

Abigail's Wisdom

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6-28-09

Introduction.

- A. When it functions according to God's plan, marriage is one of the greatest earthly blessings that mankind can know. A loving and godly spouse can be of more comfort and more help to us in this life than anybody but God. However, as we all know, marriages don't always function as God wills. Even the best marriages have rough patches, and when a husband or wife is bent on doing evil, the results can be evil indeed.
- B. A bad wife is a challenge to a righteous husband, but it's perhaps even more true that a bad husband is a challenge to a righteous wife. After all, it's the husband's role to set the tone for the marriage, to be the spiritual leader, and it's the wife's role to submit. That submission can often be challenging even when the husband is a basically good man. However, when the husband isn't doing his job, when he, in fact, seems determined to serve Satan, that leaves the wife adrift. Where is she supposed to follow his lead? When does she have to step up and be the force for good that he refuses to be? When does the time come when she has to obey God rather than men? Often, sorting through these questions can be as difficult as the situation itself.
- C. Obviously, that's not something I've ever experienced, but I do know that God's word holds the answers. This, of course, is not a new problem. Godly women have been bound to evil husbands for thousands of years, and the same challenges that those women face today have been around for all of that time. One Bible heroine who found herself in this predicament was Abigail the Carmelite. Even though her husband is an evil man who seems determined to bring disaster on his entire household, her courage and understanding allow her to serve God and find success for her family. Let's see what we can learn this morning from Abigail's wisdom.

I. The Situation.

- A. What we can get from the story of Abigail must begin with the realization that **SOMETIMES GOOD WOMEN HAVE BAD HUSBANDS**. The text tells us this pretty plainly in 1 Samuel 25:2-3. Throughout this entire story, in fact, Nabal is uniformly presented as an evil man, and Abigail is uniformly presented as a good woman. We don't know how she ended up in that situation. Most likely, her father married her off to Nabal to secure some financial or political advantage. Regardless, there she was, and she was stuck with it.
- B. Likewise, it's all too common for good women to end up married to bad husbands today. This isn't the same thing, of course, as being married to a non-Christian. A non-Christian husband can still be honorable and devote himself to caring for his wife, and a husband who claims to be a disciple of Christ can still act like a complete scoundrel. Sometimes, the woman should have known not to marry the bad man; other times, she couldn't have known. Regardless, we must acknowledge the Biblical truth about these marriages. They may be unhappy, but they are still valid in God's eyes. There is only one situation in which a Christian woman has the right to divorce her husband, and that's if he commits adultery. We can come up with all kinds of emotional appeals to the contrary, but all those arguments are based on emotion, not Scripture. It's up to the daughter of God to make the best of her dealings with her bad husband, not seek to put him away.
- C. It is similarly true that **BAD MEN MAKE BAD MISTAKES**. We see Nabal's blunder in a chunk of text that's too long to put up on the screen, so I'm going to read it from 1 Samuel 25:4-13. David here is making a two-pronged appeal to Nabal. First, he notes that his men worked to protect. Nabal's sheep the whole time they were in the wilderness. Second, this is a feast day, when the Israelites were to be hospitable to strangers.
- D. David's two-pronged request is quite reasonable, but Nabal rejects it by accusing David of being a bandit. It wasn't that Nabal couldn't have fed David's men; after all, he had thousands of sheep and goats. It was that he was shortsighted, greedy, and inhospitable, and he didn't want to. This is not one of the better decisions recorded in Scripture. Even if you don't think the guy with 600 men has a right to ask you for a meal, you give it to him so that he doesn't come and take it, and even if you don't give it to him, you don't insult him so that he gets mad and comes and kills you and your household. And yet, that's exactly what Nabal does. His insulting reply goads David into gathering his men with the intent of exterminating every male Nabal has.
- E. Similarly, women married to bad husbands today are going to see those men making bad mistakes. Remember, folks: God has told us that certain things are sin not because they're wise and good for us, but because they're foolish and bad for us. That means that a husband who is given to doing evil is going to go around doing dumb and self-destructive things. It's often left to his wife to pick up the pieces.

II. Abigail's Reaction.

- A. This is a dire situation to say the least, but we can learn a lot from how Abigail handles it. First, she teaches women in her position to **BE RESPONSIBLE**. We see her doing this in 1 Samuel 25:14-17. Obviously, this is not the first time that Nabal has done something similarly dumb. The servants know to come to her and ask her to make things right when Nabal won't, and she clearly is used to accepting responsibility for the cleanup.

- B. Women with bad husbands today also often find themselves having to be responsible. Obviously, this isn't right. God intended for the husband to take care of the wife, not the other way around. Sometimes, though, it's necessary. If the man can't or won't do what's right, somebody still has to, or else the problem will go unresolved. In practice, that burden falls squarely on the unwilling shoulders of the wife. In such circumstances, the Christian woman has to accept responsibility, to make what she can out of the mess.
- C. As part of being responsible, she should also learn from Abigail to **ACT TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT**. We see Abigail doing this in 1 Samuel 25:18-20. Nabal clearly isn't going to provide the feast he should provide, and equally clearly, this is going to provoke disaster if somebody doesn't do something. Abigail takes it upon herself to assemble the food that Nabal should have given David and take it to David.
- D. Likewise, if the bad husband of a good woman wrongs somebody else, it's often left to her to act, and she needs to be willing to. The action varies depending on circumstance. It might be that she needs to apologize for an affront to someone else's pride; it could be that she needs to offer compensation if he's been roaming around causing financial harm. Obviously, this is a situation I've never been in, but I can imagine that it's terribly difficult. Sometimes, though, it's simply necessary for the wife to rescue the husband from himself.
- E. In the course of this rescue mission, she needs to **MITIGATE WITHOUT EXCUSING**. Abigail does this quite deftly in 1 Samuel 25:24-25. We need to pay careful attention to what she's doing here. First of all, notice that she claims Nabal's iniquity for herself, not because she believes that she personally has done something wrong, but so that she can apologize and make amends in Nabal's place. As she's doing this, she's making no effort to defend her husband's indefensible actions. This too is an important negotiating tactic. Because she candidly acknowledges Nabal's faults, it leads David to listen to her and place stock in what she says.
- F. This is an important lesson to learn for women who find themselves in a similar situation today. Sometimes, Christian women are unwilling to say anything bad about their bad husband, even to those whom he has wronged. They feel that to be blunt about his misdeeds would be dishonoring him. I can appreciate that concern, but in Nabal's situation and those similar to it, blunt honesty is clearly necessary. Otherwise, the woman finds herself in the strange situation of trying to apologize for a misdeed that she won't admit exists. That doesn't make her seem virtuous. That makes her seem crazy. The responsibility of the godly woman in a circumstance like that is to help her husband, like Abigail was trying to save Nabal's life, not cover for him.
- G. Abigail also showed wisdom in her willingness to **THINK LONG-TERM**. This shows up in 1 Samuel 25:30-31. First of all, it's interesting to note that even though Nabal denies knowing David, Abigail clearly knows who he is and expects him to be the next king of Israel. Notice the way that she points him to the long-term good for everyone that David will generate by not attacking. It will be good for Nabal because he won't be dead, it will be good for David because he won't have to deal with the memory of the slaughter for the rest of his life, and it will be good for Abigail because David will remember her. Her wisdom persuades David not to attack.
- H. This lesson still holds just as true today. Oftentimes, the best way for a woman to help resolve a dispute like this is to point out how the solution is in the best long-term interests of all parties involved. Sure, it might be satisfying for those whom her husband has wronged to extract their pound of flesh, whether in court or elsewhere, but episodes like that are rarely the sort of thing we look back on with pride. If anybody walking in the footsteps of Abigail can get the people on the other side to think long-term, not short-term, it helps a lot.
- I. It also helps for us to **REMEMBER OUR FIRST LOYALTY**. David shows his recognition of whom Abigail is serving in 1 Samuel 25:32-33. Today, we might struggle with Abigail as an example for Christian women because she doesn't seem to be particularly submissive. I think that does an injustice to Abigail. What's really going on is not that she's contending with her husband; it's that she's being submissive to God. God wants her to right the wrong that Nabal has done. God wants her to save the lives of her household. God wants her to turn David aside from bloodshed, and what God wants is more important to her than what Nabal wants.
- J. This, I think, IS something that Christian women should imitate today. This isn't a rejection of the general principle of submission. Abigail's example doesn't give license to women to disobey their husbands whenever they disagree with a decision he's reached. What her example does teach them is that when their husbands want them to do one thing and God wants them to do the opposite, they have to side with God. They must not stand idly by and watch evil lead to its inevitably disastrous conclusion. Instead, it's up to them to pursue justice and avert disaster as best they can, because their first loyalty is not to their husbands, but to God.
- K. Finally, if that's a position we find ourselves in, we have to **BE HONEST WITH OUR HUSBAND**. Abigail might have been tempted to hide the whole meeting with David from Nabal, but she doesn't. Instead, she broaches the subject in 1 Samuel 25:36-37. Notice, though, that she picks her time. She doesn't bring it up as soon as she gets back, when Nabal is drunk out of his mind. If she had, he may well have killed her, which wouldn't have done anybody any good. Instead, she waits until Nabal has sobered up to tell him just how narrowly he avoided death. Ironically, the news causes Nabal to have a stroke and die ten days later.
- L. Even though a Christian woman shouldn't be looking to kill her bad husband with the truth, she does have the obligation to be honest. Sneaking around while doing right, even though it seems like the easiest course, only leads to a worse confrontation and a bigger blow-up later. She owes it to her husband to be honest.

Conclusion. If you want to serve God like Abigail did, you can begin your service this morning.