

Christian Retirement

Part 61

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON FAITH

The heart of man is like a weight, whose natural bias is downward. Nothing but a power outside of itself can cause it to ascend heavenward. The attraction of gravitation is not more powerful in its effects on the various parts of the universe, than is the debasing force of natural corruption in the heart of fallen man.

There is, however, a counteracting principle—an attracting influence which can draw the soul from earth to heaven, and unite it to the blessed God. This principle is Faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God because, until we truly believe in Jesus, we are in a state of guilt and condemnation.

True faith is not a mere passive impression, or an inoperative notion. It is a holy principle wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God, producing gracious habits, holy affections, filial reverence, and obedience. Faith is seated in the heart, influencing and purifying the whole inner man.

Faith unites the soul to Christ, as the branch to the vine. It draws virtue from him, whereby the believer is rendered fruitful in every good work. The sweet fruits of the Spirit appear and abound in rich luxuriance on these favored branches, to the glory of God.

Faith places the soul upon Christ, as the only foundation, on which it is built up a holy temple unto the Lord, unhurt by all the winds and storms which beat upon it. Faith feeds upon Christ continually, as the true bread which came down from heaven, of which, whoever eats shall live forever. Faith works by love to God, his people, and his word. It evidences its vitality by its fruits. Faith purifies the heart from sin, waging war against all internal and external evil. Faith overcomes the world, both when it smiles and when it frowns. Faith views the glorious land of promise as its own, and triumphs over all intervening difficulties and dangers which bestrew its path to Zion.

Faith makes the believer confident, yet watchful; bold, yet cautious; aspiring, yet humble. He is confident, since the promises of God are kindly given him to rest

upon—watchful, since he feels the deceitfulness of his rebellious heart—bold, since the honor of the Savior demands his confession—cautious, lest he should be only gratifying a vain-glorious spirit; aspiring after that honor which comes from God only; yet humble, since he remembers his own vileness and utter unworthiness of the least of the divine mercies.

If it be asked, how can faith effect such wonders? the reply is, because faith is the gift of God, and the power of God. The believer, abiding in Christ, and deriving continual supplies of grace and strength out of his fullness, becomes mighty through this power which works in him mightily. He is strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life. Weak and helpless in himself, he is strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus his Lord and finally obtains the palm of victory through the blood of the Lamb. Thus, faith in Christ at once gives peace to the conscience, and leads it to all true holiness; for when peace is imparted to the conscience, purity is produced in the heart.

Such is the faith of God's elect; a faith which is according to godliness. That system of religion must be awfully defective, which would dare to lower the standard of holiness under the false, I would say impious, notion of thereby exalting the grace of God. Because Christ is a Savior, shall we make him the minister of sin? Because God is merciful, must he therefore be unjust? He who is glorious in holiness, cannot save sinners in their sins or admit them into his kingdom, while sin has the dominion over them; it is impossible. The whole of divine revelation, yes, the very plan of the Gospel, is designed to preserve unsullied the infinite perfections of Jehovah; while the vilest of sinners are saved from hell, and made, through grace, to reflect the divine image, in all the beauties of holiness, righteousness, and truth.

None are saved by Christ, but those who are saved from their sins. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says, "If there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal. iii, 21.)

This declaration is most important. If God could have given a law less spiritual in its requirements, and less awful in its sanctions; if he could have given a law, lowered in its standard, and yet compatible with his infinite holiness and man's truest happiness; then life might have been attained by such a law.

But as this, in the very nature of things, is impossible; as God cannot, from the absolute perfection of his nature, command less than infinite holiness approves, or less than infinite justice demands; as his law is immutably holy, though man has rebelled against it, and lost all power to obey it; it remains an unchangeable

truth, that life cannot come by a law which condemns the very thought of sin, and lays the whole human race under merited condemnation.

On this account, the Scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. This divine truth strikes at the root of those errors which would make the Gospel a mitigated law; or mix man's works and the Savior's merits in the great act of justification; or, denying the necessity of an atonement, make man's repentance and obedience sufficient to insure the approbation of Heaven. The law is given to us, not for the purpose of obtaining eternal life by our obedience to its requirements, since "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified;" but as a rule of life, by which we are to walk under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel is revealed for the all-gracious purpose of redeeming us from all iniquity; and purifying our hearts from sin, through faith in the atonement of Jesus the Son of God. Here spring all our hopes of forgiveness; all our peace of conscience; all our joy in the Holy Spirit. From this source of mercy we derive all our power to love and serve God in the filial spirit of adoption.

Thus it is evident, that where infinite justice finds its satisfaction, there, and there only, can my guilty soul find its salvation. The Lamb of God, bleeding upon the cross, as the divinely appointed sacrifice for the sins of a fallen world, is the sinner's only refuge from the storm of eternal vengeance. To this blessed atonement I would look, and from it, I would draw all my hopes of pardon, peace, and purity.

Oh! for more faith and love. Lord, without you I can do nothing. I feel my helplessness, and my inward depravity. Lead me to the Rock which is higher than I. Wash me in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Sprinkle clean water upon me, and I shall be clean. Put your Spirit within me. Cause the south wind to blow, that my soul may be filled with precious fruits; that the spices may flow out, that my beloved may come and eat his pleasant fruits, and abide with me forever!

Oh! what a happy life is a life of faith in the son of God. To have the humble, yet scriptural, assurance that my sins are forgiven; to know from the word of truth, and to be persuaded that all things shall work together for my good; is the divine alchemy which turns all to gold.

Sickness, adversity, persecution, the buffetings of Satan, are all overruled for good, when the soul is accepted and pardoned through faith in the blood of Jesus. Nothing can separate such a soul from the love of God, while abiding in Christ by faith.

How safe, how happy, how rich is the true believer in Jesus. He is safe under the protecting wing of the Almighty; happy in the enjoyment of the divine favor; rich with all the treasures of grace and glory. He is Christ's, and Christ is God's.

And yet, how is such a state despised by the world! Those who live in the enjoyment of it are deemed enthusiasts, or perhaps insane. Numbers who would be thought religious, treat such a state of feeling with coldness, or receive it with caution. They seem to dread everything that is fervent or transporting in religion; as if the affections had no share with the understanding in the great transactions between Christ and the soul.

Oh that I could feel my heart more alive to God; more active in his service! A lukewarm spirit is hateful to a God of love. I am convinced that faith is the gift of God, not only because I read it in my Bible, but because I feel my utter inability, by any natural power of my own, to produce it in myself. I am taught to pray for this blessing in the name of Jesus. But true prayer is equally the gift of God.

Thus I perceive that I am indebted to sovereign grace alone for the whole work of salvation from first to last; from the first incipient desire after God, to the full fruition of him in glory. Then what must I do! Must I sit still and do nothing! Ah, no! This would, indeed, be enthusiasm. Satan and my own indolent heart would have me act in this manner. But such reasoning would condemn, and not excuse me in the day of judgment. God has given me an understanding, which, though darkened through the fall, is still capable, under the advantages of Christian instruction, of knowing that the Creator ought to be loved, and feared, and served above all other beings.

He has given me a conscience, which, though awfully defiled, yet, under such instruction, is capable of making me feel that I do not love, and fear, and serve this almighty Creator above all other things; and therefore, that I am a guilty creature, and deserving of his eternal wrath.

God has cast my lot in a land where Jesus is preached, where sinners are invited to come unto him for all those blessings which they have lost through the fall, and of which they stand in need. My responsibility is, therefore, increased by this offered mercy.

What, then, must I do? Surely it is my duty, as a rational and responsible creature, to listen to the call of my heavenly Father. It is my duty to come to the cross of Christ, just as I am, blind, ignorant, helpless, guilty, and polluted, that I may obtain, through the riches of his grace, light, and strength, and righteousness, and sanctification.

If I do not come, the fault is altogether my own; it is because I will not. The guilt lies in the bad state of my heart. If I do come, it is through the secret, yet powerful operation of divine grace, seeing God is the first mover of the heart to

himself. Infinite Wisdom knows how to reconcile these seeming differences; and what the believer knows not now, he shall know hereafter.

Hence it is evident, that all the specious pleas and excuses which sinners make for not coming to Jesus, will before long be found to originate in their love of sin, and in the corrupt state of their will. Hell will be filled with self-reproaches, and with eternal self-condemnations. Let not Satan, then, Oh my soul, and a perverse rebellious will, keep you from the Savior. Press to him through the crowd. Do not be afraid of meeting with a repulse. His heart is full of tenderness and love.

Bartimeus could not heal his blindness; nor the leper his leprosy; nor the poor woman her issue of blood. They all felt their respective maladies. They believed that Jesus could restore them. They applied to him, and were healed. Go and do you likewise. Cry also to the Savior; touch the hem of his garment; and he, who is all power, and grace, and love, will impart this saving faith, and enable you to draw virtue from him; saying, "I will, be clean." "Only believe. All things are possible to him that believes."

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Lord, increase my faith. Enable me to come to you now in humble confidence and love, that I may receive out of your fullness grace for grace. Lord, shine upon your work. Make me a monument of your mercy, that I may live to your glory, and sing your everlasting praise.

Oppressed with grief overwhelmed with fear,
Where can I find a refuge near?
Dear Savior, unto you I flee,
Oh! hide me in Gethsemane.

My sins assume an awful form;
Around I view the rising storm;
I fly, my only Lord, to you,
Oh! hide me in Gethsemane.

In that sweet garden, you did bear
Of guilt and pain my awful share;
Your bleeding form methinks I see
Extended in Gethsemane.

Oh! fill my heart with fervent love;
To you, let each affection move;
From sin preserve me ever free,
While sheltered in Gethsemane.

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