

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

## I. Intro - Coptic Tattoos

- A. Huge Coptic holy site (from top)
- B. Coptic holy site (from bottom)
- C. A Coptic tattoo stand at holy site - a tattoo stand????
- D. Coptic practice of tattoos to mark them as Christians
- E. Today - God's command for circumcision - why?
- F. We have seen about faith, but what about obedience?
- G. What does it mean for us to be in covenant with God?

## II. The Background: God's Blessings, Abraham's Faith

- A. God has repeatedly promised to bless Abraham
    - "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.  
<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:2-3
    - 1. Posterity - great nation (v2)
    - 2. Provision - I will bless you (v2)
    - 3. Prominence - make your name great (v2)
    - 4. Protection - bless & curse (v3)
- The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." Genesis 12:7
- 5. The great promises of seed/offspring and land

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1

- 6. God will be Abram's protector - don't fear; shield
- 7. God will bless Abram - your very great reward

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land. Gen. 15:18

- 8. The promise for descendants & land again
- 9. God had passed between the pieces to make the covenant
- 10. All of this is before our text in Genesis 17
- 11. In God's covenant, His gracious promises and faithfulness are always prior to any human response

### B. Abram's response: faith

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

- 1. Abram's response to God's gracious promises is faith
- 2. Abram's faith is credited as righteousness by God
- 3. The proper response to God's gracious covenant is faith - believing His promise to us.
- 4. Those who respond to God's covenant promise as counted as righteous - as if they had not violated God's covenant commands but rather kept them faithfully
- 5. This is the ONLY WAY people have ever been brought into a relationship with God - faith

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. Romans 4:1–5

- a. Abram was justified by faith, not works
- b. God counts as righteous those who believe like Abraham

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” Romans 4:6–8

- c. David was justified by faith apart from works
- d. David lives under the law - but was still justified by faith alone
- e. Justification by faith alone has always been the only way we become part of the people of God.

### III. God’s Call - Obedience Flowing From Faith

#### A. God reiterates His gracious covenant promises

“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.” Genesis 17:4–8

- 1. God promises MANY descendants
- 2. He changes Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many) to confirm the promises
- 3. God also promises the land again
- 4. The covenant motto - I will be your God...

#### B. God commands Abraham to obey the covenant

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Genesis 17:9–11

- 1. Abraham and his descendants must be circumcised
- 2. They are to take the sign of circumcision to show they are part of the covenant
- 3. Those who refuse to embrace obedience must be “cut off” from the covenant people  
Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” Genesis 17:14
  - a. Play on words “cut off” for not “cutting off” foreskin

- b. To refuse this sign is to refuse the covenant itself
- 4. Abraham obeys and is circumcised
 

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. Genesis 17:23

  - a. Abraham did not protest he was too old - he obeyed
  - b. Abraham, Ishmael, and every male in the house were circumcised that very day
  - c. This is clear, decisive obedience

#### IV. The Obedience of Faith

- A. Circumcision was a sign and seal of righteousness already possessed
 

We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. <sup>12</sup> And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. Romans 4:9–12

  - 1. Abraham was justified, declared righteous, BEFORE he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 17)
  - 2. God's covenant promises and provisions were all given long before Abraham was commanded to obey the call to be circumcised

- 3. Justification was grounded in Abraham's faith, not his works of circumcision
- 4. Circumcision is Abraham's response of obedience flowing from his faith
- 5. Paul says this is true for us as well - we are justified by faith, and this faith prompts a life of growing obedience to God's commands
- B. Faith produces obedience to God's commands, not just religious rituals
  - 1. I'll talk more about circumcision in a future teaching
  - 2. But clearly, God wants more than religious rituals
 

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." Genesis 17:1

    - a. God is calling Abraham to a life of obedience
    - b. The call is not just to circumcision but a wholehearted embrace of the ways of God.
    - c. Circumcision was a visible outward sign that Abraham and his descendants were to be distinct from the nations around them.
  - 3. God's covenant people will desire to follow God by obeying His commands and turning from evil
 

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, **"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."** 2 Timothy 2:19

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Titus 1:16

- a. Those who are part of God's people MUST turn away from wickedness.
  - b. There are people who claim to know God but their embrace of wickedness denies their profession.
  - c. God's gracious covenant is not a license to embrace wickedness but rather provides the power to turn from it.
4. This is because God's covenant and the Gospel are meant to restore God's good intentions in creation, while sin and wickedness are attempting to distort and destroy them.

## V. Applying the Word

### A. Do I understand justification is by faith alone?

- 1. We can never earn our way into God's favor
- 2. God's call is always for a response of faith
- 3. We must forsake trying to justify ourselves and receive God's promise
- 4. This is good news - our sins can be forgiven!
- 5. This is good news - we don't have to save ourselves
- 6. Have I trusted in Christ alone for salvation?

### B. Do I understand that true faith produces obedience

- 1. If we truly accept God's covenant it produces a desire to know, love, and serve Him
- 2. We will never be perfect, but we will desire to walk perfectly before our loving Father
- 3. The Christian life is "A long obedience in the same direction"

- 4. This is good news for sin always enslaves and deforms!
- 5. This is good news because the Spirit is empowering us to walk away from sin and towards God
- 6. This is good news because God is working to restore our true humanity
- 7. Circumcise my heart lyrics  
CIRCUMCISE MY HEART  
TO OBEY YOUR WORD  
SPEAK INTO MY LIFE,  
DEEPER THROUGH YOUR SPIRIT'S KNIFE.  
CIRCUMCISE MY HEART  
TO OBEY YOUR WORD.  
WHEN I TEND TO STRAY,  
OR CHOOSE ANOTHER WAY  
CIRCUMCISE MY HEART TO OBEY.
- 8. Where is the Spirit speaking of sin that needs to be cut away in my life?
- 9. During this time of Lent - let the Spirit search out areas of sin and cut them away

### C. Closing Prayer of Confession, Cleansing, Commitment

#### The Obedience of Faith

Genesis 17  
March 8, 2020  
Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Teaching keywords: Covenant; obedience; faith; biblical characters

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thess 5:23-24

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

<sup>3</sup> Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, <sup>25</sup> and his son Ishmael was thirteen; <sup>26</sup> Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. <sup>27</sup> And every male in Abraham’s household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him. Genesis 17:1–14, 23–27