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SERMON 1.

FAITH.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your
 ownelves.

I KNOW not any admonition in the Scriptures which has a stronger claim to our attention, than that which calls upon us, to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.

In discoursing on this subject, it is my intention, First, to speak of the necessity of Faith; Secondly, to point out certain marks or tokens, by which we may judge, whether we are in the Faith or not; and, Thirdly, to mention some of the means of increasing and strengthening Faith.

By Faith, I mean that strong belief of the truths revealed to us in the word of God, which disposes us to perform what is there commanded;—such belief, particularly, of those doctrines which are shortly brought together in the Apostles' Creed.

I. The necessity of faith is self-evident; for there can be no religion at all without faith. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”^a The purpose of religion is, to teach us

^a Heb. xi. 6.

how to please God ; but, " without faith it is impossible to please him."^b It appears that the object which God had in view, when he made a revelation of himself to the world, was the deliverance of men from a state of sin, and consequently of misery and death, and the leading them on to holiness of living and happiness. The attainment of this object, was one great reason why he sent his Son down upon earth : for he came, we are told, to " purify unto himself a peculiar people, " zealous of good works ;"^c he came to teach us that " denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this " present world."^d In order to be thus zealous of good works—in order to live thus soberly, righteously, and godly, the corruption of man's nature must be subdued, its bent or bias to evil must be overcome, some of his strongest passions, and appetites, and desires, must be resisted and denied. To prevail upon him to do this, very powerful motives are necessary ; and such motives, the most powerful and prevailing possible, are supplied by faith. " Faith," says the apostle, " is the substance " of things hoped for, the evidence of things not " seen ;"^e that is, a lively faith " gives such a " reality, certainty, and present being, to things " hoped for and yet to come, as if they were visibly " seen and actually enjoyed."^f Such faith alarms our fears on the one hand, by the threatening of never-ending torments, and invites our hopes on the other, by the promise of eternal happiness : and, by the contemplation of the awful humiliation of the Son of God, and of his dreadful sufferings for our sake, excites a hatred of sin, and enforces obedience and holiness of living by the strongest

^b Heb. xi. 6.^c Titus ii. 14.^d Titus ii. 12.^e Heb. xi. 1.^f Burket.

motives to thankfulness and love. Indeed, so essential is faith to genuine holiness of living, that (as we are taught by the Scriptures, and from them by our Church) no works, however fair they may be in outward appearance, are really good and acceptable to God, unless they proceed from a principle of faith. Conduct or actions, proceeding entirely from worldly views and motives, must not look beyond this world for their recompense. They have their reward, if they have it at all, *here*, and here only. As they have nothing to do with the motives, so they have nothing to do with the promises of religion.

But farther ; the necessity of faith appears most strongly, from the consideration, that faith is the instrument or condition of our justification. As sinners, (and if we say that we are not sinners, we may be sure that we deceive ourselves, and that the truth is not in us ;)—as sinners, I say, we are liable to God's wrath and condemnation. Now, if we at all believe the word of God, we must know, that we have no well-grounded hope of escaping that condemnation, excepting what we derive from the atonement made by the death of his Son. The benefits, however, of that atonement, (in the case of those at least to whom the Gospel is preached,) are extended to those only who believe in it, to those only who have *faith*. Hence it is that justification is by the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures by our Church, attributed to *faith* ; by which word they mean, not a barren speculative assent of the understanding, but a belief which has effect on the heart, by producing holy dispositions and affections ; and on the conduct, by producing good works ;—*faith*, in short, *which worketh by love*, love both to God and man.

Since therefore faith is so necessary ; since without faith there can be no real religion ; since faith

is so essential to good works and holiness of living; since without faith it is impossible to please God, impossible to be justified; the inquiry whether we are in the faith, becomes of the very greatest importance. Allow me then, my friends, to adopt the admonition of the Apostle, and anxiously and earnestly to exhort you to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith." There are, it is possible, in existence some of those fools who say in their hearts, that there is no God, and are even daring enough to avow their mad unbelief with their lips. There are others, who while they profess to believe in God, yet refuse to believe in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. To such men I am not now speaking. You profess and call yourselves Christians; and not only Christians in general, but members of the Church of England. As such, you take part in the Church-service, and join in saying the Apostles' Creed. But allow me to ask; may there not be some among you, who have never paid attention to the several articles of which that Creed consists? who have never considered what they mean by the words which they use? who, having been born in a Christian country, of Christian parents, take it for granted that they are Christians as a matter of course, without considering seriously whether they are Christians in reality, or only in name and profession? Permit me then to ask you, do you really believe what you say you believe? Are you really persuaded of the truth of these leading articles of faith; and does your belief show itself to be real, by the effects which it produces on your hearts and lives? These are certainly very important questions; but important and obvious as they are, I fear that there may be some, whose consciences cannot give them an answer of peace. To what are justly considered as the chief articles in the Creed, I mean to call your attention hereafter:

but try yourselves by any one of the plainest and most acknowledged doctrines of religion; take, for instance, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; do you really believe in these things? are you really persuaded that after death you will come to life again, and exist for ever, either in happiness or in misery? Certainly if you really do believe this, it ought to have an influence upon every part of your conduct. It might well be expected, that the thoughts of a future state would never be long out of your head. The alternative, whether we shall be for ever happy in the presence of God, or whether we shall be for thousands and thousands of years—TO ALL ETERNITY—tormented with the devil and his angels in that sad fire which never shall be quenched, is an alternative so awfully serious, that it should seem impossible to be indifferent about it, impossible not to think of it often, impossible not to live with a constant view to it. But is this the case with us? Are there none who are careless about religion, who appear to be indifferent as to what may become of them in another world? Can we consider such men as really believing?

Suppose, like the martyr Stephen, you saw heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and that you were allowed actually to behold the glory and happiness of that blessed place, would you not wish and strive to be admitted there? Or suppose, on the other hand—dreadful as the supposition is—yet suppose, that you actually saw the miseries of the condemned; that you beheld that horrible place, of which our Lord says,^s the fire never shall be quenched; suppose you saw the wretched guilty tormented in that flame, and witnessed their weeping, and wailing, and

^s Mark ix. 43, &c.

gnashing of teeth! would not the sight prevail upon you to leave your sins, and to try to work out your salvation with fear and trembling; to be *religious* in good earnest? But remember, that "faith is "the evidence of things not seen," and ought to have the *same* effect upon us. A man who *really* believes in heaven and hell, will naturally wish and try—try in good earnest—to obtain the one, and avoid the other.

All the concerns of common life are carried on by a sort of faith. Why does the merchant leave the wife of his bosom, and the endearments of his children, and the comforts of his home, and encounter hardships and danger in distant lands? Because he *believes* that his adventure will be for his advantage, and will increase his wealth and the means of future enjoyment. Why does the farmer rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, and spend large sums of money in tilling and preparing the ground? Because he *believes* that a harvest will come, which will repay all that he has laid out with increase. Why does the labourer bear the burden and heat of the day, and spend his strength in the cultivation of another man's field? Because he *believes* that at the week's end he shall receive his wages. If *we really believe* in a future state, ought not our belief to have a like effect upon us? If *we really believe* in the kingdom of heaven, shall we not regard it as a pearl of great price, which well deserves that we should, if it is necessary, part with every thing in order to obtain it?^b If *we really believe* that he, who in good earnest worketh the work of God, who tries zealously, in reliance on God's grace, to lead a holy life, shall gather fruit unto life eternal; will not such belief induce us to labour as steadily and

^b Matt. xiii. 46.

earnestly *at least* as those who work for earthly wages? If instead of regarding the care of the soul as the one thing needful, we attend to it but little, or not at all; if, instead of seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the first place,ⁱ we seek the good things of this world, or the gratification of our own lusts, or appetites, or fancies, before and more than the kingdom of heaven; surely we show that our profession of faith is a mere pretence, or that, at the best, our faith is miserably weak.

Perhaps this part of the subject may be placed in a stronger point of view, if we are somewhat more particular, and shortly reflect upon some of the peculiar properties or offices of faith. One of its properties is, that it enables us to overcome the world; "this is the victory that overcometh the "world, even our faith."^k Now consider seriously, have you, my friends, overcome the world, or does the world overcome you? You renounced the pomps and vanity of the world at your baptism. If, notwithstanding this renunciation, you so far attend to these pomps and vanities as to neglect any of the duties of religion; or if you are so far careful and troubled about the business of the world, or the work of your calling, as to neglect the care of your souls, you are wanting in faith. So again you show a cowardly want of faith, if the fear of being laughed at by the world, the fear of being called righteous overmuch deters you from what you know to be your duty. Or do you say, that you wish to be religious, but that the temptations which you meet with are too strong for you to resist? Recollect, that if you take "the shield "of faith," you will be able with it—"to quench "all the fiery darts of the wicked," to overcome

ⁱ Matt. vi. 33.

^k 1 John v. 4.

all the temptations of the devil;¹ and "that all things are possible to him that believeth."

Again, true faith worketh by love.^m If you are destitute of love to God, if you are wanting in love and good will to man, if you nourish in your bosoms any feelings of envy, hatred, or malice, your faith is imperfect and weak.

In short, as I remarked near the beginning of this discourse, a good life, general holiness of living, is the proper offspring of real faith. St. Peter bids us to add to our faith, virtue. St. Paul charges them that have believed to be careful to maintain good works.ⁿ St. James exhorts us to show our faith by our works,^o and assures us that "faith without works is dead."^p If we are devoid of virtue, if we are *not* careful to maintain good works, to lead a good life, we may be sure, either that we have no real faith, or that our faith, if it exist at all, is weak and nigh unto death.

Take heed, my brethren, I cannot too earnestly exhort and beseech you, to "take heed,—lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."^q If, upon examining "yourselves whether ye be in the faith," you find reason to fear that you are not, or that, at least, your faith is sadly weak and defective, lose not a moment, I beg you, in seeking to obtain that, which is so essential to your salvation. Endeavour, in reliance upon God's help, to remove or subdue whatever within you is likely to prevent the growth of faith. Unbelief is generally the fault of the heart, rather than of the head. Men often do not believe, because they *will not*. "Ye will not come unto me," said our Saviour, "that ye might have life;"^r men sometimes love darkness rather than

¹ Ephes. vi. 16. ^m Gal. v. 6. ⁿ Tit. iii. 8. ^o James ii. 18.
^p James ii. 20. ^q Heb. iii. 12. ^r John v. 40.

light, because their deeds are evil; "for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."^s Men sometimes refuse to believe, or, at least, to pay attention to the main doctrines of religion, because they know, that those doctrines reprove their present course of life, and would make them uneasy if they continued to give way to their lusts and appetites. In short, they are against religion, because religion is against them.

Above all, strive to root out from your heart all pride and vanity. Pride is the greatest hindrance possible to faith. One of the characteristics of pride is, that it exalts itself against God, and prevents men from submitting to the humbling doctrines of the Gospel. Vanity, and an excessive love of the praise of men, has a like tendency. "How can ye believe," says our Lord, "which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"^t

Having, by divine aid, removed these and other obstacles to the growth of faith, you must make constant use of the appointed means for its cultivation and increase. One of the chief of these is attention to the holy Scriptures. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."^u The Scriptures contain all that we are of necessity required to believe. Be diligent therefore in searching the Scriptures, in attending to the word of God, whether read or preached, and make it the guide and rule both of your faith and practice.

Partaking of the Lord's Supper is another efficacious mean of increasing and strengthening faith, to which we ought constantly to have recourse.

Faith is the gift of God, and one of the distinguishing graces of the Holy Spirit. From him we

^s John iii. 19, 20.

^t John v. 44.

^u Rom. x. 17.

should seek it in fervent and persevering prayer; fervent and persevering, as proceeding from a heart which knows that it is undone, if it obtains not what it asks. We should say with the afflicted father in St. Mark, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief:"* or with the Apostles, Lord, "increase our faith."^y

Being thus, by the aid of the Spirit of God, grounded and established in the faith; and showing our faith to be real and active, by the effects which it produces upon our temper and conduct; we shall at length, through the merits and death of Christ, receive "the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls;"^z shall be admitted into that abode of blessedness, where faith shall be terminated in sight, and hope in never-ending enjoyment.

* Mark ix. 24.

^y Luke xvii. 5.^z 1 Pet. i. 9.

SERMON II.

BELIEF IN GOD THE FATHER.

TITUS i. 16.

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.

HAVING discoursed to you upon the necessity of faith in general, and upon some of its properties, some of the marks by which we may be enabled to judge, whether it exists in us in reality or only in pretence; I now wish to direct your attention more particularly to the great article of faith, BELIEF IN GOD; and to the practical effects, which such belief ought to produce on our conduct.

Belief in God is the first principle, the foundation of all religion. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is."^a

Whether the idea of a God is implanted in the mind of man by his Creator; or whether, as is more probable, it has been handed down from the first parents of the human race, and by them communicated to all their descendants—there is hardly any nation upon the face of the earth, which has not some notion of a Supreme Being, to whom prayer and praise are to be addressed. Where the idea has once been entertained, it gains support among all men of thought and reflection, from the

* Heb. xi. 6.