

THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH

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The Christian's faith in something that cannot be seen is the source of wonder to the unbeliever, and is often the object of ridicule and contempt. The worldling regards the simple faith of the Christian as an evidence of weakness of mind, and with a complacent smile at the thought of the superiority of his own intellect, he declares that he never believes a thing without evidence; he never jumps at conclusions, and doesn't believe anything that he cannot see and understand.

The saying that the man who believes nothing that he cannot understand will have a very short creed, is as true as it is trite. There is not a philosopher living who can understand the one-hundredth part of the simple phenomena that he sees every day. Scientists have found out by observation that certain kinds of soil are specially adapted to certain kinds of produce; but nobody can tell why. They know that under certain conditions we may expect rain or snow; but they cannot produce those conditions, nor tell how they are produced. Indeed, of all the phenomena about which philosophers reason so learnedly, there is

not one of which they can explain the ultimate cause.

As a matter of fact, faith is one of the commonest things. There is no skeptic who does not have faith to a greater or less degree; and in many cases they go even farther, and manifest simple credulity. But the element of faith underlies all business transactions, and all the affairs of life. Two men make an appointment to meet at a certain time and place, to transact certain business; each has to trust the other's word. The merchant has to exercise faith in his employees and his customers. Yea, more, he has to, unconsciously it may be, exercise faith in God; for he will send his ships across the ocean, with confidence that they will return again loaded with merchandise, and yet he must know that their safe return depends on the winds and the waves, which are beyond human control. And even though he never once thinks of the Power that controls the elements, he puts confidence in the officers and crew. He will even trust himself on board of one of the ships, whose captain and crew he never saw, and confidently

expect that he will be brought in safety to the desired haven.

One of these men thinks that it is foolish to trust in a God "whom no man hath seen, neither can see," will go to a little window and lay down a twenty dollar gold piece, and in return will receive from a man whom he never saw before, and whose name he does not know, only a little strip of paper which says that he is entitled to ride to a distant city. He perhaps has never seen that city, and knows of its existence only by the reports of others, yet he steps aboard the cars, gives his bit of paper to another total stranger, and settles down in comfort. He has never seen the engineer, and does not know but that he may be incapable or malicious; yet he is perfectly unconcerned, and confidently expects to be carried safely to the place, the existence of which he knows only by hearsay. More than this, he holds in his hand a piece of paper prepared by some men whom he never saw, which states that these strangers, to whose care he has intrusted himself, will land him at his destination at a certain hour; and so

implicitly does this skeptic believe this statement, that he sends word ahead to some other person whom he has never seen, making arrangements to meet him at that specified time.

Still further, his faith is drawn upon in the sending of the message announcing his coming. He steps into a little room, writes a few words on a slip of paper, which he hands to a stranger sitting by a little machine, pays that man half a dollar, and then goes his way believing that in less than half an hour his unknown friend a thousand miles away will be reading the message which he left in the station behind him.

When he reaches the city, his faith is still further manifested. While on the cars he has written a letter to his family, whom he has left at home. As soon as he reaches the city, he spies a little iron box fastened to a post in the street, and straightway he goes and drops his letter into it, and walks off without giving the matter a second thought. He confidently expects that the letter which he has dropped into that box without saying

a word to anybody, will reach his wife within two days. And yet this man thinks that it is extremely foolish to talk to God with the expectation that any attention will be paid to the words.

But to all this the skeptic will reply that he does not blindly trust in others, but that he has reason to believe that he will be carried safely, that his message will be sent correctly, and that the letter will reach his wife in good season. His faith in these things is based on the following grounds:—

1. Others have been carried in safety, and thousands of letters and telegrams have been correctly sent and promptly delivered. Whenever a letter has been misplaced, it has almost invariably been the fault of the sender.

2. The men to whom he intrusts himself and his messages make a business of carrying people and messages; if they should fail to fulfill their agreements, nobody would place any confidence in them, and their business would soon be ruined.

3. He has the assurance of the government of the United States. The railroad and telegraph companies receive their charter from the government, which thereby becomes in a responsible for their faithfulness. If they do not do as they agree, the government can revoke their charter. His confidence in the letter box was due to the fact that he saw upon it the letters "U.S.M.," and he knew that they mean that the government has promised safely to deliver any letter placed in the box, if it is properly addressed and stamped. He believes that the government will fulfill its promises, because if it does not, it must soon come to an end. It is to the interest of the government to fulfill its promises just as much as it is to the interest of the railroad and telegraph companies to fulfill theirs. And all these things form a solid ground for his faith.

Well, the Christian has a thousand-fold more ground for his faith in the promises of God. Faith is not blind credulity. Says the apostle, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [ground, or confidence] of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1. This is an inspired definition, and therefore we may conclude that the Lord does not expect us to exercise faith except on evidence. Now it can readily be shown that the Christian has a great deal more reason for exercising faith in God than the skeptic has for his confidence in the railroad and telegraph companies or in the government.

1. Others have trusted the promises of God, and have found them to be sure. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains a long list of those who have verified the promises of God; who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, our of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again." And this is not confined to the days of old. Anyone who wishes, can find abundance of testimony to the fact that God is "a very present help in trouble." Thousands can testify of prayers answered in so marked a manner as to leave no

more doubt that God answers prayers than the United States Government carries the mails that are entrusted to it.

2. The God whom we trust makes a business of answering prayers, and of protecting and caring for his subjects. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Micah 7:18. "For I know the thoughts that i think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Jeremiah 29:11. If he should break one of his promises, men would cease to believe him. This was the ground of David's confidence. Said he "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" Psalm 79:9, 10.

3. The existence of God's government depends on the fulfillment of his promises. The Christian has the assurance of the government of the universe that every lawful request that he makes will be granted. Government is especially for the

protection of the weak. Suppose now that God should fail to fulfill one of his promises to the very weakest and most insignificant person in the world; that single failure would destroy the entire government of God. The whole universe would at once be thrown into confusion. If God should break one of his promises, no one in the universe could ever have any confidence in them, and his rule would be at an end; for trust in the ruling power is the only sure ground of obedience. Nihilists of Russia do not obey the czar, because they do not trust him. Any government that, through failure to meet its obligations, loses the respect of its subjects, is in an unstable condition. Therefore the humble Christian depends on the word of God, knowing that God has more at stake than he has. If such a thing were possible as that God should break his word, the Christian would lose only his life, but God would lose his character, the stability of his government, and the control of the universe.

Moreover, those who put their trust in human government, or in any institution of men, are liable to be disappointed.

With the best of intentions, mistakes will be made, because men are but fallible. But to the Christian the firm assurance is given: "There is none like unto the God of Jeshrun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deuteronomy 33:26, 27. His power is shown in creation. The things that he has made attest his eternal power and Godhead. The more powerful the government, the greater the confidence in it. Then what more reasonable than that we should have implicit confidence in the God whom nature and revelation combined, declare to be omnipotent, eternal, and unchangeable?

If I should express to an infidel my doubts as to the integrity of one of his friends, he would say: "That's because you don't know him; just try him, and you will find him as true as steel." This would be a fair reply; and so we say to the infidel who doubts the promises of God: "O taste and see that the Lord is good; ... there is no want to them that fear him." Psalm 34:8, 9. What right has anybody

to doubt God, since everybody is testing his power and goodness every moment of his life? In the first chapter of second Corinthians, verses 18-20, we find the following positive statements: "But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Sylvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us."

In this Fact alone can the sinner find any confidence in approaching to God. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever," is the sinner's only hope. It is not to taunt them, nor to glory in disappointing them, that the gracious call is given to men. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1.

Says Jesus, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out" (John 6:37); and Paul says that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come

unto God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25). And the same apostle also says:—

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16.

Again we read: "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." Hebrews 11:6. Faith, then, and boldness are characteristics that the Lord wants those to manifest who come to him. These thoughts were suggested by the reading of an old hymn, the first three stanzas of which are as follows:—

"Come humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve;
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve:
"I'll go to Jesus, though my sins
Like mountains round me close;
I know his courts, I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.
"Prostrate I'll lie before his throne,
And there my guilt confess;
I'll tell him I'm a wretch undone
Without his sovereign grace."

That is good; no better resolve could possibly be made; it is just what God wants every sinner to do. He says:—

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:6, 7.

This is the language of positive assurance. What then shall we say to the sentiment expressed in the fourth stanza of the hymn above referred to? It reads thus:—

"Perhaps he will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there."

Such language might be excusable in one who knew nothing of God; but uttered by one who has known God, or, rather, is known of God, it can be regarded only as libel upon God's word. The sinner is exhorted to resolve to throw himself prostrate before God, to confess his sins, and plead for mercy, and then is "encouraged" with the thought that perhaps God will hear his prayer, and admit his plea. Not in that manner does God encourage those who are sick of sin. Says the beloved disciple, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. He promises that he will "have mercy" upon and "abundantly

pardon" those who turn to him confessing and forsaking their sins.

There is no such thing as "perhaps" with God. His promises to the penitent, and his threats to the impenitent, are equally positive. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:16. To the straying he says: "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:12, 13. Again he says: "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right." Isaiah 45:19.

Christ says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Matthew 11:28, 29. There is no "perhaps" about this.

"God is love;" he has revealed himself to us as a God that "delighteth in mercy." The surety of this is found in the fact that Jesus died for us. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8. And "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Timothy 1:15. Since he came for this express purpose, how can there be any doubt about his receiving those who come humbly to him?

When Queen Esther was implored to go in before Ahasuerus, to beg for the life of her people, she at first refused, because it was death to go before him without being summoned, but finally she yielded, saying: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according

to the law: and if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16.

Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was a heathen king, and an unreasonable despot. In going before him the queen took her life in her hand. But our God has held out his scepter to us; he wants us to come, and entreats us to come. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ezekiel 33:11. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17.

We said that there is no such thing as "perhaps" with God. James says that with him is no "variableness, neither shadow of turning." Then those who come to him, doubtful if they will receive what they ask for, must displease him, because they reflect upon his truthfulness. That God is displeased with the one who doubts, is evident from Hebrews 11:6, and also from the

following words:—

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." James 1:5-7.

The man who thinks that "perhaps" God will hear his prayer, thinks that "perhaps" he will not; such an one cannot ask in faith, nothing wavering, and consequently cannot receive anything. The only way to come is to come boldly. The violent take the kingdom of heaven by force.

One thought more. God is pleased to have us come to him with confidence, because it shows that we believe what he says; and his own glory depends on the fulfillment of his promises. Says Paul: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with

Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-7. That is, God intends to exhibit us throughout eternity, as an evidence of the exceeding riches of his grace; the souls that are saved will be an everlasting trophy of his unchanging goodness; how then can it be imagined that he will not hear the prayer of the contrite soul, with whom he has said that he delights to dwell?

Have you repented of your sins? Do you hate them, and long for a better life? Have you confessed them? Then take the assurance of God's word as evidence that your sins are forgiven, and that you are entitled to peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then you may say with the prophet: "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also

is become my salvation." Isaiah 12:1, 2.