

“The essence of sin is self-interest.

Sin shows itself among unregenerate people in the more “fleshly” sins and the flagrant manifestations of autonomy, as individuals seek to determine their own destiny. But the regenerated person is not necessarily cleansed from self-interest. While regeneration or salvation breaks the tyranny of self-interest, the deliverance is not yet complete. To the extent that self-interest still influences us, every aspect of our lives will be set at cross purposes with God.” (Kinlaw)

What we want to do today is explore the true nature of sin and its effect in our lives. To do that I want to look at a man who was a righteous, law-abiding person yet sinned against God.

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. ² So Sarai said to Abram, “The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai’s proposal. ³ So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

⁴ So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who’s wrong—you or me!”

⁶ Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. ⁸ The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she replied.

⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” ¹⁰ Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.”

¹¹ And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress. ¹² This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”

¹³ Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.”^[a] She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?” ¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means “well of the Living One who sees me”). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. Genesis 16 NLT

What you need to know is that according to the law of Abram's day woman that couldn't bear a son was to do exactly what Sarai did. The main purpose of marriage in those days was to provide a man with an heir. If a married woman couldn't provide a son she could offer one of her servant girls to her husband and according to the law the son would belong to the wife who gave the servant to the father.

This story outlines the scope of our problem and God's response to it. Jesus Christ did not come just to restore obedience in us as human beings. Having the mind of Christ has to be about more than obedience. Abraham and Sarai were obedient to man's law and fully obedient to God's law as far as they understood it. But they interfered with God's will for their lives because they doubted His ability to miraculously accomplish what He had promised.

Abraham was deeply religious and is the first person to have the word "believe" connected to his life. (Genesis 15:5-6) Abraham believed even though he didn't clearly grasp the mind of God and His awesome power. Abraham is a pioneer of our faith and he was a deeply devout God-fearing man. He had only one problem.

He didn't have the ability to think like God thinks. In his case the results were tragic and have lasted for generations in our world.

Something very destructive happens when we try to act according to our human reasoning. When we insert our will and way into the will of God, tragedy normally follows.

The wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit is that He very lovingly will rebuke us, chastise us and begin to draw us back so that we live in the Spirit and not in our own ways.

This alone is reason enough to explain why every hour of every day needs to be surrendered to God. Left to our own to make our way through this world we will ultimately fail and make a mess of things. It is imperative that we surrender ourselves to the presence of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to indwell our lives.

We were created for one thing. We were created to be a holy bride for God's Son. I know that the church is referred to in the Bible as the Bride of Christ but it starts individually with you and I. We stand no chance if we don't pursue and embrace the mind of Christ on a daily basis.

You may be very devout in the rituals of your faith. You may come to church and never miss a Saturday evening or Sunday morning. You may have a ministry and carry it out well but even the most devout person can be far from God's mind and heart.

Abraham proves this as does Job. Job is declared in the Bible to be "blameless and upright and one who turned away from evil," but when disaster fell in his life he quickly went to a place of being sure that God made a mistake allowing him to be born. God listens to his complaints for a

long time and finally responds in Job 38-40. “Who is it that darkens counsel without knowledge? . . .” Job repented of his words and his resentment toward God.

So here are some principles of belief and understanding the mind of God and the mind of Christ.

1. It is not enough to just believe what’s right

Abraham’s story proves that we need more than correct belief to be in harmony with God. Sometimes we fall into a belief that right thinking equals right living. While I believe in doctrinal purity the more people debate them and the hotter the debate is the colder their hearts become. Just right thinking is not enough.

Just believing right could not save Abraham from the penalty of sin. The only thing that would help Abraham and you and I is a deeply personal encounter with God. I am talking about a daily ongoing conversation that never ends.

Currently there are those that try to seek God by introspection or philosophical speculation but both are expressions of self-interest and are self-serving efforts are always doomed to failure. Even though are starting here may be self-serving it is not unlike God to reveal Himself to those who earnestly seek Him.

Pascal sought the truth of life through mathematics, physics, and philosophy. He was a genius but in the end he didn’t find life in any of them. He tried religious meditation and studied the scriptures, spending many nights in fasting and prayer. And then God found him!

He scribbled his thoughts on a piece of paper and had it sewn into the lining of his coat till his dying day. That paper is now in the National Library of Paris.

Year of Grace 1654 Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement. . .
From about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight,

FIRE

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob not of philosophers and scholars
Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ. . .

“My God and Your God”

“Your God shall be my God”

The world forgotten, everything except God. . .

“O righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You”

Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy. . .

May I never be separated from Him.

We will only come to know God on His terms. If we seek to only satisfy our intellectual hunger we will be sadly disappointed. But if you seek to know Him and serve Him you will find Him or He will find you!

2. It is not enough to just desire what is right

In the Old Testament we learn that we are incapable of serving God faithfully until He transforms our minds to be like His.

Isaiah wrote about it this way:

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD.
“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts”* Isaiah 55: 8-9 NLT

The good news, no the GREAT news is that we have a promise that it does not have to always be this way. Remember last week seeing this scripture from Ezekiel?

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. Ezekiel 36: 26-27 NLT

3. It is not enough to just do right

Sometimes I am afraid we have tried to reduce our faith down to a couple of words. We sum up our theology with these two words: Do right. For some it is an attempt to avoid what they have labeled as legalism where people strive to do right and live right.

Abraham did what was right in the laws of his day. He did what was right in striving to obey God’s plan but he acted outside of God’s leading. He took matters into his own hands.

Many times our efforts to do right are with the wrong motives. We may do right to advance ourselves or to obtain some recognition. Remember self-interest is the essence of sin. That’s how I opened this message. Self-interest could not be any more opposed to the character of God.

God calls us to do more than live right. He calls us to be changed into righteous people by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. It is the transformation of our hearts and minds and that can only happen as we surrender ourselves to Him.

He calls us to live right because we possess His own heart.

They will be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. Jeremiah 32:38-39 NLT

Do you begin to see and feel how big this is?

4. It is enough to choose God’s way over our way

If Abraham could have only chosen God's way over his own way it would have been so much better even for us today. God had promised him a son out of whom would come a family, out of whom would come a nation. Isaac had twelve sons and they became kings with kingdoms. Ishmael had the same but there was one difference.

There was one descendant that Ishmael didn't get and that was Jesus.

The bible holds a promise out before us that we can live in full communion with God, here and now. We can have His heart, outlook and priorities. We can have His goals and objectives as our goals.

Now I know that sounds fantastic and hard to believe but I don't think God is a liar. I think some theologies are full of lies and have watered down this truth until we are left to think that we are just trapped in sinful bodies with no hope of overcoming but I have news for you. God offers the ability to live a fully surrendered life through the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

Listen to what God said to the Israelites. This is what He longed for in His people: "The nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes." Ezekiel 36:23

Abraham got what he wanted by doing it his way but it wasn't the son God had promised. A biological act produced Ishmael but it took an act of God to produce Isaac!

It will take an act of God and a deep desire and hunger on our part for us to allow God to inhabit our lives completely.

5. It is enough to choose sacrifice and sanctification

What God called Abraham to do is nothing more than what he calls all of us to do. He called him to leave everything, his country, his security, his identity and to follow God in every area of his life.

Nowhere do you see this more than in Genesis 22 where God asks Abraham to take his promised son and sacrifice on an altar on the side of a mountain.

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am."

² *"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."*

³ *The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants.*

“The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.”

⁶ So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, ⁷ Isaac turned to Abraham and said, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“We have the fire and the wood,” the boy said, “but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

⁸ “God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

⁹ When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰ And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. ¹¹ At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!”

¹² “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”

¹³ Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the LORD will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven. ¹⁶ “This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that ¹⁷ I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants^[a] beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. ¹⁸ And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”

What God calls us to is a detachment from the things of this world that call to us on a daily basis. We are called to the full surrender of our lives. This means that we are called to lay down our affections that are out of line with God’s will.

The little girl hopped away screaming. Obviously, the fear of living forever with a sticker in her foot was not as terrifying as the thought of me pulling it out. But a five-year-old could not outrun the preacher. Not hopping on one foot, anyway.

After I wrestled her into position and swiftly pulled the sticker from her foot, her eyes filled with joy. She danced away, laughing, free, thankful. She dance, and danced, and danced.

It wasn't long ago that I realized that any real encounter with God was somewhat confrontational. There was always something that needed to be removed from my life so that His joy could be added.

So many times, I hopped away from God, fearing the removal, settling for the pain and damage that God longed to eliminate. Just like Adam, trying to hide where shadows lie about privacy from our Father.

But unlike Adam, I have been here before. I know the routine. Kick, scream, fight, and protest until God maneuvers me into position to remove the sin and free me from further damage. But I never learn. It is the same with my rebellious heart again and again.

Every time, I try to negotiate with God. "God, I can live with this one. Watch me! I have even developed this special hobble that you will find endearing. Father, can't we pretend this once that I am already OK? Can't I hop a little longer? Why do we have to worry about this now?"

His Spirit reminds me, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" Philippians 1:6 ESV.

Why do I forget the joy of dancing, laughing, freedom and thankfulness that comes after God pulls my stickers? But I again dread His loving hand.

Why do I pretend I meet with Him, when I can walk away from such encounters without the stickers challenged? I call it worship, or Church, but I forget to meet with Him.

Why can't I show my love and trust to Him by yielding my feet (so to speak), stickers and all, for Him to wash and clean?

Father, forgive me for my lack of trust and love for you. Thank you for not letting my attitude interfere with your "sticker-pulling" agenda for my life. Thanks for planning a way that I can sing and dance on (eventually) good spiritual feet.

God is calling us today to lay down our lives and loves at His feet and surrender our wants to His will.

It may be the hardest thing you ever do but we do it because it is the right thing to do.