

99-04-18b

Let's resume now our study of the 22nd chapter of Genesis. I'd like to read through this account to refresh our minds on the details. After this episode in Genesis 21 with Abimelech, the covenant resulting in the naming of the well, Beersheba, it says that Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

The reference to Philistines is often thought to be an anachronism. History tells us that the Philistines that we're most familiar with, the Goliath-type Philistines, weren't really prevalent in the land of Palestine until around 1200 BC, which is just a few hundred years. David is about 1000 or so BC.

And you have the five cities of the Philistines and their whole structure and organization in that time. This is a different kind of Philistine. These are the predecessors.

There was a gradual migration from the Sea Peoples, the Pelishtim and the Kaphtarim, which are mentioned, I think, over in Deuteronomy 2, if I remember right. These are Kaphtar, maybe Crete, or somewhere up in the northern parts of the Mediterranean Sea. But these Sea Peoples came over to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, maybe the western portion of Palestine there, and moved in and settled in these regions.

In the same way that you could talk about Americans as early as 1620 when the Pilgrims came over, as far as European-type Americans, you don't really talk about America in its full-blown sense until the 1800s after the nation is established. But we had forerunners a couple of hundred years before that. In the same way that the Philistines or the forerunners, the early settlers from that group, are in the land and there are inscriptions and other archaeological evidences of these people going back about a thousand years earlier than the ones that you have mentioned in the books of Samuel and Kings.

This city-state situation with Abimelech, he is in that category. There is also some indication that these early people may have had some Semitic origin, that in their forebears, they were actually descended from Shem. You find this in some of their names, such as Abimelech, Abimelech, of course, is all good Northwestern Semitic for Abi, my father, Melech, king, and so forth.

Yet you have in the name of the general here, Phecol, this doesn't have a Semitic background. This almost has some cognates in Greek where it would be spelled Philagos and this sort of thing, not the Lagos that we're familiar with as far as word or that, but having the idea of a ruler of one's agricultural or military things. But this tells us of the mixture of Greek and ancient Semitic influences that were at work here in these early Philistines.

So don't be thrown off, some people say, well, this is evidence that the whole Pentateuch was written after the fact, after David, after the captivity, and it's all real late. And this is

an evidence of that because there's no such thing as Philistines before 1000 BC and so forth. Well, not at all.

In the same way, they try to do the same thing with camels. They say camels weren't even domesticated until about the 14th century BC and here's Abraham living around 2000 BC. How can he have camels and so forth? But since the time that these ideas were put forth by William Albright and others, they have found camel bones and pictures of camels and camel figurines and things going well back even before the time of Abraham.

So you have to take some of these conclusions of archaeology with a grain of salt. They are obviously working with impartial evidence. Just as another little digression here, if you can imagine somebody trying to reconstruct your life, the things that you're interested in and what you do and who you are by your trash, the things that you throw away or that you lose out in your yard, well, that's what archaeologists are working with.

They find trash pits and they find the stuff that got broken and discarded. People didn't leave their good stuff laying around and say, well, I think I'll bury this so someone can find it 3000 years from now. Archaeologists are trying to reconstruct the history of cities and lifestyles and so forth from what people lost in their yard or fell down in the cracks between their walls or when they got destroyed by disasters and so forth.

It's a pretty sketchy pile of evidence to try to reconstruct things from. So if you have a choice between a written record that goes back several thousand years and an archaeologist out there digging stuff out of the mud and trying to figure out, well, did people worship this or was this a toy for their children? They want to say, oh, there was a cult of the bull and here's this toy bull and they had it in their house and worshipped it. Well, maybe they made it for their kid and he was out there playing with it in the yard and lost it.

They don't know. So that's just my two cents on archaeology. Genesis chapter 22.

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham. And he said, here I am. Then he said, take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and Isaac, his son. And he split the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey. The lad and I will go yonder and worship and we will come back to you. So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took the fire in his hand and a knife

and the two of them went together.

But Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, my father. And he said, here I am, my son. Then he said, look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, my son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order and he bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. So he said, here I am.

And he said, do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked.

And there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, the Lord will provide.

As it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son. Blessing, I will bless you.

And multiplying, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

So Abraham returned to his young men and they rose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham dwelt at Beersheba. That's far enough for us to go this morning.

There's, as you can already imagine and observe here, quite a bit of grist for the mill. There's quite a bit to see and observe and try to understand. But I would like to begin our study of this particular section where Abraham does.

Here's Abraham. He's been through a lot. He's spoken with the Lord.

We've seen these various events in his life up to this point. And it comes to pass after these things, God tests him. God calls out to him and says, Abraham.

And he says, Here I am. God says, Take your son, your only son Isaac. You'll notice that every time God refers to Isaac in this chapter, he says, He's your only son.

Is Isaac Abraham's only son? He's not. Ishmael is Abraham's son. Why does God say, Your son, your only son? This reminds us of the view that God chooses to take of certain things.

And my favorite example of this is with regard to sin. Have you and I committed sin? Have we failed and done wrong things? We have. But God looks at us after we have acknowledged these things and come before him.

And we've been cleansed by the blood of Christ. And he says, You're blameless. You're faultless.

You have no sin. Are we sinners and have we sinned? Yes. When God looks at us and addresses us and deals with us, are we sinners and have we sinned? No.

He treats us. He views us. He speaks to us as those without sin, without fault.

He allows us to approach him in his throne room and represent ourselves before him as our own priest, with Christ as our high priest, even though under the technicalities of priesthood we're unqualified because we're defiled, we're sinful, and so forth. How can he do that? God makes a declaration. God says, This is the legal standing.

From a legal point of view, Abraham, from a judicial point of view, Abraham only has one son. For purposes of heirship, for purposes of the relationship that God has with Abraham, Ishmael, although he is a physical son, is no longer an issue. Legally, spiritually speaking, Abraham has an only son, Isaac.

And that's the same reality that pertains to us with regard to sin or failure or anything else in our lives. Has it in reality happened? Yes. But in the same way that God, although he provides and incorporates it into his plan with regard to Hagar and Ishmael, for the purposes of forward movement in God's plan and the fulfillment of God's promises, God sets that aside.

He puts it out of the way and it's no longer an issue. And God doesn't even consider it to be in existence anymore. He says, Abraham, you've got one son, Isaac, for all the purposes of our future dealings.

In the same way that he says to us, you are blameless. You are faultless. You are upright and righteous.

When we avail ourselves of God's grace and are cleansed. And it's a wonderful thing. Every time I think about this passage, when God says, you're only son, three or four times in this passage, I think, that's what God does.

That's God's choice. And he is righteous and he's just. It's legal.

It's proper for him to do this. Everything is above board. God's not winking.

He's not turning a blind eye. It is, in fact, the way God says it is. Not only with Ishmael and Isaac, but also with us.

And with our standing in Christ before God. Because we are in Christ, we are a new creation. Old things have passed away.

All things have become new. And we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. That's how God views us.

That's how God treats us. That's how God speaks to us. And it's a wonderful reality.

So he says, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love. Now, God knows how much Isaac means to Abraham. Abraham waited a hundred years.

Okay, eighty years. He waited a long, long time to have a son. However long he was married to Sarah, that's how long he waited to have a son.

He had the sort of pseudo-son and pseudo-fulfillment with Ishmael, but that wasn't the real thing. It wasn't the promise of God. It wasn't done the right way.

It wasn't in the divine plan. But here is the real thing. This is the son that he loves.

His whole life is invested in this son. God says, I want you to take this son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I shall tell you. Now, I'm thinking that when God says, one of the mountains, which I shall tell you, Abraham doesn't probably even hear that part at first.

Because when God says, take the son and offer him there as a burnt offering, if I'm Abraham, my whole brain and soul has just seized up. And thinking, am I in fact really talking to God here? Is this God? How can this be God speaking, telling me to do this terrible thing? The thing that means more to me than anything else in life, and this is God telling me to go sacrifice him as a sacrifice? So we try to imagine what's going through Abraham's mind here. And this brings up, before we even go through and discuss all the details of this passage, this is an issue that faces us.

We've talked before. We've come up on this issue in Colossians and some of our other studies. Because we've talked about how initially when we're saved and we become a believer, our big task, the first thing we have to figure out is discerning between right and wrong.

Identifying, learning from the word of God that there are things in our life that are not right, and they're in fact sin, or they're evil, or they're a failure of some sort. And to discern between good and evil. And a lot of times the choices that face us in life, the test that God puts before us, are a choice between right and wrong.

And we figure out what the decision is that we should make because, well, this decision

I'm not going to make because this has a wrong in it. It would be wrong for me to do this because this is just revenge. I'm just doing this to get back at someone.

Or I'm doing this because I completely have no faith in the promises of God. I'm trying to hedge my bets here. I'm trying to preserve myself.

I'm trying to live like the world lives and just put God on the sideline if I do this thing. So you have choices where, to make the right choice, it's a matter of discerning where is the evil, where is the sin, where is the failure. And we go along that way for a while and pretty soon, like in Hebrews chapter 5, we become mature and we have our senses exercised to discern good and evil.

I've referred to that passage several times here in recent weeks. Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 5. I just want to have that firmly fixed in our minds here because this is central to understanding our chapter. Hebrews chapter 5, verse 11.

The author of Hebrews, I personally think it was the Apostle Paul. J. Vernon McGee is on my side, so that's a majority. The author here is in the middle of explaining Jesus Christ and his high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

It's a pretty sophisticated set of information he wants to talk about. He says, I'm talking about Jesus who is called by God as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, of whom we have much to say and it's hard to explain. This is some advanced teaching I'm trying to give you here, but it's hard to explain because you have become dull of hearing, O audience, whoever the Hebrews letter is written to.

Verse 12, for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need for someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. You've forgotten your fundamentals. And notice he says, teach you again.

They learned it once, but they've fallen off the wagon somewhere. You have come to need milk and not solid food. You were a baby once, you were fed the milk and then you graduated and we started giving you the Gerbers and then we graduated and then you got solid food.

But now you've relapsed. This is what the Baptists like to call a backslider. You've fallen back into your infancy.

You have come to need milk and not solid food. Verse 13 of Hebrews 5, for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age.

That is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. If you want to grow in understanding, if you want to grow maturity-wise in the plan of God, you have to be in the solid food stage. You've got to move through and out

of the milk phase.

And in so doing, we reach the point that our senses, by reason of use, this takes practice. It's not theory. You don't just drink the milk and suddenly your senses can tell you what's good and what's evil.

Senses by reason of use are exercised to discern good and evil. Once we accomplish this, and this you can see in analogy with little children who start out on a bottle and move through the baby food phase into solid food and are maturing and growing up, you begin to hold your children accountable for right and wrong. Don't put your finger in that light socket.

Don't touch that vase. Don't play with that. Don't go there.

Don't do this and do that. We teach our children right and wrong as soon as they're able to crawl around. And their sense of right and wrong is fixed, according to the child psychologist, by age five or six.

And their moral compass is already in full swing by that time. And we have to have started the training of that well ahead of when all that starts to gel. But then, as children get older and they get to become eight, nine, ten, and so forth, we move beyond just teaching them right and wrong, and we begin to teach them how to choose between options, all of which are legitimate.

It's no longer, don't break that vase, just play with your toy. It's should you play with your toy or should you finish cleaning up your room? Have you done things in the right order and in the right priority? There's nothing inherently wrong with what you're doing, playing with your toy, but that good thing is superseded in priority by this other good thing, finish your chores or finish cleaning your room or brush your teeth or do what you were told to do in some other area of life. And as we mature, we begin to have to make choices between legitimate things.

And you can't look and say, well, should I brush my teeth or should I play with my toy? Where is the sin? If I find the sin in one of those options, I'll know the one to pick. Now we're choosing between good things and we're discerning the better thing, as Paul says in another place. Paul prays that they will come to discern the better things.

And this is choosing between the good. We've already learned how to discern between good and evil. Now we're prioritizing our good options.

This is an exercise for the mature. You can't even bother with this if you don't know the difference between good and evil. If you haven't had your senses exercised, I mean, it's pointless to even try because you're going to be tripped up by the sin that so easily besets.

So those who are of full age, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, this is a mark of maturity. This is when we're ready for more sophisticated tests. This is where Abraham is in Genesis chapter 22.

It says God is going to test Abraham. God doesn't put sin in Abraham's path here. God is going to force Abraham to choose between good things.

And on the surface of it, it's going to look like a case of God telling Abraham to commit murder, to commit a sin. But in fact, this test is an advanced test. This is a test for the mature.

This is a test, can you discern the better thing between two right options? Necessarily, in order to bring two right options into conflict, you've got to see the conflict. There has to be a conflict there. And in here, the conflict is created by a couple of different things.

One is the taking of a human life, which is proscribed not only by the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses, but going all the way back to what God told Noah after the flood, when he said, you have the responsibility to make sure that if man sheds innocent blood, that by man his blood shall be shed. And we have a responsibility for justice and a responsibility to one another, that there not be murder. And if there is murder, that there is justice for it.

That is said over against obedience to God. And this is not an uncommon theme in Scripture. I've printed out a list here that I want to commend to your attention, of other places in the Word of God where we have dilemmas put before people of this nature.

Think, for example, of the Hebrew midwives in Egypt. God has told man to observe legitimately constituted governmental authority, right? Obey those that have the rule over you. Fear God, honor the king.

We are not to be law breakers. We are to be law abiding. Well, who is the governmental authority in Egypt when Israel is there in slavery? It's the Pharaoh and his government.

Pharaoh says, kill all of the male babies. He tells this to the midwives. Well, here you have another case where are we to kill a child, or are we to disobey a governmental authority? It seems like either way you are committing a wrong.

God said obey the government, God said don't kill. Just as you have here with Abraham. You have not lying, not bearing false witness, not deceiving other people.

But you have the famous instance of Rahab when the policemen of Jericho come to her house and say, have you seen the spies? And she says, nope. Well, actually I saw them, but they left. They went that-a-way.

And they're hiding up on her rooftop under the flax. And it is as big and bald-faced a lie

as you can tell. She knows where they are.

They're upstairs in her house. And she says, they're not here. They left.

If you hurry, you can catch them. It's just a bald-faced lie. Well, God says don't lie.

So is she wrong whichever way she goes? Should she have just-what should she do in that case? You have the queen that commands that all God's prophets be killed. You get over there in 2 Kings. And you've got Ahab and Jezebel.

Jezebel says kill all the prophets. And you've got a man hiding 100 of them in a cave. Well, civil disobedience.

The queen said have them all killed. Doesn't God decide who's going to be the king and the queen? And doesn't he say obey the government? And you can go on and on. You think about the apostles in the New Testament who are commanded by the governmental authorities.

Don't preach the gospel. And they go out and do it anyway. And they get jailed for it.

And they are beaten for it. And in some cases executed for it. Daniel's three friends are another example.

The king says bow down in worship. And they don't do it. And they get put in the fire.

Make the fire seven times hotter. You have Daniel himself being thrown to the lions because of his praying three times a day and so forth. So we have these ethical dilemmas.

Ethics is the science of applying your morality to experience. Your morality in the case of a believer is your spiritual life. Your spiritual knowledge decides what your morals are.

Well, how do you put this into practice? What do you do when it seems like no matter what you do it's going to be wrong? If I do this, I'm going to be breaking commandment A. If I do this, I'm going to be breaking commandment B. Well, Abraham has a classic ethical dilemma. Because if he doesn't take Isaac up the mountain, he's disobeying a direct command of God. If he does take Isaac up the mountain and sacrifice him, he's disobeying a direct commandment of God.

How can he possibly resolve this? There have been different suggestions as far as what this all means and how we should act. Should you pick the lesser of two evils and say, well, my guiding principle is going to be the lesser of two evils. This is what I'm going to do.

I'm just going to decide which does the least harm and do that. Well, there are several problems with this. Because sometimes you don't always know which is going to be the

lesser of two evils.

We can't always foresee what the outcome is going to be of what we do. And we've already seen in many of our studies that we don't base what we do on the outcome. If John the Baptist had based his ministry on the outcome, he wouldn't have gotten his head chopped off.

But he wouldn't have preached the gospel either. So if you say, well, if I do this, my head is going to be chopped off. Well, that would end my ministry.

And obviously God called me to a ministry. You see the problem. We start arguing with ourselves and that's not a good answer.

Plus, you're also left with sort of the irony that your ethics are, I'm going to commit an evil. Instead of being moral, well, I'm going to commit an evil. I'm going to decide which is the lesser evil and I'm going to do that.

So you're committed to doing an evil in this case, which is kind of weird. There are others who say, well, and this is probably one of the more common. And some of us may actually sort of unconsciously hold to this.

Well, there's always a third alternative. God will provide a way so that you don't have to do either. And a lot of people will turn to the Abraham story and say, well, Abraham didn't have to disobey God and not go up the mountain.

Nor did he have to kill his son because there was the ram in the thicket. And so if you just wait and look, God will provide the honorable way out. And that sounds good, but you look at your other examples.

That didn't happen with the apostles. It didn't happen with Rahab. Rahab is facing the soldiers at the door.

She either has to say, yes, they're here, or no, they're not. And people say, well, Rahab was wrong. She shouldn't have lied.

She should have said, oh, yes, they're right upstairs. Let me open the door for you and waited for God to supernaturally deliver them. This is not a very practical point of view.

There's nothing in the Bible to substantiate this view. And the other thing you have to remember, especially in Abraham's case, is that Abraham had already committed himself to a course of action. He took the wood.

He climbed the mountain. He grabbed a knife. And he was fully intending his intent, which in God's economy is equivalent to action, is already there.

God says, you have not withheld your son. In God's mind, it's as good as done when

Abraham fulfills the intent. So now we're back to the issue of which one are you going to choose.

Abraham chose. Abraham didn't say, well, son, let's sit here by the altar and wait for God to provide himself a lamb. Abraham put Isaac on the altar and raised the knife.

He committed himself to a course of action, and God approves. So this idea that God will always provide, sometimes supernaturally, a third alternative doesn't hold water either. We can substantiate that in the other passages I mentioned.

So what is the answer? Well, this gets to the heart of our calling as believers in this age. What does Jesus say to the young man who comes up and asks him about the law? He says, what is the greatest commandment? What is the first and greatest commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and all thy might, all your strength. And the second, Jesus says, is like unto it.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In this age especially, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another. You have a whole chapter in 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is the guiding principle of our life. Walk in love. Faith, hope, and love.

Love is the outworking of the life of faith that's motivated by hope. So then we're tended to come up with a third alternative and say, well, the guiding principle is love. Do the most loving thing.

But here you have a problem. There's not always a loving component involved. How is Rahab going to apply a law of love when the soldiers are saying, have you seen the spies? Well, it's more loving to not let the spies be killed.

It's not always easy to figure out the law of love. What if your choice is between the fate of two individuals? They have this classic thing they always bring up in ethics classes. You're in a lifeboat.

There's an old man and a young person, and there's not enough food, and the boat's sinking, and somebody has to be kicked overboard so that the rest of them can live. Do you kick out the old person because their life is nearly over? Do you kick out the young person because they drink more water and take up more food and the people have a better chance if you leave the old people in? Or honor your father and mother. Well, I'm going to honor my father, and I'll jump out of the boat and leave father in the boat.

Trying to apply the law of love is real general. How do you bring it down to specifics to just say, well, do the most loving thing? It's really no answer at all in a lot of cases because how can you decide what's more loving? So even the law of love, when we say, well, we're going to apply love, it doesn't give us the answers we need in specific

situations. So what is the answer? That's what this passage in Genesis brings up to us as an issue, especially in terms of application.

And what we find is that the fourth, and what I think is the proper understanding and alternative here, and the reason we're starting the study of this at the beginning of 22, is this is what Abraham has to figure out before he ever starts, before he packs the wood and the fire and the two servants and goes to the mountain. Abraham has to make the decision to go. Why does he decide to go? How does he sort this out? Abraham at this point in his life is probably at the pinnacle of his spiritual growth.

He has a lot of understanding. He has a lot of the knowledge of God, and he is an example here. This is one of the reasons Abraham is called friend of God because he does have his senses exercised by reason of use to discern good and evil.

And he figures out what is the good thing to do here. And you know that Abraham asked himself this question, is God wanting me to commit a murder? Which should I do? But here's the thing, and it is related to the idea of love and the law of love, which is present in both the Old Testament and in the New. But we have a set of priorities.

We do have the sphere of love. But Jesus gives us the answer when he says, The first and greatest commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. The second commandment is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus says on these, all the law and the prophets rest. This is the summation of everything God requires. Just like it says over in the Minor Prophets there, What does the Lord require of you, O man? But to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. That's what Abraham is going to do here. And it's an application of the law of love.

Justice and mercy are an application of love. Humility before God is recognizing our place and his primacy in our lives. So what we find is this idea of love is a guiding principle.

But it's not just a general idea, we'll do the most loving thing. Love has priority. What is the most loving thing here as far as Isaac goes? In terms of loving one's neighbor, in this case loving your own child.

Well, it wouldn't be to put him on an altar and cut his throat. And so the law of love as far as people go would say, don't put Isaac on the altar. But that is superseded by the law of love for God.

There is no doubt in Abraham's mind that it is truly God who has spoken. And it is God himself who has said, go to the place I will show you. Offer your son as a burnt offering.

And the interesting observation here is that when you see a seeming conflict between two options, both of which are right but only one of which you can do and you're going to violate the other one, finding the priority of love not only tells us what needs to be done, but we find that in not doing the other thing, that is no longer a wrong. If Abraham here in obeying God by going to Mount Moriah and offering his son is observing the higher priority in the law of love, then the sacrifice of his son is no longer a wrong thing. Think about the other examples we talked about.

Think about Rahab the harlot shielding the spies. In a choice between obeying those that have the rule over you, which is a third level law of love, if you will. It's a third level of obedience.

Governmental authorities are at a distance. The spies are at close hand. The spies are obviously, like they say in the Blues Brothers movie, on a mission from God.

There is a clear sphere of love that applies to the spies with whom she has a covenant and the governmental authorities who are pagans about to be destroyed by God, which she already knows from observation. So, what is the level of responsibility to governmental authority versus the spies? Her law of love and in priority perspective is to the spies at first hand and this legitimizes lying to the governmental authorities. This lying is no longer wrong in God's eyes because it is obeying the higher law.

The apostles who preach the gospel after the governmental authorities specifically and directly order them not to, are they in fact sinning before God in disobeying those that have the rule over them when God explicitly says obey those that have the rule over you? What does the law of love say? You have a responsibility to the gospel that is higher than the responsibility to the governmental authorities and when you fulfill that higher responsibility, that civil disobedience is no longer a sin. If you think this out and apply it, we have situations like this that occur quite often. It is in danger of happening in our society today when it comes to child training.

The incursion of the government and their anxiety about child abuse and so forth has intruded itself even into households where they have already removed spanking from the schoolhouse and have removed it in part from households where if you have an adopted child and human services is coming and checking on you and they are saying you can't use corporal punishment, here you have this adopted child, we will take them away and so forth. There is a situation with an organization that some of us are acquainted with where as a place for children to be nurtured and cared for and foster care being given for them, the government said you are not allowed to discipline them in a biblical way. You have to make a choice.

Am I going to abdicate my responsibility to this child before God or am I going to say the government says I can't. Either way it seems like you are doing them wrong. Here is where this principle gives us an understanding of what is right.

There are cases where even though the law says something, the law of love in a system of priority says that it is not wrong to disobey. This is something that has to be applied cautiously. We have to be sure we are on solid ground.

It is something that God is not going to test us with until we have sufficient resources in our soul to sort this out. Some people would love to take this and run with it. There was a man in a church I used to attend that thought the government was taking food out of his family's mouth by making him pay his taxes.

So he decided he wasn't going to pay his taxes. That is obviously not a biblical concept and it is not right to fail to pay taxes. Jesus demonstrated this in his own life.

He paid taxes that he did not owe. He explained why. He said, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

How people can justify on a biblical basis not paying tax I don't understand. You can look at places in Europe now where there is conflict, where the government is engaged in various activities with regard to their own population. If the government comes down and says, give up these people, we are going to do this, that, and the other to them, are you going to comply or not? It is something that can happen today.

It can happen in your life and in my life in a variety of ways. It applies in relationships with believers. We know that in certain cases believers commit actions that require separation.

There is the doctrine of separation from a believer. What about unity? What about accepting everyone in Christ and so forth? There is a higher principle that applies. There are times when someone will take themselves out of the place of fellowship by their disobedience, by their failure, by their indifference or their apathy.

There are times when if they have been approached and they don't care to reform, we breach the law of love to that believer in favor of a higher law where God says you need to set them out of the way. That is the hand that you have to cut off in order that you not continue to offend. What we are about to study in Genesis 22, when Abraham makes this decision and sorts this out, brings this concept to the forefront.

It is not a matter of Abraham is willing to commit a murder for God. It is a way of God bringing these things into conflict. Abraham's responsibility as a father to preserve and protect his son, not only as his beloved son, but as his future in the fulfillment of God's promises versus a direct commandment from God to take him up and sacrifice him as an offering.

How do we resolve something like that? How did Abraham resolve it? Abraham says I have this great love for my son. God points it out in verse 2. But can I keep things in perspective? Can I prioritize my love spheres and realize that love for God, obedience to

God as a result of love has to come first. That is what Abraham does.

That is why he is so great. That is why he is used as an example of that. This is where we are going to resume next week when we study the details of this mountaintop experience.

I will just leave you with a tidbit here from verse 2. When God says go to the land of Moriah to a mountaintop that I will show you, the mountaintop he is going to go to is known and is well marked. The dome of the rock sits on it today. It is in fact Mount Zion.

It is very near a place where Abraham has been before. He knows this territory because Melchizedek lives just down the hill from this mountaintop. Abraham is going to be able to find it and climb it because he has been there before.

He was in the plain that this mountain overlooks a few chapters earlier when he and Melchizedek shared bread and wine. It is a fascinating piece of geography that we will get a chance to study in detail next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you that not only do we have an eternal hope and an everlasting inheritance in your plan, but that we also have the opportunity to partake of those things in this life. We thank you that you have left us clear guidance on how to live in a way that pleases you. We know that as a result of your mercy and your grace we are cleansed and forgiven and given the opportunity to grow and mature and put on the new man that is renewed in knowledge.

We pray that the things that we have observed this morning will contribute to that goal in our souls, that we will have our senses exercised to discern good and evil by reason of use, and that each decision that we face will be one that clarifies for us the priorities in your plan and that we will be able to decide, think, and act in a way that is pleasing in your sight and that glorifies our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name. Amen.