

God's Covenants

The Obedience of Faith

Key idea:

True faith leads to a life of growing obedience to God's covenant and commands.

Key text:

Genesis 17 (17:1-14; 23-27)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

²³ On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Key points:

1. God made astounding covenant promises to Abram, and He reiterated those promises consistently throughout Abram's life.
2. Abram's response to God's covenant promises was faith, and God counted his faith as righteousness.
3. The Gospel tells us that the only way any human being can ever be justified before God is by faith alone.
4. After Abram had already been justified, God commanded him to obey God's covenant commands and to walk before God in obedience.
5. Faith produces obedience to God's commands - not just adherence to religious rituals but growing obedience to all of God's commands.
6. God's covenant people will desire to follow God by obeying His commands and turning from evil.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's text and teaching stood out most to me? Why?
2. Why does God seem to repeat His promises to Abram so many times? Do I need to be reminded of God's gracious promises? Am I more hardwired to think in terms of the law or in terms of the Gospel?
3. In light of God's constant repetition of His gracious covenant promises, what should I do to remind myself of God's promises to me? How can I practically preach the Gospel to myself each day?
4. Why does God change Abram's name from Abram to Abraham? How would this help Abraham remember God's covenant promises to Him?
5. Why does God command Abraham to be circumcised? How does this covenant sign function in reminding Abraham of His covenant obligations? What would happen if Abraham's physical descendants refused to accept this covenant sign?
6. What is the relationship between faith and obedience in the life of God's people? Why is the order of this relationship important? What happens if I get the order confused or reversed?

7. Does God's call to obedience only include religious rituals such as water baptism, worship, Bible reading, and prayer, or does it include more? How do I know? Why is this important?
8. Does all of this mean that if I am not perfect in obedience I am not a Christian or that I am in danger of losing my salvation? If not, what will it look like in my daily life?
9. If I am justified by faith alone, why does God care if I obey His commands? Why does He call me to wage war against sin in my life if my sins are already forgiven?
10. Is there a particular area in my life that the Holy Spirit is showing me needs to be submitted to God and His covenant commands? How can I grow in obedience in this area?
11. Whom can I pray for, share what I have learned, and invite to church this week?

Preview of next week: Roger and Marilyn Reeck of Wycliffe Bible Translators