

## FAITH AND WORKS.

"What advantage, my brethren, has anyone, though he say he has faith, but have not works? This faith is not able to save him." – James 2:14.

We are taught that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and if faith without works is of no advantage, the inference is plain, that without works it is equally impossible to please God. And yet, we may have both faith and works and not be pleasing or acceptable to God. It is all-important that we have the right kind of faith and that our works should be the development and outgrowth of that faith.

What, then, is faith? We answer, True faith is the reasonable and accepted conclusion of a logical argument based on a reasonable premise or foundation. And more, it is the *only* reasonable conclusion to which such a logical argument could lead. Thus, reasoning on the principle of cause and effect, a principle firmly established in all the operations of natural and moral law, we see in the whole realm of nature the evidences of an intelligent Creator. We know that such effects as appear in the order of nature – as for instance the order of the spheres, the succession of the seasons, and of day and night, the growth of vegetation, etc., etc., – could not be produced without an intelligent first cause. And so undeniable is the basis of fact thus furnished in nature's testimony, and so logical the reasoning from cause to effect, that the conclusion – that there is an intelligent, wise and powerful Creator – is so palpable and irresistible that the Scriptures declare the man a fool who does not accept it. – Psa. 14:1.

And yet no man has ever seen God, nor can see him. (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16.) From these data alone we should have faith in God, even if he had given us no written revelation of himself. In a similar manner our faith in his written revelation and in all that it contains is established. For all that God expects us to believe beyond

the realm of our senses and observation, he has given us an undeniable foundation of tangible fact, upon which he invites us to use our reasoning powers to arrive at conclusions of which we would otherwise be ignorant. Thus faith is a conviction of things unseen, based on the logical deductions from known facts – a most reasonable thing.

There is nothing more common or necessary among men than faith. We exercise faith in the laws of nature and act upon it constantly. We till the soil and sow the seed in full faith in a future harvest to be brought forth by the continued operation of natural law, reasoning that the sun which shines to-day will shine again to-morrow, that the showers of yesterday will be repeated, and that vegetation will still be true to the old law of development and growth under these favorable conditions. Who thinks of questioning these things? No one. Why? Because we have become thoroughly acquainted with these methods in the past, and faith in them for the future is reasonable; while, on the other hand, doubt and unbelief would be unreasonable and foolish. The man who would refuse to plant for fear the sun would not rise again or the rain fall, would be rightly considered a fool. Why? Because faith is the only reasonable thing where the ground of faith is so well established. Even a child would laugh at another child who could not trust his parents for to-morrow's necessities when to-day's and yesterday's [R1158 : page 6] were abundantly provided for. His lack of faith would be so unreasonable. And just so when we have become acquainted with God, as all may who will study his works and ways in nature and revelation, to doubt is foolish, and full, perfect confidence in his wisdom, justice, love and power, is the only reasonable conclusion.

Therefore it is that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Thus faith, being a reasonable conviction of things unseen, becomes a basis of hope for the things which God has promised. As Paul expresses it, "Faith is a basis of things hoped for, a conviction of things unseen." (Heb. 11:1.) With the same confidence, therefore,

with which we look for an autumnal harvest from our spring-time seed-sowing, before we see any sign of it, we should also look for the fulfillment of all God's promises in due season, even before we see the slightest indication of their fulfilment.

There is no difficulty in exercising faith in God and in any and all of his promises if we acquaint ourselves with his character. It should be as unwavering as our confidence that to-morrow's sun will rise. Thus it was in the cases of some commendable example to which the Apostle Paul refers (Heb. 11) – of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, and the prophets, who by faith in the promises and directions of God subdued kingdoms, shut lion's mouths, quenched the power of fire, raised dead ones to life, and in hope of a better resurrection submitted to privations, persecutions and ignominious deaths, having faith in the promise of God to reward their loyalty to him and the grand principles of truth and righteousness, in due time. If God declares that a flood is coming and commands the building of an ark, the reasonable course is to build and to warn men, though the flood and every indication of it should tarry for a hundred and twenty years. When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, it was reasonable for Abraham to comply, and to leave the fulfilment of the promises, which centered in that son, to God. When he commanded Lot to flee out of Sodom, it was reasonable for Lot to make haste and depart, though the morning was gloriously fair.

These were commendable acts of simple, child-like, implicit faith. But observe that in every instance of faith commended in the Bible, there was good ground for faith: there was a clear command of God, a well defined principle of truth and righteousness; and no foolish imaginations or vague impressions were blindly followed. How foolish Noah would have been to spend a hundred and twenty years building an ark and warning the people, if he had only imagined that a flood was coming. How culpable Abraham would have been in laying his son on the altar of sacrifice, had he only imagined God

desired him to do so. And how simple Lot would have been to run out of Sodom that bright morning declaring that the city would be destroyed, if he had no positive information of it.

But notice that in each instance of unusual requirement God gave clear evidence of his will, either by an angel, a vision, or some remarkable circumstance – ways, however, which are not now necessary since the completed Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments form a perfect guide to faith (2 Tim. 3:15-17), and which, therefore, are not now resorted to. And in the instances of suffering and martyrdom cited, God's will was clearly expressed in the principles of truth and righteousness which he ordained. These illustrations should be specially marked by very many who claim wonderful faith in God, when the chief wonderment about it is their ability to believe so much on so slight a foundation.

In many enterprises, too, undertaken under the name of works of faith, and successfully carried on financially, faith has a better foundation in the sympathies of philanthropic people, than in the plan, methods and promises of God. If Christian people make public statements that they are starting a benevolent enterprise for the amelioration of the present woes of suffering humanity, they may do it with a large degree of faith in the support of benevolent people; even the worldly are often fully as active in these directions as Christians – for instance, mark the responses to calls for help in great calamities and disasters.

Success in these directions of popular benevolence we do not regard as proofs [**R1159 : page 6**] of remarkable faith in God, though those so engaged are doing good works, and public appeals for assistance in such work are right and proper, under some circumstances at least. A far more remarkable manifestation of faith in God is that humble confidence which espouses his unpopular cause, which perseveres in pursuing it in the face of all opposition and without human encouragement, and which patiently endures

whatever of reproach, discouragement, privation, and even persecution it may bring, assured of ultimate triumph according to his promise, and finding in his blessed truth and in his approval all the present reward and incentive desired.

One expression of the Apostle Paul should not be forgotten among us: It reads, "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself." (Rom. 14:22.) If we advertise our faith and our needs and thus make capital out of them by eliciting the sympathies and assistance of men, it is not resting in God to a very great extent; and such soon make manifest to observing Christians that they are endeavoring to be pleasers of men. There is much in the way of profession of great faith and in the relating of really improper proceedings and their results as wonderful feats of faith, which often does great harm to both speakers and hearers.

While a true faith is pleasing to God, what often passes for faith among Christians must be correspondingly displeasing to him. Many, without careful observation and study of God's ways, jump at hasty conclusions, often greatly out of harmony with the spirit of divine truth, and acting and teaching accordingly, dishonor the Lord and bring reproach upon his cause. Among such, too, are often found the loudest boasters of faith. Their faith is so strong, so rooted and grounded and established in what God did not say, that they have no inclination to hear or heed what he did say. In such instances God would be honored far more by the sealing of the lips. Rather let our faith be expressed to God, and let our confidence be manifest to him; and to our brethren let it be manifested more by faithfulness in his service than by words. Thus was the faith of the ancient worthies attested. Where is boasting then? It is excluded by the law of faith. (Rom. 3:27.) The very nature of pure, true faith is opposed to boastfulness. In fact, a humble, faithful walking with God excludes every mean disposition, and elevates the character far beyond them.

Let us endeavor to have more of that pure, true faith

"Which bears unmoved the world's dark frown,  
Nor heeds its scornful smile;  
Which seas of trouble cannot drown,  
Nor Satan's arts beguile" –

the faith which overcomes the world, and the spirit of the world in us, which will remove mountains of difficulty, and secure all that our hearts desire, since it is written, "Ye shall ask what ye will [our wills being in harmony with the will of God], and it shall be granted unto you."

When we see, thus, how reasonable a thing faith is, how God through his natural and written revelation of himself appeals to the highest faculty of our nature and bids us follow its leading and rest in and act upon its proper conclusions in studying his works and ways, we realize truly that without faith in him and in his reasonable revelation of himself, in nature and through his apostles and prophets, it is impossible to please him; because we have here a broad and firm foundation for faith.

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