

Faith And The Christian Fight (Part 7)

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We will begin this sermon by turning to Hebrews 11:8.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing where he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

This sermon marks the seventh in this present series on faith, and it is my hope that you are not growing weary of this subject. I do not know whether you fully appreciate faith's value to your well being, but outside of God's grace and Christ's blood, not even love is as important as faith. Faith, you see, is our response to God's love. In fact, right in this chapter—Hebrews 11:6—it is boldly stated "But without faith it is impossible to please God." Now surely, above all beings, you want to please Him. If you do, then believe Him, and trust Him.

It was by means of faith that Abel chose to make a sacrifice that is acceptable to God; that is, one that really pleased Him. It was faith that enabled Enoch to walk with God and to seek Him as he walked. It pleased God to permit him to do so. God then saved Enoch's life by transporting him to another area when his life was severely threatened.

It was faith that motivated Noah to build the ark, and it so pleased God that He proceeded to save him from the flood's destruction by means of the very instrument his faith motivated him to build.

Consider this: A person is justified by faith in Christ's blood, and salvation itself is by grace *through* faith. Is anything more important?

Now today, we are continuing to plough through many details vital to more fully understanding faith's foundational workings in a converted person's life.

When we left off in the previous sermon it had focused on three aspects of a Christian's life. The first one is that God uses Abraham's example as the overall pattern to teach us

how we should respond to God's love in faith.

The second one was that each called person actually received two callings, but nobody accepts the first one. Everybody on earth—everyone who has ever lived—rejects the first one. The first one comes largely from the created world in the fact of the Bible's easy availability. Both of those sources give ample evidence of the existence of a Creator God. The rejection is largely made by simply ignoring what the Book says, and what the creation is saying. All of us have gone on with life as though God's existence and His requirements are of little importance.

The second calling though is so personal, that in John 10 Jesus declares that we are called by name. This summoning has far more impact, and few called in this manner outright reject it.

The third point in that previous sermon is *why* Abraham is considered the "father of the faithful." Jesus explains this in John 8; it is because of family resemblance. However, not physical resemblance, because Abraham's seed is drawn from all nations and races. Rather, the resemblance is in term of faithful conduct according to God's way of life.

In a major sense, this message that I am giving today is going to be more of a Bible study, especially in the first part of it. What I am going to do is to string together a large number of scriptures that show, step-by-step, what happened to Abraham when he obeyed God's call. This step-by-step outline parallels what happens to each of God's children legally and spiritually. This will help us grasp the root of some frequently used terminology. The foundation is set for us in Genesis 12. I want you to turn there

Genesis 12:1 Now the LOORD had said unto Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you:

Genesis 12:4 So Abram departed, as the LOORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran

It is not entirely beyond the realm of calling Abraham the first Christian—his call and his being led from his old position in relation to God and to the world. In other words, there is a "positional" change when a person responds to God.

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I John 5:19-20 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

When God calls us, we are in the world. That is our position before Him. We are in the world, and the whole world lies in wickedness, so we are in wickedness, and if we understand, we are wicked. We do not like to think of ourselves as that way, but in relation to God, we are wicked as part of that world. Let us confirm this through the Apostle Paul in the book of Galatians where he reinforces what John said.

Galatians 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.

When we were called, it was the will of God that we be called. He did this so personally, that He did it by name, according to Jesus. It is not a helter-skelter thing at all. It is not a random acceptance of Christ. It is directly aimed at others even though they may hear the same things that we do. They do not hear them in the same manner, and it does not have the same impact in their lives because God is not calling them.

In the book of John Jesus adds this.

John 15:19 If you [meaning Jesus' disciples] were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

When that calling comes, we are wicked. We are evil. We are under that system, that way of life under the government of Satan the Devil. But God's calling begins to wrench us free from that, and so we are called personally. So the first step, when we begin to respond to God's calling, is that the Christian is translated out of the world. At the same time, as part and parcel, the person's condition before God changes. It begins to undergo a change. This is not position. This is *condition*. His condition before God begins to change.

We are going to go first to the book of Romans, chapter 6, and in verse 6.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man [the one that was part and

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

parcel of the world] is crucified [put to death] with him [with Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve [or be enslaved to] sin.

So this calling begins to make a change in our condition before God. From God's perspective, we were dead.

I John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:

Before God's calling, before His granting us repentance, things in our heart, in our mind, our attitude toward Him, we were not sons of God. Our condition before God is "of sons," and therefore the world knows us not. Before, we were part and parcel of it, but when we begin to come under the government of God, through Jesus Christ, we become hated. We become enemies. It might not be something that is apparent at that time, but it will happen.

These verses here show the spiritual change from one condition to another:

Romans 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Why not? Because they do not have the faith of Jesus Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God. So when God begins to work with our mind, it is done personally. He calls us by name. There begins to build in us a change of attitude and conduct in relation to God. The faith of Jesus Christ begins to bud and grow within us, and it begins to become possible for us to please God.

Romans 8:8-10 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

The second step that occurs is that through God's calling the Christian is brought into a new spiritual union, with a new kindred, a new family, and new relationships; therefore, the very personal calling from God creates two separations, and these separations

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

create what the Bible terms "sanctification." That is what the word "sanctification" means. That is its biblical term. To be sanctified is to be set apart.

Now while there are two separations, there also are a number of joints. God takes us from one, and He joins us to another. We are separated from the world. We are separated from death, and given life. We are separated from the world and joined to the Kingdom of God, and thus our spiritual standing and our spiritual state before both God and the world is radically changed.

Understanding these two separations is important toward growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, because the world concentrates heavily on one's justification while treating one's sanctification very lightly indeed. It happens in practical matters. This world's false Christianity is that grace's emphasis is placed on accepting Christ and His blood for the forgiveness of sin, but little emphasis on obedience to His governance of our life, and thus real sanctification *rarely* occurs within them. We will take one commandment. How many people out there know about the Sabbath, but do not keep it? This is one example of why they are not separated from what they were before. They are saying, in effect, that they really do not believe God; however, that separation does occur to those God indeed has called.

I Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

We are the "elect" only because of what *God* has chosen to do. It is the sanctified life—"the separated-from-the-world life"—that provides the proof of whether one is converted, whether one really has the faith of Jesus Christ. If we are then legally cleared before God, the Christian no longer belongs to the world. His position and his condition have changed, and thus the Bible no longer perceives such a one as being "in the flesh." That is the biblical term.

Other things occur as well that are important to understand if we are going to make good practical use of what God is doing with us in His calling. I want you to turn to Philippians 3:20. You will notice that this verse begins with the preposition "For." When it does that, the sentence is explaining something. In other words, it is explaining something that he said previously. This is addressed to people in the church. This is addressed to brethren. This is addressed to people who are converted. They *have* God's

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

spirit.

Philippians 3:20 For our conduct . . .

I am going to change that word "conduct," because there is a better word. It should be translated "citizenship." It is the Greek word *politeuma*. It is the word from which we get the word "politics," and it is indicating citizenship.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven; . . .

That was not the condition or the position we were in before God called us. Our citizenship was where we were born, where we grew up, where we voted, where we gave our patriotic feelings and efforts towards.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spiritual separation produces for Christians a legal transfer of citizenship that we must recognize. I cannot emphasize that enough. We **must** recognize it.

Paul reinforces this transfer of our citizenship in the book of Colossians, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13.

Colossians 1:12-13 Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who has delivered us from the power of darkness [in the world] and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

It is in that kingdom where our citizenship now lies. Because this has taken place, we are legally responsible to God to live our life as a *stranger*, as the *King James Version* might say. A better modern word is "alien," as if we are in a foreign land. We must be obedient to the laws of this new nation by placing higher priority in our life's activities on our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

This opens the door to another line of practical thought. Remember, all these things are tied to Abraham. When you understand what happened to Abraham, you will

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

understand that this is happening to us just like it did to him, except, unlike him, he had to walk from one country to another. He actually had to go through the steps of being an alien in another country. We do not have to do that, but the same thing is happening spiritually within the land in which we reside.

We are now going to go to James 4, verse 4. Here is one of the effects of this transfer of citizenship.

James 4:4 You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

That is plain and clear, and really easily understood. I do not know that these people were literally committing adultery, but they were literally committing *spiritual* adultery. Why? How? Because they had too much concourse with the world. In II Corinthians Paul confirms this in another way. This is eminently practical.

II Corinthians 6:14 Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness?

II Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

In other words, that pleases Him, because by faith we leave worldly practices behind and we turn our attention to pleasing Him through acts of faith. So by means of this, of the Holy Spirit-motivated conduct, we are to come out from among them and be separate. We are going to carry this a little bit further with a few more familiar scriptures.

Basically, what Paul is saying here, and what James is also saying without using the words, is that we cannot straddle the fence. That is easy for us to understand, I hope. We are either committed to one, or to the other. We are either going to use our calling and the faith God gives to us, or we are not going to do so. We are saved by grace through faith, and that is not of yourself. It is the gift of God [Ephesians 2:8].

That faith is a gift from God so that we can turn in the direction that God has for us to go, so we cannot, we must not, straddle the fence because, as Jesus taught, a man

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

cannot serve two masters. He will either love one, or the other. He will cling to one, and let go of the other. We have choices to make that involve these two principles.

In practical terminology, here is what is required of us from a slightly different perspective. Turn to Romans 12:1-2. These are two of the most familiar scriptures to us, written by the Apostle Paul. If you understand the book of Romans, you will understand that actually the first eleven chapters were written to show us what I have just said to you in many words. He shows us the process of conversion, giving us the doctrines step by step. By the time he gets to chapter 12, he is saying, "I have taught you what has happened to your relationship to God and to your relationship to the world. Now what do you do with it?" Here is what we do.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you [I plead with you] therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable [or spiritual] service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Who knows how much is bound up in actual practical demonstration of the faith that God has given us in these two verses? But here we have an overview of *what* is required of us in a very general way.

Let us go to Romans 13:11-14, because Paul continues this theme. Here he puts a note of urgency within it.

Romans 13:11-14 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

There is one more note of admonition from the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:7-8. This is a sobering note thrown into our understanding of the process that is unraveling. I mean this in a good sense in our lives. We cannot see God, but He can see us. He knows what is going on in our lives. We cannot pull the wool over His eyes.

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Galatians 6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Let me summarize just very briefly what has occurred to us. What has happened since God's calling, in an overall sense, is that Christ's claim upon us as our Redeemer has become paramount to our life and time. Abraham was so impressed by what he was learning through his calling that he reacted by setting an example for all of his spiritual children to follow. He did not know that he was father of the faithful at the time, but God was recording what he did, and now it stands there as a significant event that we are to pattern *our* lives after.

Romans 7:21-23 has set up something in our lives that we have to deal with. The Apostle Paul tells us this. Now by the time he wrote this he had been converted for about 20 years, so this is coming from a man of considerable experience, of great understanding in God's way of life. He was a man who was a leader. He had gone through a great deal, and here he is, confessing to us what was going on within him twenty years after his conversion. He says:

Romans 7:21-24 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: [In his mind he knew what was happening, what was going on inside him.] But I see another law in my members **warring** against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Did you notice that word "warring"? Do you know what the title is I have put on this series? "The Christian's Fight."

The practical, daily, experiential reality is that now we walk to the beat of a different drummer. We do this with two competing, warring dimensions within our mind at the same time that we must contend with. But with the help of God, through Jesus Christ, this must be overcome in order to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. Because of this emerges the Christian's fight which this world seems to love to avoid mentioning, and thus why true Christianity is so difficult.

I am going to link together some more scriptures to help clarify and summarize the

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

pattern established through Abraham. First I want you to remember Hebrews 11:8. What this verse emphasizes is that when Abraham set out, he did not know where he was going. Now that "not knowing where he went" took place in Genesis 12.

Are you aware that the same thing is mentioned in the New Testament, that we do not know where we are going either? It is mentioned toward the end of the book. It is like you have to read through almost all the whole thing till you run into this verse, but it was the Apostle John who said it. We read the verse already, but let us go back again to I John, chapter 3. This time we are going to add one verse to it.

I John 3:1-2 Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knows us not because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, **and it does not yet appear what we shall be**: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

"It does not yet appear what we shall be." Do you see a similarity between that and what happened with Abraham? What it comes down to is this: We are involved in an awesome adventure, **blind** to many of that adventure's particulars. There is so much that we **do not know**, and what is emphasized in Hebrews 11:8 regarding Abraham's calling is that he trusted God *regardless* of not knowing.

Now trust is the most powerful fruit, the strongest and clearest evidence of belief. Trust and belief are not exactly the same. Trust is faith in action, and it is this that sets the truly converted apart from those who only believe intellectually.

Brethren, all you have to do is read the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of commentaries that are available out there, written by sincere, intelligent people. We can see the tremendous amount of knowledge that these people have been able to glean by combining the scriptures with what is available in history itself. They have this knowledge, but somehow, brethren, because they do not have the spirit of God, they cannot put it together in the right sequence.

Mr. Armstrong used to say that this way of life shown in the Bible is like a picture puzzle. There are thousands of pieces in this picture puzzle. If you have put together enough picture puzzles, then you know that each piece only fits in one place, and the piece cannot be forced to fit into a place where it does not belong. This is what God's calling enables us to do. We do not put the pieces together flawlessly. They go together as we cooperate with God, and He reveals that we have got it in the right place, and another

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

piece of the puzzle gives us further understanding of what He is doing.

He does give us plenty of general things to go by, and one of the general overviews is the life of Abraham, our father in the faith. We can pick out what happened in his life and realize that we are following the same basic path that he did. Individual particulars are going to be different. We live a couple of thousand years later. Four thousand years later almost, but still we are following the same general pattern that was in his life.

This thing about trusting God is so important. Are you aware that there is this lack of trust in mankind toward God even despite the fact they believe a great deal about God that is true and right?

Parents, I will give you what I feel is a practical demonstration in our relationship with our children. Do you understand that one of the major reasons why kids go bad in their teen years is because they do not trust you? They do not trust their parents, but they will trust other kids. They trust what they see in movies, extolling the popular culture. They trust what the songs tell to their emotions. They trust their own thoughts on their own experiences, but mom and dad are low on the influence scale.

It is interesting what Jesus said about Abraham in the book of John, chapter 8 and verse 56. He said:

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.

Abraham believed, and he trusted God. To him it was not a matter of mere intellectual fact. He trusted, and he acted in accordance with what he believed.

Now those who are children of Abraham, as they begin to reflect on their life, are going to be able to see that maybe they did not trust in situations as dramatic in the way that Abraham did. God could not hit everything in Abraham's life, but on the other hand, He did hit enough of it that we should be able to pick out bits and pieces of our life and see that we are following the same general trajectory as our father Abraham did.

Now Abraham, by going forth, "not knowing where he was going," demonstrated that he unreservedly put himself in God's hands. He actually performed what he said he believed. His feet, as it were, gave proof of what was in his heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," and out of the abundance of the heart, the body responds to what is there, because Jesus put what Abraham did in Matthew 16:24-26

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

as to what we have to do in order to walk in the steps of our father Abraham.

Matthew 16:24-26 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself [be a living sacrifice], and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul [life]? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul [life]?

Abraham set his affection on things above, and not to please himself. He did this to a degree that few have ever even come close to matching.

To deny one's self is to set aside one's own claim to the day-to-day use of one's time and energy in favor of another. In this case it is Christ.

Now often God's command seems to be demanding, even severe, but the acceptance of our calling has placed the burden of this responsibility right on our shoulders.

There is no doubt that Abraham's neighbors thought that he was loopy. Even his lowest neighbors undoubtedly thought he was crazy in what he was doing. The world cannot clearly understand the actions of one who walks by faith, because he is walking to the beat of a different drummer. The rhythm of his life and the choices that he makes are going to seem—to put in a kind way—unusual; in a less kind way, crazy. "Oh! You don't believe that, do you?" "Oh yeah, I do." They just do not get it.

Do you know what the unconverted do? The Bible shows it. If they are confronted with the same knowledge and circumstances as a converted called person is, but without God's gracious calling and gift of faith, the unconverted will adjust through compromise and self-justification. They will rationalize that under their central circumstances, God surely would not expect them to do that. "Well, if I do that, I would have to give up my job." "If I would do that, I would not have any money to live on." I am talking about tithing. "If I would do that, what would my family think of me?" "If I would do that, I would lose my standing in the neighborhood, amongst my friends." The unconverted world is governed by its limited carnal senses and feelings, and not by faith in God's character.

Hebrews 11:8 also tells us that Abraham was drawn by faith to a land that he would afterwards receive as an inheritance, also called Canaan, or the Promised Land. That area of course is a type of the Kingdom of God.

What if Abraham had refused to step out? What God has recorded through Abraham is that by how he responded illustrates a path, a way of trust, that leads us to our inheritance. It is the narrow way, the difficult way that leads to life. God expects us to follow that trustful attitude that motivated what Abraham did.

One of the things that makes the path difficult is that so often we feel we really do not have the faith to do what we think we should do, and so we hem-and-haw around as well, and stagger here and there. But God patiently works with us until we are finally willing to do it.

Did you ever stop to think that this difficult way would never even have existed if God had not given it? It is true. But all that Abraham did proved that Abraham's heart was with God, that he was one with God's way. You know that God was testing Abraham all along the way. In fact, in Genesis 18:19 God said, "For I know him [Abraham] that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him."

There was a test there, and Abraham did what was required of him, and God was certain that he would follow through in teaching his children. Incidentally, overall he did a great job. He and Sarah together produced Isaac, who almost measures up to his father in terms of yieldedness to God. He was quite a man. Abraham, along with Sarah, reared Isaac in the right way.

We know that Abraham is going to be in the Kingdom of God, and that he is going to have a mighty high position in that kingdom. Abraham's response begins to illustrate that no proud, stiff-necked rebel will be in the Kingdom of God; rather, those who walk in the steps of Abraham as God plots out the course for each called one, no one wrapped up in himself will survive the difficult path. It will be only those who, by faith, are humbly submissive to God's will the way Abraham was, and you know that Abraham was given a couple of very tough responsibilities to do.

In short then, God's calling at the beginning begins to separate us from a number of negative, worldly, and carnal spiritual factors, but it also attaches our loyalty, our responsibility and purposes in life to God and into His kingdom.

In biblical terminology we are transferred from death to life, from fleshly-minded to spiritually-minded, from Israelite or Gentile to Abraham's seed, from uncircumcised to circumcised of the heart, and from the world to the Kingdom of God. It is most essential that the severing from the old way be as complete as possible despite what happens to

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 7) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

our heart in its reattachment to God in the way of the world and carnality. These things, brethren, remain a constant threat. They are magnets to try to get us to go back. From these, the things that are inside us, arises the great need for faith to fight the Christian fight to keep from backsliding to where we were before.

We see a small portion of this from Abraham's life, that his breaking away was not quite as smooth as it may appear on the surface.

Let us go back to Genesis 12:1 and be reminded, and we will build something on this.

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get you out of your country and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you.

"Abraham, Get going!" But there were factors in Abraham's life that made this quite difficult, as we are going to see. We are going to see this by going to a place in the book of Luke where Jesus covered something that affects us all. I should not say that quite so broadly. It affects most of us. It affects some more than others.

Luke 14:25-27 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

This is an admonition from Christ as to where I have come to see in my experience in the ministry is one of the major causes of problems to the newly-called person. Very much of the problem does not come from people who have no connection to you at all, but many of the problems come from our flesh and blood brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, parents, and children, depending upon your age. That is the carnal way. This is to be expected. They begin to realize that the direction into which you are headed is beginning to negatively affect their relationship with you.

I know that in my own case, my mother virtually disowned me, disowned my children, disowned my wife. It was not because we punched her in the nose or anything, but we made her life uncomfortable because we were never going to be there for Easter dinners. We were never going to be there on Thanksgiving. We were never going to be there on Christmas.

She began to perceive that this was going to break up the family unit because we were heading off in a direction different from what she had loved carnally, and that is understandable. She, of course, wanted us to compromise with these things. Even though I told her no Christmas gifts, she got Christmas gifts anyway, and I gave them back just like I told her I would do if she bought gifts for our children. I tried to do it in a kind manner. I tried to do it privately, but of course she took it very hard. It was understandable to me, but she was doing it because her world was being upset. If she had any feelings for us at all she would not have done it. "Huh! Go your own way," see, but there was intolerance within her because of that.

What Jesus was warning here of course is that in many, many cases the family is going to be one of those things that has to be overcome right at the beginning of the calling.

Well, brethren, Abraham had trouble with his family. The Bible does not give us a lot of detail, but it does give us enough so that we are able to have some insight to this. Here is the way I think the scenario went.

You recall in Isaiah 55:5, which scripture we went to the last time I spoke, God said, "I called Abraham *alone*." If we take that to the extreme, when God originally called Abraham, even Sarah was not a part of it. God put the screws to Abraham right off the bat, and his family was at the center of it.

Genesis 11:27-31 Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran begot Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. [Haran died even before they left Ur of the Chaldees.] And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan: and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

I do not know whether you caught it there. Apparently the family was so excited and caught up, at least emotionally, in the things Abraham was telling them, as he was learning during the earliest stages of his conversion, and so they decided that they were going to leave with him. Did you notice that in verse 31 who was leading the family? It was not Abraham. It was Terah. It says in verse 31 that "Terah took Abram." Abram did not just get up and walk away from the family. No. The whole family went with him under

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the leadership, not of Abraham, but of Terah. He is the one who is mentioned first, and it very clearly shows that he was the one who was in charge

Now I get from this a picture of Abraham. I do not know whether he fully agreed with what his family was doing, but his respect for his father was great enough that he deferred to Terah rather than cause a scene and just go off with his wife, and maybe Lot, and go themselves. But the whole lot of them went to Haran. Do you know how long of a walk that was from Ur to Haran? It was 700 miles. They walked there.

In one sense, Abraham was a young man in his prime. His father was a great deal older than he was, and Terah was the patriarch of the family and he led the way. I will not go into the whole thing, but there is a section in *Barnes' Notes* that goes into a great deal more detail of this. They come to the conclusion that they spent five years in Haran. That is a long time. Incidentally, it is another 500 miles from Haran to the Promised Land. Now verse 32 fills in something.

Genesis 11:32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Now there is Chapter 12:1, "**Now** the LORD had said unto Abram, . . ." He did not go off on his own until his father was dead. As that study in *Barnes' Notes* shows, they were there in Haran very likely for five years. But you will notice that when Abram finally did leave, he was now the leader, and he went off.

I think that part of this experience is not just the family difficulties, but I also think that God chose to send Abram in that direction because God wanted us to be impressed by the distance they had to go in order to get to the Promised Land, and that the distance—1200 miles altogether—is to illustrate to us that sometimes leaving the family is one of the hardest trials that somebody may ever face. It was 1200 miles on foot. That was quite an experience.

We are going to continue with this because I think this tends to show us how little control we sometimes exercise over some circumstances, and why we have to continue trusting God and fighting through while working to overcome as He leads us through some difficult circumstances. God knew he was there all that time, and there is no doubt that God continued to feed Abraham's mind with things that were going to be necessary.

Abraham did not leave Haran until Terah died, and it looks as though God might have put Terah to death in order to shake Abraham loose. It is because of Abraham's

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deference to his father. Maybe Terah was sick. I do not know. I have no idea. The Bible does not fill in every detail. Maybe the first 700 miles put him under the weather. That is a long walk, but it does tend to show God's patience, and you know God will continue to deal with him all the while he was there, and when his father died, now he did not have to defer to his father. It is very interesting that not only did Abraham and Sarah leave, but they added a number of people while they were there in Haran.

There is something else that we can also speculate on as to why God waited until certain things had occurred, among them being the death of Terah. I want you to turn to Joshua 24:1-3.

Joshua 24:1-3 And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, [and then He tells exactly who He means]—even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.

What I want you to see here is this. Despite the fact that the family went with Abraham and Sarah, from Ur to Haran, they remained absolutely totally pagan. That is what Joshua said. They were idolaters. They were not worshipping God. God called Abraham alone, and I think that what happened as they were there, He then added Sarah to that, and maybe also Lot, but the original calling came to Abraham. It was just him by himself. Then in Haran there were some added. But God did not want the influence of Terah on that family any more, and I believe that He either waited until Terah died, or that He put Terah to death so that he would no longer have any influence on Abraham. Abraham then was the patriarch of the family—a converted family.

There is an interesting thought to this in the New Testament in Stephen's testimony given to the leadership of Israel in his day. I want you to turn to Acts 7:1-4. I want you to notice the wording there.

Acts 7:1-4 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he [Stephen] said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get you out of your country, and from your

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kindred, and come into the land which I shall show you. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charan: and from thence, when his father was dead, he **removed** him into this land wherein you now dwell.

Isn't that an interesting translation? God *removed* Abraham into the land wherein they now dwell. That shows very clearly that God took a direct hand in getting Abraham out of Haran to the place where He wanted Abraham to be. He removed him. It almost seems like He did not give Abraham a choice. "GO!" This is what I mean when I said earlier that though Abraham responded quickly, there were family circumstances that in a sense were beyond his control. Because of his respect for his family, especially for his father Terah, there were things he did not want to upset that would have added to the delay that was caused there in Haran that may have lasted as much as five years from the time that he was originally called there in Ur till he finally was removed. It almost sounds like he was booted out. God put a pretty hard prod on him to get him moving once again.

I think that we can conclude from this that even the best of them—and surely Abraham is one of the best of them in terms of faith and response to God—had some difficulty.

Deuteronomy 32:9-12 shows that God every once in a while has to stir the nest. It even uses that terminology, and I think that He did that with Abraham.

Deuteronomy 32:9-12 For the LOORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, hears bears them on her wings: So the LOORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

I think that this is about as good a place to stop. My time for today is up. Abraham is now in the land, as today's message ends, and his life in the land is about to begin. The Bible very confidently tells us that while in the land he walked by faith, and he did it, brethren, for about 100 years. What a testimony, as we shall see the next time I speak on this subject.