently by a Japanese bomber. His body was never found. He left behind a young wife and a daughter--- and a reputation for integrity.

In 1949 city officials in Chicago decided to rename this little airport called Orchard Depot Airport. (CHICAGO O'HARE) They renamed it O'Hare International Airport. So now you know the rest of the story. A messed up father did the right thing and left a better name and a better reputation and a better example for his son. We all have failures of integrity, some worse than others, but there is always hope. For by God's grace we can change, and we can leave a better legacy. (PROJECTOR OFF)