

## CHAPTER 66

### THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

(~~8117~~ HEBREWS 11:17-19)

“Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (~~4613~~ Romans 6:13).

The Lord has an absolute claim upon us, upon all that we have. As our Maker and Sovereign He has the right to demand from us anything He pleases, and whatsoever He requires we must yield (~~1391~~ 1 Chronicles 29:11). All that we have comes from Him, and must be held for Him, and at His disposal (~~1394~~ 1 Chronicles 29:14). The Christian is under yet deeper obligations to part with anything God may ask from him: loving gratitude for Christ and His so great salvation, must loosen our hold on every cherished temporal thing. The bounty of God should encourage us to surrender freely whatever He calls for, for none ever lose by giving up anything to God. Yet powerful as are these considerations to any renewed mind, the fact remains that they move us not until *faith* is in exercise. Faith it is which causes us to yield to God, respond to His claims, and answer His calls.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (~~8117~~ Hebrews 11:17-19).

The apostle’s purpose in citing this remarkable incident, was to show that it is the property of faith to carry its possessor through the greatest trials, with a cheerful submission and acceptable obedience to the will of God. In order to make this clearer unto the reader, let us endeavor to exhibit the powerful influence which faith has to support the soul under and carry it through testings and trials.

**First**, faith judgeth of all things aright: it impresses us with a sense of the uncertainty and fleetingness of earthly things, and causes us to highly esteem invisible and heavenly things. Faith is a spiritual prudence opposed not only to ignorance, but also to folly: so much unbelief as we have, so much folly is ours — “O fools and slow of heart to believe” (<sup><4225></sup>Luke 24:25). Faith is a spiritual wisdom, teaching us to value the favour of God, the smiles of His countenance, the comforts of Heaven; it shows us that all outward things are nothing in comparison with inward peace and joy. Carnal reason prizes the concerns of the present life and grasps at its riches and honors; sense is occupied with fleshly pleasures; but faith knows

“Thy loving kindness is better than life” (<sup><4938></sup>Psalm 63:3).

**Second**, faith solves all riddles and doubts when we are in a dilemma: what a problem confronted Abraham; what! shall I offer Isaac and bring to naught God’s promises, or must I disobey Him on the other side? Faith removed the difficulty: “accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.” Faith believes the accomplishment of the promise, whatever reason and sense may say to the contrary; it cuts the knot by a resolute dependence upon the power and fidelity of God. Faith casts down carnal imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

**Third**, faith is a grace which looks to future things, and in the light of their reality the hardest trials seem nothing. Sense is occupied only with things present, and thus to nature it appears troublesome and bitter to deny ourselves. But the language of faith is,

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; *while* we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (<sup><47417></sup>2 Corinthians 4:17, 18).

Faith looks within the veil, and so has a mighty influence to support the soul in time of trial. He who walks in the light of Eternity goes calmly and happily along through the mists and fogs of time; neither the frowns of men nor the blandishments of the world affect him, for he has a ravishing and affecting sight of the glorious Inheritance to which he is journeying.

**Fourth**, “faith worketh by love” (<sup><4886></sup>Galatians 5:6), and then nothing is too near and dear to us if the relinquishing of them will glorify God. Faith not only looks forward, but backward; it reminds the soul of what great things

God has done for us in Christ. He has given us His beloved Son, and *He* is worth infinitely more than all we can give to Him. Yes, faith apprehends the wondrous love of God in Christ, and says, If He gave the Darling of His bosom to die for me, shall I stick at any little sacrifice? If God gave me Christ shall I deny Him my Isaac: I love him well, but I love God better. Thus faith works, urging the soul with the love of God, that we may out of thankfulness to Him part with those comforts which He requires of us.

“Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called”  
(verse 18).

This was brought in by the apostle to show wherein lay the greatest obstacle before Abraham’s faith.

**First**, he was called on to “offer up” his son and heir.

**Second**, and this after he had “received the promises.”

**Third**, not Ishmael, but his “only begotten” or well-beloved Isaac — this is the force of the expression: it is a term of endearment as ~~4018~~ John 1:18, 3:16 shows.

**Fourth**, he must slay the one from whom the Messiah Himself was to issue, for this is clearly the meaning of the Divine promise recorded in verse 18.

Long ago John Owen called attention to the fact that the Socinians (Unitarians) reduced God’s promise to Abraham unto two heads: first that of a numerous posterity, and second that this posterity should inhabit and enjoy the land of Canaan as an inheritance. But this, as he pointed out, directly contradicts the apostle, who in Heb. 11:39 affirms that, when they had possessed the land of Canaan almost unto the utmost period of its grant unto them, had *not* received the accomplishment of the promise--we wish our modern “dispensationalists” would ponder that verse. While it is true that the numerous posterity of Abraham and their occupancy of Canaan were both means and pledges of the fulfillment of the promise, yet ~~4128~~ Acts 2:38, 39 and ~~4016~~ Galatians 3:16 make it unmistakably plain that the subject-matter of the promise was Christ Himself, with the whole work of His meditation for the redemption and salvation of His Church.

“Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called.” This Divine promise is first found in ~~01212~~ Genesis 21:12, and the occasion of God’s

giving it unto Abraham supplies us with another help towards determining its significance. In the context there, we find that the Lord had given orders for the casting out of Hagar and her son, and we read,

“And the thing was very grievous in Abraham’s sight because of his son” (<sup>0211</sup>Genesis 21:11).

Then it was, to console his stricken heart, that Jehovah said unto His “friend”: grieve not over Hagar’s son, for I will give thee One who is better than a million Ishmaels; I will give thee a son from whom shall descend none other than the promised Savior and Redeemer. And now Abraham was called upon to slay him who was the marked-out progenitor of the Messiah! No ordinary faith was called for here!

Who can doubt but that now Abraham was sorely pressed by Satan! Would he not point out how “inconsistent” God was?--as he frequently will to us, if we are foolish enough to listen to his vile accusations. Would he not appeal to his sentiments and say, How will Sarah regard you when she learns that you have killed and reduced to ashes the child of her old age? Would he not seek to persuade Abraham that God was playing with him, that He did not really mean to be taken seriously, that he could not be so cruel as to require a righteous father to be the executioner of his own dutiful son? In the light of all that is revealed of our great Enemy in Holy Writ, and in view of our own experience of his fiendish assaults, who can doubt but what Abraham now became the immediate object of the Devil’s attack.

Ah, nothing but a mind that was stayed upon the Lord could have then resisted the Devil, and performed a task which was so difficult and painful.

“Had he been weak in faith, he would have doubted whether two revelations, apparently inconsistent, could come from the same God, or, if they did, whether such a God ought to be trusted and obeyed. But being strong in faith, he reasoned in this way: This is plainly God’s command, I have satisfactory evidence of that; and therefore it ought to be immediately and implicitly obeyed. I know Him to be perfectly wise and righteous, and what He commands must be right. Obedience to this command does indeed seem to throw obstacles in the way of the fulfillment of a number of promises which God has made to me. I am quite sure that God has made those promises; I am quite sure that He will perform them.

How He is to perform them, I cannot tell. That is His province, not mine. It is His to promise, and mine to believe; His to command, and mine to obey” (John Brown).

The incident we are now considering shows us again that faith has to do not only with the promises of God, but with His precepts as well. Yea, this is the central thing which is here set before us. Abraham had been “strong in faith” when God had declared he should have a son by his aged wife (~~4049~~ Romans 4:19), not being staggered by the seemingly insurmountable difficulty that stood in the way; and now he was strong in faith when God bade him slay his son, refusing to be deterred by the apparently immovable obstacle which his act would interpose before his receiving the Seed through Isaac. Ah, dear reader, make no mistake upon this point: a faith which is not as much and as truly engaged with the precepts as it is with the promises of God, is not the faith of Abraham, and therefore is not the faith of God’s elect. Spiritual faith does not pick and choose: it fears God as well as loves Him.

As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off our hearts from the carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer us, so the commandments are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to and obey them. The Psalmist declared, “I have *believed Thy commandments*” (~~4066~~ Psalm 119:66); he recognized God’s authority behind them, there was a readiness of heart to hear His voice in them, there was a determination of will for his actions to be regulated by them. So it was with Abraham, and so it must be with us if we would furnish proof that *he is our* “father.”

“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (~~4039~~ John 8:39).

God’s Word is not to be taken piece-meal by us, but received into our hearts as a whole: every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which each several part is suited to produce. If the promises stir up comfort and joy, the commandments must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The precepts are a part of Divine revelation. The same Word which calls upon us to believe in Christ as an all-sufficient Savior, also bids us to believe the commandments of God, for the molding of our hearts and the guiding of our ways. There is a necessary connection between the precepts and the promises, for the latter cannot do us good until the former be

heeded: our consent to the Law precedes our faith in the Gospel. God's commands "are not grievous" (~~618B~~ 1 John 5:3). Christ must be accepted as Lawgiver before He becomes our Redeemer: ~~233D~~ Isaiah 33:22.

How the readiness of Abraham to sacrifice his son condemns those who oppose God's commands, and will not sacrifice their wicked and filthy lusts!

"Whosoever he be of you," says Christ, "that *forsaketh not* all that he hath, he *cannot* by My disciple" (~~414B~~ Luke 14:33):

by which He meant, until he does in heart sincerity and resolute endeavor turn away from all that stands in competition (for our affections) with the Lord Jesus, he cannot become a Christian: see ~~288D~~ Isaiah 55:7. In vain do we claim to be saved if the world still rules our hearts. Divine grace not only delivers from the wrath to come, but even now it effectually "teaches" its recipients to *deny*

"all ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (~~312D~~ Titus 2:12).

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (verse 19).

Here we learn what was the immediate object of Abraham's faith on this occasion, namely, the mighty power of God. He was fully assured that the Lord would work a miracle rather than fail of His promise. Ah, my brethren, it is by meditating upon God's sufficiency that the heart is quietened and faith is established. In times of temptation when the soul is heavy with doubts and fears, great relief may be obtained by pondering the Divine attributes, particularly, God's omnipotency. His all-mighty power is a special prop to faith. The faith of saints has in all ages been much strengthened hereby. Thus it was with the three Hebrews:

"our God whom we serve *is able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace" (~~278D~~ Daniel 3:17)!

"With God *all* things are possible" (~~410D~~ Mark 10:27):

He is able to make good His word, though all earth and hell seem to make against it.

Here too we see exhibited another of faith's attributes, namely, the committal of events unto God. Carnal reason is unable to rest until a solution is in sight, until it can see a way out of its difficulties. But faith spreads the need before God, rolls the burden upon Him, and calmly leaves the solution to Him.

“Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (<sup><2146></sup>Proverbs 16:3):

when this is truly done by faith we are eased of many tossings of mind and agitations of soul that would otherwise distress us. So here, Abraham committed the event unto God, reckoning on His power to raise Isaac again, though he should be killed. This is the very nature of spiritual faith: to refer our case unto Him, and wait calmly and expectantly for the promised deliverance, though we can neither perceive nor imagine the manner in which it shall be brought about.

“Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him; and He *shall* bring to pass” (<sup><1976></sup>Psalm 37:5).

O how little faith is in exercise among the professing people of God today. Occupied almost wholly with the rising tide of evil in the world, with the rapid spread of Romanism, with the apostasy of Protestantism, the vast majority of those now bearing the name of Christ conclude that we are facing a hopeless situation. Such people seem to be ignorant of the history of the past. Both in O.T. times and at different periods of this dispensation, things have been far worse than they now are. Moreover, such trembling pessimists *leave out God*: is not HE “able” to cope with the present situation? A hesitating “Yes” may be given, at once nullified by the query, “But where is the promise that He *will* do so?” Where? Why in <sup><2519></sup>Isaiah 59:19,

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood (has he not already done so!), the Spirit of the Lord *shall* lift up a standard against him”

— but who *believes* it!

Ah, my Christian reader, ponder thoughtfully that blessed affirmation of Him that cannot lie, and then bow the head in shame for thine *unbelief*. Every thing in the world may seem to lie dead against the fulfillment of many a Divine promise, yet no matter how dark and dreadful the outlook

appears, the Church of God on earth today is not facing nearly so critical and desperate a situation as did the father of the faithful when he had his knife at the breast of him on whose one life the accomplishment of *all the* promises did depend. Yet he rested in the faithfulness and power of God to secure His own veracity: and so may we do also at this present juncture. He who responded to the faith of sorely-tried Abraham, to the faith of Moses when Israel stood before the Red Sea, to the three Hebrews when cast in Babylon's furnace, *will* to ours, if we *really* trust Him. Forsake then your newspapers, brethren, get ye to your knees, and pray expectantly for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Man's extremity is always God's opportunity.

“Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.” This supplies an interesting sidelight on the spiritual intelligence of the patriarchs. The O.T. saints were very far from being as ignorant as some of our superficial moderns suppose. Erroneous conclusions have often been drawn from the silence of Genesis on various matters: the later books of Scripture frequently supplement the concise accounts supplied in the earlier ones. Rightly did John Owen point out, “Abraham firmly believed, not only in the immortality of the souls of men, but also the resurrection from the dead. Had he not done so, he could not have betaken himself unto this relief in his distress. Other things he might have thought of, wherein God might have exercised His power; but he could not believe that He would do it, in that which itself was not believed by him.”

Some, perhaps, think that Owen drew too much on his imagination, that he read into <sup><8119></sup>Hebrews 11:19 what is not really there. If so, they are mistaken. There is one clear statement in Genesis 22, which, though not quoted by the eminent Puritan, fully establishes his assertion: there we are told that the patriarch said unto his young men, “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, *and come again to you*” (verse 5). This is exceedingly blessed. It shows us that Abraham was not occupied with his faith, his obedience, or with anything in himself, but solely with the living God: the “worship” of Him filled his heart and engaged all his thoughts. The added words “and come again to you” make it unmistakably plain that Abraham confidently expected Jehovah to raise again from the dead the one he was about to sacrifice unto Him as a burnt offering. A wonderful triumph of faith was this: recorded for the praise of the glory of God's grace, and for our instruction.

O my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, we want you to do something more than read through this article: we long for you to *meditate* upon this blessed sequel to Abraham's sore trial. He was tested as none other ever was, and grand was the outcome; but between that testing and its happy issue there was the exercise of faith, the counting upon God to interpose on his behalf, the trusting in His all-sufficient power. And God did not fail him: though He tried his faith to the limit, yet in the nick of time the Lord intervened. This is recorded for our encouragement, especially for those who are now passing through a fiery furnace. He who can *deliver from death*, what cannot He do! Say then with one of old, "Neither is there any Rock (to stay ourselves upon) like our God" (<sup>0000</sup>1 Samuel 2:2); Hannah had found a mighty support to her faith in the power of God.

"By faith Abraham... offered up Isaac... accounting that God was able to raise him up." Faith, then, *expects* a recompense from God. Faith knows that it is a saving bargain to lose things for Christ's sake. Faith looks for a restitution of comforts again, either in kind or in value: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren,... for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren... and in the world to come eternal life" (<sup>4100</sup>Mark 10:29, 30)

— that is, either actually so, or an abundant equivalent. When one of the kings of Israel was bidden by the Lord to dismiss the army he had hired, he was troubled, and asked,

"What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel" (<sup>4200</sup>2 Chronicles 25:9);

whereupon the prophet replied, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this"! When a man, through faithfulness to Christ, is exposed unto the frowns of the world, and his family faces starvation, let him know that God *will* undertake for him. The Lord will be no man's Debtor.

"From whence also he received him in a figure" (verse 19). Abraham had, as to his purpose, sacrificed Isaac, so that he considered him as dead; and he (thus) received him back from the dead — not really, but in a manner bearing likeness to such a miracle. This illustrates and demonstrates the truth of what has just been said above. God returns again to us what we offer to Him:

“whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap”  
 (<sup><0107></sup>Galatians 6:7).

“That which he hath given will He pay him again”  
 (<sup><0117></sup>Proverbs 19:17),

for He will not be beholden to any of His creatures. Hannah gave up Samuel to the Lord, and she had many more children in return (<sup><0121></sup>1 Samuel 2:20, 21). How great, then, is the folly of those who withhold from God anything which He asks of them: how they forsake their own mercies, stand in their own light, and hinder their own good.

“From whence also he received him in a figure.” Here is the grand outcome of the patriarch’s faith.

**First**, the trial was withdrawn, Isaac was spared: the speediest way to end a trial is to be completely resigned to it; if we would save our life, we must lose it.

**Second**, he had the expressed approval of the Lord, “now I know that thou fearest God” (<sup><0121></sup>Genesis 22:12): he whose conscience is clear before God enjoys great peace.

**Third**, he had a clearer view of Christ than he had before: “Abraham saw My day” said the Savior — the closer we keep to the path of obedience the more real and precious will Christ be unto us.

**Fourth**, he obtained a fuller revelation of God’s name: he called Him “Jehovah-Jireh” (<sup><0124></sup>Genesis 22:14): the more we stand the test of trial the better instructed shall we be in the things of God.

**Fifth**, the covenant was confirmed to him (<sup><0126></sup>Genesis 22:16, 17): the quickest road to full assurance is full obedience.