Our Walk of Faith

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
—Hebrews 11:1

PAUL EXPLAINS THAT 'faith is the substance [foundation] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' If we possessed the things hoped for, and could see the things unseen, we would not need faith. It is because we are surrounded by circumstances and conditions that are adverse to, and hidden from, the view of the glorious things which God has promised, that we need faith—faith to surmount and look beyond them into that spiritual land of promise that is "very far off."—Isa. 33:17

Those who are acquainted with the Divine plan know why God has permitted evil to reign for more than six thousand years. They believe that thereby the world of mankind will ultimately learn a valuable lesson regarding the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and its terrible consequences upon the sinner. They realize, however, that the world must yet have an opportunity to experience the favorable conditions of the millennium before they will be able fully to understand, and properly appraise, the value of the present reign of sin and death.

The permission of evil is also designed to be of inestimable value to the church of this Gospel Age.

We must learn our lessons from this experience now, and the only way we can do it is upon the basis of faith. In this time when evil flourishes, when the wicked prosper, and when the proud are called happy, it requires faith to stand for unpopular Truth, and with the unprosperous righteous and the persecuted humble and meek.

Under these circumstances, our faith must lay hold upon the promises of God, and believe in his integrity to fulfill them. He has promised us the Divine nature, "glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) Upon the basis of faith and obedience, we must prove ourselves worthy of such high exaltation. Those who walk by faith during this Gospel Age are being formed into a New Creation. We are even now "new creatures" in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) In the past, all of God's intelligent creatures were first created and then tested. But with the New Creation it is different. We are being tested before the creative process is complete, because when it is finished all those who qualify will have immortality. They will be deathproof, so they must be proved worthy of such a high creation before they attain it.

It is for this reason that the Lord permits his people to be surrounded with evil, and evil influences. It is only their faith in him, and in the rightness of his plan for them and for the world, that gives them the victory over their surroundings. The world, under the leadership of Satan, finds an ally in our fallen flesh. Faith in God and in his promises to guide and help—faith in the glory he has promised—is absolutely necessary in order to be victorious over this unholy alliance.

THE WORKS OF FAITH

After explaining that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, Paul reminds us of a number of wonderful examples of what faith will accomplish in the lives of the faithful. He draws his illustrations from the experiences of the Old Testament Worthies. This makes them the more meaningful, for those men of God had less knowledge of the Divine plan than we have been given, and they were not encouraged to run for so great a prize as that offered during the Gospel Age.

The Ancient Worthies, however, did exercise a marvelous faith. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." (Heb. 11:4) Enoch walked with God; Noah preached righteousness and built an ark; Abraham offered up Isaac as a burnt offering [or showed his willingness to do so]; Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Joseph stood staunchly for righteousness in the land of Egypt; Joshua conquered Canaan; Elijah challenged and defeated the priests of Baal; Daniel stopped the mouths of lions; the three Hebrews risked the flames of the seven-times heated fiery furnace; and Jeremiah endured the horrors of the dungeon. These men of God had the one thing in common that enabled them to go through these experiences. It was their faith in God and his promises.

Their knowledge of God's promises was the basis for their faith. It was because of his knowledge of those promises that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (vs. 10) All of these faithful men of old enjoyed a similar knowledge of God's purpose, not

in all its clarity as we are privileged to understand it today, but clear enough to realize that any temporal advantage they might enjoy could not compare in value to the eternal blessings that God had promised.

But the knowledge alone did not give them faith. It was the foundation of their faith only as they were persuaded that God's promises were true, and they could place their heart reliance upon them. By making God's promises their own, they ordered their lives in harmony with them. When, for example, Abraham heard the voice of God calling him to go into an unknown country, he obeyed. Anything short of full obedience would have manifested a proportionate lack of faith.

So it was with all the Worthies of old. They did not entangle themselves with the things of this world, nor did they put their trust in man, nor in the false gods of the people with which they were so frequently surrounded. As Paul shows, they walked as pilgrims and strangers in the earth, longing for the kingdom that God had promised. James writes that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20), and by their works the Ancient Worthies demonstrated the great vitality of their faith. It was a faith that did not shrink, no matter how formidable the foes were that pressed against them. It was a faith that did not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe.

IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

We, like these faithful men, must have knowledge of God and of his plans in order to exercise a living, victorious faith. In Romans 10:14, Paul asks

the question, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" The Lord wants us to exercise strong faith, a faith that is based upon a verified knowledge, so he has asked us to reason with him—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." (Isa. 1:18) Men who are overly impressed with their own importance might ask us to accept their word without question or investigation, but the great God of the universe invites us to reason with him, that we may be satisfied that what he has told us is true. How wonderful is our God!

We reason with God through his Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Paul tells us. (Rom. 10:17) When we study and reason on the Scriptures, God is reasoning with us; that is, he is appealing to our reason upon the basis of the marvelous harmony, beauty, grandeur, and reasonableness of the loving plan of the ages which is set forth in his Word. With this firm foundation of knowledge, our faith will be correspondingly strong.

A victorious faith is more than merely to believe in God and in the fact that he has made promises. James tells us the "devils also believe, and tremble." (James 2:19) Our belief, our faith, if it is to give us victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, must enable us to do more than tremble. It must become a personal, vital conviction that leads to obedient activity in doing the will of God.

FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST

In addition to having faith in the promises of God, and in his loving plan that they outline, we should have faith in God himself. By faith, our relationship

with our God should ripen into a personal acquaintance in which we appreciate him more and more as our loving Heavenly Father—a Father with whom we can always have sweet fellowship. Our faith should enable us to go to him in our sorrows and pour out the troubles of our heart with the assurance that he will always be ready to provide us with the "balm of Gilead" (Jer. 8:22), to comfort us in our every time of need.

By faith, we should be able to see our Lord Jesus as our tender and loving Shepherd, who is caring for all our needs. Isaiah wrote, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." (chap. 40:11) The Lord tenderly cares for us. He may even resort to discipline; but this will not be necessary if faith is wholly obedient to his every call, following him in the paths of righteousness wherever he may lead.

STRENGTHENED BY EXERCISE

Faith grows stronger as we step out on the promises of God and thus put them to the test. This principle is illustrated in the experience of Israel in crossing the River Jordan into the promised land. The priests, marching ahead of the Israelites, were to touch the waters of the river with their feet, and the promise was that then the water would separate to make a path through which they could cross to the other side.

The priests, full of faith, took this step, and the Lord, fulfilling his promise, caused the water to divide. They put God's promise to the test, and saw it verified. Thus their faith was strengthened. Every faithful child of God should enjoy similar

evidences of God's love, and of his ability to fulfill all his good promises. This will be so if we take the steps of obedience as the Lord indicates them to us through his Word.

Our full consecration to the Lord was our first major step of obedience to the faith that was gradually crystallizing in our hearts as our growing knowledge of the Truth revealed that we did not belong to ourselves, but to the Lord. Then followed the evidence of the Lord's acceptance, and the begetting of the Holy Spirit. Each new step of faith, as we work out the details of the Lord's will throughout our daily walk in life, is rewarded with additional evidence of the Lord's guiding presence, overruling providence, and his sustaining grace.

THE "WORK OF FAITH"

In I Thessalonians 1:3, the Apostle Paul speaks of the "work of faith." Faith initiates our every activity in the Lord's service. It enables us to understand and appreciate the "deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10), and to teach them to others to whom the Lord has given hearing ears. Through faith in the truths of the Word, we are able to offer acceptable sacrifice to God; to fight the good fight of faith; to remain dead to self and to the world and to be alive toward God; to be zealous in the service of God; to abound in the graces of the Spirit; to suffer for righteousness' sake; and to thwart the fiery darts of the Adversary. Without faith we could do none of these things acceptably to God.

Faith enables us to do the will of God without questioning his wisdom, or considering what the

cost to ourselves may be. Faith says, 'I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord; I'll be what you want me to be.' Daniel's faith "stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb. 11:33), and it will enable us to bear witness to the Truth to an indifferent and hostile world. Thus will our faith, through our works, overcome the world.

THE TRIALS OF FAITH

Peter wrote, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."—I Pet. 1:6,7

The meaning of Peter's illustration is apparent. Our faith, and the superstructure of Christian character built upon it, contains certain elements of dross, of impurities, so the Lord refines us by trials—trials that are represented by the refiner's fire. Elsewhere, the Scriptures speak of our Lord as the Great Refiner, the purifier of silver and of gold.—Mal. 3:3

It is not literal fire that the Lord uses to refine and strengthen our faith, but fiery trials. For the most part they consist of the little vexations of life—losses, disappointments, delays, restraints, being 'put on the shelf,' our own faults or the faults of others, failures, hardships, necessities, oppositions, physical pain, weariness, sorrow, danger, and persecution. None of the Lord's people experience all of these, and with most of us none of them are, as a rule, overpoweringly severe. They do hurt, and

only as our faith can lay hold upon the promise that "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28), will we be able to endure them and continue our rejoicing in the Lord.

At times, the pleasant things of life can also prove to be trials of our faith. Indeed, when our experiences are pleasing to the flesh it is easy to lose sight of the Lord, and of our need to exercise faith in him and in his promises. If to render a service to the Lord means to give up the ease and comforts that we might otherwise enjoy, our faith is tested. Jesus indicated the principle involved here when he said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23) Not many of the Lord's people today have financial riches, but we may have riches of health and other assets that a strong faith will prompt us to devote more fully to the Lord.

If our faith is strong, we will see in every experience and situation of life a challenge to obedience. We will also realize that every trial and every joy that the Lord permits is designed for our greatest good. Do we really believe that no weapon that is formed against us can prosper, and that no joy of the flesh can lure us away from our God, if we lean upon him and trust him for his promised grace? If so, then we have a victorious faith.

ENDURING TRIALS

Jesus said, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." (Mark 14:38) While these words were addressed to his immediate disciples during those trying hours in Gethsemane, they are a fitting admonition to us also. We are to be watchful. The

enemies of the New Creature are ever on the alert to ensnare us in the meshes of pride, ambition, earthly honor, ease, and worldly pleasure. The flesh falls easy victim to the blandishments of Satan and the world. How well the poet expressed it:

"My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise;
The hosts of sin are pressing hard
To draw thee from the prize."

It is here that faith will give us victory; a faith, that is, which, fully trusting in the promises of God, will also make us alert to his directives, warnings, principles of righteousness, and fully trustful of his assured help in every time of need. In this, the 'work of faith' will be our diligent study of the Word, and its zealous application to every detail of our consecrated lives.

Jesus said we are also to pray. Prayer keeps open the vital lines of communication with our Heavenly Father, he who has promised that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Ps. 84:11) Jesus said that our Father would surely give the Holy Spirit to those who asked him. By the Holy Spirit he enlightens and strengthens us. Filled with his Spirit, we have the assurance that greater is he who is for us than all who are against us. Faith assures us of this, and thus gives us victory in our trials, of whatever nature they may be. Thus our perplexities are transformed into "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."—Phil. 4:7

As faith endures trial, giving assurance that every painful circumstance is essential to our being transformed into the Lord's image, the soul is mellowed to a loving submission to whatever Divine

providence may permit. As our faith grows stronger, we can finally and calmly say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (vs. 13) This is not self-assurance, for when we look to self we tremble. But when, by faith, we look to the Lord, believing that not one of his good promises will ever fail, we are strong; and we can say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. 15:57

Each new victory of faith draws us nearer to the Lord and results in a greater determination to know and to do his will. By experience, we learn that, with each step of obedience, the Lord's grace sustains, and his wisdom guides. We may not always know just why certain experiences are permitted, but faith enables us to rest in his will, knowing that he gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him. The victory of faith enables us to know that it is better to walk in the dark with him than to go alone in the light.

Victories of faith will increase our strength to resist the attacks of our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The Lord has provided us with a wonderful armor of protection, but we do not know its full value until, by faith, and in obedience to the Captain of our salvation, we become active combatants in the Christian warfare. As we fight the good fight of faith, and learn the value of the armor of Truth that the Lord has provided, we become ever stronger "in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10) We learn that greater is he who is for us than all they who be against us.

Victories of faith result in an increased growth in Christian character. Peter admonishes us to add

to our faith virtue, knowledge, fortitude, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Faith is the foundation of all these graces. When faith is weak, character is unstable, but a strong and ever-increasing faith results in the abounding of "these things," which in turn will lead to an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:4-11

Apart from faith, trials often lead, not to mellowness of character, but to irritability of disposition. The disappointed heart becomes resentful and rebellious. But full conviction of faith by which we are assured of the intrinsic value of all our trials, transforms every stinging, burning experience of life into a mellowing providence of God, designed to help produce in us the ripened "fruit" of "goodness and righteousness and truth."—Eph. 5:9

When by faith we see our joys and sorrows as the providence of God, rather than the mere happenstances of life, a trying experience does not embitter us. Instead, we see each such experience as an opportunity to thank the Lo r d for permitting further "light afflictions," which by faith we know are working out in us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (II Cor. 4:17) Thus each fiery trial, regardless of who or what might be the immediate cause, instead of being a 'stumblingstone,' is a 'stepping-stone' to higher planes of grace and truth.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane and knew that his enemies were about to seize and crucify him, he did not think of this bitter cup as one that they had poured for him. Instead, to him, as he said to Peter, it was the cup which the Father had given him. (John 18:11) So it should be with us, and will be, in

proportion to our faith in the promises and the providence of God.

Faith is essential in every aspect of the Christian life. Our study of the Bible would be meaningless without faith. In the Bible are all the treasures of Divine wisdom so essential for our instruction in righteousness and our guidance in the narrow way. We need this wisdom, and James tells us that if we ask God for it, he will give it to us, "liberally," but only if we "ask in faith, nothing wavering." (James 1:5,6) Without faith, how meaningless indeed would be our prayers!

Faith is the basis of our fellowship with the brethren. Our activity in the Lord's vineyard is the work of faith. The Christian warfare is the good fight of faith, and the victory over the world and all our other enemies is the victory of faith. Our journey in the narrow way is the walk of faith.

"The just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) Our life as New Creatures depends upon an abiding and growing faith in God, in his promises, and in every loving provision he has made for us—faith in the atoning blood of Christ; faith in the work of the Holy Spirit; faith in the "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."—Heb. 1:14

The more we experience the blessings resulting from these loving provisions of our Heavenly Father, the stronger becomes our faith, and the greater will be our trust in him. Thus, as we take each step of obedience, our prayer for increased faith will be answered by the revealing manner in which our God proves to us that there hath not failed, nor can fail, one word of all his good promises. ■