

From Control to Trust **(Parallel: Abraham's Future is Ours Series – Part V)**

10/4/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

NOTE: Until Gen. 17:5, Abraham has the name of Abram, but to simplify the discussion we will be using the name God gives him, Abraham.

1. Read Genesis 15:1-6.

a) In the first three verses Abraham responds to God’s promises with a complaint. Describe the problem and why Abraham might have grounds for concern.

Abraham had heard promises before about how he was going to have lots of offspring, but nothing had happened for the ten years since the initial promise. He was 75 then and 85 years old now, so there was even less of a chance that he and Sarah could still have children. He was frustrated and exasperated. He wanted more than words. It seemed like his only choice was to pass along all his possessions to the offspring of his head slave, so he offered that as a likely option to see how God would respond

b) Summarize God’s response in v. 4 – 5.

God made it clear that his original promise did not require Abraham to make any compromises. What He had said originally would in fact happen, even if it was humanly impossible. His graphic illustration using the visible stars as equivalent to the number of offspring Abraham would have, but we now know that was not an exaggeration.

c) Based on the response of God, Abraham makes a choice. What was it?

Abraham had a choice to make. He had already chosen to leave his family and set out on his own to a land only God knew. Now he either needed to cut his ties with God and head out on his own, or believe that the God who had brought him this far was going to do exactly what He promised. Abraham made the firm decision at that point to believe God.

2. Pastor Steve described two extremes of what we believe about God. What were they and where do you fall on the continuum that connects them?

The extreme ends are represented by:

a) God does everything without us. He acts alone and doesn’t need us to assist Him. This is the Calvinist approach in which God acts, God decided the future and then we must respond.

- b) God does nothing without us – He doesn't act alone, but waits for opportunities to act through us. He waits, invites, defers, and involves us. This is the Armenian approach in which we act in faith and are the feet, hands, and mouth of God to others as the Holy Spirit leads us.

New Christians may be more inclined toward the Calvinist approach, thinking that they are not worthy to act on behalf of God. They are hoping God will carry them away from their troubled past. But at some time, we need to walk on our own and work on His behalf.

- 3. How do we resolve the dilemma that comes from:
 - a) It bothers God when we won't take a step
 - b) It bothers us when God doesn't take His step after we've stepped out.

This is a tough one and you may want to plan in advance how long you want to spend on it. On one hand, we are told to step out in faith and accomplish great things for God. On the other hand, we assume God will bless what we try to do and we wait for the rewards to show.

As an example, a couple may feel strongly that they have been called by God to go into fulltime foreign missions. They quit their jobs and begin raising financial support. They have taken a serious step of faith in response to God's call. Many months later they are still a long way from reaching their goal and have pretty much expended their savings. Frustration is turning into fear.

And yet, we have to believe that God acts on God's schedule because He knows that is best for the whole of His Creation. It is possible that we are not ready yet to receive what He wants to give us. It is also possible that we are to be an example to those around us of how followers of God handle adversity.

- 4. What is your reaction to the claim that God is slow?

We must learn to wait. God knows when the timing is right.

- 4. What was Abraham and Sarah's response to what they perceived as a slow and unresponsive God? (see Gen. 16:1-2)

They followed local tradition and Sarah found an appropriate female servant who could be a surrogate mother by becoming pregnant with Abraham. It seemed to make sense. The offspring would be from Abraham and would be within his household. It was not considered adultery or bigamy at that time. After all, time was running out!!!

The problem is that Abraham believes God, but he doesn't trust God.

- 6. How are believing and trusting different?

We can believe that something will be the case in the future, but trusting has to do with the present. We can believe in the concept that an airplane can fly from Chicago to Miami. When we step onto the plane and strap ourselves in our seat, we must trust the airplane and its crew to actually get the job done.

7. What would God have us to do in the time between when we receive a promise or a calling and when we finally experience fulfillment, especially if the gap between the two is many years?

It's almost assured that something will go wrong, something will happen that will cause pain or suffering. Satan will work hard to make sure our faith does not grow stronger. Thus, we need to take our step and then wait upon God (leaning forward and reminding ourselves frequently of what God has said to us).

8. So how did all this work out for Abraham? (read Hebrews 11:11-12 and comment)

Abraham is remembered several centuries later as a man of faith, who took God's promise and then acted on the basis that God was in this with him, even when it seemed like God had gone to sleep.

9. What is the bottom line for all this debate? (see Romans 4: 16-17 to see how this resolves itself)

Ultimately, taking a step requires faith in God. We then have to trust that God will be there with us. The key word here seems to be 'grace'. If we believe that God loves us, then we won't despair if the time lag between when we receive the call and take the first step versus when God finally brings everything together.

10. Pastor Steve ended with an observation that "Visions are not discerned; they are revealed." How does this expand on the main thoughts from the rest of the sermon?

If we discern the message of a vision, then we are doing that (seemingly) on our own. It would give us a false sense of power in this universe if we were able to discern our own visions. On the other hand, to the extent that God reveals to us a message through a vision, then there is no limit to what we can do. In the first case, it's all about us. In the second case (God's revelation) it's all about God finally choosing to let us take a peak into His mind.