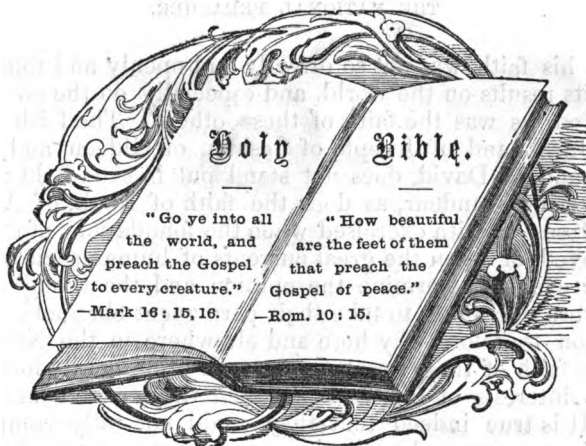




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SERMON XXI.

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FAITH IN THE ATTRIBUTES.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."—HEBREWS 11: 7, 8, 24, 25.

THE faith of Noah, of Abraham and of Moses, is most fully described of all that is recorded in this chapter of faithful men, because they occupy the most conspicuous position in the Hebrew history. These three men stand at the transitions of history—that history which, according to the record of his word, God himself had arranged and ordered. They stood at the test-places. They were the strong pivots around which all human affairs turned. And although Enoch was eminent for holy living, and did great and lasting good—we may believe—in influencing the men of his

engrossment of its own. It will live to help and bless and cheer the hearts which God has put into its trust, nor count a word or action trivial which can increase their joy.

Let no one say that kindness is a small duty or an unworthy theme for our earnest meditation in the house of God. There are duties greater and more urgent for every soul which has not yet repented of sin and believed on the Son of God. There are themes which must oftener occupy us here. But there is no point of Christian duty so simple, there is no grace so easily attainable, there is no power for good so direct and wide, there is no right endeavor which, put forth in earnest, would banish instantly from earth so much of wretchedness, or bring in so much of joy.

SERMON XXIII.

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WHY SHOULD THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST BE AFRAID TO DIE?

"To die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better; nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."—*PHIL. 1: 21, 23, 24.*

I design to address ordinary, average believers, and to show that the feelings of the Apostle Paul about dying are such as common Christians may and ought to entertain, and that such feelings would contribute greatly to their comfort and advancement in piety.

As all the difficulty in the Christian mind on this subject can be traced to unbelief and spiritual ignorance, I will attempt to undermine and remove it by a simple statement of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.

To the poor, lost, guilty and condemned sinner, the Lord Jesus Christ is all and in all. Every blessing for time and eternity is through him, by his mediation and merit, for his sake and glory. We are taught most fully and distinctly that he and he only is the way, the truth, and the life; that in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; that his is the only name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved;

and that he of God is made unto the believing sinner wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. All the agency, all the love, all the grace of God the Father and of God the Holy Spirit are received through, and only through, Jesus Christ. So that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; all power and authority; the administration of all things, in heaven, earth and hell, are lodged in him. And this Lord Jesus, so all-sufficient and almighty, is no distant, dreadful being, difficult of approach, but our own flesh and blood, meek and lowly, gentle and tender-hearted, inviting, in accents most assuring, any and all of the human family to participate in his friendship and grace.

Another great and most blessed truth is, that all the good grace and glory that are in Christ, whether by reason of his own plenitude of love and power, or from the Father, or from the Spirit, are to be had by simple, hearty, childlike faith. Pardon, acceptance and adoption, from God the Father; conviction, renewal, holiness, light and strength, from God the Spirit; peace, joy, penitence, hope, heaven, life everlasting, are through Christ alone, and are to be had on no hard terms—are to be had for the taking. They are all a mere gratuity; they are ours without money and without price. Let any man look unto Jesus, let him trust in Jesus, and the infinite fulness that is in him becomes the heritage and the joy of the poor sinner. There is no other way of pardon, protection, life and glory, than this. Faith is the hand of the needy sinner stretched out to receive the benefaction. Faith is the golden key that unlocks the divine treasure-house of grace and glory.

But to be less general. The Bible teaches us that we are *justified by faith*, not by works; that is, not by anything we are, or by anything we can do. We are utterly disabled, disqualified, to furnish the shadow of a basis on which divine mercy may remit the penalty of our sins and give us a title to eternal life. So that it is utterly preposterous for us to dream of being justified by any fancied or real holiness, or repentance, or obedience of our own—by the performance of any commanded or voluntary works whatsoever. Faith—not the deeds of the law, not frames or feelings, not vigils, fasts, or penances, not sufferings nor sacrifices, but simple, unsophisticated, childlike faith—secures us pardon and eternal life. There is no need of a sinner even *thinking* of anything else. The diversion of the mind to some other method is not only foolish, but sinful, and may be fatal. The law can do nothing. If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law; and the sooner we die unto the law, the better. Sacrifices, sufferings, penances, vigils, *doings* of any and every kind are all rejected as worth-

less by God, and the sooner we cease from them as dependencies the better. The Lord Jesus Christ is set before us as having atoned for sin and brought in a perfect and everlasting righteousness, and is presented to us as a perfect, living, divinely-accepted substitute; and by believing on him, trusting, looking to him, his atonement and righteousness, with all their rich, inestimable benefits and blessings, are made ours—ours absolutely, ours forever; every sin is pardoned; we are accepted, adopted, made one with Christ, saved in him, safe with him from all evil to all eternity. This is all ours; not because we have in any way or degree fitted ourselves for it, but because we have not, and cannot do this, because we are unrighteous, ungodly, unfit in ourselves. It is ours only by the free overflowing grace and love of Jesus Christ received by faith.

Now, just as these great blessings are ours by faith in Christ from God the Father, so light, and truth, and holiness, and strength, are ours from God the Spirit by faith in Christ. We are sanctified by faith, by faith alone—by faith without works, even as we are justified by faith alone. Sanctification is the sole, unassisted, almighty work of the Holy Spirit, in and for the sake of the Son of God, and received by faith in him. Prayer—the reading of God's Word, the communion of the saints, attendance on the ministry of the truth and sacraments of the church, visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, whatever we denominate Christian good works—do not sanctify, do not strengthen, but Christ sanctifies by the ineffable, secret, and most gracious operation of his Holy Spirit. That Spirit dwells in us, as in the temple of old, abiding with us day and night, never leaving nor forsaking us, and working in us his own fruits and graces in his own time and way; and all this by the will and good pleasure of Jesus, the man of Nazareth, the Son of God. We look to him for this mighty presence, and his sanctifying grace is ours according to our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those Christian good works just named, and all others, are either the instruments and channels, the *means*, of the grace of the Holy Spirit, or they are the evidences and fruits of that grace. The means of grace and the God of grace may never be confounded.

Thus clearly, vividly, evidently set forth before us, is the Lord Jesus Christ as the Fountain—the one source of all the blessings that are in the whole Godhead for perishing sinners. He is our all and in all, and thus preëminently is faith in him made the facile, simple instrument of their complete and perpetual possession.

Oh, that we could evermore keep God's method of our salvation in our mind and heart! Oh, that all dependence on means and works and frames and experiences might give way to exclusive dependence on him as the wisdom of God and the power of God

unto our full salvation ! Oh, that we could learn to look away from ourselves, our doings, our sins, our failures, our penitence, our prayers, and look alone unto Jesus in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily !

And this leads me to another observation. While the Lord Jesus Christ is thus a perfect, never-failing, ever-present substitute and Redeemer, we in ourselves, to the end of our lives, are sinful and abominable. A superficial, hasty self-inspection, under the influence of our pride and self-conceit, will lead us to imagine that we are righteous, and to thank God that we are not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and to bless ourselves on account of our observance of moral and Christian precepts and ordinances. We are all Pharisees by nature. But a calmer, profounder view in the light of God will change all this and reveal us to ourselves, unspeakably, incomparably unworthy and sinful, and compel the cry, God be merciful to me a sinner. To the latest day of his life, the real Christian must own that he has a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. To the last, the language of Job—I am vile—I abhor myself; of Isaiah—We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and of Paul: I am carnal, sold under sin: the good that I would I do not. I am less than the least of all saints, the chief of sinners—will express the deep and sad experience of sin in the heart and life of the believer in Christ. There is nothing in the feelings, frames, exercises and works of the Christian in which he can find any deep repose, any living satisfaction whatsoever. He casts his own righteousness aside; he does not wish to be seen by God in it. Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith. I will go in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. His *growth* in grace; his progressive transformation into Christ's image; his becoming more and more meet for heaven, are facts—are realities verified by God himself in his word; but they are matters rather of faith than of sight; to a great extent they are invisible, undiscoverable by himself. There is no record of a Bible saint whose conviction of personal goodness was the ground of assurance in his advancing years. On the contrary, these two things are given us as the signs of the sanctifying power of the Spirit in the Christian: 1st, A keener, deeper, more vivid sense of personal vileness and sinfulness; and 2d, A keener, deeper, more vivid sense of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ as a Saviour for him. Without diminishing the value of other evidences (and they have their value and their place), I think I may say that the most delightful, the most assuring, the most solid evidence of true grace is a growing disposition more simply and more fully to

believe in and be satisfied with the Lord Jesus Christ. The danger of looking much to other evidences is, that the Christian will grow in self-righteousness in proportion as he thinks he is growing in goodness, while this evidence will help him to rejoice in Christ's righteousness and disgust him more and more with his own.

My dear Christian friends, true peace—the peace of God in the soul—and joy, joy in the Holy Ghost—real Gospel comfort and assurance, are not found in a sense of freedom from actual sin, nor in a conviction of freedom from the power and pollution of indwelling sin; but, on the contrary, they cannot exist but under a sense, a deep and painful sense, of the existence and power and defilement of the accursed thing. Any assuring consolations that spring from supposed or real religious attainments, from a feeling of personal goodness, are, for the most part, delusive and unscriptural. It belongs to the very nature of the Gospel that its richest blessings are given to those who feel themselves to be sinful, unworthy, hell-deserving. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners; to heal the morally leprous, to bless the weary, heavy-laden, broken-hearted. God justifies and sanctifies the ungodly, the guilty. The work of grace implies the presence and power of sinful dispositions and sinful acts. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And if any man sin—and there is not a just man on the earth that doeth good and sinneth not—he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. God has joined these twain together in the Christian, and as long as he is in the flesh he cannot put them asunder. There must be a deep sense of personal sin, in order to a high joy in forgiving and sanctifying mercy. The former is the foundation, the necessary groundwork of the latter. When David bewailed himself and said: “My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed,” then it was that he had a profound conviction and a precious persuasion that God was his God. “I trusted in thee, O Lord. I said, Thou art my God. Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” As sin will, so sorrow for it must, continue as long as we are in the flesh. Continually must we weep in secret places over our guilt and shame and wickedness of heart. The Christian can have little comfort and joy in Christ who does not experience godly sorrow, mourning, humiliation, contrition of soul for sin. Alas for us, if our religion is such as to deliver us from the tears and lamentations of broken hearts. God forbid that we should ever imagine that a sinful heart, the source of the profoundest sorrow ever experienced on the earth, is not in us; for grief, anguish, shame on account of sin, is the necessary con-

dition of the sweetest, richest sense of the Redeemer's grace and love: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Blessedness itself is tied to a broken, mourning heart. It is when we mourn for him whom we have pierced as one mourneth for his only son, and are in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born, that God says: "I will pour upon him the spirit of grace and of supplications."

John Owen—and I have never known a more skilful spiritual physician than he—says: "As in all worldly joys there is a secret wound, so in all godly sorrow and mourning, considered in itself, there is a secret joy and refreshment; hence it doth not wither and dry up, but rather enlarge, open, and sweeten the heart. I am persuaded that generally they mourn most who have most assurance. And all true gospel mourners will be found to have the root of assurance so grafted in them, that in its proper season—a time of trouble—it will undoubtedly flourish."

I have said enough now to enable you to understand more satisfactorily the experience of the Apostle Paul to which I have referred; for the difference between the weakest and the strongest Christian is neither *what*, nor so great as we generally suppose. Were Paul with us, there can be no doubt that he would in many respects express himself concerning his religious condition very much as we do concerning ours. He would tell us of his doubts and fears and temptations; of his struggles, failures, broken resolutions, wandering thoughts, and wayward affections. He would speak in strongest language of the power of inbred, indwelling sin; of his mixed motives; of his vile ingratitude. He would tell us that the spirit in him lusted against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit; that he was carnal, sold under sin; that the good he would he did not; that he was anxious and troubled about his spiritual state, lest after having preached to others he himself should be cast away; that he was less than the least of all saints. His daily moan would be: "Oh, wretched man that I am;" and, notwithstanding all this, felt doubtless far more deeply than we have ever felt it, he would say: "For me to die is gain; I am in a strait betwixt two. Thanks be to God who giveth me the victory *through* the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a great mistake to suppose that Paul was conscious of a degree of holiness and perfection of which we are not, and that he derived comfort from a view of his goodness. On the contrary, there can be but little doubt that he was far more conscious of unholiness and imperfection than we are; and that he rated his attainments far below the

estimate we often put upon ours. His righteousnesses were all as filthy rags; he repudiated the idea of any dependence on them. He scouted the thought of their being of any value in themselves; "not having mine own righteousness which is of the law." He looked upon his good works as unworthy of his regard. He counted not himself to have attained. He forgot the things that were behind, and kept his eye on the prize in Christ. The solid ground of his hope and of his assurance was the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was everything to the apostle; and this is precisely what he is to us. The language of a poor sailor exactly describes the common state of himself, of the apostle, and of all Christians: "I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all, and Jesus Christ is my all in all." Paul put his trust in Christ with as much simplicity and sincerity of heart as he could, and we do not find him in a single instance distressing himself with the question whether he truly believed—ordinarily a very difficult, a very needless, a very useless question. As the beggar who stretches out his hand to receive the gift of his benefactor thinks but little of his hand by which he receives the gift, and everything of the boon he takes, so Paul concerned himself very little about the faith by which he received Christ; his whole soul was on and in the Christ whom he received. Christ was a complete Saviour, and he was complete in Christ, however imperfect and unworthy he might be in himself. No change in the fulness of Christ could be made by time. Justification, sanctification, strength, illumination, guidance, protection, safety, complete salvation, were all in Christ for him. A believer is perfectly saved the moment he believes in Christ. *All* his sins are forgiven; he is accepted and adopted by God the Father. The Holy Ghost takes up his abode in him; angels guard him; a mansion in heaven is prepared for him; nothing is wanting; and waiting twenty or fifty years will make no change for the better in these respects. So far as death is concerned, at any moment it is gain unspeakable and full of glory.

Multitudes shrink from dying, because they suppose that by living they can have time to prepare to die; that they will be better prepared in the future than they are now. This is a vain and self-righteous thought. No one—live he as long as did Methusaleh—can fit himself to stand before God in judgment. Preparation for eternity is not a work of time; it is not the result of human efforts; it is not a process of conduct; it is not a matter of progress. The believer in Jesus, by the very act of believing, is instantly, perfectly prepared; for not himself, but Christ, is his Saviour, and he is complete in Christ the moment he believes.

A Christian may wish to live, if not to prepare to die by living, yet to assure himself that he is prepared. And what does this amount to? The true scriptural confidence of salvation is not

what men ordinarily deem it to be. The only reliable assurance any one can have arises, not from a satisfactory survey of his own evidences; not from a clear intellectual apprehension of his own attainments in piety, grace, and goodness; not from a sense of diminished sin and corruption; not from a weariness of the world and worldly things; but only from a survey of the infinite fullness of Jesus Christ by the aid and witness of the Holy Spirit, giving the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of his understanding being thereby enlightened, that so he may know what is the hope of his calling. He who looks unto Jesus as his own Saviour, and trusts in him alone, has all the assurance he needs. This sweet and precious Gospel grace is experienced only by those in whom a sense of utter unworthiness, a conviction of profound guilt, a conflict with indwelling sin, often with bitter temptation, are manifested. Any other assurance is presumption. Paul's confidence consisted not so much in knowing his own good estate before God, as in knowing Christ. He was careful to know, not how holy and unblamable his own life was, but how holy and glorious the life and death of Christ were. He knew, not himself, but him whom he believed, and was persuaded that he was able to keep what he had committed to him, against that day.

Oh, my dear hearers, believe—really believe—that Jesus Christ loves you and gave himself for you, and you will be persuaded that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.