

The GOSPEL TRUTH

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LIVING BY FAITH

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Reported by The Editor.

"The just shall live by faith." Habakkuk 2:4

These words which occur first in Habakkuk are quoted in Gal. 3:11 and again in Heb. 10:38. They express a great truth which has a specially rich and important development in the gospel.

I. I will first explain the sense in which all men live by faith; and

II. The sense in which the just live by faith.

I. Faith is not merely an intellectual state. It is more than a mere conviction or state of being convinced. We do not reach the radical idea till we get to the heart, and till we find in this term, faith, the heart's confidence--a trusting in which the heart reposes on the word or character of one deemed worthy of confidence. It is a phenomenon of the will--it being of necessity a thing of free choice whether we will or will not refuse confidence, it being supposed that the intelligence sees good reason for such confidence.

In its generic signification it may be applied to any thing in which we repose confidence. Any exercise of mind in which we yield it up to confide and to trust is faith.

All intelligent beings live by faith in some thing. Little children live by faith, and it is striking to observe how much this is true of them. Indeed unreflecting persons do not by any means conceive how universal this principle is and must be, and how necessary to the existence of social and sentient beings. Even little children must learn to have faith in the use of their muscles, else they would not venture to trust themselves upon their feet at all. Nor would any sane man eat his daily food but for faith. He has faith in his cook that she has not poisoned it. He

must have faith that this food will do him good and will not kill him. Without faith men would not dare lie down to sleep. They must have some confidence in their fellow beings that they will be permitted to sleep without being murdered. In fact men would not dare to do any thing which implies peaceful repose unless they lived by faith. Without faith, there could be no repose of mind--nothing but sleepless and intense solicitude. In this state no man could live. His very solitudes would wear out his nerves and crush down his physical system.

It is astonishing to see how much faith there is in every thing. Look at men any where in any relations;--you see them living by faith. If you, young people, had not faith, you would not be trying to get an education. Society could not get along in any form it may assume, without faith. Farmers would neither plant nor sow; nobody would bestow labor for the sake of future good results; nothing could be done,--without faith. If faith should utterly cease, the race must perish. You would be surprised, if you were to reflect, to see how soon the entire race must perish if faith were to cease. Faith is the great secret of their being--the underlying condition of their continued existence.

Without faith we overcome no obstacles, for we make no efforts. And who does not know that we never accomplish anything useful without effort? All useful things then must go undone, if it were not for faith.--God has so constituted the universe that faith must be in exercise or its necessary processes must be arrested and ruin come down on all created beings.

On the other hand, in proportion as faith exists, society moves along admirably. An army, held together in strong and perfect discipline, owes its bond of strength to faith. A school well ordered, in diligence pursuing its noble work, lives by faith. A family, loving by promoting each others' interests, moving along with helpful labors and cares, have their central power in faith.

Of course I am speaking here only of faith in the generic, not the religious, sense. If confidence really exists, in all these relations, then all goes right; all moves along smoothly. But if faith is lacking, every thing is wrong, necessarily and eternally so.

It is common for skeptics to sneer at christianity because it makes so much account of faith. They seem to assume that they have no need of faith, in anything. It would be easy to show that of all men, religious skeptics must be most credulous and must have most faith, of some sort. The chief peculiarity in their case is, that having rejected the light and the evidence of truth through their radical enmity of heart against it, they are shut up to the necessity of believing things without evidence and against evidence as their only resort. They are compelled to believe that to "leap into the dark" at death is the best ending of human life.

But I must pass from this subject and proceed to inquire,

II. What is religious faith?

It differs from other faith in its objects, but not essentially in its nature. But I ought first to say that christians have naturally faith like other men and women. They have the same faith in a general sense which is common to society and to human nature every where.

They have also more than this;--they have a christian faith, by which they live a christian life. The secret of this christian life is the faith they have in the Son of God. This faith "works by love." Their confidence in Christ, in all he says and does, weds their souls to Him and begets unceasing love.

Their confidence in Christ's benevolence makes it a present reality to their souls, and hence the influence of such a presence of love cannot fail to inspire a corresponding love in their hearts towards Christ and his people, and indeed, towards all creatures. . . Without confidence in God and in Christ, they could not live such a life of faith. The motive would be wanting. How could they have peace with God, except through faith in Christ's atonement as the ground of reconciliation? How could they walk in the strength of the Lord without faith in his exceedingly great and precious promises? How bring their hearts under the influence of all the great truths of the gospel, unless they have a religious faith in those truths?

Many christians complain of the lack of emotion in their religious exercises, but overlook the great reason of their deficiency. They do not seem to see that the fountain out of which proceeds the strong, deep flow of emotion, is no other than faith. See that daughter. She is here at school; her dear mother is at home. She sits down to write out her soul. See how her faith in her mother's love opens the great fountain of her emotions. That mother's character is before her mind a present reality. She never can question the strength or the fulness of her mother's love. Hence when her attention turns to her mother, a thousand thoughts rush upon her mind, "and tears begin."

Is it any wonder that a christian's faith should in like manner inspire his affections and quicken his emotion?

By faith, the just live a life of obedience. Faith works by love, and love inspires the heart to obey. Faith brings the soul into such union and harmony with God that love and obedience become a second nature. Nothing can be more easy and natural than to obey where there is love and faith. If you confide in your Heavenly Father you will of course try to please him.

Again, by faith, you will live a life of submission to all God's will. Adverse things will of course cross your path in this earthly state; but if you confide in your Heavenly Father, you will pass smoothly along, submissive and satisfied that he who rules all does all things well. Said a man to me, only the other day--I hold to this--that whatever occurs to me and mine will work for my good. If any loss befalls me, do I not know it shall be in some way for my gain? I know it must be. If one of my horses dies, it is all best. God will make it up in some spiritual good. Another man said to me--If I set my heart upon accomplishing any object, make efforts for it, and succeed, it is well; and if I do not succeed, then it is well. I know the failure must be better than the success, else God would have given me the success. Do I not know that He will give me the best thing? It does not follow that He was displeased with me for making the efforts which He saw it best to frustrate. He expects me to act according to my best light and judgment; then if He sees a still better way and frustrates my way, all is well. Now I ask you, how could these men feel this repose and this submission to God's providence without faith?

So a man learns to adjust himself to the workings of God, as a ship at sea on the tops of the bounding waves. If anything comes dashing across his path and blasting his plans, gradually by his faith in God he adjusts himself to the blast and sings, "all is well, for it is my Father!" He trains himself from his first conversion to this self-adjustment by faith, even as the infant on his new and untrained limbs, learns to balance himself on the center of gravity, gaining new skill by each day's practice, until you are surprised to see what evolutions he can make with the utmost apparent ease and safety. So in the Christian's life; the trustful Christian learns to adjust himself

suddenly to the blasts that strike him under the vicissitudes of God's allowances, and keep his mind upright and on its balance, however sudden may be the changes which pass over him. He learns to apply every where those great truths he has learned of God. He holds practically that all God does is best. Hence he can pass through trials with calm and heavenly resignation. He expects to come out at last as Jacob did. You recollect Jacob began with saying--"Joseph is dead, and Simeon is dead; and ye will take Benjamin away also; all these things are against me." Did man ever make a greater mistake? Joseph was not dead, but was sent onward to the granary of the world to provide means of subsistence not for Jacob's family only, but for the whole nations. Simeon was not dead. All these things were not against him but for him, in the highest sense; and the good old man lived to see how sadly he had misinterpreted the ways of God towards himself and his house. So the fierce blast smites many a soul, and the poor man, weak in faith, staggers under the blow and trembles through great fear; but soon he gathers up his confidence, and lifting his head above the surging billows, he cries out, All is well! What though the lightnings flash and the thunders roar; what though darkness and storm combine their terrors; why shall he tremble? Is not God on the throne, high above and over all?

So the Christian lives exempt from care, bearing his burdens without distraction because he rolls them over upon the Lord. In the midst of business ever so complicated, his mind rests sweetly in the Lord--his faith causing his soul to have rest.

He has peace in God because he is justified by faith. His own soul has internal peace, because through faith he is sanctified. How could he have peace in either of these respects if he did not embrace Jesus Christ and his revealed plan of atonement by his blood and of cleansing by his Spirit?

In like manner by faith men live a joyous life, and a useful life. Faith lays the foundation for both the silent influence of a good example and for the active influence of direct efforts. You can look for neither without a living faith.

By faith men live a humble life. By faith they learn to take a low place. Indeed the very idea of faith involves humility; just as the idea of doing all yourself and trusting to no one for help, implies self-sufficiency and independence. The Christian is emptied of self-reliance before he can be filled of Christ. He sees he has nothing to be proud of; that humility becomes him; and that his spirit must accept this low position ere he can receive all fulness of grace from his Lord.

By faith he lives a cheerful life. Generally the tenor of the life of faith is cheerful. Satisfied with God and his providence, why should he not be cheerful? He has occasion to rejoice evermore. God will bring out such glorious results, and his faith so distinctly anticipates them; he cannot but know that the church is safe, and that all he loves on earth is safe.

By faith he lives a self-denying life. If he has faith he will not make much of the little petty comforts of this life. His soul is upon far greater and better things. Why should he care for these little things when souls are to be saved or lost? He can afford to deny himself of almost every earthly comfort in order to save a soul, or to please his Lord and Master. When he encounters labor and toil, glad to go to the very ends of the earth on the gospel mission, he knows he has nothing to fear and no reason to anticipate loss to himself. It is true he does not go for the sake of personal gain; but he goes, deeply conscious that he is pursuing the most truly valuable objects and pursuing them because they are most truly valuable. As for his own reward, he knows he finds it in large measures in his work itself, and as for the future, he cheerfully leaves it with God. Without faith, such a life

would be hard indeed; but with faith, why should he fear poverty, or persecution or shame? All is right--all is well enough. Who cannot afford to submit to all this, so long as his soul reposes in faith on his God?

By faith he lives a spiritual life, and not a merely natural one. His life is spiritual, not in the abused and perverted sense in which modern necromancers use the word, but in the sense of being in real communion with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God dwells in his heart by faith.

By faith he lives a prayerful life. It is natural for him to pray. He loves prayer, and breathes it even as he breathes the atmosphere. He has confidence in God and expects blessings in answer to prayer. Such a man has reasons enough for much prayer.

His life of faith is hopeful. He is not easily discouraged, for his confidence rests in the mighty God. He expects to succeed in doing all that God would have him do; and why should he wish to do more? Is he a minister of the Gospel, going forth to preach? He goes hopeful. Why should he not? He expects success in the name of the Lord if he has faith.

He will by faith lead an active life. Faith will spur on his activities. Under an earnest faith in divine truth, how can he help being active and zealous? If he believes God's word, he will believe in the fearful peril of sinners, and in the awful doom that awaits them. How can he desist and abstain from labor for souls so long as he sees them stand on slippery places, with fiery billows rolling below? Will he not devote himself with untiring diligence to pluck whomsoever he can from the ruin of a lost sinner?

Faith secures sympathy with God. Confidence in any man ensures your sympathy with him. So if you have confidence in God, you will give him the warm and earnest sympathies of your heart. Unbelief locks up the heart against sympathy with God; but faith opens it wide. It is wonderful to see how true faith in God opens the gate ways of the soul and lets in the waters of spiritual life and power.

Faith makes the Christian's life humane. It trains him to look on all as God's children and to love them and care for them as such. Seeing how much pity and forbearance God has towards his sinning creatures, he is drawn by his faith to exercise the same.

By faith he lives a life of Gospel liberty. He is not in bondage to law or to fear. He does not pray because he is obliged to, but because he trusts and loves. All right mental exercises are spontaneous, God by his Spirit writing his own law on the heart. It would be easy to show that a life of faith secures all these results.

These results constitute real life. Hence we see how eminently and how universally it must be true that the just shall live by faith.

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