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DOCTRINES OF GRACE.

SAVING FAITH.

WERE any intelligent person asked to name the imperative condition on which a soul must be saved according to the Christian religion, he could not do anything else with the Bible in his hand than mention faith. From beginning to end of the Evangel of God, from the call of Abraham in Genesis to the last invitation of the Spirit in Revelation, the Divine voice is clear and consistent. Our manifest duty is to believe, and the refusal to believe is destruction. There are various types of saintliness in Holy Scripture, and the Judges are very different men from the Apostles, but every type is founded on faith. Amazing achievements were wrought by the heroes of Hebrew history, and the devotion of the first Christians arrested the world: the power was always faith, which was the nurse both of sacrifice and of charity. Exceeding precious promises are made in the name of God; they are all contingent on faith. Heavenly revelations are made to simple men who were prepared to receive them through faith. The patriarchs unite in giving one sublime example of faith, the psalmists sing the praises of faith, the prophets reproach Israel with the want of faith, the apostles go everywhere preaching faith. Jesus Himself made one demand of the world, that the world should believe in Him; when the world did not believe, He was helpless and could do nothing; when any one showed conspicuous faith, Jesus could not conceal His admiration; there was nothing which He could deny to faith, and nothing which faith, He said, could not do. According to Him, he that believeth is saved, and he that believeth not is not saved, and throughout the history of the Early Church the distinction is sharply drawn between believers and unbelievers. The believers are the disciples of Jesus, and the heirs of salvation. By faith a man enters

the kingdom of God, and by faith he continues therein, and by faith he shall come into its fulness when the kingdom of grace becomes the kingdom of glory.

It is surely, therefore, most desirable that one should understand what is the nature of faith, and the exact meaning of this demand which our Master made. Faith in the usage of common speech has two senses, and the confusion of these two senses has been a disaster, for it has not only darkened the religious mind, but has also gravely weakened the religious life. When one says that he believes that Jesus died and rose again, he is declaring his faith in a fact of history as he might have declared his faith in the battle of Waterloo. When one says that he believes in the doctrine of the Trinity, he is declaring his faith in a proposition of theological science as he might have declared his faith in the solution of one of Euclid's problems. This faith is purely intellectual; it deals with facts either in the domain of history or of reason. Between this faith and the life of the person there is no necessary contact, for the person may go about his daily work unmoved by the conclusion. But one may say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," and when he says that, he has passed into another sphere of thought and of feeling. It is as if he had said that he believed in his mother, but with a still deeper and more sacred meaning. He is dealing now, not with facts or with doctrines, but with a person, and there is an immense difference between believing in a fact and believing in a person. When one believes in a person, he does not only believe with his intellect—which he certainly does, and therefore the facts of Christ's life are included within faith—but he believes also with his heart, with his conscience, and with his will, with his whole mental and spiritual personality. The act of faith which Jesus demands is therefore an act of personal faith, faith between a person and a person, and it implies the surrender of the

one who believes to the other. Intellectual faith may be called belief, but this faith must be called trust.

It goes, of course, without saying that where any person puts his trust in another that other stands to him in a certain relation—mother, friend, partner—and certainly no one can be invited to trust in Christ without regard to His person and His character. When Christ appealed for faith, He appealed to men in a certain condition—who were sinners and who needed salvation; and He appealed as one who had a certain office and who had undertaken a certain duty—who was a Saviour, and who had been appointed of God to complete the great work of human salvation. The trust, therefore, which one puts in Jesus, according to the Gospel, is the trust of a sinner, and Jesus who receives that trust, according to the Gospel, receives it as a Saviour. The believer in this act commits himself soul and body, without reserve and with entire loyalty, into the hands of Jesus, Who, on His part, undertakes to save him soul and body, without limit of time or circumstance. And the bond which unites together the sinner seeking salvation and the Saviour affording salvation is faith.

Before any man is entitled to place this absolute confidence in Jesus Christ, he must have good reasons for believing that Christ as a Saviour is worthy of this trust, and that he on his part is at full liberty to trust in Christ. After one understands the nature of Christian faith, he must master the grounds upon which it rests. What is the foundation and the warrant of faith by which it is justified and upon which it stands invulnerable? Three answers have been given to this question, and each of them is true; indeed, they form together one complete ground of faith. Of course the first ground of faith must always be the testimony of Holy Scripture, for no one can believe unless he has heard. Faith cometh by hearing, and what one hears is the Gospel of God. Holy Scripture teaches us the

greatness and the hopelessness of our sin, the tender mercy and loving compassion of God, His purpose of salvation, and the gift of Jesus Christ. Holy Scripture also declares unto us the arrival of the Son of God within our race by the Incarnation, His Life of Perfect Obedience and Law-keeping, His Passion and His Death. Holy Scripture also explains to us that in His Life and Death Jesus was a representative of the human race, and that by His Resurrection and Ascension and endless Intercession He has become our Saviour, and Holy Scripture lays down with the utmost clearness, and with overflowing grace, the excellence of Jesus as the Friend and Lord and Redeemer of the human soul. Finally, the voice of God through Holy Scripture appeals unto each man that he should make no delay and have no hesitation, but should make haste and instantly commit himself into the hands of Christ. We are commanded and encouraged to believe throughout the length and breadth of the Bible, and therefore every man is justified in this trust, and any one refusing to trust is condemned.

Another ground of faith can be found in the voice of the Church, and by this ought to be understood the voice of believing men throughout all the ages. Very often the testimony of the Church has been limited to her authoritative teaching of doctrine, when she is really working in an intellectual sphere, and is demanding an intellectual faith. The testimony of the Church should be extended to include her witness to the salvation of the human soul, through the grace of Jesus Christ, and here she is speaking within a spiritual sphere, and is making her appeal to the heart. Her witness is of incalculable value, and comes only short of the testimony of Holy Scripture. Should any one hesitate to believe the Gospel declared by the Prophets and Apostles in the Bible, because it is too good to be true, or should any one desire some human evidence from those

who have made the great experiment of faith, then the Church comes in and supplements the contents of Holy Scripture. An innumerable company of saints of all ages and various intellectual creeds declare that they have heard the voice of God, and have gone forth like Abraham at His command, risking their whole spiritual position and an unknown future upon the Word of God and the Person of Jesus Christ. They have run this risk, and they have not been put to confusion; they have rather discovered, and are prepared to declare, that the half had not been told them of the goodly land into which they have already come, and whose fulness stretches before them into Eternity. It is as if a sinful man, penitent for his past and longing to see the salvation of God, should stand at the door of God's kingdom holding in his hand one of the great invitations of the Evangel, such as "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." "Is this to be read," he says, "in the fulness of its meaning? and is it possible that such a person as I am embraced in its intention?" Unto this wistful soul comes one witness after another from the gates of the kingdom, prophets, apostles, saints, martyrs. Each one comes now as an individual believer, and each one as he comes sets his seal upon the invitation, declaring that he has trusted, and that God has been true. And at the sound of this Amen the fearful soul plucks up heart to believe.

There is also a third ground of faith, which is sometimes exalted beyond measure by those who quarrel with the Catholic Creed, and regarded with unjust suspicion by those who hold that Creed in its most intense form. It may be called spiritual reason, and it has its own use and validity. When one is considering the Gospel of God with all gravity, is it not natural that he should ask himself whether this Gospel be such as God would have given, and which He might have expected? whether, in fact, it is a worthy and

becoming Gospel? There is a spiritual fitness in things, and as we have been created with a conscience and with a reason, they are bound to investigate, and to pass judgment upon this Gospel. Should our moral sense reject the message of God because it is not such as could have come from Him, or could have been addressed to us, then, in spite of the authority of Scripture and the witness of the saints, we are not entitled to believe. Should our moral sense give hearty welcome to that Gospel because it has revealed the heart of God, and also has revealed ourselves, then the witness of the Bible and the witness of the faith have been confirmed within each man's judgment, and by each man's inner light. Upon these three grounds the witness of revelation, the witness of the Church, and the witness of the spiritual reason, faith builds her house and is strong. Afterwards she will obtain another ground, and lay her foundation in still greater depths and strength, because by-and-by the soul will come for herself to know what others have told, and hearing will pass into experience. Experience is the condition of certitude, so that he who trusted on the Word of God and the word of his fellow-men will be able to say, "I know Whom I have believed," and then the soul will have all joy and peace in believing.

Various difficulties in the matter of faith occur to the honest mind, and are especially harassing because they affect the grounds of faith, and one of the chief concerns the Bible. No one can ignore even the power of this unique Book when he is in search of faith, and the very criticism which beats upon the Bible is a tribute to its authority. There are minds which the Book immediately satisfies, and their faith builds upon it as upon a rock; there are minds which are puzzled and offended by the Bible. They are concerned about discrepancies in numbers and dates, they are horrified at certain deeds and speeches, they are confused about opposite views of truth in the

Bible. Such people have even come to imagine that with another kind of Bible faith would have been easier, and that this Bible is a hindrance to faith. Had it been, for instance, a little historical manual, carefully checked by some scholar, or a synopsis of doctrine, or a collection of moral sentiments ; had St. Stephen read up his Pentateuch before making his great speech in the presence of the Sanhedrin, and had the old Hebrew Judges acted like St. John, and had St. James sent his letter to St. Paul for adjustment before publication, then unbelief would have been unknown. One is amazed at a person thinking after this fashion, not on account of his want of honesty, but on account of his want of imagination. Were the Bible this wooden Book some people seem to desire, with no imperfections of human nature, no indifference to petty details, no play of individuality, then the Bible would certainly cause no difficulty to-day, for it would long ago have gone out of circulation. That book could hardly be divine which was not even human, and no one could vex himself with such criticism if he grasped the nature of the Bible. It is not a book written in heaven and dropped down from the clouds, it is the revelation of God through human experience. It is the likeness of the face of God drawn in the consciousness of saints ; first a few rough strokes, then the suggestion of a face, and then the brightness of God's countenance in Jesus Christ His Son. What concerns us is not the canvas and the colouring, but the expression of the face, which is Love. The Bible is not merely history and biography, it is a message, which begins in the early books and grows clearer and fuller and kinder, till it reaches its climax in the Gospels. There is the stalk of the corn, and there is the chaff, which are the facts and the follies of human nature in Bible history ; but there is also the grain in the ear, and that is the Gospel of God. It is this message of the Eternal, separated from its environment of Hebrew history, which is the warrant of

faith, and the sound of this Evangel can be heard from almost every part of the Bible.

Faith also is often perplexed by the mysteries of the Christian religion, and people are apt to feel in all sincerity that Christianity is simply an incomprehensible and esoteric faith with doctrines of fathomless depth, like the Holy Trinity, and the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Atonement for Sin, and the work of the Holy Ghost. Faith is therefore placed beyond the reach of plain folk. Who can pretend, for instance, to understand the Procession of the Holy Ghost or the union of the Divine and Human in the Person of Christ? Had Christianity not busied herself with such hopeless enigmas, some one says—had Christianity been only a rule for life, then it would have been possible for me to believe. Upon the other hand, had Christianity been a little manual of commonplace morals about paying one's debts and giving to the poor, one had thrown the Gospel of Christ into the fire because it was so trivial, and so shallow. Every religion must go into the whole question of the soul and God, or else it does not deserve its name; and if Christianity has dared to pierce to the very origin of existence, it has given a pledge of reality. No doubt Christianity has dealt with mysteries; but it is to be remembered that it is not these mysteries which are the object of faith, but Jesus Christ Himself. It does not matter, in the first instance, whether one understands the Person of Christ, or the exact principle of His atoning sacrifice, if so be that one receives Christ Himself by faith. His faith then possesses the fulness of Christ and of His sacrifice together, and in the ages to come faith may explore the goodly land at her leisure till every mystery has yielded its secret and speculation has passed into knowledge. Faith is invited to make her first venture in the Gospel with Jesus, Whose victory over sin every one can verify, and Whose grace no one can deny. The door for Christian faith

is not the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, nor is it even the doctrine of the Cross, but it is the Living Christ Himself.

Certain people also will always find a reason for unbelief in the divisions and controversies of Christendom. The witness of the saints, they say, is not harmonious, but is broken. If Christian people everywhere, and at every time, had spoken with one voice, it would have been easy to believe; but Christendom is one huge Babel, in which an ordinary person loses his head, and despairs of certainty. No one can estimate how the contradiction and wranglings of Christians have increased the difficulty of faith or hindered the conversion of the world. At the same time, however, it ought to be remembered that the lamentable disunity of Christendom is not so deep as might appear; for if two matters of dispute—the orders of the clergy, and the sacraments of the Church—be withdrawn, Christendom speaks with one voice. It has the same doctrine of God, and of Christ, and of Grace, and of Sin. Besides, are not these very divisions an impressive proof of the intensity of our religion? because men had not contended even unto blood about doctrine had not these doctrines been the symbols for eternal truths. Faith, instead of being alienated by the divisions of Christendom, should rather see in these divisions the inestimable value of Jesus Christ, for Whose slightest word men are prepared to suffer and die. In short, the most serious difficulties that stand in the way of evangelical faith would be removed and cease to exist if we only remembered that we are invited to place our faith, not in the Bible, not in the creeds of the Church, not in foolish Christian people, but in Jesus Christ Himself, in Whom faith can find no difficulty, in Whom faith will ever receive the fullest satisfaction.

Should it be asked why it is necessary to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, and why Christ cannot save the soul

except upon this condition of faith, then the answer goes to the very root of the Christian religion, and indeed of all religion. What is sin but rebellion against God? and what is its punishment but alienation {from God? Is not the sinner, when he is found, in a far country so distant from God and from holiness that between his soul and God there is no fellowship? What is salvation but restoration from this far country and restoration to the communion of God? There is only one way by which the soul can return to the Father, and that way is Christ Himself. When the soul is united to Christ so that Christ and the soul are one in standing, in mind, in character, and in life, then the soul has come home again with Christ to the Father's House and the Father's bosom. It has the same communion with God which Christ has. This union can only be effected by faith, just as it is rendered impossible by unbelief. Faith is the bond which connects the soul with Christ, so that the soul being now in Christ Jesus, is partaker of the virtue of all that He has done, and heir to the fulness of all that He is. Through faith the soul is hidden in Christ, through faith the soul becomes a part of Christ, a member of His Body under the direction and protection of the Head, a branch in the vine receiving its sap and life from the stock. He that refuses to believe remains outside Christ; he that consents to believe is in Christ Jesus, and in idea and in prophecy is before God as Christ Jesus Himself.

The excellence of this Gospel of Faith must surely be plain to every mind; for while none could be more profound in its issues, none could be more simple in its statement. It lays aside for the moment the problems of the past and future, and confines the hearer's attention to two persons, himself and Jesus Christ. It takes him as he finds himself—weak, ignorant, sinful, and cast down; it takes Christ as He is found in the Gospels—holy, strong, triumphant, and

gracious. It asserts that all which the sinner needs is to be found in Christ, and that all which Christ is can be obtained by the sinner, and then it lays down the one reasonable and necessary condition, that the sinner shall trust in Jesus with all his heart. No gospel could be more gracious, because on this condition of faith alone the sinner will be transported from his environment of sin and the entail of his sinful heredity broken, and he will be placed in a new environment of holiness, and be made one of a new creation. And no gospel could be more hopeful because it unites the fortunes of the sinner for time and eternity with those of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, and in Whom dwells the whole fulness of the Godhead.

JOHN WATSON.

JOSEPH: AN ETHICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY.

LECTURE I.

“THE YOUTH AND HIS DREAMS.”

GENESIS XXXVII. 1-11.

IN any walk among the hills on a summer's day we might here and there step across many little rills and take no heed; or we might come at any time to a well-head that was the beginning of a brook. But we should pause and look down the course of any slenderest stream with a thrill, if we were told that in those gentle overflowings of nature there began a river which swelled to so vast a flood that it divided kingdoms and carried fleets that determined the destinies of the world.

When we read the Book of Genesis, we have the feeling of being on the uplands of human life. There is a pleasant loneliness and leisureliness in it, and something of the peace that there is among the hills. A pathos also seems to creep along the Book, or something akin to pathos; a “pastoral