

“Why the Faithful Don’t Have to Fight”

1. BE GRACIOUS IN YOUR DISPUTES

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1. The old saying goes, “It’s a dog eat dog world.” I found a poem recently entitled “Dog Eat Dog” that expresses the cynicism of a world like that.

2. In one stanza, the poet says:

“Preacher lies to the congregation cause that comes naturally,
Shopman cheats his customer for maximum profitability,
Politician takes all the bribes he can, constitutionally,
Lawyer robs you with a pen completely legally,
Country bombs its matty land nationalistically,
It’s a dog eat dog world, a dog eat dog world, a dog eat dog eat dog eat dog world.”ⁱ

3. While it may be true that this is a dog eat dog world, as followers of Christ, we are not supposed to have a dog in that fight.

4. In I Timothy 6:12, Paul encouraged the young preacher to, “*Fight the good fight of faith...*” The good fight of faith, however, is not the same as the greedy, selfish, cold-blooded, competitive fight of a dog eat dog world.

5. While others may bark and bite, scratch and claw for their little piece of this passing world, the faithful don’t have to fight.

6. We know that the meek shall inherit the earth. We depend on the Word of God rather than living by the ways of man.

7. In our text we find an example of this truth from the life of Abram. In Genesis 13, Abram displays the kind of patient faith that avoids strife by resting on the promises of God.

8. When faced with a situation in which Abram could have fought with his nephew, Lot, Abram chose rather to be selfless and sacrificial, and in the end he received the greater blessing.

9. There are a number of lessons we can take from this text. I want to point you to three of them as we seek to learn from this passage of Scripture. The first lesson we take from this text is this:

I. BE GRACIOUS IN YOUR DISPUTES

1. When Abram left his homeland, he brought with him not only his wife, Sarai, but also his nephew, Lot.

2. Some have argued that taking Lot along was a measure of disobedience, since God's original command to Abram in Genesis 12:1 was, *"...Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred..."*

3. Whatever the case, it does seem as you study the life of Abraham, Lot was always more of a burden than a blessing.

4. In our text, Abram and Lot's relationship faces a bit of crisis as a dispute arises among their respective camps. Verse 7 says, *"And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle..."*

5. I want you to notice a couple of things about this situation and how it was resolved. Notice first of all:

A. The start of this problem

1. Earlier in this chapter, we read of how Abram had been blessed by God, and was, *"...very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold."* (v. 2)

2. Apparently, those blessings had been extended to Lot as well. Verse 5 says, *"And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents."*

3. All these flocks and herds and tents were nice, but things were getting a little crowded in the family caravan.

4. Verse 6 says, *"And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together."*

5. Is it really all that surprising that an abundance of material things was the start of this dispute that arose among Abram and Lot's people?

6. Many times even the closest of relationships have been injured or ended by some squabble over money and materialism.

7. No wonder I Timothy 6:9 warns, *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."*

8. Shortly before his death in 1885, William Vanderbilt was worth an estimated \$200 million. He said of his fortune, "I have had no real gratification or enjoyment of any sort, more than my neighbor on the next block, who is worth only half a million."

9. Abram and Lot's dispute reminds us that having more stuff does not lead to having a better life. Their stuff was the start of this problem.

10. As we look at how this dispute was handled though, notice not only the start of this problem, but consider with me further:

B. The solution to this problem

1. Though Abram was the patriarch of the family, not to mention the one to whom God had given His promise, nevertheless we find Abram being very gracious in how he handled the dispute that arose between he and Lot.

2. Look with me at verse 8. It says, *"And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren."*

3. Verse 9 continues, *"Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."*

4. As I studied for this message, I found at least four different writers who all used the same word to describe Abram's handling of this situation. They called him, "magnanimous".

5. Magnanimous is an old word that means to be high-minded, great-souled, and noble. That is good description of the way Abram responded to this dispute.

6. R. Kent Hughes says of Abram, "He nipped the potential catastrophe in the bud...Confident and unthreatened, he was selfless and generous..."ⁱⁱ

7. How many blow-ups and brawls could be avoided in our lives if more of God's people behaved like Abram did, and rather than fighting for their rights, graciously preferred others above themselves?

8. Why did Abram behave this way? It was a matter of faith! He knew God had promised to bless Him and to give Him the land.

9. He did not have to fight over it with Lot. It was His by God's grace, and therefore he could be gracious in sharing it with Lot.

10. As Christians, we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. We are heirs to all that He has and one day we will reign with Him in His kingdom.

11. When we live with an understanding of who we are and what we have in Christ, we don't have to win every petty dispute and disagreement. Because of God's grace, we can be gracious!

12. Looking further at this text, consider a second lesson we find here. We learn not only to *be gracious in your disputes*, but another lesson is this:

II. BE GUARDED WITH YOUR DECISIONS

1. Very often the Bible will place two very different characters together as a way of showing the contrast in their lives. Think of Cain and Abel, Samuel and Saul.

2. In this text, Lot is the antithesis of Abram. Where Abram is gracious, Lot is greedy. Where Abram is selfless, Lot is selfish.

3. As Abram serves as a good example for us, Lot stands in this text as a bad one. Abram's graciousness left Lot with a decision, and he teaches us the danger of making the wrong choice.

4. Abram said to Lot, "Choose which way you want to go, and what part of the land you want. Whichever way you choose, I will go the other way."

5. Faced with that gracious offer, the Bible tells us that Lot chose "the plain of Jordan", and set up his tent near the city of Sodom.

6. Consider Lot's decision with me. Notice first of all:

A. The motive for Lot's decision

1. Look now at verse 10. It says, "*And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.*"

2. While Abram walked by faith, Lot lived by sight. He looked out over the plain of Jordan and saw lush land and the bright lights of the city.
3. Lot knew that his flocks and herds would be well fed, and he would also have the convenience of living near a thriving community.
4. Lot's decision was purely pragmatic. He chose the direction of his life and family based on what would be most profitable and pleasurable.
5. Based on that kind of decision making, for Lot, the decision was, as one writer put it, "...as easy as falling off a log."ⁱⁱⁱ
6. But what seemed like a "no-brainer" for Lot, should have been a more careful and guarded decision. There were other things that Lot should have taken into account, and wished later that he had.
7. As a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ, you cannot afford to make decisions based purely on what looks the best, sounds the best, and seems the best.
8. Just because a certain job may pay more money, does not mean that it is the right job for you. Just because something feels good to you doesn't mean that it is good for you.
9. Every decision we make ought to be motivated *first* by how it will affect our relationship to Christ. No matter how good something may seem, if it draws us away from Him, it is *not* the right decision.
10. Jesus said, "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That ought to be the primary and preeminent motive behind every decision we make.
11. With that being said, consider not only the motive for Lot's decision, but notice also further:

B. The mistake in Lot's decision

1. Verse 12 says that Lot set up his tent near the city of Sodom. Then verse 13 gives an important commentary about that city. It says, "*But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.*"
2. Everything about Lot's decision seemed right. The land was beautiful and fertile, and looked like the Garden of Eden.
3. There was a huge mistake, however, in Lot's decision. In moving to that place, Lot put himself and his family in close proximity to a cesspool of sin.

4. As we move on in Genesis, we find Lot not only moving near Sodom, but eventually living *in* Sodom, and even becoming an important part of that society.

5. II Peter 2:7-8, says that though God eventually spared Lot from the destruction of Sodom, it says that Lot was, "*vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*"

6. The story of Lot's move toward Sodom reminds us that any decision we make that moves us closer to this world and the sin that festers in it is a decision that will hurt us, and one we will live to regret.

7. In November of 2010, former president, George W. Bush released his biography and memoir. The title of the book is *Decision Points*.

8. A description of the book says, "George W. Bush served as president...during eight of the most consequential years in American history. The decisions that reached his desk impacted people around the world and defined the times in which we live."^{iv}

9. You don't have to be a president to reach decision points. All of us face them. While not all decisions are critical ones, for God's people, all of them should be careful ones.

10. Look again at this text, and notice a third lesson we learn here. We learn not only to *be gracious in your disputes*, and *guarded with your decisions*, but a last lesson is this:

III. BE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR DESTINY

1. Geographically at least, it looked like Lot got the better end of this break up. Yet, as we finish this chapter, we realize that the reason Abram did not have to fight was because He served the God who works all things out for the good of those who love Him.

2. After Lot had gone his way, verse 14 says that God spoke to Abram and repeated His promise to Him, even enlarging the blessings He was going to give His servant. Read verses 14-16 with me, and listen to the promise of God to Abram.

3. God said to him, "*Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.*"

4. Why should Abram squabble over a little piece of the land? He had a divine destiny that involved *all* of the land.
5. Dear Christian, rather than going through this life grappling for small pieces of a passing world, why don't we live with gratitude for the eternal promises of God that are already ours to claim?
6. Like everything else in Abram's journey, this destiny could only be received by faith. The same is true for us and the promises of God for our future.
7. Consider Abram's faith in pursuing the destiny that God had placed before him. Notice firstly:

A. The anticipation of faith

1. Part of God's promise to Abram involved his "seed", that is, his offspring. In verse 16, God says to Abram, *"I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth..."*
2. This was a wonderful promise for a man whose only family outside of his wife had just left him. Yet, when the promise was given, Abram had no children.
3. On top of that, Abram wasn't getting any younger. He was 75 when he left Haran, and had to be close to 80 when this promise was given to him.
4. Yet, Abram still followed the Lord, and leaned on His promises instead of going his own way, as Lot had.
5. Romans 4:19 says of Abram, *"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb."*
6. Abram teaches us that believing the promises of God often means that we anticipate with faith the things we cannot yet see by sight.
7. For instance, I have never seen heaven. Obviously, if I had, I wouldn't be here to tell you about it.
8. Nevertheless, though I have not seen heaven, I still live everyday anticipating the day when I *will* see it. That is what Hebrews 11:1 is talking about. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*
9. The way we keep ourselves from settling for the brevity of this world is by anticipating the eternity of the world that is come!

10. In believing and seeking the destiny that God had revealed to Him, we see in Abram not only the anticipation of faith, but notice also here:

B. The action of faith

1. James 2:26 says, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* Long before Brother James wrote that, Abram demonstrated it.
2. Look now at verse 17 in our text. God said to Abram, *"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."*
3. Look at the beginning of verse 18. It says, *"Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron..."*
4. In other words, God said, "Get up and go," and Abram got up and went. He acted in faith on the promise that God had given him.
5. Abram reminds us here that is not enough to say we believe the promises of God. We must live and act as though we believe them as well.
6. Therefore, if we really believe what God has said about our eternal destiny, that heaven is our home and our reward, then we won't go through this life struggling and striving for the things of this world.
7. No, like Abram, we will live with an attitude of grace and patience, believing God for our future, and thanking Him for what He is going to do.
8. Notice that this chapter ends with Abram in a familiar position. It says that Abram moved to Hebron, *"...and built there an altar unto the LORD."*
9. At that altar, Abram worshipped the God who had promised him the very things and so much more that he had graciously given up to Lot.
10. The faithful don't have to fight. We just have to wait.

1. As we watch Abram's conduct in this chapter, we are pointed to Someone even greater than Abram.
2. In many ways, Abram's graciousness, selflessness, and faith point us to the Lord Jesus.

3. The old writer, A.W. Pink says, "In the waving of his rights Abram foreshadowed that One who was made, according to the flesh, 'the son of Abraham' (Matt. 1:1). He who was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God voluntarily waived His rights and took upon Him the form of a servant..."

4. "...All power in heaven and earth was His, yet He suffered Himself to be *led* as a lamb to the slaughter... Yes, He 'waived his rights' and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps."^v

5. The real reason that the faithful don't have to fight for the things of this world is because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, rose triumphantly over death, and is coming again to lay claim to the world He rightly possesses.

6. With that truth planted in our hearts, let other men fight for the good places and fertile lands now. We know whose they really are.

ⁱ Lee, Nim, "Dog Eat Dog", *poemhunter.com*, accessed 4/7/11

ⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 200

ⁱⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, p. 201

^{iv} "Product Description", *Amazon.com*, accessed 4/7/11, <http://www.amazon.com/Decision-Points-George-W-Bush/dp/0307590615>

^v Pink, A.W., Gleanings in Genesis, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1976), p. 153-154