

Dealing with the Root

Genesis 20

ILLUSTRATION: Last week, many of us gathered on the newly purchased land at Central Nassau to dedicate it to the Lord. Well, after the formal ceremony was over, Julie and I walked out into the woods to the actual spot where the building will one day stand, which is currently covered by longleaf pines and small palmettos - typical of Florida. Before laying a foundation on that property, they will have to remove all the growth down to the roots. If they don't, what will happen? No matter how well your concrete is mixed, roots will one day press through and damage that structure.



ROOTS:

- Roots are under the surface; they are not obvious
- Roots play the long game - they aren't in a hurry.
- Roots can reproduce the entire woodland if not fully removed.

Well, scripture teaches that there are spiritual roots. That is, there are lingering remnants of erroneous theological positions, understandings, or worldviews that, if not properly removed, wreak havoc on one's life years later.

I'm sure you've read where the writer to the Hebrews warned: **Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)**
¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Well, bitterness is a root, but it is not the only root that must be dealt with.

ILLUSTRATION: When I first came to Christ, there were a few things that God seemed to deliver me from immediately, one of which was anger. I was just an angry young man. I was impatient, and I ended up in a lot of needless arguments. I came to Christ. It was as if cold water had been thrown on the fires of my anger.

Fast-forward about 15 years. Julie and I were traveling up I-65 from Huntsville to Nashville. Traffic was backed up for what seemed to be several miles. I opened my car door to try and figure out what was going on when a diesel truck driver a few cars back rolled his window down and proceeded to cuss me, telling me I had no business getting out of my car.

Well, that didn't sit right with me. Before I knew it, I had climbed up on that man's diesel and was inviting him to step out of his truck so we could discuss the matter man-to-man.

He declined my invitation. Eventually, I got back in my car, closed the door, and there was Julie sitting beside me. It turns out this is not what she was accustomed to on a normal Tuesday. She said, “What on earth is wrong with you?”. Then it seemed to hit me what I had done, and they got us both into it.

Where did that come from? It was a spiritual route that had not been dealt with. We all have them, and they seem to emerge at the most opportune times.

CONTEXT: In our text today, we see a root in the life of Abraham that will spring up and cause great trouble for him. Abraham repeats a 25-year-old failure. Remember back in chapter 12...

Genesis 12:10–20 (ESV)

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.”

Pharaoh did indeed take her but spared and even blessed Abram. The great plagues hit the household of Pharaoh and he recognized that Abram had deceived him.

25 years pass, by this point, God has appeared to Abram a couple of times. He had reaffirmed the covenant, given him the sign of circumcision, changed his name to Abraham, and Sarai’s name to Sarah. He had also, and this is very important, God had woven Sarah into the covenant. So Abraham knows that the promise of God would be fulfilled through Sarah. She would have a son, the son of promise.

That knowledge makes what he is about to do even worse.

Genesis 20:1–18 (ESV)

¹ From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”

Now, why did Abraham make the same mistake again? He was fearful of this powerful King Abimelech. Was God fearful of Abimelech? No, God says, you are a dead man... listen, you shouldn’t fear anything God doesn’t fear, because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Throughout the text of scripture, we see otherwise GOOD MEN doing some very BAD THINGS.

- **Acts 23:3** 30 years after his conversion, **Paul** loses his temper with a high priest who struck him and says to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!"
- **Galatians 2:11-14** **Peter** caves to the Judaisers and will not fellowship with his Gentile brothers. Paul has to rebuke him to his face. It even says Barnabus got caught up in the racist or ethnic ideology.
- **What about Moses?** He figures out that he is a Hebrew and he wants to help his fellow kinsmen, but he gets angry at an Egyptian and kills him. Then, at the end of his life, God tells him to speak to the Rock so water could come forth, and Moses gets so angry at the people that he beats the Rock, which was a type of Christ. Thus, he was expelled from entering the land of Promise.

Abraham was no exception...Now, do you think Abraham thought to himself... well, that turned out pretty well! I don't think so. Honestly, I expect that Abraham hated what he had done. He knew better.

I imagine his perspective was like that of Paul in **Romans 7:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

You see, the Bible Speaks of our Salvation in Three Tenses:

1. Past Tense = Justification

Justification is what Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy 1:8-9 (NASB95)

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ **who has saved us** and called us with a holy calling...

- Justification is the Judicial declaration that you are righteous because of Christ.
- Justification is all of God and none of man.
- Justification happens instantly and completely.
- When you are saved, you are as justified as any Christian in all of History.
- When you are saved, you are as justified as you will ever be. (In heaven, you will be no more Justified than you are right now.

2. Future Tense = Glorification

Romans 5:9 (NASB95)

⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we **shall be saved** from the wrath of God through Him.

Since you have been justified by faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God promises that you shall be glorified.

Glorification is what Paul is talking about when he writes in 1 Corinthians

15:51-53 ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- Again, glorification is completely and totally a work of God whereby He changes your physical body into a spiritual, eternal body.

But the bible also uses the word saved in the present tense...

3. Present Tense = Sanctification

2 Corinthians 2:15 (NASB95)

¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those **who are being saved** and among those who are perishing;

Justification and Glorification happen instantly and completely; they are totally God's doing. However, sanctification is a gradual and progressive process, and it does require human effort. You must discipline yourself in Godliness. Paul says, I buffet my body and make it my slave.

The only way to address the roots of our old nature is through intentional, ongoing, and progressive sanctification. This is what is meant in verses like...

- Romans 12:2

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Sanctification involves a progressive change in the appetite, so that what you once loved, you no longer find repulsive. **ILLUSTRATION:** A hog turned into a man.

Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as **rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ

Those who fail to work with God in this process as like those mentioned in 2 Peter 2:22 (ESV)

²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

HOW DOES GOD DEAL WITH ABRAHAM'S ROOT?

1. A Consistent Presence

Notice that even in the midst of Abraham's folly, God was with him and protected the man of the Covenant.

⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." ⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid.

Now notice, Abimelech had not consummated his relationship with Sarah. God prevented it. Why is that important? Because Sarah was now a part of the Covenant plan. If Abimelech had been with Sarah intimately, it would have polluted the bloodline of Abraham.

2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ ...or he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our Shepherd is with us. And even in this pitiful situation, God was with Abraham.

We have to remember that we may walk out on God, but He doesn't walk out on us. He is there, even in the darkest moments.

Not only is God present, He institutes a...

2. A Confrontational Situation

⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?"

God confronts Abraham by speaking to the Pagan King Abimelech. One of the things God did with Israel that he will do with us is that he will point out our lack of Sanctification through the unbelieving world.

1 Corinthians 11:28–32 (ESV)

²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment

on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Psalm 139:23–24 (ESV)

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

ILLUSTRATION: Have you noticed how quickly the lost world points out a Christian's fall? God uses that!

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago, I had a lady in the church who just decided she didn't like me. She would examine everything I did, trying to find something that was wrong. To be honest, I couldn't hardly stand to see her coming. But eventually, a brother taught me to recognize God's hand in her criticism. Not to get defensive, but to agree with her and say, "Sister, I'm probably a lot worse than you realize, but God hasn't given up on me yet". She felt led to another church at that point.

Not only is God present, He institutes a...confrontation which brings Abraham to a...

3. A Confession of Sin

¹¹ Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' ¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "

Sin is like a mold; it dies when we bring it into the light. We have the option of bringing it into the light ourselves, through confession or God will force it into the light by exposing our sin.

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is present, He institutes a confrontation which brings Abraham to confession...

4. A Continued Use

God didn't stop working with Abraham because he fouled up. Grace puts fallen saints back to work in his priestly duties.

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

I am thankful for **SALVIFIC** grace, but I am also thankful for **SANCTIFYING** grace.

ILLUSTRATION: Remember, Peter, three times he denied Christ.

John 21:15–19 (ESV)

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

APPLICATION:

- **Know who you *were*:** identify and uproot baptized baggage.
- **Know who you *are*:** know who you are in Christ, but also know what you have the capacity to do. **1 Corinthians 10:12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.
- **Know how to change:** Change is slow and it takes time. Focus on progress not perfection. **Romans 12:2**, Do not be conformed, be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: A quartermaster in the Russian army fell into drinking and gambling. One night he squandered not only his own money but the regiment's funds trying to win it back. Drunk and desperate, he sat before the open, empty safe, loaded his pistol, and scrawled a note: *“The money is gone... it is hopeless, for who can repay?”* Slumped over, he passed out.

That same night, Tsar Nicholas was making a surprise inspection of the camp. Seeing a light in the quartermaster's tent, he stepped inside—found the safe open and empty, the pistol on the desk, and the man unconscious on the floor. The emperor started to summon the guards, then paused over the note. Beneath the final line—*“Who can repay?”*—Nicholas took his pen and wrote his name: **Nicholas**. He secured the safe and arranged from the imperial treasury the funds needed to cover the loss.

At dawn the quartermaster awoke, bracing for his end. He opened the safe and found a bag of valuables sufficient to settle the debt—and his own note, now signed by the tsar.

The emperor's name guaranteed the payment. What was hopeless had been covered by another's authority and resources.

That is the gospel: our ledger reads "*Hopeless—who can repay?*" and, at the cross, the King writes His name over our debt and pays it in full.