

Genesis, Part 20

In our last session, we saw the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot and his wife and two daughters barely escaping, being physically dragged out of the condemned city by the two angels. Lot's wife looked back yearningly at what she was losing and became part of the destruction of the city, a "pillar of salt". Believers sometimes cling to what they should give up.

Lot and his two daughters were no better and sought refuge in Zoar one of the cities of the plain that was slated for destruction. They came to their senses and ended up in a cave above the valley where they thought they would be safe. Then we saw the sordid story of his daughters fearing childless old age getting their father drunk and lying with him while he was passed out. Of course, they became pregnant. Foolish ideas often lead to bad decisions.

Though Lot was a righteous man, he paid dearly for his choice to live in Sodom. First, he lost his wealth; all that he had worked so hard to accumulate over the years went up in smoke. He learned too late how transitory earthly riches are. Lot also lost his wife. She must have been behind the others as they fled the city and not making a determined effort to leave. Her heart was still in Sodom! And he lost his two daughters, for they committed a loathsome sin not long after leaving Sodom.

Now the story shifts back to Abraham, and we see him on the move again. The story records God's providential protection of His people, but its emphasis is on purity, specifically the preservation of Sarah's purity. For the fulfillment of the promise, marriage is important and demands separation from worldly corruption. Sinfulness and weakness of faith created a threat to the promised blessing. It is a sad commentary on one's lack of faith if God has to deliver him again and again.

Genesis 20:1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a

dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.” ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now then, return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”

Abraham renewed his journeys, this time traveling into the Negev. He camped between Kadesh on the southern edge of the Negev and Shur on the border of Egypt. The territory was known as Gerar. Abraham had remained some twenty years at Mamre, and no hint is given as to why he now moved. One commentator speculates that it was because of an influx of Hittites into the area of Hebron (cf. Gen 23).

Here we go again with the “she’s-my-sister” deception. Once more, Abraham is not trusting God but trusting self – and his “self” is making bad decisions. Abraham’s actions here make no sense given the divine announcement that the child of promise would be born within the year. Evidently, at age ninety, pregnant, and “worn out,” to use her own words, it seems Sarah was still physically attractive to a pagan king. For these reasons, some have proposed that this chapter is not in chronological order. Without question, chronological dislocation can be demonstrated in the patriarchal narratives. Here, however, there does not appear to be sufficient grounds for transposing this episode to an earlier phase of Abraham’s life.

This believer, though he knows better from experience, continues to commit the same sins. In the words of Thomas Whitelaw, “A sin once committed is not difficult to repeat, especially if its legitimate consequences, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah, have been mercifully averted. One is apt to fancy that a like immunity will attend its repetition.”

As it turned out, the lie was also unnecessary for Abimelech was a man with high moral standards, higher in fact than Abraham himself. In the previous chapter, Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom. In the present chapter under far less dangerous circumstances, Abraham, in effect, offered his wife to a pagan king. God's choice of Abraham had nothing to do with merit!

Why was Abimelech so attracted to Sarah? Some have suggested that she had been rejuvenated to have children. Others have suggested that the marriage had nothing to do with physical attraction. Abimelech was seeking a marriage alliance with the clan of Abraham. The Scriptures are not clear on the reasons.

God dealt with Abraham better than he deserved. Divine grace intervened and rescued both Abimelech and Abraham from a potentially disastrous situation. Five aspects of grace can be seen in these verses.

1. **Revealing grace.** God came to Abimelech in a dream warning him that he had taken another man's wife into his harem. Abimelech pled innocent of any intention to commit adultery.
2. **Restraining grace.** God had prevented Abimelech from having a sexual relationship with Sarah and thus sinning against God. That the act of adultery had not actually been consummated was certainly not due to Abraham's actions!
3. **Protecting grace.** The purity of the promised seed was protected by the restraint placed on Abimelech.
4. **Directing grace.** Abimelech was told to restore Abraham's wife immediately. Abimelech still could be forgiven of the sin he innocently committed through the intercessory prayer of the prophet Abraham. If he disobeyed this divine directive he and all his family would die.
5. **Chastening grace.** The Lord had brought the curse of infertility on the house of Abimelech because he had taken Sarah. Taking another's spouse is so serious a sin that it must be punished even if done in ignorance.

The Bible does not whitewash its characters. In no way is Abraham exonerated for what he did. Not one word of defense is offered on his

behalf. God's intervention must be seen, not as His approval of what was done, but as His determination to fulfill the covenant promise despite the moral lapses of His servant.

Gen 20:8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?"

Abimelech was eager to comply with the directive of God. Early the next morning he assembled his servants and briefed them concerning what had happened. They were afraid when they heard that their master had committed this offense against God.

Abimelech next called Abraham to the assembly and interrogated him. His probing questions were designed to rebuke Abraham publicly. Abimelech was being most charitable in his words when he said: "You have done to me things that ought not to be done!" In the mind of the king there had to be some logical explanation, some grand scheme behind such a dastardly deception.

Gen 20:11 Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'
¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "

Abraham gave three explanations for his conduct:

1. He thought his life was in danger in Gerar because of Sarah. Pagan kings took the women they wanted even if it meant killing a husband. Where the fear of God is absent there is no respect for the rights of

others. Abraham never dreamed that these pagans would be God-fearing men.

2. Sarah was his half-sister. The two shared a common father. Therefore Abraham told a half-truth.
3. Claiming a brother-sister relationship was a strategy going back to the days when God called the patriarch from Ur of Chaldees. The scheme was Abraham's. (At least he did not try to blame the whole idea on his wife!) The sibling relationship was more universally respected than the marital relationship in this period.

Why was this sin repeated? Because Abraham had not judged it in his life. Certainly, he had confessed it to the Lord and been forgiven, but confessing sin is not the same as judging sin. To judge our sins means to see them in their true light (as God sees them), to hate them, and to put them out of our lives. In verse 13 Abraham admitted that this sin came with him out of Ur of the Chaldees.

Gen 20:14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

Abimelech restored Sarah to Abraham as the Lord directed. He then made three other gestures to demonstrate his contrition over the incident:

1. He gave Abraham a gift of sheep, oxen, male and female servants.
2. He invited Abraham to dwell in the land of Gerar anywhere he pleased.
3. He gave an additional gift of a thousand pieces of silver to Sarah's brother. Abimelech spoke sarcastically. This was to be Sarah's vindication. People would be reluctant to ridicule Sarah when they observed how richly she had been blessed.

As previously mentioned, when a sin has no consequences, there is a tendency to repeat it. Not only has his sin been without consequences, but

Abraham has been materially rewarded with sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and land, not to mention 1,000 pieces of silver. It almost seems like Abraham is “gaming the system”.

I see no reason given in the text for why Abraham packed up his family and moved. What was he afraid of in Mamri that motivated him to move further south and face the perceived danger there that caused him to once again fabricate the sister/brother deception? God had promised many things, especially a child, and yet Abraham failed to trust in those promises and continued to devise human viewpoint solutions to dangers that God was perfectly capable of dealing with and willing to do so.

Gen 20:17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Nevertheless, despite Abraham’s failings, God did protect him and Sarah, enrich them, and grant them grazing rights (15). Moreover, he heard Abraham’s prayers for Abimelech and his wives and healed their temporary infertility (17–18).

God protected their marriage and thereby His promise. God controls birth; He miraculously intervenes; He opens and closes wombs (vv. 17–18). No mere human potentate can thwart God’s plan. Despite Abraham’s failings, the promises were still being fulfilled. That is the nature of unconditional covenants. But if God could answer Abraham’s prayers for Abimelech’s infertile wife, what about Sarah? Was she not going to have the child as promised?

The contrast between Abraham’s saintly deeds in ch. 18 and his deceitful cowardice here is shocking. If his fear in Egypt (12:10–20) was understandable though not justified, what can be said for his repeating the same misleading story about his wife in Gerar? After enjoying such intimacy with God in chapter 18 why had he abandoned faith in divine protection and relied on his cunning? On the other hand, the men of Gerar are shown to be very different from the Sodomites. Abimelech protested the

purity of his motives and his desire to please God. So we learn that Abraham was not as saintly as Chapter 18 perhaps suggested, nor were all the Canaanites as wicked as those in Sodom. Real life is often a mixture of contradictions—the totally pure or completely evil exists only in fiction.

One thing we should understand about sin is the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the man of God can commit any sin the heathen can commit – and do it repeatedly. Abraham is a perfect example of the failure to trust God and seek his own solutions instead – even after God has personally spoken to him and assured him. Another good example of this is David who somehow convinced himself it was not a problem to take another man’s wife (Bathsheba), get her pregnant, and then arrange the murder of her husband. Some eventually see the “error of their ways” as a result of God’s chastisement, and they repent/confess their sins, but some do not and face the sin unto death.

God plagued the heathen court but protected Abraham. God said to the ruler, “You are a dead man,” but He called Abraham a “prophet”. This does not mean that believers have license to sin, but it does show that God is faithful even though we might be unfaithful.

2 Tim. 2:12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

Certainly, Abraham suffered shame and reproach because of his sin, but God protects His own. Had Abimelech taken Sarah, it would have altered God’s plan for the birth of Isaac the very next year. Abraham’s selfishness and unbelief almost wrecked his own life and the future of the Jewish nation. Sadly enough, his son Isaac would use this same scheme in later years (26:6ff), and with the same bitter results.

A Year Later

Genesis 21:1 The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.

³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was

eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.” ⁷ And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

God provided the child of promise to Abraham and Sarah ... and at the very time God had promised (cf. 18:10). They responded in faith by

- a. naming him Isaac (21:3),
- b. circumcising him according to the covenant (v. 4; cf. 17:9–14, and
- c. praising God for this amazing fulfillment (21:6–7).

The name Isaac (“he laughs”) is cleverly explained in this passage. The name recalled Abraham’s joyous laugh (17:17) and Sarah’s mocking laugh (18:12) at the announcement of his birth. Sarah said that God gave her laughter (v. 6), that is, joy. Her laughter of unbelief (18:12) was now changed to rejoicing through the provision of her son. Everyone who heard about this would laugh, that is rejoice with her.

On the eighth day, the child was circumcised according to the previous commandment of the Lord. Isaac was now officially a child of the covenant.

God Protects Hagar and Ishmael

Gen 21:8 And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” ¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. ¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also because he is your offspring.”

Eastern women nurse a child until about age three, and the weaning of the child was an occasion of great celebration. So Abraham made a feast on

the day Isaac was weaned. The joy of the occasion quickly faded, however, when a family problem became evident.

The problem was Ishmael. He was continually mocking, translated here in verse 9 as “laughing”. The word is (*tsachaq /tsaw·khak/*) and is never used for harmless playing. Perhaps Ishmael made fun of the promises that God had made in respect to Isaac. Paul used the word “persecuted” (*dioko / dee·o·ko/*) to describe what was taking place (Gal 4:29). The Hebrew also indicates repetitive action. Ishmael was seventeen years old at the time of Isaac’s weaning.

When Sarah observed the actions of Ishmael, she demanded that her husband drive out the handmaid and her son. More than motherly prejudice is involved here. Sarah recognized better than her husband the difference between the child of promise and the child of the flesh. The inheritance must be Isaac’s exclusively. Both the teenager who scoffed at God’s promises and his mother must be removed from the camp (21:9–10).

God endorsed Sarah’s petulant demand for Ishmael’s expulsion (10–12). Abraham, however, was very fond of Ishmael (cf. 17:18), and he exploded in anger at Sarah’s proposal. The “very displeased” and “not displeased” here in verses 11 and 12 understates his feelings.

What Sarah asked was not only personally painful, it was illegal under the law codes of that day. A special revelation was required to convince Abraham that he should go beyond the law and drive out Hagar. The patriarch was to listen to his wife. This direction was accompanied by a word of promise concerning the two sons. In Isaac, Abraham’s seed was to be called; yet because he was also Abraham’s seed, God would also make a great nation of Ishmael (21:11–13). Only God’s reassurance persuaded Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

One way to look at this is that Isaac represents those who belong to God, the redeemed, while Ishmael represents the flesh, our old sin nature. Salvation does not change the old nature, nor can the old nature be improved or disciplined (see Rom. 6–7). The only way to overcome the old nature is to accept God’s estimate of it and obey God’s Word. Abraham loved Ishmael; but God said, “Cast him out!” Romans 6 informs us that our

only victory over the flesh is crucifixion—reckoning ourselves dead. Christians who cater to the old nature (Rom. 13:14) will always have conflict and trouble.

Another way to look at this is seen in Galatians 4:21–31 where Paul explains that these events with Ishmael and Isaac are an allegory that symbolizes God’s Old Covenant with Israel and His New Covenant with the Church.

Gal 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴ Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!

For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” ³¹ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

We may briefly summarize the main ideas as follows:

- Hagar symbolizes the Old Covenant of law, identified with the earthly Jerusalem in Paul’s day.
- Sarah symbolizes the New Covenant of grace, identified with the heavenly Jerusalem (“the Jerusalem above”).
- Ishmael was born of the flesh and was the son of a slave.
- Isaac was “born of the Spirit” and was the son of a free woman.

- The two sons, then, picture the Jews under the slavery of law and the true Christians under the liberty of grace.

Paul argues that God commanded Abraham to cast out Hagar (the Old Covenant) because His blessing was to be upon Isaac. All of this fits into Paul's argument in Gal. 3–4 that Christians today are not under the law. One represented bondage at Sinai, the other freedom when the promise finally came. When Christ, the seed, came, the old was done away. Now that the promise has come, believers are co-heirs with the promised Seed by adoption through God's grace. To go back under the Law would be to undo the fulfillment of God's promise. Those adopted by the Seed become seeds and are set free from the bondage of the Law (Gal. 5:1). Just as Ishmael and Isaac were in conflict (Gal. 4:29), so the flesh and the Spirit do not harmonize. The flesh struggles against the Spirit, often mocking it (Gal. 5:16–18). Therefore believers are to "get rid of the slave woman and her son" (Gal. 4:30), that is, to remove the threat of the flesh and "live by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16).

Gen 21:14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸ Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰ And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. ²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

The divine directive was implemented with great tenderness the next morning. Abraham gently placed provisions upon the shoulder of Hagar. He delivered into her care the seventeen-year-old Ishmael and sent the two of them away (21:14).

Bewildered by what had happened, Hagar wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba north of the region of Gerar. She did not head toward her native Egypt as she had done when she fled from Sarah. When the water was exhausted, both mother and son were faint unto death. She helped her son to the most comfortable spot she could find under a shrub. She walked a distance from him so she would not be forced to watch his dying gasp. Unable to do anything more for herself or her son, she wept tears of desperation (21:15–16).

God was nearer than Hagar realized. He heard the voice of the lad. The angel of God who earlier had appeared to Hagar (16:7) directed her to return to the lad, take him by the hand, and help him to his feet. The angel then renewed the promise he had made to her seventeen years earlier, that God would make of Ishmael a great nation. Hagar's eyes were then opened to see a well of water. Wells in the wilderness usually were covered over to prevent evaporation. She filled her water skin and gave the boy a drink (21:17–19).

God exercised providential care over Ishmael. He grew to maturity in the wilderness where he became a skilled archer. The Wilderness of Paran where he settled lay between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez to the south of Kadesh. Eventually, his mother took for Ishmael an Egyptian wife (21:20–21).

A Treaty with Abimelech

Now (vv. 22–34) a covenant was made that allowed Abraham to settle in the land in peace and Abimelech to share in the blessing. All this built slowly to the test in chapter 22, each chapter showing the completion of different phases of the promises.

Gen 21:22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. ²³ Now,

therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.”²⁴ And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

²⁵ When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, ²⁶ Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸ Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” ³⁰ He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.” ³¹ Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

The story fits well in the context that builds up to the sacrifice of Isaac in chapter 22. Abimelech the ruler of Gerar observed the blessing enjoyed by Abraham. He rightly concluded that God was with the patriarch in all that he did. Abimelech wanted a covenant with Abraham that would guarantee friendship between the two peoples forever. Up to this time, Abraham had been a nomadic visitor in the region of Gerar. Now Abimelech recognized him as a ruler of equal station (21:22–23).

Abraham was willing to make such a covenant, but first, an obstacle needed to be removed. Abimelech’s servants had seized a well of water from Abraham. Abimelech pled ignorance, and Abraham seemed satisfied. Apparently, Abimelech immediately returned the well to Abraham (21:24–26).

Abraham provided sheep and oxen to be slain to cut the covenant in the manner illustrated back in Genesis 15. Since the ratification ceremony took place on his territory, Abraham was obligated to provide the necessary

animals. He also gave the king a special gift of seven ewe lambs. These lambs were given to guarantee Abraham's sole right to the well which had been in dispute.

The word *šāba'* ("to swear or take an oath") occurs three times in the passage (vv. 23–24 [swear], 31 [swore]); the numerical adjective *šeba'* (seven) occurs three times (vv. 28–30); the name *be'ēr šāba'* ("well of seven" or "well of the oath") also occurs three times (vv. 31–33). Abraham named that spot "Beersheba". (The earlier use of this place name in Genesis 21:14 was by way of anticipation of this narrative.) The stress is on the significance of the oath (v. 31) between Abraham and Abimelech, a fact commemorated by Beersheba's naming.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba as a memorial to the covenant with Abimelech. There he also "called upon the name of Yahweh," (he engaged in public worship). A new name, *'el 'olam*, the "everlasting God," characterized this worship. Thus did Abraham seek the Lord's blessing on the new relationship with Abimelech (21:31–34).

The covenant with Abimelech paved the way for Abraham to return to the land of the Philistines. Since Beersheba was located in the northern part of Abimelech's domain, this would not have been a long move. There Abraham dwelt for many days.

Abimelech pressed for the treaty so that Abraham would not deal falsely with him (21:23). All Abimelech knew of this man was that (a) God blessed him (v. 22) and (b) he was deceptive (v. 23). This tragic contradiction called for a binding treaty. Likewise, Israel was to keep her oaths and avoid falsehood. Today believers should speak the truth without using oaths.

Mat 5:37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil

James 5:12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Truthful and faithful dealings that preserve such peaceful relations enhance the work of God.