

INTRODUCTION

We live in such a litigious society that people have sued companies if they have suffered harm from using their products. This has led to lawyers helping them to limit their liability by adding all kinds of product warnings. A prime example of that was when the 80-year-old lady sued McDonald's because she spilled hot coffee on her lap. They settled out of court, but now all McDonald's cups have a warning label that says, "Caution: Handle with Care. I'm hot." But some of the product labels are bordering on ridiculous. Here is eight of my favorite funny product warning labels. And remember, there's probably a lawsuit behind each one of these labels.

1. Nytol sleeping pills you can find the Warning: May Cause Drowsiness.
2. Vidal Sassoon hair dryers: Do not use while sleeping.
3. Collins Vanishing Fabric Markers: Do not use to sign checks or legal documents.
4. Apple iPod Shuffle: Do not eat.
5. Dremel Rotary Tool: This product not intended for use as a dental drill. After I carve this ornament, I think I'll do a root canal.
6. Frankel's Superman costume: Does not enable flight or super strength.
7. Rowenta Steam Iron: Do not iron clothes while wearing them.
8. Scrubbing Bubbles Toilet Wand: Do not use for personal hygiene.

Those product warnings may sound unnecessary, but I've introduced them because the book of Hebrews is full of warnings. There are several strong slap-in-the-face warnings. There's a warning against having a hardened heart like the children of Israel who turned their hearts from God and wandered in the wilderness. There's a warning against the danger of arrested spiritual development.

But this book is also full of a series of encouragements, causing one scholar to call it a book of slaps and pats. The writer of Hebrews develops a cycle of warnings (slaps) followed by encouragements (pats on the back). In our text today, we find the warning: Don't be lazy. It's followed by the encouragement: Imitate those who have demonstrated faith and patience.

Hebrews 6:12-20. "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."

"Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things [His promise and His oath] in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has

entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Today is Time Change Sunday. In 1964 Bob Dylan sang, “The times they are a changing.” But he wasn’t talking about changing your clocks to adjust to Daylight Saving Time. He was talking about the social and political upheaval happening in the 1960s.

We live in a world that is constantly changing, but according to this passage of scripture, there are two unchangeable things about God. They are His promise and His oath. And in a world where seasons change, people change, and politics change, it’s good to link our lives to the unchanging goodness of God. And Jesus Christ is our constant source of hope in the midst of change because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore.

The writer of Hebrews warns us about being lazy and instead encourages us to imitate those who by faith and patience received God’s promises. And we don’t have to guess who is a good example. He nominates Abraham for us to imitate. So let’s see how Abraham responded to these two unchangeable things: God’s promise and God’s oath.

1. ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD’S PROMISE

God made a two-fold promise to Abram. The first part of the promise had to do with children. First, God promised Abraham that his wife, Sarah, would give birth to a son and one day he would have as many descendants as there were stars in the sky. The second part of the promise had to do with land. God promised Abram that his descendants would settle in the land of Canaan.

There were two big obstacles to this two-fold promise. First, as far as the land was concerned, the property wasn’t available: The Canaanites, the Moabites, the Perizzites, and the termites were already living there. God said, “I’ll take care of that in my time.”

Second, when it came to the promise of a son, Sarah was barren and by this time she was in her sixties. Abraham was 75. To make matters worse, Abram’s name meant, ‘Exalted Father.’ We would call him “Big Daddy” today. Every time he stopped for water he would be asked, “What’s your name?” He would say, “My name is ‘big daddy.’” The other nomads would say, “Well, Big Daddy, where are all your children?”

We read these words about him in Romans 4, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations...Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God.” (Romans 4:18-20)

Meanwhile, Sarah lost a little of her faith along the way. She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. She said, “Abram, I’m sterile, but why don’t you sleep with my maid Hagar, maybe she can have a child.” I can just hear Abram saying, “Yes, dear. Whatever you say.” And Hagar did have a son and they named him Ishmael. Ishmael became the father of all the Arab people. So we

see the tragic consequences when we try to accomplish God's plan using our own human means and methods instead of God's supernatural power.

So finally, when Abraham was almost a hundred years old, Sarah conceived a son and gave birth to Isaac. The angels said, "Name him Isaac," which means 'laughter' because Sarah laughed at the thought of bearing a child in her old age. And so, Abraham is an example to us two powerful virtues: Faith and Patience!

2. ABRAHAM RECEIVED GOD'S OATH

Oaths are important. I was present when Sheriff Larry Smith took his oath of office. I have been present at the Federal Courthouse as new American citizens take an oath of citizenship. I was blessed to be present in Washington in January when President Trump took his oath of office. And in almost every courtroom in America, witnesses are asked to take an oath that what they are about to say is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God."

In the Old Testament, oaths were widely used. In fact, they were required. Men would swear by someone greater than themselves. If they were in an argument and they said, "As surely as Yahweh lives, I'm telling the truth" that would end the argument right there. In fact, oath-taking had become such a huge tradition that by the time Jesus came along, He mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Don't swear by heaven or earth, or Jerusalem. Instead, you should be so honest that your 'yes' should mean 'yes' and your 'no' should mean 'no.'" (James 5:12)

So when God used an oath, there was nothing greater than Himself to swear by. So several times in the Old Testament the Lord swore by Himself. He would say, "As sure as I live, this will take place."

And God not only gave Abraham a Promise, He guaranteed the promise with an oath.

When Abraham's son, Isaac, was just a boy, God told Abraham to Isaac to Him. One of my favorite Italian artists was Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio, who died at age 38 at the pinnacle of his artistic career. His painting, "The Sacrifice of Isaac," hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. By now Abraham is 113 and Isaac is a teenager. So Abraham took his son to Mt. Moriah. They had probably made animal sacrifices there before and as they walked up the mountain, Isaac was puzzled. He asked, "Dad, where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide the lamb." Isaac didn't know he was going to be the sacrifice.

For many years, I wondered *why* Abraham would be willing to kill his son. We find the answer in Hebrews 11 where the Bible says Abraham had so much faith that he believed if he did slay his son, God would raise him from the dead!

As Abraham was preparing to plunge the knife into his only son, God sent an angel to stop Him. There was a ram caught in a thicket, and Abraham sacrificed the ram instead of his son.

Mt. Moriah and Mt. Calvary are on the same mountain. Centuries after Abraham and Isaac walked up Mt. Moriah, the Lord Jesus was our ram caught in a thicket—His thicket was a crown of thorns. Jesus became our sacrifice. He was our substitute.

When God saw the depth of Abraham's faith, He made an oath to Abraham. "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." (Genesis 22:16-18) The descendent of Abraham and Isaac through whom all nations would be blessed would be fulfilled in Jesus.

Even in the New Testament, we see the oath of God. In Romans 14:11 God says, "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me, and every tongue will confess to God."

So the two unchangeable things by which it is impossible for God to lie is His Promise and His oath. We see what it meant to Abraham, but what does it mean to us? Let me share with you three Take-Away Truths from this passage.

1. I can trust all of God's promises

We read in the text, "Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

Throughout history, God has been making promises. The first promise God made was in Genesis 9. The Bible tells about a terrible flood that occurred on earth many centuries ago. It's not just in the Bible, almost all civilizations having a preserved written ancient history refer to this great flood. After the fatal flood, God made a promise to Noah and his descendants that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. Whenever you see a rainbow, you should be reminded of God's first promise. The last promise of the Bible is found on the last page of Revelation where Jesus promised, "Yes, I am coming quickly!"

How many promises do think God has made? There's a little devotional book called *A Promise a Day* that contains 365 promises of God; one for each day of a year. But don't stop with one-a-day. God has made many more promises than that.

Herbert Lockyer was a preacher and prolific author who wrote the book, *All the Promises of the Bible*. Dr. Lockyer went through the Bible and counted 7,457 promises God has given to man! That means if you read one promise a day, it would take you over 20 years to read them all! If I tried to preach on a different promise each Sunday, it would take me 143 years to cover them all!

And for those of us who follow Jesus, God has already said, "Yes!" to every one of these promises. The Bible says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in

Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

We will all suffer from broken promises during this life. We will all hear things like, "The check is in the mail." Or "This will only take a moment of your time." Or "I'm not trying to sell you anything." Or "This won't hurt a bit." Or, "If I'm elected, I will..." Someone once said politics is the most promising of all careers, because they make promises and break them.

The wife of Albert Einstein was once asked if she believed her husband's theory of relativity. She said, "Of course." When asked if she understood it, she replied, "I don't understand it, but I believe it because I know that Albert believes it and he can be trusted."

You don't have to understand all the promises of God; you just need to trust God to deliver them to you! Trusting the word of other people is often like trying to walk across a bridge of Kleenex. But the promises of God are rock solid, and you can trust them, because you can trust God. As the song says, "Standing on the promises that cannot fail; When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail; By the living Word of God, I SHALL prevail! Standing on the Promises of God!" (Words by R. Kelso Carter)

2. I can know God's purpose for my life

Our text says, "God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear." God gave Abraham a purpose for his life. Abraham understood it and it gave him a reason to wake up every day. What is it that wakes you up every day? Do you know God's purpose for your life? God has a plan for your life and it is not to hurt you, but to help you. His purpose is to give you a hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

God has both a general and specific purpose for your life. You will never understand the specific purpose for which you were created until you understand and participate with God and His general plan for all of His children. We find God's purpose clearly stated in Romans 8. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Romans 8:28-29)

Not everything that happens in life is good. But when you understand God's bigger plan, you can see God is at work for good through every experience of life. God's purpose for your life can be summarized in this statement: God chose you in order to change you to be like Jesus. God wants to change your character to be like Christ and ultimately He'll even change your body to be one like that of the Lord.

People often misunderstand the doctrine of predestination. The Bible never speaks of those who are predestined to heaven or predestined to hell. It only speaks of God's children to be predestined to be like Jesus. I believe you have a choice about whether or not to follow Jesus. But once you are truly born again, you don't have a choice about what God wants to do with your life—He wants to change you to be like Jesus.

I can illustrate it this way. You have a choice about whether or not to get on an American Eagle Jet out here at Tyler Airport. But once you get in seat and get strapped in, you don't have any choice about the destination of the aircraft. It is predestined to fly to DFW. And once you are strapped into a relationship with God, you are predestined to become more and more like Jesus. That's God's purpose for your life.

3. I can find refuge when I flee to Jesus

The writer used interesting language when he wrote, "We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged." The idea of fleeing and taking hold of something is a clear reference to what the Bible describes as cities of refuge in the Old Testament. You hear a lot about sanctuary cities in the U.S., a city of refuge was something totally different. A sanctuary city offers refuge to those who are guilty of immigration laws. A city of refuge offered safety to those who were innocent of murder.

There are several passages about cities of refuge. Here's one: "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood." (Joshua 20:2-3)

The Hebrew justice system taught "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That was actually a merciful standard for that time. Because before that, if you poked out somebody's eye, they wouldn't just poke your eye out; they would kill you. The Hebrew system practiced capital punishment, a life for a life, in the case of murder. But there really wasn't a law about manslaughter. So God told the Jews to set up certain cities of refuge. If a man accidentally killed another man, the family of the dead man could demand blood. But the guilty party could flee into one of those cities of refuge. If he could run into the city and grab hold of one of the four corners of the city altar, he would be safe there from his pursuers. He had taken a life. He was guilty, but if there was no malice or evil intent, he could remain in the city of refuge in order to be safe from the revenge of the family of the man who had died. Citizens of these cities of refuge would be willing to give their lives if necessary to protect those who had fled there for refuge.

CONCLUSION

To this day in the Middle East, this principle of protective hospitality is still strictly followed. A few years ago I saw the movie Lone Survivor. It was based on the true story of Marcus Luttrell, a Texan who was member of a SEAL Team. They were sent into battle to take out some Taliban leaders. Their position was compromised and they had to flee. All of them were killed except Marcus Luttrell, and he sought refuge in an Afghan village. The members of the village practiced this Biblical custom of protective hospitality and they gave him refuge from the Taliban. The Taliban attacked these villagers and killed some of them for providing shelter to the American fighter.

That's who Jesus is for us. He is our city of refuge, and even though we're guilty, when we flee to him, we can grab hold of the hope He gives us. And as we will see next week, our hope is as sure as an anchor. And you can be sure that the anchor will hold in spite of the storm.

Is there anything God can't do? Yes, He can't lie. In a world that is constantly changing, it's good to know that there are at least two things that are unchanging: God's promise and God's oath!

OUTLINE

1. ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD'S PROMISE

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations...Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God."
Romans 4:18-20

2. ABRAHAM RECEIVED GOD'S OATH

"I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."
Genesis 22:16-18

TAKE-AWAY TRUTHS

1. I can trust all of God's promises

"Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." vs. 12

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."
2 Corinthians 1:20

2. I can know God's purpose for my life

"God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear." vs. 17

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."
Romans 8:28-29

3. I can find refuge when I flee to Jesus

"We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged." vs. 18

"Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood."
Joshua 20:2-3

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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