

Text: Genesis 18:16-33

Title: Some Responsibilities of Spiritual Privilege

Time: 8/3/08 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The privileges of home ownership are great, but it involves some important responsibilities. I can remember the first home Maureen and I bought in Danbury, CT. It was a two-family fixer-upper, and buying that house meant a lot of new responsibilities that I did not have before.

When the mortgage, insurance, and taxes came due, I was responsible to pay those bills. When the upstairs pipe broke and water came through the downstairs ceiling, I was responsible to do the repair. When over 100 inches of snow fell on our driveway that first winter, I was responsible for shoveling them off again. Home ownership was a wonderful privilege, but it came with some heavy responsibilities.

Abraham had the wonderful privilege of knowing the Lord (vv. 16-19a). Note that vv. 17-19 is the first time that the promise to Abraham is expressed via soliloquy. God addresses Himself; "Shall I conceal?" is a question He must answer. This soliloquy emphasizes the certitude of God's promise to Abraham, for He cannot lie to or deceive Himself. Abraham had the tremendous privilege of knowing the Lord. This relationship saved his soul and gave him hope for the future. But it also carried with it important responsibilities. We will focus this morning on some responsibilities that come to each of us who are privileged to know the Lord.

I. Those with the privilege of knowing the Lord have the responsibility of obedience (v. 19).

Illustration: One of the challenges our kids run into when they go to Christian camp involves having to live for a week with some their own age, or even older, who may not actually be Christians and have plenty of mannerisms and habits to prove it. These young people need the Lord, and it is one of the camp's missions to lead them to Christ. But they can be difficult to live with for a week.

Brandon had a few in his cabin that were like this, and he asked one of them whether they were a Christian. His fellow camper responded that if Brandon meant the kind of Christian who was going to heaven, then the answer was "yes"; but if he meant the kind of Christian who was weird and tried to do what was right, then "no", he was not one of those weird people.

Application: The Bible never gives us two categories of Christians, those who just have the privileges and those who have the privileges and the responsibilities. Eternal life is new life (Rom. 6:4, 23). The promise of heaven and a changed life on earth result from the same work of regeneration. The privileges always go with responsibilities and a desire to fulfill those responsibilities in the grace of God.

If you have no changed life this morning, no desire to fulfill the responsibilities of obedience, there is a good chance you are not saved. The first responsibility of obedience in the church age is baptism, and this is why only baptized believers can be members of our church. We want to make sure that only believers are members of our church, and believers have new life in them that makes them want to obey God's command to be baptized.

Note that part of obedience is teaching our children to obey. We need to pass the faith on to the next generation, and as

both a Dad and a pastor I am very thankful for the gifted people of New Boston Baptist Church who have a burden for the souls of our children.

Those with the privilege of knowing the Lord have the responsibility of obedience. How are we doing at obedience? Will our day be filled with accomplishing the commands of Christ for our life, or do we believe that we are in control to spend our day doing what we want to do? If the latter, perhaps we do not really know the Lord the way we think we do.

II. Those with the privilege of knowing the Lord have the responsibility of hating sin (vv. 20-22).

Illustration: You have heard about the correct way to boil a frog. As the adage goes, if you throw the frog into boiling hot water he will jump out again, but if you gradually increase the temperature in the water the frog is in, he will ultimately allow himself to be boiled alive.

Evidently, some experiments were conducted in 1882 at Johns Hopkins University that yielded these exact results with frogs. But whether the idea describes scientific law or just the quirks of a few 19th century frogs, the moral it illustrates teaches a valid truth. Gradualness of change can desensitize us to change.

This is especially true in regard to sin. We lose our hatred for sin when we allow it to gradually impact our lives. We become desensitized to the awfulness of sin as we gradually allow influences into our thinking that are designed to make us think that sin is not such a big deal. I want us to learn two keys to hating sin from our passage:

1. Trust God's truth regarding sin rather than the world's opinion about it.

Application: God's truth regarding sin is carefully weighed and investigated. The world's opinion about sin is a defensive lie designed to protect the sinner's enjoyment of sin.

God teaches Abraham this truth with the form of revelation that He is using to communicate with Abraham in this passage, a theophany. God appears to Abraham in the form of a man, and men have to eat, and they have to go down to inspect and validate. God already knew what the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was like (v. 20), but in the form of a man, he sends the angels to investigate so that Abraham would see that God had carefully weighed and investigated His conclusions about the awfulness of sin.

God's hatred of sin is perfectly accurate; not arbitrary or capricious in any way.

The world, on the other hand, lies about the awfulness of sin. It does not even call sin *sin*; it calls sin being gay or paying under the table or only a little white lie. The world disguises sin as equal rights protection and even as holy matrimony. But sin is none of these things. Sin is sin, a transgression of the holy law of the Holy God of heaven.

So who will we trust when it comes to their description of sin? Will we trust the world's gloss or God's truth? Only when we submit to God's truth in the matter will we have the hatred for sin its destructive force deserves. It is the responsibility of us who are privileged to know the Lord to view sin the way He does. Note a second key to hating sin.

2. Recognize the suffering caused by sin.

Application: The crying noted here is a cry of suffering (Hasel quoted in Hamilton, p. 20, fn. 17: “the loud and agonized ‘crying’ of someone in acute distress, calling for help and seeking deliverance”).

Note, however, that this was the cry of the city prior to God’s judgment there. The suffering was not a result of God’s judgment, but rather the result of a lack of it. While Genesis 19 emphasizes the presence of the corruption of homosexuality producing this cry, Ezek. 16:49 also lists arrogance, abundance of food with careless ease, and failure to help the poor and needy.

These are the sins that led to the moral perversity that created the great cry of suffering in the land. The word used to describe sin as *very great* is literally *very heavy* in v. 20. See Ps. 38:4 speaks of the heaviness of sin: “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.”

Illustration: John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* references Ps. 38:4 as Bunyan describes the burden of sin in the words of the Pilgrim as follows:

“I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, [Isaiah 64:6] standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. [Psalms 38:4] I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read he wept and trembled, and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, ‘What shall I do?’ [Acts 16:30-31].

Application: This is the cry of those suffering under the burden of sin. This is the cry that the Lord heard in Sodom, and it is the cry that we need to have our ears tuned to.

When we see the suffering that sin causes, we will love the sinner more by better hating the burden of his sin. The less we hear this cry of the awfulness of sin, the less ready we shall be to give the love of Christ that can meet this need.

III. Those with the privilege of knowing the Lord have the responsibility of intercession (vv. 23-33).

Illustration: One of the best books on prayer available is one written by John R. Rice. Reading that book opened my eyes to the importance of the responsibility we have for intercessory prayer with its treatment of Luke 11:1-13.

Remember when the disciples had seen Jesus pray in a certain place they asked him, "Lord teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples"? Jesus taught them the Lord's prayer, and then continued on to tell of a man who had two friends, one who had bread and one who did not. It is the job of the disciples of Christ to ask their friend, who has bread enough for all, for bread to give to those friends of his who have none. Rice called this the Lord's college-course on prayer. Abraham's example gives us some important components of successful intercession for others.

1. Recognize the condition for successful intercession – the righteous must be there. Abraham could intercede for others because he knew he could draw near himself (v. 23); the basis for the plea for God's mercy is the presence of the righteous. The more righteous, the more likely the mercy of God (Jer. 5:1). It is possible, however, for conditions to be too far gone for the righteous to have this kind of influence (Ezek. 14:12-20).

Dr. Rice gives us some valuable instruction about the importance of righteousness to our intercession: "Some Chris-

tians make the mistake of never separating from unsaved sinners. They are not a peculiar people. They are like Lot down in Sodom who called the men of Sodom 'brethren' and lost his testimony so that 'he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law' (Gen. 19:14). We should not be conformed to this world. It is true that we are in the world and we must have contact with sinners, but we should not live as they do. Saved people must be different if lost people are to come to us for the bread of life. But other Christians go to the opposite extreme. They feel that this world is not their home, that they here have no continuing city, therefore, they make much of their heavenly friends who have plenty of bread but never carry any to the other friends who have none. Some Christians try so hard to be sanctified and separated that they do not love sinners, they do not win souls" (*Prayer: Asking and Receiving*, 83-84).

This is an important balance. Abraham's example shows that the righteous need to be there and they need to be there to save the city, not merely care for themselves.

2. Possess the confidence of successful intercession – the Judge of all the earth will do right (v. 26). He is the God who commands His people to righteousness and justice (v. 19), and He can do so because He does what is right as the just Judge of all the earth. He is a merciful God who would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the presence of 10 righteous. He found one that we know of, Lot. He demonstrated His power through blinding the Sodomites before destroying the city. He ultimately has to pull Lot and his family from the city and acquiesces to Zoar. He remembers right mercy in times of just judgment.

3. Practice the persistence of successful intercession – Abraham continued standing before the Lord (v. 22, see Jer. 15:1

for the intercessory import of standing before Yahweh). Abraham repeats his requests throughout this prayer.

4. Maintain the humility of successful intercession – we are dust and ashes. Note Abraham’s humility (vv. 27, 30, 31, 32). Intercession stopped when God finished speaking to Abraham, not when Abraham finished speaking to God. As we intercede we ought to want to conform our wills to God’s will, not His will to ours. He wanted to save the righteous of Sodom even more than Abraham did.

Conclusion: Is your life’s purpose to fulfill the responsibilities that are incumbent upon those who are privileged to know the Lord. Do you want to obey Him, hate sin as He hates sin, and intercede for sinners in need of Him? If not, perhaps you have not yet had the privilege of coming to know the Lord as your own Lord and Savior. This morning, you can repent of your lack of obedience, hatred of sin, and intercession for others, and turn to Christ for salvation by faith. He will save you from sin if you trust Him to, for He died for your sins and rose again in victory over them.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*