

“A Half Truth is a Whole Lie”

Genesis 20:1-18

September 18th, 2016

A pastor knocked on the door of a rundown apartment. The mother didn't want to talk to the clergyman, so she told her little boy to tell the man at the door she couldn't talk with him because she was in the bathtub.

Her son answered the door this way, “We ain't got no bathtub, but Mom told me to tell you she's in it.”

There's so much parents teach their children by poor example! (Like, in this case, it's OK to lie when it's not convenient to be truthful).

Let's try it. Suppose while parking your vehicle late one night, you slightly scrape the side of a Porsche parked next to you. You are certain no one else is aware of what happened. The damage to the Porsche is minor and would be covered by insurance. *Would you leave a note?* I read some time ago about a guy who really did that, except people were watching him. And he took out a piece of paper and he wrote on it, “Several people are watching me, and they think I'm leaving you a note that includes my name and cell number on it. But I'm not!”

Having managed the troubled waters that are Genesis chapter 19, we come today to the 20th chapter of Genesis in search of some relief. And, what we find instead is more bad news... sad news, really. Having learned of the wicked, sexually deviant men of Sodom, and the total destruction that God brought upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the depressing sin of Lot and his daughters, we yearn for God to intervene in His grace as we study chapter 20 today. And, eventually we'll get there, but things don't start out that way.

In this chapter, we see God's man, Abraham returning to a sinful way, and in so doing, threatening all that God had promised him. Fortunately, God is never asleep at the switch, and we see Him doing some amazing things here in chapter 20.

Genesis 20:1-18:

“And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. ²Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She *is* my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

³But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man's wife.”

⁴But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? ⁵Did he not say to me, ‘She *is* my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He *is* my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”

⁶And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours.”

⁸So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. ⁹And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great

sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” ¹⁰ Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?”

¹¹ And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. ¹² But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He *is* my brother.’”

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, “See, my land *is* before you; dwell where it pleases you.” ¹⁶ Then to Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who *are* with you and before everybody.” Thus she was rebuked. ¹⁷ So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children*; ¹⁸ for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.”

I’ll explore two primary points in today’s passage, as well as some personal applications:

MP 1 – The Promise Threatened;

MP 2 – The Promise Protected.

If you didn’t know who Abraham was, and you read this for the first time, which of the two men would you say was the believer? Surely not Abraham! “If anybody reveals excellent character, it is Abimelech and not Abraham.” (Wiersbe, 86) As we saw in **Genesis 12:10-20**, here in **Genesis 20:1-18** we see an Abraham that is fearful and weak. His actions put at risk God’s promise to provide Abraham with an heir – we see right off the **promise threatened**. With the first verse, we see Abraham is on the move “to the South (Negeb), and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar.”

We don’t know why Abraham left, and headed South (the Negeb). *Maybe it was so he didn’t have to be continually reminded of what happened at Sodom?* But, we do know that the Negeb was the far southern border of Judah, and Gerar was a city near the border with the land of the Philistines. Abraham was moving toward enemy territory!

We’re introduced to the King of Gerar in verse 2 – “Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She *is* my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.” We’ll soon find out what kind of a man Abimelech was, but here we’re reminded of Abraham’s besetting sin – dishonesty/bearing false witness (9th Commandment). Abraham was a liar, and just when we thought he was some tower of faithfulness, we’re reminded of the kind of man Abraham would be apart from the God’s grace.

Later in this passage, when Abimelech confronts Abraham, Abraham rationalizes his deception. In verses 11-13, Abraham justified his sin by voicing his fear that the land was pagan and not moral (“the fear of God *is* not in this place”). Then, he points out that in all actuality, Sarah really was his sister (“the daughter of (his) father, but not the daughter of (his) mother”). (Of course, that also presents another problem – step/half siblings marrying each other, but that’s not the focus of the text before us!)

Abraham had difficulty being a truth teller. But, he remained God's man even so. Here's the grace! In verse 7, God tells Abimelech that Abraham is his prophet (spokesperson to his people), and, further, that Abraham was Abimelech's intercessor with God – God would hear and answer Abraham's prayers on Abimelech's behalf, and be gracious to him.

Is this troubling to you – that God would continue to be kind to Abraham, despite his repeated sin? For sure, we dare not forget God's grace to us, not only in saving us from the eternal fires of hell, but in sticking with us even when we are unfaithful to Him. *Are you aware of the sins that are strongholds in your life?* I'd venture to guess, fellow Christian that you know your most troubling sins. "Each of us has besetting sins that refuse to let us go...They revisit us time and time again. Similar situations lead us to act in a similar vein. But, as with Abraham, God continues to bring the situations upon us so that we should see our sin, and that we should turn to Him, that we should trust Him and realize He will protect us. The solution is complete trust and faith in God." (Currid, 369)

Abraham's lie deceived Abimelech into thinking Sarah was not a married woman, so he took her for himself. If they were to come together intimately, Sarah may have become pregnant with Abimelech's child, and not the promised heir from Abraham's body!

So, we see God acting to **protect the promise**. Verse 3 teaches that in a dream, God warns Abimelech that he is a dead man because he has taken to himself a married woman...that's some nightmare when God predicts your death! Now, for a pagan, Abimelech was an upstanding citizen – a man of integrity and high morals. He appeals to that in speaking with God. In verse 6, we see God explaining to Abimelech that God is the one who kept Abimelech from sinning. He kept Abimelech from pursuing sexual relations with Sarah, and He also closed up the wombs of all the women around!

Isn't that just amazing? Have you ever been in a situation where you were tempted to do something harmful or sinful, and something drew you away? It was very likely God's work.

Surely, Abimelech is not without sin here. "To take the wife of another man, even if done innocently enough, is a life and death issue. God would not tolerate it. Nothing short of restitution and prayer would set things back to their normal condition." (Ross, 374)

Let's bring this home to us. *How have you responded to the loving rebuke of others who've humbly and lovingly challenged you for your sin?* I've seen far too many who seek to justify their sin (like Abraham in this chapter), as if blatant sin can somehow be lessened even by the mistakes of others in bringing them to the surface! *How should we respond when our sin is confronted?* With humility, with submission, and with contrition! Not with questioning, not by deflecting, or not by on extenuating circumstances! Christian, if your sin is brought to your attention, lower yourself and seek reconciliation!

God further instructs Abimelech to confront Abraham with his sin. Because Abraham was a godly man, he would take ownership of his sin, forsake it, and seek forgiveness from God and Abimelech, against whom Abraham sinned. (It's hard enough, sometimes, to submit to the

rebuke of a fellow Christian, it is even harder to do so with one who is an unbeliever who confronts you with your sin!)

Verses 14-16 portray an Abimelech who is eager to make things right with someone against whom he sinned. In giving Abraham all the sheep, oxen, servants, and his wife back, Abimelech stands as a picture of restitution and reconciliation. He truly seems to be a man of integrity.

Well, we're in the midst of football season, but some of us are glad it's still baseball season! Here's a baseball example of integrity:

In 1959, 40-year-old Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox was suffering from a pinched nerve in his neck. He said, "It was so bad that I could hardly turn my head to look at the pitcher." For the first time in his remarkable career, Williams batted under .300, hitting just .254 with only 10 home runs. Ted Williams was the highest paid player in baseball that year, making \$125,000.

The next year, the Red Sox offered him the same contract. Williams said, "I told the Red Sox management I wouldn't sign it until they gave me the full pay cut allowed, 28 percent. My feeling was that I was always treated fairly by the Red Sox. They were offering me a contract I didn't deserve." So, Williams cut his own salary by \$35,000!"

Men of integrity come in all forms and fashions. One of the greatest military leaders this nation has produced was Robert E. Lee, a man who faithfully served the United States of America for many years, then the War Between the States broke out. Torn between his duty to the nation, and his love for his native Virginia, General Lee with anguish, decided to cast his lot with his home state and the Confederacy. General Lee, though poor after the end of the American Civil War, refused a salary of \$50,000 a year to let an insurance company use his name. He said that if his name was so valuable, he must guard its integrity.

If unbelievers, like Abimelech, can act with integrity, then surely God's people must do so!

Job 2:3 – God is speaking to Satan, "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity...'

Psalms 26:1 – The psalmist David speaking to God – "Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the LORD; I shall not slip."

Proverbs 11:3 – God's Word contrasts integrity with perversity – "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them."

Titus 2:7 – Paul tells us what the men of the church must be "...in all things, (they must show themselves) a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,"

A German proverb teaches:

"When wealth is lost, nothing is lost;
When health is lost, something is lost;
When character is lost, all is lost."