

THE WORKS OF ABRAHAM

© Eddy D Field III

The Judaizers of the apostolic church were Pharisees who insisted that Christians, even Gentile Christians, were required to keep all of the Moses, including the rites, like circumcision. The Jerusalem Council denied this, and affirmed rather that all men are justified by faith, and that Gentiles must not become Jewish proselytes. Saint Paul, in his epistles, argued that a man is righteous before God by faith, and not by works of the law, and he presented Abraham as the paragon of faith. When God promised Abraham innumerable descendants, “he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness,” and this was before he was circumcised. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-4, 9, 10) Moreover, Saint Paul reasoned, Abraham received circumcision after he believed, and as a sign and seal of the righteousness which he had by faith. Abraham was justified before God by faith, and before he received the rite of circumcision. So, it is not the physical descendants who are the true sons of Abraham, but the spiritual ones. Abraham is “the father of all them that believe,” Saint Paul wrote. (Romans 4:11)

The church in Galatia was troubled by the Judaizers, and the Galatian Christians were in danger of falling away from the faith. They believed in Jesus, but the Judaizers taught them that they had to obey all of the law of Moses in order to be righteous before God. Saint Paul argued from the example of Abraham: Abraham was righteous before God by faith, and those who have have like Abraham are his sons and heirs. He wrote, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:6, 7)

All Christians agree that a man is saved by grace through faith, for that is what Saint Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) Protestants, in distinction from Catholics, maintain that a man is justified by faith alone, and not by the merit of good works. This is a major tenet of the Reformation. The Reformed tradition teaches that a man is not justified by works, but neither is he justified without them. Unfortunately, some Protestants hold that a man is justified by faith, without works. This is contrary to the Scriptures. Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) However, Abraham, because he believed God, also obeyed Him. When God first called Abraham, He said to him:

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. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham believed God, and so he did as God commanded. Saint Paul explained to the Hebrews, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Hebrews 11:8) Some years later, God put Abraham’s faith to the test by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac. As Abraham raised the knife to slay his son, God stopped him, and said to him, “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.” (Genesis 22:12) Saint James

explained, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:21, 22)

Those who have faith are children of Abraham. There can be no doubt about it. However, Abraham’s faith was not void of works. By faith He obeyed God. He obeyed God just because He believed God. So, the children of Abraham are those who not only believe God, but who also obey Him. Saint John records that, when Jesus proclaimed that He is the light of the world, “many believed on him.” (John 8:30) However, Jesus said to them that believed in Him, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31, 32) They replied by invoking their descent from Abraham, and insisted that they had never been in bondage. They said, “We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” (John 8:33) They mistook Jesus, however, and He corrected them. He did not mean physical slavery, but spiritual; they were slaves of sin. He acknowledged that they were Abraham’s physical descendents, but He denied that they were his spiritual ones. In fact, they were so wicked that they sought to kill Him, the only-begotten Son of God. He told them that He spoke the word His Father, but they did the deeds of their father. They again invoked their descent from Abraham, so Jesus said to them, “If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.” (John 8:39-41) He told them that the devil is their father, and they do his desires. Those who have faith are children of Abraham who had faith. But Abraham by faith obeyed, and so do Abraham’s children. The true sons of Abraham are not those who believe only, but who believe and obey.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*