from doing our duty, may he hide and cast out all our faults until he has cleansed us of all the corruptions of our flesh and clothed us in his righteousness. May he grant that grace not only to us but to all the peoples and nations on earth.

SERMONS ON GENESIS 11-20

Sarah and Hagar: Conflict Following a Bad Decision

Friday, 22 March 1560

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes (Gen.16:1-4).

The qualities of the saints which are proposed to us as examples ought to be very useful, for we have the assurance that God strengthens his people, no matter how weak they are by nature, so that their lives correspond to their calling. And that is why we ought to be incited to pray to God that what we do not possess by nature, he will grant by grace. And then, in the same way, we ought also to be more resolved to put forth an effort. And despite the fact we are weak and cannot easily give ourselves to God's service and fulfil our duty, we ought to take heart when we see those who show us the way.
But Scripture shows the vices of those who have faithfully served God and have been like living examples of saintliness; that also ought to be for our advantage, for we have ample occasion to lower our heads when we see those who have been incomparably more excellent than we but have nonetheless sometimes stumbled, even gone astray or completely fallen. Such examples ought to teach us to walk with greater care and be on guard so Satan will not take us by surprise.

Moreover, we are also advised that if we do not satisfy our duty in every respect and on every occasion, God will still support us as he has supported us. That is what makes us overcome all our lack of confidence and why we will continue to move forward despite some failure, and why despair will never get the best of us. And that is also why the shortcomings of the saints are placed before us, so that we will be even more on guard for fear the same thing or worse will happen to us. So seeing our weakness, let us learn to find our strength in God.

As at present, Moses recounts a very serious fault committed by Sarah, the mother of all believers, as well as by our father Abraham. In a single act, many offences were committed against God. For one, they violated sacred marriage and perverted what God had established, a thing that was to be inviolable. For God created a woman for the man. He said, 'I will make a helper for him' (cf. Gen. 2:18), and not two or three. And then he declared that they will be two in one body (cf. Gen. 2:24). Now we find Sarah attempting to change God’s arrangement. That is considerable brashness. That shows a severe lack of seriousness, one that works against faith. As we saw earlier, the characteristic of faith is to remain still. It is in peace and quiet, the prophet shows, that we test our trust in God. It is, he says, by not being in a hurry and not being afraid, but by waiting in silence for the outcome God wishes to provide (cf. Isa. 30:15). And here is Sarah, impatient, not waiting for what God intends to do, but she wants to move ahead in accordance with her own thinking. Abraham follows suit. So here in this act is another very serious and reprehensible fault, which is that their faith in God was not perfect, as it should have been.

Moreover, they also presume to interpret God’s promise. God’s truth must remain pure, and we cannot stir into it our thinking as if it were leaven to act upon the whole loaf. So as many fanciful thoughts as we have in our heads, that many corrupt thoughts are there to infect the pure simplicity of God’s word.

Now Sarah and Abraham do that and worse. They choose a means to their liking which God did not approve. Now the least we can do when God guides our steps is not to wiggle a finger, so to speak, without his permission. And what do they do? They make their own decision without asking whether it pleases God or whether he condemns it. So Abraham and Sarah committed a lot of offences in a single act. Why is it that the Holy Spirit wanted that to be known until the end of the world? It was not to make us bolder to commit evil, as if we could use Abraham and Sarah as an excuse, but it was to humble us and cause us to walk in fear and be more watchful, as well as to incite us to pray to God and fight more vigorously against all trials. And finally, even though we feel within ourselves such great evil that resists God’s will, let us continue to struggle mightily against all tests of our faith, knowing that God will support us if we experience some lack.

In addition, the father of the faithful, who was so exalted by God, was put to shame. It is as if God had set up a scaffold in the middle of his church and had put Abraham on it to make him acknowledge his sin and serve as a shame until the end of the world because of that act.

Now that teaches us that, if we have offended God, we must not make it an evil to bear the shame of our sin and that God’s righteousness must be restored. If he chastises us, we must bear...
that shame even if everybody has accused us, for we gain nothing by resisting him. Thus God's righteousness is to be more precious to us than our own reputations. So let us not act like those who answer contemptuously after committing some crime: 'What will become of my honour? Must I be defamed this way? Do I have to suffer such shame?' God will not enter their thinking. They will not be thanked because they did not lead a thousand to hell because of the scandal they commit and the bad example they set; that will not contribute to their reputation, and yet they will want others to continue to think highly of them. Now we see that God did not spare his servant Abraham, even though he had already established him as the father of the faithful, as he will make known later and we will see in the following chapter (cf. Gen. 17:4).

We now have to be specific about what the story contains. It is said that Sarah had neither conceived nor given birth since Abraham had been promised a lineage (cf. Gen. 15:4-5). Consequently, she gives her handmaid to her husband as a wife so he can beget a child by her and thus fulfil God's promise. Now we see here that Sarah's zeal was good. Her intention was good. So it would seem her action was excusable. And in fact God's Spirit intended to show that her fault was not as great as if she had had something bad and devious in mind, for she did not want to make a brothel of her house or be a procuress for her husband. What then? She had no ambition to have a lineage, but she receives God's promise in faith. Her desire was good; she scorns both this world's goods and its ease and everything she has in it to the point of forgetting herself; for we know the power of jealousy in a woman. And yet when a wife wants her husband to take a second wife and have children by him, are we not justified in saying that she is not concerned for herself? Consequently, Sarah must have had a wonderful faith and been on fire, so to speak, to obtain what God had promised him, namely, a blessed seed in which resided the complete salvation of the world. That is a foundation as beautiful as it is wondrous. An angel could not be more perfect in that desire and commitment than Sarah is. Even so, that excellent commitment which causes her to stumble and commit the many mistakes we have mentioned here, that one act, which leads her to commit five or six different sins, nonetheless proceeds from a worthy zeal.

Upon seeing a situation like that, let us each distrust ourselves when we want to follow our own feeling. It is true that was done by a woman despite the special commendable qualities God had given her. We do not see that she ever murmured against her husband. And when he moves her from place to place on occasion, she is as long-suffering as he; she is his companion in all his dispositions; she obeyed God to the utmost, and since she was the mother of all believers, there is no doubt she was appropriately instructed to walk in the ways of God and lean on his promises. And yet we see what happened to her. Why? Because she wanted to give her own interpretation. So what do we have to do? Let us return to the lesson we learned from the prophet Isaiah, which is that our power must be in silence and rest, that is, if we do not wish to be shaken and finally fall, we must use the virtue of patience, just as we are exhorted to do later in the tenth chapter of Hebrews (verse 16), for we are always in such a hurry that if God does not finish what he said, we think everything is lost and that it will not be done on time. 'Oh, God promised this and that, and he does not show us he is willing to bring it to pass. So it is over if I do not step in right now.' We would indeed like to be God's companions. And why? First, because we are not content with his word, we want to stir in some mishmash and some brilliance from our own heads. And that is corruption, as I have said. And then it is as if we only wanted him to be our help and as if we could provide something for him, as if his power were not sufficient. Now that does not occur to us immediately, as someone who might have asked Sarah,
Do you wish to interpret the matter better than God? Do you presume to help him as if he were not sufficient to bring to pass what he promised without your or any other creature’s involvement? It is certain she would have preferred to be cast into a bottomless pit than to have claimed that. And who would have said to her, ‘Are you undertaking to help God as if he did not possess enough of his own power?’ Such a diabolical thought would never have occurred to anyone. Nevertheless, we see what happened to her. As soon as she interprets the promise, it is certain she is disappointed because she is adding to God’s word and is in that way perverting it and turning it from its true meaning, and then she proceeds by her foolish temerity. How? She is depriving God of his honour because she wishes to use a means he did not establish, but one she chose. So we understand the instruction given to us here when we know how to profit from it.

In addition, let us note that it is not enough to consider a goal which is good and approved but that we must always use the means that God allows. Now we have two ways that guide us in ordering our lives well: one is to aspire to what God calls us to; the other is to know how we must walk. God fails us neither in the one nor in the other, for in his word he puts a target, a bull’s-eye, for us to aim at. We can never fail if we keep our eyes and our senses fixed on the purpose God sets before us, and in addition he gives us limits or restrictions that say: ‘You will not veer to the left or to the right. That is your path. Walk in it.’ Thus does our Lord proclaim that his will is an excellent guide and that if we do not veer from it, we will always walk the right path to reach our goal, which he is leading us to. That, then, is what we have in God’s word.

And yet, it is not enough to say, ‘My intention is good’; and I am not talking about that good intention the papists fantasize about when they say, ‘I do that with good intention, even though it is completely contrary to God’s word.’ But when our good intention is founded on God’s truth and we can say that our desire is to serve God and that he is content with that because I am intending to do what he commands, that is still not enough, but we must concentrate on how we go about it. In other words, fully wishing to obey God, we follow his commands, that is, our steps are led and guided in such a way that we undertake nothing but what he approves and what we know he requires of us.

That is how Sarah offended, and Abraham too, because he so easily believed her. For it is quite certain that Abraham was not motivated by a wicked lust. He was not lecherous or given to excess. He kept faith with his marriage. And it was not his idea to seek a second wife, for it could have been said that he used that hypocritically as a pretext, but that did not occur to him. He is waiting for God to do what he said. So this is Sarah’s idea. In fact, she wants to enjoy the blessing she expects from God, which is not for a worldly and corruptible good but for the salvation of her soul and the whole world. The same is true of Abraham. Being influenced by her, he was motivated by no other desire than to have a lineage, and his pursuit was not worldly. They both want to acquire only what they need, that is, they could not be children of God without that lineage they were anticipating. Their fault, then, lies in the means. They want God’s word to have its place, but they want to carry it out. It is their fantasy. When they put themselves in charge, it is as if they wanted their powers to be mingled with God’s. And since they are following their notion, they indicate that God is not enough for them.

But the fact remains, as I said, that if we are to regulate our lives well, we must move only in the direction we should, but we must always carefully ask whether our means are acceptable and whether God permits them. In fact, experience shows us if we are not circumspect, we will often be carried away by one extreme or another. We see people of great zeal who say, ‘How am I to do...
that? Oh, God has to be served and honoured.' And then they will say, 'This is what will advance the cause of the gospel. And then, are we not obliged to help our brothers?' Wondrous are their undertakings! In fact, they will have good motives, but they will not be better than Abraham's and Sarah's. Yet they do not want to tread heavily, but they will make some very serious mistakes. And what will be the outcome? They will often have some good way to go about it, but they will discover in the end that God does not want men to take a lot of liberties and dismiss him and put him on the sidelines. Such people will be disappointed with their efforts in the end. And it will do them no good to complain, for they will have thrown themselves into the ditch. The path was set out before them, that is, they should not have attempted anything that was not allowed by God's word. Now they wanted to be wise. They wanted to be quick to the task and join hands with God. And then they wanted to insert a part of their own wisdom, but that only spoiled everything. We see that at every turn. So let us avoid undirected zeal.

Many Jews did not crucify our Lord Jesus Christ out of malice or because they hated the teaching he brought, nor did they reject the salvation of the world when they later persecuted the gospel. Paul testifies that they had a zeal for God and that it was intense because they thought everything was lost (cf. Phil. 3:5-6) and that their entire religion would be struck down if our Lord Jesus Christ were to be put first. But their zeal was undirected.

Consequently, for our acts to be approved, they must be motivated by zeal and prudence. Now that prudence will not be found in us. We must seek for it in God's word and in his Spirit, as he says in the thirty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah, for there he rebukes all the counsels that men imagine and fabricate without consulting him or allowing his Spirit to preside at their deliberations. Those, the prophet notes, are the two mistakes men commonly make. In other words, they do not give the Holy Spirit the pre-eminence he ought to have. That is, they act without seeking instruction from God's word. That being the case, let us be advised to cling to the pure simplicity of faith and be careful not to add any of our own notions. Then, since we are tending in the direction God calls us, let us adhere to the acceptable ways he has established so that we will not deviate to the left or to the right. And third, when we are moved by a worthy zeal, let us control it so that we will not be carried away by unguided impetuosity. Let us ask of God, and let us allow his Spirit to preside over us. That, then, is in short what we have to remember.

But let us add what has just been said about being patient, for when it comes to God's promises, it is certain we rip them to pieces every time unless our minds remain calm. The vice of haste is so deeply rooted in men that they will rush ahead unless they are forcibly restrained, so to speak. So we must struggle against our excessive desires and bring ourselves into line with God's will, and once he begins, we must allow him to complete his task and work the way that seems good and expedient to him and not to us. That is what we need to note.

Now as for this second marriage, we have already said that Sarah and Abraham perverted God's order and profaned the marriage he had sanctified and blessed so there would be good and worthy partners among people. It is true that the unfortunate custom which ruled at the time led them to do that. And on that subject we still have to be admonished not to lose the custom of marriage. For what God declared at the creation of Adam seems to have been buried, namely, that two would become one flesh and that the man would have to be satisfied with one helper (cf. Gen. 2:18, 24). It is as if that were put underfoot. Why? The custom is against
them and they think that what is in vogue among men and what is
the prevailing custom is the law and that everything is permitted
since everyone is in agreement. As today, the papists are becom­
ing hardened against God's truth, even though it is quite clear to
them; for if they can claim: 'If this has already been the practice for
such a long time and everybody goes along with us,' they will have
established the practice and God will seem to be shut out. Why?
Men took over whenever they did what they did, and their kind
have continued long.

Now that is how Abraham and Sarah were led astray in that
particular. In that country of the East, it was a very commonly cor­
rupt practice for a man to take several wives; for this evil continues
even today among the Turks, and the Jews relaxed their practice.
God rebuked them for it through the prophets (cf. Mal. 2:14-15),
but he could not keep them from it, for they always gave in to it.
So at the time, there were many women who were going from man
to man. For men did not know or serve God, and the sanctity of
marriage was violated in that practice. Abraham and Sarah were
blinded by that, for they did not inquire as they should have, in
keeping with Jesus Christ's admonition, whether that was so from
the beginning (cf. Matt. 19:8). For with this single statement, our
Lord Jesus Christ destroys any argument that can be alleged by
men. How so? It was even permitted in the law, and examples
of it are as commonplace as anything else. ‘Indeed, but what did
God institute,’ he says, ‘if he is the author of marriage? He must
be believed and followed. He says that the two will be one flesh.’
So Abraham has a veil before his eyes when he does not adhere to
God's first institution, as he should have. However, when things
are in a state of confusion in the world and people have given
themselves great licence and turned from the right path, let us
be advised not to have our minds occupied with that, but to push
aside all those troubles and indiscretions and ponder God's truth
without adding human speculations to it. That, in short, is what we
still have to remember.

Nevertheless, we see by the reward meted out to Abraham and
Sarah how God chastises his own. Moreover, when men take more
liberties than they should by adding all this hodgepodge that they
bring with them, they turn everything they hope for upside down
and God mocks their folly. What happens when Abraham takes
Hagar as his wife? It is true she conceives and that was miraculous
in itself, for Abraham was old and decrepit, but he nonetheless
begat a lineage. So it appears that Sarah was a prudent woman
and her counsel was the best for the world, and even that Abraham was
foolish for not thinking he was supposed to assist in God's prom­
ise. Now that is how our Lord often permits those who are rash
and undertake things that blossom in their own minds to prosper
and then become forgetful of him, for it seems that God has bless­
ed them, favours them and in this way approves what they have
attempted. When he has thus extended his hand to them, what
can one think but that he agrees with them and indicates that their
undertaking and counsel are good? So it seems that when men
prosper in their enterprises, God folds under their brashness and
foolish presumption. Indeed, our Lord permits them to do so for a
time only to humble them and bring them to confusion later.

Therefore, even though our counsels have some success and for­
tunate outcome at first, let us be careful not to applaud ourselves for
what we have done against God's word, for if we were to have the
best results in the world, we will always be condemned for our folly.
Let us not judge from the first results, for our Lord will turn all our
hopes on end in a moment of time, and we will remain in confusion.
And that is also why we must return to him. But if he occasionally
permits things to turn out as we desire, let us not for that reason
be hardened and obstinate, but let us realize we have exceeded our
limits and confess that we have failed and are guilty in our hearts so
that God will pardon us our excesses and not abandon us. That, then,
is what we have to observe about what Moses recounts.

In addition, we must note that Abraham had already lived ten
years in the land of Canaan, for he had left the land of his birth
long before, as we have seen that he had remained in Canaan until
after his father's death (cf. Gen. 11:32; 12:4-5). Sarah waited for a
long time to see whether God wanted to give her a lineage. Was
not ten years long enough? He gives no semblance of beginning.
She could certainly be excused for being patient so long. And now
that Hagar conceives without delay, it could be said that God is
making her counsel prosper because he accepts it. But let us learn
that it is not enough for us to exercise great patience. We must see
it through to the end, for ours is not a journey of three or four days;
nor are our struggles for three or four days, but we must continue
until we die. So, as Paul says, let us learn not to look back but to
look to what lies ahead (cf. Phil. 3:13). So much for that point.

After we have endured a long time and demonstrated great con­
stancy and perseverance of faith for a period of ten and twenty
years, let us not think we have done our share. And not only that.
Let us then be on guard more than ever. Abraham had overcome
many and grievous trials. We saw how the famine drove him from
the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 12:10), but he did not succumb; he
remained firm and constant. It is true he failed once in respect
of his wife, and that was indeed a weakness (cf. Gen. 12:11-13),
but he nonetheless returned to the land of Canaan because God's
promise has a grip on him and possesses him (cf. Gen. 13:1), and
he is concerned about nothing else. In a word, we see in him an
invincibly courageous heart and a mortal man. And that trial, what
is it? It is but a small puff of wind, a fly passing before his eyes, and
without thinking about it, he becomes a corrupter of God's order!
He breaks his marriage vow. He turns away from the promise and
interprets it badly. Then he goes beyond what is allowed. In a word,

he acted very stupidly; and that trial is quite insignificant. Let us
see in that our weakness. All the more then must we take refuge
in God and cling to him as being hidden under his wings when
he brings us the grace to walk uprightly for a long time. That, in
summary, is what we have to remember about this.

Moreover, since Hagar's conception, insofar as it concerns Abra­
ham and Sarah, was only a semblance of success, let us learn again
that we need to be deprived of everything we might hope for, and
let God deprive us of what we might desire so that we will always
prefer his holy word to what we might naturally consider to be
appropriate, expedient, and useful. That is another thing this pas­
sage instructs us about.

The fact remains that in the end God shows them their folly
when Sarah is afflicted by her handmaid, and Abraham is also
vexed, persecuted, and blamed, even though falsely. And that, I
say, is a just compensation for their wanting to move the situation
forward on their own. Sarah was saying, 'It is possible I will be
built up.' That word signifies she has a house. It is true that in the
language this word 'son' comes from 'to build up' by similarity, for
the verb 'to build up' is related to the similarity. Now in marriage
there appears to be no building except that of children. So when
Sarah speaks of a building, it is because there are children, there is
a family, and seed will follow. That is what sustains the world and
also each house. If a man and a woman live without successors, it
is as if they had travelled the whole road of life and that nothing
remained after their deaths. But if a house is left behind, the house
remains established.

So in that way Sarah wanted to be built up, that is, to have a
house established. And God thwarts her plan. She is obliged to
be despised by her handmaid, as she deserves to be, for it is the

1 The Hebrew verbal form in Genesis 16:2 is *ibhânâth*, from the root *bnh* (to build,
to edify); and 'son' is *bn*.—M.E.
handmaid who built. But on what foundation? On that false notion which she got into her head and even on a bold notion contrary to God's word, one which brought with it a kind of blasphemy, since God had wanted to condemn her severely, even though it had not occurred to her that he would. Now Abraham, who too quickly took his wife's counsel, now has her as his judge. That is what happens when we abandon God and his word and listen to men. Those very people who have corrupted us and led us to perdition have to blind us later and cut our throats, in a manner of speaking. Why? We have preferred them to God. So he has to avenge himself for the contempt we have shown for his majesty inasmuch as we have chosen creatures and worms of the earth over him. Consequently, Abraham, whose authority was greater than the woman's, subjected himself to her over against God. A man can indeed follow his wife's word in a worthy undertaking, but Abraham abandoned God and let himself be influenced by shallow advice. As a result, his wife must now blame him, condemn him, call him spiteful and corrupt and wrong, and insult him greatly, even though he is innocent of it all.

And now we first have to note here the example of man's ingratitude. Hagar had been honoured by her mistress more than she deserved, for she was a handmaid, not like the ones we have today for hire, but she was a servant for life and death, a slave, as we say. Sarah had such authority over her that there was no question of paying wages, for she had to live and die under her mistress's hand. It was not necessary to come to terms back then as now: 'Will I have food? Will I have wine to drink? Will I have this? Will I have that?' For when they wanted to give her oat bread, she had to be content. That was the condition of serfs back then. Now here is Hagar, who is so honoured that she is a wife of her master, Sarah's companion. She forgot the position from which she came to the extent of scorning her mistress. Here we see a notable example of the ingratitude of people who cannot stand the idea of being lifted up by God, especially when they are lifted from a base condition, when they are immediately changed and no longer recognized. If there was any modesty in them before, there is now only pride and haughtiness. And where does that come from? From their ingratitude toward God and their neighbours, who have helped them and extended a hand to them. This example is given to teach us to correct that vice, when we are infected with it, so that we will not follow the example of Hagar, who is here assigned to ignominy. For God gives her a sentence of condemnation, as we will see farther along (cf. Gen. 16:9). That, then, for that point.

But Sarah and Abraham deserve to have Hagar as a thorn in their side. Why? As I have already said, Sarah wanted to pick up on God's right and authority and contribute what was not hers to contribute when she came up with a new way of marriage. It was an illegitimate form of marriage which was totally repugnant to God's institution, which is not to be violated by men. So Sarah takes from God when she gives to her servant. Where does she get the authority to make Hagar her husband's wife? Neither she nor even the angels of paradise have it, for God had already provided a contrary way. So it is quite right that she is chastised, as we now see. Thus let us learn that when we offer our hand to someone to help him, we are always to do so in good conscience and not to show contempt for God, and we must not take as our own what he rightly permits us. That is also the meaning of the proverb, that if we take a man from the gallows, he will himself place us there. Why? For let us consider who most often motivates us to give pleasure, to gratify and favour one another, to do a good turn, as we say. We do not consider what God promises us, but what is worse, we appear to have conspired against God, and all the favours, kindnesses, and pleasures that we provide are designed to snatch from God the superiority he reserves for himself and to do more
than we are permitted. So let us not be surprised if those whom we gratify beyond all reason later rise up against us, for we first rose up against God. So let us take heed when it is a matter of giving something or other to men that we not give what God reserved for himself, but let us give what he has placed within our hands and intends for us to share with others. Let each consider his ability and the means that are given to him from on high, and thus let each employ his efforts to please his neighbours, to help them in their time of need and nothing more. For if we go beyond that, it is certain God will know how to compensate us. And if Abraham was not spared, even less will we be.

Moreover, when we see that Sarah is so hot with anger that she comes straight and rants against her husband, we are admonished to keep our passions bridled, for we can give them just a little leeway and they will take charge and we will lose all restraint and be a raging fire. Sarah, as we have pointed out, was with good reason called mother of the church, and God gave her what she needed. When he gave her the honour of raising her to such a high position, it is certain he did not do so simply to adorn her with a frivolous title, but he immediately gave her the requisite qualities. Now she comes against her husband, whom she gave such reverence that she called him her lord, not perfunctorily, as Peter points out. He says that faithful women do very well when they conform to her example by yielding to the mastery owed to their husband (cf. 1 Pet. 3:5-6). Now she pounces like a wild animal without considering that she is subject to her husband by God's command. And what is the reason? Her passion blinds her to the point that she loses all reason, moderation, and modesty. You would say she is no longer herself. All the more then must we work to repress our passions when we see such outrageous and impetuous actions and realize we could not gain control if the long hand of God did not grant us the grace to overcome them. So when we tremble with such anger, let us be prudent and use great effort to calm down. That is what we have to remember.

And even what Sarah adds must strengthen this teaching for us. The first thing she says is that the wrong done to her comes from Abraham. And then she takes the name of God in vain (cf. Gen. 16:5b), which will be discussed later. But when she unjustly accuses her husband, that ought to advise us to calm down, even though we have suffered some wrong, and to consider carefully whether we have been wronged out of malice or inadvertently, or who perpetrated it or how the person went about it. So we must inquire carefully when we have been stung with words so we do not go off half-cocked the way Sarah did. For it is certain we will do a hundred times worse than she did because we have learned much less than she did in God's school. So let us be advised to be very calm when we endure wrong so we will not blame our neighbours out of hand and will also remember Paul's admonition that love is not distrustful (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5), that we must not accuse men before we are sure they are guilty. So that is how we are to take even more advantage of Sarah's example. But the rest will be drawn out tomorrow, at God's pleasure.

Now let us bow before the majesty of our gracious God in acknowledgment of our faults, praying he will touch us increasingly to the quick and bring us to such repentance that we will continually groan before him and also struggle valiantly against all our vices and corruptions until we are cleansed of them. And let us take more and more advantage of his will until we have learned to honour him as we should. In other words, may he govern us, use us, and so direct our steps that our only guide will be his holy word and we will have no other desire or inclination but to conform our ways to his. May he grant that grace not only to us but to all the peoples and nations on earth.