

## CHAPTER 79

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF FAITH

(~~3813~~ HEBREWS 11:33, 34)

True faith performs a prominent part in all experimental godliness. Where there is a total absence of the grace of faith, a man is without God and without hope in this world; but where that spiritual principle exists, if only in the very small degree, there has taken place a wondrous and miraculous change. The one who is the subject of it may not, for a time, understand its nature; but instead, make the greatest mistakes about it; nevertheless, that change is no less than one passing from death unto life. “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed” (~~4172~~ Matthew 17:20): that little grain has a principle of *life* in it, and contains in embryo the future plant; so with the implanting of the principle of grace in the heart — it will yet develop into, or rather be consummated in, Glory.

It behooves each one of us to take diligent pains in ascertaining the *origin* of our faith. There are various kinds of faith spoken of in the Scriptures: there is a dead faith, a demon’s faith, a fancied and forced faith, a creature and presumptuous faith — all of which are to be dreaded, for they come not from above. But spiritual faith is *Divine* in its origin: “it is the gift of God” (~~4008~~ Ephesians 2:8). True faith is no offspring of nature, but has a celestial birth:

“every good and every perfect gift is *from above*, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (~~3017~~ James 1:17).

Spiritual faith is the heart’s persuasion of the Truth of God, and is produced in us by the almighty creative power of the Holy Spirit, when He applies the Word in life-giving energy to the soul.

Now this faith is not only Divinely-communicated, but it is Divinely-*sustained*. Spiritual faith is neither self-sustained nor man-sustained. It does not support itself, nor does its possessor support it. It depends entirely upon God. Alas, alas the “faith” of the vast majority of professing Christians, instead of being of this *self-helpless* nature, fills them with a

deceiving self-ability. Nothing is so dependent upon God in Christ; nothing so utterly unable to live without the Spirit's supporting power, as that faith which He Himself produces in the heart. But the "faith" of multitudes today is of a totally different nature, and we might accommodate and apply to them those words of Paul's, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings" — but *without* the Spirit.

This faith is not only Divinely-given and Divinely-sustained, but it is also *Divinely-energized*: it acts only by the quickening power of God. "Without Me," said Christ, "ye can do *nothing*" (<sup>415</sup>John 15:5); then, certainly, without *His* enablement we cannot act faith upon Himself or His promises. But a spurious faith, springing up out of mere nature, self-made and self-supporting, is also a self-acting one. The possessors of it can believe when they like, as they like, and what they like. There is Christ, *they* can lay hold of Him. There are His promises: *they* can appropriate them. There are His offices: *they* can act faith upon them. Alas, such ability savors nothing of the faith which God gives to His people, and which causes them to lie at the footstool of His mercy as humble supplicants.

This faith is also *Divinely-increased*: "Lord, increase our faith" (<sup>416</sup>Luke 17:5). But let it be pointed out that such an "increase" does not render the Christian less dependent upon the Spirit of God — that would be a miserable increase: like the prodigal son getting his portion of goods and setting up for himself. Nor is it such an increase that now remains at one level, always acting with a certain power, always in the same lively exercise. Far from it; real Christians know from painful experience how often *their* faith is at a low ebb, and when apparently the most needed, is the worst crippled in its actings. Nor is it such an increase that its possessors should necessarily be conscious of it. Moses knew not that his face shone. Most probably the centurion and the Canaanitish woman little thought that they had "great faith." Sometimes those who have the most faith feel they have very little, if any at all; while sometimes those who have little, say they are rich and increased with goods.

In what, then, does an increase of faith consist? Is not the Christian's growth, *as a believer*, a growth in a true, living, spiritual, experimental knowledge of himself as a sinner, and of God in Christ as the Father of mercies? Faith is fed by knowledge: not by mere notions in the brain, for those only feed a false and presumptuous confidence; but by a spiritual and

Divine knowledge. As *this* knowledge increases, faith increases; as this knowledge is confirmed in the soul, faith is confirmed and strengthened.

“Blessed is the man whom Thou *chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law*” (<sup><19412></sup>Psalm 94:12).

Again; “He *led him about, He instructed him*” (<sup><16320></sup>Deuteronomy 32:10): God leads into a great variety of circumstances, and in these circumstances He causes His people to receive instruction. In that way they learn the truth in an *experimental* manner, and what they receive from the Word is confirmed more and more unto them. In that way they learn the vanity of the world, the fickleness of the creature, the depravity of their own hearts.

Now this Divinely-given and Divinely-supported faith is renewed or stirred into exercise by the operations of the Holy Spirit, and brings forth fruit “after its own kind”; that is, fruit which is spiritual in its nature and supernatural in its character. In other words, faith is an active principle: it “*worketh by love*” (<sup><4816></sup>Galatians 5:6). As it is energized by its Giver, it produces that which mere human nature is utterly incapable of producing. An unmistakable proof of this is seen in our present verses, where we read,

“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (<sup><38133></sup>Hebrews 11:33, 34).

There are two ways in which the remarkable contents of these verses may be considered: according as we look at their letter in a natural way, or according as we ponder them with an anointed eye. Water will not rise above its own level: the heart of the natural man being a stranger to spiritual things, cannot discern them when they are spread before him — that is why the majority of the commentaries are so largely devoted to the historical, grammatical, and geographical details of Scripture. There *is* an historical allusion in each clause of our text, but what the true Christian desires, is to know the spiritual purport and the practical application of them unto himself. Only thus do the Scriptures become a *living* Word unto him. This is what we have sought to keep steadily in mind as we have passed from verse to verse of Hebrews 11, and which we will endeavor to be occupied with now.

“Who through faith subdued kingdoms.” The opening word takes us back to the list of worthies mentioned in the preceding verse, and here we are supplied with an enumeration of some of the wonderful works performed by them: nine fruits of their faith are mentioned — compare the nine-fold “fruit of the Spirit” in ~~(402)~~ Galatians 5:22, 23. Therein we behold once more the marvelous and miraculous efficacy of a spiritual faith.

“These instances are taken from things of all sorts to show that there is nothing of any kind whatever wherein we may be concerned but that faith will be useful and helpful” (John Owen).

No matter what our lot may be — “pleasing or painful”; no matter what station we are called to fill — high or low; no matter how formidable or difficult the obstacles which confront us, “*All things are possible to him that believeth*” (~~(402)~~ Mark 9:23).

“Through faith subdued kingdoms.” The word here used for “subdue” means “to fight or contend, to enter into a trial of strength, of courage on the field, to prevail in battle.” The historical allusion is to the exploits of Joshua and David:

“Joshua subdued the kingdoms in Canaan, and David subdued those which were around that country, such as Moab, Ammon and Syria; and they both subdued these kingdoms through believing” (J. Brown).

The important point to recognize is that the “kingdoms” here “subdued” were those which sought to prevent the people of God (Israel) from entering into and enjoying their rightful inheritance. Now let us spiritualize that fact. The Christian has been begotten “unto an inheritance” (~~(400)~~ 1 Peter 1:3, 4): that “inheritance” is to be enjoyed *now*, by faith, for “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” But there are powerful enemies seeking to harass and hinder us, and they must be “subdued.”

There are two principal “kingdoms” which the Christian is called upon to “subdue”: one is within himself, the other without him — the “flesh” and the “world.” It was to the former of these that the apostle had reference when he said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (~~(402)~~ 1 Corinthians 9:27). The same task is set before the Christian:

“For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (~~4869~~Romans 6:19).

The “flesh” or sinful nature within us *must be* “subdued,” or it will certainly slay us — bring about our eternal undoing:

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (~~4813~~Romans 8:13).

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that *ruleth his spirit* than he that taketh a city” (~~2062~~Proverbs 16:32).

Does the reader exclaim, Such a task is a hopeless one! Joshua might have said the same when he first set foot in Canaan, and found it occupied with a powerful and hostile people. And, my reader, Joshua did not “subdue” them in a day, nor in a year! No, it was accomplished little by little. It meant fierce fighting, it meant the exercise of much courage and patience, it meant surmounting varied discouragements; but at the end God crowned his labors with success. And remember that it was by *faith* he “subdued kingdoms.” Ah, faith looks to God and draws vigor and strength from Him. True, I *am* weak and impatient in myself, yet

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (~~5043~~Philippians 4:13).

There is also a “kingdom” without, which the Christian must “subdue,” or else he will be destroyed by it:

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (~~5004~~James 4:4).

And *how* is the “world” to be “subdued?” ~~6104~~1 John 5:4 gives us the answer: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, *our faith*.” Sweetly is this signified in the Song of Solomon: “Who is this that *cometh up from the wilderness*?” (~~2085~~Song of Solomon 8:5). Here the child of God, though toiling and struggling, worn and weary, is represented as rising above the world. And *how* is this accomplished? How is it that the spouse of Christ is enabled to rise above the immense hindrance of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” — those things which are “in the world” (~~6126~~1 John 2:16)? She is seen “*leaning upon her Beloved*”

(~~<2188>~~Song of Solomon 8:5). As He is our object, the world loses its power over us; as He is our strength, we get the victory over it.

“Wrought righteousness.” In their narrower sense, these words signify “to execute judgment, to enforce the laws of justice.” the historical reference would then be to such passages as Joshua 11: 10-15, ~~<0240>~~1 Samuel 24:10, ~~<1085>~~2 Samuel 8:15. But in its wider scope “wrought righteousness” means the living of a holy life:

“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (~~<1951>~~Psalm 15:1, 2).

“In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (~~<4105>~~Acts 10:35).

“Righteousness” signifies up to the required standard; and to work righteousness means, walking according to the rule of God’s Word:

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (~~<4072>~~Matthew 7:12).

Now right actions must spring from right principles and must be performed with right ends, if they are to be acceptable to God. In other words, they must issue from a living faith and have in view the glory of God. It is the absence of *faith* and the substituting of *self-interest* for the honor of the Lord, which is the cause of all the injustice and oppression in the world today. But let it now be carefully noted that “subdued kingdoms” *precedes* “wrought righteousness.” This order is unchanging: evil must be hated before good can be loved (~~<3085>~~Amos 5:15), self must be denied before Christ can be followed (~~<41624>~~Matthew 16:24), the old man must be put off before the new man can be put on (~~<4042>~~Ephesians 4:22-24). In other words, the “flesh” must be mortified before the “spirit” can be manifested.

“Obtained promises,” or secured the blessings promised. God assured Joshua that he should conquer Canaan, Gideon that he should defeat the Midianites, David that he should be king over all Israel. But outwardly, tremendous difficulties stood in the way of the accomplishment of those things, yea, apparent impossibilities prevented them. Gideon was put upon a great improbability when he was commanded to take but three hundred men, fall upon and destroy an immense host. David and his little company

seemed to be no match for the armed forces of Saul, and after his death, for years the throne seemed as far away as ever. But where there is a real trust in the living God the most formidable difficulties may be overcome.

“Obtained promises.” Ah, it is one thing to hear and read about the wonderful things which the faith of *others* secures, but what about your own experience, dear reader? You may sincerely think that you believe in and are resting upon the sure promises of God, but are you obtaining a *fulfillment* of them in your own daily life? Are the blessings set forth in the promises actually in your possession? Are you securing the things promised? If not, is the reason to be found in your failure to heed what here precedes? *Before* “obtained promises” comes “subdued kingdoms” and then “wrought righteousness.” We must not expect to “obtain” the precious things set before us in the promises until we definitely and diligently set about the subjugation of the flesh, and *walk* according to the rules of God’s Word — regulating our conduct by its precepts and commands.

“Stopped the mouths of lions.” The historical reference is, of course, to Daniel in the den. It shows again the marvelous power of faith. This comes out clearly in <sup>2163</sup>Daniel 6:23:

“So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, *because he believed in his God.*”

But how far may this be of help to us? Is the answer far to seek? There are ferocious people, as well as fierce animals! There are savage oppressors and persecutors who seek to intimidate, if not destroy, the mild and harmless Christian. True, yet they should not terrify us, still less spoil our testimony, by causing us to hide our light under a bushel. Daniel would not be forced into compromising by the threat of the lions of Babylon, nor should we be by the menacing looks, words, and actions of the world’s lions today. Say with one of old, “I will trust and not be afraid.”

“Stopped the mouths of lions.” Why it almost looks as though faith were omnipotent! What cannot real faith do! We dare not set any limitations to it, for faith has to do with the living God, and nothing is too hard for Him. Ah, dear reader, faith lays hold of *the Almighty*, and not until your faith learns to do that, is it of much worth. Is the Lord God a living reality to you, or do you have but a theoretical knowledge of Him? The ultimate reference in our text is to him of whom it is said,

“The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (~~4088~~1 Peter 5:8).

His mouth is opened against many a child of God, uttering lies, telling him that his profession is an empty one. Have you learned to “stop his mouth?” Do his false accusations no longer terrify you? Does he now find it useless to thus harass you any longer? It all depends: “stopped the mouths of lions” is preceded by “*obtained promises*”!

“Quenched the violence of fire.” The reference is to the three Hebrews in Babylon’s furnace. It shows the efficacy of faith to rest upon the power of God in the face of great danger, yea, before what seemed to be certain death. Those three Hebrews resolved to perform their duty, no matter what the event, committing themselves unto the disposition of a sovereign God, with full persuasion of His power to do whatever He pleased, and which would be most for His glory. Such an exercise of faith appears very, very marvelous to us. Ah, let it be fully borne in mind that Daniel and his fellows trusted God in times of peace and prosperity, as well as in seasons of peril and adversity. If we live by faith, it will not be difficult to die by faith.

“Quenched the violence of fire.” A twofold spiritual application may be made of these words.

**First**, we read of “the fiery darts of the wicked” (~~4066~~Ephesians 6:16), and these are to be “quenched” by “taking the shield of faith.” If we are subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, and obtaining promises, neither the mouth of the lion will be able to intimidate us, nor *the temptations* of the devil overcome us.

**Second**, we read of faith which is “tried with fire” (~~4007~~1 Peter 1:7) or fierce afflictions: this fire (like Babylon’s) is not “put out,” but its “violence” or *power to injure*, is “quenched.” If the soul cleaves to God naught can harm it. It is faith, and not water, which quenches the fire: behold the martyrs *singing* amid the flames!

“Escaped the edge of the sword.” The historical reference is to such passages as ~~0980~~1 Samuel 18:4, ~~1180~~1 Kings 18:10, 19:1-3, ~~2495~~Jeremiah 39:15-18: in several of which it seems as though those eminent servants of God escaped from danger more by fear than by faith — by *fleeing* from those who threatened their lives. The life of faith is many-sided, and care needs to be taken to preserve the balance: to keep from mere passivity on the one hand, and from fanatical presumption on the other. While the

Christian is to walk by faith, yet there is wrestling (<sup>4062</sup>Ephesians 6:12) and fighting to be done (<sup>3462</sup>1 Timothy 6:12); we are to seek grace and develop all heroic virtues, such as courage, valor, hardness (<sup>3808</sup>2 Timothy 2:3), and endeavor by Divine aid to overcome everything which hinders us entering into God's best. On the other side, the Christian must not refuse the use and aid of all lawful means in times of danger: "when they persecute you in this city *flee ye* into another" (<sup>4062</sup>Matthew 10:23) — to refuse to do so, is not faith, but presumption.

"Escaped the edge of the sword." What is the deeper meaning of this? Our minds at once turn to <sup>3808</sup>Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword": confirmation of this is found in the fact that the Greek of our text reads "Escaped the *edges* of the sword." But *how* is the Christian to "escape" the edges of the Spirit's Sword? By being in practical subjection to the precepts of Scripture, walking in communion with God. It is when we get into a backslidden state and give way to the lusts of the flesh, that the Word condemns our ways, pierces our conscience, and strikes terror to our hearts. God does not wound or afflict "willingly" (<sup>2383</sup>Lamentations 3:33), but only when our conduct is displeasing to Him. If our hearts be right with God, His Word will strengthen and comfort, rather than cut and wound us. If we *judge* ourselves for all that is wrong, the Sword will not smite us; when we fail to, the Word searches and convicts us. Note <sup>6695</sup>Revelation 19:15, where the same figure of the "sharp sword" is seen in Christ's mouth as he comes forth to destroy His enemies!

"Out of weakness were made strong." In those words there may be a latent reference to Samson in the dosing scene of his life, but most probably the historical allusion is unto Hezekiah. In <sup>2200</sup>2 Kings 20:1 we are told that Hezekiah was "sick unto death," and then that he prayed unto the Lord, which was in marked contrast from Ahaziah (<sup>2200</sup>2 Kings 1:2) and Asa (<sup>4462</sup>2 Chronicles 16:12). <sup>2200</sup>2 Kings 20:3 is much misunderstood: the key to it is found in <sup>1004</sup>1 Kings 2:4. Hezekiah was conscious of his integrity, and sincere desire to please God, but he had no son to succeed him to the throne, and therefore did he here call to mind His promise. The Lord responded to his faith, restored him to health, added fifteen years to his life, and gave him a son.

"Out of weakness were made strong." It is not simply that "the weak were strengthened," but "out of *weakness* were made strong," the emphasis

being upon an extremity of feebleness. It shows us that the vigor of faith is not dependent upon health of the body! It is written “The prayer of faith (not the “anointing” of the “elders”) shall save the sick” (<sup><3065></sup>James 5:15 and cf. <sup><5807></sup>Philippians 2:27). But our text is not to be restricted to physical “weakness;” God is able to make the doctrinally and spiritually weak to stand: <sup><6144></sup>Romans 14:4. The secret of the Christian’s strength lies in maintaining a consciousness of his weakness (<sup><4720></sup>2 Corinthians 12:10). The trouble is that as we grow older, most of us grow more independent and self-sufficient. The fact is that the oldest Christian has no more strength *in himself* than he had when he was but a “babe in Christ.” Just so soon as we fail to feel and acknowledge before God our personal weakness, do we fail to prove the sufficiency of God’s grace! Seek strength from Him daily.

“Waxed valiant in fight.” Probably the reference is to Samson (<sup><0755></sup>Judges 15:15) and David. The phrase signifies that these heroes of faith refused to be intimidated by the might and number of their enemies; undaunted by the great odds against them, they refused to give way to a spirit of cowardice, and entered into a pitched battle against their foes: compare <sup><6323></sup>Deuteronomy 31:23, <sup><0600></sup>Joshua 1:7, <sup><1906></sup>Psalms 3:6, <sup><4409></sup>Acts 4:29. Once again we would stress the importance of the *order* here: “waxed valiant in fight” is preceded by “out of weakness were made strong!” and that in turn by “escaped the *edge* of the Sword”! May we not easily perceive here why it is that we are so quickly and so frequently overcome by our spiritual foes?

“Turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Such passages as <sup><6000></sup>Joshua 10:1-10 and <sup><1057></sup>2 Samuel 5:17-25 may be consulted for typical illustrations of what is here in view, carefully bearing in mind that while the power of God, giving success to the efforts of Joshua and David, was the efficient cause of their victories, yet instrumentally, it was “through faith” they were wrought. The path of faith is one of conflict because the Adversary contests every step of the way. The chief reason why the individual Christian experiences so little victory in his spiritual warfare, is because his *faith* is so little in exercise. And we may add, the chief reason why the Church collectively is failing so lamentably to “turn to flight the armies of the aliens” is because there is so much jealousy and strife among its own members!