

The Bible Student's Library

“The entrance of thy word giveth light.”

LIVING BY FAITH.

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Christian Growth.

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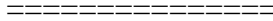
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LIVING BY FAITH.



In Rom. 1:17 the apostle Paul makes the following statement, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." This statement is the summing up of what the apostle has to say about the gospel in verse 16. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, but only "to everyone that believeth;" in it the righteousness of God is revealed. The righteousness of God is the perfect law of God (Isa. 51:6, 7; Ps. 119:172), which is but the transcript of His righteous will (Ps. 40:7, 8). All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17), or the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4; Rom. 7:7). The gospel is God's remedy for sin; its work, therefore, must be to bring men into harmony with the law,—to cause the workings of the righteous law to be manifested in their lives. But this is wholly a work of faith,—the righteousness of God is revealed from "faith to faith,"—faith in the beginning, and faith to the end,—as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

This is true in all ages since the fall of man, and will be true until the saints of God have His name in their foreheads, and see Him as He is. It was from the prophet Habakkuk (2:4) that the apostle quoted the statement. If the Prophets had not revealed it, the first Christians [4] could not have known of it; for they had only the Old Testament. To say that in the most ancient times men had but an imperfect idea of faith in Christ, is to say that there were no just men in those times. But Paul goes right back to the very beginning and cites an instance of saving faith. He says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he

was righteous." Heb. 11:4. He says of Noah, also, that it was by faith that he built the ark to the saving of his house; "by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Heb. 11:7. We say that their faith was in Christ, because it was faith unto salvation, and besides the name of Jesus "there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

There are too many who try to live the Christian life on the strength of the faith which they exercised when they realized their need of pardon for the sins of their past life. They know that God alone can pardon sins, and that He does this through Christ; but they imagine that, having once been started, they must run the race in their own strength. We know that many have this idea, first, because we have heard some say so, and second, because there are such multitudes of professed Christians who show the working of no greater power than their own. If they ever have anything to say in social meeting, besides the ever-recurring formula, "I want to be a Christian, so that I may be saved," they tell only of a past experience, of the joy they had when they first believed. Of the joy of living for God, and of walking with him by faith, they know nothing, and he who tells of it [5] speaks a strange language to them. But the apostle carries this matter of faith clear through to the glorious kingdom, in the following most forcible illustration:—

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Heb. 11:5, 6.

Note the argument to prove that Enoch was translated by faith: Enoch was translated because he walked with God, and had the testimony that he pleased God; but without

faith it is impossible to please God. That is enough to prove the point. Without faith not an act can be performed that will meet the approval of God. Without faith the best deeds that a man can do will come infinitely short of the perfect righteousness of God, which is the only standard. Wherever real faith is found, it is a good thing; but the best of faith in God to take away the load of the sins of the past will profit a person nothing unless it is carried right through in ever-increasing measure until the close of his probation.

A CAUSE OF FAILURE.

We have heard many people tell how hard they found it to do right; their Christian life was most unsatisfactory to them, being marked only by failure, and they were tempted to give up in discouragement. No wonder they get discouraged; continual failure is enough to discourage anybody. The bravest soldier in the world would become faint-hearted if he had been defeated in every [6] battle. Sometimes these persons will mournfully tell that they have about lost confidence in themselves. But if they would only lose confidence in themselves entirely, and would put their whole trust in the One who is mighty to save, they would have a different story to tell. They would then "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Says the apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." Phil. 4:4. The man who doesn't rejoice in God, even though tempted and afflicted, is not fighting the good fight of faith. He is fighting the poor fight of self-confidence and defeat.

All the promises of final happiness are to the overcomer. "To him that overcometh," says Jesus, "will I give to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with My Father in His throne." Rev. 3:21. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things," says the Lord. Rev. 21:7. An overcomer is one who gains victories. The inheriting is not the overcoming; that is only the reward for overcoming. The overcoming is now; the victories to be

gained are victories over the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—victories over self and selfish indulgences. The man who fights and sees the foe give way, may rejoice; nobody can keep him from rejoicing, for joy comes spontaneously as the result of seeing the enemy give way. Some folks look with dread upon the thought of having to wage a continual warfare with self and worldly lusts. That is because they do not as yet know anything about the joy of victory; they have experienced only defeat. But it isn't so doleful a thing to battle constantly, when there is continual victory. The old veteran of a hundred battles, who has been victorious in every [7] fight, longs to be at the scene of conflict. Alexander's soldiers, who under his command never knew defeat, were always impatient to be led into the fray. Each victory increased their strength, which was born only of courage, and correspondingly diminished that of the vanquished foe. Now how may we gain continual victories in our spiritual warfare? Listen to the beloved disciple:—

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4.

Read again the words of the apostle Paul:—

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

Here is the secret of strength. It is Christ, the Son of God, the One to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, who does the work. If He lives in the heart to do the work, is it boasting to say that continual victories may be gained? Yes, it is boasting; but it is boasting in the Lord, and that is allowable. Says the Psalmist, "My soul shall

make her boast in the Lord;" and Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal. 6:14.

The soldiers of Alexander were reckoned invincible. Why? Was it because they were naturally stronger and more courageous than all their enemies?— No; but because they were led by Alexander. Their strength was in his leadership. Under another leader they would [8] often have been defeated. When the Union army was fleeing, panic-stricken, before the enemy at Winchester, the presence of Sheridan turned their defeat into victory. Without him the men were a quaking mob; with him at their head they were an invincible army. If you had listened to the remarks, after the battle, of the soldiers who served under those and similar leaders, you would have heard the praises of their general mingled with all their rejoicing. They were strong because he was; they were inspired by the same spirit that he had.

OUR MIGHTY LEADER.

Well, our Captain is the Lord of hosts. He has met the chiefest foe of all and has vanquished him single handed. Those who follow Him invariably go forth conquering and to conquer. Oh, that those who profess to be His followers would put their trust in Him, and then, by the repeated victories that they would gain, they would show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light!

John says that he that is born of God overcomes the world, through faith. Faith lays hold of the arm of God, and His mighty power does the work. How the power of God can work in a man, accomplishing that which he could not possibly do for himself, no one can tell. It would be as easy to tell how God can give life to the dead. Says Jesus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8. How the Spirit works in a man to subdue his passions, and to make him [9] victorious over pride, envy, and selfishness, is known only to the Spirit; it is sufficient for us to know that it is done, and will be done in everyone who wants that work wrought in him, above all things else, and who trusts God for the performance of it.

We cannot tell how Peter was enabled to walk on the water, when the waves were rolling about him; but we know that at the command of the Lord he did it. So long as he kept his eye fixed on the Master, Divine Power enabled him to walk as easily as though it were solid rock underneath; but when he looked at the waves, possibly with a feeling of pride in what he was doing, as though he himself was doing it, fear very naturally took possession of him, and he began to sink. Faith enabled him to walk on the waves; fear made him sink beneath them.

Says the apostle, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days." Heb. 11:30. Why was that written?—For our learning, "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Rom. 15:4. Why, is there any prospect that we shall ever be called upon to fight armed hosts, and to take fortified cities?—No; "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12); but the victories which have been gained by faith in God over visible foes in the flesh, are placed on record to show us what faith will accomplish in our conflict with the rulers of the darkness of this world. The grace of God, in answer to faith, is as powerful in these battles as in those; for says the apostle:—

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"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;

casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

It was not physical foes alone that faith enabled the ancient worthies to conquer. We read of them that they not only "subdued kingdoms," but "wrought righteousness, obtained promises," and, most wonderful and most encouraging of all, "*out of weakness were made strong.*" Heb. 11:33, 34. Their very weakness became strength to them through faith, because the strength of Christ is made perfect in weakness. "Who, then, shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? since it is God that justifieth, and we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Rom. 8:35, 37.

FROM FAITH TO FAITH.

But there is another expression in the text which stands at the beginning of this tract: "For therein [in the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed *from faith to faith.*" This expression has been the subject of much learned discussion by theologians, and very few of them are agreed as to its meaning. The fact that learned men are disagreed in regard to it, need not frighten us from it with the thought that it cannot be understood, for we [11] read that things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes. If we are but simple enough to accept the obvious Scripture meaning, as explained by the Scriptures, we need not be in darkness.

One of the greatest causes of the failure of many people to understand the book of Romans, and indeed, any other

portion of Scripture, is a failure to hold to first principles and Bible definitions. Men attempt to define some terms according to their theological training, and find it hard work to make them fit. Then if they at one time accept the Bible definition of the term, they do not adhere to it, but give it some other meaning the next time they meet with it. This can lead to nothing else but confusion.

The cause of the difficulty in understanding this text is a failure to cling to the Bible definition of the term, "the righteousness of God." We have already seen that it is an expression indicating God's character, and that His character is set forth in the ten commandments. They sum up the whole duty of man, which is to be like God. Eccl. 12:13, 14; James 2:8, 12. The law, having been transgressed, cannot, as a matter of course, be perfectly represented in any person's life, so the gospel was devised that man might in Christ find the perfect righteousness of the law. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, because it makes manifest the righteousness of God. Not only is the law—the righteousness of God—preached, and its majesty upheld, by the gospel, but by the gospel the fruits of righteousness are made to appear in the life of the believer.

Some would make "righteousness of God" in this [12] text synonymous with "justification." That is all right, if they do not limit the application of the text to the moment of justification from past transgression. It is the application of the law in Christ to the life of the transgressor that justifies him. Through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, God by His grace counts the past life of the sinner who believes as though it had been in every respect in accord with His law. Rom. 3:25. This is justification. It is the revelation, or manifestation, through the gospel, of the righteousness of God. Rom. 3:21, 22. But the text says that this is "revealed from faith to faith;" and this can mean nothing else but a progressive work of righteousness. The verse teaches that the righteousness of God is revealed

from one degree of faith to a higher degree of faith, and consequently that righteousness must ever be on the increase. This is shown by the quotation which the apostle makes to prove his statement. It must be that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, he argues, because it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

The force of this is found in the fact that the Christian life, which is the result of faith, is progressive. The Christian life is a continual growth. Peter says: "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:17, 18. The only way to keep from falling from that which we have, is to grow. David says of the righteous man that "he shall be like a tree [13] planted by the rivers of water." Ps. 1:3. This means continual growth.

We read of the path of the just, that it "shall be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. 4:18. But "the just shall live by faith;" therefore it must be that their faith increases.

Again: Paul says to the Corinthians, "Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness." 2 Cor. 9:10.

To the Thessalonians he wrote, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men." 1 Thess. 3:12. And again he said, "But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." 1 Thess. 4:10. But faith works by love (Gal. 5:6); that is, love is the outgrowth of true faith; therefore increasing love must be the result of increasing faith.

To the Hebrews the apostle wrote: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." Heb. 6:1. And in the epistle to the Philippians

Paul said: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Phil. 3:12-14. Here is set forth a continual reaching out for some higher attainment. The calling of God in Christ Jesus is a calling to holy or righteous living, for [14] we read, "But like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because as it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15, 16. Revised Version

This righteousness to which we are called, and for higher attainments in which we must constantly press, is obtained only by faith, as Paul expresses his desire to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, "but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. 3:9. Therefore, since righteousness comes only by faith, and it must increase, it follows that faith must also increase. So it was not a vain prayer which the disciples uttered when they said, "Lord, increase our faith." Luke 17:5.

That faith is susceptible of growth is plainly declared by the Scriptures. Paul had hope that when the faith of the Corinthian brethren was increased, he should be helped by them to preach the gospel in the regions beyond them. 2 Cor. 10:15, 16. To the Thessalonians he wrote that he prayed exceedingly night and day, that he might see them, and might perfect that which was lacking in their faith. 1 Thess. 3:10. And still later he wrote, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." 2 Thess. 1:3.

This last text contains the whole of the argument that we have made. Their faith grew, and as a consequence their

charity abounded. Charity, or love, is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. 13:10; 1 John 5:3. It is the manifestation of the righteousness of God, and is a result of true faith, for faith works by love, and the only right- [15] eousness which will be accepted when the Lord comes is that which is by the faith of Christ, "the righteousness which is of God by faith." Such being the teaching of Scripture, there is no reason why we should not understand Rom. 1:17 just as it reads, The righteousness of God is revealed, or manifested, from faith to faith.

One or two notable instances recorded in Scripture will illustrate this. The apostle records that "by faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Heb. 11:31. This case has been a cause of stumbling to some who have not given careful thought to it. It is well known that Rahab lied to the men sent by the king of Jericho to seize the spies (see Josh. 2:2-6), and they imagine that in saving her God placed a premium on lying, and that it is right sometimes to lie. Neither is true. Rahab was saved, not because of her lie, but because of her faith. She, in common with all the people of Jericho, had heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea and how He had led the Israelites; but she alone, of all the inhabitants of Jericho, believed that the hand of the Lord was in the matter, and that He had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites. She had simple faith, but was totally ignorant of God's law. In the code of the heathen morality, lying was accounted a virtue, and she knew nothing better. But her faith made it possible for her to be saved, and brought her into a place where she could learn righteousness. As a natural consequence her faith in God would increase when she learned more of Him. In her case we have a clear instance of the revelation of the righteousness of God from faith to faith.

The same thing is true of Cornelius. He feared God [16] with all his house, and gave much alms, and "prayed to God alway." As a consequence, an angel was sent to

him, directing him to send for Peter, who should tell him what he ought to do.

The sum of the whole thing is that it is faith that brings God near to us. If we first believe that He is, He will reveal Himself to us more fully. If we rejoice in that light and walk in it, our faith will be increased, and that will bring more light. As with Rahab, so with all. God does not grant us a blessing because we are righteous, but in order that we may become righteous. When our faith brings us to Christ, it is that we may learn of Him. To our faith, we add virtue and knowledge. But as faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, it follows that the more we really know—accept—of the Word of God, the greater will be our faith. And so, increasing daily in faith, the just go on from strength to strength, until the dawning of the perfect day ushers them into the immediate presence of God.

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