

LIFE BY FAITH
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A SERMON
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“The just shall live by faith.”
Galatians 3:11

THE apostle quotes from the Old Testament, from the second chapter of Habakkuk, at the fourth verse, and thus confirms one inspired statement by another. Even the just are not justified by their own righteousness, but live by faith. It follows then most conclusively, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. If the best of men find no justification coming to them through their personal virtues, but stand accepted only by faith, how much more such imperfect beings, such frequent sinners as ourselves?

Men who are saved by faith become just. The operation of faith upon the human heart is to produce love, and through love, obedience, and obedience to the divine law is but another name for morality, or what is the diviner form of it, holiness. And yet, wherever this holiness exists, we may make sure that the holiness is not the cause of spiritual life and safety, but faith is still the wellspring of all.

You saw a few weeks ago, the hawthorn covered with a delicious luxuriance of snow-white flowers, loading the air with fragrance. Now, no one among the admiring gazers supposed that those sweet May blossoms caused the hawthorn to live. After a while you noticed the horse chestnut adorned with its enchanting pyramids of flowers, but none among you foolishly supposed that the horse chestnut was sustained and created by its bloom. You rightly conceived these forms of beauty to be the products of life, and not the cause of it.

You have here, in nature’s emblems, the true doctrine of the inner life. Holiness is the flower of the new nature. It is inexpressibly lovely and infinitely desirable, nay, it must be produced in its season, or we may justly doubt the genuineness of a man’s profession. But the fair graces of holiness do not save, or give spiritual life, or maintain it—these are rills from the fount, and not the fountain itself.

The most athletic man in the world does not live by being athletic, but is athletic because he lives, and has been trained to a perfection of animal vigor. The most enterprising merchant holds his personal property not on account of his character or deservings, but because of his civil rights as a citizen.

A man may cultivate his land up to the highest point of production, but his right to his land does not depend upon the mode of culture, but rather upon his title deeds. So the Christian should aim after the highest degree of spiritual culture and of heavenly perfection, and yet his salvation, as to its justness and security, depends not on his attainments, but rests upon his faith in a crucified Redeemer, as it is written in the text, “The just shall live by faith.”

Faith is the fruitful root, the inward channel of sap, the great life-grace in every branch of the vine. In considering the text this morning, we shall use it perhaps somewhat apart from the context in which it stands, and yet not apart from the mind of the Spirit, nor apart from the intention of the apostle, if not here yet in other places.

I. In the first place, IN THE PUREST SPIRITUAL SENSE IT IS TRUE THAT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

It is through faith that a man becomes just, for otherwise, before the law of God he is convicted of being unjust. Being justified by faith he is enrolled among the just ones. It is through faith that he is at first quickened and breathes the air of heaven, for naturally he was dead in trespasses and sins.

Faith is the first sure sign of the spiritual life within the human breast. He repents of sin and looks to Jesus because he believes the testimony of God's Son. And he believes that testimony because he has received a new life. He depends upon the atoning blood of Jesus because his heart has received the power to do so by the Holy Ghost's gift of spiritual life.

Ever afterwards you shall judge of the vigor of the man's inner life by the state of his faith. If his faith grows exceedingly, then his life also is increasing in power. If his faith diminishes, then depend upon it, the vital spark burns low.

Let faith ebb out, and the life-floods are ebbing too. Let faith roll in with a mighty sweep, in a floodtide of full assurance, then the secret life-floods within the man are rising and filling the man with sacred energy. Were it possible for faith to die, the spirit life must die too. And it is very much because faith is imperishable that the new life is incorruptible.

You shall find men only live before God as they believe in God and rest in the merit of His dear Son. And in proportion, also, as they do this you shall find they live in closer fellowship with heaven. Great saints must be great believers. Little-faith never can be a matured saint.

Observe that this truth proves itself in all the characteristics of spiritual life. The *nobility* of the inner life—who has not noticed it? A man whose life is hid with Christ in God is one of the aristocrats of this world. He who knows nothing of the inner life is but little above a mere animal, and is by no means comparable to the sons of God, to whom is given the royal priesthood, the saintly inheritance.

In proportion as the spiritual life is developed, the man grows in dignity, becoming more like the Prince of glory, yet the very root and source of the dignity of the holy life lies in faith. Take an instance. The life of Abraham is remarkable for its placid nobility. The man appears at no time to be disturbed. Surrounded by robber bands, he dwells in his tent as quietly as in a walled city. Abraham walked with God, and does not seem to have quickened or slackened his pace. He maintained a serene, obedient walk, never hastening through fear, nor loitering through sloth. He kept sweet company with his God—and what a noble life was his!

The father of the faithful was second to no character in history. He was a kingly man, yea, a conqueror of kings, and greater than they. How calm is his usual life! Lot following his carnal prudence is robbed in Sodom, and at last loses all. Abraham following his faith, abides as a pilgrim, and is safe. Lot is carried away captive out of a city, but Abraham remains securely in a tent, because he cast himself on God.

When does Abraham fail? When does that mighty eagle suddenly drop as with wounded wing? It is when the arrow of unbelief has pierced hi. He begins to tremble for Sarah, his wife. She is fair, perhaps the Philistine king will take her from him. Then, in an unbelieving moment, he says, "She is my sister." Ah! Abraham, where is thy nobility now? The man who so calmly and confidently walked with God while he believed, degrades himself to utter the thing that is not, and so falls to the common level of falsehood.

Even so will you, so shall each of us, strong or weak, noble or fallen according to our faith. Walking confidently with God, and leaning upon the everlasting arm, you shall be as a celestial prince surrounded by ministering spirits, your life shall be happy and holy, and withal glorious before the Lord. But the moment you distrust your God, you will be tempted to follow degrading methods of evil policy, and you will pierce yourself through with many sorrows.

As the dignity, so the *energy* of the spiritual life depends upon faith. Spiritual life, when in sound health is exceedingly energetic, it can do all things. Take the apostles as an instance, and see how over sea and land, under persecutions and sufferings, they nevertheless pressed forward in the Holy War, and declared Christ throughout all nations.

Wherever the spiritual life fairly pervades man, it is a force which cannot be bound, fettered, or kept under. It is a holy fury, a sacred fire in the bones. Rules, and customs, and proprieties, it snaps as fire snaps bonds of tow. But its energy depends upon God the Holy Ghost, entirely upon the existence and power of faith. Let a man be troubled with doubts as to the religion which he has espoused, or

concerning his own interest in the privileges which that religion bestows, and you will soon find that all the energy of his spiritual life is gone—he will have little more than a name to live, practically he will be powerless.

Take Abraham again. Abraham finds that certain kings from the East have pounced upon the cities of the plain. He cares very little for Sodom or Gomorrah, but among the prisoners his nephew Lot has been carried away. Now, he has a great affection for his kinsman, and resolves to do his duty and rescue him.

Without stopping to inquire whether his little band was sufficient, he relies entirely upon the Lord his God, and with his servants and neighbors hastens after the spoilers, nothing doubting, but expecting aid from the Most High God.

That day did JEHOVAH, who raised up the righteous man from the east, give his enemies to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow, and the patriarch returned from the slaughter of the kings laden with the spoil. He could not but fight while he believed. It was impossible for him to sit still and yet believe in God. But if he had not believed, then had he said, “The matter must go by default. It is a sorrowful misfortune, but my nephew Lot must bear it. Perhaps God’s providence will interpose for him.”

Faith believes in providence, but she is full of activity, and her activity, excited by reliance upon providence leads like wheel within a wheel to the fulfillment of the providential decree.

My brethren, it is necessary for us to believe much in God, or we shall do but little for Him. Believe that God is with you, and you will have an insatiable ambition to extend the Savior’s kingdom. Believe in the power of truth, and in the power of the Holy Ghost who goes with the truth, and you will not be content with the paltry schemes of modern Christendom, you will glow and burn with a seraph’s ardor, longing and desiring even to do more than you can do, and practically carrying out with your utmost ability what your heart desires for the glory of the Lord.

Further, it is quite certain that all *the joy* of the spiritual life depends upon faith. You all know that the moment your faith ceases to hang simply upon Jesus, or even if it suffers a little check, your joy evaporates. Joy is a welcome angel, but it will not tarry where faith does not entertain it. Spiritual joy is a bird of paradise, which will build its nest only among the branches of faith. Faith must pipe, or joy will not dance. Unbelieving Jacob finds his days few and evil, but believing Abraham dies an old man, and full of years.

If you would anoint your head and wash your face, and put away the ashes and the sackcloth, you must trust more firmly in the faithfulness of the Lord your God. Doubts and fears never could strike so much as a spark with which to light the smallest candle to cheer a Christian. But simple trust in Jesus makes the sun to rise in his strength with healing beneath his wings, even upon those that sit in the valley of the shadow of death. In proportion as you lean on Christ—in that proportion shall life’s burden grow light, heaven’s joys grow real, and your whole being more elevated.

I might thus continue to mention each point in the secret life, but I rather choose to proceed in order to observe only, that all our *growth* in the spiritual life depends upon our faith. True life must grow in its season. You can tell the difference between two stakes which are driven into the ground. The one may happen to have life in it, and if so, before long it sprouts, while the dead one is unchanged.

So with the Christian. If he be living he will grow. He must make advances. It is not possible for the Christian to sit still and remain in the same state month after month. But if he is to increase in spiritual riches, he must of necessity exert a constant and increasing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter cannot walk the waters except he believes, doubting does not help him, but it sinks him.

I fear that some of my brethren and sisters try to grow in spiritual life by adopting methods which are not of faith. Some think that they will set themselves rules of self-denial or extra devotion—these plans are lawful, but they are not in themselves effective. For, vows may be observed mechanically, and rules obeyed formally, and yet the heart may be drifting away yet further from the Lord. Yea, these

vows and rules may be a means of deluding us into the vain belief that all is well, whereas we are nearing spiritual shipwreck.

I have found in my own spiritual life that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one which is indispensable to a believer's life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the compelled remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may gender unto bondage, and strangle prayer rather than assist it.

To say I will humble myself at such a time, and rejoice at such another season, is nearly as much an affectation as when the preacher wrote in the margin of his sermon, "cry here," "smile here." Why, if the man preached his sermon rightly, he would be sure to cry in the right place, and to smile at a suitable moment. And when the spiritual life is sound, it produces prayer at the right time, and humiliation of soul and sacred joy spring forth spontaneously, apart from rules and vows.

The kind of religion which makes itself to order by the almanac, and turns out its emotions like bricks from a machine, weeping on Good Friday, and rejoicing two days afterwards, measuring its motions by the moon, is too artificial to be worthy of your imitation. The liberty of the spiritual life is a grand thing, and where that liberty is maintained constantly, and the energy is kept up, you will need much faith, for the fading of faith will be the withering of devotion, liberty will degenerate into license, and the energy of your life will drivel into confidence in yourself.

Let who will bind himself with rules and regulations in order to advance himself in grace, be it ours, like Abraham, to believe God, and it shall be counted us for righteousness, and like Paul, to run the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus. Faith enriches the soil of the heart. Faith fills our treasuries with the choicest gold, and loads our tables with the daintiest food for our souls.

By faith we shall do valiantly, stopping lions' mouths, and quenching violent flames. But faith in Jesus, the Savior, faith in the heavenly Father, faith in the Holy Spirit, this we must have, or we perish like foam upon the waters.

As the other side of all this, let me notice that some Christians appear to try to live by experience. If they feel happy today, they say they are saved, but if they feel unhappy tomorrow, they conclude that they are lost. If they feel at one moment a deep and profound calm overspreading their spirits, then are they greatly elevated. But if the winds blow and the waves beat high, then they suppose that they are none of the Lord's people. Ah, miserable state of suspense! To live by feeling is a dying life. You know not where you are, nor what you are, if your feelings are to be the barometer of your spiritual condition.

Beloved, a simple faith in Christ will enable you to remain calm even when your feelings are the reverse of happy, to remain confident when your emotions are far from ecstatic. If indeed we are saved by Jesus Christ, then the foundation of our salvation does not lie within us, but in that crucified Man who now reigns in glory. When He changes, ah, then what changes must occur to us! But since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, why need we be so soon removed from our steadfastness?

Believe in Jesus, dear heart, when you can not find a spark of grace within yourself. Cast yourself as a sinner into the Savior's arms when you cannot think a good thought, nor uplift a good desire. When your soul feels like a barren wilderness that yields not so much as one green blade of hope, or joy, or love, still look up to the great Husbandman, who can turn the desert into a garden.

Have confident faith in Jesus at all times, for if you believe in Him you are saved, and cannot be condemned. However good or bad your state, this shall not affect the question. You believe, therefore you shall be saved. Give up living from hand to mouth in that poor miserable way of frames and feelings, and wait only upon the Lord from whom comes your salvation.

Many professors are even worse. They try to live by experiences. I am afraid a great many among Dissenters are of that kind. They must have a revival meeting once a week at least. If they do not get a grand display quite so often, they begin to fall dreadfully back, and crave an exciting meeting, as drunkards long for spirits. It is a poor spiritual life which hangs on eloquent sermons and such like stimulants. These may be good things, and comforting things, be thankful for them, but I pray you do not let your spiritual life depend upon them.

It is very much as though a man should, according to scriptural language, feed on the wind and snuff up the east wind, for your faith is not to stand in the wisdom of man, nor in the excellency of human speech, nor in the earnestness of your fellow Christians, but in your simple faith in Him who is, and was, and is to come, who is the Savior of sinners.

A genuine faith in Christ will enable you to live happily even if you be denied the means of grace, will make you rejoice on board ship, keep Sabbath on a sick bed, and make your dwelling house a temple even if you find a log hut in the far West, or a shanty in the bush of Australia. Only have faith, and you need not look to these excitements any more than the mountains look to the summer's sun for their stability.

Shall I need further to say by way of caution that I am afraid many professors live *anyhow*? I know not how otherwise to describe it. They have not enough caution to look at their inward experience. They have not enough vigor to care about excitement, but they live a kind of listless, dreamy, comatose life. I mean *some of you*!

You believe that you were saved years ago. You united yourselves to a Christian church and were baptized, and you conclude that all is right. You have written your conversion in your spiritual trade-books as a good asset, you consider it as a very clear thing. I am afraid it is rather doubtful, still you think it sure.

Since that time you have kept up the habit of prayer, you have been honest, you have subscribed to church funds, have done your duty outwardly as a Christian, but there has been very little vitality in your godliness. It has been surface work, skin-deep consistency. You have not been grievously exercised about sin. You have not been bowed under the weight of inward corruption. Neither have you been, on the other hand, exhilarated by a sense of divine love and a delightful recognition of your interest in it.

You have gone on dreamily, as I have heard of soldiers marching when they were asleep. O for a thunderbolt to wake you, for this is dangerous living!

Of all modes of living, if you be a Christian, this is one of the most perilous. And if you be not a Christian, it is one of the most seductive, for while the outward sinner may be got at by the preaching of the Gospel, you are almost beyond the reach of Gospel ministry, because you will not allow that warnings are meant for you. You wrap yourselves up and say, "It is well with me," while you are really naked, and poor, and miserable in the sight of God. Oh, if you could but get back to live by faith!

II. Secondly, "the just shall live by faith"—this means that FAITH IS OPERATIVE IN OUR DAILY LIFE.

It is operative in many ways, but three observations will suffice. Faith is *the great sustaining energy* with the just man under all his trials, difficulties, sufferings, or labors. It is a notion with some that true religion is meant to be kept shut up in churches and chapels, as a proper thing for Sundays, which ought to be attended to since a man is not respectable if he does not take a pew somewhere, even if he does not need sit in it, or sitting in it pays no more attention to the Word preached than to a ballad singer in the street.

There is a decent show of religion which people as a rule must keep up, or they cannot be received into polite society. But the idea of bringing religion down to the breakfast table, introducing it to the drawing-room, taking it into the kitchen, keeping it on hand in the shop, in the workshop, or the corn exchange, carrying it out to sea in your vessel—this is thought by some to be sheer fanaticism.

And yet if there is anything taught by the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is just this, that religion is a matter of common, everyday life, and no man understands the Christian religion at all unless he has fully accepted it as not a thing for Sundays, and for certain places and certain times, but for all places, and all times, and all conditions, and all forms of life.

An active, operative faith is by the Holy Spirit implanted in the Christian, and it is sent to him on purpose to sustain him under trial. I shall put this to some of you as a test by which you may try whether you have obtained the faith of God's elect. You have lost a large sum of money, well, are you distracted and bewildered? Do you almost lose your senses? Do you murmur against God? Then I ask you what are

you better than the man who has no religion at all? Are you not an unbeliever? For if you believed that all things work together for your good, would you be so rebellious? Yet that is God's own declaration.

Now is the time when your faith in God should enable you to say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." What do you more than others unless you can thus speak with submission and resignation—ay, even with alacrity? Where is your new nature if you cannot say, "It is the LORD, let him do as seemeth him good"? By this shall you test whether you have faith or not.

Or it may be you have lost a darling child, and that loss has cut you to the very quick. You are scarcely able to reconcile yourself at present to it, yet I trust you do not so repine as to accuse your God of cruelty, but I trust your faith helps you to say, "I shall go to him, though he shall not return to me. I would not have it other than my heavenly Father has determined." Here will be a crucible for your faith.

Those two instances may serve as specimens. In all positions of life, a real faith is to the believer like the hair of Samson, in which his great strength lies. It is his Moses' rod dividing seas of difficulty, his Elijah's chariot in which he mounts above the earth. So too, in difficult labors for instance, in labors for Christ's cause, a man who feels it his duty to do good in his neighborhood, yet may say, "I do not know what I can do, I am afraid to commence so great a matter, for I feel so unfit, and so feeble."

My dear friend, if it is your duty to do it, your not being able to do it cannot excuse you, because you have only to go and tell your heavenly Father of your weakness and ask for strength, and He will give it liberally.

Some of us who can now speak with ease were once very diffident in public. Those preachers who are now most useful were poor stammerers before their gifts were developed, and those who are our best teachers and most successful soul-winners, were not always so. But they had faith, and they pressed forward, and God helped them.

Now, if your religion is not worth an old song, you will not persevere in holy work, but if it is real and true, you will press forward through all difficulties, feeling it to be an essential of your very existence that you should promote the Redeemer's cause. I would quite as soon not be, as live to be a useless thing. Better far to fatten the fields with one's corpse, than to lie rotting above ground in idleness. To be a soldier in Immanuel's ranks, and never fight, never carry a burden, nor uphold a banner, nor hurl a dart—ay, better that the dogs should eat my worthless carrion, than that such should be the case.

Feeling this then, you will press forward with the little power you have, and new power will come upon you, and so you will prove that your faith is sincere, because it comes to your support in the ordinary work of Christian life. Under all difficulties and labors then, the just shall live by faith.

Furthermore, faith in ordinary life *has an effect upon the dispensations of divine providence*. It is a riddle which we cannot explain how everything is eternally fixed by divine purpose, and yet the prayer of faith moves the arm of God. Though the enigma cannot be explained, the fact is not to be denied.

My brethren and sisters, I may be thought fanatical, but it is my firm belief that in ordinary matters, such as the obtaining of your living, the education of your children, the ruling of your household, you are to depend upon God as much as in the grand matter of the salvation of your soul.

The hairs of your head are all numbered, go to God then about your trifles. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father, cast upon the Lord your minor trials. Never think that anything is too little for your heavenly Father's love to think upon.

He who rides upon the whirlwind, walks in the garden at evening in the cool breath of the zephyr. He who shakes the avalanche from its Alp, also makes the dry leaf to twinkle as it falls from the aspen. He whose eternal power directs the spheres in their everlasting marches, guides each grain of dust which is blown from the summer's threshing floor. Confide in Him for the little as well as for the great, and you shall not find Him to fail you. Is He God of the hills only, and not the God of the valleys?

"Are we to expect miracles then?" saith one. No, but we expect the same results as are compassed by miracles. I have sometimes thought that for God to interpose by a miracle to accomplish a

purpose is a somewhat clumsy method, if I may be allowed such a word, but for Him to accomplish the very same thing without interfering with the wheels of His providence, seems to me the more thoroughly God-like method.

If I were hungry today, and God had promised to feed me, it would be as much a fulfillment of His promise if my friend here brought my food unexpectedly, as if the ravens brought it. And the bringing of it by ordinary means would all the better prove that God was there, not interrupting the machinery of providence, but making it to educe the end which He designed.

God will not turn stones into bread for you, but perhaps He will give you stones to break, and you will thus earn your bread. God may not rain manna out of heaven, and yet every shower of rain falling upon your garden brings you bread. It will be the better for you to earn your food, than to have it brought by ravens, or better that Christian charity should make you its care than that an inexhaustible barrel and cruse should be placed in your cupboard. Anyhow, your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure.

My witness is, and I speak it for the honor of God, that God is a good provider. I have been cast upon the providence of God ever since I left my father's house, and in all cases He has been my Shepherd, and I have known no lack. My first income as a Christian minister was small enough in all conscience, never exceeding forty pounds, yet I was as rich then as I am now, for I had enough. And I had no more cares, nay, not half as many then as I have now. And when I breathed my prayer to God then, as I do now, for all things temporal and spiritual, I found Him ready to answer me at every pinch—and pinches I have had full many.

Many a pecuniary trial since then have I had in connection with the college work which depends for funds upon the Lord's moving His people to liberality. My faith has been often tried, but God has always been faithful and sent supplies in hours of need.

If any should tell me that prayer to God was a mere piece of excitement, and that the idea of God's answering human cries is absurd, I should laugh the statement to scorn, for my experience is not that of one or two singular instances, but that of hundreds of cases, in which the Lord's interposition for the necessities of His work has been as manifest as if He had rent the clouds, and thrust forth His own naked arm and bounteous hand to supply the needs of His servant.

This, my testimony, is but the echo of the witness of the Lord's people everywhere. When they look back they will tell you that God is good to Israel, and that when they have walked by faith they have never found that God has failed them.

The Red Sea of trouble has been divided, the waters have stood upright as a heap, and the depths have been congealed in the heart of the sea. As for their doubts and their difficulties, like the Egyptians, the depths have covered them, there has not been one of them left. And standing on the further shore to look back upon the past, the redeemed of the Lord have shouted aloud, "Sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously," for faith has conquered all their difficulties, and brought supplies for all their needs.

Do not let me be misunderstood however, faith is never to be regarded as a premium for idleness. If I sit down and fold my arms and say, "The LORD will provide," He will most likely provide me a summons to the county court, and a place in the parish workhouse. God has never given any promise to idle people that He will provide for them, and therefore they have no right to believe that He will. To trust in God to make up for our laziness is not faith, but wicked presumption.

Neither does the power of faith afford ground for fanaticism. I have no right to say, "I should like to have so-and-so, and I will ask for it, and shall have it." God has never promised to give to us everything which our whimsies may select. If we really want any good thing, we may plead the promise, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly," but we must never dream that God will pander to our fooleries. The God of wisdom will not be art and part with our mere whims.

Nor is faith to be a substitute for prudence and economy. I have known some who have to a great degree abstained from energetic action because they feared to interfere with the Lord. This fear never

perplexes me. My faith never leads me to believe that God will do for me what I can do for myself. I do not believe that the Lord works needlessly. Up to the highest pitch that my own prudence, and strength, and judgment can carry me, I am to go depending upon divine guidance. Then I stop, for I can go no further, and I plead with my Father thus—"Now, Lord, the promise reaches further than this, it is Thy business to make up the deficiency."

There I pause, and God is as good as His Word. But if I stop short when I might advance, how dare I ask the Lord to pander to my sloth? I believe in Christian work we ought for God to exert ourselves to the utmost, both in the giving of our substance and in the collecting help from our fellow Christians. And come in faith and prayer to the Lord for help.

Faith is operative in the land of the unseen, not in the seen. Faith is to come to your help where creature-power fails you. Up to the point at which you can work you must work, and with God's blessing upon it, your work will not hinder your faith, but be an exhibition and display of it.

Thus with a simple faith in God, not fanatical, not idle, but going on in the path of prudence, desiring to glorify God, you shall find that all difficulties will vanish, and your doubts and fears shall fly away. Do understand that even faith itself will be no guarantee against trials and against poverty, for it is good for God's people to be tried, and there are some of them who would not glorify God if they were not poo.

Therefore you are not to suppose that you have no faith because you are in need, neither are you to expect that in answer to prayer God will necessarily keep you in easy circumstances. If it be best for you that you should not be poor, He will keep you from it. But if it be better that you should be, He will keep you in it. Resignation should walk hand-in-hand with faith, and they each will minister to the other's beauty.

III. Lastly, THIS IS ALSO TRUE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AS A WHOLE.

The Christian church lives by faith. She lives by faith in opposition to *speculation*. Every now and then a fit of speculative philosophy seizes the church, and then her vitality withers. In the days of the schoolmen, just before Luther's time, good men were fighting and squabbling from morning to night, gathered like so many carrion crows around the dead body of Aristotle, fighting about nobody knows what. It is said that they held sage discussions upon how many angels could poise themselves upon the point of a needle!

While such foolish and unlearned questions as these were being raised, the poor people in the Christian church were starved, and the church lost all its energy, sinners were not converted, fundamental truth was despised. Then came Luther and the notable revival.

In more modern days, in the period after Doddridge and Watts, among Dissenters, the habit of philosophizing upon the Trinity was common. Brothers tried to be very exact and precise, as exact and precise as the Athanasian creed, while others combated their dogmatism, and the result was that a large proportion of the Dissenting churches fell asleep practically, degenerated doctrinally, and Socinianism threatened to eat out the very life of evangelical Dissent.

Speculation is not the life of the Christian church, but faith, a reception of the Bible truth in its sublimity and authority, an obedient belief in revelation, not because we understand all its teachings, but because not understanding, we nevertheless receive the Lord's Word upon the *ipse dixit* of the Most High.

Whenever the church is simple-minded enough to require no outworks to her faith, to care very little about evidences, internal or external, but just to fight the battle on the ground of divine authority saying, "This is of God, and at your peril reject it," she has been "fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners." Let her begin to split hairs, try to move away objections, and spend all her time upon her outworks, and then her glory departs.

In the next place, faith is the life of the church in opposition to *reliving despondency*. In our own churches it used to be the habit for our friends to be very well content if they built a chapel in the lowest

part of a town, down two courts, three alleys, and a turning. And as to attendants, the members appeared to be particularly anxious to avoid anything like the excitement of a crowd. They were a most retiring people as a rule, but as to coming out into the forefront to set their city on a hill, and make their light shine by evangelizing the masses, that was a forgotten business.

At the present hour, from other quarters you constantly hear expressions defiled with the most dastardly timidity, denoting the most shameful cowardice. For instance, lately we have heard that “The church is in danger!” “The church is in danger!” Christians with their Bibles, and all the truths in the Bibles, with their ministers and all their earnestness, with the Holy Spirit, with God’s promises, with the foundations against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, and yet in danger!

Really, such remarks and such fears are quite unworthy of the manhood of those who believe in the divinity of the Christian faith. No church can make progress till she believes enough in her God to be sure that in Him she is strong. While she imagines that she is weak, she is weak, fear paralyzes her, dread kills her energies, but when she believes in the divine strength with which she is encircled as with a golden girdle, then she marches on with certainty of triumph.

May we as a church always believe that resting upon the strength of God nothing can hurt us. I defy the House of Lords, the House of Commons, the Pope, the Turk, and all the nations in all the world and all the devils in hell to put this church in danger. I do not know anything that they could take away from us, for I know of nothing which they have given us. If they had endowed and established us, they could take away what they gave, but as they have not given us a thread for a shoe latchet, they can do whatever they please, and we shall not even call a church meeting to consider it.

Yet here are other churches, with lord bishops, and deans, and prebends, and I know not what beside, which are horribly shaken because an arm of flesh is failing them. The pay of their preachers will by and by, by a gradual process, be withdrawn, and they tremble for the ark of the Lord! Shame on your little minds, to be thus afraid! Surely you have lost confidence in truth and in God, or you would not fear because of the talents of gold which will be justly withheld from you.

Remember that truth allied with earthly power has often been defeated by error, but truth alone has always defeated error, even when that error has had physical might upon its side. Let truth have her fair chance and stand alone. She is most strong when least hampered with human strength, and most sure to be victorious when she has no might but that which dwells in herself, or comes from her God.

In the next place, the Christian church lives by faith, that is, faith in opposition to a *squeamishness* which I see springing up nowadays as to the selection of instruments. Let me be understood. I hear it is said, “Why allow these men to preach in the street? Is it not a pity that illiterate persons should preach at all? Some of them are very ungrammatical, and really what they say at the very best is very so-so. Is it not better that none should go out but the best trained men?”

Then for missions, it is said the very best picked men only should be sent forth. As to young men, full of zeal, not having had experience, and not having learned all the classics, and being well up in mathematics it is of no use thinking to send them. Many a church indeed thinks that all her officers ought to be rich, all her ministers learned, all her agents Masters of Arts at least, if not Doctors of Divinity.

This was not so in olden times. Thus it was not when the church of God grew mightily, for of old the church of God had faith—in what? Why, faith in weakness, faith in the things that were not. Did not she believe that “Not many noble, not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised.”

It is very memorable that in the catacombs of Rome, among those remarkable inscriptions which are now preserved with so much care as the memorials of the departed saints, it is rare to find an inscription which is all of it spelled correctly, proving that the persons who wrote them, who were no doubt the very

pick of the Christian flock, could neither write nor spell correctly. And yet these were the men that turned the world upside down.

When Wesley began his career, our churches were nearly dead with the disease called “proprieties,” but Mr. Wesley employed men, some of whom were quite unlettered, to go about to preach, and by those men this nation was revived. To this day our Primitive Methodist friends are doing a great and noble work, for which God be thanked, because they use almost every man they have, and they use the men till they become fit to be used, trained and tutored by practice.

In this church I thank God I have always encouraged every brother and sister to do all they can, and I do still urge all so to do. I trust there is not a young man here who can say that I ever held him back in desiring to serve his Master. If I have, I am sure I am very sorry for it.

Oh! do all of you all that you can, for this church at any rate has faith in you all, that though you make a thousand blunders, yet it is better to have the Gospel preached blunderingly than not at all. And while three millions and more in London are perishing for lack of knowledge, it is better that you spoil the Queen’s English and make ever such mistakes than that you should not preach Jesus Christ. God will not be angry with you for all your ignorance, if you are not ignorant of the one thing needful.

So, brethren, it comes to this, that we must not as a Christian church calculate our resources, nor take out our note books and count up how much we have to rely upon. The exchequer of the church is the liberality of God. The power of the church is the omnipotence of JEHOVAH. The persuasions of the church are the irresistible influences of the Holy Ghost. The destiny of the church is an ultimate conquest over all the sons of men.

Advance then, every one of you to the fray, for you advance also to conquest! Rely upon Him who has said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!” and you shall find that as the just you shall live by faith, while if you sit down and waste your time, or turn your backs and retire from the battle, you shall be written among the cravens whose memorial is in the dust.

But if you stand fast and are immovable, “always abounding in the work of the Lord,” your record shall be on high, and your portion shall be at the right hand of the Father, where Christ sitteth, and where you shall also sit forever and ever. God bless these words for His name’s sake. Amen.

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.