

Genesis 17 - The Sign of the Covenant

I. Introduction

A. For those of you who have not been with us for the past several months, we have been slowly working our way through Genesis this year

1. I started the story of Abraham five weeks ago, and my overarching premise with Abraham has been, "The Promise was Christ. The Response was Faith."
2. So, in each story of Abraham I have tried to show how God's promises to Abraham point to Christ
3. And I've tried to show how Abraham's actions teach us about faith
4. And I've tried to show that Abraham's actions of faith were rooted in God's promises of Christ
5. So, I've tried to make the basis of my messages 'Christ is' statements based on God's promises and 'Faith is' statements based on Abraham's actions

B. As a quick review of where we are in the story of Abraham, we are in the second cycle of Abraham's story

1. In Genesis 15 we saw God make a covenant with Abraham, focused on the promise of a son and we saw Abraham believe God's promises
2. But in Genesis 16, we saw Abraham fail in faith and try to gain the promises by his own power by taking Hagar and the birth of Ishmael
3. So, according to the pattern of Abraham's story, we now expect a restoration and reaffirmation of God's promises to Abraham which is exactly what we see in Genesis 17

C. Last week we went through Genesis 16 and saw that there is nothing that human effort can do to gain the promises of God - God's promises are 'by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone'

1. But, and I even mentioned this in my conclusion last week, our church teaches the necessity of obedience for those who believe in Christ
2. How can we hold both the righteousness of Christ and the necessity of obedience at the same time? Aren't those two things opposed to each other? Didn't I just preach strongly against our works last week?
3. These questions are what I want to address this morning as we go through Genesis 17
4. For the last two weeks we have defended the truths of 'by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone' looking at God's covenant with Abraham and imputed righteousness and then Abraham's failure with Hagar and the impossibility of human works to gain the promises of God
5. And I'm glad we started there and I think Scripture arranges itself so that we start there, because we have to have that firmly tamped down and settled in our hearts and minds before we can even start to talk about obedience, because our deceitful hearts will try to make obedience something we can earn before God
6. But this morning, after having defended those truths for the last two weeks, here in Genesis 17 I want to show how the necessity of obedience is not at all opposed to 'by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone', in fact, it is in complete support of it
7. So the question I want to answer by the end of our study this morning is, "How can we hold both the righteousness of Christ and the necessity of obedience at the same time?"

D. Read Genesis 17

E. Proposition and Outline

1. Proposition - 'In Christ alone' and the great solas of the reformation are not opposed at all to the obedience of faith, in fact they are perfectly harmonized with each other
2. Outline:
 - a. Observations - what do we see in Genesis 17?
 - b. Contrast and Purpose - how does Genesis 17 fit with Genesis 15 and what does it teach us?
 - c. New Testament Reflection - does the New Testament agree with my observations and purpose?
 - d. Where is Christ?
 - e. What is Faith?
 - f. Conclusion - How do we answer our question this morning?

II. Observations

A. Genesis 17 is very carefully organized in a repetitive sequence

1. There are three components of Genesis 17: names, statements and sign which are arranged like this:
 - a. First there is a name, then a statement reflecting on that name
 - b. This repeats, and then there is a sign, then the whole thing repeats again
 - c. So it is name, statement, name, statement, sign; name, statement, name, statement, sign

B. The first name is given in verse 1: **I am God Almighty, I can do the impossible**

1. This is the first time El Shaddai has appeared, but it becomes the name by which the patriarchs knew God
 - a. Exodus 6:3 - *I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty,*
 - b. So, the name with which God identifies Himself is very important to Abraham
2. And, as your English versions translate it, it means God Almighty, the God who can do the impossible
 - a. God had promised to do the impossible in chapter 15, to give Abraham a son in his old age
 - b. Abraham had not believed God could do the impossible in chapter 16, trying to get a son in his power
 - c. God was going to command the impossible in the rest of the sentence, to be blameless
 - d. God was going to reconfirm His impossible promise, to give Abraham a son by Sarah

C. The reflecting statement is in verse 2: **Walk before me and be blameless so I can make my covenant with you**

1. This first name/statement pair is the hallmark of a covenant
 - a. As I'm sure many of you know, in ancient royal covenants, the senior king would open the covenant by announcing his relationship to the recipient of the covenant
 - b. So, the pattern here already tells us that we are in a covenantal setting again
2. The statement after God's name is a command to Abraham: be blameless
 - a. This is a reflection of what has just happened in chapter 16 with Hagar, God calls Abraham to consider who He is and to be blameless before Him, not chasing after the promise on His own
 - b. But, it is also a contrast with chapter 15, God's covenant with Abraham in chapter 15 had no requirements of Abraham, it was completely unilateral - we'll come back to this in the next point
 - c. But, we see that the command is firmly rooted in the story, it's not a command coming out of the blue
3. The name and the command go together
 - a. Abraham had not been blameless in chapter 16 because he didn't believe God could do the impossible, so God reminds Abraham who He is and then commands Abraham to be blameless
 - b. But the name is also connected to the command because this was an impossible command - who can be blameless before God? But, in giving an impossible command, God reminds Abraham that He can do the impossible - the command is impossible, but nothing is impossible for God

D. The second name is in verse 5 - **Your name shall be Abraham, father of a multitude**

1. Abraham literally means 'father of a multitude' - it declares God's promises have been fulfilled
 - a. As we see God renaming Abraham and Sarah in this chapter, we must remember that naming someone in the ancient near east was a very powerful statement, a statement of authority and power
 - b. When God renames Abraham He is saying His promises will surely be fulfilled, even if they aren't yet
2. So, the name contrast with the statement of verse 2
 - a. God tells Abraham to walk before Him and be blameless so that God could make a covenant with him
 - b. The covenant was conditional on Abraham's blamelessness
 - c. But in verse 4, God says that His covenant is with Abraham, despite his failure to be blameless
 - d. And to seal this promise, God renames Abraham, indicating His promises will not fail
 - e. So after a condition, the text returns to the unconditional nature of the covenant, like chapter 15

E. The reflecting statement is found in verses 6-8: **I reconfirm My promises**

1. So the name and statement clearly go together - my covenant is unilateral so I reconfirm all of my promises
 - a. I reaffirm the promise of offspring - *I will make you exceedingly fruitful, nations, kings*
 - b. I reaffirm the promise of land - *I will give to you and your offspring the land of your sojournings*
 - c. I reaffirm the promise of rule - *I will be their God*
2. The most important thing to note is that God reaffirms His promises despite Abraham's failures
 - a. Abraham had not been blameless before God, but God reaffirms His promises
 - b. So, the conditional nature of verses 1-2 must somehow be superseded by the unconditional nature of the covenant of chapter 15 - God's promises will be fulfilled no matter what

F. To finish the first half of the chapter, a sign of the covenant is given in verses 9-14: Circumcision

1. As we look at the sign, I want to consider its purpose in the text
 - a. I believe its purpose here is to signify the truths we have already discussed
 - b. So, it must somehow signify both the conditional and the unconditional nature of the covenant
 - c. And it must reflect on what has just happened in chapter 16 with Hagar
2. Circumcision is a sign of the need to keep the covenant, that is, to walk before God and be blameless
 - a. Verse 9 - *And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations."*
 - b. When Abraham and his offspring were circumcised it would be a permanent reminder that they were in covenant with God, so they needed to walk according to that covenant
3. But circumcision is also a sign of the everlasting nature of the covenant, that is its unbreakable nature
 - a. Verse 13 - *So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.*
 - b. Circumcision was also a reminder that there was no way out of the covenant, the sign was permanent
4. A sign reflecting the failure of faith of Abraham
 - a. I'm not pointing to a specific verse here, but rather to the nature of the sign
 - b. Abraham's failure to believe God had been in trying to reproduce a son on his own power
 - c. So the covenant sign meets him there and reminds him that he cannot gain the promise on his own power - we might ask, why circumcision? And I think that is the answer, a reflection of the failure

G. The second half of the chapter starts with a name as well in verse 15: Sarah, princess

1. The significance of this name is a little harder to determine because Sarah and Sarai both mean princess
 - a. There may be some slight difference in meaning, but the best scholars are unsure what it is
2. But, I think there is significance just in the fact that God renames her
 - a. She had been named princess, but that name had not been given by God
 - b. So God renames her and He names her the same thing - she is now a princess by God's authority

H. And the statement follows closely the name in verse 16: A son shall come from Sarah

1. As I mentioned when we discussed chapter 16, to this point Sarah had not been specifically mentioned
 - a. But now God is explicitly clear that His promise will come through Sarah, through Abraham's wife who had been barren for nine decades - God's promise would come through the impossible
2. And the name and statement go together
 - a. God affirms that Sarah is a princess and then He promises that kings shall come from Sarah
 - b. Sarah would not bear any son, but a son who would lead to a king, God promises not only to do the impossible, but to do the impossible in a magnificent way

I. The last name comes in verse 19: Isaac, laughter

1. Isaac's name is wrapped up in what happens in verse 17 - Abraham fell on his face and laughed
 - a. It continues the theme of impossible - the promise of Isaac is so impossible Abraham just has to laugh
 - b. And God replies, in effect, yes the promise is that impossible, so he will be called laughter
2. But the name also signifies the result of Isaac's birth
 - a. The promised son will bring joy into the world, though Sarah was barren, she will have joy
 - b. Though the promise seemed impossible, there will be joy and mirth when God fulfills His promise

J. And the reflecting statement is in verses 19-21: My covenant will be with Isaac

1. This is paired with the name again - though Isaac is so impossible there must be laughter God's covenant will be with Isaac, the impossible, not with Ishmael, human effort
2. And, God's covenant with Isaac will be the source of joy that Isaac brings
3. So, Isaac, the promised son, will bring unbelievable mirth because God's covenant will be with him

K. The second half of the chapter closes with the sign as well in verses 22-26: Abraham obeys and takes the sign

1. This signifies that Abraham understood and submitted to everything God had said
 - a. He understood and submitted to God's rebuke of his actions with Hagar
 - b. He understood and submitted to the conditional nature of the covenant
 - c. He understood and submitted to the unconditional nature of the covenant
 - d. He understood and believed the promise of Isaac
2. I think this action in particular is what Paul refers to in Romans 4
 - a. Romans 4:20-21 - *No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

III. Contrast and Purpose

A. In my next point, I want to look at some contrasts between God's covenant in chapters 15 and 17

1. Genesis 17 is a covenant renewal, not a covenant initiation
 - a. There are two phrases used to describe covenants in the Bible
 - b. A covenant can be cut - Genesis 15:18 - *On that day the Lord [cut] a covenant with Abraham*
(*koom bereeth*)
 - i. This terminology reflects the covenant sacrifice and it is always used when a new covenant is made - the covenant sacrifice is the hallmark of the new covenant
 - c. Or a covenant can be established, or more literally held up - Genesis 9:9 - *Behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your offspring after you*
(*karath bereeth*)
 - i. This terminology reflects a covenant that has already been made and is being reaffirmed - although circumstances might question the covenant the covenanter props-up his covenant
 - d. Genesis 17 is a propping-up of the covenant
 - i. Genesis 17:7 - *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you*
 - ii. The events of chapter 16 have called the covenant of chapter 15 into question, but God appears to reaffirm, to uphold His covenant - His covenant will not fail, His promises are sure
 - iii. So Genesis 17 must be understood in terms of Genesis 15, they are not separate but the same
2. Genesis 17 makes an explicit requirement
 - a. I've already mentioned this several times as we went through the text, but a glaring difference between chapter 15 and chapter 17 is the fact that God makes a requirement of Abraham
 - b. Chapter 15 is completely unilateral, there is no requirement of Abraham anywhere in the chapter
 - c. But chapter 17 makes requirements everywhere
 - i. Walk before me and be blameless, Keep my covenant, Be circumcised
 - d. If the covenants are the same covenant, we must deal with why requirements are added in chapter 17
3. Genesis 17 has a physical sign - one hallmark of a covenant is the giving of a sign
 - a. This was the one thing missing from chapter 15 - God's covenant didn't have a sign
 - b. This serves to tie the two covenant passages together - Genesis 17 completes Genesis 15
4. Genesis 17 has no sacrifice - this is another hallmark of a covenant - a solemn promise sealed by sacrifice
 - a. Again, this serves to tie the two covenants together - neither passage stands alone as a covenant, they are joined together to help us understand the one covenant that God made with Abraham

B. If Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 are one covenant, what does Genesis 17 teach us about the covenant of God?

1. Upon consideration of the contrasts and connections between Genesis 15 and 17, I think the main purpose of Genesis 17 is to show that a unilateral covenant does not mean there is no response from the recipient
 - a. Throughout Genesis 17, the idea of a unilateral covenant - a covenant that God keeps and that God will fulfill on His own power - is still presented - God affirms His promises to Abraham unconditionally
 - b. But God also calls him to live according to the covenant - Abraham's actions won't gain the covenant, but the covenant requires a response - God's unilateral covenant doesn't make Hagar ok
 - c. If God has made a covenant with Abraham, the only response is to walk before God and be blameless
2. This theme will blossom in the rest of Abraham's story - righteousness by faith is not without righteousness
 - a. Genesis 15 comes first to declare clearly that God's covenant is unilateral - that God will accomplish His covenant and that God will provide an alien righteousness to the recipients of His covenant
 - b. But Genesis 17 follows closely to teach us that the fact that God's covenant is unilateral does not mean we can disregard the covenant - the covenant does have requirements, not requirements that earn the covenant but requirements that reflect the covenant
3. So God appears to Abraham again to stress the need to walk in the covenant, to live by the promises
 - a. Genesis 17 renews a covenant - there is no new covenant that is based on Abraham's obedience, instead Abraham's obedience must be based on the covenant of Genesis 15
 - b. Genesis 17 makes a requirement - the requirement can't earn the promises because Genesis 15 has already given the promises unilaterally, the requirement must reflect the promises
 - c. Genesis 17 has a physical sign - the truth of walking by the promises is given by a sign of reminder
 - d. Genesis 17 has no sacrifice - the requirement does not earn or seal the promise in the way a sacrifice does - God's sacrifice is what earns the covenant, not Abraham's obedience

IV. New Testament Reflection

A. The New Testament reflection on Genesis 17 mostly has to do with circumcision

1. So, in Acts 7:8 Stephen references the covenant of circumcision - *And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day*
2. But Paul is clear that circumcision didn't gain Abraham righteousness before God - it didn't earn the promise
 - a. Romans 4:9-11 - *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*
 - b. In response to those who thought that circumcision was a requirement to earn the promise, Paul says in Galatians 5:2-5 - *Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.*
3. Instead, circumcision is a sign of the need to walk according to the covenant of God, so Paul rephrases it in spiritual terms
 - a. Romans 2:29 - *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
 - b. Galatians 5:6 - *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*
 - c. Galatians 6:15 - *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*
 - d. Philippians 3:2-3 - *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh*
 - e. Colossians 2:11 - *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,*
 - f. I Corinthians 7:18-19 - *Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.*

B. So, chapter 17 and circumcision is not a new requirement to earn the promise but rather a call to live according to the promise

1. This is how the New Testament consistently views the topic of circumcision
2. And this is consistently the teaching of the New Testament - a unilateral, that is, a gracious covenant does not mean there is no requirement to walk according to the covenant
 - a. Negative sense - Romans 6:1-2 - *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*
 - b. Positive sense - Colossians 1:9-10 - *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*
 - c. I Thessalonians 2:12 - *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*
 - d. Ephesians 4:1 - *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*
3. The phrase 'walk in a manner worthy' is reminiscent of Genesis 17 - walk before Me and be blameless
 - a. God's covenant of Genesis 15 and God's covenant in Christ were both unilateral, gracious, but they both require that we walk in a manner worthy of the covenant
 - b. Grace does not imply license, instead grace calls us to obedience - we must walk in a manner worthy
 - c. But, at the same time, obedience does not contrast with grace - the covenant is by grace alone

V. Christ is the one who harmonizes the conditional and unconditional covenant

- A. For those of you who haven't been with us for our study of Abraham, I have tried to center my sermons on two statements - Faith is and Christ is**
1. Abraham, in the New Testament, is held up as an example of faith and we should learn from Abraham
 2. But, we could get caught simply trying to imitate Abraham and lose sight of why Abraham had faith - we need to see that Abraham's faith was on the promises of God and all of these promises point to Christ
- B. As I've gone through Genesis 17, I have not carefully dealt with the statement in verse 2**
1. God tells Abraham - *walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you*
 2. I've said that Genesis 17 isn't imposing another condition on the covenant, but that verse sounds extremely conditional - if you walk before me and be blameless then I can make my covenant with you
 3. I've based my teaching above on the contrasting unconditional statement in Genesis 15 and throughout Genesis 17, but right here it sounds very conditional
 4. So, is God's covenant with Abraham conditional or unconditional?
- C. We have a similar problem when we go to many of the covenants of God - sometimes they sound conditional and sometimes unconditional - which is it?**
1. The Davidic Covenant is Unilateral - II Samuel 7:12-16 - *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*
 2. But the Davidic Covenant is Conditional - I Kings 8:25 - *Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.'*
- D. In the Old Testament this is confusing, until we have something happens that harmonizes conditional and unconditional statements of the covenants - Jesus Christ**
1. God's covenants can be both conditional and unconditional because God will fulfill the conditions of the promise in Jesus Christ
 - a. This is one reason the importance of understanding Christ as fully God and fully man is important
 - b. Jesus comes as a man and is the one who walks blamelessly before God as a man, a man fulfilled the conditions of the covenant
 - c. But Jesus is God and fulfills the covenant, it is unilateral because God Himself keeps the conditions
 2. So God's covenant with Abraham was unconditional because God would fulfill the conditions in Jesus Christ
 3. God's covenant with Moses and Israel was unconditional because God would fulfill the conditions in Christ
 4. God's covenant with David was unconditional because God would fulfill the conditions in Jesus Christ
- E. So Christ is all over this passage**
1. We could look again at how Christ is the fulfillment of each of the promises reaffirmed here
 - a. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of a land
 - b. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of a son
 - c. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of God's rule
 - d. We looked at this when we went through chapter 12
 2. But here we add something new - Jesus Christ, the God man, is the one who harmonizes the conditional and unconditional covenants of God
 - a. God's covenants are unconditional to us because they are conditional on Christ's obedience
 - b. And Christ's obedience is absolutely sure, there is no possibility of failure - so they are completely unconditional to us - they are unconditional because God is sure to fulfill the condition
 - c. John Piper puts it well -
- F. As we struggle to understand the additions of conditions in Genesis 17, this must point us to Christ who fulfills the conditions on our behalf so that we enjoy the promises of God unconditionally**

VI. Faith is walking according to the promise of God, being blameless before Him

A. Just like Abraham, Scripture continually calls us to walk in a manner worthy of God

1. Colossians 1:9-10 - *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*
2. I Thessalonians 2:12 - *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*
3. Ephesians 4:1 - *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

B. Walking in a manner worthy of God, obeying His commands, is an expression of faith

1. Romans 1:5 - *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,*
2. Romans 16:25-27 - *Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith--- to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*
3. Paul's goal is explicitly to bring about the 'obedience of faith' the obedience that springs from faith, not trying to earn the promise of God but joyfully obeying because we believe the covenant
4. John 3:36 - *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
5. There is an obedience that is synonymous with believing - otherwise John 3:36 doesn't make sense

C. The obedience of faith does not earn us righteousness before God because it itself is a gift of God

1. Ephesians 2:8-10 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*
2. Obedience comes from faith, and faith, according to Ephesians 2:8, is a gift of God
3. But to make it even clearer, Paul tells us that our good works are really created by God and are not ours

D. And God's covenant to us is unconditional because Christ will fulfill the covenant in us

1. Romans 16:25 - (above)
2. Philippians 2:12-13 - *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*
3. Jude 24-25 - *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*
4. It is God, in Christ, who strengthens us for the obedience of faith - it is God, in Christ, who works in us - it is God, in Christ, who will present us blameless before His throne
5. Our blamelessness before God is sure because God will work it in us

E. Because Christ has perfectly kept the conditions of the covenant and because He will perfectly keep the conditions of the covenant in us, we must strive to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received

1. We can never stress enough the fact that salvation is 'by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone'
2. But we also can never imply that this means there is no necessary response to the covenant
3. Our obedience cannot earn or gain the promise, but our obedience does reflect the promise of God
4. So, go out from here and walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, in a manner worthy of the unconditional covenant of God

Conclusion

- A. As I conclude this morning, I want to go back and show that the whole passage is summed up in the first verse - the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless"**
1. The whole passage is rooted in God's name - He is God Almighty - the one who can do the impossible
 2. The command, walk before me and be blameless must be understood in light of God's name
 3. We can walk before God and be blameless because He is God Almighty
 - a. The command to walk before God and be blameless has nothing to do with us and our identity
 - b. The command has everything to do with God and His identity - He is God Almighty
- B. In reality, the command is a promise - walk before Me and be blameless**
1. God says, "*walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant with you*"
 2. But then He follows that up by saying, "*Behold, my covenant is with you*"
 3. And He can follow it up with that promise because He says, "*I am God Almighty*"
 4. If God is God Almighty, then it is He who is able to keep His promises - it is He who will do the work, it is He who will make us walk before Him and be blameless
 5. And not only do we have His promise here in Genesis 17, but we have seen Him work in Christ - God Almighty has revealed Himself as God Almighty, the one who does the impossible, in Jesus Christ
- C. And God makes the same command and promise to every child of Abraham in faith**
1. Just as he renamed Abraham as a symbol that Abraham already had the promises even when He did not have the promises, so God tells us we have the promise even when we do not yet have the promise
 2. The thing is, I can say with confidence that I am not blameless
 - a. I can say with James that we all stumble in many ways
 - b. And I can say with John that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us
 3. But I know that God has promised to make me blameless
 - a. As we saw in Jude - God will present me blameless before the presence of His glory
 - b. And John tells us that when we see Christ, we will be like Him
 - c. And Paul tells us that Christ has become sanctification for us
 4. And I know that God commands me to walk before him and be blameless
 - a. We saw in Ephesians that we must walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received
 - b. And in Colossians that we must walk in a manner worthy of the Lord
 - c. And Peter tells us that we must be holy as God is holy
 5. So I can say with Paul, "*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*"
 - a. My motivation and hope in obedience has nothing to do with me - it has nothing to do with me being able to obey or me earning anything by obedience
 - b. My motivation and hope in obedience has everything to do with Christ - what He has done and is doing for me
 - c. My motivation and hope in obedience is knowing that, in Christ, I have the promise of being blameless even though now I do not yet have the promise of being blameless - it is so sure in Christ that
 - d. In Christ, God Almighty is working on my behalf to make walk before Him and be blameless so I can forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead
- D. So this is the answer to how we hold both the righteousness of Christ and the necessity of obedience at the same time - our obedience is rooted in who God is as He has revealed Himself in Christ**
1. Child of God, this promise is for you - you will walk before Him and be blameless
 2. So live according to the calling you have received, not because of anything you are or can be, but because of everything that Christ is and has done
 3. "*You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*"
 4. Christ is my sanctification, I know I will be blameless before Him, so I walk now anticipating that promise
 5. My call to obedience is a call to see that God is God Almighty and that God Almighty has worked in Christ