



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
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September 2013

The Faith of Abraham

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“And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.”
(Romans 4:12 KJV)

Abraham sometimes called “the father of the faithful.” He was great in God’s overall scheme of things, especially God’s eternal plan of salvation for mankind. The Jewish people were his physical descendants, but Christians are his spiritual descendants. Paul writing to Christians said: *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, **then are ye Abraham’s seed**, and heirs according to the promise.”* (Galatians 3:26-29)

We can learn much about faith by observing some events in Abraham’s life that can help us to be truly “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.”

When He Left Home

The Genesis (12:1) account tells of Abram, as he was known then, answering the call of God to leave home and go where God would show him. Hebrews (11:8) says that he went “not knowing whither he went.” As a man of faith he did not have to know all about what was in store for him from the beginning to the end. All he needed to know was that God had given the command to go and to trust in God to show him, in due time, where he should

go. He recognized the principle that God later enunciated through Moses that the secret things belong to God and the revealed things belong to us (Deut. 29:29).

When we begin our journey with God we do not have to know all that is ahead of us. Some things are revealed, such as our final destination and some of what to expect along the way, but there is a lot we may not know. But we trust God, in due time, to make those things known to us through a study of His word. The promise is that “disciples indeed,” by continuing in the Lord’s word, will know the truth and the truth will make them free. (John 8:31-32).

When He Settled With Lot

As Abraham and Lot wandered about the land of Canaan, they both became rich in flocks and herds. They were so large that the land could not sustain them both, causing a strife between Abraham’s and Lot’s herdsmen. (Gen. 13). It became evident that the most expedient thing was to go their separate ways to feed their animals and prevent the strife. Abraham proposed that there were two choices of land and gave Lot the choice between the “well-watered” land of the Jordan plain or the less favorable land of Canaan. It was a wise proposal to avoid strife between him and Lot and their herdsmen. He could have insisted that because of his age that he would take the better land, but instead he was willing to risk getting the less suitable land for his herds and flocks in order to bring about peace – following the principle later laid down in the scriptures: “As much as depends

on you live peaceably with all men.”

It is apparent that Abraham believed that God would take care of him – no matter which of the lands that Lot would leave to him. He also recognized that peace is more important than temporal advantage. He recognized that peace with his nephew was more important than a piece of meat (cf. Rom. 14:17). All of this took a deep faith on Abraham’s part.

The New Testament teaches us that there is only one thing more important than peace. That is purity (James 3:17).

When He Was Promised a Son

Abraham and his wife were getting old and still childless. Abraham proposes to God that his steward’s son be his heir. God assures Abraham that he would have an heir in one that would be his biological son. This was hard for both Abraham and his wife, Sarah, to accept. In fact, they both laughed at the idea (Gen. 17 and 18). Nonetheless Genesis 15:6 tells us that he “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

It was not easy for him to believe that such a huge number of descendants would come to him, an old man with an old wife. He could not bring this about by his own bodily strength and that of Sarah. He considered his body as dead and the womb of Sarah as dead – but he still believed that God was able to pull it off. (Rom. 4:19-24).

We need that kind of faith. We need to believe that God is able to do as he has promised in spite of our human weaknesses. If we believe in Him and surrender our will to his will he will accomplish what he has promised.

When He Pleaded for Sodom

When God’s messenger told Abraham of the planned destruction of Sodom, where Lot was now living, Abraham began to plea for the sparing of that city. (Gen. 18:23ff). He showed his faith in God’s willingness to listen to His servants and make changes in answer to their prayers. He also showed faith in God’s honoring persistent praying. (Cf. Luke 18:1-5). When Abraham started his plea, he asked if God would save Sodom from destruction if 50 righteous people could be found

there. After receiving a positive answer he, by increments, pleaded on down to just 10. His persistence in pleading to God reduced the number greatly. Faithful people realize that God’s actions are affected by their prayer and will persistently ask for what they desire until they get it or are convinced that what they are asking is not God’s will. Of course, all requests should be desired only if it is God’s will.

His pleading for Sodom also showed his great love for Lot and his family in spite of Lot’s having chosen the better grazing land.

When He Offered Isaac

After giving Abraham his promised son, Isaac, God put Abraham’s faith to a severe test. (Gen. 22). God called upon Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice upon an altar. How could this be? First, offering one’s children as a sacrifice was a heathen practice not fitting for one with faith in God. Second, this was the son of promise and now God was about to take him back. Third, if Isaac died how would God fulfill his promise of blessing the world through Abraham’s seed?

Abraham having received plain instructions proceeded, with faith in God, to obey God’s command, in spite of the difficulties. The Hebrew writer tells us that he accounted that God could raise him from the dead. (11:17-19). God would somehow make his promise to Abraham good regardless of whatever difficulties it might seem to present.

There are times when we read God’s plain instructions in the Scriptures that are obviously meant for us to follow – yet we can see a number of difficulties with obeying the command. What are we to do? We need to do as Abraham – obey the plain teaching of God and leave it to him to work out whatever difficulties that we may think associated with that obedience.

Abraham was not a perfect man. He, like all great men, had weaknesses. He lied at least twice in a tight situation claiming that Sarah was his sister. He briefly laughed at the promise of God (Gen. 17:7).

Men of faith, with the help of God, overcome

their weaknesses. They depend on the Lord to give them strength and forgiveness – upon the condition of obedience to His word. ■

Fight the Good Fight

Irven Lee

The sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Eph. 6:17). It is the only offensive weapon given to Christians in the battle for right, but there are several other pieces of equipment needed by every soldier who is fighting a good fight. These weapons are for his own protection and strength so that he can stand against the fiery darts of the wicked one. He must have on the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness, and he must have his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. He should know and practice the truth. If he fights error there will be contrary reactions, so he should not be one who lives in a glass house and throws stones.

The advice to Timothy and Titus did not include any comments on posture, gestures, enunciation, grammar, or volume in speaking. It is a matter of common judgment that a speaker should give thought to these things because the effectiveness of his lessons might be hindered by his lack of skill, but it is much more important that he be an example or pattern of good behavior (1 Tim. 4:12, 16; 2 Tim. 2:21-26). There are times when people put too much emphasis on the tone of voice, the smooth flow of words, and other physical attributes, while there is very little notice given to the message. It is the truth that can make men free; it is the gospel that is the power of God to salvation; it is the word that can save the soul (John 8:31, 32; Rom. 1:16-18; James 1:21-27).

A beautiful voice may be pleasant to the ear, but the beautiful voice cannot save the soul. We should speak so as to be heard and understood, and our earnestness of soul may be indicated by our manner of speech, but pure emotionalism will not reach the intellect with knowledge, or put strength in one's will, or supply purity in one's life. Emotionalism may bring tears to the eyes and

cause some to come to the front during an invitation song, but this approach to the work will reach the shallow soil type which will wither when the sun appears.

Preachers are to encourage or exhort, but they are to instruct, warn, reprove, and rebuke as well. Lasting results come when the whole counsel is declared with boldness. Paul reminded the elders at Ephesus of his three years' work among them. He said, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:18-21, 26, 27).

Paul's emotions are very evident in his preaching, but his boldness, hate for sin, love for souls, and love for God are also evident. He was fully aware of the sinfulness of sin and of the great need for repentance. He loved God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. His effort was to please God rather than men, so he had no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but he rather reproveth them. The great Teacher said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). Stephen asked his Jewish brethren, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:52). They killed Stephen, but no pleasant answer has ever been found for his question.

We are not trying to teach brethren to be needlessly offensive or to forget kindness and wisdom. We are to be as harmless as doves and as wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16). We are to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke" as we shine as lights in a dark world. We may wisely adapt our lives to be more likely to accomplish the worthy work our Lord has assigned. Paul could say, "I am made all things to

all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake" (I Cor. 9:22, 23). He used the milk of the word, and, at the proper time, he used the meat of the word.

Paul's task was to pull down some mighty strongholds. It is amazing that the pagan gods and the Roman Empire fought the servants of God so bitterly, but the gospel is still here while the Roman Empire and the pagan gods are completely destroyed. That is possibly the most remarkable victory of recorded history. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The-Greek philosophers mocked, the idolaters raged, and Rome fought; but the little rock cut out of the mountain prevailed. Humble men who were armed with the gospel, for which they were willing to die, won an absolute and complete victory. No Roman ruler, pagan priest, or Greek philosopher dreamed of such defeat when the struggle began.

Emotionalism would not have crushed the powerful foes of the early Christians. They had conviction, knowledge of God's wisdom, courage, and zeal. There was the power of lightning in their message and example. They did not try to destroy these strongholds with thunder. Sensationalism, excitement, and the waving of flags would never have done the job. Compromising truth in order to make friends with the dragon, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth would have led to failure. It was a fight unto the death of the weaker.

Today atheism, evolution, fornication, alcoholism, robbery, blasphemy, ignorance of the Bible, materialism, and denominationalism are as powerful as the ancient foes of Christ. Brave men who are well armed are needed now for the fight. Gideon's army was cut down to three hundred men who would surround the innumerable host of the Midianites, hold up lighted torches, and stand in

their places. God can win by few or by many. The strongholds of our day can be pulled to the ground if there can be found an army of faithful men who will faithfully follow and boldly proclaim the whole counsel of God regardless of the sacrifices.

The fornicators, social drinkers, lovers of the praise of men, blasphemers, materialists, and unconverted ignorant men are found among the influential church members in some places. If the ground should open and swallow all such nominal church members, the pure in heart that remain would make a smaller but more powerful army against the devil's strongholds in our day. Emotionalism, compromise, and noise will not clean up our wicked world. Who has the whole armor of God at hand and a willingness to use it? The host of the Midianites heard the trumpets and saw the torches of Gideon's three hundred brave men. The victory was not won by the men who were hidden in caves. If God be for us who can be against us?

Truth Magazine (Nov. 29, 1979) via The Auburn Beacon. ■

Are we looking for loopholes

While living in the Birmingham area, I received a call from a sister from across town telling about a congregation over that way that would not accept her daughter into their fellowship because of her "marriage situation." She wanted to know what I thought the Bible taught on divorce and remarriage.

I asked her to get her Bible and read with me Matthew 19:3-9, especially verse 9:

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9 NKJV)

After reading the passage without further comment, the sister said, "I know that it says that, but isn't there a loophole in there somewhere."

Do you reckon that there might be many other folks that, because of situations in their lives, might be looking for loopholes rather than accepting the plain wording and obvious meaning of the scriptures? (EB) ■