

Faith And The Christian Fight (Part 6)

The Calling of Abraham

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We are going to begin in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 8. This is significant scripture for us. For those of you who are here in Louisburg, I think you will be almost amazed of how the sermonette tied together with my sermon. I get these kind of reminders all the time that somebody is telling me who is in charge. Those of you who heard that sermonette will know what I mean.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

It is my purpose in this present series, taken from Hebrews 11, to make us more acutely aware of the reality of the God of the Bible, and of course of His purpose as well. I want us to be more able to more clearly understand the legal, spiritual, and experiential ramification of His calling so that we can make the very best use of His calling and not just be in His kingdom, but to glorify Him and earn rewards as we proceed.

In the previous sermons of this series, we covered the first three examples of the uses of faith in a Christian's life through Abel, through Enoch, and through Noah. Abel's example is of justification by faith in Christ's blood. Enoch's example takes us a step further in that it reveals the basic nature of faith, and that is, that once a person is justified, he walks with God and devotes his life to seeking God. This advances the Christian's life into the sanctification period.

Noah's example, in one sense, witnesses to us of the entire package. It does this by adding, somewhat more specifically, to what one does during his walk with God. What *is* it? He works, cooperating with God, carrying out some assignment that is given, and is rewarded and delivered from destruction.

In all three cases—of Abel, Enoch, and Noah—the calling of God that separated them from others was assumed. In each case the application of faith is foundational and broadly general to all of us. All of us are required to use our faith diligently, persistently seeking God so as to make the best use of our calling.

Beginning in Hebrews 11:8, Paul begins to zero in on examples of more specific uses of faith, and the first is of Abraham in regards to his calling.

You probably noticed that the Bible devotes a great deal of space to Abraham. I do not know whether you are aware of it, but his name appears 311 times in scriptures. The first time is in Genesis 11:26. The last time is in I Peter 3:6. In other words, things regarding him span virtually the entirety of the Bible. He is first the father of Israel, the nation, chosen of God to work through.

This is significant, because following the revelation of the source of all the families on earth (Hebrews the 10th chapter, and then in Genesis the 11th chapter, revealing the beginning of anti-God Babylon) God's work among mankind is virtually limited to Abraham's descendants. He is clearly shown as the father of Israel in much the same way as George Washington is viewed as the father of

the United States of America. This was because of the significant role that George Washington played in the founding of this nation. The same is true of Abraham, but more importantly, he is designated by God as "the father of the *faithful*" too.

Turn now to the book of Galatians, chapter 3, verse 27. Remember that this was written to Christians.

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Therefore, we can be "in Christ" and "Abraham's seed" at one and the same time.

We are going go to now to Romans 4.

Romans 4:10-13 How was it then accounted? While he [Abraham] was circumcised, or in uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised [That is, he is the father of Gentiles too.], that righteousness might be imputed to them also. and the father of circumcision to those who are not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Abraham was designated as the father in Galatians 3. He is designated as the father in Romans 4. How can this be if we are begotten by the Spirit of God? Should not *He* be our father? See if you can answer that. In what way is Abraham, a very significant man, our father?

Now Abraham, as father of the physical nation God elected to perform His work in and through, is also the father of those elected by God to be part of the *spiritual* nation that God is forming. Grasping Abraham as the father of the physical nation is easy, but grasping him as the father of a spiritual nation is not so easy, because we are begotten by the spirit of our God and Father in heaven; so we are *both* at one and the same time. Do we have two fathers? No, we do not, because Abraham's spiritual fatherhood must be seen in a different light. The Jews did not grasp this either, so they did not have the correct answer to things Jesus was teaching to them.

I want you to turn to John 8, and we will see Abraham's spiritual fatherhood explained by Jesus.

John 8:16 "And yet if I do judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me." [In other words, They stand together, as it were.]

John 8:18-19 "I am One who bear witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." Then said they to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You neither know Me nor my Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."

You can see what the subject material is about in this chapter. It has something to do with spiritual fatherhood.

John 8:28-29 Then said Jesus to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him."

This discussion is not over yet. Abraham comes into the picture, beginning in verse 33, but you have a background there. Who was Jesus' Father? Who was the father of the Jews?

John 8:33-44 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's descendants [that is, physically], but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father." Then said they to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are unable to hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his resources [implying nature], for he is a liar and the father of it."

We are beginning to see Abraham's spiritual fatherhood. Every one of you knows that what I am about to say is true. Family members bear a likeness, a resemblance to one another, and it is that principle that designates who is a spiritual child of Abraham. In this case it is not a matter of *physical* resemblance, but of *spiritual* resemblance, and that resemblance is designated by Christ as "they believe" and "the works that they do" which backs up the belief the people claim that they have.

In other words, people who are Abraham's children will grow. They will overcome, and they will gradually change into the spiritual image of Jesus Christ, and this identifies them as Abraham's children. They have faith, and they back up that faith with the works that will change them into the spiritual image of Jesus Christ. Abraham is the spiritual father of *those* people.

It is interesting the parallels one can find here. One factor of all others that set Abraham apart from others was that faith drove, motivated, inspired, and guided, sometimes dramatically, what he did with his life more than just about anybody else. So Abraham is not only the physical progenitor of Israelites, but he is the spiritual *pattern* his descendants are morally to be conformed to. Abraham is the prototype of a converted Christian.

The first thing that Paul draws attention to in Hebrews 11:8 regarding Abraham's faith, was that when he was called, he obeyed, not knowing where he was to go.

We are going to go back to Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and curse I will him who curses you; and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed."

Abraham had to leave his country (which was Babylon), his kindred, meaning his people ethnically (in this case the Semitic people), and then his near relatives—those who were blood relations to him. The implication of his leaving is that he did not dilly-dally around. You can see no sense to that in what happened. He was called. Boom! And it seems, as though, on he went. He did not say, "God, give me more specific directions. Do I go north, east, south, or west?" It seems that it appeared physically as though he had a pretty good idea the direction he was supposed to go.

It is also possible that God prepared him beforehand by bringing about knowledge of His existence, and that this in turn brought about social circumstances that thus added to Abraham's sense of urgency. In other words, I am saying that God provided basic knowledge of His existence, and perhaps from this even some measure of persecution about what Abraham was learning. This is not unusual for God to do this. He often provides incentives through experiences He leads people through as He prepares us for a more formal calling He is going to give us later on.

It is also important to understand that God provides two distinct callings for every person on earth. Maybe this will be a revelation to you. You did not know that you got a calling beforehand, did you? Yes you did, and do you know what? You rejected it. Everybody on earth rejects the first calling of God.

Turn with me to the book of Proverbs, chapter 8, and notice carefully the wording. This is the chapter in which wisdom (which is really God) is personified as a woman. Notice the wording.

Proverbs 8:1-4 Does not wisdom cry? And understanding put forth her voice? She stands in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She cries at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, **I call**, and my voice is to the sons of man.

Do you see what He says there? "**I call**." Think about what He says. He is saying that everywhere you look, there is evidence of the existence of God. It matters not whether it is in the street of a city, whether it is in the halls of justice, or whatever, it is there.

Do you want further proof? This is *really* clear.

Proverbs 1:20-21 Wisdom cries without: she utters her voice in the streets: She cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she utters her words, saying, . . .

In other words, you do not have to be out in the country to see God. Evidence of Him is in the city as well.

Proverbs 1:22-30 . . . How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? And the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

Because I have called, and you refused; [This is addressed to all of mankind.] I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: But you have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes; When your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

Do you want more proof? I will give it to you. Let us go back to the book of Romans. This is probably one of the better known ones.

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold [who suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest [is evident, is clear] . . .

Am I convincing you that all of us are hardheaded? God Himself says that the knowledge that God *is* , is clear.

Romans 1:19 . . . Because that which may be known of God is manifest [is shown] unto them.

If God had not shown it, He could not hold us guilty. We are all guilty of rejecting His calling because He expects us to use our mind and submit to what we see, but as we just saw in Proverbs, we all reject it. We pay no attention to it.

Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they [mankind] are without excuse.

He can hold everybody on earth guilty of rejecting Him.

Do you want more? How is this possible? Let me show you another avenue, especially one that might tie into what we just read in Proverbs 8 and Proverbs 1.

God has had the Bible translated into how many languages? It is available to virtually anybody on earth. The last I heard, it was well over twelve hundred or so different languages and dialects the Bible has been translated into, and so God can honestly say, "You would have none of My reproof." The reproof is in His word. He said, "You rejected My voice." His voice is in His word. Everybody reads the Bible and rejects it, showing that we would rather be misled than to honestly, humbly submit to the God of creation.

Do you want to know how far the revelation of God goes against mankind? Turn to Romans 2:14-15. Notice this.

Romans 2:14-15 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law [They did not receive the written law from Mount Sinai, so they had not the law.] do by nature the things

contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law **written in their hearts**, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

Deep within every man, regardless of race or ethnicity, is a God-given awareness that *God is*—a consciousness not only of Him as a personality, but even some of the basics of what He requires of us morally.

Let us show something good and wonderful that has happened to you and me. We are going to go back to Matthew 20:16-18.

Matthew 20:16-18 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death.

So thorough is mankind's rejection, that when He came as a Man they killed Him. *We* killed Him. If we had been there, we would have done the same thing as the Jews did. That is how thorough this rejection of God's calling is, of the evidence there is in creation that *God is*. But there is some hope. Did you notice verse 16? He says that "many are called, but few chosen."

Satan has done his work so well, that even God admits that he has succeeded in deceiving the entire world. And so what God does is that He personally separates some away from their deception, and God directly and personally favors a number for His purposes.

All of us know well John 6:44, that no man comes to Christ unless the Father draws him, but there are other scriptures—in fact, many others—showing God *personally* separates a few from the milling masses who are rejecting Him outright. Now take hold of that word "chosen." We are going to go to Romans 9:11.

Romans 9:11 For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls.

The word "election" appears in that verse. It is a noun. It is the noun-form of the verb "elect." Elect means to select, to pick, to choose, to determine, and to separate. This verse is telling us that God personally determined whom He was going to favor for His purposes, and in this case He favored Jacob. The same is true for every one of us that God has called, and these people become known in the New Testament, and there are even some references to it in the Old Testament as "the elect."

Romans 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for; but the election *has* obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

In the *King James Version*, in verse 7 we see the word "election." My *King James* has a marginal reference in which they change that word "election" to the verb form "elect." This word "elect" becomes a title, designating a specific group of people. Now synonymous with this "elect," they are

also called "*the chosen*" and also called "*the called*." They are a special group of people. In one place in the Bible they might be called "*the elect*," and in another place they will be called "*the chosen*," and in another place they will be called "*the called*."

From here we are going to go to Matthew 24 to another pretty well-known scripture. It is an example of a group of people designated by a title.

Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Please understand this. We can see very clearly from Romans 9, which we will not go into any detail, the word "elect" does not mean "better." Get that thought out of your mind. It simply means somebody *selected*. Now if there is anything we can apply to it that is good and wonderful and positive, it is that "*the elect*" refers to a people, above all other people, who have received a blessing that they did not in any way deserve or earn. It was simply God's choice, and His alone.

I do not know why He chose Jacob. Neither does anybody else. Yet there were two rascals wrestling with one another in their mother's womb, and God said, "I want this one. I do not want that one." And so Jacob He chose, and Esau He rejected.

Abel He chose. Cain He rejected. Do you get the point? Were they both sinners? Absolutely. Every one of us rejected that first call of God. We did not in any way earn to be personally set aside.

Remember, all of this is being fed into Hebrews 11:8. Abraham is the pattern. Do you begin to see the point? Abraham did not earn the calling of God. He was a heathen. He had to come out of Babylon. God made him come out of Babylon physically. Abraham was a heathen. All his relatives were heathen, and he was called of God. I do not know exactly, specifically what his calling consisted of, but we are going to see a little bit later that God *appeared* to him. I do not know what that word means either. Whatever it was, Abraham was convinced—"Buddy, I am getting out of here!" And he did.

There is another interesting side to our calling, and for this we are going to go to the book of John, chapter 5, and verse 25.

John 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

The subject material here is context primarily about a resurrection, but I want you to see that "hearing" is put within this context.

From here we are going to go to Ephesians 2 and we are going to connect this to another thought that the Apostle Paul wrote. Again, this is written to Christians.

Ephesians 2:1 And you has he quickened [*made alive*] who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Connect this to John 5:25—the dead hearing the voice of God. I think we all understand we were not really literally dead, but we were dead spiritually, were we not? Somehow or another, brethren, the dead hear the voice of God.

Let us add a couple more scriptures to this, and you will see the thought-pattern that I am developing here.

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are you saved through faith.

We are beginning to connect together death, faith, and spirit. In addition to that, Paul tells us the following in Romans 10:17:

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

And then in John 6:63 Jesus added the following:

John 6:63 The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and **they are life**.

Being enabled by God through His calling to hear, even though we are spiritually dead, gives rise to truly effective faith. Do you see that?

The answer to part of this is that there are none of the elements of a spiritual life that faith is not connected to. In addition, faith in turn is directly connected to being enabled to hear what God says and not be blind to the reality of His existence and the reality of His purpose. This same process begins to open our minds to the practical uses of the knowledge of God and living by faith, which we would never have unless He unplugged our ears and opened our eyes.

This really gets interesting. We are going to go back to the book of John again. This is the chapter in which the subject is the shepherd, and of course the shepherd is Christ.

John 10:3 To him [the Shepherd] the porter opens; and the sheep hear his voice.

Who, in this teaching of Jesus, are the sheep? It is us!

John 10:3 To him the porter opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep *by name* .

That is how personal it is. It is not just something that He blows out all over the place. His calling is by name. He picks and chooses, for whatever His purposes are, for whatever His reasons are. He says, "I want that one over there named John. And I want that guy over there named Joe, and James over there. Those are the ones I want, and they are going to be My sheep, and they are going to become part of My flock." It is not haphazard. God does nothing haphazardly. Everything is ordered from the top on down.

John 10:3 To him the porter opens: and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

Leads them out from where? From the pen they have been in. What is the pen in this? It is the world where we have been enslaved and held captive. He leads them out.

John 10:4 And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

They can recognize His voice because, miraculously, God made them able to hear. What a gift we have been given! It is just awesome. All of this has to take place in order for saving faith to be produced, because as long as our mind is unopened, and as long as our ears are closed, we would never ever get it, despite what God considers to be an adequate revelation of Him. He can condemn us for our lack of recognition of His existence.

John 10:6 This parable spoke Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them.

God did not call them out by name, and so they remained blind as a bat spiritually.

Let us look at another gift in Romans 8:30. This is just so much icing on the cake, so much more proof that He was scanning the earth looking for those He wanted to call. As I said earlier, as God prepares our mind—I know that He does—so that we will be given a fair chance to accept the opening of our minds and the production of faith. He does this through a multitude of ways and reasons, giving us the kind of mind that will accept His calling. You are going to see a sequence of things, that one triggers the other, all in the mind of God.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, ...

We were predestinated before we were called. Nothing is done haphazardly

Romans 8:30 ...them he also called: ...

Romans 8:30 ...and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Boy! If you want encouragement, there it is! It is awesome!

Let us keep carrying this forward a bit.

I Corinthians 1:26-27 For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: But God has chosen [as part of His elect] the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

He purposely takes those who may not be on the very bottom of the barrel, but may be only an inch from the bottom, as Richard Plache used to say, "the cream of the crud." That is pretty graphic, but it makes sense. So we have nothing that we can brag about before God, even as Jacob, who was called before he was even born. That is the kind of proof the Bible gives. It has nothing at all to do with us being nice guys before God calls.

It has nothing to do with our religious bent we had before we were called. We may have been very religious, gone to church, and reared in a nice home and received the blessing and benefit of that kind of thing, but we had nothing to do with it. Maybe our parents had something to do with it, because they helped to shape us, and who knows, maybe God gave us those parents so that they would shape us the way He wanted us to be.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Our calling is an act of sovereign grace in which our mind, our spirit, is aroused to an awareness of God and His truth, His importance, and purposes to which we never had any idea about before. We may have been religious before our calling, but not in a peculiar way that we are now. We did not get the whole package. We may even have discovered, as it were, the Sabbath on our own before we were ever called, but that is not too unusual. Other people do that as well. It does not mean they are converted.

When all of the factors that we now believe are combined with a God-given urge—a respect of Him, a fear of Him, (I do not necessarily mean terror. I mean it in the sense of a reverent respect for Him that we never had before), it provides us with a motivation to seek Him according to the pattern that He has provided in His word. It will usually, for almost all of us, include things like the keeping of the Sabbath, the keeping of the Holy Days, which the overwhelming majority of us never did before.

It may even include tithing. Imagine that! One tithe. Two tithes. That is something we cannot imagine doing before when we were unconverted. Two tithes! How about three, buddy? That is what lies ahead.

How about praying? How about studying His word with an open mind and a willingness to submit to what it says? We did not have that before. At any rate, those things become important to us and to continuing in the process. That is His doing.

I think you understand that much of the entire package we see as logical and sensible, the unconverted think of as strange, something to be avoided, and persecuted for at times. But what we have is the result of God's choosing to give us grace and at the same time choosing to leave them in their blindness.

This brings us around to Hebrews 11:8 once again, and Abraham, but I do not want you to go to Hebrews 11:8 yet. I want you to go back to the Old Testament, to the book of Isaiah, chapter 51, verses 1 through 8. I want you to know that before we get out of the first verse, you will see that this is directed straight at you and me.

Isaiah 51:1-8 Hearken to me, you that follow after righteousness, [That is us.] you that seek the LORD: [That is us.] look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein,

thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. Harken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and my arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on my arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Harken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear you not the reproach of men, neither be you afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Isaiah is looking forward, down the corridor of time, knowing of a surety that there is coming a time when the nations, the civilizations on earth, and even the earth as we know it today, will be no more. God, through Isaiah, is urging the spiritual children of Abraham and of Sarah to look to them—to Abraham and Sarah—for instruction. Why? I gave you a little hint earlier: Abraham is the prototype.

Part of the reason He is urging us to do this is because *now* is the time for those who seek righteousness to take advantage of what God has given. He appeals to us to consider our life by looking back to what God has recorded regarding Abraham and Sarah. This is because during God's working with them He established foundational patterns for a life of faith, and there is much practical spiritual understanding to learn about our experiences in our relationship with Him and the family of God that He is busily engaged in creating. It is essential that we learn, because our cooperation in this creation is required. This is exactly what Paul was doing using Abel, Enoch, and Noah, and now, above all, Abraham.

The first element of Abraham's life Paul draws upon is Abraham's calling. Abraham was called when he was literally living in Babylon in the plains of Shinar in the city Ur.

We are going to turn to Joshua 24, verses 1 and 2. Joshua uttered this not too long before he died.

Joshua 24:1-2 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, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

We have to feed this into Abraham. Abraham did not come from a God-fearing family. In fact, Abraham too was a heathen. As I mentioned earlier, God was in all likelihood beginning to work with him, preparing him for his calling, guiding his thinking. There are historical indications that he was a member of a family of a priestly caste. It seems to be something that the Chaldeans did within Babylon; they were one of the families within Babylon, and powerful enough that the whole area was called Chaldea, or Babylon. But they were a priesthood caste, and it is very likely then that Abraham was already questioning the validity of the false gods he was serving. In other words, God was leading him.

We find this then in the book of Acts, where Stephen is giving his witness before the Jews there.

Acts 7:1-4 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran. And said unto him, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and come into the land which I shall show you. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein you now dwell.

What Paul included in God's appearance to Abraham is not known. That is as far as it goes. Whether it was literal, in a vision, or in a dream, is not explained anywhere else in the Bible, but the element we need to understand is, as with us, Abraham did not earn his calling. Abraham had done nothing to deserve what God was giving him.

Recall what we read in Isaiah 51:2, because it says there "God called him *alone* ." In the beginning, apparently not even Sarah was involved in the calling. Boy, that would put the screws on a guy. I do not know whether she was actually co-called, but I think we have to take God's word at face value there. He said He called Abraham alone. However, when we put the tail end of Genesis 11 together with what we have just read here, there seems to have been a pretty general measure of family dependence upon Abraham, because when Abraham said, "I'm out of here," a good bit of the family went with him, and that leads to something else we will get to in the next sermon. But God makes it clear that Abraham was the only one that was spiritually called.

Now how many of us have had that happen? It really did not happen to me, because Evelyn was called *with* me. We were called at exactly the same time. We both heard Herbert Armstrong and *The World Tomorrow* program for the first time together. I cannot say that she was called alone, or that I was called alone, but I think for the overwhelming majority of you, it was the other way around. In most cases the husband was called separately, or the wife was called separately, and that put the family screws, as it were, on that person to break away from those family relationships.

Now this is an unanswerable question in terms of, "Why does this happen in this way?" All we can say is God shows mercy on whom He shows mercy. It is completely His doing. God chose Noah. There might have been billions of people that He could have given grace to, but He did not. It was Noah that He called.

This we know, that sometime before leaving Babylon, God became a living reality to Abraham to a degree that nobody else near and dear to him experienced—to the degree that even in the midst of his own personal self-seeking, self-pleasing, unconverted life he was motivated to pick up and leave and set aside all the normal routines of his life and become a traveling man.

I do not know whether you have ever read a book like *The Bible as History* by Werner Keller, a German fellow. If you ever get near a library and you want to read something that is fascinating, especially regarding life in the city of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham came from, you will be astounded at what archeologists have dug up about that place. Those people had running water on the second floor. They had flush-toilets inside their homes. They could do calculus. Are you aware of that? They were a very advanced civilization.

They had paints with pigments of such quality that the colors remain to today. When they painted their walls, it was for good. They were a highly advanced people. When Abraham left, he was not

leaving a little back-water town somewhere, but he was leaving the very center of the highest civilization on the face of the earth at that time—a really advanced people. It was a Summerian civilization that he was in.

But at some time in his life, it must have been somewhat like what happened to Job. There in Job 42 he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of my ears, but now *I get it !*" And up Abraham went. It was that important to him, and so he left the normal routines of life. I do not know whether Abraham's calling was gradual or sudden, but he did what had to be done. He was already 70 years old, and yet he severed virtually every relationship that matters.

Many times, things that God requires of us during our calling, as we move toward baptism, may seem to us to be unusually harsh and hard requirements. We probably would not have thought that in Abraham's life, but he embarked on a journey and a future having absolutely no idea where it was leading. God did not dump the whole thing on him at once, and God does not dump the whole thing on us.

I can say personally, when God called me, I was a welder working in a steel mill. I had no idea whatever that I would be standing before groups of sometimes ten thousand people, speaking, like at a Feast of Tabernacles. It was the furthest thing from my mind. It never even entered my mind. I will tell you the truth. When I wrote to Herbert Armstrong to send a minister around because I wanted to get baptized, Evelyn and I honestly thought in our heart of heart it was Herbert Armstrong, Ambassador College, and the Ritenbaughs in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We had no idea there was anybody even around us, and were astounded to learn that there was a church in Pittsburgh that had not quite a hundred people in it, and that the pastor of the church lived about four or five miles away, and the associate minister only lived about six or seven miles away. How about that? We did not even have to leave our house. Abraham had to leave his homeland.

There is no doubt God was testing Abraham, and thus we should expect a measure of testing in our calling as well. But here is the big lesson in Abraham's calling. Remember, he is the pattern. God expects all of those He calls to make a complete break from their former life. Did you hear that word— *complete* ? Believe me, brethren, that is difficult, and it is not something that is done immediately. It is something that we stutter around, beginning to do, but it takes years, in most cases, for us to be completely severed away from our roots, though we still love the people. We may have enjoyed those things back there. In one sense, they no longer have the meaning that they had before. This is what happens.

We will close on II Corinthians 5:14.

II Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us,

This means that it is Christ's love and His calling that begins to shape and mold us, and in a sense almost forces us to go in the direction that He wants us to go. It has to be that way because we would not do this naturally and normally.

II Corinthians 5:14 ... because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.

This is one of the big things that gets us moving. We realize that Christ died for our sins; we want to be under His blood, and we want Him to be our leader.

II Corinthians 5:15-16 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, [This is what Abraham walked away from.] but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: . . .

Do you see what he said there? When God calls us, our understanding, our view, our impression, our perceptive of other people begins to change, and instead we begin to look at these people through the spiritual eyes that God is giving to us. We should not look at them carnally any longer, but actually we should look at them for the potential that is there even though they are unconverted, and even more so for those who are already in the church. We are not removed from our problems yet, but that is coming, and so we do not look at people the same way anymore.

II Corinthians 5:16 . . . yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Our perspective of Jesus Christ changes as well.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

So what happened here to Abraham must happen to us. Abraham's mind, and therefore his life, was so arrested and redirected by God's revelation of Himself that Abraham responded in dramatic fashion, seeing that he could no longer live life as he had the previous 70 years. There had to be changes. He could no longer live completely unto himself. He no longer perceived people in the way that he had for those 70 years, and most especially he no longer perceived his new God and Savior in a way he formerly had, because a new man was being created from within, and thus a clean and permanent break had to be made to his former life. His life now had a new Object—Christ—toward which it must be directed. It had a new way, a new relationship, new desires and new requirements that needed to be fulfilled.

Do not forget that Abraham was a special case. He is the prototype, and thus sets a vivid overall example for all of his spiritual children that will follow him.

The next section of my sermon has a lot of scriptures in it. I am already two minutes overtime, so we will save that for the next time. We will pick right up on Abraham because he and his example are very, very important to our life. There are so many basics and spiritual wisdom that we must get from the example that was set through him. I think you will find that interesting.