

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

NO. 317

A SERMON
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

“Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”
John 4:48

YOU will remember that Luke in his letter to Theophilus speaks of things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, as if there was a connection between His doings and His teachings. In fact, there *was* a relation of the most intimate kind. His teachings were the explanation of His doings—His doings confirmations of His teachings. Jesus Christ had never occasion to say, “Do as I say, but not as I do.” His words and His actions were in perfect harmony with one another. You might be sure that He was honest in what He *said*, because what He *did* forced that conviction upon your mind.

Moreover, you were led to see that what He taught you must be true, because He spoke with authority—an authority proved and demonstrated by the miracles He wrought.

Oh my Brethren in Christ! when our biographies shall come to be written at last, God grant that they may not be all sayings, but that they may be a history of our sayings and doings! And may the good Spirit so dwell in us, that at the last it may be seen that our doings did not clash with our sayings!

It is one thing to preach, but another thing to practice, and unless preaching and practice go together, the preacher is himself condemned, and his ill practice may be the means of condemning multitudes through his leading them astray. If you make a profession of being God’s servant, live up to that profession, and if you think it necessary to exhort others to virtue, take care that you set the example. You have no right to teach, if you have not yourself learned the lesson which you would teach to others.

Thus much by way of preface, and now concerning the subject itself. The narrative before us seems to me to suggest three points, and those points each of them triplets. I shall notice in this narrative first, the *three stages of faith*, in the second place I shall notice the *three diseases to which faith is subject*, and then I shall come, in the third place, to ask *three questions about your faith*.

I. To begin then, with the first point. It seems to me that we have before us FAITH IN THREE OF ITS STAGES.

Doubtless, the history of faith might with propriety be divided just as accurately into five or six different stages of growth, but our narrative suggests a threefold division, and therefore we stand to that this morning.

There is a nobleman living at Capernaum, he hears a rumor that a celebrated prophet and preacher is continually going through the cities of Galilee and Judea, and is given to understand that this mighty preacher does not merely enthrall every hearer by His eloquence, but wins the hearts of men by singularly benevolent miracles which He works as a confirmation of His mission. He stores these things in his heart, little thinking that they would ever be of any practical service to him.

It comes to pass on a certain day that his son falls sick—perhaps his only son, one very dear to his father’s heart—the sickness, instead of diminishing, gradually increases. Fever breathes its hot breath upon the child, and seems to dry up all the moisture in his body, and to blast the bloom from his cheek. The father consults every physician within his reach, they look upon the child and candidly pronounce him hopeless. No cure can possibly be wrought. That child is at the point of death, the arrow of death has almost sunk into his flesh, it has well near penetrated his heart, he is not near death merely, but at death’s very point, he has been forced by disease upon the barbed arrows of that insatiate archer.

The father now bethinks himself, and calls to recollection the stories he had heard of the cures wrought by Jesus of Nazareth. There is a little faith in his soul, though but a little, still enough to make him use every endeavor to test the truth of what he has heard. Jesus Christ has come to Cana again, it is some fifteen or twenty miles.

The father travels with all speed, he arrives at the place where Jesus is, his faith has got to such a stage, that as soon as he sees the Master, he begins to cry, "Lord, come down ere my child dies." The Master, instead of giving him an answer which might console him, rebukes him for the littleness of his faith and tells him, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The man however, pays little regard to the rebuke, for there is a desire which has absorbed all the powers of his soul. His mind is so overwhelmed with one anxiety that he is oblivious to all besides.

"Sir," said he, "come down ere my child dies." His faith has now arrived at such a stage that he pleads in prayer, and earnestly importunes the Lord to come and heal his son. The Master looks upon him with an eye of ineffable benevolence, and says to him, "Go thy way; thy son lives." The father goes his way cheerfully, quickly, contentedly, trusting in the word which as yet no evidence has confirmed.

He has now come to the second stage of his faith, he has come out of the seeking stage into the relying stage. He no more cries and pleads for a thing he has not, he trusts and believes that the thing is given to him, though as yet he has not perceived the gift.

On his road home, the servants meet him with joyful haste, they say, "Master, thy son liveth." He inquires quickly at what hour the fever left him. The answer is given him—about the seventh hour the fever abated, nay, it stayed its course.

Then he comes to the third stage. He goes home, he sees his child perfectly restored. The child springs into his arms, covers him with kisses, and when he has held him up again and again to see if he was really the little one that lay so wan, and pale, and sick, he triumphs in a higher sense still. His faith has gone from reliance up to full assurance, and then his whole house believed as well as himself.

I have given you just these outlines of the narrative that you may see the three stages of faith. Let us now examine each more minutely.

When faith begins in the soul, it is but as a grain of mustard seed. God's people are not born giants. They are babes at first, and as they are babes in grace, so their graces are as it were in their infancy. Faith is but as a little child, when first God gives it, or to use another figure, it is not a fire, but a spark, a spark which seems as if it must go out, but which is nevertheless fanned and kept alive until it comes to a flame, like unto the vehement heat of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.

The poor man in the narrative, when he had faith given him, had it but in a very small degree. It was seeking faith. That is the first stage of faith. Now just notice that this seeking faith excited his activity. As soon as ever God gives a man the seeking faith, he is no more idle about religion, he does not fold his arms with the wicked Antinomian and cry, "If I am to be saved, I shall be saved, and I will sit still, for if I am to be damned, I shall be damned."

He is not careless and indifferent, as he used to be, as to whether he should go up to the house of God or no. He has got seeking faith, and that faith makes him attend the means of grace, leads him to search the Word, leads him to be diligent in the use of every ordained means of blessing for the soul.

There is a sermon to be heard, no matter that there are five miles to walk, seeking faith puts wings upon the feet. There is a congregation where God is blessing souls, the man, if he enters, will probably have to stand in the crowd, but it does not signify, seeking faith gives him strength to bear the uneasiness of his position, for "Oh," he says, "if I *may* but hear the Word."

See how he leans forward that he may not lose a syllable, for "Perhaps," saith he, "the sentence that I lose may be the very one that I want." How earnest he is that he may not only be sometimes in the house of God, but very often there. He becomes among the most enthusiastic of hearers, the most earnest of men who attend that place of worship. Seeking faith gives a man activity.

More than this, seeking faith, though it is very weak in some things, gives a man great power in prayer. How earnest was this nobleman—"Lord, come down ere my child die." Ay, and when seeking

faith enters into the soul, it makes a man pray. He is not content now with muttering over a few words when he rises in the morning, and then, half asleep, ringing the same chimes at night when he goes to bed, but he gets away—he steals a quarter of an hour from his business if he can, that he may cry to God in secret. He has not the faith yet which enables him to say, “My sins are forgiven,” but he has faith enough to know that Christ can forgive his sins, and what he wants is that he may know that *his* sins are really cast behind JEHOVAH’s back.

Sometimes this man has no convenience for prayer, but seeking faith will make him pray in a garret, in a hayloft, in a saw pit, from behind a hedge, or even walking the street. Satan may throw a thousand difficulties in the way, but seeking faith will compel a man to knock at mercy’s door.

Now the faith that you have received does not yet give you peace, it does not put you where there is no condemnation, but yet it is such a faith that if it grows it will come to that. It has but to be nourished, to be cherished, to be exercised, and the little one shall become mighty, seeking faith shall come to a higher degree of development, and you that knocked at mercy’s gate shall enter in and find a welcome at Jesus’ table.

And I would have you further notice that the seeking faith in this man’s case did not simply make him earnest in prayer, but importunate in it. He asked once, and the only answer he received was an apparent rebuff. He did not turn away in a sulk and say, “He rebukes me.” No. “Sir,” saith he, “come down ere my child die.”

I cannot tell you how he said it, but I have no doubt it was expressed in soul-moving terms, with tears starting from his eyes, with hands that were placed together in the attitude of entreaty. He seemed to say, “I cannot let You go except You come and save my child. Oh, do come. Is there anything I can say that can induce You? Let a father’s affection be my best argument, and if my lips be not eloquent, let the tears of my eyes supply the place of the words of my tongue. Come down ere my child die.”

And oh! what mighty prayers those are which seeking faith will make a man pray! I have heard the seeker sometimes plead with God with all the power that Jacob ever could have had at Jabbok’s brook. I have seen the sinner under distress of soul seem to take hold of the pillars of the gate of mercy and rock them to and fro as though he would sooner pull them up from their deep foundations than go away without effecting an entrance. I have seen him pull and tug, and strive and fight, and wrestle, rather than not enter the kingdom of heaven, for he knew that the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent would take it by force.

No wonder that you have not any peace, if you have been bringing before God your cold prayers. Heat them red-hot in the furnace of desire, or think not they will ever burn their way upwards to heaven. You that merely say in the chill form of orthodoxy, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” will never find mercy. It is the man who cries in the burning anguish of heart-felt emotion—“God be merciful to *me* a sinner, *save me* or I perish,” that gains his suit. It is he who concentrates his soul in every word, and flings the violence of his being into every sentence, that wins his way through the gates of heaven. Seeking faith when once it is given can make a man do this.

Doubtless there are some here who have got as far as that already. I thought I saw the tears starting from many an eye just now brushed away very hastily, but I could see it as an index that some said in their souls, “Ay, I know the meaning of that, and I trust God has brought me thus far.”

One word I must say here with regard to the weakness of this seeking faith. It can do much, but it makes many mistakes. The fault of seeking faith is that it knows too little, for you will observe that this poor man said, “Sir, come down, *come down*.” Well, but He need not come down. The Lord can work the miracle without coming down. But our poor friend thought the Master could not save his son unless He came and looked at him, and put His hand upon him, and knelt down perhaps upon him as Elijah did. “Oh, come down” saith he.

So is it with you. You have been dictating to God how He shall save you. You want Him to send you some terrible convictions, and then you think you could believe, or else you want to have a dream or a vision, or to hear a voice speaking to you, saying, “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” That is your fault

you see. Your seeking faith is strong enough to make you pray, but it is not strong enough to cast out of the mind your own silly fancies. You are wanting to see signs and wonders, or else you will not believe.

O nobleman, if Jesus chooses to speak the word and your son is healed, will not that suit you as well as His coming down? "Oh," saith he, "I never thought of that." and so, poor sinner, if Jesus chooses to give you peace this morning in this hall, will not that suit you as well as being a month under the whip of the law? If as you pass out of these doors you be enabled simply to trust in Christ and so find peace, will not that be as good a salvation as though you should have to go through fire and through water, and all your sins should be made to ride over your head?

Here then, is the weakness of your faith. Though there is much excellence in it because it makes you pray, there is some fault in it because it makes you imprudently prescribe to the Almighty how He shall bless you—makes you in effect to impugn His sovereignty, and leads you ignorantly to dictate to Him in what form the promised boon shall come.

We will now pass on to the second stage of faith. The Master stretched out His hand and said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." Do you see the face of that nobleman? Those furrows that were there seem smoothed in a moment, all gone. Those eyes are full of tears, but they are of another sort now—they are tears of joy. He claps his hands, retires silently, his heart ready to burst with gratitude, his whole soul full of confidence.

"Why are you so happy, sir?" "Why my child is cured," saith he. "Nay, but you have not seen him cured." "But my Lord said he was, and I believe Him." "But it may be that when you get home you will find your faith to be a delusion and your child a corpse." "Nay," saith he, "I believe in that man. Once I believed Him and sought Him, now I believe Him and have found Him." "But you have no evidence whatever that your child is healed." "Nay," saith he, "I do not want any. The naked word of that divine prophet is enough for me. He spake it and I know it is true. He told me to go my way, my son lived, I go my way and I am quite at peace and at ease."

Now mark, when your faith gets to a second stage in which you shall be able to take Christ at His word, then it is you shall begin to know the happiness of believing, and then it is your faith saves your soul. Take Christ at His word, poor sinner. "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." "But," saith one, "I feel no evidence." Believe it none the less. "But," says another, "I do not feel enjoyment in my heart." Believe it, be your heart ever so gloomy, that enjoyment shall come afterwards.

That is a heroic faith which believes Christ in the teeth of a thousand contradictions. When the Lord gives you that faith, you can say, "I consult not with flesh and blood; He who said to me, 'Believe and be saved,' gave me grace to believe, and I therefore am confident that I am saved. When I once cast my soul, sink or swim, upon the love and blood and power of Christ, though conscience give no witness to my soul, though doubts distress me and fears plague me, yet it is mine to honor my Master by believing His Word, though it is contradictory to sense, though reason rebels against it, and present feeling dare to give it the lie."

Oh! it is an honorable thing when a man has a follower, and that follower believes that man implicitly. The man propounds an opinion which is in contradiction to the received opinion of the universe, he stands up and addresses it to the people, and they hiss and hoot, and scorn him, but that man has one disciple who says, "I believe my Master, what he has said I believe is true."

There is something noble in the man who receives such homage as that. He seems to say, "Now I am master of one heart at least," and when you, in the teeth of everything that is conflicting, stand to Christ and believe His words, you do Him greater homage than Cherubim and Seraphim before the throne. Dare to believe, trust Christ, I say, and thou art saved.

In this stage of faith it is that a man begins to enjoy quietness and peace of mind. I am not quite certain as to the number of miles between Cana and Capernaum, but several excellent expositors say it is fifteen, some twenty. I suppose the miles may have altered in their length lately. It need not, however, have taken this good man long to get home to his son.

It was at the seventh hour that the Master said, “Thy son liveth.” It is evident from this text, that he did not meet his servants till the next day, because they say, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” What do you conclude from that? Why I draw this inference, the nobleman was so sure that his child was alive and well, that he was in no violent hurry to return. He did not go home immediately, as though he must be in time to get another doctor if Christ had not succeeded, but he went his way leisurely and calmly, confident in the truth of what Jesus had said to him.

Well says an old father of the church, “He that believeth shall not make haste.” In this case it was true. The man took his time. He was, it may be, twelve hours or more before he reached his home—though probably it was but fifteen miles for him to travel. He who takes the naked word of Christ to be the basis of his hope, stands on a rock while all other ground is sinking sand.

My brothers and sisters, some of you have got as far as this. You are now taking Christ at His word, it shall not be long before you will get to the third and best stage of faith. But if it should be ever so long still stand here, still believe your Lord and Master, still trust Him. If He does not take you into His banqueting house, still trust Him. Nay, if He locks you up in the castle, or in the dungeon, still trust Him. Say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” Should He let the arrows of affliction stick fast in your flesh, still trust Him, should He break you to pieces with His right hand, still trust Him, and by and by your righteousness shall come forth as the light, your glory as a lamp that burneth.

We must now hurry on to the third and best stage of faith. The servants meet the nobleman—his son is healed. He arrives at home, clasps his child and sees him perfectly restored. And now, says the narrative—“Himself believed and his whole house.” And yet you will have noticed that in the fiftieth verse, it says that he believed. “The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him.”

Now some expositors have been greatly puzzled, for they did not know when this man did believe. Good Calvin says, and his remarks are always weighty, and always excellent—(I do not hesitate to say that Calvin is the grandest expositor that ever yet thought to make plain the Word of God. In his commentary, I have often found him cutting his own institutes to pieces, not attempting to give a passage a Calvinistic meaning, but always trying to interpret God’s Word as he finds it)—Calvin says, this man had in the first place, only a faith which relied for one thing upon Christ. He believed the word Christ had spoken. Afterwards he had a faith which took Christ into his soul, to become His disciple, and trust Him as the Messiah.

I think I am not wrong in using this as an illustration of faith in its highest state. He found his son healed at the very hour when Jesus said he should be. “And now,” he says, “I believe,” that is to say, he believed with full assurance of faith. His mind was so rid of all its doubts, he believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, sure He was a prophet sent from God, and doubts and misgivings no longer occupied his soul.

Ah! I know many poor creatures who want to get up to this state, but they want to get there all at first. They are like a man who wants to get up a ladder without going up the lowest rounds. “Oh,” they say, “if I had the full assurance of faith, then I would believe I am a child of God.” No, no, believe, trust in Christ’s naked word, and then you shall come afterwards to feel in your soul the witness of the Spirit that you are born of God.

Assurance is a flower—you must plant the bulb first, the naked, perhaps unseemly bulb of faith—plant it in the grain, and you shall have the flower by and by. The shriveled seed of a little faith springs upwards, and then you have the ripe corn in the ear of full assurance of faith.

But here I want you to notice that when this man came to full assurance of faith, it is said his house believed too. There is a text often quoted, and I do not think I have heard it quoted rightly yet. By the way, there are some people who know no more of authors than what they hear quoted, and some who know no more of the Bible than what they have heard quoted too.

Now, there is that passage, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”—what have the last three words done that they should be cut off?—“And thy house,” those three words seem to me to be as precious as the first. “Believe and thou shalt be saved and thy house.” Does the father’s faith

save the family? Yes! No!—*Yes* it does in some way, namely, that the father's faith makes him pray for his family, and God hears his prayer, and the family is saved. *No*, the father's faith cannot be a substitute for the faith of the children, they must believe too. In both senses of the word, I say "Yes, or No." When a man has believed, there is hope that his children will be saved. Nay, there is a promise, and the father ought not to rest satisfied until he sees all his children saved. If he does, he has not believed right yet.

There are many men who only believe for themselves. I like, if I get a promise, to believe it as broad as it is. Why should not my faith be as broad as the promise? Now, thus it stands, "Believe and thou shalt be saved, and thy house"! I have a claim on God for my little ones. When I go before God in prayer, I can plead, "Lord, I believe, and Thou hast said I shall be saved, and my house, Thou hast saved me, but Thou hast not fulfilled Thy promise till Thou hast saved my house too."

I know it is sometimes thought that we who believe that the baptism of infants is heresy, and not a single text of Scripture gives it so much as an inferential support, neglect our children. But could there have been a greater slander? Why instead thereof, we think we are doing our children the greatest service that we can possibly do them, when teaching them that they are not members of Christ's church, that they are not made Christians in the day that they are christened, that they must be born again, and that that new birth must be in them a thing which they can consciously realize, and not a thing can we do for them in their babyhood, while they are yet in their long clothes, by sprinkling a handful of water in their faces.

We think they are far more likely to be converted than those who are brought up in the delusive notion taught them in that expression of the catechism—a most wicked, blasphemous, and false expression—"In my baptism wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." The Pope of Rome never uttered a sentence more unholy than that, never said a syllable more contradictory to the whole tenor of God's Word.

Children are not saved by baptism, nor grown-up people either. "He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"—but the baptism precedes not the belief. Nor does it co-act or co-work in our salvation, for salvation is a work of grace, laid hold of by faith and faith alone. Baptized or unbaptized, if you believe not, you are lost, but unbaptized, if you believe you are saved. And our children dying in their infancy without any unhallowed or superstitious rite, are saved notwithstanding.

II. And now we come to the second department of our subject, the THREE DISEASES TO WHICH FAITH IS VERY SUBJECT, and these three diseases break out in different stages.

First with regard to seeking faith. The power of seeking faith lies in its driving a man to prayer. And here is the disease, for we are very likely, when we are seeking to begin, to suspend prayerfulness. How often does the devil whisper in a man's ear, "Do not pray, it is of no use. You know you will be shut out of heaven!" Or when the man thinks he has got an answer to prayer, then Satan says, "You need not pray anymore, you have got what you asked for." Or if after a month of crying he has received no blessing, then Satan whispers, "Fool that thou art to tarry at mercy's gate! Get gone! Get gone! That gate is nailed up and barred fast, and you will never be heard."

O my friends! if you are subject to this disease while seeking Christ, I bid you cry against it, and labor against it, never cease to pray. A man can never sink in the river of wrath so long as he can cry. So long as ever you can cry to God for mercy, mercy shall never withdraw itself from you.

Oh! let not Satan push you back from the closet door, but push in, whether he will or not. Give up prayer and you seal your own damnation, renounce secret supplication, and you renounce Christ and heaven. Continue in prayer and though the blessing tarry, it must come, in God's own time it must appear to you.

The disease which is most likely to fall upon those in the second stage—namely, those who are trusting implicitly on Christ—is the disease of wanting to see signs and wonders, or else they will not believe. In the early stage of my ministry, in the midst of a rural population, I used to meet continually with persons who thought they were Christians because, as they imagined, they had seen signs and

wonders, and since then, stories the most ridiculous have been told me by earnest and sincere people, as reasons why they thought they were saved.

I have heard a narrative something like this—"I believe my sins are put away." Why? "Well, sir, I was down in the back garden and I saw a great cloud, and I thought, now God can make that cloud go away if He pleases, and it did go away, and I thought the cloud and my sins were gone too, and I have not had a doubt since then." I have thought, well, you have good reason to doubt, for that is totally absurd. Were I to tell you the whims and fancies that some people get into their heads, you might smile and that might not be to your profit. Certain it is that men patch up any idle story, any strange fancy, in order to make them think that they may then trust Christ.

Oh! my dear friends, if you have no better reason to believe you are in Christ than a dream or a vision, it is time you began again. I grant you there have been some who have been alarmed, convinced, and perhaps converted, by strange freaks of their imagination, but if you rely on these as being pledges from God, if you look on these as being evidences that you are saved, I tell you that you will be resting on a dream, a delusion. You may as well seek to build a castle in the air, or a house upon the sands.

No, he who believes Christ, believes Christ because He says it, and because here it is written in the Word, he does not believe it because he dreamed it, or because he heard a voice that might probably be a blackbird singing, or because he thought he saw an angel in the sky, which was just as likely to be mist of a peculiar shape as anything else.

No, we must have done with this desire to see signs and wonders. If they come, be thankful, if they come not, trust simply in the Word which says, "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men." I do not wish to say this to hurt any tender conscience, which conscience may perhaps have found some little comfort in such singular wonders, I only say this honestly, lest any of you should be deceived, I do solemnly warn you to place no reliance whatever on anything you think you have seen, or dreamed, or heard.

This volume is the sure word of testimony, unto which ye do well if ye take heed, as unto a light which shineth in a dark place. Trust in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, cast all thy confidence where He put all your sins, namely, upon Christ Jesus alone, and thou shalt be saved, with or without any of these signs and wonders.

I am afraid some Christians in London have fallen into the same error of wanting to see signs and wonders. They have been meeting together in special prayer meetings to seek for a revival, and because people have not dropped down in a fainting fit, and have not screamed and made a noise, perhaps they have thought the revival has not come. Oh that we had but eyes to see God's gifts in the way God chooses to give them!

We do not want the revival of the North of Ireland, we want the revival in its goodness, but not in that particular shape. If the Lord sends it in another, we shall be all the more glad to be without these exceptional works in the flesh. Where the Spirit works in the soul, we are always glad to see true conversion, and if He chooses to work in the body too in London, we shall be glad to see it.

If men's hearts are renewed, what matter it though they do not scream out. If their consciences are quickened, what matter it though they do not fall into a fit, if they do but find Christ, who is to regret that they do not lie for five or six weeks motionless and senseless. Take it without the signs and wonders. For my part I have no craving for them. Let me see God's work done in God's own way—a true and thorough revival, but the signs and wonders we can readily dispense with, for they are certainly not demanded by the faithful, and they will only be the laughingstock of the faithless.

Having thus spoken of these two diseases, I will only just mention the other. There is a third then, which lies in the way of our attaining the highest degree of faith, namely, full assurance, and that is, want of observation. The nobleman in our text made careful inquiries about the day and the hour when his son was healed. It was by that he obtained his assurance. But we do not observe God's hand as much as we should.

Our good Puritan forefathers, when it rained, used to say that God had unstopped the bottles of heaven. When it rains nowadays, we think the clouds have become condensed. If they had a field of hay cut, they used to plead of the Lord that He would bid the sun shine. We perhaps are wiser than we think, and we consider it hardly worth while to pray about such things, thinking they will come in the course of nature.

They believed that God was in every storm, nay, in every cloud of dust. They used to speak of a present God in everything, but we speak of such things as laws of nature, as if laws were ever anything, except there was some one to carry them out, and some secret power to set the whole machine in motion.

We do not get our assurance because we do not observe enough. If you were to watch providential goodness day by day, if you noticed the answers to your prayers, if you would just put down somewhere in the book of your remembrance, God's continued mercies towards *you*, I think you would become like this father who was led to full assurance of faith because he noticed that the very hour when Jesus spoke, was the very hour when the healing came. Be watchful, Christian. He that looks for providences will never lack a providence to look at.

Take heed then of these three diseases, of ceasing from prayer, waiting to see signs and wonders, and neglect of observing the manifest hand of God.

III. And now I come to my third and last head, upon which solemnly, though briefly, there are THREE QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO YOU ABOUT YOUR FAITH.

First then, you say, "I have faith." Be it so. There be many a man who says he has gold that has it not, there be many that think themselves rich and increased in goods, that are naked, and poor, and miserable. I say unto you, therefore, in the first place, does your faith make you pray? Not the praying of the man who prates like a parrot the prayers he has learned, but do you cry the cry of a living child? Do you tell God your wants and your desires? And do you *seek* His face, and *ask* His mercy? Man, if you livest without prayer, you are a Christless soul, your faith is a delusion, and your confidence which results from it, is a dream that will destroy you.

Wake up out of your deathlike slumbers, for as long as you are dumb in prayer, God cannot answer you. You shall not live to God if you do not live in the closet, he who is never on his knees on earth, shall never stand upon his feet in heaven, he that never wrestles with the angel here below, shall never be admitted into heaven by that angel above.

I know I speak to some today that are prayerless ones. You have plenty of time for your counting-house, but you have none for your closet. Family prayer you have never had, but I will not talk to you about that. Private prayer you have neglected. Do you not sometimes rise in the morning so near the time when you must keep your appointments, that—you do kneel it is true, but where is the prayer? And as to any extra occasions of supplication, why, you never indulge yourselves in them. Prayer with you is a sort of luxury too dear to indulge in often.

Ah! but he who has true faith in his heart, is praying all day long. I do not mean that he is on his knees, but often when he is bargaining, when he is in his shop, or in his counting house, his heart finds a little space, a vacuum for a moment, and up it leaps into the bosom of its God, and it is down again, refreshed to go about its business and meet the face of man.

Oh! those short brief emotional prayers—not merely filling the censer in the morning with incense, but that casting in of little bits of cinnamon and frankincense all day long, so as always to keep it fresh—that is the way to live, and that is the life of a true genuine believer. If your faith does not make you pray, have nothing to do with it, get rid of it, and God help you to begin again.

But you say, "I have faith." I will ask you a second question. Does that faith make you obedient? Jesus said to the nobleman, "Go thy way," and he went without a word, however much he might have wished to stay and listen to the Master, he obeyed. Does your faith make you obedient? In these days we have specimens of Christians of the most sorry, sorry kind, men that have not common honesty.

I have heard it observed by tradesmen that they know many men that have not the fear of God before their eyes, that are most just and upright men in their dealings, and on the other hand, they know some professing Christians who are not positively dishonest, but they can back and hedge a little, they are not horses that will not go, but every now and then they jib, they do not seem to keep up to the time if they have a bill to pay, they are not regular, they are not exact, in fact sometimes—and who shall hide what is true?—you catch Christians doing dirty actions, and professors of religion defiling themselves with acts which merely worldly men would scorn.

Now, sirs, I bear my testimony this morning as God's minister, too honest to alter a word to please any man that lives, you are no Christian if you can act in business beneath the dignity of an honest man. If God has not made you honest, He has not saved your soul. Rest assured that if you can go on, disobedient to the moral laws of God, if your life is inconsistent and lascivious, if your conversation is mixed up with things which even a worldling might reject, the love of God is not in you.

I do not plead for perfection, but I do plead for honesty, and if your religion has not made you careful and prayerful in common life, if you are not in fact made a new creature in Christ Jesus, your faith is but an empty name, as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

I will ask you one more question about your faith and I have done. You say, "I have faith." Has your faith led you to bless your household? Good Rowland Hill once said, in his own quaint way, that when a man became a Christian, his dog and his cat ought to be the better for it, and I think it was Mr. Jay who always would say that a man, when he became a Christian, was better in every relation. He was a better husband, a better master, a better father, than he was before, or else his religion was not genuine.

Now, have you ever thought, my dear Christian brethren and sisters, about blessing your household? Do I hear one saying, "I keep my religion to myself"? Do not be very anxious about its ever being stolen then, you need not put it under lock and key, there is not enough to tempt the devil himself to come and take it from you. A man who can keep his godliness to himself has a small proportion of it, I am afraid it will be no credit to himself, and no blessing to other people.

But you do sometimes, strange to say, meet with fathers that do not seem as if they interested themselves in their children's salvation any more than they do about poor children in the back slums of St. Giles's. They would like to see the boy put out well, and they would like to see the girl married comfortably, but as to their being converted, it does not seem to trouble their heads.

It is true the father occupies his seat in a house of worship, and sits down with a community of Christians, and he *hopes* his children may turn out well. They have the benefit of his hope—certainly a very large legacy, he will no doubt when he dies leave them his best wishes, and may they grow rich upon them! But he never seems to have made it a matter of anxiety of soul, as to whether they shall be saved or not.

Out upon such a religion as that! Cast it on the dunghill, hurl it to the dogs, let it be buried like Koniah, with the burial of an ass, cast it without the camp, like an unclean thing. It is not the religion of God. He that cares not for his own household, is worse than a heathen man and a publican.

Never be content, my brethren in Christ, till all your children are saved. Lay the promise before your God. The promise is unto you and unto your children. The Greek word does not refer to infants, but to children, grandchildren, and any descendants you may have, whether grown up or not. Do not cease to plead, till not only your children but your great grandchildren, if you have such, are saved.

I stand here today a proof that God is not untrue to His promise. I can cast my eye back through four or five generations, and see that God has been pleased to hear the prayers of our grandfather's grandfather, who used to supplicate with God that his children might live before him to the last generation, and God has never deserted the house, but has been pleased to bring first one and then another to fear and love His name.

So be it with you, and in asking this you are not asking more than God is bound to give you. He cannot refuse unless He run back from His promise. He cannot refuse to give you both your own and your children's souls as an answer to the prayer of your faith.

“Ah,” says one, “but you do not know what children mine are.” No, my dear friend, but I know that if you are a Christian, they are children that God has promised to bless. “O but they are such unruly ones, they break my heart.” Then pray God to break their hearts, and they will not break your hearts any more. “But they will bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.” Pray God then that He may bring their eyes with sorrow to prayer, and to supplication, and to the cross, and then they will not bring you to the grave.

“But,” you say, “my children have such hard hearts.” Look at your own. You think they cannot be saved, look at yourselves, He that saved you can save them. Go to Him in prayer and say, “Lord, I will not let thee go except thou bless me,” and if your child is at the point of death, and as you think, at the point of damnation on account of sin, still plead like the nobleman, “Lord, come down ere my child perish, and save me for thy mercy’s sake.”

And oh, Thou that dwellest in the highest heavens Thou wilt ne’er refuse Thy people. Be it far from us to dream that Thou wilt forget Thy promise. In the name of all Thy people we put our hand upon Thy Word most solemnly, and pledge Thee to Thy covenant. Thou hast said Thy mercy is unto the children’s children of them that fear Thee and that keep Thy commandments. Thou hast said the promise is unto us and unto our children, Lord, Thou wilt not run back from Thine own covenant, we challenge Thy Word by holy faith this morning—“Do as thou hast said.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.