

ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

Abraham, the highly renowned patriarch, who had not his equal in honor, as Sirach writes, believed God and trusted upon his word with the whole heart, and thus manifested obedience and power as the result of his faith. The Lord commanded him and said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee, and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed," Gen. 12: 1—3. When he heard the command, he believed his God and consulted not the ease of his body nor his natural reason, but renounced both, and did not strive nor dispute with God, in whom he trusted and by whose command he went forth; he did not desire to know before hand into what land he should go. He believed his God with his whole heart, he was obedient and went forth at that hour, together with Sarai, his wife, not knowing where he should go. He reposed firmly and surely upon the promise of God, who would not deceive nor betray him, for he well knew that he was a God who was true and firm in all his words, and that he would bring him into such a country as he had promised him.

Behold, how upright and perfect, how plain, obedient, and full of confidence is true, christian faith, as may be seen in this patriarch. Compare your faith and its fruits with Abraham's faith and its fruits, and I presume you will find that you have never yet become his faithful seed and children;

for it is manifest that you are stubborn and unbelieving, so fleshly and earthly minded that you would not give a clay house, a poor bed, a cow or a horse, nor would you endure a hard word for the sake of the word of the Lord, and his testimony; and I doubt whether you would forsake father or mother, or the land of your birth, for the sake of your faith, and like Abraham, travel with wife and children to an unknown land. Cursed unbelief keeps off the whole world from the truth; for many of you say, We well know that you have the truth, but what does it avail? We are poor and full of years, we cannot longer labor or earn; we have a house full of children and cannot earn our bread in other lands: we fear, also, that the Lord may not have such a care for us as he had for Abraham; others, say we, have much wealth, we are young in years, and may live long, yet father and mother hinder us. The wife says, my husband opposes me; the husband says, my wife is against me, and the like unbelieving fleshly excuses and cares. They never take to heart, nor understand, that Christ has richly promised you, that if you abide by his word, you shall receive all the necessities of the earth, as food, clothing, and shelter. "I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread," Ps. 37: 25.

Faithful readers, observe, if we had a firm faith and a sure confidence, like this godly man, and dare trust from the heart upon the living God, O how little should we trouble ourselves with such heathenish cares, concerning dwelling, eating, drinking, and clothing, for we well know, that Christ,

God's own Son, has promised that if we seek the kingdom of heaven, and his righteousness, and turn our hearts to some honest labor, he will not forsake us to all eternity, but will supply all our necessities, for he cares for us.

Secondly, observe his faith, when a message came to Abraham, that Lot, his brother's son, was taken to Sodom by Chedorlamar, the king of Elam, and his confederate kings, Abraham rose up with three hundred and eighteen of his servants and followed after the aforementioned kings; he overtook them in the night and slew them and re-took all their goods, together with Lot, the prisoners and their wives, Gen. 14: 16.

Here the faithful patriarch manifested his love, the result of faith, and feared not the power of the four kings. He trusted in the living God, he sought not his own safety, nor the safety of his servants, but willingly risked all, in order that he might rescue his oppressed kinsman from the hands of his enemies, as an example for all the spiritual children of Abraham, that they should so love their brethren who are born of the incorruptible seed of the holy divine word, and not only assist them with money and goods, but also in an evangelical manner, risk and give their lives for them in time of need. I say in an evangelical manner; for the aid of the sword is forbidden to all true christians. According to the New Testament, all true believers should meekly suffer, and not fight and combat with swords and firearms. But if we wish to save or gain our neighbor's soul, by the help of the Spirit and word of our Lord, or if we see our brethren in need or peril, and persecuted for the sake of the word of the Lord, then we should not close our doors to them, but receive them in our houses, share with them our food, aid, comfort and assist them in their tribulations, &c. In such cases, we should risk our lives for our brethren, even if we knew beforehand that it would be at the cost of our lives. This example we have of Christ, who for our sakes, did not spare himself, but willingly yielded his life, that we through him, might live.

In the third place, observe, that to Abraham the promise was given, that his seed should be as numerous as the stars of heav-

en; that they should be strangers in another land that was not theirs, and that they should be oppressed and compelled to serve four hundred years, &c. When this promise was made he believed; he believed this, and his belief was reckoned to him for righteousness. He waited with patience, and it was fulfilled in its time; he murmured not, nor disputed with God, because his seed should suffer so greatly for so many years. An admonition to all true christians that they should cleave to the word of the Lord, with all the heart, and should hold firmly to his promise; for God cannot forget or break his word; heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall stand and abide forever. All who shall trust in it, to them it shall be reckoned as righteousness, as it was to Abraham. Through faith he saw the promise from afar; he saw it, and comforted himself therewith. In like manner also with us, the promise of the future, eternal life, is given through Christ, and we are informed that for his name's sake, we must suffer much from this perverted and wicked generation. This promise is seen from afar, and all who sincerely believe it and comfort themselves therewith, will doubtlessly receive it in due time, however hard and long they may be persecuted and tormented by the evil Egyptian race. For, although the children of Abraham were grieved with much sorrow and pain for some hundreds of years, yet did the Lord, according to his promise, lead them forth victoriously, and gave them the land of promise; and thus it will be with us if we doubt not the promises, but receive them with a firm faith, as Abraham did, and through faith walk in all the commandments of God, possess our souls in patience and honor, fear, love, thank and serve the Lord. How lamentably soever, we are here persecuted, oppressed, smitten, robbed and murdered by the hellish Pharaoh, and his fierce, unmerciful servants, or burned at the stake, or drowned in the water, yet shall the day of our salvation arrive, and all our tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and we shall be arrayed in the white silken robes of righteousness, and with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, follow the Lamb, and sit down in the kingdom of God and possess the precious, pleasant land of

eternal peace. Praise God, ye who suffer for Christ's sake and raise your heads, for the time is near when you shall hear, Come ye blessed, and ye shall rejoice with him forever.

In the fourth place, observe, that Abraham received a command from God, that he and also his male children of eight days old, should be circumcised, with all his servants, those who were born in his house, and those who were bought, and this should be a covenant sign between God and him. He was not disobedient to God, nor yet displeased with him, neither did he complain nor murmur against him on account of the great pain and smarting he should suffer in his old age, by performing such a dishonorable and ridiculous ceremony, whereby he could neither praise God, nor help or serve his neighbor, but he heard and believed the word of the Lord, and humbly and submissively followed it without delay. He well knew, that unless he would believe the word of God, he could obtain no grace, no blessing, no promise, for only the obedient obtain the promise.

Here again the simple, plain submission, and willing obedience of Abraham's faith, are made manifest by its fruits: for if he had followed flesh and blood, and reasoned with himself, he undoubtedly would not have obeyed, but he would have entered into argument with God, and said, No, Lord, it shall not be so, for this sign will profit me nothing, for Thou art not praised thereby nor my neighbor served. All the heathen who know not thy great name will mock at it as foolishness, from the very nature of the ceremony. O no! He spake not against the Lord, but he believed and acted, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.

This is for the encouragement of all the pious, that they should believe, and submissively follow the word of the Lord, however heretical and ridiculous it may appear to them, not murmuring against the Lord why he so commanded it; but it is enough that they know that he has commanded, and in what manner he has commanded.

Again, it shames all haughty despisers and unbelieving mockers, who so presumptuously open their blasphemous, wicked

months against Christ, and say, What can baptism profit us, or why does God demand so much water? It is enough, if we are inwardly pious men, regard the commands of love, and lead a pious, virtuous life, and such like hypocritical words; for these poor miserable hypocrites know not when the inward man, of which they boast, has become upright through faith and pious in God, through the grace, word, and Spirit of the Lord, that he dare not depart one hair's breadth from the word and ways of the Lord, but does willingly all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded him, let it be what it will.

It is very manifest that Christ Jesus has commanded water baptism, upon the confession of our faith, and that he received it himself, Matt. 3: 16. The holy apostles did not teach nor practice otherwise; their signification and effect were not otherwise, and so many glorious promises depend thereon, as may plainly be seen and read, Mark 16: 15 (understand me rightly), not by virtue of the wrought sign itself, but that we receive Christ, in whom the Father gave the promise through faith, and are ready to live according to his word. Say, beloved, how shall one obtain the accompanying promise if he does not do what is commanded? But what does it avail all who believe not the Lord's word, who would rather have money, goods, body and life, than Christ? They are earthly and fleshly minded, they strive against Christ, disobey the Scriptures, dispute and say, What can water benefit us? But if they believed the word of the Lord from the heart, as Abraham did, and were new and changed men in Christ Jesus, through the power of the same faith, they would love their enemies, do good for evil, pray for those by whom they are persecuted, be ready to forsake possessions and all that they have and are for the glory of the Lord, and for the necessary service of their neighbor. They would not reject the cross of the Lord, but flesh and blood would be mortified: they would fear God and his judgments, and love him, for his kindness; they would undoubtedly not murmur and dispute, but stand prepared, like Abraham, to seal their faith by its fruits; they would receive the commanded baptism, surrender

themselves to all obedience, and according to their weakness, walk as the Lord commands, teaches and enjoins upon all true Christians.

Since they believe not Christ and his word, they neither fear nor love him; therefore they reject, upbraid and blaspheme his holy doctrine, Spirit, commandments, prohibitions, ordinances and usages as deceiving heresy, and obedience to him as an open abomination. O reader, beware! God, the Lord, is a God who adheres to his word; he brought calamity upon Adam and Eve and their posterity on account of the forbidden fruit. For a small transgression Uzzah was punished with death, 2 Sam. 6: 7. On account of one transgression, the faithful Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land. Whoever received not the bloody sign of circumcision, was to be cut off from among the people. Therefore, it must be plainly understood, that his word and will must be obeyed, otherwise we cannot be saved, for he is the God who has made heaven and earth and the fullness thereof; the Almighty, terrible God, who lives forever in his majesty and glory; the Lord and Ruler over all. Woe to him who speaks against him and despises his word and will. The works of such an one testify that he believes not in Christ, and whosoever believeth not, as Christ himself declares, is condemned already. Therefore, it is all in vain to excuse ourselves or seek evasion. How any one who is so unbelieving and rebellious, that he refuses God a handful of water, can conform himself to love his enemies, mortify the flesh to the service of his neighbor, and to take up the cross of Christ, I will leave the serious reader to reflect upon, in the fear of God.

I know for certain, that all their disputation, pretensions and evasions are nothing but fig leaves, and their lives, nothing but hypocrisy.

In the fifth place observe, when the Lord had spoken to Abraham, that at the end of the year he would return, and that Sarah, his wife, should have a son, whom he should call Isaac, and that he would make his eternal covenant with him and his seed after him; though he was nearly a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, nevertheless, he

doubted not. He did not think upon, or regard his own frailty and the barrenness of Sarah, but firm and strong in faith, he trusted upon the promise of his God, and praised him for his grace; for he knew that God was able to perform that which he had promised. Therefore, from this same Abraham, because he believed the word of the Lord, descended as many as the sand which is upon the sea shore or the stars of heaven, Gen. 22: 17.

Behold, most beloved, how an upright, unfeigned, christian faith regards God as almighty and true; it knows that he can and will do all that he has promised, and therefore, Abraham looked not upon the frailty and age of himself and Sarah. He doubted not the promised words, but believed without wavering, for he knew well, that the same God who created heaven and earth, and the fullness thereof through his word, who stretched the heavens abroad, and to the stormy, raging sea set an established bound, whose word sustains the earth in the midst of the water, who rules all with the word of his strength, and gives life to the dead, could undoubtedly, when he chose, render that fruitful, which before was barren.

Since then, such a promise was given to him of God, he doubted not, but hoped for that, which in nature, was not to be expected. Through faith in God, he received that which was promised to him, namely his son Isaac, through the aged and barren Sarah; so in like manner it is spiritually with us; if we believe, with the whole heart, the promised word of grace, which is the gospel of peace, whereby the redemption from our sins, through the blood of the Lord, is made known; so will also our dead conscience flourish and live; we shall receive the spiritual Isaac, Christ Jesus, with the eternal blessing, and bring forth fruit. Christ said, My mother and my brethren are those, who hear the word and will of God, and do accordingly: but whosoever believeth not this Isaac, receives not Christ, but the wrath of God abides upon him.

In the sixth place observe, how severely the Lord tried the faith of Abraham, when he said, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for

a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of," Gen. 22: 2. Abraham heard the word of the Lord and was obedient. He took his son with him and went to the place, which the Lord had commanded him; and when he came there, Isaac said, Father, behold here is fire and wood, but where is the lamb that shall be offered? Abraham answered his son, and said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."

O my most beloved, reflect! Observe the conduct and conversation of Abraham and his son Isaac. I suppose reason will teach you how full of trouble and grief the mind of the father was on account of his beloved son, for Abraham was flesh and blood as we are. That son, who was born to him in his old age, through the promise and gift of God, his only son born of a free woman, the desire, the joy and the peace of his heart, the staff of his age, through whom he received the comforting promise; must be slain and burned with fire.

How hard and sorely he was tried, yet did he not oppose God with a single word, nor contend and say, Why hast thou given me a son since he must die? Neither did he reprove the Lord, by saying, that he had falsified his promise, for it was through Isaac that the promise was made, but he confided in his God with his whole heart; he laid aside all reasoning and wisdom, and followed not sense nor flesh. He spared not his beloved son for the Lord's sake. He loved his God far above his child, and therefore he refused not to offer him willingly as a burnt offering to Him from whom he received him. He bound him and lifted him upon the wood, and raised his hand and knife to slay him; he believed that God could again raise him from the dead. He was about to obey the command which he had received, when an angel spake from Heaven, saying, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God; seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me," Gen. 22: 12. And thus the obedient, faithful Abraham received his son as a type of the resurrection. The word of James is true, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteous-

ness, and he was called the friend of God," James 2: 23.

Beloved children, we must always stand confounded before God, when we compare our little, weak faith and its fruit with the faith of Abraham. He refused not to travel in an unknown country, as soon as he was commanded. He was a man full of peace, and sought not his own interest. He released Lot out of the hands of his enemies. He believed the promise concerning the promised land and seed. He murmured not on account of the long time nor of the oppression of his seed. He suffered himself to be circumcised in advanced age. He believed the Lord's promise concerning Isaac, and taught all his servants and children, that they should follow the way of the Lord, and do that which was right. He was willing to offer Isaac as the Lord had commanded him. This may truly be called faith.

So entirely was this pious man dead to himself, that he denied all his lusts, his will and mind, and loved his God alone. He trusted, feared, loved and honored his God, with all his soul and heart, and walked according to his commandments, as is evidenced by his fruits, as may be observed and understood from many passages of Scripture. But what kind of faith our false, boasting christians possess, who suffer themselves to think that they are the seed of Abraham, I will let their fruits be the judge; for they covet and hoard, curse and swear, lie and cheat; they are haughty and proud, eat and drink intemperately, commit fornication and adultery, fight, rob, steal, take usury, and are full of idolatry and wickedness. Those who have a little light refuse to remove from one village to another, or from one city to another, for the word and truth of the Lord; they seek their own interests, and esteem brotherly love but lightly; they are earthly minded, and flee from the cross of Christ; they regard not the promise and goodness of the Lord; they fear not his coming judgment, and punishment; they love the creature more than the Creator; his name be blessed forever, Amen.

In short, I know not what it is, in which they do not serve themselves, nor act contrary to the command of God. They boast

notwithstanding, that they are the children of Abraham, and have his promise. Ah no! my friends, your prophets have led you astray, and your false hopes deceive you; as true as the Lord lives, if you believe not his word, from the whole heart, nor through the power of the same faith, walk in his ways, bring not forth the christian fruits of righteousness, and do not follow the footsteps of this pious patriarch; you are not his seed and children, neither have you his faith nor his promise. But all who receive Christ in their hearts, through faith, and adhere strictly to his word and obey it, are the spiritual children of Abraham, and fellow heirs of his promise, for they are reckoned his seed.
