

# Hebrews

---

Hebrews 11:17-19 – Examples of Faith - Part 3

November 1, 2009

---

- I. **Hebrews 11:17-19** . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; [18] it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." [19] He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.
- II. Prayer
- III. Examples of Faith
  - A. The story of God testing Abraham in relation to Isaac is told in **Genesis 22:1-18**. And as most of us know, the Old Testament is rich with stories and word pictures that give us greater understanding of what is taught in the New Testament. This story is no different. In fact, for Christians down through the centuries, this has been a treasured story because it gives us a sense of what it was like for God to sacrifice His only son on our behalf.
  - B. However, times are changing. And they have changed so much that in the past one hundred years, some Christians have come away from reading this story with a lower view of God. In fact, they think this story makes God look bad – bad in a way that implies He has a flaw in His character. After all, they ask, why would a loving, good God ask anyone to sacrifice one of his children? And beyond that, how could a loving God make our life more difficult by testing us, let alone by putting us through such a grotesque and cruel test?
    1. However, this story is not about God. It's about Abraham, which means it is also about us. And this is an important point that I hope we can grasp today as never before.
    2. Too often we make life's challenges and hard times and disappointments and tragedies and sufferings about God – as if such things meant He was failing to act as the loving, good God we expect Him to be. Such thinking is not only fed by the **poor me** or **victim** mentality, it feeds those attitudes and ways of thinking.
    3. But the truth is, just as life's challenges and hard times and disappointments and tragedies and sufferings are about us, so God's testings are about us, too. And when I say these things are about us, I mean they are about us in two ways –

- a. First, they reveal what faith we have in God and how far we will go in obeying Him.
    - b. Second, they provide us with unequalled opportunities to continue becoming more and more Christ like. They are our door to spiritual growth and to a deeper spiritual life.
  4. This is why we read in **James 1:2-4** . . . Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the **testing** of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
  5. And so I urge you, don't be like those who have the victim mentality. Don't be like those who question God's goodness and love when hard times hit – as if He were letting you down in some way. Instead, be like Abraham. Focus on trusting God so that you continue living by faith – willingly and confidently obeying God throughout the ordeal you are facing.
- C. The second lesson to be learned from this story about Abraham and Isaac is that God is to be our supreme love – our most treasured treasure – and His will the ruling will in our lives. Nothing – no matter how precious it is to us – nothing is to come between us and our love for God, our faith in God, and our obedience to God.
1. For Abraham, this meant accepting God's command to kill his only son and burn his body as a sacrifice to God. It is hard for me to imagine how difficult that would be for any parent.
  2. Yet this was Abraham's test. And I want to remind us that this test was not about God and God's character, but about Abraham and his character. God was testing Abraham to see if he would put anything before his faith or trust in God, before his loyalty or obedience to God, and before his love for God.
  3. Now I think it is important to note that Abraham had already trusted in God to the point of obeying God in numerous situations – and many of them challenging situations at that. What is more, Abraham had remained faithful to God while waiting 25 years for God to fulfill His promise of an heir. So we know that Abraham had been living by faith. We know that he had remained faithfully obedient through hard times.
    - a. And yet God tested him – and this test pushed Abraham further than he had ever been pushed before. In fact, it pushed

him to the limit of choosing between loyalty to God and the love of his son – a son who was his one and only heir.

- b. And the reason Abraham is held up to us as an example to copy is because he passed that test by being willing to sacrifice the dearest earthly thing in his life for the sake of trusting in and obeying God.
4. This is the example God sets before us today. We can live a good, commendable, Christian life – trusting in God and obeying God as we ought. We can make good progress in the Christian faith – growing in the grace and knowledge of God to the point of good Christian maturity.
  - a. Yet it is in being tested like Abraham that we finally are faced with having to make the hardest choice of all – the choice between God and our most precious earthly treasure – whatever it may be.
  - b. And the reality is, if we have already been choosing lesser earthly treasures over the supremacy of God, then we won't be choosing God when He puts us to this test. My point is, if it is somewhat **easy to disobey** God today on lesser issues, we will not have the faith or the heart to obey Him when tested in relation to earthly treasures that are far more important to us.
  - c. Yet God has tested many of His people this way down through the ages.
5. The story is told that when John Bunyan was in jail, he often thought about what would happen to his family if he was executed. He especially thought of his little blind daughter, who was so dear to him. He eventually wrote these words: "I saw in this condition I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet, thought I, I must do it, I must do it."
6. Someone else penned these words: "The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be, Help me to tear it from Thy throne, And worship only Thee."
7. I remember like it was yesterday the morning God spoke to me about an earthly treasure I held as precious – that I worshiped as one worships an idol. And the truth is, I forsook God and worshiped my precious treasure whenever I wanted what it had to offer. Why? Because I loved its pleasures more than God, himself.
  - a. Now it is not as if I hadn't been living by faith and walking in obedience to God's will and word in many areas of life. The fact is, I was living by faith – in many areas and ways.

- b. But my faith ended – and therefore my obedience ended at this treasure. And as ought to be obvious to us all, where my faith and obedience ended, my love for God came to a grinding halt as well.
    - c. On that morning, God made me keenly aware that I had been choosing my earthly treasure over Him, and if I was going to be loyal to Him and live by faith – I had to change my choice.
  - 8. What is your idol? What is that one thing you treasure more than God? Where does your faith end and selfishness begin? Where do you stop obeying God and start going your own way for the sake of some treasure you hold precious in this life?
    - a. I don't doubt your having already given up or died to many things for God's sake. But today's lesson is not about the things you find easy to sacrifice or have already given up on God's behalf. Today's lesson is about choosing God – and therefore choosing obedience to God – over that one thing or possibly two things that in the deepest or hidden reaches of your heart you treasure more than God.
    - b. It is my hope and prayer that we would want to follow Abraham's example and choose God over every and any earthly treasure – even that thing or person that is our dearest earthly treasure in this life.
- D. There is one more lesson I want to bring to your attention today. Abraham continued living by faith, and therefore remained loyal and obedient to God in the face of something that to the best of human reasoning made no sense.
  - 1. What I mean by saying Abraham was facing something that made no sense is that God's test looked like God was acting against Himself in taking away the very thing He had promised.
  - 2. Yet instead of turning this situation back on God and questioning God, Abraham assumed the best about God and acted in accord with God's command. This is why we read here in **Hebrews 11:19** ... Abraham considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received Isaac back as a type.
  - 3. It seems to me that we often face situations like this in our life. I don't mean that God has directly and specifically commanded us to do something as startling as He commanded Abraham to do. But as we read and understand God's word, we discover truth that, according to our frail and earthbound understanding, makes no

sense. As a result we often ignore or disregard these Bible truths. Yet when we ignore or disregard God's commands that to the best of our human reasoning make no sense, it implies that we don't think enough of God to even try to live according to His word.

4. If you are wondering what I am talking about here, let me give you three examples from the Sermon on the Mount and two from Romans 12.
  - a. **Matthew 5:38-41** . . . You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. [40] "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. [41] "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.
    - (1) Without question, it takes faith and a disciplined obedience to turn your other cheek and to give up more than you're being sued for. But the God of Abraham is our God, too!
  - b. **Matthew 6:19-21** . . . Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; [21] for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
    - (1) Again, I am fully aware that it takes faith and disciplined obedience to share what you have with those in need so as to lay up treasure in heaven instead of holding on to what you have to ensure having enough for the "just in case" times and for the future.
  - c. **Matthew 6:31-33** . . . Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' [32] "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. [33] "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
    - (1) Such thinking is contrary to the wisdom of the world, and possibly even the advice of our parents. To live like this takes faith – faith that God will provide what you need while you are focusing on seeking His kingdom and His righteousness.

- d. **Romans 12:14** . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
  - (1) Wow – who thinks like this? Can you imagine trusting God enough to bless those who persecute you instead of cursing them and hating them and being bitter of what they have done to you? Yet this kind of meekness is just as possible as Abrahams courage in putting Isaac on that alter those many years ago.
- e. **Romans 12:17-18** . . . Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.
  - (1) It takes faith to never pay back evil for evil – especially when dealing with your brother or sister, your spouse, that no good co-worker, or your mean boss.
- 5. These are the kinds of “God doesn’t make sense” choices we often face. Without question, living according to each of these five scriptures requires faith – faith like Abrahams. And without question, living by faith in these ways will bring challenges you might rather avoid. However, rather than ignoring what God says or acting as if it is nonsense to obey God in these things, follow Abraham’s example and think the best about God. Why? Because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This means we can be confident that if God provided a substitute for Isaac, He will provide what we need when we, by faith, obey His word and carry out His will – even when it may seem irrational and unrealistic from our earthbound perspective.

#### IV. In Summary

- A. Times of testing, trial, or even temptation are not an indictment of God but rather a challenge for us. And so I urge you, don’t be like those who have the victim mentality. Don’t turn on God when hard times hit as if He were letting you down in some way. Instead, be like Abraham. Focus on trusting God so that you willingly and confidently obey His will and word throughout the ordeal you are facing.
- B. Every test or trial or temptation is a time to prove who or what is supreme to us. It is a time to reinforce what we treasure the most. May we be like Abraham in making God our supreme love – our most treasured treasure – and His will the ruling will in our lives, so that nothing – no matter how precious it is to us – nothing comes between us and our love for God, our faith in God, and our obedience to God.

- C. Finally, like Abraham, we face commands from God that don't make sense – at least they don't make sense in light of the way everyone else seems to be living. In those times, follow Abraham's example of thinking the best about God and trusting that God will somehow, somehow provide for us and protect us as we faithfully live according to His will and word.
- D. **God is good! Let us build your faith on Him.**