

The Relationship Between Faith and Obedience (part-three of a seven-part study)

Often overlooked in a consideration of God's unconditional promise covenant with Abraham is the fact that the promise is not limited to his physical descendants and the geography which they would occupy. It includes something far more significant which Abraham received as a promise, when he exercised his faith by a demonstration of obedience that is difficult to fathom. The event begins with God issuing a command to Abraham, recorded for us in Genesis 22:1-2 –

“Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’”

The Biblical record indicates little, if any, hesitation on the part of this man of faith, this friend of God. Why? The author of the epistle to the Hebrews gives us the answer in Hebrews 11:17-19. How did Abraham reconcile this apparent contradiction between God's promise and His command? By believing that after he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. But God stops the sacrifice before it is completed, knowing that Abraham was about to follow through. The angel of the Lord repeats the promise of physical descendants and a land which they would possess (22:17), with an additional promise issued in Genesis 22:18 –

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Is this a reiteration of the previous promise or is it something entirely new? We will answer that question in our next segment. But for now, let's examine what I consider to be the greatest example of the connection between faith and obedience anywhere in the Word of God. First, Abraham believes God in order to reconcile within in his own mind the dilemma he was facing. He believes that if he obeys God and sacrifices Isaac, God would honor his obedience and fulfill His promise by raising Isaac from the dead (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19). In other words, *Abraham's faith in God's promise enables him to obey God's command*. Second, James in seeking to convince his readership of the unbreakable relationship of faith and obedience, uses Abraham as that ultimate example, in James 2:20-23 –

“But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God.”

I must issue a very serious word of caution in posting this study with the example of Abraham. His testing by God was highly unusual and extremely unique. God is not calling on people to such a similar test in our day and age of the Church. For you to think that He is would be a grave and dangerous mistake on your part, making you liable for criminal behavior of the worst kind, which no court of law would ever justify based on the events of Genesis 22. We are not living in Genesis 22 and you are not Abraham. I hope I am making myself clear to any and all reading this post.