

the darkness and bondage of spiritual death, he is translated into the light and liberty of spiritual life, and becomes an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. The sentence once passed, is never afterwards repealed. "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" As Abraham, therefore, was in a justified or gracious state already, he could not again be justified in the same way, by offering up Isaac on the altar. Accordingly our Saviour declares, "he that is once washed, needeth not save to wash his feet," intimating thereby, that though the believer may fall into sin, and consequently stand in need of cleansing and pardon, yet being already in a gracious state, he is not again justified in the same sense as he was at first. In what sense, then, was Abraham justified by works? In answer to this we reply, that James seems to refer in the passage before us, not to justification in the strict and proper sense of the term, but to the manifestation or proof of it, as given in the character and life; and this corresponds to the ordinary meaning of the word—the meaning which is not unfrequently given to it in Scripture. When I say that "I am justified in adopting a certain line of conduct," I mean, that I am clearly in the right, that my conduct can easily be vindicated or defended. When Job said to his friends, "God forbid that I should justify you," his meaning was, "it is impossible that I should vindicate you, or approve of your conduct." So when we read, that "Wisdom is justified of her children," we are taught that the divine wisdom, in the various arrangements of Providence, will be perceived and appreciated by those who are taught of God and made partakers of His grace; they will be ever disposed to cry out, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

Now Abraham, as we have seen, had been long in a gracious or justified state; but this had not been openly certified to the world until now—the reality and eminence of his faith, and the depth of his piety, in the most trying and difficult circumstances, had never until now been fully and decisively put to the test—never before had his character stood out so prominently amidst the ungodliness and profligacy that prevailed around—and never before could he appeal to so triumphant a refutation of the charges of insincerity and hypocrisy which his adversaries could bring against him. No one could now charge him with dissimulation or falsehood in his religious profession; for he had given the strongest evidence of the eminence of his piety, and the uprightness of his heart; and his character was completely justified in the sight of God, of angels, and of men. Thus have we endeavoured to show in what sense Abraham was justified by works. His character was established and vindicated; he was proved and declared to be a righteous man. He was not made or constituted righteous, by offering his son upon the altar, but he was made out, or proved, to be a man of eminent faith and piety; for if he had not been a good man previously—a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost—he neither would, nor could, have been willing to obey a command so contrary to natural feeling and reason. And what was it that led him so cheerfully to obey? for the Apostle speaks of Isaac as actually offered up on the altar. And he was offered up in the intention of Abraham; it was by no fault of his that his hand was stayed. It was just his eminent faith. He believed that God was able to raise up Isaac, even though his body were reduced to ashes on the altar. Accordingly, the Apostle adds—

Verses 22, 23. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." The faith of Abraham, like that of other saints, was eminently fruitful. Of the worthies referred to in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews, it is recorded that "through faith they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed