

GENESIS 16

Introduction

These are the first words Sarah speaks that are recorded for us in Genesis. While the sum of her words are wicked, her very first words are a treasure of wisdom. She says to Abraham in verse two,

"See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children*."

Sarah was trying to preface her remarks by describing her circumstances. Within that prefacing phrase is a precious principle. It was revealed when she said, "...the Lord has restrained me..." Had Sarah meditated upon that wonderful insight, the heartache of the events of Chapter Sixteen need never have occurred!

The Lord had indeed restrained her from bearing a child. The child that would be born to her, Isaac, was to be the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. His birth would later serve as an illustration: In Galatians Chapter Four, the Apostle Paul speaks of Isaac as born through the promise of God and not through the power of the flesh. The very circumstances of Isaac's birth to Abraham and Sarah were intended to illustrate a timeless spiritual principle. Their life was to be a metaphor to others looking on for centuries to come.

God's restraints were intended to be a wonderful blessing to Sarah, to Abraham, and to the entire human race! The restraints that seemed to them so unbearable were actually God's best for them.

f God's restraints in *your* life are intended to be a wonderful blessing to you, to your family, to the Church, and to all those whose lives you influence! The restraints that can seem so unbearable are actually God's best for you!

There are circumstances in each of your lives that serve as God's spiritual restraints. You often recognize them; but, like Sarah, you endeavor to alter them by some ingenious scheming. Better to submit to them and let God work His purposes in your life and in the lives of others through them.

What are some of the areas in which God may be seeking your submission to His restraints? Our text reveals three that are key in all of life:

#1 Submit Yourself To The
Restraints Of God's Providence
(v1-3)

#2 Submit Yourself To The
Restraints Of God's Principles
(v4-6)

#3 Submit Yourself To The
Restraints Of Your Position
(v7-16)

#1 Submit Yourself To The
Restraints Of God's Providence
(v1-3)

Providence means that God has not abandoned the world that He created, but rather works within that creation to manage all things according to the counsel of His own will. Christians readily acknowledge God's providence - until it affects their own individual lives. When it comes to God's management of great, sweeping, historic and prophetic events, we're blessed. When it comes to God's management of the events of our own lives, we can easily get bummed!

It was certainly God's providence that Sarah was barren; she even said so herself. But while trusting God to fulfill great, sweeping, historic and prophetic events, she couldn't content herself to submit to His providence in her barrenness. Instead she endeavored to alter her circumstances with an ingenious scheme.

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children*. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.

It is believed that Hagar was acquired during Abraham's disastrous excursion earlier into Egypt. God had restored them, but the consequences of Abraham's poor decision were still with them

Genesis 16:2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

Egypt had been spiritually unprofitable. Nevertheless, Sarah is willing to try an Egyptian solution to her spiritual problem. Egyptian (worldly, fleshly, carnal) solutions will always present themselves. They always prove unwise.

Genesis 16:3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.

It was a socially accepted and perfectly lawful practice for the barren wife to give her husband one of her servants as a secondary wife to bear children. Legally the children would be considered the husband's own and would bear his name and become his physical heirs.

What is socially accepted and perfectly lawful is *not* always God's best for you!

^ Many socially accepted customs and practices ought to be avoided by the Christian who is seeking to live a life pleasing to His Lord.

% Behaviors and practices that would be considered "lawful" need to be analyzed as to their affect on your spiritual growth and maturity. The Apostle Paul, instructing us in these areas, says in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.

It is easy to see that Sarah ought to have submitted herself to God's providence. It is harder to see in your own life! Indeed, even moreso than in Sarah's case, in your case you can, thanks to modern technology, alter many more things that would once have been impossible. How can you avoid her mistake and submit yourself to the restraints of God's providence?

You must identify when your situation is a matter of God's providence! While that can be difficult, you've already picked-up some clues from our text:

v Sarah had God's internal witness that God's providence was restraining her. "...The Lord has restrained me..." was her testimony. God the Holy Spirit Who indwells you can and will reveal to you the restraints of providence.

v Sarah was not content with God's providence. In Philippians 4:11 you read, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content..."

v Sarah's solution was borrowed from Egypt.

It would have been better for Sarah to have submitted herself to the restraints of God's revealed providence. It is better for you to do so as well.

#2 Submit Yourself To The Restraints Of God's Principles (v4-6)

Sarah wouldn't submit to God's providence; neither would she or Abraham submit to God's principles. We don't want to be overly critical, or to read too much back into the account of their marriage. Nevertheless we can probably assume that Abraham and Sarah knew the basic account of God's creation of Adam and Eve and that they were aware of His timeless biblical principles governing marriage. Those principles were not followed and the results were awful domestic strife within their home.

Genesis 16:4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Hagar is a pagan unbelieving Egyptian until her encounter with God at the well later in this chapter. It is a basic principle in marriage, and in the Christian life in general, not to be intimately involved with unbelievers. You are told in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?"

Genesis 16:5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong *be* upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me."

Genesis 16:6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

Abraham and Sarah had a difficult time figuring out the proper roles of leadership and submission with their marriage. In verse six Abraham ignores and neglects his leadership and makes Sarah the head of the household, telling her "...your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please."

The biblical principle for marriage is loving leadership by the husband as the spiritual head, and a love to be led by the wife. Part of the curse upon the human race

after Adam and Eve's fall in Eden was that women would try to usurp and overthrow the authority and leadership of men.

It can still be difficult to figure out exactly how leadership and submission ought to be expressed in your marriage. Many men who seem to be strong spiritual leaders can actually be neglecting their role. Many women who seem submissive can actually be manipulative and conniving. The opposite is true as well. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out, in his commentary of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, that observed behaviors are not always a true indication of spirituality.

How can you figure out proper headship and submission? Here are some clues from our text:

v There is an obvious lack of spiritual input from Abraham. He doesn't speak until it's too late - and when he does speak it is to surrender his responsibilities as the leader of the home.

When the husband is not seeking God then, no matter how spiritual he seems to others, he is failing in his role as the head. He has little to say because he has received little from God!

I'd go so far as to suggest that Abraham was neglecting Sarah. There is no word of comfort, no instruction. Sarah had been left to herself; left to herself, she concocts this terrible plan to cope with her shame and loneliness. Abraham ought to have been tenderly caring for her.

v Sarah suggested an Egyptian solution. Whenever the wife is drawn towards Egypt - towards the things of the world - there is a lack of submission in her life to God. If she won't submit to God, it's no wonder she won't submit to her husband.

v Sarah's untamed tongue and temper are clear evidences that she refuses to remain submissive. I'll extend this to men as well - If you cannot tame tongue or temper you are not submitted to God and you won't be able to fulfill the roles God has instructed you in as husband and wife.

We need not restrict this point solely to marriage. The Bible is full of principles that provide blessed restrictions to our behavior. You are set free by God's restrictions. Listen to these verses from Romans Six:

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6:20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Romans 6:22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

You have been set free from sin in order to pursue righteousness. Your understanding of practical, daily righteousness come by the reading of,

the study of, the application of, and obedience to the principles found in God's Word. Submit yourself to the restraints of God's principles!

#3 Submit Yourself To The
 Restraints Of Your Position
 (v7-16)

The word which Hagar receives is "submit." She is to return and submit herself to the restraints of her position as Sarah's servant. Hers is the common experience of many Christians - they don't like the position they are in and, so, they remove themselves from their circumstances. Even though Hagar's situation was difficult, she was instructed to submit to her position.

Genesis 16:6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

It always seems appropriate to flee our undesirable position. Whether it is your marriage or your ministry or something else, when things are not to your liking, you have a tendency to want out. It is interesting that in Hagar's case the bad circumstances were some of her own doing! In verse four you learned that "...when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes."

Many circumstances that you want to escape are partly your own doing. In your marriage you "conceive" some idea; in your ministry you "conceive" some ideal. When your husband or your Church doesn't support you, you escape to a new marriage or a new ministry. God often wants you to remain.

Genesis 16:7 Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.

Here you have a story worthy of its own lengthy sermon. The Angel of the Lord is what theologians call a Theophany - an appearance by Jesus before His incarnation as God come in human flesh. God sought after Hagar! In a desolate wilderness He led her to a well of water. Just so lost sinners are running from God in the desolate wilderness of sin. God seeks them in the wilderness, brings them to the well of His Word in which Jesus, the Water of life, is revealed.

Genesis 16:8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

Genesis 16:9 The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand."

Abraham and Sarah were not the witnesses of God's love and grace that they should have been. They fell short. They were, however, the people God had chosen to bless Hagar with, regardless of their failure and her fear.

You and I are frequently not the witnesses of God's love and grace we ought to be! We fall short. We are, however, the people God has chosen. My failures as a husband or as a pastor do not excuse others from obedience to God. They do not automatically release someone from the restraints of their position in my family or in the family of believers.

Genesis 16:10 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude."

Genesis 16:11 And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you *are* with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction.

Genesis 16:12 He shall be a wild man; His hand *shall be* against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

As you will see later on in Genesis, Hagar does give birth to Ishmael who fulfills this far-reaching prophecy as the father of the Arab peoples.

Genesis 16:13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?"

Genesis 16:14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

Hagar names the well, "The well of the Living One Who sees me." She lives having seen God. She is saved by this encounter at the well! Men and women and children today find life when they see Jesus Christ is God.

Genesis 16:15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

Genesis 16:16 Abram *was* eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Evidently Hagar's testimony had an effect on Abraham. He believed she had met his God and acknowledge that by naming this child according to God's Word.

Submitting to the restraints of your position are difficult. There are times, of course, when you can and should throw off restraints. If, for example, your Church leaders begin teaching heresy, you should *not* submit to the restraints of your position; you should confront them and leave.

Normally that is not the problem. There is some conflict in some relationship that causes us to leave rather than submit as we should. How can you know when you ought to remain submitted to the restrictions of your position?

v Hagar had contributed to her own problem by having a proud, haughty attitude. The first thing you should do is *examine yourself*. What others do is no excuse for you to sin.

v Hagar learned that it was precisely in submitting to her difficult position that God would bless her. Remember that your spiritual growth and good are important to God. Often the most growth comes during times of affliction or adversity that you would rather escape from than submit to.

v Often I hear that the decision to leave a marriage or a ministry is arrived at because "It's better for everyone involved." It would *not* have been better for Hagar to go back to Egypt and remain an unbeliever; it would *not* have been better for Abraham and Sarah to be rid of Hagar. Just so it is often *not* really better for others when you refuse to submit to the restraints of the position God has you in under them.

v Hagar learned that God was in control of her life and that He ought to be consulted before any decisions were made. You and I are not free to do as we please! We have been set free to obey God. That will often involve submitting ourselves to the restraints of our position - in the family, in the Church, and in the world.

Conclusion

God dispenses His gifts in your life as He sees fit to do so. This can greatly trouble you:

^ In the area of God's Providence, you can desire that which He has withheld...

% In the area of God's Principles, you can chafe under them...

^ In the area of your Position, it can seem unbearable to submit...

His restraints are intended to bless and free you. Within them you grow; outside of them you wither.

Identify the restraints that God has graciously established in your life. Remain submitted to them until you have a clear leading from God the Holy Spirit and until you are wholly leaning on God's Word.