




FROM THE PASTOR

Weekly Devotional

Protecting the Good Name of Others

Pastor Heiple 

And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." — John 1:46

Today we continue our study of Question 144 of the *Larger Catechism*, which asks, "What are the duties required in the Ninth Commandment?" The second part of the answer states, "The duties required in the Ninth Commandment are... a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocence; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them." Last time we looked at our duty to promote the truth. Today we consider our obligation to protect the names and reputations of our neighbors.

Previously, we saw how Abraham's scheme to hide the true nature of his relationship to Sarah—by proclaiming that they were brother and sister (a half-truth) when they were actually husband and wife—was not "freely, clearly, and fully speaking the truth and only the truth." In fact Abraham developed this ploy for the specific purpose of concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife. He knew that if he and Sarah introduced themselves as brother and sister, people would assume they were not at the same time husband and wife, which was the errant conclusion at which he aimed. It was a sophisticated way of prejudicing the truth and promoting falsehood without speaking an outright lie.

Additionally, his ill-advised plan failed to promote the truth in another way: it did not frame "a charitable esteem of our neighbors," nor was it a way of "defending their innocence... and unwillingness to admit of an evil report concerning them." When king Abimelech discovered how Abraham had deceived him as to the true nature of his relationship to Sarah, he was understandably upset. He had Abraham brought before him and basically demanded of him, "Why have you wronged me? Explain yourself!" Abraham's reply is not very flattering: "And Abraham said, 'Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife,'" (Gen. 20:11). What a sad answer! So unworthy of the father of the faithful. Abraham justified his intentional misrepresentation and suppressing of the truth out of his fears over what the people of Gerar might be thinking and what they might do.

We do not know why Abraham thought this. Perhaps he heard reports of evil behavior by the people of Gerar, or maybe he saw things as he traveled in the region. No doubt he had his reasons for concluding that there was no fear of God in the land. And it is possible that he had some real justification for believing that someone might kill him in order to take Sarah into a harem. Be that as it may, Abraham's response was not an action based on his faith in God and his love of his neighbor (or even enemy). In his own words, his actions flowed from his fear of man and a love of his own skin. Ironically it was Abraham, who, in employing this ruse, did not fear God, nor did he seek to protect the reputations of the people of the land, nor even to protect his wife from being taken into a harem, for she was taken, precisely because of his dissembling. The only thing Abraham was protecting was his own life, and this is not what a man of God is called to promote first and foremost. The bottom line is that he was willing to sacrifice the truth and put others at risk because he thought it would increase his odds of staying alive.

At this point perhaps someone might object that Abraham did not have the full obligation to these people as neighbors since he was merely passing through their land. Here is where we have to keep in mind the context of Abraham's actions. The Bible says he had moved south and now he "dwelt" and "stayed in Gerar," which was Abimelech's kingdom (Gen. 20:1). Clearly, Abraham was not merely passing through; he was planning on remaining in and living in this region for some time. What a terrible way to introduce himself to the community! These people were and would be Abraham's neighbors. If they were too wicked to be that, then he should not have moved in, but if was going to live there then he owed them the love of a neighbor. May God grant that you and I think well of our neighbors and do what we can to protect their reputations.



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THE LORD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Sunday Morning · April 14, 2024



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The Celebration of Worship



Prelude & Welcome

Reflection & Preparation

Psalm 115:1-5

Call to Worship

Psalm 65

Leader Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed. O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come.

All **Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them.**

Leader Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.

All **By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas.**

Invocation

Hymn

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise · Trinity 38

Scripture Reading

Hebrews 12:1-17

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Song

When All Your Mercies · Insert

Worship in Giving

Offertory

Psalm – A Psalm of Hope · Heather Sorenson
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Hymn

No, Not Despairingly Come I to Thee · Trinity 495

Pastoral Prayer

Sermon

The Blessing Must Go to Jacob · Dr. Ray E. Heiple, Jr.

Genesis 27:1-41 NKJV

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it.

⁶ So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying,

⁷ ‘Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.’

⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you.

⁹ Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves.

¹⁰ Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.”

¹¹ And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man.

¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.”

¹⁵ But his mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.”

¹⁴ And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved.

¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son.

¹⁶ And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.

¹⁷ Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?”

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.”

²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the LORD your God brought it to me.”

²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.”

²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.

²⁴ Then he said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He said, “I am.”

²⁵ He said, “Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s game, so that my soul may bless you.” So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near now and kiss me, my son.”

²⁷ And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: “Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field Which the LORD has blessed.

²⁸ Therefore may God give you Of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, And let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, And blessed be those who bless you!”

Notes

Hymn

God Moves in a Mysterious Way · Trinity 128

Benediction & Postlude

Following the service, the elders will be available to pray with you at the front of the sanctuary.