

# The Christian.

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## EDITORIAL.

### ABRAHAM'S JUSTIFICATION.

Paul, the apostle, says, "If Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Romans iv. 2, 3. See also the whole chapter.

James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" James ii. 21, 22. See also this chapter.

Many an infidel has arrayed these two apostles against each other in the case of Abraham's justification. And many Christians have been puzzled to harmonize the two. Space will allow us to notice but a few of the theories which have been published to make their testimonies agree.

One says, "The sinner is justified without works by faith alone, but a saint must work to be approved and justified of God." This theory is inadmissible from the fact that James cites us to cases of the *unsaved* to illustrate the necessity of works, "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way?" So the harlot, and Abraham the saint, were justified in the same way.

Another says, "Abraham was not justified by the works of Moses' law." Paul says nothing here of Moses' law, as Abraham was dead centuries before the law was given by Moses.

We now ask, "Does James contradict Paul in any way?" No. Let the reader observe: 1st, That both Paul and James say Abraham was justified by *faith*. This fact is valuable, for there is *one faith*. They also both say, "God justified him." This, too, is important, for there is but *one God*. Had their testimony differed on the *Person* or the *faith* that justified Abraham, it would be a serious matter. But it is only on *works* their testimonies differ. One says, "Works were absent when he was justified;" the other says, "Works were present." Now, both were true, because one spoke of a kind of works that were absent, and the other of another kind of works which were present in the justification of the Patriarch. Paul speaks of works of obedience to the *moral* law of God, but James speaks of works of obedience to His *positive* law. These laws being different their works are also different.

The moral law of God is that holy, just and unchangeable principle which binds intelligent creatures even before it is commanded in words. Positive law is that which God is pleased to enjoin on men without explaining its meaning, but often as a test of confiding obedience. It derives all its virtue from the will of God and not from our knowledge of its fitness. In short, moral law is commanded because it is *right*. Positive law is right because it is *commanded*.

Jesus says that to love the Lord our God with all

our heart and mind and soul and strength, is the first and great commandment, and to love our neighbor as ourself, is the second. "On the two (moral) commandments hang all the law and the prophets. He who has always done this, whether man or angel, is sinless and justified by works of perfect obedience to moral law. Such needs no Saviour. Paul declares that Abraham was not so justified, but, like other sinful men, needed a Saviour, and to be justified by *faith* and so he reasons in his Roman letter. He writes this letter to prove the truth and vindicate the grandeur of that secret which Christ had revealed to him. "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in the gospel." (Ep. iii. 6.) Many of the Jewish converts still held that their connection to Abraham made a wide difference between them and the Gentiles in the matter of justification. Paul labors to convince them that on such a matter they were no better than the Gentiles by nature. That Abraham himself was not justified as a sinless person or as an angel is justified; but that he was a sinner, justified by faith, and was even in uncircumcision like Gentiles are when his faith was imputed to him for righteousness. He thus proves that neither Abraham nor any of his descendants could be justified by works of obedience to the moral law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

In his first two chapters Paul showed that all, both Jews and Gentiles, were guilty before God, and that Christ came to have mercy on all, which is the theme of the letter.

Let us now hear James describe the work by which Abraham was justified. It was the work of offering up his son Isaac on the altar, in obedience to the positive command of God. It was not a work of merit, but a work of faith and submission to the Divine authority—a work which mingled with justifying faith. The moral law forbade to kill, but God now commanded him to kill his beloved son, the son of promise, in whose seed all families of the earth should be blessed. He did not see how these promises could be fulfilled, or why he must make the dreadful sacrifice. God said it and this was quite enough for the man of faith. He had cheerfully obeyed God long before and now his confidence was stronger than ever. By this work his faith was made perfect.

Again Rahab was justified by the same kind of works. It was *positive* and not *moral* law which she obeyed. Messengers sought for the spies to kill them. Moral law would say, "Tell the truth, save your country." But she was permitted to deceive these messengers and save the servants of God. Such was her faith in God that she trusted herself and her father's house to the promise of His servants, and He forgave her past sins and saved her and family from the general destruction of the people of the land. Her works of faith gained her a good report, and her name shines in the cloud of God's witnesses mentioned in the eleventh of Hebrews. By faith every one of these worthies did or suffered *something*, and a faith without works is always described in the word of God as dead and useless. Obedience to moral law are works of merit, but obedience to positive law are works of faith imputed without merit to him who submits to the will of God.

Let us consider a few cases of disobedience to positive law: God forbade man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He did not explain why, but said, "Thou shalt not eat." They ate, and thence followed death and all our woe. The men of Bethshemesh against *positive* law looked into the Ark and over 50,000 perished. (1 Sam. vi. 19.) Uzza touched the Ark and died. Saul saved the cattle for sacrifice, which he was told positively to destroy, and lost his kingdom and his life for it.

Let us consider some cases of obedience to positive law: By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, &c., &c. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days. Naaman, the Syrian, washed seven times in the Jordan and was cured of leprosy. The man with the withered hand stretched it forth at Jesus

command and it was healed. The blind man *came and washed his eyes in the Pool of Siloam* and was cured. All may see that these were not works of merit, but of cheerful submission to Divine authority, and may also see the consequence. Had any of them refused to obey the Lord because they could not see the propriety of these works, or the connection between them and their results, what would be the consequence of their disobedience?

It is as true now as ever that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But He saved Abraham and all the elders who had obtained a good report by faith in the merits of another "Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." The cross of Jesus declares to the universe God's justice in forgiving the sins that were past, as well as how He can now be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Rom. iii. 25, 26.) No wonder that on the very Mount of Moriah Abraham saw Jesus' day and was glad. Glad that a kind Father who gave him back his son Isaac, did not spare His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all. How glad we should be to be justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Abraham believed God when He promised him Isaac, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and now as readily bound his son on the altar "accounting that God was able to raise Him up even from the dead, from whence also He received Him in a figure."

When Jesus rose from the dead and was about to leave the earth He sent the gospel to every creature, and declared: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 15, 16.) In this He clearly promises to justify the sinner that believes in Him. And being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Does He require any work of obedience to positive law in this justification? He certainly does, and it is not a work of merit, but a work of faith and submission. "Did the apostles always require this act?" They certainly did. In every case they required men to believe in the Lord with all their heart, to truly repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus. On no occasion did they tell sinners that they were saved without or before baptism. Jesus tells how He would save them. The apostles told those who asked, "What they should do," to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins. Paul says, "Not by work of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," (Tit. iii. 5), and, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. x. 22.) Our bodies and our spirits are to be surrendered to Christ in His appointed way. d. c.

THE *Freeman* gives us an account of a baptism that took place in Holy Trinity Church, on the last night of the year:

"A Jewess, who has lately become a Christian, through deep conviction of the truth, was admitted a member of the church by baptism, and by her own desire was immersed. For this purpose the south-west porch, which was added in 1884, was fitted up as a baptistry and well suited the purpose. Mr. Bathurst addressed the congregation briefly from the lectern. He said that lest there should be any misunderstanding concerning the propriety of immersion in their ancient branch of the Church Catholic, he desired to state that it was strictly in accordance with ancient precedent, and with the authority of the Prayer Book. He quoted from the rubrics of the Infant and Adult Baptismal Services in proof of this. Mr. Bathurst then said: I would also mention that before I ventured (at the express wish of the Catechumen) to administer the rite by immersion, I wrote to the Bishop of the