

FAITH

(Discourse by a young Elder who prefers to remain anonymous.)

Well, dear Friends, we are going to discuss a topic which is very familiar to us as new creatures. Our topic is FAITH, a good one we think. A discourse on faith might be given when things are starting to roar in the world, as they might soon (we do not know). But we would rather think along the line of the Apostle Paul and our Lord Jesus, whose faith was so real to them. Our Lord spent 3½ years of his life in faith. The Apostle Paul, some thought to be beside himself (crazy). Jesus and Paul were walking as new creatures--the way they saw things was by the eye of faith.

So maybe we can remind you of some of these things and encourage you to seek more fully the blessed walk of faith. If we try to go this walk without faith, it is not joyous and we will not go very far; but how beautiful, how joyous it is walking as new creatures by faith with God--a joy unspeakable.

We'll now mention some on what faith is. The word faith in the New Testament comes mainly from the Greek word "pistis" which is also translated assurance, belief, believe, believeth and fidelity. The word also has the thought of persuasion and conviction. In Heb. 11:1 the Apostle Paul gives a definition of faith: "Now faith is the substance (margin--confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Waymouth translation reads, "Now faith is a confident assurance of the reality of things which we do not see."

What a wonderful thing! Faith has two principal elements. First, an intellectual assurance, which would be having an intellectual grasp of some of the basic doctrines: one supreme Almighty God, a Plan of Redemption, of which Jesus Christ and his ransom sacrifice for all are the central themes. These and other features might be styled the foundation of our faith, the ground work. The second part would be the trust and reliance on God's promises to us, upon our Father, the one who has given us new life and who invites the implicit confidence and love of His children. This latter part we might consider as making up the heart reliance. Both of these are needed.

Our faith will become so real to us, if we are obedient. The Pastor said: "Faith and obedience are like our two feet. We put one forward, then the other, and so we develop in faith by continuing in the spirit of obedience, doing whatever the Lord would have us do. Our faith will become a substance to our minds which will clarify things to us." Faith becomes as real and tangible to us as any material substance, even more so; for the things upon which our faith lays hold are eternal. It is said that faith is the operation, the exercise of our minds in respect to God and His promises.

Not every one has faith. Some because they do not have the knowledge of God or because they are too fallen, cannot exercise a trust a confidence in God. Also the god of this world hath blinded men that they believe not, but think this to be foolishness.

When we approached God we had some measure of faith, some measure before we consecrated, yet the faith by which we were enabled to accomplish our consecration even unto death, was not of ourselves--we had no such faith when God first laid hold upon us. He developed in us that faith by the revelation of His love, through His promises by the Word.

But when we become sons and come under the anointing of the Holy Spirit then Faith blossomed. These new creatures then gladly sacrifice the things they can see and hold for the things that they can't see or hold, but are convinced are there. "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit which searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (1 Cor. 2:9, 10) This is part of the Lord's blessing for the church at the present time. This spirit-begotten faith in things not yet seen is part of the saints' present inheritance and would be closely linked with the sealing of the spirit. The more we know of our God the more faith we can have. This doesn't mean though, the more we know of our God the more faith we will have. Just to show this we mention Satan--he knows a lot about God, but he doesn't have any heart-reliance on Him. But if we do go in the healthy spiritual walk, a step of knowledge, a step of grace, we should do fine, and it will be a joy to study and learn more of our God, to increase our faith.

Yes, Faith is an all-important matter to the true Christian and none can please God without it. Paul said, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh unto God must first believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

God created man to be higher than the brute creation--man can appreciate more than the mere physical senses. "Man was made to glorify his Creator and to have a knowledge of Him in order to obtain the fullest happiness and blessing from the enjoyment of his God-given faculties." We're now in what is called the "faith age" and God is specially pleased to deal with and reward His spirit-begotten children according to their faith. It is a wonderful thing to walk by faith, to trust in the hand of our great Jehovah God. It is a most wonderful way to test someone, and very soon this way shall be over and the people shall walk by sight. But God shall reward not only the faithful Christians, those of this age but also those of times past that loved God and had faith in Him. He will reward them shortly--the Ancient Worthies that Paul tells us about in the 11th chapter of Hebrews--their faith was counted unto them for righteousness.

The Ancient Worthies shall be rewarded with perfect human life when they are resurrected, before the world of mankind return. They experienced character

development during their lifetime. (Heb. 11:120) Jude tells us a little bit more about Enoch. (Jude 14-16) He must have been separated somewhat from the others by his faith, for the darkness hateth the light. And Noah--they must have laughed at him as he said it was going to rain--it had never rained before: "For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, but there went up a mist from the earth." Noah probably worked at this for 100 years--that's quite a while, but he had faith in God. He trusted in God's promises. Abraham is the next one that Paul shows forth as a hero of faith. Abraham is called, "The Father of the Faithful." With Abraham, God started a faith family, to whom were given many and great promises. The Gospel was first declared to Abraham and all who believe in that gospel of a Messiah are called the children of Abraham. And there is another way that we can view Abraham as the Father of the Faithful. He typified the Heavenly Father; Isaac typified Jesus, and Rebecca typified the church. It was by faith that he and his family left the land of the Chaldeans--faith in God's promise to him; by faith he sojourned there and believed that he would have a seed even though Sarah was past age. And then when the seed did come he was asked to slay it. But Abraham accounted that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. What a blessing Abraham will get when he is resurrected--God will greatly reward his faith. Yes, Abraham had faith, he had more than a hope. If Abraham had just thought all these things up, that he would possess the land and that he and his seed would bless all the families of the earth --well Abraham might have hoped a lot but it wouldn't be faith. Faith is more than hope. Faith implies a promise, and when the promise is given by the Great Creator of the universe, we see that Abraham had good reason to trust in the promises.

And so do we, for with Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. We saw that this same God held out certain promises. We saw that God planned to restore the world of mankind and that we would have a share in that if we continued on earth--but God held out the promise that if we gave up all that life on earth and lived a life of sacrifice now and gave ourselves completely to Him, even at the cost of suffering that He would let us be with Him and His Son as spirit beings of the divine nature, helping to uplift the world of mankind. So we, by faith gladly gave up our future inheritance on earth. By faith we completely gave ourselves to God forever to serve him. By faith we lay hold upon the Lord's promised grace to help in time of need. By faith we believe that He that started this good work in us is able to finish it. This good work that is done in us is sanctification, being sanctified, being set apart to God. We are transformed into the image of God's son by the renewing of our minds. Faith is a very important part of sanctification. It is by faith that we believe all things work together for good to those -- who love God and are called of Him according to His purpose. It is by faith we sacrifice present pleasures and suffer persecution believing that these work out a good character in us that they are God's will, and that we shall be rewarded afterward.

By faith we try to use every ability, every talent in God's service. By faith we build one another up in this most holy faith which we believe is the true faith once delivered to the

saints. By faith we look forward to intimate communion and fellowship with our Father and Jesus, already having a foretaste this side of the veil. Yes, when our spiritual eyes and heart are clear, we try as hard as we can, we say to ourselves "I'm going to be faithful; I'm going to extend every bit of effort to do the right things to become like Jesus." We believe this is the proper attitude and one pleasing to the Father. When we look to Jesus by faith, what an example we see--the Author and Finisher of our faith, the One by His example and teaching has inspired our faith and who will, if we continue to follow His leadings, do His will, He will finish and establish our faith so that we will be immovable.

By faith Jesus left His pre-human existence, trusting in God that He would be born a man and if He proved faithful in His mission, He again would receive a spirit nature. By faith He consecrated; and by faith He endured the self-sacrifice even unto death, even though He had no place to lay His head, He trusted in the Father. By faith He accepted all things as of the Father's overruling. For 3 ½ years He wandered around Israel, things were so plain before His eyes of faith.

If we could continue to the end of our course as He did to the end of His--continue on as He did all the time. In our imperfect state, how easy it would be to lay back awhile and forget the picture our eyes see when they are in tune with the true reality. The true reality is that we are new creatures, running in a Narrow Way of loyalty, self-sacrifice and suffering. We are sons of the Most High and should act like His sons. Not that we would go about boasting of this, but that we should obey Him because He knows what is best for us, and if we're in the right heart condition we should rejoice in His will knowing it is the best for our new creature interests, and that is what we want to prosper in, isn't it?

Sometimes the old man would have it otherwise and starts to get our heart going the other way, and then our eyes of faith get dim and our Father's will starts to seem grievous. Then we need some eye salve. But we should want to please our Heavenly Father, and make Him happy. No doubt our Heavenly Father is very pleased about many things. As it makes our earthly fathers happy when we do their will joyfully, so it pleases our Heavenly Father when we keep His commandments, joyfully and act as it becomes the sons of the Most High.

Ambassadorship is closely linked with this last part--we are ambassadors for a far-off country; and also we're stewards. Stewards--that's easy to forget. All we have to do is to forget about it. So much depends upon our viewpoint. Who's viewing things--the old man or the new creature? We only have one body at this time and two minds. To the old man these things are grievous, but to the New Creature, when the eyes of faith are clear, these things are marvelous. Imagine, if we're faithful. We shall hear that "well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

What wonderful joys they shall be! We shall see God; shall live for eternity--that's a long time. And we shall be of the divine nature. We shall be able to uplift the world of mankind from the dark pit they are in now. Truly there are wonderful things set before us. The prizes of this earth we should count as loss and dross if our eyes are properly focused and our hearts are in tune, if we are in the proper heart attitude.

The Apostle James tells us a little more along this line concerning our faith and how our actions will be if we have faith. (James 2:14-28) The word "work" as used by James, can also be translated actions, and might be thought of as fruitage of character. The apostle is not speaking contrary to the truth, that we are justified by our faith. Maybe some in the early church had swung to the extreme of saying "I believe this, I believe that" and sitting down, and that is all. James is saying that if the right kind of faith be developed in the heart, it will surely bear fruit and make an outward manifestation. This would be in accordance with our Lord's words, "By their fruits, ye shall know them." (Matt. 7: 16)

We are begotten by the Holy Spirit and if we keep that spirit, eventually a quickening will take place in us--a desire to serve the Lord, a spirit of activity. We might use the example of an unborn infant. The infant would correspond to faith. By and by the infant would start to kick--a quickening. This would correspond to the quickening of the new creature. As in the natural unborn infant, the period of quickening may come sooner or later, but the strength, the vigor of the unborn infant is usually estimated by the degree of quickening. So it is with the spiritual creatures, those not completely born. When we have grown in faith properly, when faith has developed sufficiently, the degree of activity in obedience to God in the service of the Truth and righteousness and the brethren, will indicate the strength or the weakness of spiritual development as a new creature. After having heard, seen and, tasted of the grace of God and enjoyed it, there should be a desire to serve our Father to show others these wonderful things. But if we do not have such a desire we should try to stimulate the desire. A faith that will not develop obedience in harmony with ability is in sore trouble. For a New Creature, quickening is absolutely necessary before one could be born a spirit being.

So as the apostle says, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Or faith without actions or a character is dead. When we think about the parables of the pounds or talents, we can see what the apostle was saying. The Apostles Peter, James and John were very energetic and zealous. These were those that Jesus loved most; so we want to be burning with fervency of love for the Lord and appreciation of His great love and His beautiful plan of the ages. So we see that we should want to increase our faith.

We might ask, "Well, how do I go about having my faith increased?" One of the first things to do would be to ask it of the Lord as the apostles did, "Lord increase our Faith." That's very fine. The Lord will do His part if we do our part. Some might say, "Well

don't the scriptures declare that faith is the gift of God?" Yes, they do. Every good and perfect gift cometh from above. But how is this gift given? We have some faith when we first come to God, but then He supplies the necessary ingredients for our faith to grow. When He begets us of the Holy Spirit then it can grow wonderfully. It is said because we have the divine instruction, we are taught by His Word and providences. (Rom. 10:17) If God did not come and help us, would we have such faith? Surely not, it is a gift of God. The Scriptures also declare it to be His workmanship and a fruit. So God will do His part, He will not withhold this thing from His children.

But we ask, what do we have to do to increase our faith? First we would say prayer. We would ask in faith, nothing wavering, and as Jesus said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." We have to watch for the Lord's fulfillment after we have asked. Maybe sometimes we forget to watch, but we have to continually guide ourselves in the right manner. Our Father has promised us that he will give us certain things and we should believe Him. It might appear at times that He has forgotten our requests, but we should persist in our petitions if we know it is a proper thing to ask of Him. He might withhold the blessing until we are in the proper attitude to appreciate it.

Next, we would think of study as a means to increasing our faith--study of the wonderful plan of the ages, proving it to ourselves by the scriptures. History also bears it out and by watching world events of the present day we see prophecies being fulfilled before our eyes. As we go along day by day, we are watching, our mental eyes are watching different points, thinking how the plan fits together; and we may hear someone say something, something in the news, and we say, well, that confirms what I know to be true all the more. As we go along, we become more and more convinced and know the things we have learned are real.

Next in our steps to increasing faith is the taking unto ourselves of God's exceeding great and precious promises. If we have made a full surrender of ourselves and have been accepted of the Father, we can take these unto ourselves, and should take them. Having taken these unto ourselves we can have the rest of faith, if we are faithfully carrying out our covenant. We can have, if fully trusting in Him, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Even though the sea roar and the mountains be moved into the midst of it, yea though we walk through the valley of the shadow death we shall fear no evil for God is with us. These promises should be read and taken unto self. When we are in sore distress we can take that beautiful promise given through Isa. "For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee." And there are so many wonderful promises. Isn't it wonderful how the apostle said, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

Another step would be watching the Lord's overruling providences of our experiences in life. Sometimes we're in a jam, it doesn't look like things can be worked out, and then the Lord will so easily just click things into place. Or He might overrule things so that we can meet with the friends at a convention, or maybe even as we drive along the road, keeping us from a near accident, or permitting us to be in one to learn some needed lessons.

Yes, the Lord has made wonderful provisions for us to have our faith increased, but we have to walk in the appointed way. Seeking to put on the fruits and graces of the spirit would also be a way of having our faith increased; and also seeking to be used by the Lord in His service. He will provide it if we really want it. So often we hear the dear friends testimonies--how the Lord answered their prayers for opportunities of service. Maybe they ask for witnessing opportunities and they get them in wonderful ways--this is strengthening to faith.

So we want to increase our faith as we see it is said by the Master, "According to your faith be it unto you." It is highly ranked as being something that we need to make our calling and election sure. So we never want to lose our faith. We realize that Satan would try with his fiery darts and many tricks that he has learned. So we need to have the shield of faith. And we should never doubt--we should never let slip our faith in God. We should be like Joshua and Caleb and not like the ten spies and the rest of Israel who trusted not in the arm of the Lord. We should be as the three Hebrew children. Jehovah is our God; He is our Father. We should never entertain any thought of doubt. That is what Satan wants us to do, sow seeds of doubt.

One should become established in the knowledge of the doctrines lest when a fiery trial of faith come upon us, and we would fall to Satan who would cut our foundation away--our faith in God, and faith in God's Son along with the ransom work. We should learn the doctrines. Doctrines are teachings, God's teachings concerning His Plan of the Ages.

Satan will come to one of the friends when maybe he has fallen in a shortcoming, maybe a serious shortcoming and will try to get into his mind and will start generating the thought that God will not receive him back again. Maybe he has fallen short in the same thing quite a bit, and this time maybe he partially willfully walked into it. Satan will try to stress the point of "willfully." He watches, we believe, for our weak points and tries to work on him. But this point of "willfully"--we would think that if the brother had any remorse for doing the wrong thing, that it would not be considered a "willful" sin, one for which there is no recourse but second death. Yes, Satan will really try to get one frightened, even terrified. He will try to put him into the second death class; then if that doesn't work he'll quickly put him in the Great Company class. You see how a knowledge of God's teachings is so important. What beautiful love and mercy we have shown us in the parable of the prodigal son. Here is a knowledge of God. But even when

we see that we're maybe not in the Great Company. Satan might try to give us the thought that we're going out of the truth, that we've got the wrong spirit. We might feel that we have to wrestle with the Lord till morning to receive His favor back again. But we have that heart reliance upon the Lord. If we have partially, willfully, walked into something wrong, we might expect some stripes for it--maybe the Lord's favor withdrawn for a short season. But then we know we are His sons and that He loves us--he chastens us; and we know, that His favor will return. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench." Satan will try to destroy our faith in the precious promises, but we have to use the two parts of our faith--intellectual and heart reliance. He'll try to get us to forget that the Father is overruling all things, that all things work together for good to those who are called of God, according to His purpose.

Satan will try his utmost to get us depressed and to get us to forget that the Lord wants to form in us that wonderful character trait of patient endurance, of sometimes patiently, cheerfully, enduring our own weaknesses. But we have to have faith in God, that He will accept us if we're of a contrite heart. (Prov. 24:16) Yes it is quite a battle. But so much better is the course run if we're faithful, if we're obedient. We can rejoice knowing that the trial of your faith is very precious in the sight of the Lord. Even if we're faithful the Lord might withdraw His spirit for a short season so that we might have more of the experiences as our Lord Jesus had--of having the Father leave us. If this should happen, we might think, well here is an opportunity to show the Lord that I trust Him, even though I can't see Him--I trust Him.

So, dear Friends, we want to have faith and we want to be properly exercised by this faith to follow in the footsteps of our dear Lord; to have the new creature rule, sound in faith, with the Lord clear before our eyes in love and joy. Especially we who are the last members to be here with our Lord reigning, we can lift up our heads and rejoice to see that our deliverance and that of the world draweth nigh.

So brethren, we hope you will have a victorious race "for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." Always remember that the Lord is overruling things. He is at the helm. Even though you have a fiery trial with the brethren, or in the family, or whatever comes to be a fiery trial, trust in the Lord. You are as the apple of His eye. When things look bad, remember when almost all left Jesus, except for a few., the twelve, and Jesus asked Peter "will you also go away?"; and Peter said, "Lord to whom will we go, thou hast the words of eternal life." And He does! Nothing else is like the Bible--it must be God's Word. And we have proven it to ourselves, and we have proven that which we call the "plan of the ages"--that it is in fact the DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES. Our eyes have been anointed. We have come under the anointing of the High Priest. As one brother said, "Before I was blind, but now I can see." Let us appreciate this brethren, let us be truly thankful to the Lord THAT WE CAN SEE HIS SALVATION and love His righteousness. Keep your shield up, rejoice in tribulation.

He will never leave thee. You have entered into an amazing family, such love and goodness! Keep on, our Father is pleased to have it this way. Draw nigh to Him and He will draw nigh to thee.