

CHAPTER 8

ENCOURAGEMENT TO LIVE BY FAITH

I COME now to THE SECOND USE — Have FAITH IN CHRIST.

Question. ‘But what are we to understand by faith?’

Answer: Faith importeth as much as to say, receive, embrace, accept of, or trust in, the benefit offered. All which are, by holy men of God, words used on purpose to shew that the mercy of God, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, are not to be had by doing or by the law; but by receiving, embracing, accepting, or trusting to the mercy of God through Christ — “We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they,” ^{<BIB>}John 1:12; ^{<BIB>}2 Corinthians 4:1; ^{<BIB>}2 Corinthians 11:4; ^{<BIB>}Colossians 2:6; ^{<BIB>}Hebrews 11:13; ^{<BIB>}1 Timothy 1:15; ^{<BIB>}Ephesians 1:12, 13; ^{<BIB>}Acts 15:11. Thus you see what the gospel is, and what faith doth do in the salvation of the soul.

Now, that faith might be helped in this work (for great are they that oppose it), therefore the Scriptures, the word of truth, hath presented us with the invitation in most plain and suitable sentences; as, “That Christ came into the world to save sinners — Christ died for our sins — Christ gave himself for our sins — Christ bare our sins in his body on the tree; and, That God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Further, as the invitations are plain and easy, so the threatenings to the opposers are sore and astonishing —

“He that believeth not shall be damned — Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, God gave them up to strong delusions, that they all might be damned,” ^{<BIB>}Mark 16:16; ^{<BIB>}2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

Objection: But faith is said to be an act of obedience.

Answer: And well it may; for it is the most submitting act that a man can do; it throweth out all our righteousness; it makes the soul poor in itself; it

liveth upon God and Christ, as the almsman doth upon his lord; it consenteth to the gospel that it is true; it giveth God and Christ the glory of their mercy and merit; it loveth God for his mercy, and Jesus Christ for his service; whatever good it doth, it still crieth, Hereby am I not justified, but he that justifieth me is the Lord.

Well, but is there in truth such a thing as the obedience of faith? Then let Christians labor to understand it, and distinguish it aright, and to separate it from the law and all man's righteousness; and remember that it is a receiving of mercy, an embracing of forgiveness, an accepting of the righteousness of Christ, and a trusting to these for life. Remember again, that it putteth the soul upon coming to Christ as a sinner, and to receive forgiveness as a sinner, as such. We now treat of justification.

But a little to insert at large a few more of the excellences of it, and so draw towards a conclusion.

First, The more thou believest for remission of sins, the more of the light of the glorious gospel of Christ thou receivest into thy soul —

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed,
from faith to faith,” ^{<BIB>}Romans 1:16, 17;

that is, according to the decree of faith. Little faith seeth but little, but great faith seeth much; and therefore he saith again, That by faith we have “access into the grace of God,” ^{<BIB>}Romans 5:2. The reason is,

1. Because faith, having laid hold upon Christ, hath found him

“in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,”
^{<BIB>}Colossians 2:2, 3.

In him therefore it finds and sees those heights and depths of gospel mysteries that are nowhere else to be found; nay, let a man be destitute of faith, and it is not possible he should once think of some of them.

2. By this means the Holy Spirit is plentifully received, ^{<BIB>}Galatians 3:1-3. Now the Spirit of God is a spirit of wisdom and revelation; but yet so as in the knowledge of Christ, ^{<BIB>}Ephesians 1:17; otherwise the Spirit will shew to man not any mighty thing, its great delight being to open Christ and to reveal him unto faith. Faith indeed can see him, for that is the eye of

the soul; and the Spirit alone can reveal him, that being the searcher of the deep things of God; by these therefore the mysteries of heaven are revealed and received. And hence it is that the mystery of the gospel is called the “mystery of faith,” or the mystery with which faith only hath to do, <sup>1 Timothy 3:9. Wouldst thou, then, know the greatest things of God? Accustom thyself to the obedience of faith; live upon thy justifying righteousness.

And never think that to live always on Christ for justification is a low and beggarly thing, and as it were a staying at the foundation; for let me tell you, depart from a sense of the meritorious means of your justification with God, and you will quickly grow light, and frothy, and vain. Besides, you will always be subject to errors and delusions; for this is not to hold the head from or through which nourishment is administered, <sup>Colossians 2:19. Further, no man that buildeth forsakes the good foundation; that is the ground of his encouragement to work, for upon that is laid the stress of all; and without it nothing that is framed can be supported, but must inevitably fall to the ground. Again; why not live upon Christ alway? and especially as he standeth the mediator between God and the soul, defending thee with the merit of his blood, and covering thee with his infinite righteousness from the wrath of God and curse of the law. Can there be any greater comfort ministered to thee than to know thy person stands just before God? Just and justified from all things that would otherwise swallow thee up? Is peace with God and assurance of heaven of so little respect with thee that thou slightest the very foundation thereof, even faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ? and are notions and whimsies of such credit with thee that thou must leave the foundation to follow them? But again; what mystery is desirable to be known that is not to be found in Jesus Christ, as Priest, Prophet, or King of saints? In him are hid all the treasures of them, and he alone hath the key of David to open them, <sup>Colossians 2:1, 2; <sup>Revelation 3:7. Paul was so taken with Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of this, that he was crucified for us, that he desired, nay, determined not to know any thing else among the Corinthians, that itched after other wisdom, <sup>1 Corinthians 2:2.

Objection: ‘But I see not that in Christ now that I have seen in him in former days. Besides, I find the Spirit lead me forth to study other things.’

Answer: To the first part of this objection I would answer several things

—

- 1.** The cause why thou seest not that in Christ now which thou hast seen in him in former days is not in Christ, but in thy faith; he is the same, as fresh, and as good, and as full of blessedness, as when thou didst most rejoice in him, ^{<3011>}Hebrews 1:11, 12.
- 2.** And why not now, as well as formerly? God is never weary of being delighted with Jesus Christ; his blood is always precious with God; his merits being those in which justice hath everlasting rest, why shouldst thou wander or go about to change thy way? ^{<1080>}Proverbs 8:30; ^{<2426>}Jeremiah 2:36.
- 3.** Sin is the same as ever, and so is the curse of the law. The devil is as busy as ever; and beware of the law in thy members. Return, therefore, to thy rest, O soul! for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.
- 4.** Guilt is to be taken off now, as it was years ago; and, whether thou seest it or no, thou sinnest in all thy works. How, then, canst thou stand clear from guilt in thy soul who neglectest to act faith in the blood of the Lamb? There thou must wash thy robes, and there thou must make them white, ^{<6674>}Revelation 7:14, 15.
- 5.** I conclude, then, thou art a polluted, surfeited, corrupted, hardened creature, whosoever thou art, that thus objectest.

But I find, sayest thou, as if the Spirit led me forth to study other matters.

What other matters? What matters besides, above, or beyond the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, and of our acceptance with God through him? What spirit, or doctrine, or wisdom soever it be that centers not in, that cometh not from, and that terminates not within, the bounds of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is not worthy the study of the sons of God; neither is it food for the faith of Jesus Christ (^{<3061>}John 6:51); for that is the flesh of Christ (and that is eternal life.) Whither will you go? Beware of the spirit of Antichrist; for “many false spirits are gone out into the world.” I told you before, that the Spirit of God is “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ,” ^{<4017>}Ephesians 1:17; ^{<5445>}John 14:15; 16; and that without and besides the Lord Jesus it discovereth nothing; it is sent to

testify of him; it is sent to bring his words to our remembrance; it is sent to “take of his things and shew them unto us.” Wherefore, never call that the Spirit of Jesus which leads you away from the blood and righteousness of Christ; that is but the spirit of delusion and of the devil, whose teachings end in perdition and destruction. Tempt not Christ as they of old did. But how did they tempt him? Why, in loathing the manna, which was the type of his flesh and blood, which we are to eat of by believing. I say, tempt him not, lest you be destroyed by the serpents, by the gnawing guilt of sin; for, take away Christ, and sin remains, and there is no more sacrifice for sin: if so, thou wilt be destroyed by the destroyer, ^{<4207>}Numbers 21:5-7; ^{<4300>}1 Corinthians 10:10. But again:

Living by faith begets in the heart a sonlike boldness and confidence to Godward in all our gospel duties, under all our weaknesses, and under all our temptations. It is a blessed thing to be privileged with a holy boldness and confidence Godward, that he is on our side, that he taketh part with us, and that he will plead our cause “with them that rise up against us,” ^{<4104>}2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:17, 18; ^{<4027>}Galatians 4:27; ^{<3182>}Philippians 3:2, 3; ^{<4511>}Romans 5:11. But this boldness faith helpeth us to do, and also manageth in our heart. This is that which made Paul always triumph and rejoice in God and the Lord Jesus; he lived the life of faith; for faith sets a man in the favor of God by Christ, and makes a man see that what befalls him in this life, it shall, through the wisdom and mercy of God, not only prove for his forwarding to heaven, but to augment his glory when he comes there. This man now stands on high, he lives, he is rid of slavish fears and carking cares, and in all his straits he hath a God to go to. Thus David, when all things looked awry upon him, “encouraged himself in the Lord his God,” ^{<0806>}1 Samuel 30:6. Daniel also believed in his God, and knew that all his trouble, losses, and crosses, would be abundantly made up in his God, ^{<2163>}Daniel 6:23. And David said, “I had fainted unless I had believed.” Believing, therefore, is a great preservative against all such impediments, and makes us confident in our God, and with boldness to come into his presence, claiming privilege in what he is and hath, ^{<1271>}Psalm 27:13; ^{<4304>}John 3:4, 5; ^{<3102>}Hebrews 10:22, 23; ^{<4100>}Ephesians 1:4-7. For by faith, I say, he seeth his acceptance through the Beloved, and himself interested in the mercy of God, and riches of Christ, and glory in the world to come. This man can look upon all the dangers in hell and earth without

paleness of countenance; he shall meditate terror with comfort, “because he beholds the King in his beauty,” ^{<2317>}Isaiah 33:17, 18.

Again; living by faith makes a man exercise patience and quietness under all his afflictions; for faith shews him that his best part is safe, that his soul is in God’s special care and protection, purged from sin in the blood of Christ. Faith also shews him that after a little while he shall be in the full enjoyment of that which now he believes is coming:

“We, through the Spirit, wait for the hope
of righteousness by faith,” ^{<4115>}Galatians 5:5.

Wherefore, upon this ground it is that James exhorteth the saints to whom he wrote to patience, because they knew the harvest would in due time come, ^{<3111>}James 5:7-11. Faith lodgeth the soul with Christ: “I know,” saith Paul, “on whom I have believed” (and to whom I have committed my soul), “and am persuaded (I believe it) that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day;” therefore it were no shame to him to wear a chain for his name and sake. Oh! it is a blessed thing to see, I say, by the faith of the Lord Jesus, that we are embarked in the same ship with him; this will help us greatly “both to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,” ^{<3112>}2 Timothy 1:12-16; ^{<4101>}Psalm 46:1-6; ^{<2126>}Lamentations 3:26.

Further, I might add, that living by faith is the way to receive fresh strength from heaven, thereby to manage thine every day’s work with life and vigor; yea, every look by faith upon Jesus Christ as thine doth this great work. It is said, when Paul saw the brethren that came to meet him, “he thanked God, and took courage,” ^{<4115>}Acts 28:15. Oh! how much more, then, shall the Christian be blessed with fresh strength and courage even at the beholding of Christ; “whom beholding as in a glass, we are changed,” even by beholding of him by faith in the word, “into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord,” ^{<4118>}2 Corinthians 3:18. But to be brief.

Make conscience of the duty of believing, and be as afraid of falling short here as in any other command of God, ^{<4146>}John 6:46.

“This is his commandment, that you believe,”
^{<4123>}1 John 3:23.

Believe, therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is the will of God, that you believe. Believe, therefore, to the saving of the soul. Unbelief is a fine-spun thread, not so easily discerned as grosser sins; and therefore that is truly “*The sin that doth so easily beset us,*” ^{<3801>}Hebrews 12:1. The light of nature will shew those sins that are against the law of nature; but the law of faith is a command beyond what flesh or nature teacheth; therefore to live by faith is so much the harder work; yet it must be done, otherwise thine other duties profit thee nothing. For if a man give way to unbelief, though he be most frequent in all other duties besides, so often as he worshippeth God in these he yet saith, God is a liar in the other, even because he hath not believed:

“He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,” ^{<6501>}1 John 5:10, 11.

So, then, when thou givest way to unbelief; when thou dost not venture the salvation of thy soul upon the justifying life that is in Christ — that is, in his blood, etc. — at once, thou givest the lie to the whole testament of God; yea, thou tramplest upon the promise of grace, and countest this precious blood an unholy and unworthy thing, ^{<3809>}Hebrews 10:29. Now how, thou doing thus, the Lord should accept of thy other duties, of prayer, alms, thanksgiving, self-denial, or any other, will be hard for thee to prove. In the meantime remember, that faith pleaseth God; and that without faith it is impossible to please him. Remember also, that for this cause it was that the offering of Cain was not accepted: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain;” for by faith Abel first justified the promise of the Messiah, by whom a conquest should be obtained over the devil, and all the combination of hell against us: then he honored Christ by believing that he was able to save him; and in token that he believed these things indeed, he presented the Lord with the firstlings of his flock (^{<3810>}Hebrews 11:4), as a remembrance before God that he believed in his Christ. And therefore it is said, “By faith he offered;” by which means the offering was accepted of God; for no man’s offering can be accepted with God but his that stands righteous before him first. But unbelief holdeth men under their guilt, because they have not believed in Christ, and by that means put on his righteousness. Again; he that

believeth not, hath made invalid (what in him lies) the promise of God and merits of Christ, of whom the Father hath spoken so worthily; therefore what duties or acts of obedience soever he performeth, God by no means can be pleased with him.

By this, therefore, you see the miserable state of the people that have not faith — “Whatever they do, they sin;” if they break the law, they sin; if they endeavor to keep it, they sin; they sin, I say, upon a double account — first, because they do it but imperfectly; and, secondly, because they yet stay upon that, resisting that which is perfect, even that which God hath appointed. It mattereth not, as to justification from the curse, therefore, men wanting faith, whether they be civil or profane, they are such as stand accursed of the law, because they have not believed, and because they have given the lie to the truth, and to the God of truth. Let all men, therefore, that would please God make conscience of believing; on pain, I say, of displeasing him; on pain of being with Cain rejected, and on pain of being damned in hell. “He that believeth not shall be damned,”

^{<4166} Mark 16:16. Faith is the very quintessence of all gospel obedience, it being that which must go before other duties, and that which also must accompany whatever I do in the worship of God, if it be accepted of him. Here you may see a reason why the force and power of hell is so bent against believing; Satan hateth all the parts of our Christian obedience, but the best and chiefest most. And hence the apostle saith to the Thessalonians,

“That he sent to know their faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted them, and so his labor had been in vain,”

^{<5186} 1 Thessalonians 3:5.

Indeed, where faith is wanting, or hath been destroyed, all the labor is in vain, nothing can profit any man, neither as to peace with God, nor the acceptance of any religious duty; and this, I say, Satan knows, which makes him so lend his force against us.

There are three things in the act of believing which makes this grace displeasing to the wicked one —

1. Faith discovereth the truth of things to the soul; the truth of things as they are, whether they be things that are of this world, or of that which is

to come; the things and pleasures above, and also those beneath. Faith discovereth to the soul the blessedness, and goodness, and durableness of the one; the vanity, foolishness, transitoriness of the other. Faith giveth credit to all things that are written in the law and in the prophets, ^{<4214>}Acts 24:14, both as to the being, nature, and attributes of God; the blessed undertaking of the Lord Jesus Christ; the glory of heaven and torments of hell; the sweetness of the promise and terror of the threatenings and curses of the word; by which means Satan is greatly frustrated in his assaults when he tempteth either to love this world or slight that which is to come, for he can do no great matter in these things to any but those who want the faith — “In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird;” therefore he must first blind, and hold blind the minds of men, “that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine into them,” else he can do no harm to the soul. Now faith is the eye of the godly man, and that sees the truth of things, whatever Satan suggests, either about the glory of this world, the sweetness of sin, the uncertainty of another world, or the like, ^{<3134>}1 John 5:4, 5; ^{<3117>}Proverbs 1:17; ^{<4002>}2 Corinthians 4:4; ^{<3127>}Hebrews 11:27.

2. Faith wraps the soul up in the bundle of life with God; it encloseth it in the righteousness of Jesus, and presents it so perfect in that, that whatever he can do, with all his cunning, cannot render the soul spotted or wrinkled before the justice of the law; yea, though the man, as to his own person and acts, be full of sin from top to toe, Jesus Christ covereth all; faith sees it, and holds the soul in its godly sense and comfort of it. The man, therefore, standing here, stands shrouded under that goodly robe that makes him glister in the eye of justice. Yea, all the answer that Satan can get from God against such a soul is, that he “doth not see iniquity in Jacob, nor behold perverseness in Israel: for *here* Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts, though, as to their own persons, their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel,” ^{<0232>}Numbers 23:21-23; ^{<2516>}Jeremiah 51:5; ^{<3164>}Romans 6:14; ^{<0512>}Deuteronomy 33:12. Thus, therefore, the soul believing, is hid from all the power of the enemy, and dwells safely under the dominion of grace.

3. Faith keeps the soul from giving credit to any of his insinuations; for whatever Satan saith, either about the acceptance of my person or performances, so long as I believe that both are accepted of God for

Christ's sake, he suggesteth to the wind; wherefore, faith doth the same against the devil that unbelief doth against God. Doth unbelief count God a liar? Faith counts the devil a liar. Doth unbelief hold the soul from the mercy of God? Faith holds the soul from the malice of the devil. Doth unbelief quench thy graces? Faith kindleth them even unto a flame. Doth unbelief fill the soul full of sorrow? Faith fills it full of the joy of the Holy Ghost? In a word, doth unbelief bind down thy sins upon thee? Why, faith in Jesus Christ releaseth thee of them all.

4. As faith keeps the soul from giving credit to the insinuations of Satan, so, when he makes his assaults, it over-masters him, and makes him retreat;

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. — Whom resist
steadfast in the faith,” ^{<5047>}James 4:7; ^{<6189>}1 Peter 5:9.

Believe, as I have already said, that God loveth you, that the blood of Christ was shed for you, that your person is presented complete before him, through the righteousness of Christ, and Satan must give place; thy crediting of the gospel makes him fly before thee; but thou must do it steadfast in the faith; every waver giveth him advantage. And indeed this is the reason that the godly are so foiled with his assaults, they do not resist him steadfast in the faith; they often stagger through unbelief. Now, at every stagger he recovereth lost ground again, and giveth battle another time. Besides, by this and the other stagger he taketh heart to attempt by other means, and so doubleth the affliction with manifold temptations. This is, I say, for want of being steadfast —

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able
to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,” ^{<4166>}Ephesians 6:16.

To quench them, though they come from him as kindled with the very fire of hell. None knows, save him that feels it, how burning hot the fiery darts of Satan are; and how, when darted, they kindle upon our flesh and unbelief; neither can any know the power and worth of faith to quench them but he that hath it, and hath power to act it.