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RESTORING A FALLEN BROTHER

Genesis 14:1-24

By

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July 7, 1996

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Genesis Lesson 29

Restoring A Fallen Brother Genesis 14:1-24

One of the most needed and yet most neglected ministries in the body of Christ is that of going after and seeking to restore a brother or sister who has fallen into sin. We avoid doing it for a number of reasons: No one likes confrontation. We don't know what to say or how to go about it. We don't want to be judgmental or critical. We're aware of our own shortcomings and don't want to come across as hypocrites. So we say, "It's none of my business," and let the person go on in his or her sin. Or, perhaps you tell one of the pastors or elders and let them deal with it.

But Galatians 6:1 instructs us: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." The ministry of restoring a fallen brother belongs to all who are spiritual, which means, spiritually mature, those who walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26). While never easy, it is vital to the spiritual health of the church. You cannot be faithful to the Lord if you don't grow in your ability to perform this important ministry.

Restoring a sinning brother calls for a faith that is both bold and humble--bold enough to confront sin and do battle with the forces of darkness, and yet humble enough to see how prone I am to sin and humble enough to depend on the Lord so that I don't fall into sin in the process of seeking to restore my brother.

In Genesis 14, we see Abram exercising that kind of bold and humble faith. His nephew Lot made the decision to move his tents toward Sodom, which had the better grazing land. That choice started Lot on a spiritual slide from which he never recovered. By chapter 14:12 we find that Lot had moved into the city limits. Sodom, along with some other city-states in the region, had for 12 years been subject to a coalition of city-states in the east. But in the thirteenth year they rebelled (13:4).

The kings from the east weren't going to let this region go without a fight. It was their trade route to Egypt. And so they be-

gan dealing with their opposition. They finally defeated Sodom, her king fled, and the residents and goods of Sodom were taken captive, including Lot. A fugitive came and told Abram, who staged a surprise, nighttime attack, recovering all that had been taken, including Lot and his possessions. On his return from battle, Abram was met by two kings, the mysterious Melchizedek, king of Salem, and the king of Sodom. Toward Melchizedek Abram was humble, offering him a tithe of the spoils. Toward the king of Sodom Abram was bold in rejecting his offer to keep the rest of the spoils for himself. In rescuing Lot, Abram exemplifies the kind of bold and humble faith we need if we want to be faithful in the ministry of restoring a fallen brother:

To restore a fallen brother we need faith
in God which is both bold and humble.

Boldness and humility may seem antithetical, but they are not. They comprise the biblical quality of meekness or gentleness. We usually think of meekness as weakness, but biblical meekness is strength under control. A meek person is strong, but submissive to the Lord. He is like a powerful but well-trained horse, which can charge forth into battle, but is so sensitive and submissive that it will stop or turn at the slightest nudge from its master. Such humble boldness is a fruit of the Spirit that marks the godly person (Gal. 5:23).

Abram had that kind of bold, humble faith in God. In chapter 13, he humbly yielded to Lot and gave him first choice of the land. When Lot chose the most fertile land and then was taken captive, Abram didn't say, "It serves him right!" He boldly went and rescued Lot. Then he humbly bowed before Melchizedek but boldly resisted the king of Sodom's offer. He knew when to be bold and when to yield.

1. Bold faith goes to battle to restore a fallen brother (14:1-16).

Most of us probably err here; we're too passive, too hesitant to confront the forces of evil. Abram could have had a lot of excuses for not going after Lot. It was Lot's fault; he chose Sodom. A man will reap what he sows. And isn't God sovereign? He could have prevented these kings from conquering Sodom if it had been

in His purpose. Why interfere? And, it wouldn't be prudent for a man like Abram to go after four powerful kings. They hadn't bothered him. He was living in peace. Why stir up a hornet's nest? In the same way, we can always come up with plenty of excuses for not going after a fallen brother. But there's always one compelling reason to go:

- A. The reason for bold faith is the bondage of a brother (14:1-12).

Abram wouldn't have risked going after these kings except that he heard that Lot had been taken captive (14:14). Even though Lot wasn't right to be living in Sodom, he was a believer. And he was Abram's nephew. Abram knew that he was his brother's keeper. Even though Lot was at fault and was experiencing the consequences of his poor choice, Abram went after him.

These verses are a graphic illustration of the consequences of a believer dabbling in the world. Lot chose Sodom because he thought he could get rich there. He thought that the things of the world would bring him happiness and fulfillment. But the result was that he lost everything to this invading army and he himself was taken as a slave. Often a foolish Christian will cast off what he perceives as the "restrictions" of God's Word and pursue the pleasures the world offers. But he ends up in bondage of the worst sort. It's like a family pet rabbit that longs to break out of its cage and finally does so, only to find itself cornered by a dog. Sin promises us freedom, but we end up becoming the slaves of corruption (2 Pet. 2:19).

But the point for the spiritual Christian is that when our brother is caught in some trespass, we must exercise bold faith in seeking to restore him. Doing nothing is not an option if you love God and your brother.

- B. The response of bold faith is to do battle to restore our brother (14:13-16).

Sometimes, if you do not have a relationship with the person, all you can do is pray. But when the situation involves someone you know, the Lord may want you to be involved. Remember, it's never convenient or easy to go after a Christian who has fallen into the clutches of the enemy. It is always risky and it takes time and

emotional energy. But the Lord Jesus went after the straying sheep, and if we are His followers, we must do the same. It is not just the responsibility of pastors. It is the job of every mature (spiritual) Christian. There are several things we can learn from Abram's rescue of Lot about doing battle spiritually to restore our brother:

(1) *You must be separate from the world and sin to rescue a fallen brother.* If Abram had been living in Sodom, he would have been in the same fix Lot was in. Abram was living by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron (14:13). He had formed a mutual defense alliance with Mamre and his brothers, Eshcol and Aner (14:24). Some might argue that it was wrong for Abram to do so; in later times it was wrong for God's people to form alliances with pagans.

But in Abram's defense, in spite of this military alliance, he maintained his distinctive spiritual calling and purpose. Abram began by building an altar there (13:18), so he no doubt had told Mamre and his brothers about the one true God. He was in the world, but he wasn't blending in with them. He was maintaining his distinctiveness as "Abram the Hebrew," worshiper of God (14:13). This is the first time the word "Hebrew" occurs in the Bible. It probably comes from the name Eber, one of Abram's ancestors (10:21, 24). But here it is used to set Abram apart from the Canaanites. From that position of separateness from the world, Abram was free to deliver Lot.

The only way you can help a brother or sister who is ensnared in the world or in some sin is to walk in holiness yourself ("you who are spiritual"). One reason Christians are often hesitant to confront a sinning brother is that they know there is sin in their own lives. So they adopt the philosophy, "You don't confront me and I won't confront you." But the result is that sin festers and grows and the body of Christ is weakened.

(2) *You need preparation to rescue a fallen brother.* Abram led forth 318 trained men as well as his allies (14:24). Even though he was a peaceful man, Abram knew that the time would come when he needed to go to war. So he had trained his men before the enemy hit.

When Paul says, "you who are spiritual," he's not referring to something you attain instantly. As Galatians 5 spells out, the spiri-

tual Christian is one who walks in the Spirit, who has replaced the deeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. That takes time. If you aren't growing in the Lord and in your understanding of the principles of His Word, you won't be able to apply those principles wisely when someone you know needs them. We need to use times of calm to learn spiritual warfare for the times of battle.

(3) *You must use wisdom to rescue a fallen brother.* Abram divided up his forces and pulled off a surprise night attack. The enemy army was probably somewhat lax after their string of victories. They weren't expecting any retaliation. Maybe they were drinking and partying, with their guard down. That's when Abram and his troops hit. No doubt he was trusting in God, but he also wasn't stupid.

Consider the way Nathan confronted David in his sin. He didn't walk up and say, "David, you committed adultery and murder." He told David a story and got him to sympathize with the victim in the story. Then he sprung his trap by saying, "You're the man! You did what the aggressor in the story did." David broke down in repentance.

Howard Hendricks tells of how he went to speak at a church. He was met at the airport by the pastor's wife, who told him, as they drove to their home, of her concern because her husband was overworking, heading toward a heart attack. He wouldn't listen to her pleas to limit his ministry commitments. She asked Dr. Hendricks to talk to him. Most of us would have said something like, "Aren't you working too hard?" The pastor would have said something like, "Well, it's the Lord's work." And the rebuke would have rolled off him.

But Hendricks didn't do it that way. He waited for the right moment and then asked the pastor, "Do you smoke?" He got a stunned look from the man, who finally blurted out, "No, of course not!" "Why not?" Hendricks persisted. "Because my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I shouldn't abuse it," he replied. Hendricks shot back, "Then why are you abusing your body by working yourself toward an early grave?" The message hit home!

(4) *You must act on principle, not results, to rescue a fallen brother.* In verse 16 we read that Abram brought back Lot and all his posses-

sions. Brought him back where? To Sodom. Lot didn't learn a thing; he wasn't changed one bit by this whole experience. There's no word of thanks from Lot. In spite of what had just happened, Lot moved back to Sodom and continued his downward spiritual course. Abram probably could have guessed that Lot would do that. But he rescued him anyway.

Have you ever heard about a Christian caught in sin and you thought, "Why try to help him? It wouldn't do any good." There are three reasons to help him anyway. *First*, Christian love demands it. If you love someone you can't sit around while he destroys himself through sin. *Second*, we don't know the future, so we can't assume that our brother will fall again. Maybe this time he will learn to walk with God. *Third*, we need to deliver ourselves. God told Ezekiel (3:16-21) that if the watchman didn't warn the wicked to turn from their sin, God would require it of him. But if he warned them, but they refused to listen, at least the watchman had delivered himself. If you see a brother or sister in sin, you are responsible to try to restore him, no matter what he later does. The godly person needs a bold faith in God when a brother is caught in sin.

But boldness can easily become brashness. Satan often comes to us when we've been bold and pushes us farther in the same direction. Thus we also need humble faith.

2. Humble faith honors God and holds to Him after a spiritual victory (14:17-24).

Abram headed back from his great victory and was met by two kings, the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Apparently the king of Sodom came up to him first, but before he could speak, the king of Salem arrived (14:17-20). Only after Abram had dealt with the king of Salem did he deal with the king of Sodom. There are two battles in this chapter: Abram's battle with the foreign kings, and his battle with the tempting offer of the king of Sodom. The second battle was the greater, because it was the more subtle of the two. Abram's fellowship with the king of Salem strengthened him to resist the temptations of the king of Sodom. In these two encounters we find Abram honoring God and holding to Him, not yielding to the temptations of success.

Melchizedek, the king of Salem, is one of the most intriguing men in the Bible. He seems to come out of nowhere and returns about as quickly as he came. He was the king of what later became Jerusalem. He brought out bread and wine to refresh the weary warriors. And “he was a priest of God Most High” (Hebrew = “El Elyon,” v. 18). This is the first mention in the Bible of anyone being a priest. We don’t know to whom he was a priest or how he became one or how he learned of God. We don’t even know his name, since Melchizedek is probably a title. It means “king of righteousness.” Some have speculated that he was an angel or even a preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, but those views are not likely.

We do know, from Psalm 110 and from the Book of Hebrews (the only other places in the Bible Melchizedek is mentioned) that he was a type of Jesus Christ, who became a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. We also know that even though Abram was one of the greatest men of faith in the Bible, Melchizedek was even greater. This is proved by the fact that he blessed Abram (“the lesser is blessed by the greater,” Heb. 7:7) and he received tithes from Abram (Heb. 7:1-10). Abram humbly accepted Melchizedek’s blessing and offered him a tenth of the spoils. From Abram’s encounters with Melchizedek and with the king of Sodom, we learn two things about humble faith:

A. Humble faith honors God.

Melchizedek attributed Abram’s victory to God Most High (14:20). Abram didn’t say, “Now wait a minute! God helps those who help themselves. Let’s give credit where credit is due.” Rather, he affirmed Melchizedek’s statement by giving him a tenth of the spoils. Both men were honoring God publicly for this great victory.

Next Abram honors God before the king of Sodom, who offers Abram a deal. Abram can take the rest of the spoils, but the king wants his people back. But Abram refuses to take anything, lest the king of Sodom could say, “I have made Abram rich” (14:23). Abram was guarding God’s honor. God had promised to prosper Abram, and he didn’t want the king of Sodom taking credit for God’s work. If the world can take credit for part of the believer’s success, then God is robbed of His glory. So even though Abram could have rationalized that this was God’s means of

blessing him, he didn't do it. He wouldn't equate Sodom's goods with God's blessing. Humble faith honors God when there are spiritual victories.

B. Humble faith holds to God and resists the temptations of success.

The test of how we handle success is usually greater than how we deal with crisis. According to Ezekiel 16:49, Sodom was very rich. So when the king of Sodom offered Abram the spoils of battle, which consisted of all the wealth of Sodom, it was no small prize. Abram could have become fabulously wealthy by accepting this offer.

If you put yourself in Lot's sandals, this was an ironic turn of events. He had picked the best land for himself and left Abram the barren land of Canaan. He went for the money and ended up being taken captive and losing all he had. Abram had opted to trust God, and now he is given the opportunity to have not only all of Lot's possessions, but all the possessions of the whole city of Sodom! Can you imagine how shocked Lot would have been, who sought the riches of Sodom, to watch as Abram was offered all those riches? But he must have been even more shocked when Abram refused them! He probably thought old uncle Abram had slipped into senility!

But Abram wasn't senile. He knew God as "the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth" (14:22), who will give him what has been promised without the world's help. Abram had thought this through beforehand in the presence of God, and had decided that he wouldn't take anything from the spoils so that he wouldn't be indebted to the king of Sodom. In other words, it was a settled decision on Abram's part not to be in bondage to things, but to trust God to provide according to His promises. Convictions like that are the sort of thing you need to work out before you face temptation. If you make up your convictions as you go, you'll be destroyed by the temptations of success. But if you determine up front to hold to God by faith, you're more likely to be able to resist those temptations.

Note one other thing: Abram held his convictions for himself, but he didn't force them on others who weren't yet where he was

at. He told the king of Sodom to give his men who went with him their share of the booty (14:24). These men were on Abram's side and they were probably learning about Abram's God. But they weren't at Abram's level of conviction concerning the spoils of battle. If Abram had forced his convictions on them, they would have gone away grumbling, and it would have been a barrier to their later coming to the same point of faith as Abram had come to.

Conclusion

Genesis 14 is an illustration of Galatians 6:1. Verses 1-12 illustrate, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass"; verses 13-16 illustrate, "you who are spiritual, restore such a one"; and verses 17-24 shed light on, "in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

When asked why Congress doesn't decrease deficit spending, Senator Strom Thurmond explained, "It's awfully hard to get a hog to butcher itself." That's why we need one another in the body of Christ. We need to learn from Abram and exercise bold, yet humble, faith in the ministry of restoring our brothers and sisters who have been taken captive by sin. We are our brother's keeper!

Discussion Questions

1. What are some guidelines for determining whether to talk to someone about their sin or to let it go for a while?
2. Do you agree that most Christians are too passive in confronting sin? How can we grow in godly boldness?
3. What are some barriers or excuses which keep us from attempting to restore a sinning Christian? How can we overcome these?
4. How can we know if we are "spiritual" (Gal. 6:1)?

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