

Devotional Thoughts :: Abraham, My Friend_26

Abraham, My Friend_26 - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/8 11:27

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man

Chapter Four: New Beginnings
person-to-person

Let's gather up some fragments that remain from this account of Abraham's faith. (New Readers to this column should be warned that the 'fragments which remained' ultimately proved to be more than the original meal!) In our last devotion we examined the phrase 'the people of the God of Abraham'. This time I want to return to the fundamental idea of these verses; these verses define the original Bible concept of faith, the faith of Abraham. It might not be amiss to remind ourselves that not all faith is genuine faith. Twice in the letters to Timothy Paul refers to 'unfeigned faith'. Literally it is 'faith without hypocrisy'. There are three things which the New Testament indicates have counterfeits; three qualities which are defined 'without hypocrisy' to distinguish from the fake variety. The three are faith, love and wisdom. The word 'hypocrite' in Biblical Greek means an actor. 'Unfeigned faith' is 'faith without pretending'. The reason that Paul referred to 'unfeigned faith' is the sad reality that there is much 'fake faith' on offer, in addition to 'fake love' and 'fake wisdom'. Unlike so much of the variety on show in halls and church buildings all around the world, the genuine articles are never theatrical. They are never 'staged', never intended as a tableau. What is true of one is true of all; like 'genuine love', 'genuine faith' and 'genuine wisdom' never 'vaunt' themselves. Genuine love, faith and wisdom never say 'look at me, look at me' but always 'Behold Him...'

To repeat an earlier devotional, genuine faith is 'God-wards'. Did we examine this passage? Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man. (Joh 2:23-25 KJV) Modern versions struggle with these verses as does the KJV. The same Greek verb 'pisteuo' is used in verses 23 and 24. In verse 23 it is translated 'believe' and, in the KJV, in verse 24 as 'commit'. It is a startling statement. 'They believed in His name, but He did not believe them'. Or if we follow the lines of other translations, 'they trusted in him, but He did not trust in them'. They committed themselves to Him but He would not commit Himself to them. The chapter continues with an important statement; He knew what was in man

He did not trust them because He knew them. Even though they had 'a faith' their faith was not the kind that He could have faith in! Did you know that there is a kind of faith which is useless to God; it is not 'load-bearing'. The Hebrew word for faith has this sense of 'load-bearing' built into it. It has links with foundations and pictures of buildings. The building 'rests upon' its foundation; the building 'believes' in its foundation. The foundation must be able to 'support' the building. The 'believers' in John 2:23 had a foundation upon which they were building, but the foundation was not one upon which Christ could build. Their faith could not support what He wanted to build upon it.

Their faith was not the 'genuine' kind. What was wrong with it? The clues are here if we will look for them. They believed because of the signs which He did, and faith in 'signs' can never support the kind of things that Christ's wants to build in our lives. This dependence upon signs became a defining feature of the Jews of Christ's day and was thoroughly rebuked. On one particular occasion He linked their 'hypocrisy' with their demands for this kind of sign. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed. (Mat 16:3-4 KJV) The sign may well be used to attract our attention, but then our dependence must be upon Him. A dependence upon signs and miracles can only produce a faith that is dependent upon signs and miracles. Christ cannot depend upon this kind of faith.

Let's loop back to Abraham for a while; Abraham believed in Jehovah, Abraham's foundation was being laid upon Jehovah. This is not an amorphous new age god, but 'god' with a particular identity. This is not, unlike the dwellers in Athens, faith in an unknown God but faith in someone known to Abraham. Let me illustrate; a particular feature of 20th and 21st century evangelicalism is the 'altar call'. It presumes the knowledge of certain Bible facts and says, on the b

asis of these facts, put your faith in Jesus. This is faith in Jesus through facts. Perhaps we need to question whether faith in Jesus through facts is any better than faith in Jesus through miracles. Or more importantly whether or not it produces the kind of faith that He can build on.

Well, how was Abraham's faith different? Abraham had had several encounters with Jehovah. He knew who Jehovah was. (the KJV and its variants indicate where the sacred name of Jehovah has been used by putting a word into upper case letters.) Consequently 'God' is undefined, but GOD is Jehovah. Similarly 'Lord' is undefined but LORD is Jehovah. By way of illustration... Melchizedek revealed to Abraham the God who was over all; And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: (Gen 14:19 KJV) but when Abraham addressed the king of Sodom, Abraham put a name to this 'Most High God'; And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, (Gen 14:22 KJV) This was not an oath to an unknown, anonymous, God; it was a 'person-to-person' communication.

It is this person-to-person faith which I want to draw our attention to. The events of Genesis 15 will define the word 'faith' for the rest of the Biblical revelation. Abraham, and this event in particular, will become the Bible's standard illustration of 'genuine faith'. The Chapter begins, appropriately, with a speaking God; After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. (Gen 15:1 KJV) Please note that this was not a stranger who spoke to Abraham but the LORD (Jehovah). Abraham knew this person; he knew this voice. He will be able to trust this person because he knows Him; this is not faith in miracles, or in facts, or even primarily in 'the word of God'; Abraham will trust Jehovah. And then we must note how Jehovah speaks. Here is one of my little oddities... I mourn the loss of the second person singular pronouns! In modern English we have lost the use of 'thee, thou, thy' etc. and the loss is enormous. Whenever someone used the pronoun 'thee' it was a person-to-person call. Sometimes the person's name was audible, as here, "fear not, Abram: I am thy...". But even if the name is not spoken you could always add it. This word is not an anonymous word from an anonymous god to an anonymous human being; it is intensely personal. I can only mean one person; in this instance Jehovah. And thou can only mean one person; in this instance Abraham. This I and thou is absolutely exclusive; it excludes every other being in the creation. It is I and thou alone.

Jehovah does not offer to 'do' something for Abraham, nor does He offer to give Abraham something. He declares His determination to 'be' all the Abraham could ever need. And He uses this abiding present "I am". It is the first such self-revelation of God in the history of the world. And it is, and always must be, a revelation. No-one can discover God by searching or by 'drawing logical deductions' from Bible verses; He will have to reveal Himself to 'thee'. Anything that God chooses to 'do' He can choose to 'undo'; one day He made the world, one day He will unmake it. Anything that God gives He may take away. But when God says "I am" it is forever. I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Mal 3:6

When God says "I am thy..." that is forever too. God could have said "Abraham, I will give you a shield and I will give you vast riches." But 'shields' can be broken and 'riches' can be wasted. All we ever need in life is a shield and treasure; human beings need nothing more, safety and provision. But this is Jehovah saying "Abraham, I know what you need... Me". Abrahamic faith is person-to-person faith in someone who gives Himself, not just gifts. Miracles are tokens of the God who is willing to give Himself. Our faith is not to be in His gifts but in His self-revealed nature and character. God is prepared to go to great lengths to get us to this place. Jeremiah provides us with a wonderful example. The Lamentations must be one of the most desperate pieces of literature in existence. Jeremiah's world is in ruins. His city is in ruins, his government is in ruins, his religion is in ruins, his theology is in ruins. He pours out his grief in floods of tears and then in the midst of all this brokenness he says; And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. (Lam 3:18-24 KJV)

In the midst of his perished 'strength and hope' a revelation is given to him and a testimony is born; the LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. When everything else had died, Jeremiah discovered that all He ever needed was God; Jehovah is my portion. This is Abrahamic faith; all I need is Jehovah.

Abraham's faith was not ultimately in words or revelations or miracles; it was in Jehovah Himself. Abraham believed in Jehovah; and He reckoned it to him for righteousness. Christ, on earth, was not anxious to hurry men and women into believing; He wanted them to get to know Him. Genuine faith is always person-to-person. To the enquirers who wanted to know where He lived He replied 'Come and see'. I wonder, do we have the courage to preach this kind of gospel?

A gospel that is not anxious to get Â‘decisionsÂ’ but which presents Christ in His fullness and says Â‘come and seeÂ’? It was a lesson the disciples learned early; And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth h? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. (Joh 1:46 KJV)

Re: Abraham, My Friend_26 - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/6/8 13:37

Quote:
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Bro. Ron,

It seems that the bottom line to repentance is whether people want God or they don't. It seems to me that there is a fear that if ministers tell all they know to be true of the person of Christ and their walk with Him (if they decide to follow Him) that they may reject Him. I recently was at a seminar of a well known organization that has a phrase in the pamphlet they handed out to people witnessing and sharing their faith; it read, "Don't dwell too much on the negative." What ever happened to "Count the cost"? Why is there a feeling like we are trying to, "Sell people on Christ." What do we know that we are leaving out? When have you ever heard a minister say, "And by the way, 'all those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution'." So the more you become like Christ the more persecuted you will be. The Lord even told Paul and showed him all the things he had to suffer for Him- right after the Damascus road.

I think of the passage in John's epistle when he states, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen; how can he love God whom he hath not seen." Do we love God or are we in love with our IDEA of God. The 'god' that too often gets created in our image after our desires.

Your devotional speaks volumes to all of this. People DON'T want hell, but do they WANT the REAL Jesus Christ? The Gospel is often presented with all the gifts that God has to offer- but when is a message ever preached where the people are simply offered God? So often we hear,- Come to Christ and He will bless you with... He will deliver you from... He will do this or that. Do we make the emphasis God's stuff or God Himself? David was a man- not after God's stuff, but His heart. John's epistle also states; "They went out from us, but they were not of us..." Christ knows those who are His. It just seems that as humans we would prefer to look at a bundle of tares and wheat that was large, than a refined bundle of grain. I keep thinking of the old saying, "It's about the quality- not the quantity." Oh that God's people would once again realize that Christ desires to thoroughly purge His threshing floor- but we have to bring in the sheaves.

God Bless Bro. Ron for such a Christ honoring message!

Re: Abraham, My Friend_26 - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/6/14 19:09

I love this book! :-)

Much thanks once again Ron, am learning so much here. Being a contractor this naturally got my attention:

Quote:
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Love the way you used this here. A load bearing wall for the unfamiliar is in essence that which supports the structure of a house or building. This may be obvious, but it can at times fool you in buildings that you may have to remodel. The parallels to faith here are numerous. Interestingly you could get away with it in theory, that is building a house without a pro

per load bearing wall in it, but the weight will be upon the structure regardless and it is only a matter of time before the whole thing comes crashing down...

A bit unrelated to 'buildings', but for some reason I can hear Bro. Ravenhill saying "...*what will happen when they get shipped up the Amazon?*"

Re: - posted by Delboy (), on: 2004/6/16 3:58

Hi Robert,
I really liked your response to Ron's Abraham 26 especially;

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How true this can be in our age of high tech quick fix church programmes.
In many churches there are budgets set for evangelism this can bring pressures to see results. Where is the balance between working in the harvest because the day is short and the "come and see?". Maybe this is another topic that can be discussed in a new thread.