

Genesis 18:1-33

by John Calvin

Abraham's hospitality and charity towards strangers is rewarded by God, who promises him a son and spares Sodom due to Abraham's intercession.

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-32

Topics: "Faith And Prayer", "Gods Righteousness"

Description

John Calvin preaches about the encounter between Abraham and the Lord, highlighting Abraham's hospitality towards the three men who were actually angels, and his intercession for the righteous in Sodom. Abraham's humility and compassion are evident as he converses with God, showing reverence and concern for justice. The dialogue between Abraham and the Lord demonstrates the importance of faith, prayer, and trust in God's righteousness, even in the face of impending judgment.

Transcript

1. And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

1. Deinde visus est illi Jehova in Querceto Mamre, quum ipse sederet in ostio tabernaculi, quando incalescebat dies.

2. And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

2. Et elevavit oculos suos, et vidit, et ecce tres virri stabant juxta eum: et vidit, et cucurrit in occursum eorum ab ostio tabernaculi, et incurvavit se super terram.

3. And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

3. Et dixit, Domine mi, si nunc inveni gratiam in oculis tuis, ne nunc transeas a servo tuo.

4. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

4. Tollatur nunc parum aquae, et lavate pedes vestros, et considite sub arbore.

5. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

5. Et capiam buccellam panis, et fulcite cor vestrum, postea transibitis: quia idcirco transiistis ad servum vestrum. Et dixerunt, Sicfacias quemadmodum loquutus es.

6. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it , and make cakes upon the hearth.

6. Itaque festinavit Abraham ad tabernaculum ad Sarah, et dixit, Festina, tria sata farinae similiae consperge, et fac subcinerios panes.

7. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.

7. Et ad boves cucurrit Abraham, et tulit vitulum tenerum et bonum, et dedit puero, et festinavit ut paraet eum.

8. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

8. Et tulit butyrum, et lac, et vitulum quem paraverat, et posuit ante eos: et ipse stabat juxta eos sub arbore, et comederunt.

9. And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

9. Et dixerunt ad eum, Ubi est Sarah uxor tua? Et dixit, Ecce, in tabernaculo.

10. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

10. Et dixit, Revertendo revertar ad te secundum tempus vitae, et ecce, filius erit Sarah uxori tuae, Sarah autem audiebat in ostio tabernaculi, quod erat post eum.

11. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

11. Et Abraham et Sarah erant senes et propectae aetatis, desieratque esse ipsi Sarah via secundum mulieres.

12. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

12. Risit ergo, Sarah intra sese, dicendo, Postquam senui, erit mihi voluptas? Et dominus meus senuit.

13. And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

13. Et dixit Jehova ad Abraham, Utquid risit Sarah dicendo, Num etiam vere pariam, et ego senui?

14. Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

14. Numquid abscondetur a Jehova quicquam? ad tempus revertar ad to secundum tempus vitae, et ipse Sarah erit filius.

15. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

15. Et negavit Sarah, dicendo, Non risi: quia timuit. Et dixit, Nequaquam, quia risisti.

16. And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

16. Et surrexerunt inde viri, et respexerunt contra faciem Sedom: et Abraham ibat cum eis, ut deduceret eos.

17. And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

17. Tunc Jehova dixit, An ego celabo Abraham quod ego facio?

18. Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

18. Et Abraham erit in gentem magnum et fortem, et benedicent sibi in eo omnes gentes terrae.

19. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

19. Quia novi eum: propterea praecipiet filiis suis, et domui suae post se, et custodient viam Jehovae, ut faciant justitiam et iudicium, ut venire faciat Jehova super Abraham, quod loquutus est super eum.

20. And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

20. Itaque dixit Jehova, Clamor Sedom et Hamorah certe multiplicatus est, et peccatum eorum utique aggravatum est valde.

21. I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

21. Descendam nunc, et videbo an secundum clamorem ejus, qui venit ad me, fecerint consummationem: et si non, sciam.

22. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

22. Et verterunt se inde viri, et perrexerunt in Sedom: ipse vero Abraham adhuc stabat coram Jehova.

23. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

23. Et accessit Abraham, et dixit, Numquid etiam disperdes justum cum impio?

24. Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

24. Si forte fuerint quinquaginta iusti intra civitatem numquid etiam disperdes, et non parces loco propter quinquaginta justos, qui sunt intra eam?

25. That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

25. Absit tibi ut facias secundum rem hanc, ut mori facias justum cum impio, et sit justus sicut impius: absit tibi, an qui iudex est omnis terrae, non faciet iudicium?

26. And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

26. Et dixit Jehova, Si invenero in Sedom quinquaginta justos intra civitatem, parcam toti loco propter eos.

27. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:

27. Et repondit Abraham, et dixit, Ecce, nunc coepi loqui ad Jehovam, et sum pulvis et cinis:

28. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it

28. Si forsitan defuerint de quinquaginta iustis quinque, numquid disperdes propter quinque totam civitatem? Et dixit, Non disperdam, si invenero ibi quadraginta et quinque.

29. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

29. Et addidit adhuc ut loqueretur ad eum, et dixit, Si forte inventi fuerint ibi quadraginta. Et dixit, Non faciam propter quadraginta.

30. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

30. Et dixit, Ne nunc sit ira Domino meo, et loquar, Si forte inventi fuerint ibi triginta? Et dixit, Non faciam, si invenero ibi triginta.

31. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

31. Et dixit, Ecce, nunc coepi loqui ad Jehovam, Si forsitan inventi fuerint ibi viginti? Et dixit, Non disperdam propter viginti.

32. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

32. Et dixit, Ne nunc sit ira Domino meo, et loquar tantummodo semel, Si forsitan inventi fuerint ibi decem? Et dixit, Non disperdam propter decem.

33. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

33. Et perrexit Jehova, quando finivit loqui ad Abraham, et Abraham reversus est ad locum suum.

1. And the Lord appeared unto him It is uncertain whether Moses says, that God afterwards appeared again unto Abraham; or whether, reverting to the previous history, he here introduces other circumstances, which he had not before mentioned. I prefer, however, the former of these interpretations; namely, that God confirmed the mind of his servant with a new vision; just as the faith of the saints requires, at intervals, renewed assistance. It is also possible that the promise was repeated for the sake of Sarah. What shall we say, if in this manner, he chose to do honor to the greatness of his grace? For the promise concerning Isaac, from whom, at length, redemption and salvation should shine forth to the world, cannot be extolled in terms adequate to its dignity. Whichever of these views be taken, we perceive that there was sufficient reason why Isaac was again promised. Concerning the word Mamre we have spoken in the thirteenth chapter Ge 13:1. Probably a grove of oaks was in that place, and Abraham dwelt there, on account of the convenience of the situation.

2. And, lo, three men stood by him. Before Moses proceeds to his principal subject, he describes to us, the hospitality of the holy man; and he calls the angels men, because, being clothed with human bodies, they appeared to be nothing else than men. And this was done designedly, in order that he, receiving them as men, might give proof of his charity. For angels do not need those services of ours, which are the true evidences of charity. Moreover, hospitality holds the chief place among these services; because it is no common virtue to assist strangers, from whom there is no hope of reward.

For men in general are wont, when they do favors to others, to look for a return; but he who is kind to unknown guests and persons, proves himself to be disinterestedly liberal. Wherefor the humanity of Abraham deserves no slight praise; because he freely invites men who were to him unknown, through whom he had no advantage, and from whom he had no hope of mutual favors. What, therefore, was Abraham's object? Truly, that he might relieve the necessity of his guests. He sees them wearied with their journey, and has no doubt that they are overcome by heat; he considers that the time of day was becoming dangerous to travelers; and therefore he wishes both to comfort, and to relieve persons thus oppressed.

And certainly, the sense of nature itself dictates, that the strangers are to be especially assisted; unless blind self love rather impels us to mercenary services. For none are more deserving of compassion and help than those whom we see deprived of friends, and of domestic comforts. And therefore the right of hospitality has been held most sacred among all people, and no disgrace was ever more detestable than to be called inhospitable. For it is a brutal cruelty, proudly to despise those who, being destitute of ordinary, have recourse to our assistance.

It is however asked, whether Abraham was wont, thus to receive indiscriminately all kinds of guests? I answer that, according to his accustomed prudence, he made his distinction between his guests. And truly, the invitation, which Moses here relates, has something uncommon. Undoubtedly, the angels bore, in their countenance and manner, marks of extraordinary dignity; so that Abraham would conclude them to be worthy not only of meat and drink, but also of honor. They who think that he was thus attentive to his office, because he had been taught, by his fathers, that the angels often appeared in the world in human form, reasons too philosophically.

Even the authority of the Apostle is contrary to this; for he denies that they were, at first, known to be angels either by Abraham, or by Lot, since they thought they were entertaining men. (Heb 13:2) This, then is to be

maintained; that when he saw men of reverend aspect, and having marks of singular excellence, advancing on their journey, he saluted them with honor, and invited them to repose. But at that time, there was greater honesty than is at present, to be found amid the prevailing perfidy of mankind; so that the right of hospitality might be exercised with less danger. Therefore, the great number of inns are evidence of our depravity, and prove it to have arisen from our own fault, that the principal duty of humanity has become obsolete among us.

And bowed himself toward the ground. This token of reverence was in common use with oriental nations. The mystery which some of the ancient writers have endeavored to elicit from this act; namely, that Abraham adored one out of the three, whom he saw, and, therefore perceived by faith, that there are three persons in one God, since it is frivolous, and obnoxious to ridicule and calumny, I am more than content to omit. For we have before said, that the angels were so received by the holy man, as by one who intended to discharge a duty towards men. But the fact that God honored his benignity, and granted it to him as a reward, that angels should be presented to him for guests, was that he was not aware of, till they had made themselves known at the conclusion of the meal. It was therefore a merely human and civil honor, which he paid them. As to his having saluted one in particular, it was probably done because he excelled the other two. For we know that angels often appeared with Christ their Head; here, therefore, among the three angels, Moses points out one, as the Chief of the embassy.

3. Pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant In asking thus meekly, and even suppliantly, there is no doubt that Abraham does it, moved by the reason which I have stated. For if he had slaughtered calves for all kinds of travelers, his house would soon have been emptied by his profuse expenditure. He, therefore, did honor to their virtue and their excellent endowments, lest he should pour contempt upon God. Thus, neither was he so liberal as to invite wanderers, or other men of all kinds, who herd together; nor did ambition induce him to deal thus bountifully with these three persons, but rather his love and affection for those gifts of God, and those virtues which appeared in them. As to his offering them simply a morsel of bread, he makes light of an act of kindness which he was about to do, not only for the sake of avoiding all boasting, but in order that they might the more easily yield to his counsel and his entreaties, when they were persuaded that they should not prove too burdensome and troublesome to him. For modest persons do not willingly put others to expense or trouble. The washing of feet, in that age, and in that region of the world, was very common, perhaps, because persons traveled with naked feet, under burning suns: and it was the great remedy for the alleviation of weariness, to wash the feet parched with heat.

5. For therefore are ye come to your servant He does not mean that they had come designedly, or for the express purpose of seeking to be entertained, as his guests; but he intimates that their coming had occurred opportunely, as if he would say, 'You have not slipped into this place by chance; but have been led hither by the design and the direction of God.' He, therefore, refers it to the providence of God, that they had come, so conveniently, to a place where they might refresh themselves a little while, till the heat of the sun should abate. Moreover, as it is certain that Abraham spoke thus in sincerity of mind; let us after his examples conclude that, whenever our brethren, who need our help, meet us, they are sent unto us by God.

6. And Abraham hastened into the tent Abraham's care in entertaining his guests is here recorded; and Moses, at the same time, shows what a well-ordered house he had. In short, he presents us, in a few words, with a beautiful picture of domestic government. Abraham runs, partly, to command what he would have done; and partly, to execute his own duty, as the master of the house. Sarah keeps within the tent; not to indulge in sloth, but rather to take her own part also, in the labor. The servants are all prompt to

obey. Here is the sweet concord of a well-conducted family; which could not have thus suddenly arisen, unless each had, by long practice, been accustomed to right discipline. A question, however; arises out of the assertion of Moses, that the angels did eat. Some expound it, that they only appeared as persons eating; which fancy enters their minds through the medium of another error; since they imagine them to have been mere spectres, and not endued with real bodies. But, in my judgment, the thing is far otherwise. In the first place, this was no prophetic vision, in which the images of absent things are brought before the eyes; but the angels really came into the house of Abraham. Wherefore, I do not doubt that God, -- who created the whole world out of nothing, and who daily proves himself to be a wonderful Artificer in forming creatures, -- gave them bodies, for a time, in which they might fulfill the office enjoined them. And as they truly walked, spoke, and discharged other functions; so I conclude, they did truly eat; not because they were hungry, but in order to conceal themselves, until the proper time for making themselves known. Yet as God speedily annihilated those bodies, which had been created for a temporary use; so there will be no absurdity in saying, that the food itself was destroyed, together with their bodies. But, as it is profitable briefly to touch upon such questions; and, as religion in no way forbids us to do so; there is on the other hand, nothing better than that we should content ourselves with a sober solution of them.

9. Where is Sarah? Hitherto God permitted Abraham to discharge an obvious duty. But, having given him the opportunity of exercising charity, God now begins to manifest himself in his angels. The reason why Moses introduces, at one time, three speakers, while, at another, he ascribes speech to one only, is, that the three together represent the person of one God. We must also remember what I have lately adduced, that the principal place is given to one; because Christ, who is the living image of the Father, often appeared to the fathers under the form of an angel, while, at the same time, he yet had angels, of whom he was the Head, for his attendants. And as to their making inquiry respecting Sarah; we may hence infer, that a son is again here promised to Abraham, because she had not been present at the former oracle.

10. I will certainly return unto thee Jerome translates its 'I will return, life attending me:' 411 as if God, speaking in the manner of men, had said, 'I will return if I live.' But it would be absurd, that God, who here so magnificently proclaims his power, should borrow from man a form of speech which would suppose him to be mortal. What majesty, I pray, would this remarkable oracle possess, which treats of the eternal salvation of the world? That interpretation, therefore, can by no means be approved, which entirely enervates the force and authority of the promise. Literally it is, according to the time of life. Which some expound of Sarah; as if the angel had said, Sarah shall survive to that period. But it is more properly explained of the child; for God promises that He will come, at the just and proper time of bringing forth, that Sarah might become the mother of a living child.

11. Were old, and well stricken in age Moses inserts this verse to inform us that what the angel was saying, justly appeared improbable to Sarah. For it is contrary to nature that children should be promised to decrepit old men. A doubt, however, may be entertained on this point, respecting Abraham: because men are sometimes endued with strength to have children, even in extreme old age: and especially in that period, such an occurrence was not uncommon. But Moses here speaks comparatively: for since Abraham, during the vigor of his life, had remained with his wife childless; it was scarcely possible for him, now that his body was half dead, to have children; he had indeed begotten Ishmael in his old age, which was contrary to expectation. But that now, twelve years afterwards, it should be possible to become a father, through his aged wife, 412 was scarcely credible. Moses however chiefly insists upon the case of Sarah; because the greatest impediment was with her. It ceased, he says, to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 413 With this expression, he soberly speaks about the monthly stream of the women.

At the same moment with this, the possibility of conceiving ceases.

12. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself Abraham had laughed before, as appears in the preceding chapter Ge 17:1: but the laughter of both was, by no means, similar. For Sarah is not transported with admiration and joy, on receiving the promise of God; but foolishly sets her own age and that of her husband in opposition to the word of God; that she may withhold confidence from God, when he speaks. Yet she does not, avowedly, charge God with falsehood or vanity; but because, having her mind fixed on the contemplation of the thing proposed, she only weighs what might be accomplished by natural means, without raising her thoughts to the consideration of the power of God, and thus rashly casts discredit on God who speaks to her. Thus, as often as we measure the promises and the works of God, by our own reason, and by the laws of nature, we act reproachfully towards him, though we may intend nothing of the sort. For we do not pay him his due honor, except we regard every obstacle which presents itself in heaven and on earth, as placed under subjection to his word. But although the incredulity of Sarah is not to be excused; she, nevertheless, does not directly reject the favor of God; but is only so kept back by shame and modesty, that she does not altogether believe what she hears. Even her very words declare the greatest modesty; 'After we are grown old shall we give ourselves up to lust?' Wherefore, let us observe, that nothing was less in Sarah's mind, than to make God a liar. But herein consisted in this alone, that, having fixed her thoughts too much on the accustomed order of nature, she did not give glory to God, by expecting from him a miracle which she was unable to conceive in her mind. We must here notice the admonition which the Apostle gathers from this passage, because Sarah here calls Abraham her lord . (1Pe 3:6.) For he exhorts women, after her example, to be obedient and well-behaved towards their own husbands. Many women, indeed, without difficulty, give their husbands this title, when yet they do not scruple to bring them under rule, by their imperious pride: but the Apostle takes it for granted that Sarah testifies, from her heart, what she feels, respecting her husband: nor is it doubtful that she gave proof, by actual services, of the modesty which she had professed in words.

13. And the Lord said . Because the majesty of God had now been manifested in the angels, Moses expressly mentions his Name. We have before declared, in what sense the name of God is transferred to the angel; it is not, therefore, now necessary to repeat it: except, as it is always important to remark, that the word of the Lord is so precious to himself, that he would be regarded by us as present, whenever he speaks through his ministers. Again, whenever he manifested himself to the fathers, Christ was the Mediator between him and them; who not only personates God in proclaiming his word, but is also truly and essentially God.

And because the laughter of Sarah had not been detected by the eye of man, therefore Moses expressly declares that she was reprehended by God. And to this point belong the following circumstances, that the angel had his back turned to the tent, and that Sarah laughed within herself, and not before others. The censure also shows that the laughter of Sarah was joined with incredulity. For there is no little weight in this sentence, 'Can anything be wonderful with God?' But the angel chides Sarah, because she limited the power of God within the bounds of her own sense.

An antithesis is therefore implied between the immense power of God, and the contracted measure which Sarah imagined to herself, through her carnal reason. Some translate the word ■■■■ (pala ,) hidden , as if the angel meant that nothing was hidden from God: but the sense is different; namely, that the power of God ought not to be estimated by human reason. 414 It is not surprising, that in arduous affairs we fail, or that we succumb to difficulties: but God's way is far otherwise, for he looks down with contempt, from above, upon those things which alarm us by their lofty elevation.

We now see what was the sin of Sarah; namely, that she did wrong to God, by not acknowledging the greatness of his power. And truly, we also attempt to rob God of his power, whenever we distrust his word. At the first sight, Paul seems to give cold praise to the faith of Abraham, in saying, that he did not consider his body, now dead, but gave glory to God, because he was persuaded that he could fulfill what he had promised. (Ro 4:19.) But if we thoroughly investigate the source of distrust, we shall find that the reason why we doubt of God's promises is, because we sinfully detract from his power.

For as soon as any extraordinary difficulty occurs, then, whatever God has promised, seems to us fabulous; yea, the moment he speaks, the perverse thought insinuates itself, How will he fulfill what he promises? Being bound down, and preoccupied by such narrow thoughts, we exclude his power, the knowledge of which is better to us than a thousand worlds. In short, he who does not expect more from God than he is able to comprehend in the scanty measure of his own reason, does him grievous wrong.

Meanwhile, the word of the Lord ought to be inseparably joined with his power; for nothing is more preposterous, than to inquire what God can do, to the setting aside of his declared will. In this way the Papists plunge themselves into a profound labyrinth, when they dispute concerning the absolute power of God. Therefore, unless we are willing to be involved in absurd dotings, it is necessary that the word should precede us like a lamp; so that his power and his will may be conjoined by an inseparable bond. This rule the Apostle prescribes to us, when he says,

'Being certainly persuaded, that what he has promised,

he is able to perform,' (Ro 4:21.)

The angel again repeats the promise that he would come 'according to the time of life,' that is, in the revolving of the year, when the full time of bringing forth should have arrived.

15. Then Sarah denied . Another sin of Sarah's was, that she endeavored to cover and hide her laughter by a falsehood. Yet this excuse did not proceed from obstinate wickedness, according to the manner in which hypocrites are wont to snatch at subterfuges, so that they remain like themselves, even to the end. Sarah's feelings were of a different kind; for while she repents of her own folly, she is yet so terrified, as to deny that she had done, what she now perceives to be displeasing to God. Whence we infer, how great is the corruption of our nature, which causes even the fear of God, -- the highest of all virtues, -- to degenerate into a fault. Moreover, we must observe whence that fear, of which Moses makes mention, suddenly entered the mind of Sarah; namely, from the consideration that God had detected her secret sin. We see, therefore, how the majesty of God, when it is seriously felt by us, shakes us out of our insensibility. We are more especially constrained to feel thus, when God ascends his tribunal, and brings our sins to light.

Nay; but thou didst laugh . The angel does not contend in a multiplicity of words, but directly refutes her false denial of the fact. We may hence learn, that we gain no advantage by tergiversation, when the Lord reproves us, because he will immediately dispatch our case with a single word. Therefore, we must beware lest we imitate the petulance of those who mock God with false pretences, and at length rush into gross contempt of Him. However he may seem to leave us unnoticed for a time, yet he will fulminate against us with that terrible voice, 'It is not as you pretend.' In short, it is not enough that the judgment of God should be revered, unless we also confess our sins ingenuously and without shifts or evasions. For a double condemnation awaits those who, from a desire to escape the judgment of God, retake themselves to the refuge of dissimulation. We must, therefore bring a sincere confession, that, as persons

openly condemned, we may obtain pardon. But seeing that God was contented with giving a friendly reprehension, and that he did not more severely punish the double offense of Sarah; we hence perceive with what tender indulgence he sometimes regards his own people. Zacharias was more severely treated, who was struck dumb for nine months. (Lu 1:9.) But it is not for us to prescribe a perpetual law to God; who, as he generally binds his own people to repentance by punishments, often sees it good to humble them sufficiently, without inflicting any chastisement. In Sarah, truly, he gives a singular instance of his compassion; because he freely forgives her all, and still chooses that she should remain the mother of the Church. In the meantime, we must observe, how much better it is that we should be brought before him as guilty, and that like convicted persons we should be silent, than that we should delight ourselves in sin, as a great part of the world is accustomed to do.

16. And the men rose up from thence . Moses again calls those men, whom he had openly declared to be angels . But he gives them the name from the form which they had assumed. We are not, however, to suppose that they were surrounded with human bodies, in the same manner in which Christ clothed himself in our nature, together with our flesh; but God invested them with temporary bodies, in which they might be visible to Abraham, and might speak familiarly with him. Abraham is said to have brought them on the way; not for the sake of performing an office of humanity, as when he had received them at first, but in order to render due honor to the angels. For frivolous is the opinion of some who imagine that they were believed to be prophets, who had been banished, on account of the word. He well knew that they were angels as we shall soon see more clearly. But he follows those in the way, whom he did not dare to detain.

17. Shall I hide from Abraham? Seeing that God here takes counsel, as if concerning a doubtful matter, he does it for the sake of men; for he had already determined what he would do. But he designed, in this manner, to render Abraham more intent upon the consideration of the causes of Sodom's destruction. He adduces two reasons why He wished to manifest his design to Abraham, before he carried it into execution. The former is, that he had already granted him a singularly honorable privilege; the second, that it would be useful and fruitful in the instruction of posterity. Therefore, in this expression, the scope and use of revelation is briefly noted.

18. Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation . In Hebrew it is, 'And being, he shall be,' etc. But the copulative ought to be resolved into the causal adverb. 415 For this is the reasons to which we have already alluded, why God chose to inform his servant of the terrible vengeance He was about to take upon the men of Sodom; namely, that He had adorned him, above all others, with peculiar gifts. For, in this way, God continues his acts of kindness towards the faithful, yea, even increases them, and gradually heaps new favors upon those before granted. And he daily deals with us in the same manner. For what is the reason why he pours innumerable benefits upon us, in constant succession, unless that, having once embraced us with paternal love, he cannot deny himself? And, therefore, in a certain way, he honors himself and his gifts in us. For what does he here commemorate, except his own gratuitous gifts? Therefore, he traces the cause of his beneficence to himself, and not to the merits of Abraham; for the blessing of Abraham flowed from no other source than the Divine Fountain. And we learn from the passage, what experience also teaches, that it is the peculiar privilege of the Church, to know what the Divine judgments mean, and what is their tendency. When God inflicts punishment upon the wicked, he openly proves that he is indeed the Judge of the world; but because all things seem to happen by chance, the Lord illuminates his own children by his word, lest they should become blind, with the unbelievers. So formerly, when he stretched forth his hand over all regions of the world, he yet confined his sacred word within Judea; that is, when he smote all nations with slaughter and with adversity, he yet

taught his only elect people, by his word through the prophets, that he was the Author of these punishments; yea, he predicted beforehand that they would take place; as it is written in Amos, (Am 3:7.)

'Shall there be anything which the Lord will hide

from his servants the prophets?'

Let us therefore remember, that from the time when God begins to be kind towards us, he is never weary, until, by adding one favor to another, he completes our salvation. Then, after he has once adopted us, and has shone into our minds by his word, he holds the torch of the same word burning before our eyes, that we may, by faith, consider those judgments and punishments of iniquity which the impious carelessly neglect. Thus it becomes the faithful to be employed in reflecting on the histories of all times, that they may always form their judgment from the Scripture, of the various destructions which, privately and publicly, have befallen the ungodly. But it is asked; was it necessary that the destruction of Sodom should be explained to Abraham, before it happened? I answer, since we are so dull in considering the works of God, this revelation was by no means superfluous. Although the Lord proclaims aloud that adversity is the rod of his anger; scarcely any one hearkens to it, because, through the depraved imaginations of our flesh, we ascribe the suffering to some other cause. But the admonition, which precedes the event, does not suffer us to be thus torpid, nor to imagine that fortune, or any thing else which we may fancy, stands in the place of God's word. Thus it necessarily happened, in former times, that the people, although iron-hearted, were more affected by these predictions than they would have been had they been admonished by the prophets, after they had received punishment. Wherefore, from them, it will be proper for us to assume a general rule, in order that the judgments of God, which we daily perceive, may not be unprofitable to us.

The Lord declares to his servant Abraham that Sodom was about to perish, while it was yet entire, and in the full enjoyment of its pleasures. Hence no doubt remains, that it did not perish by chance, but was subjected to divine punishment. Hence also, when the cause of the punishment is thus declared beforehand, it will necessarily far more effectually pierce and stimulate the minds of men. We must afterwards come to the same conclusion, concerning other things; for although God does not declare to us, what he is about to do, yet he intends us to be eyewitnesses of his works and prudently to weigh their causes, and not to be dazzled by a confused beholding of them, like unbelievers, 'who seeing, see not,' and who pervert their true design.

19. For I know him, that he will command his children . The second reason why God chooses to make Abraham a partaker of his counsel is, because he foresees that this would not be done in vain, and without profit. And the simple meaning of the passage is, that Abraham is admitted to the counsel of God, because he would faithfully fulfill the office of a good householder, in instructing his own family. Hence we infer, that Abraham was informed of the destruction of Sodom, not for his own sake alone, but for the benefit of his race. Which is carefully to be observed; for this sentence is to the same effect, as if God, in the person of Abraham, addressed all his posterity. And truly, God does not make known his will to us, that the knowledge of it may perish with us; but that we may be his witnesses to posterity and that they may deliver the knowledge received through us, from hand to hand, (as we say,) to their descendants. Wherefore, it is the duty of parents to apply themselves diligently to the work of communicating what they have learned from the Lord to their children. In this manner the truth of God is to be propagated by us, so that no one may retain his knowledge for his own private use; but that each may edify others, according to his own calling, and to the measure of his faith. There is however no doubt, that the gross ignorance which reigns in the world, is the just punishment of men's idleness. For whereas the greater part close their eyes

to the offered light of heavenly doctrine; yet there are those who stifle it, by not taking care to transmit it to their children. The Lord therefore righteously takes away the precious treasure of his word, to punish the world for its sloth. The expression after him is also to be noticed; by which we are taught that we must not only take care of our families, to govern them duly, while we live; but that we must give diligence, in order that the truth of God, which is eternal, may live and flourish after our death; and that thus, when we are dead, a holy course of living may survive and remain. Moreover, we hence infer, that those narratives which serve to inspire terror, are useful to be known. For our carnal security requires sharp stimulants whereby we may be urged to the fear of God. And lest any one should suppose that this kind of doctrine belongs only to strangers, the Lord specially appoints it for the sons of Abraham, that is, for the household of the Church. For those interpreters are infatuated and perverse, who contend that faith is overturned if consciences are alarmed. For whereas nothing is more contrary to faith than contempt and torpor; that doctrine best accords with the preaching of grace, which so subdues men to the fear of God, that they, being afflicted and famishing, may hasten unto Christ.

And they shall keep the way of the Lord . Moses intimates, in these words, that the judgment of God is proposed, not only in order that they who, by negligence, please themselves in their vices, may be taught to fear, and that being thus constrained, they may sigh for the grace of Christ; but also to the end that the faithful themselves, who are already endued with the fear of God, may advance more and more in the pursuit of piety. For he wills that the destruction of Sodom should be recorded, both that the wicked may be drawn to God, by the fear of the same vengeance, and that they who have already begun to worship God, may be better formed to true obedience. Thus the Law avails, not only for the beginning of repentance, but also for our continual progress. When Moses adds, to do justice and judgment, he briefly shows the nature of the way of the Lord, which he had before mentioned. This, however, is not a complete definition; but from the duties of the Second Table, he briefly shows, by the figure synecdoche , what God chiefly requires of us. And it is not unusual in Scripture, to seek a description of a pious and holy life, from the Second Table of the Law; not because charity is of more account than the worship of God, but because they who live uprightly and innocently with their neighbors, give evidence of their piety towards God. In the names of justice and judgment he comprehends that equity, by which to every one is given what is his own. If we would make a distinction, justice is the name given to the rectitude and humanity which we cultivate with our brethren, when we endeavor to do good to all, and when we abstain from all wrong, fraud, and violence. But judgment is to stretch forth the hand to the miserable and the oppressed, to vindicate righteous causes, and to guard the weak from being unjustly injured. These are the lawful exercises in which the Lord commands his people to be employed.

That the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him . Moses intimates that Abraham should become possessed of the grace promised to him, if he instructed his children in the fear of the Lord, and governed his household well. But under the person of one man, a rule common to all the pious is delivered: for they who are negligent in this part of their duty, cast off or suppress, as much as in them lies, the grace of God. Therefore, that the perpetual possession of the gifts of God may remain to us, and survive to posterity, we must beware lest they be lost through our neglect. Yet it would be false for any one hence to infer, that the faithful could either cause or deserve, by their own diligence, that God should fulfill those things which he has promised. For it is an accustomed method of speaking in Scripture, to denote by the word that the consequence rather than the cause. For although the grace of God alone begins and completes our salvation; yet, since by obeying the call of God, we fulfill our course, we are said, also in this manner, to obtain the salvation promised by God.

20. The cry of Sodom . The Lord here begins more clearly to explain to Abraham his counsel concerning the destruction of the five cities; although he only names Sodom and Gomorrah, which were much more famous than the rest. But before he makes mention of punishment, he brings forward their iniquities, to teach Abraham that they justly deserved to be destroyed: otherwise the history would not tend to instruction. But when we perceive that the anger of God is provoked by the sin of man, we are inspired with a dread of sinning. In saying that the "cry was great," 416 he indicates the grievousness of their crimes, because, although the wicked may promise themselves impunity, by concealing their evils, and although these evils may be silently and quietly borne by men; yet their sin will necessarily sound aloud in the ears of God. Therefore this phrase signifies, that all our deeds, even those of which we think the memory to be buried, are presented before the bar of God, and that they, even of themselves, demand vengeance, although there should be none to accuse.

21. I will go down now . Since this was a signal example of the wrath of God, which He intends to be celebrated through all ages, and to which he frequently refers in the Scripture; therefore Moses diligently records those things which are especially to be considered in divine judgments; just as, in this place, he commends the moderation of God, who does not immediately fulminate against the ungodly and pour out his vengeance upon them; but who, when affairs were utterly desperate, at length executes the punishment which had been long held suspended over them. And the Lord does not testify in vain, that he proceeds to inflict punishment in a suitable and rightly attempered order; because, whenever he chastises us, we are apt to think that he acts towards us more severely than is just. Even when, with astonishing forbearance, he waits for us, until we have come to the utmost limit of impiety, and our wickedness has become too obstinate to be spared any longer; still we complain of the excessive haste of his rigour. Therefore he presents as in a conspicuous picture, his equity in bearing with us, in order that we may know, that he never breaks forth to inflict punishment, except on those who are mature in crime. Now, if, on the other hand, we look at Sodom; there a horrible example of stupor meets our eyes. For the men of Sodom go on, as if they had nothing to do with God; their sense of good and evil being extinguished, they wallow like cattle in every kind of filth; and just as if they should never have to render an account of their conduct, they flatter themselves in their vices. Since this disease too much prevails in all ages, and is at present far too common, it is important to mark this circumstance, that at the very time when the men of Sodom, having dismissed all fear of God, were indulging themselves, and were promising themselves impunity, however they might sin, God was taking counsel to destroy them, and was moved, by the tumultuous cry of their iniquities, to descend to earth, while they were buried in profound sleep. Wherefore, if God, at any time, defers his judgments; let us not, therefore, think ourselves in a better condition; but before the cry of our wickedness shall have wearied his ears may we, aroused by His threats, quickly hasten to appease Him. Since, however, such forbearance of God cannot be comprehended by us, Moses introduces Him as speaking according to the manner of men.

Whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it. 417 The Hebrew noun ■■■■ (cala ,) which Moses here uses, means the perfection, or the end of a thing, and also its destruction. Therefore, Jerome turns it, 'If they shall have completed it in act.' I have, indeed, no doubt but Moses intimates, that God came down, in order to inquire whether or not their sins had risen to the highest point: just as he before said, that the iniquities of the Amorites were not yet full. The sum of the whole then is; the Lord was about to see whether they were altogether desperate, as having precipitated themselves into the lowest depths of evil; or whether they were still in the midst of a course, from which it was possible for them to be recalled to a sound mind; forasmuch as he was unwilling utterly to destroy those cities, if, by any method, their wickedness was curable. Others translate the passage, 'If they have done this, their final destruction

is at hand: but if not, I will see how far they are to be punished.' But the former sense is most accordant with the context.

22. But Abraham stood yet before the Lord . Moses first declares that the men proceeded onwards, conveying the impression, that having finished their discourse, they took leave of Abraham, in order that he might return home. He then adds, that Abraham stood before the Lord, as persons are wont to do, who, though dismissed, do not immediately depart, because something still remains to be said or done. Moses, when he makes mention of the journey, with propriety attributes the name of men to the angels; but he does not, however, say, that Abraham stood before men , but before the face of God; because, although with his eyes, he beheld the appearance of men, he yet, by faith, looked upon God.

And his words sufficiently show, that he did not speak as he would have done with a mortal man. Whence we infer, that we act preposterously, if we allow the external symbols, by which God represents himself, to retard or hinder us from going directly to Him. By nature, truly, we are prone to this fault; but so much the more must we strive, that, by the sense of faith, we may be borne upwards to God himself, lest the external signs should keep us down to this world. Moreover, Abraham approaches God, for the sake of showing reverence.

For he does not, in a contentious spirit, oppose God, as if he had a right to intercede; he only suppliantly entreats: and every word shows the great humility and modesty of the holy man. I confess, indeed, that at times, holy men, carried away by carnal sense, have no self-government, but that, indirectly at least, they murmur against God. Here, however, Abraham addresses God with nothing but reverence, nor does anything fall from him worthy of censure; yet we must notice the affection of mind by which Abraham had been impelled to interpose his prayers on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom.

Some suppose, that he was more anxious concerning the safety of his nephew alone than for Sodom and the rest of the cities; but that, being withheld by modesty, he would not request one man expressly to be given to him, while he entirely neglected a great people. But it is, by no means, probable that he made use of such dissimulation. I certainly do not doubt, that he was so touched with a common compassion towards the five cities that he drew near to God as their intercessor.

And if we weigh all things attentively, he had great reasons for doing so. He had lately rescued them from the hand of their enemies; he now suddenly hears that they are to be destroyed. He might imagine that he had rashly engaged in that war; that his victory was under a divine curse, as if he had taken arms against the will of God, for unworthy and wicked men; and it was possible that he would be not a little tormented by such thoughts. Besides, it was difficult to believe them all to have been so ungrateful, that no remembrance of their recent deliverance remained among them.

But it was not lawful for him, by a single word, to dispute with God, after having heard what He had determined to do. For God alone best knows what men deserve, and with what severity they ought to be treated. Why then does not Abraham acquiesce? Why does he imagine to himself that there are some just persons in Sodom, whom God has overlooked, and whom he hastens to overwhelm in a common destruction with the rest? I answer, that the sense of humanity by which Abraham was moved, was pleasing to God.

Firsts because, as was becoming, he leaves the entire cognizance of the fact with God. Secondly, because he asks with sobriety and submission, for the sole cause of obtaining consolation. There is no wonder that he is terrified at the destruction of so great a multitude. He sees men created after the image

of God; he persuades himself that, in that immense crowd, there were, at least, a few who were upright, or not altogether unjust, and abandoned to wickedness. He therefore alleges before God, what he thinks available to procure their forgiveness.

He may, however, be thought to have acted rashly, in requesting impunity to the evil, for the sake of the good; for he desired God to spare the place, if he should find fifty good men there. I answer, that the prayers of Abraham did not extend so far as to ask God not to scourge those cities, but only not to destroy them utterly; as if he had said 'O Lord, whatever punishment thou mayest inflict upon the guilty, wilt thou not yet leave some dwelling place for the righteous? Why should that region utterly perish, as long as a people shall remain, by whom it may be inhabited?'

Abraham, therefore, does not desire that the wicked, being mixed with the righteous, should escape the hand of God: but only that God, in inflicting public punishment on a whole nation, should nevertheless exempt the good who remained from destruction.

23. Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? It is certain that when God chastises the body of a people, he often involves the good and the reprobate in the same punishment. So Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, and others like them, who worshipped God in purity in their own country, were suddenly hurried away into exile, as by a violent tempest: notwithstanding it had been said

'The land vomiteth out her inhabitants, because of their iniquities,' (Le 18:25.)

But when God thus seems to be angry with all in common, it behoves us to fix our eyes on the end, which shall evidently discriminate the one from the other. For if the husband man knows how to separate the grains of wheat in his barn, which with the chaff are trodden under the feet of the oxen, or are struck out with the flail; much better does God know how to gather together his faithful people, -- when he has chastised them for a time, -- from among the wicked, (who are like worthless refuse,) that they may not perish together; yea, by the very event, he will, at length, prove that he would not permit those whom he was healing by his chastisements to perish. For, so far is he from hastening to destroy his people, when he subjects them to temporal punishments, that he is rather administering to them a medicine which shall procure their salvation. I do not however doubt, that God had denounced the final destruction of Sodom; and in this sense Abraham now takes exception, that it was by no means consistent, that the same ruin should alike fall on the righteous and the ungodly. There will, however, be no absurdity in saying, that Abraham, having good hope of the repentance of the wicked, asked God to spare them; because it often happens that God, out of regard to a few, deals gently with a whole people. For we know, that public punishments are mitigated, because the Lord looks upon his own with a benignant and paternal eye. In the same sense the answer of God himself ought to be understood, 'If in the midst of Sodom I find fifty righteous, I will spare the whole place for their sake.' Yet God does not here bind himself by a perpetual rule, so that it shall not be lawful for him, as often as he sees good, to bring the wicked and the just together to punishment. And, in order to show that he has free power of judging, he does not always adhere to the same equable moderation in this respect. He who would have spared Sodom on account of ten righteous persons, refused to grant the same terms of pardon to Jerusalem. (Mt 11:24.) Let us know, therefore, that God does not here lay himself under any necessity; but that he speaks thus, in order to make it better known, that he does not, on light grounds, proceed to the destruction of a city, of which no portion remained unpolluted.

25. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? He does not here teach God His duty, as if any one should say to a judge, 'See what thy office requires, what is worthy of this place, what suits thy character;' but he reasons from the nature of God, that it is impossible for Him to intend anything unjust. I grant that, in using the same form of speaking, the impious often murmur against God, but Abraham does far otherwise. For although he wonders how God should think of destroying Sodom, in which he was persuaded there was a number of good men; he yet retains this principle, that it was impossible for God, who is the Judge of the world, and by nature loves equity yea, whose will is the law of justice and rectitude, should in the least degree swerve from righteousness. He desires, however, to be relieved from this difficulty with which he is perplexed. So, whenever different temptations contend within our minds, and some appearance of contradiction presents itself in the works of God, only let our persuasion of His justice remain fixed, and we shall be permitted to pour into His bosom the difficulties which torment us, in order that He may loosen the knots which we cannot untie. Paul seems to have taken from this place the answer with which he represses the blasphemy of those who charge God with unrighteousness.

'Is God unrighteous? Far from it, for how should there be unrighteousness with Him who judges the world?'

(Rom. 3:5, 6.)

This method of appeal would not always avail among earthly judges; who are sometimes deceived by error, or perverted by favor, or inflamed with hatred, or corrupted by gifts, or misled by other means, to acts of injustice. But since God, to whom it naturally belongs to judge the world, is liable to none of these evils, it follows, that He can no more be drawn aside from equity, than he can deny himself to be God.

27. Which am but dust and ashes . Abraham speaks thus for the sake of obtaining pardon. For what is mortal man when compared with God? He therefore confesses that he is too bold, in thus familiarly interrogating God; yet he desires that this favor may be granted unto him, by the Divine indulgence. It is to be noted, that the nearer Abraham approaches to God, the more fully sensible does he become of the miserable and abject condition of men. For it is only the brightness of the glory of God which covers with shame and thoroughly humbles men, when stripped of their foolish and intoxicated self-confidence.

Whosoever, therefore, seems to himself to be something, let him turn his eyes to God, and immediately he will acknowledge himself to be nothing. Abraham, indeed was not forgetful that he possessed a living soul; but he selects what was most contemptible, in order to empty himself of all dignity. It may seem, however, that Abraham does but sophistically trifle with God, when, diminishing gradually from the number first asked, he proceeds to his sixth interrogation. I answer, that this was rather to be considered as the language of a perturbed mind.

At first he anxiously labors for the men of Sodom, wherefore he omits nothing which may serve to mitigate his solicitude. And as the Lord repeatedly answers him so mildly, we know that he had not been deemed importunate, nor troublesome. But if he was kindly heard, when pleading for the inhabitants of Sodom, even to his sixth petition; much more will the Lord hearken to the prayers which any one may pour out for the Church and household of faith. Moreover, the humanity of Abraham appears also in this, that although he knows Sodom to be filled with vilest corruptions, he cannot bring his mind to think that all are infected with the contagion of wickedness; but he rather inclines to the equitable supposition, that, in so great a multitude, some just persons may be concealed.

For this is a horrible prodigy, that the filth of iniquity should so pervade the whole body, as to allow no member to remain pure. We are, however, taught by this example, how tyrannically Satan proceeds when once the dominion of sin is established. And certainly, seeing the propensity of men to sin, and the facility for sinning are so great, it is not surprising that one should be corrupted by another, till the contagion reached every individual. For nothing is more dangerous than to live where the public license of crime prevails; yea, there is no pestilence so destructive, as that corruption of morals, which is opposed neither by laws nor judgments, nor any other remedies.

And although Moses, in the next chapter Ge 18:1, explains the most filthy crime which reigned in Sodom, we must nevertheless remember what Ezekiel teaches (Ezek. 16:48, 49,) that the men of Sodom did not fall at once into such execrable wickedness; but that in the beginning, luxury from the fullness of bread prevailed, and that, afterwards, pride and cruelty followed. At length, when they were given up to a reprobate mind, they were also driven headlong into brutal lusts. Therefore if we dread this extreme of inordinate passion, let us cultivate temperance and frugality; and let us always fear, lest a superfluity of food should impel us to luxury; lest our minds should be infected with pride on account of our wealth, and lest delicacies should tempt us to give the reins to our lusts.

Footnotes

411

"Vita comite revertar." See Vulgate , where the expression is "Revertens veniam ad to tempore illo, vita comite."

412

"Patrem ex vetula effoetaque muliere fieri posse."

413

The following passage is not translated: -- "Quo genere loquendi verecunde menses notat qui mulieribus fluunt. Una autem cum fluxu menstruo desinit concipiendi facultas."

414

Does not the English version fully express this meaning? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" -- Ed.

415

"Copulativa in causalem resolvenda est." -- Vatablus in Poli Syn. The meaning of the expression is, that the word "and," at the beginning of the verse, should be translated "for." The ■ (vau) not being intended as a copulative, simply to connect this sentence with the former, but as a causal conjunction, or one which stated the reason for the course before determined upon. In calling the conjunction an adverb, Calvin follows the practice of many writers, who give this as a common title to prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. -- Ed

416

"Clamorem pro scelerum gravitate multiplicatum fuisse."

417

"Fecerint consummationem." If they have brought it to a consummation. "Assavoir s'ils ont accompli." If indeed they have accomplished, etc. -- French Tr

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