

“Kept From Sinning” Genesis 20:1-18

Some have said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. Think about a hamster running on that wheel.

That’s where we once again find Abraham who has embroiled himself in another episode of to tell the half-truth. Some scholars believe that based on **verse 13** this ruse was tried more than just the two times we have recorded in Scripture: **“and when God made me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’”** It didn’t work in Egypt and it didn’t work here.

I am opting this morning not to go with an outline as we look at the account together, but in the end I will have a few thoughts from which those of you who like to take notes may have a few things to jot down on paper for later reference about one phrase I want to extract out of the text for consideration.

Back in **12:10** we read that there was a famine in the land where Abraham was living. He had finally arrived in the place God had promised, but instead of trusting in the Lord, feared for the well-being of his family because of the famine and headed down to Egypt where there was plenty of provisions. It is there that we read about the first account of their ruse to mislead Pharaoh. They were found out, rebuked and sent packing. Fast forward now to **chapter 20**. We read in the opening verses that Abraham moved again. It’s unclear if this was directed by God or if he just decided to move on his own. The difference here is that where they end up is still within the borders of the land God promised.

You can see by the map that they had been living in Hebron at the great oak of Mamre and they moved in a southerly direction down between Kadesh and Shur. Remember when we looked at **chapter 16** that it was where God had a conversation with Hagar. If you recall, Shur is on the doorstep of Egypt. **Verse 1** concludes by telling us that Abraham ended up in Gerar, which you can see is

not all that far from Hebron where he had been living. So he is still living in the promised land to be given to his descendants. Again, from the text we don’t know if this was God’s will to move. What happens next though, was not part of God’s will. In **verse 2** Abraham is still trying to help God out, still not able to put all his trust in the Lord, still walking by sight and not by faith, still afraid of the people in whose land he was living. Abraham appears to have had a lapse of memory or temporary amnesia because he seems to have forgotten the lessons learned back in Egypt.

We read in **verse 2** that the king of Gerar took Sarah to be part of his harem. Gerar was the capital city of the Philistines, near the Egyptian border. It is the same Philistines in the days of the judges and the days of David. The people were descendants of Ham who lived along the seacoast and had mixed with some of the descendants of Jephthah. It was a prosperous city on a major and profitable trade route and some scholars speculate that Abraham may have gone there hoping to establish some business with his vast herds and flocks.

Living in and traveling around this region Abraham had witnessed enough of the culture to realize that they were an ungodly people. Once again he resurrected the old stand-by principle of self-preservation to tell the people Sarah was his sister and from on what we read Abraham once again lost his wife to a pagan king.

By a show of hands how many of you would agree that when we are in God’s will we don’t have anything to fear?

So if we believe we are in God’s will why is it that we forget God and rely on our own efforts?

On numerous occasions God had given Abraham His promise of blessing that would come through an heir. He promised His protection. He established it through an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 15:1, 4-6

Genesis 17:1-2

In **chapter 17:3-8** God says **“I will”** five times. When God says **“I will”**, He means just that.

It's not maybe.

It's not I hope so.

It's not I think I can.

His "I will" is a promise.

Genesis 18:14 "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

He had been living in and around a pagan culture for a long time and these promises of being the Almighty, a shield, an unstoppable force capable of keeping His promises had somehow been filed in the wrong storage cabinet of his brain and he wasn't sure in this case if he could fully trust God for protection so he recycled an old but failed method of self-protection. **Hebrews 12:1** tells us to take off those old sins that so closely cling to us. They're like drier sheets that don't want to come off. We all have sins to which we are most susceptible and here for Abraham it is the sin of fear and doubt. So he tells a half truth which is really a whole lie.

Warren Wiersbe says that "A half-truth has enough fact to make it believable and enough deception to make it dangerous."

Now you may be wondering why a king would look at a woman who was 90 years old and decide she was worth taking as a bride. I read one scholar who suggested that it was for political purposes. Abraham was a rich and prosperous sheikh in the land and to unite them in an alliance took Sarah as his wife. Many of Solomon's 700 wives were done so for political reasons.

Other scholars suggest that in preparation for Sarah to become pregnant and bear a child God had miraculously changed her physically to be much younger looking than she really was.

It doesn't really matter the reason, what matters is that while in Egypt she was barren, now she is able to have a child through God's intervention. To protect her so that there could be no mistake that the child she would conceive belonged to Abraham, God struck the household of King Abimelech with some plague that kept him from going near Sarah. God came to the king in a dream one night with a warning. Fearing the news of God's wrath, he

confessed that he had not touched her and that he was really the innocent party in the whole thing.

Culturally what he did was right in his own eyes, but it was not right in God's eyes. The king could take whomever he wanted and as many as he wanted. Their culture accepted it. But it wasn't ok with God. He told the king that He had kept him from sinning, not against Abraham, but against Him and instructed the king to return Sarah to her rightful husband. He called Abraham a prophet, which incidentally is the first time this term is used in Scripture. It does not mean Abraham could tell the future, but rather means he was a spokesman for God, even though at that moment he wasn't acting like one. Abraham would pray for healing over the king's household. If not, the consequence for his actions would be death for he and his family.

Abimelech called an early morning council meeting and shared the news from his late-night dream with God, called in Abraham and thoroughly rebuked him for the charade.

I think John Phillips is correct when he writes that "Probably one of the greatest sins an unbeliever hates about a believer is dishonesty." That certainly seems to be the case here. Abraham, why did you lie to us? Phillips then writes "what a rebuke it is when an unsaved man has to teach a believer common honesty and decency." The rebuke from an unsaved person is more bitter and stinging than the rebuke from another Christian.

We do not read here that God rebuked Abraham probably because the rebuke by the pagan king who had acted more righteously than Abraham, did not need any further reprimand. Abraham explained that the reason for the ruse was because he saw no fear of God in that place among the people.

Our culture isn't any different. There is no fear in the land among the people. There is no reverence for God. There is no thought of God.

This comes from the Washington Post. "Kelli Dunaway was sworn in as a councilwoman for St. Louis County on August 13, 2019. Because the

U.S. Constitution doesn't require elected officials to take the oath of office on a Bible, Dunaway opted for Dr. Seuss' book, *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*. The single mother of two elementary-age children said the book felt right because 'it has an empowering message.' Religion was not a part of her formative years so she felt like the Bible would have been inappropriate for her children who are half Jewish. The newly elected councilwoman said, 'A lot of people believe that without God, there can be no morality, and I just don't agree with that.' She cited the words of the book as those which resonate with the public: 'You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes.' She then said, 'You get to direct your own destiny. If that message can spread, it can change the world.'"

And yes, that kind of message can spread and change the world, but not for the better.

There was no fear of God where Abraham had moved. We can even safely conclude that no matter where he moved there was no fear of God. With that conclusion Abraham didn't feel safe, he felt unprotected, vulnerable and anxious and went into self-preservation mode trusting self instead of God.

After being chased all over Israel, David concluded in **I Samuel 17:1** that one day he would die at the hands of Saul. He voiced this after God had chosen him to be the next king and anointed by Samuel. He trusted God to deliver him from the bear and lion and to help him conquer Goliath, a giant whom even Saul feared. **So why did he doubt God?** Let me ask you a rhetorical question: **Does God lie?**

In a devotional written by Dr. David Jeremiah this past week, what he says about David is true about Abraham and true about any of us who doubt God's Word. "The thought in David's heart at this time was a *false* thought, because he certainly had no ground for thinking that God's anointing him by Samuel was intended to be left as an empty, unmeaning act. On no occasion had the Lord deserted His servant; he had often been placed in perilous positions, but not one instance had occurred in which divine intervention had not delivered him. The trials to which he had been exposed had been varied; they had not assumed one

form only, but many--yet in every case He who sent the trial had also graciously ordained a way of escape. David could not put his finger on any entry in his diary and say of it, "Here is evidence that the Lord will forsake me," for the entire course of his past life proved the very reverse. He should have argued from what God had done for him that God would be his defender still.

But is it not in the same way that we doubt God's help? Is it not *mistrust without a cause*? Have we ever had the shadow of a reason to doubt our Father's goodness? Hasn't His loving-kindness been marvelous? Has He ever once failed to justify our trust? Our God has never left us at any time. We have had dark nights, but the star of love has shone out amid the blackness; we have been in tough battles, but over our head He has held high the shield of our defense. We have gone through many trials but never to our detriment, always to our advantage; and the conclusion from our past experience is that He who has been with us in six troubles will not forsake us in the seventh.

What we have known of our faithful God proves that He will keep us to the end. Let us not, then, reason contrary to the evidence. How can we ever be so ungenerous as to doubt our God?"

I want to share something Linda posted on Facebook this past week that I think is very appropriate as a good reminder to all of us. It was not written when Abraham was living, but he certainly knew it intuitively and experientially. It should have been a motto he lived by and relied on and ours as well.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God."

In the Amplified it reads **"Let be and be still, and know (recognize and understand) that I am God."**

Verse 1 begins with this **"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."**

That's what God meant when He told Abraham back in **15:1** not to fear because He was his shield, his protector, his defense.

So why did Abraham doubt?

Abraham became fearful of the people who had no

reverence for God and he took his eyes off the One who said He would guard him.

Peter did the same thing, right? When the storm seemed to overwhelm him, he took his eyes off Christ and that's when he began to sink.

Dear folks, there will always be people around us who don't fear God. Where will we look? Whom will we trust?

This is what the post said about **Psalm 46:10**.

“Be still” – stop talking, put down your phone, stop commenting, listen, stop arguing, stop questioning, stop moaning.

“and know” – stop doubting, be sure, have faith, don't look for another opinion.

“that I am God” – God is Almighty, God is in control, God is love, God is king, God is my hope, rock, and fortress, God is ever-present in times of trouble, God is my Father, my shepherd, He will lead me, nourish me, protect me, restore me.

There are people around us who do not fear God. Will we walk by sight living by failed attempts or will we walk by faith in God who promised never to leave or forsake us, who promised to be our strong tower where the righteous can find refuge, who promised to be our ever-present help in trouble?

For some reason Abraham and Sarah had forgotten that, but the good news is that God did not abandon them or leave them to their own consequences. After all, He had given them the promise of an heir. God protected them despite their lack of faith.

Abimelech did two things before they parted. First, he showered Abraham with lavish gifts. His generosity is a strong contrast to Abraham's fearfulness and deception. Then he told Abraham he could live anywhere in the land he chose. So, while Abraham's sin did not damage his righteous standing with God it did damage his reputation with man. **James Strahan writes “The bad example of a good man, has an enormous power for evil.”**

Abraham took the gift as a way of perhaps not

offending Abimelech any further, he prayed for Abimelech and his household to be healed and then he departed. That God heard the prayer of Abraham suggests to me that Abraham had also done some soul searching and confessed his sin. We are told in **Psalm 66:18** that **“if I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.”** That Abimelech was healed suggests Abraham had repented.

In the end though spared and protected by God, Abraham's lie cost him his character, his testimony and his ministry. Instead of being a blessing to a nation, he was the cause of judgment.

In a study on the life of Abraham, Iain Duguid writes **“God's ability to use even our sins for His own purposes shows that He doesn't love us simply for the great things we can do for Him. There's an additional verse to the children's hymn ‘Jesus Loves Me’ that we don't sing very often, but that captures this aspect of God's love perfectly:”**

Jesus loves me when I'm good,
When I do the things I should.
Jesus loves me when I'm bad,
Though it makes Him very sad.

God's love for us is everlasting and does not change. Abraham came to understand that in a very real way, a lesson we should all learn.

Now as we conclude this morning, I want us to go back to a little phrase found in **verse 6**. **“I have kept you from sinning against Me.”**

Have you ever wondered how many sins God has kept us from doing? How does He do that? How does He keep us from sinning against Him?

Jesus, in His high-priestly prayer answers that question for us.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.”

The word for sanctify here is the same as to make holy or to be set apart. One author notes that sanctification and revelation or truth as it's revealed in God's Word go together. In other words, you cannot separate the truth of God's Word from sanctification. In an earlier discussion with Jews

who had believed in Him, meaning they had made a formal profession of Him, He said this **“If you hold to My teaching (that’s another way of saying if you obey them), you are My disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)**

John MacArthur adds that this Word of truth is empowered by the Spirit of truth. In **John 14:16-17** and **15:26** Jesus informed the disciples that He would be sending another Counselor to be with them and calls this Counselor the Spirit of truth. Then in **John 16:13** Jesus said that this Spirit of truth would guide them into all truth, and it is through this same Spirit of truth that we come to know first the truth about salvation and then the truth about sanctification.

So in **John 17:17** the claim Jesus is making about the Word is that it has the ability to set us apart from sin, to keep us from sinning. In **Romans 6:2** Paul adds that we have died to sin and don’t need to live it any longer and then in **Romans 8:9** also says that because we are controlled by the Spirit of God who lives in us, we don’t need to be controlled by the sinful nature. If the Spirit of truth controls us it stands to reason that He uses the Word of truth as we read and apply it. We find that spelled out for us in **Psalm 119**.

Psalm 119:9-11

First comes the inquiry.

1. The Inquiry – v. 9a

“How can a young man, young woman, old man, old woman, any man, any woman, in fact, how can anyone keep his way pure?”

That’s a question we should all ask ourselves every day. How can I keep myself pure, unstained, unmixed, blameless? The word for pure or cleanse here always conveys an idea of morality or that of righteousness. The question has to do with the practical nature of our walk with God. Positionally He already sees us as holy, but daily we sin in some way, so the question has to do with the practice of holiness in every day living.

[Nurses know the importance for practicing a routine](#)

of cleansing so they don’t either pass on germs or pick up germs. Before they enter a room and after they leave a room, they wash their hands.

How do we cleanse ourselves so we don’t sin?

Charles Spurgeon puts it this way: **“How do we get right and keep right?” Because we already have a sin tainted life, how can we know what is right and then choose to do what is right? How do we keep clear of the sins that are behind us that want to cling to us and keep away from the sins that may be ahead of us?** For the person who claims to follow Christ there is perhaps no greater question to ask if we would seek to know and follow the answer.

The psalmist speaks of a way that lies before the spiritual pilgrim. There are only two ways and it is his desire to follow the way that is pure or right instead of going his own way. He knows the other leads only to despair and destruction, where the way he wants to follow leads to peace and purity.

Spurgeon adds that **“it is ours to ask the question, it is God’s to give the answer and enable us to carry it out.”** That’s an important point, because it acknowledges that we do not have the ability to know the right path to take without asking, nor do we have the power within ourselves to resist without the knowing. We have neither the knowledge or the strength in ourselves to pursue a path of purity. To know the right path to take to be pure, to be right before God, we must inquire and the psalmist asks because he wants to know.

Let’s keep in mind that God’s way must become my way because there is no other way to be pure.

The answer to the inquiry is found in the second half of the verse where we see the imperative.

2. The Imperative – v. 9b

“By living according to Your Word.”

You want to know how you can keep your way, your path, your life pure? Obey God’s Word. The word **“living”** suggests that in every aspect of your living – work, family, leisure – you practice godliness through obedience to Biblical principles.

A posting resurfaces on Facebook from time to time and says the 10 commandments are just that, commandments not suggestions.

The implication in **verse 9** is that we must know the Word with the word “know” referring to doing it. If you want to live a daily life of being pure, the Bible must be your chart, your map, your guide, your compass, your light, your heading, your barometer in fact in must be your life. It must be the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the food you eat to sustain your spiritual life. The psalmist insists that obeying the word is imperative.

John Wesley started what he called a holy club. He compiled a list of 21 questions that each member was to ask themselves every day. One of the questions they were asked to consider was this: Did the Bible live in me today? Was it at home in my life or was there an awkward silence?

I can guarantee you that the ebb and flow of my life is directly affected by whether or not I am letting God’s Word live in me. When I attempt to live the Christian life in my own power, the thin veneer of false spirituality will soon be rubbed away and the real me will quickly become evident.

So how do we live according to God’s Word? We find it in **verse 10**. Notice the impassion.

3. The Impassion – v. 10a **“I seek You with all my heart.”**

That suggests a love for and devotion to God.

How passionate are we when it comes to seeking God in His Word? How passionate are we about God’s Word because they are one in the same? We cannot have one without the other. There must be a delightful and diligent pursuit of knowing God that is found through discovering Him and His will evident through a pursuit of Him in His Word. This pursuit of God cannot be half-hearted or lackadaisical. The word **“seek”** gives a sense of devotion, loyalty, desire and delight. The psalmist has a heart that is looking inward with a desire to be pure, the result of such a pursuit we find back in **verse 2** that brings us blessing or happiness. The

person who looks inward also looks upward to God for it is in the pursuit of God through fellowship that he understands the joy of living right.

His desire to seek the Lord is met with a request. He asks for God’s intervention.

4. The Intervention – v. 10b **“do not let me wander from Your commands.”**

Warren Wiersbe writes that **“If our heart is seeking after God, then our feet will not stray from God.”**

Psalm 37:23 “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.”

Certainly if we are seeking the Lord, as Wiersbe suggests, we won’t leave His path. We will want to obey not out of duty but out of devotion and desire. And implied in this is a wholehearted desire not to stray from God’s commands. We are asking God to keep us on the road of obedience, a path that **Psalm 1:2** says meditates on God’s Word. Meditating on God’s Word keeps us from walking the path of the ungodly, standing with sinners, or sitting with mockers.

Spurgeon says that while the young man **“prayed to be kept in the right road he took care to run in it, with his whole heart seeking the Lord.”**

Verse 10 should not only be our prayer, but also our path. It should not only be the journey but our destination. It should not only be our delight but also our desire. We find that this is possible from **verse 11** where we note the imprint of the Word.

5. The Imprint – v. 11a **“I have hidden Your word in my heart”**

When Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus found in **Revelation 2**, He rebuked them for leaving their first love. Their heart had turned cold to the things of God and He encouraged them to repent and return to the things they did at first when their heart was tender and longing to do God’s will and obey God’s Word. When we stop spending time in God’s Word, we will expect to see evidence of a cooling even a coldness to the things of God, spending time in His Word, spending time in

prayer, spending time with His people. *Passion for God is fueled by a pursuit of God through perseverance in His Word.*

I cannot stress to you how important treasuring God's Word in your heart is to your spiritual well-being. In the near future we are going to add a short time in our service to learn our memory verses posted each month in the bulletin.

Hiding God's Word in our heart isn't a treasure to bury, but a treasure to value, to use. **Spurgeon writes that "his heart would be kept by the Word because He kept the Word in his heart...He did not wear a text on his heart as a charm, but he hid it in his heart as a rule."** These nuggets of truth become principles by which to live by. They are sources of strength when the road is long and tiring. They are sources of encouragement when events are discouraging. They are words of comfort in times of grief, power in times of weakness, hope in times of despair, joy in times of sorrow. God's Word is for all occasions and we would do well to hide it in our heart. **Proverbs 4:23** says that above all else guard our heart, for out of it are the well springs of life. **How do we do that?** We keep our heart by hiding God's Word there. It becomes our defense against an attack by the enemy. Memorizing and meditating on God's Word leaves an indelible imprint in us. It's in **verse 11** that we find the answer as to how God keeps us from sinning against Him. When God's Word is imprinted in us it will have an impact on us.

6. The Impact – v. 11b **"that I might not sin against You."**

In his book [Reclaiming the Art of Biblical Meditation](#), Robert Morgan tells the story of Rear Admiral Barry Black who was Chaplain of the US Senate. He was one of 8 children who grew up in a dangerous Baltimore neighborhood. It was nothing to see drug dealers and prostitutes or to hear the echoing sounds of gun fire. His mother came to Christ through an evangelist. She was pregnant at the time with Barry and when she was baptized she asked the Lord to baptize her son with the Holy Spirit as well. In a book he wrote about growing up

in Baltimore he told about how zealous his mother was for them to memorize Scripture even paying them a nickel for every verse they learned. He said he specialized in low hanging fruit like John 11:35 "Jesus wept." But when he began learning so many verses each week she had to alter her agreement and pay a flat rate of a quarter a week. He described in his book how invaluable those verses became in the years that were to follow writing that those verses hidden deep in his heart kept him from a life of crime, prison, and throwing his life away. He said that those verses were "something to hold on to."

More than just some thing to hold on to, hiding God's Word gives you Someone to hold on to.

Hide God's Word in your heart not as a badge to wear or as a way of impressing others, hide it so you don't sin against God. God's Word is a tool to use and will only help if you are obeying it. James tells us to be doers of God's Word not hearers only.

There's a lot more we could say about how God keeps us from sin like the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer or through consistent prayer or the encouragement by or the accountability with other believers, but let me close with two verses. Let these words be their own commentary. If you are struggling today with some sin, know that God's Word hidden in your heart will be your tool to help deliver you and keep you from sinning.

Job 23:12 "I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."

Psalm 37:31 "The law of His God is in his heart, his feet do not slip."

Do you want to keep your way pure?

Live according to God's Word.

Seek God with your whole heart so you don't stray.

Hide His Word in your heart, so you won't sin against Him.