

MCLEAN BIBLE CHURCH
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>> LON SOLOMON: One of my favorite Christian writers is a fellow named A. W. Tozer. Here's what he wrote one time. I quote. He said, have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late and how little revival has resulted? Considering the volume of prayer that is ascending these days, rivers of revival should be flowing. That no such results are in evidence should not discourage us -- A. W. Tozer says -- rather, it should stir us to find out why our prayers are not answered.

He concludes by saying: I believe that our problem is that we have been trying to substitute praying for obeying -- and it simply will not work. End of quote.

Now, this is what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about obeying God. Obedience to God, as we return to our verse-by-verse study of book 5 in the book of genesis. A little background first. Remember in Genesis 16, we saw Sarah and Abraham grew impatient waiting for the son that God had promised them. And so they took matters in their own hands and they engaged in a legal and acceptable practice in the culture of their day, namely that Sarah gave her hand maiden, Hagar, to Abraham. Abraham had relations with Hagar. Hagar bore a son to Abraham named Ishmael. And this son was considered to be Sarah's son as well. Thereby removing the stigma of barrenness from her. That's where we've been.

Now we're ready for Chapter 17. Verse 1. When Abraham, the Bible says, was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham. There have been 13 years between Chapter 16 and Chapter 17, biblically silent years, years when Ishmael grew into a young man, years when no doubt Abraham had given up on the idea that Sarah was ever going to have a son. And then suddenly God appears to Abraham and reconfirms the covenant that he's already made with Abraham. Verse 2. The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, I am God almighty. Walk before me and have integrity, for I will confirm my covenant between me and you, and I will greatly increase your descendents, and you will become the father of a multitudes of people.

Now, the first thing God reconfirms with Abraham is his promise that Abraham will become the father of multitudes of people. As a matter of fact, God even changes Abraham's name to reflect this. If you look he says, in Verse 5, no longer will you be called Abram, which means exalted father, your name will be Abraham, father of a multitude.

Skip down to Verse 8. And the whole land of Canaan, God says, I will give to you and your descendents after you as an everlasting possession. This is the second part of covenant that God reconfirms with Abraham, namely his promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendents as they -- as a permanent possession.

But then God adds a new promise to this covenant. That he's never mentioned before. Verse 7. God says to Abraham, I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendents after you throughout all generations for an everlasting covenant -- here's the new part -- to be God to you and God to your descendents.

Third and finally, God promises that as part of this covenant -- remember what we said, this is new news for Abraham, that God is going to single out, that God is going to choose out Abraham's descendents to have a special, unique, personal and private relationship with God in a way

that the rest of the human race does not have, that Abraham's descendents will be a special -- especially chosen group of people.

And you say all right, Lon, wait a minute. Let me just make sure that I'm tracking with you here. And I understand what all of this means.

The Jewish people and the Arab people are both descendents of Abraham. The Jewish people are descendents of Abraham through Isaac, the Arab people are descendents through Ishmael, right?

Correct. You say, Lon, if I understand correctly, since they're both descendents of Abraham, therefore, number one, the Arab people are God's specially chosen people just like the Jewish people, number two, that Arab people have a claim to the land of Palestine, just like the Jewish people, and finally, the God of Arab people and Islam, that is the God Allah, is the same God of the Bible that we Jews and Christians worship. Is this right? Have I got it right? No. You got it wrong. You got it absolutely, utterly wrong. You say, but wait a minute, wait a minute. That's exactly what all of this sounds like, doesn't it?

Well, friends, we haven't finished the Chapter. We finish chapters here before we make conclusions. And when we finish the chapter, what we find is that God limits this covenant that he's making with Abraham here in Genesis 17 only to Abraham's descendents through Isaac. Watch. Verse 18. And Abraham said to God, O that Ishmael may live for an everlasting covenant, and for his descendents after him. As for Ishmael, God says, I urge you, behold, I will bless him. And I will multiply him. And I will make him fruitful. And he shall become the father of 12 princes. And I will make of him a great nation. Hey, has God done that for the Arab peoples? Hello. Yes. Has God kept his promise to the Arab peoples? Yes. Watch. Verse 21: But, God says, my covenant, I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.

So folks, what this means is that even though the Arab people are descendents of Abraham, God's everlasting covenant with Abraham here in Genesis 17 is not with them.

Therefore, No. 1, the Arab people are not God's specifically chosen people, only the Jewish people are. Therefore, No. 2, God's promise regarding the land of Canaan does not belong to the Arab people, it belongs to the descendents of Isaac, the Jewish people. And therefore, No. 3, God is not the unique and private God of the Arab people; only the Jewish people. Allah, according to the Bible, is not the true and living God of the Bible. According to the Bible Islam is not a true path to God. And according to the Bible, Mohammed is not God's ultimate messenger to mankind. The Lord, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead is. (Applause)

>> LON SOLOMON: And this is truth from the Bible. This is not Lon's truth. This is biblical truth, my friends. Now, you say, all right, end? No. Not yet. Because God adds one more thing to this covenant. Look down with me at Verse 10. God said further to Abraham, this is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your descendents after you, every male among you shall be circumcised and this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. After reiterating to Abraham all the provisions of his covenant with the Jewish people, God now gives Abraham a most curious command. God commands Abraham to circumcise himself and not just himself, but every male born into God's covenant people, the Jewish people from that time on.

And the point of this, God says, is that this is to be a sign of the covenant between me and the Jewish people. This is my way of highlighting

the Jewish people's unique relationship with me, all mighty God. What did Abraham do, Verse 23?

On that very same day Abraham took his son Ishmael, and every male in his household and circumcised them just as God had told him to do. Now, Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised. And Abraham his son was 13 years old, Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very same day. And every male in Abraham's household was circumcised along with them.

Now, that's as far as we're going to go in our Chapter. Because it's over. That's the end of the Chapter. But we're going to stop now. We're going to ask our most important question. And we all know what this is. Yeah? We do. Uh-huh.

So all of you on the Internet campus, and all of you down in the Edge community, and everybody at Loudoun and everybody at Prince William and everybody in Bethesda and everybody in the lobby and everybody here, are we ready? That was okay. I hope you're so what he's better than your yes. Are we ready?

>> ALL: Yes.

>> LON SOLOMON: 1, 2, 3.

>> ALL: So what?!?!?!?!?!?

>> LON SOLOMON: Yeah. You say Lon, so what?

Say, you know, I really feel bad for Abraham. But besides that, what difference does any of this make for me? Well, let's talk about that. Did you notice at the very end of this chapter that God made a special point to emphasize something? Let me go back. See if you catch it. Verse 23. On that very same day, the very day God commanded him about circumcision, Abraham circumcised every male in his household, just as God told him to do. Verse 26, Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised, here it is, on that very same day. And every male in Abraham's household was circumcised along with them.

Now, friends, here's the intriguing thing. When we look at Genesis Chapter 17, we find that God did not specifically command Abraham that he had to do the circumcision on that very day. Abraham could have carried it out later that week. Or he could have done it the next week. Or he could have done it the next month. And still have qualified to do what God told him to do. But Abraham did it that very day. Abraham did not put it off for even one day. Do you see that? Do you see that?

And there's a reason. The reason is because Abraham had a wonderful spiritual habit in his life, namely Abraham practiced instant and complete obedience to God. As soon as Abraham knew what God wanted him to do, Abraham did it without delay exactly the way the Lord told him.

Now, we see this wonderful spiritual habit in Abraham's life at every stage in his life. We see it at the beginning of his life. Genesis 12:1, the Lord said to Abraham leave your country and people and your father's household. And go to the land I'll show you, Verse 4:4, so Abraham left. I love that. Just as the Lord had commanded him. Hebrews 11, 8 by faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, the land of Canaan, Abraham obeyed and went -- look -- not even knowing when he set out where he was going. Just knowing he was obeying God.

We see the same spiritual habit in Abraham's life at the very end of his life. When he was over 100 years old, Genesis 22, 1. God tested him and said to him, take your son, your only son, Isaac, who you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on the

mountain that I will show you. Verse 3. So Abraham arose early the next morning, saddled his donkey, and set out for the place God had told him to go. If God appeared to you and told you to sacrifice your daughter, your son, would you get up early the next morning to set out and go do that? Abraham did. And as we've just seen in Genesis 17 with circumcision, Abraham in the middle of his life had this wonderful spiritual habit of obedience.

Folks, you want to know why God referred to Abraham as -- well, you just saw a big part of the answer -- Abraham was a man of obedience. So let's define. What is obedience? Obedience means, very simply, that we -- excuse me, I got to find where I am here -- obedience means that we follow the orders and carry out the instructions of someone in authority over you; you do what you're told.

And as followers of Christ, we must understand that in God's vocabulary obedience is a treasured word. The Bible reiterates this over and over and over again. Listen, Jesus said, John 14:15, if you love me -- you will what? -- obey what I command.

Jesus said, Luke 6:46, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and yet you do not do, you do not obey what I say? Psalm 111:10, a good understanding have all those who read God's commandments? No. A good understanding you have when you do God's commandments. Joshua, 1:8, God said to Joshua, this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. Why? So that you, Joshua, might be careful to do everything written in it. Why? Because then, Joshua, you will be prosperous and then you will have good success. And I suppose James sums it up about as well as anybody.

He says in Chapter 1:22, prove yourselves to be doers of the word, not merely hearers only. Folks, over and over again the Bible tells us that God is not interested in rituals or creeds or denominations, or prayer books or hymn singing or church membership or religious activity, above all else first and foremost, God wants obedience.

And as the prophet Samuel said to a disobedient king Saul, 1 Samuel 15:22, does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as he do in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, Samuel said, to obey is better than to sacrifice.

To obey is better than to sing in the choir. It's better than to put money in the offering plate. It's better than to teach Sunday school. It's better than to lead a small group. It's better than to be a church member. It's better than to have a quiet time. It's better than anything. To obey.

Now, folks, this has enormous significance for our lives as followers of Christ today. You see, our modern day of Christianity emphasizes the love of God, the mercy of God, the understanding of God, the compassion of God, the forgiveness of God. And this is okay. All of these things are legitimate parts of God's nature.

But so often we emphasize these things to such an extreme that I'm afraid we forget something. We forget that our God is a holy God and that he demands obedience from his children. And listen, you and I can never become true men and women of God, we can never become personal friends of God like Abraham was, until we get serious about obeying God in every facet of our life. It's just that simple.

As many of you know, I lead tours to Israel and other places. And we sometimes get registrations in from couples that are living together.

They're not married. They're not brother and sister either. You understand what I'm saying.

And folks, we don't let this happen. I mean, this is a Christ-centered tour. Then we run by biblical standards. And we don't let this happen. I make them, you know, either take roommates or take private rooms. We don't do this. So a couple years ago I got this registration form from a couple, and they had different last names, but the same address. Errr. So I do whether as I always do, I went to call them up and say you can't do this. And I just happened to look to see how old they were before I called them. The woman was 69, and the man was in his 70s. Brave new world. What do you want me to say? (Chuckling)

You know, I mean, I don't know. So I called them up. And I got the woman on the phone. And I said, ma'am, I'm -- you know, I'm sorry, you can't do this, you can't -- she said do what? I said you can't come on the tour and share a room, you know, with a man that's not, you know -- shacking up, you can't do this. And so she said to me, are you -- Lon, are you serious? I'm 69 years old. Are you out of your mind? I'm not shacking up with this man, I'm married to this man. We just didn't change our last names much she said are you crazy? I'm 69 years old. He's 70 years old. (Chuckling)

I said, I don't know, brave new world, whatever. They came on the tour, everything was fine. And we were laughing about it actually n the tour. And she said to me, you don't really have people who try to register for your tour doing this, do you?

And I said we most certainly do. And she said, well, they certainly don't come primarily from McLean Bible Church. And I say oh, yes, they most certainly do. And she said seriously? After sitting there and hearing the word God preached by you and knowing what the word of God says, they're still living together? She said that astounds me. I don't understand how that can happen.

And I said, ma'am, I'll tell you how it can happen. It happens because many people do what they want to do in life whether they attend McLean Bible Church or not. Whether they know what the Bible says or not. And that's the issue for us today as followers of Christ. As a follower of Christ, do you do what you want to do in life, or do you do what the Lord Jesus Christ tells you to do in life? You say, well, Lon, I just -- that's kind of a complex question. No, it isn't. No, it isn't. It's a very simple question.

Friends, listen, we're either living our lives 100 percent under the authority of God's word, the Bible, or we are living our lives under the authority of our self, as far as God is concerned there is nothing in between. It's just that simple. So where are you?

You know, let me say in concluding that Charles Finney, the great evangelist once said, you can't preach against sin in the abstract. Well, you know what?

By the same token, we can't talk about obedience to God in the abstract. So let me ask you a concrete question. And the concrete question is: What has God been asking you to obey him and do? Has he been asking you to obey him and give your life to Christ? Has he been asking you to obey him and make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? Let's get even more concrete than that. Shall we?

Has the Lord Jesus been asking you to humble yourself and go seek someone's forgiveness or to forgive somebody else who hurt and in some way

damaged you? Has God been asking you to make restitution for some wrong you did?

Has he been asking you to speak to some relative or friend about their need for Christ, and you know you're going to pay a price for doing this, but you know the Lord is asking you to do it anyway. Has the Lord been asking you to stop sleeping with your boyfriend or your girlfriend or your fiancé or to stop dating that person? You know you have no business dating, or to knock off that adulterous relationship and confess your sin to your husband or your wife and rebuild your marriage? Has the Lord been asking you to get help for that secret pornography problem that you have? Or to stop undressing women with your eyes every day. Has the Lord been asking you to get serious about beating that smoking problem, that drinking problem, that drug problem, and to repent of that rotten attitude you've got towards some person?

Things that are dishonoring Jesus Christ in your life. Has the Lord been asking you to stop cursing and gossiping and to stop all that nasty, dirty talk that comes out of your mouth? Or to take on some area of Christian service as a volunteer? Or has he been asking you to become a full-time servant of Christ? Or has he been asking you to have a quiet time for yourself every day and to have a time of devotions with your family and your children? Look, I don't know what the Lord's been asking you. But I can promise you he's asking ya something. And the question is, have you obeyed?

You say, well, Lon, listen. Isn't it true that in order to obey God in these things, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to be active and flowing in you are our lives? Absolutely true. About you my friends, please remember that it takes our determination, our willingness, our commitment, our zealousness about being obedient to God first before God activates the Holy Spirit's power in our life. If you're sitting around waiting for God the Holy Spirit to just drop some kind of magic dust on you from heaven and suddenly you're going to obey God, you're kidding yourself. We have to first stand up and say, I want to obey God. I'm committed to obeying God. You'll see the power of the Holy Spirit after you do that. But not until.

So let me close with Deuteronomy 28. Listen. Now, it shall be, says the Lord, if you will fully obey the Lord, blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and blessed shall be the produce of your ground.

Blessed shall you be whether you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord shall cause your enemies to be defeated before you, then she'll come out against you one way and flee before you 7 ways. The Lord shall make you the head and not the tail, if only you will fully obey the Lord's commands. Folks, above everything else, this is what made Abraham, Abraham. And this is what God wants from you and me.

Let's pray together.

And with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, maybe you and God have been wrestling over some area in your life where God is commanding you to do something. I want to give you a few quiet moments, if you need them. To run up the white flag right here and say, okay, Lord, just like Abraham, instant and complete obedience is what I'm going to do. If you need a moment, take it right now. Lord, Jesus, you once said this is a hard saying after a message is reached. And who can hear it? I think that's probably true a little bit of our message today.

But Lord Jesus, remind us we will never see the power of Christ in our life, we will never see the power of Christ in this church, we will never see the power of Christ in revival just from praying. We will see it when we get serious about obeying you. And many of us here have been living under the authority of ourselves. I want to pray today that you would help us repent from the heart of that. Give us the attitude of young Samuel in 1 Samuel Chapter 3. Whenever he would hear your voice, he would say, speak, Lord, for I, your servant, am listening. Lord, may that be our attitude. Speak, Lord, whether you speak through the pages of the Bible to us, or you speak directly to our hearts, speak to me, Lord, tell me what you want me to do. For I, your servant, am listening. And all the things that we prayed about today, give us the courage and the power by your spirit to carry them out. In obedience to Christ. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. And what did God's people say?

>> ALL: Amen.

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