

FAITH.

"Now faith is a basis of things hoped for, a conviction of things unseen." – Heb. 11:1.

THE CHRISTIAN life is a life of faith. Its first step is a step of faith, and its last step is the triumph of faith. All its victories are victories of faith, and its joys are the joys of faith. In the above text the Apostle speaks of faith as a basis of hope, as something substantial upon which hope may build. Hope is not faith; but hope is that buoyant, gladsome thing that is born of faith. A hope that is not based upon faith is a mere idle fiction which has no substantial comfort in it. Faith is the basis or substance out of which the living hope springs and grows naturally. Faith, then, must be a reasonable thing, well founded in that which is fixed, immovable, sure and steadfast, even in the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. – 1 Pet. 1:23.

Such faith is not a matter of the intellect alone, altho the intellect has much to do with it. It is also a matter of the heart – "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." If the heart be not right toward God, the intellect is easily biased toward its own preferences, which, in the carnal mind, are contrary to the righteousness of God; and so, the heart being wrong, the mind gropes in darkness concerning those things which pertain to eternal life and godliness. – "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7); and, therefore, to such God does not, and cannot, reveal the treasures of his wisdom and grace.

We are taught that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6); and further that "faith without [corresponding] works [which attest its genuineness] is dead." (Jas. 2:17.) "What advantage," inquires James, "has any one, tho he say he has faith, but have not works? This faith is not able to save him." (Jas. 2:14 – *Diaglott.*) And if faith without works is of no advantage, the inference is plain that

without works it is equally impossible to please God. Yet, we may have both faith (or what often passes for faith) and works (corresponding with it) and not be pleasing to God. The faith not well founded, together with the works built upon it, is likely to be swept away when the storms and floods of trial beat upon it as upon a house built of wood, hay and stubble and resting on the shifting sand. It is all-important, therefore, that we have the right kind of faith, and that our works should be the outgrowth of that faith.

What, then, is faith? We answer, True faith is the reasonable and accepted conclusion of a logical argument based upon 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 effect to cause, that the conclusion [R2162 : page 164] – 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.

From these data alone we have substantial testimony upon which to base faith in God, even if he had given us no written revelation of himself. And no less substantial is the testimony given upon which to base our faith in his written revelation. 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.

It is also manifest that, since the foundation upon which to base faith, and the reasoning power wherewith to draw logical conclusions from the known foundation truths, and "the spirit of a sound mind," the holy spirit, the spirit, mind or disposition of Christ, to accept in simple sincerity all truth, are all given to us of God, so also, as Paul affirms, the faith thus derived may be considered, as it thus really is, "the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8), while it is also the free exercise of our own volition in obedience to the laws of conscience and of sound judgment.

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 operations 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?

Surely no one will question them who has 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 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; while full faith, 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 that harvest, we should also look for the fulfilment of all God's promises in due season, even before we see 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 and in simple sincerity apply our hearts unto the instructions of his Word. Our faith in all God's promises should be as unwavering as our confidence that to-morrow's sun will rise. Thus it was in the cases of some commendable examples 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 lions' 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, in due time to reward their loyalty to him and to the principles of truth and righteousness. When God declared that a flood was coming and commanded the building of an ark, the reasonable course was to build the ark and to warn men, altho the flood, and every indication of it, tarried for many years.

Similarly, when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, it was reasonable for Abraham to obey the command and to leave to God the fulfilment of the promises which centered in that son. When he commanded Lot to flee out of Sodom it was the only reasonable thing for Lot to do, to make haste and depart, tho the morning was gloriously fair.

These were commendable acts of simple, implicit and reasonable 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 energy and valuable time in 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* that God desired him to do so. And how insane Lot would have appeared in hastening out [R2162 : page 165] of Sodom that bright morning declaring that the city [R2163 : page 165] would be destroyed, had he been given no reliable divine assurance of it.

Notice that in each instance of unusual requirement God gave clear evidence of his will according to the methods of that dispensation, 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, and which were properly recognized as more valuable even than life. These illustrations of faith should be specially marked by very many who claim to have *wonderful faith* in God, when the chief wonder in it is the 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 more 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.

Successes in the direction of popular benevolences are not always proofs of faith in God, tho those so engaged are doing good works, and public appeals for assistance are often right and proper; but a clearer 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. It reads, "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God." (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, we are in great danger of seeking to be pleasers of men. Almost imperceptibly this motive will creep into the heart and become a governing power in our actions, often causing deflections from the straight and narrow path of divine appointment. Beware when all men speak well of you, and when multitudes are ready to line up with your work and your methods; and look well to it that no element of worldly ambition or worldly policy be in it to ensnare your feet and to allure you from the narrow way. – Luke 6:26. See also Luke 4:6-8.

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. Some, without careful observation and study of God's ways, jump to 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 our deeds of faith than by our 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. It is sincere and too humbly mindful of personal weakness and necessary dependence on God to be boastful. In fact, a humble, faithful walk with God excludes every mean disposition, and elevates the character far beyond them.

However, the faith of which we speak is something which belongs only to the children of God. Their hearts being in harmony with God and his righteousness, his Word is unto them the end of all controversy; and their faith in that Word is the basis of their joyful hopes, the inspiration of their activities, and the anchor to their souls through all the storms of the present life.

While faith depends for its earliest existence upon a right attitude of heart toward God and his righteousness, it continues to grow and thrive by a more close acquaintance and intimate communion with God and a continual striving to attain to his righteousness. Faith, in its beginning, is always comparatively weak; but God does not despise the day of small things. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." (Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20) So also the Lord's people who are strong in the faith are taught to bear with the weaker ones. – Rom. 14:1; 15:1; 1 Thes. 5:14; Acts 20:35. **[R2163 : page 166]**

Since faith must necessarily be at the very basis of Christian character and is such an important element in its construction, even to the grand and glorious finish; and since "without faith it is impossible to please God," the effort of every Christian should be toward a continual growth in faith. To do this we must maintain a close walk and

fellowship with God in all circumstances and under all conditions. Does the sunshine of prosperity make glad our hearts? Let us see that we are glad in the Lord; that our hearts are lifted to him in grateful adoration and praise for all his benefits, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift. Or, do the clouds gather and the storms of adversity beat upon the soul? then call to mind the goodness of the Lord in times past, and take courage, assured that the sun will shine again when the lessons of this discipline have been learned. – Psa. 77:10-12.

Nothing is more encouraging to faith than to consider the Lord's past faithfulness to us, and his promises that thus it shall be to the end. All our interests, temporal and spiritual, are in his hands, if we are his; and "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to the called according to his purpose." How often, as the years go by, the children of God can see this! As they realize what the discipline of life, patiently and lovingly submitted to, has already wrought in them, they see, as perhaps they could not see while passing through much of it, how necessary it has been to the developing of character in them; and so they are thankful for the rough and thorny places, as well as for the smooth, because of the peaceable fruits of righteousness, which they have learned to prize above all else.

Christians may often encourage one another's faith by mingling their prayers and praises together, and by speaking to each other of their Christian experiences, of how God has led them and borne them up under trials which otherwise would have overcome them. Such indeed is the will of God, that we should so stimulate each other by loving communion and fellowship one with another in spiritual things, and by unitedly drawing near to God in prayer and praise. This is a means of grace that no Christian who has the opportunity to enjoy can afford to forego. Yet even this must not supersede that still more potent means of grace; *viz.*, secret communion with God, when, alone with him, we can open our hearts as to none else, assured that, even though language be lame, he is able to read the very thoughts and purposes of our hearts.

From such seasons of prayer and communion come the answers of peace which strengthen faith into a firm and steady confidence; and thus we are enabled the more fully to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ, and of the fulness of God's loving benevolence toward us. – Eph. 3:16-19.

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 spirit of the world in us and about us, and 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 done unto you." – John 15:7.

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 (our reason) and bids us follow its logical deductions of faith in God, and to rest in and act upon its proper conclusions in studying his works and ways, we realize truly that this faith is a firm basis of hope in the things unseen, "which hope we have as an anchor, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth [by faith] into that within the veil" – into the glory of the spiritual condition. – Heb. 6:19.

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