

THE SEVENTH SERMON

OF JACOB AND ESAU,

<012606> **GENESIS 26**

- 6** Isaack therefore dwelt in Gerar:
- 7** And when the men of that place asked him concerning his wife, he said it is my sister, for he feared to say, it is my wife: For (said he) I must take heed lest the men of this place kill me for Rebecca, because she was fair.
- 8** Now it came to pass when he had remained there many days, that Abimelech the king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and as he looked, Behold Isaack played with Rebecca his wife.
- 9** Wherefore Abimelech called Isaack and said, surely behold she is thy wife: how then sayest thou she is my sister? To whom Isaack said, because I said, I must take heed lest I die for her.
- 10** Then said Abimelech, what is this that thou hast done unto us? It was not far off that one of this people had not lien by her, so thou haddest brought sin upon us.

WE HAVE SEEN THE TEMPTATION which happened to Isaack, when he was so pressed with famine, that it enforced him to forsake the place of his habitation: For this should at the least have been, that God should have nourished and fed him in that country which he had assigned unto him for an inheritance: But if he would not accomplish his promise upon him, should he not have given him some little taste thereof? But now when famine driveth him away, this is, as if God had forsaken him there; and as though he had had no more care of him. Isaack therefore had here a great combat to endure, seeing he was as it were destitute of God's favor, which is common to all. For if he nourish the contemners of his majesty, and the wickedest of the world, making his sun to shine upon them, and causing the earth to bring forth fruit for their nourishment: what should he do for them whom he hath taken into his custody, and adopted for his children? But yet see a greater temptation, seeing Isaack was forbid to go into

Egypt, and that God had showed him a certain place of rest, and would that he should dwell there, until he might return, and that the dearth were passed. When God then had led him thither as if he should say, behold a corner to rest in, which I do assign thee: and there farther, that he feareth lest he should be killed for his wife's sake: and after that he was taken and reprov'd: mark further these tokens of the wrath of god upon him, in such sort that he could not be but in an horrible perplexity. Now it is very true, that he was wonderful weak, as we shall see hereafter: but howsoever it was, the issue showeth, that God was not forgetful of him. And this is sufficient. For he will for a time keep himself secret, in such sort that the poor faithful ones shall be as it were lost: but this is enough, that after that he hath humbled them, after that he hath discovered their infirmities, that he showeth himself altogether to make them feel as it were by effect, that all this while that it seemed to them that they were quite abandoned from him, he yet in pity looked upon them. Mark then how it came to pass with Isaack.

Now in the first place it is said, that instead of confessing that Rebecca was his wife, he said she was his sister. We saw the like in Abraham: But this is marvelous, that Isaack had not learned this lesson, by the experience that was given to his father and mother: for they were both chastised for their overgreat fear. And Isaack could not be ignorant of it. There is no doubt but his father had such care (as we have seen) to teach his family, but that he had instructed his son herein: Take heed to thyself: For I have been tossed to and fro all my life long, the like may happen unto thee: For God hath yet set me four hundred years before we enter into the possession of that Country: it must needs be that thou go from one side to another. But I distrusted the protection of my God, and I have received my payment for it: yea I was chastised for it by a profane king, that had no fear of God: a poor blind wretch reprov'd me of my fault, and God made both me and thy mother ashamed thereof, when we were so corrected there. Therefore fortify thyself. There is no doubt, but that Isaack had received such instruction: but when he came to receive the blows, he had lost all, and was devoid both of reason and counsel, and there is no doubt, but he had some distrust in him. For faith will always minister unto us an invincible constancy, to attempt nothing, but that which God alloweth.

Mark wherein we may know whether we be well grounded in God, and stayed upon his promises: that is, when we shall be in any trouble, in any perplexity, and in any danger, if we walk on always in the path which GOD hath commanded us, and do not decline therefrom, then he will guide us in all our ways. If then we have this courage, only to repose ourselves upon God, and to hope that he will help us: then see an undoubted trial and proof of our faith. But if we decline either on the one side or on the other, it is very certain that our infidelity bewrayeth [*defile, disfigure*] itself, and that we show (not having any victory against temptations) that we are not sufficiently stayed, and that we have (as a man would say) our stragglings thoughts. For we see that Isaack fell to a very unlawful thing, when to save his life, he cloaked the truth as we have seen.

This therefore is a token, that he had no perfect faith: but that he had some mistrust mingled with it. But in this he is not to be excused: and yet nevertheless he was a mirror of all holiness. So then we have all, good occasion to hang down our eyes, and to know that when we imagine that we have well profited in God's School, yet we shall be far off from our mark. And indeed it shall be a very easy matter unto us, when we are far off from all combats, to be the valiantest in the world: but when they shall approach to buckle with us, than behold us all afraid. Thus then let us know, that there is not one that hath not need to pray daily, that God will increase his faith, correcting the remnant of his unbelief. Mark this for one lesson. Now hereupon we have one good advertisement: and that is, that when any danger befalleth us, or that we fear to fall into any evil: that this is as it were a cloud to dazzle our eyes, in such sort that we know not what will become of us, we have no certain counsel, and the wisest are overtaken therein: Let us not presume to be subtle or sharp and to have such promptitude, to esteem that we shall always be strong and mighty, that we shall have light hearts, and shall find remedies in our brain when any trouble shall come upon us, let us keep ourselves from such arrogance: but let us rather acknowledge that God hath in himself the spirit of wisdom and of counsel, and let us run unto him. And when we shall be as it were oppressed and that we cannot at the first resolve ourselves, let us not be as those that always forge and coin new discoveries: but let us go unto God, and pray him to shine unto us in the midst of darkness: yea and specially let us wait that we be not altogether pressed down: but let us acknowledge the ignorance that is in us. And forasmuch, as we have not by

a great deal so much staidness as were requisite, let us both morning and evening pray unto God that he will guide us, and show us what we have to do. Mark then that which we have to learn by the example of Isaack. But here a question might be asked, whether he committed so great a fault, seeing he lied not: For we have seen before, that Rebecca was his Cousin. He might then say she is my sister: For the word in that language importeth as much as of my blood or kindred. There is no question here neither of the first nor second degree. So Isaack lied not in saying that Rebecca was his sister. And yet notwithstanding all this, he faulted, yea indeed: For God is no Sophister, and doth not stay upon a word as we have declared before: but he regardeth the intent.

When therefore we shall have well painted our words, and that there shall be some goodly color and fair show to acquit us before men, all this is nothing: For GOD soundeth the heart. And though men can find nothing to say against our excuses, yet this proveth not that GOD is content therewith. And this which is here, is a very good and profitable admonition. For how do men commonly jest with God? It is true, that we will confess that it belongeth to him to search into our secret thoughts, and that nothing is hidden from him: but yet so it is, that we deal with him after the manner of men: and which is worse, we will altogether go beyond him, and we will blear his eyes: and we will jest more boldly with him than with men. For although we have many starting holes, which might discharge us of blame, yet so much there is that we have some remorse, knowing other men will not judge so thereof, this man is no beast, he may know my craft. When therefore we have thus disguised our words, yet we shall be always in doubt, whether men be satisfied or not. But when the matter is of God, we do nothing but writhe [*twist*] our mouth, or rather mow and snuff at God: For we are as brute beasts, yea and worse too in this point. But so much the more ought we to learn this doctrine: that is to say, that God careth not for all our goodly colors: for they are nothing else but breeches of leaves, and this excused not our father Adam, that he came not out to make his account. What must we then do? We must so acknowledge our faults in simplicity, that we be first our own judges: and when we shall once have found out, that there was some crooked and indirect dealing, we must acknowledge that it displeased God. For mark Isaack's intention, it was to hide his marriage. It is true that the words which he useth are not such as for which he should be called a liar: but yet

for all that there was some leasing [*falsehood*] in him. And why so? Because he would not confess his marriage: but would that it should be unknown, and that men should not think that Rebecca was his wife. Mark then in sum the thing we have to learn: That is, that whatsoever words we have in our mouth, nothing can justify us, unless that our affection be pure and right, and that we go not in any bypaths, to stray here and there. And when Saint Paul condemneth lying: he addeth

that everyone speak in truth to his neighbors.

(^{<490425>} Ephesians 4:25)

When we shall have proceeded thus far herein, see how we shall be holden and reputed true before God. But if there be any slights or crafts, and that we endeavor to speak so, that it cannot be understood what we say, and that it be so wrested and turned, as if our tongue were double, in this we are already condemned for liars. This then in sum is that which we have to learn upon this point. Now when it is said, *That Isaack feared lest he should have been killed for his wife's sake:*

There is no doubt, but that he might thereby also have taken occasion, seeing (as Abraham his father alleged) that there was no fear of God in the country: not for that there was so outrageous impiety, that neither good nor evil was known there. For we see how the King of the Country spake: but forasmuch as the true religion ruled not there, and because there was nothing but Idolatry, it seemed rather to Isaack that all was confused. For indeed we shall never have a sure rule, to walk in equity and right, unless we have the majesty of God present, and that we be holden in with that, as it were a bridle. Now when we know not what God is, and that we have nothing but confuse speculations, albeit that we have some honesty, and though we have the discerning of good and evil, and that we are not given to hurt, nor to commit wrong and violence, yet so it is that there is not staidness in us. For (as I have said) we cannot build upon any other foundation, to have a firm and stable building, but upon the fear of God going before. Isaack therefore might have some occasion to fear and to prevent danger: but in the meanwhile he ought to have known, of what force God his safeguard was, even such as it had been before by experience declared unto him: For if he had been well advised, he would not but have understood that God had his arm stretched out, for to have succored [*helped*] him, and that in visible manner: For he had said unto him:

Fear not, for I am with thee: I am thy very large reward:
(^{<011501>}Genesis 15:1)

It is true that this was not spoken expressly to him: but that which was spoken to his father, was as well spoken for him. For he was the heir of that promise.

Seeing then he waited not upon God, herein he is reprov'd of infidelity. It is true that Faith letteth [*hindereth*] not but that we may apprehend those dangers, wherewith we are beset round about: For Faith serveth not to make us insensible. And this should be no virtue, to us to call upon God: unless we were provoked, seeing that we cannot escape danger without his aid: but there is a great difference, whether our fear be such as maketh us to go out of the right path: or rather be as a spur unto us to provoke us to go unto God. If Isaack had thought thus with himself, it behooveth that I return me to my God: For I have no other refuge, but to have had recourse to his help: he hath promised it me, yea and I have already experience thereof in my need. It must therefore needs be that his truth do yet declare and show itself towards me. If Isaack had been come thus far, it is certain, that his faith had been so much the better tried: and his fear had showed, as if he had been strengthened in God, being weak in himself: but when he is overcome with fear, and farther taketh such counsel as God condemneth: therein he frameth [*proceedeth, disposeth*] not himself to the duty of a faithful man. When Isaack went thus, herein he showeth he feareth, inasmuch as he was not sufficiently given to the word of God, and that his faith was not well resolved: but in that he wavereth and varieth, hereby he showeth that he did not steadfastly trust in God as he should.

But now we see Isaack's fault, we must so much the rather be warned (as we have already said) that in all the objects which we shall have to make us afraid, that we always do God this honor, that there is sufficient in him to remedy it, that if we call upon him, and after that we use the means that he hath left unto us, and which he alloweth, without going beyond our bounds either to the right hand or to the left. Isaack therefore did no wrong at all to them of that country, but to God, which is much more. And moreover, he is not wholly to be excused, seeing he conceived such a judgment of his own head: For although there were no fear of God in that place, nor true Religion in that country, yet so it is that true charity is not suspicious. None had yet done him any scathe or injury, ought he then at the first dash

to have condemned them? For this cause God suffered this evil to come upon him: and yet showeth him singular mercy: For his wife might have been ravished, as also might have come to pass to his father.

Behold a king which is of the country of Gerar, and yet God bridleth him from doing any hurt to Isaack, yea knowing well that he had no such virtue in himself, as was in his father Abraham, like as we have showed already: and mark also wherefore God preventeth [*precedes, anticipates*] him, when he had determined to go into Egypt he withdraweth him: as it were by force, and forbiddeth him to go out of the land which he had promised him. We have showed already that God according to the measure he hath given us, doth also prove us. He worketh therefore in all men, as in sundry shops and by instruments which are not of the same power. And so, mark Isaack who was spared for once: but also we see how pitiful and kind the Lord was unto him, when he loosed not the bridle to King Abimelech to do that unto him which was done unto Abraham his father. For if we demand, why it fell out at one time, and not at another. It is certain that God governed this by his wonderful counsel: For after he once looseth the reins unto men, it is certain that they pass their bounds. And it is said expressly that he *holdeth the hearts of Kings in his hand*, and that he turneth them hither and thither as he thinketh good. So then it behooveth us to conclude, that the heart of the king of Gerar was holden that it desired not Rebecca: otherwise he had been subject to that concupiscence, that poor Isaack should have been thereby tormented even unto the uttermost and had been swallowed up with terrible distress: but (as we have said) God who is faithful spareth his own, or trieth them more to the quick, according to the power that he knoweth to be in them.

Moreover when we shall be so fearful and so weak, that with much ado, we shall be scarce able (as a man would say) to bear one fillip [*blow, buffeting*]: yet let us trust that God will give us strength, when it shall please him to draw us out to a more hard trial: but notwithstanding this ought not to make us careless. If I feel myself feeble, and that I say, O, God will spare me, for, he knoweth that I can bear nothing: it is certain, that I shall be punished for my unthankfulness. And why so? So far forth as we are weak we must run unto him, who hath all power to supply our wants [*lack*]. And therefore let us learn when it is said that God will help us, and that he will give us strength to endure all the combats, which shall be directed against us, this is to the end we should learn to exercise

ourselves in prayer day by day. And therefore let us not be sluggish, because it is said that God strengtheneth his, all after as it shall please him to draw them into trial: but let this serve to make us always to look more nearly unto ourselves: and after we know our miseries, that we should seek for remedy, and pray him that it would please him never to suffer us to fall in any sort whatsoever, but that he will support us, or else when he will that we shall fight more courageously, that he will give us wherewithal that we may be armed from above, as he knoweth best always how to give victory to those that trust in him, and who fight not but under his banner. Mark then concerning the diversity we read betwixt Abraham and Isaack. Now it is said:

That the King saw Isaack sporting himself with Rebecca his wife, and that afterwards he called him, and said unto him: For a truth that is thy wife.

By this we may see that there was a great deal more integrity at that time, than there is at this day, and that whoredoms and dissolute lives were not so common. For some men at the first dash would have set up a sinister judgment against Isaack. It must needs be therefore, that men had more honesty, than is to be seen in our time. And seeing there is no doubt, that Isaack getting this reputation amongst all, that he was no villain nor whoremonger, that under color of saying she was his sister carried a whore after him. There is no doubt (I say) but when both he and his manner of life was known, but that everyone was persuaded, that he was an holy man, and fearing God, and that he was not given to any such vices and enormities.

And this is a point which we ought well to mark: For there is no man that would not be counted an honest man: and so soon as men do conceive any evil of us: we think that they do us great wrong: and yet in the meanwhile we regard not to use the means, that should not cause us to be ill thought of, and how to avoid that men should not charge us with blames and faults. The means were so to bear and order ourselves, that all might have their mouths stopped: that first of all the fear of God bear rule in us, and next that we have our conversation with men, in love and in uprightness, even as God hath commanded us the same. If we have this, it is certain that we shall stop up many wicked mouths. But it is very true, that the holiest and godliest, men cannot many times let the wicked to speak evil of them: For

was not the Son of GOD himself subject unto slanders and opprobries [*reproaches, disgrace*]? Was it not upbraid him, that he blasphemed against GOD his father. But yet for all this, the Scripture saith not without cause, that then we stop the mouths of the wicked, when we shun all offenses, and when we do not only labor to abstain *from evil*, but also from *all show of evil*.

Wherefore they that have so great care of their credit and reputation, that they cannot abide to be abased either in one respect or other, let them have regard to the means: that is to say, let them prevent that they be not justly blamed, and herein they follow the example of Isaack. For we see that being a stranger in a barbarous Country, where there was nothing but Idolatry: nevertheless so it is that he is yet esteemed for a man fearing God, and that they could not raise up an evil judgment of him. And why so? Because they were convinced of the contrary by his good life and honesty: Let us do the like, and it is certain, that we shall stop many slanders and many reproaches. But yet we have further to note, that then there was such honesty amongst men, that if a man sported familiarly with his wife, it was in marriage. But nowadays all is so overflowed, that a man must shut his eyes against the greatest villains of the world. Let a man go into Courts, O, it is certain that therein the wickednesses are so unruly, as a man can behold nothing more. And especially if a husband see his wife to be allured with another man's eye, and that some do abuse her thereby as though she were an harlot, he must set a good countenance upon it: for if he show any sign, that he is grieved therewith, and that he do not laugh at it, as others do, O, say they, he is a jealous fool and a dizzard [*jester, fool*]. Lo how it is in this case: For men are come even to the heap of iniquity, insomuch that they have lost all shamefacedness, because they are given to such beastly liberty, that there is no more honesty amongst them. And I would to God this mischief were in no place else but in these courts: But it is even a deluge or flood, which a man shall see in all estates, yea even to the least, such gestures of incontinency, and dissolute wantonness, that it is pity to behold. But let us mark how far off we be from these men which were as it were miserable blind ones having no knowledge of God, having no law written, no nor yet any revelation: and yet notwithstanding they had this honesty, that none ticked nor toyed overfamiliarly with another man's wife, nor had any gestures whereby any evil might be suspected, as we see here. *For truth* (saith he) *this is thy wife*. And whereupon doth he

conclude it? It is because that vice was not accustomed there: and it was not come in use nor in possession amongst men, in such sort but that they might easily discern betwixt marriage and whoredom.

Now this teacheth us so to behave ourselves each towards others, that there be no unchaste looks, no vicious gestures: but that we be in such sort pure from all evil, that even before men we give no occasion to speak evil, nor yet to think evil of us. It is true that he speaketh here of some gesture which was overfamiliar to a strange man: For it needeth not that we should be so austere, that we cannot live together, without giving occasion of evil: and yet in the meantime living in familiarity, yea and sporting ourselves with all honesty, showing that we have chaste hearts, chaste eyes, and all our senses chaste.

But when Isaack played thus with his wife, he made some sign of a husband to his wife: so that it might be judged either this man is a whoremonger, or else he must needs be her husband. Now to think him a whoremonger, they could not, because he had behaved himself honestly in the fear of God, and with the good will of everyone in the country of Gerar: he must therefore be esteemed for her husband. But hereupon Isaack confesseth his fault: but he confesseth it alleging that he feared, lest he should have been killed. Here things are rehearsed more briefly, than we have seen before. For Abraham was rebuked more sharply: and likewise he maketh a more long excuse thereof. *I did know* (saith he) *that there was no fear of God in this Country*. Only Isaack saith, *I feared lest they would kill me*.

Now he showeth here that although Rebecca were his sister, nevertheless seeing that his purpose was to cloak the truth: it was to be condemned. So likewise, when we will be very subtle for a time, let us not be so obstinate as altogether to maintain all that we have said and done (although there be some fault in us:) but let us frankly acknowledge it. For Isaack might have said, yea, she is my sister. But notwithstanding that which he had said, he addeth that he was to be blamed, as also Abimelech did: For he saw just cause to condemn Isaack, and therefore he saith unto him,

Wherefore hast thou done this thing?

Now we have to note on the one side, that which was alleged before: that is to say, that God had reprov'd and chastised the kings because of his

servants, albeit they were but a few in number, albeit they were as poor wandering people in the land of Canaan. And seeing GOD maintained their quarrel, and set himself against all the violence and evil that could be done unto them: hereby he showeth the singular favor that he did bear unto them. And also the Prophet addeth, that for this cause he saith: *Touch not mine anointed, and do my Prophets no harm.*

It is true that there was in Abraham and Isaack excellent virtue and holiness: but howsoever it be, yet so it is that we at this day are also anointed to be under the keeping of God, and we succeed to all the promises which were given unto them. So then, though we shall be never so small a number, and as a poor despised people, as Sheep in the throat of Wolves, yet let us not doubt, but that GOD hath wherewith to defend us, and that he will display his power, as much as shall be necessary, yea and that against the mightiest Kings of the world. For sometimes God hath indeed suffered that those of the meaner and common sort of people have vexed and molested his servants, as we shall see hereafter, and that very shortly. Which whatsoever it be, when he hath declared that he foreseeth the war, and that he setteth himself in order against the Kings: Hereby he hath showed that the life of his servants is dear and precious unto him. Let us therefore hope the like, and we shall not be deceived. And when we shall see the mightiest of the world to be our enemies, and shall daily hear rumors of many tumults and troubles: let us not doubt, but that our Lord will remedy all, and will always be our buckler to put back all our blows, when it shall be most like that they must fall upon our heads. Lo what we have to put in practice by the example of Isaack. And although here God afflicted not Abimelech as before, and that he reproveth him not as he had done the king of Egypt: nevertheless he keepeth him bridled, and holdeth him as it were in fear: so that although Rebecca were fair, yet it fell so out: that the king of the country desired her not, no albeit he imagined that it had been lawful for him to have taken her to wife. Lo then on the one side what we have to mark: on the other this, that nevertheless God humbled Isaack and suffered not his infidelity to remain altogether unpunished: yet the punishment is very gentle. But howsoever it was, he was reformed. Now if nothing had happened unto Isaack, and that it had not been perceived that Rebecca had been his wife, he had not returned from it, neither had he ever remembered his fault which he had committed: and specially he had pleased himself herein, because the event was good and as

he would have wished, and therefore he would have thought that God would have allowed it. For men when their faults are not showed them, flatter and harden themselves in them. But God worketh our good and salvation when he maketh us to feel our sins, and correcteth us in such sort, that we are even compelled to think upon them. Mark then how it fell out herein to Isaack. It is very true that God did bear with him very much, when he suffered nothing to be attempted against his wife, that the very king of the country called so gently for him, and complained to him as to his equal and companion. Lo a wonderful support: and hereby we see that God hath pity upon his, not trying them further than they are able to bear. But whatsoever it is, yet so it is that Isaack cometh to acknowledge his sin. And who is judge thereof? Even a poor painim [*pagan, heathen*], an Idolater. God might rather have sent an Angel from heaven, or else have given him some revelation to have said unto him, what dost thou? But he leaveth him there: For he was not worthy to be taught so honorably, but the blind ones must discover his evil and condemn him.

Lo then, the shame that was done unto him, to the end that he might be the more humbled thereby, and to the end that he might learn forever after, better to trust in God, and no more to fall into that fault. This is that we have to mark. And withal let us take good heed unto ourselves, and let us not care that men reprove us: but let us take in good part all corrections that God sendeth us by his word. For what honor doth he unto us, when he provoketh us to come unto him, and when with doctrine he joineth exhortations? And after, when he seeth that we are too slow, and besides that we are as it were incorrigible, he useth more sharp reprehensions. But whatsoever it be, all this is done in his name, that when we read in the holy Scripture, and that we come to the Sermon, and that there he summoneth us, he is always our Judge.

And lo, also why our Lord Jesus Christ speaking of the preaching of the Gospel saith:

When the holy Ghost shall come, he shall judge the world.

(^{<431426>} John 14:26)

The spirit of God therefore exerciseth his jurisdiction upon us: and to what end? It is to the end that when we have been condemned, so that we do pass willing condemnation, and that we be apt to learn, and that we ask pardon, he is ready to give us. So then, seeing that GOD hath done us this

honor to judge us as it were in his house, and privately by ourselves: when he showeth us our faults, are not we overmuch hardened, if we do not bow down our neck, and become apt to learn, and be ready to be reformed by him? For if we will rebel so against him, God will suffer that we come to another school, and that even the wicked and unbelievers condemn us. We shall find very many even in this case, that fret themselves and gnash their teeth, if a man scratch their scabs and rub them on the gall, when they come to the Sermon. For see their replies: was the Scripture made to spur poor people in such sort? and is this the manner to teach, to cry out after such a fashion? It seemeth that he would lighten against us. But in the end God teacheth them after another sort: that is, that his trumpet must sound, and that their shame must be published in every place, and in the end they must go to the school of the Gibbet. And moreover when we make not our profit of the corrections which are daily set before us, it must needs be that we be condemned an hundred miles off, and that by good right. But if herein we suffered alone, there were no danger: the worst is that the name of God is blasphemed through our wickedness.

So then, let us learn by this example to become so tractable and apt to be taught and wrought upon, that when GOD shall reprove us, we willingly suffer ourselves to be condemned of him, and that we be ashamed of ourselves: to the end that our shame and infamy be not discovered and laid open to the whole world. Lo then what we have farther to learn of this place. But it is said that Abimelech complaining to Isaack added,

It was not far off, that some of the people had not lain by thy wife: and thou caused great evil to come upon us.

Concerning the first point, here Isaack is reproved, of his inconsideration and folly. For that as much as was in him, he laid his wife open to be defiled. And why so? We have seen before that the husband ought to be as a veil or coverture to his wife. When a woman shall be married, and that her husband shall live with her doing his duty, this is to the end, she may be there as it were in safeguard, and that none come to deceive nor defile her. Now therefore Isaack, for the discharging of his duty, ought to have been as a veil or coverture to his wife: that is to say, under the name of a husband and of marriage: he ought to have let that none should have attempted to withdraw her, whether it were to have her to wife, or after any other manner: For marriage is as a safeguard, (as we have said) and

God would have it honored in all ages. And although adulterers would abandon it, as Swine and Asses: yet notwithstanding they have always had remorse in it: and evermore even amongst the Painims [*pagans, heathen*], adulterers went not unpunished. It is known that if ever anything in this world was privileged, it was marriage: yea, and thefts and other crimes ought a great deal rather to be borne with, than such enormities: to wit, when the covenant and company which God hath dedicated in his name, to the end it should be holy, as it were separated from profanation, is violated.

When therefore this was violated, the Painims [*pagans, heathen*] knew that it was so great an abomination, that in no wise it ought to be borne with. Now therefore by the way, Abimelech findeth fault with Isaack concerning this, that he had thus prostituted his wife, as much as lay in him. And we are taught by this doctrine to meet with dangers aforehand, and not to tempt God by our rashness and folly. Let us take good heed therefore how we cloak evil, and (as a man would say) shut the door against God: so that through our rashness and unadvisedness God be offended. Lo then the wisdom which we ought to have: and therefore because we have it not, we must ask it of God. But now for the second matter Abimelech saith:

Thou hadest made great evil to come upon us.

And how? When any of the people had committed adultery, and that he had so offended, what grief soever it had been, he should only have deserved to be punished: and ought then a whole country to have answered it? Now we see here that a miserable heathen, and unbeliever, and a poor blind person, knew that the land should be defiled by an adulterer: and that if this remained unpunished, notwithstanding before God, lo an whole people culpable therein, in respect of the temporal punishment. It is true that God knoweth how to turn the chastisements that he sendeth to them that are innocent from that fault to their profit: For if they suffer, which consented not unto the evil, this shall not be altogether as if they had been faulty: But God turneth this to their salvation. In the meanwhile so it is that he never chastiseth them without cause: if we see it not now with our eye, yet when all those registers shall be opened, then we shall find, that God hath not gone (as they say) indirectly and awry. And when he sendeth general punishments upon a whole people, for one particular fault as it seemeth, nevertheless he knoweth well that all be not innocent

therein, as it is expressly said here, and as also Abimelech understood. For when adulteries are committed, and be not punished, lo an infection which creepeth over the whole land: but shall we yet say that a man is innocent therein, when we close our eyes, and when we suffer all this to overflow? Although a man be no judge but a private person, yet he ought to oppose himself as much as lieth in him.

Now on the other side there is not anyone, but he spreadeth the sail instead that he should let the evil: if we had the courage and zeal of God, we would procure that he might be served and honored, as he is worthy. But this we do not: there is a certain faintness and sluggishness in all. To be short, vices never reigned, and had sway in any Country, but both great and small were partakers therein, by reason of their too much patience or dissimulation or coldness. Mark then why God punisheth sins not without cause.

But moreover concerning adultery, we see what a miserable Heathen hath pronounced. Let us therefore be ashamed when such a great evil shall reign in the midst of us: and let us know, that there shall need no other judge to condemn us, us (I say) that have been baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we shall maintain such filthinesses and infections, seeing a poor miserable blind Heathen, knew well what heinous enormity there was in such a vice. Lo then what we have to learn, that we may make our profit of this place. And farther, let us learn to honor Marriage, seeing God hath dedicated it, and that it is a covenant which he hath consecrated in his name: that also it be maintained in his honor and dignity, and that both Husbands and Wives dwell in such honesty one with the other, that each one may govern their houses in peace and quietness, and that there be no looseness amongst us: but that we know that we have better profited in the School of GOD, than our Father Isaack had done in this point, forasmuch as he declined therein.

But now let us prostrate ourselves before the high majesty of our good God, in acknowledging our offenses, praying him that it will please him, to make us feel the infirmities and vices that are in us, to the end that we may be displeased therewith, in such sort, that we may fight against them, and not to give ourselves any liberty therein: and when we have offended, that we may be touched with such repentance, that we may return to him, and mourn for them, until he have reformed us by his holy spirit, and have

drawn us into a good way, after that we shall have strayed from it. And that withal he would in the meanwhile so support us in our weakness, that we never leave to be his Children, albeit we honor him not as our father, as were meet. And that he will not only show us this favor, but also to all peoples and nations of the earth etc.