

Faith

NO

Fancy



JAMES DURHAM (1622-1658)

FAITH NO FANCY

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FAITH NO FANCY

THE great errand of the Gospel is to propose to people Jesus Christ as the object and ground of faith, and to represent Him as the only One to be rested on for that very end.

To the acting and exercise of faith two things are necessary: the one is objective, when the Object is proposed in the preaching of the Gospel; the second is subjective when there is an inward, spiritual, and powerful quickening and framing of the heart to lay hold on the Object of faith.

Though it is true that not all to whom the Object is proposed, are quickened, yet to all to whom the Gospel comes, Christ is proposed to be believed on by them, so that when the Gospel is preached we may say, as Christ said to His hearers, “The kingdom of God is come near unto you” (Luk 10:9).

It may be objected: how can this Gospel come to all alike, seeing so many do not get the saving fruit of it—it cannot be that those that never get good of the Gospel have it as near to them as these that are saved? I answer: Not to speak of God’s purpose, or what He intends to make of it, nor of the power and fruit that accompanies it to some and not to all; it is certain that the Gospel objectively reveals the same glad tidings to all, with the same command and encouragement, and certification in threatenings as well as promises. In these respects Christ is brought alike near to all, and when God comes to reckon, He will let sinners know in that day that the Gospel came to their door and was refused. Yea, it comes, and where it comes it will take hold of some to pluck them out of the snare, and be ground of faith to them; and to others it will be a ground of challenge and so the savor of death unto death. For though it takes not effect as to its promises in ALL, nor in its threatenings in ALL, yet as to either death or life it will take effect in everyone—so as if life be refused, death comes in the room of it.

For the clearing of our subject we shall speak a word to these two things: 1. to the ordinary distinctions of faith, 2. to some difference between this saving faith and false or counterfeit faith; or to these acts of true faith, more generally taken, which yet are not saving.

I. The Ordinary Distinctions of Faith

When we speak of faith, we shall draw it to these four kinds ordinarily spoken of, and shall not alter nor add to the common distinctions of faith, though more may be given.

A. *Historical faith*

The first is *historical faith*, which may be called true, being that whereby we assent to the truth of a thing because of the supposed fidelity of the one who tells it; as when an author writes a history, we give it credit upon report that he who wrote it was an honest

man. So historical faith is, when people, hearing the Word preached or read, assent to the truth of it all, and do not question but that Christ came into the world, that He was God and man in one Person, that He died and rose the third day, and ascended to heaven, that they that believe on Him shall be saved, etc. And taking the Word to be God's Word, they may give to it a higher assent than they give to any man's word, because God is worthy, infinitely worthy of more credit than any man, yea than all men, and angels too. There may be, I say, a higher or greater assent in this historical faith of divine truths than there is in believing of any human history, which may be the reason why many overvalue historical faith—and yet it is but of the same kind, and a thing which many reprobates have. See this in John 2, at the close, where it is said, "Many believed on him when they saw the miracles which he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them." They were brought to believe from the signs which they saw that He was more than a mere man, and that it was the Word of God which He spoke, and yet it was but a historical faith. Yea, this faith may be and is in devils, who are said to believe and tremble. There are many who, if they believe Christ to be God and man, and the Word to be true, think it enough. Yet James, having to deal with such, tells them that the devil believes as much as that, and more thoroughly than many who have this historical faith. Satan knows God to be true and One that cannot lie, and he finds it so to his loss; he knows that such as believe cannot perish, for he cannot get one of them to hell; he knows that there is a time set when Christ will come to judge the world, and therefore he says often to Him, "Torment me not before the time." And as the devil has this faith, so there are many in hell that have [it] too. The rich glutton had it, therefore he bids go tell his brethren, that they come not to that place of torment; and it is told him, "They have Moses and the prophets," which implies that he then felt the truth of many things he would not believe before. This I speak, that you may know that this historical faith is the first step of faith, but *it may be in hell*, and so in many in whom saving faith is not.

It is really a wonder that people who are called Christians should own this to be saving faith, and think they are well advanced when they are only come the devil's length in believing; yea, there are many that never came this length, else they would tremble more.

B. Faith of miracles

The second sort of faith is the *faith of miracles*, which is often spoken of in the New Testament, as when the Lord says. "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye should say to this mountain, be thou removed and cast into the sea, and it should be done" (Luk 17:6). There was an *active* faith to work miracles, and a *passive* faith to receive the particular effect that the miracle did produce; some had the faith of miracles to heal, others to be healed. This is an extraordinary thing, and people may go to heaven without it, and go to hell with it—though they cannot go to heaven without historical faith. Hence it is said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works," to whom He will say, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity!" (Mat 7:22-23). And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, "If I had all faith, and could remove mountains, if I want chari-

ty, it availeth me nothing.” This faith of miracles alone avails not to salvation, because it acts not on Christ held forth in the promises as a Savior to save from sin, but it acts on Christ as having power and ability to produce such an effect, which may be where there is no quitting of a man’s own righteousness—and if there be not grace in the person who has the faith of miracles, it is an occasion of pride. We call you then to historical faith as necessary though not sufficient, but not to this faith of miracles, it being neither necessary nor sufficient.

C. Temporary faith

The third sort of faith is *temporary faith*, spoken of in Matthew 13:18-22, and set forth under the parable of seed sown on stony ground, which soon springs up, but withers. So some hearers of the Gospel receive the Word with joy and are affected with it, but endure not. The difference between this and historical faith is this: historical faith, as such, resides in the judgment and reaches not the affections; at best it reaches *not* the affection of joy, for though the devils tremble, yet they are never glad. Temporary faith reaches the affections and will make a man to tremble at the threatenings (as Felix did) or to delight himself in the promises of the Gospel, and to snatch at them, as it were, from the apprehension of the sweet taste and relish he finds in them. It is even here as when it is told a healthy man that a physician is come to town: he is neither glad nor sad at it; but tell it to a sick man, and he is pleased from the apprehended possibility of a cure; yet this apprehended possibility of a cure never sends him to the physician nor puts him to apply the cure.

D. Saving faith

The fourth sort is *saving faith*, which goes beyond all the rest, and brings the sick man to the physician *and* to make use of the cure. There may be some measure of true saving faith where there is not much temporary faith, or moving of the affections; and there may be a considerable measure of temporary faith where there is no saving faith at all—a fallen star may seem to shine more than a fixed one that is over-clouded, yet that fallen star has no solid light.

Know then that faith is called for, but take not every sort of faith for saving faith. It would make tender hearts bleed to see so many mistaken in the matter of their faith. There are some who say they had faith all their days—that they were convinced of the lamentable deceit and delusion they are under! Learn to distinguish between *Faith* and *Fancy*, between true saving faith and historical, temporary faith. Though historical and temporary faith are not delusions, yet in so far as you rest on the same and mistake them for saving faith, you are deluded—for saving faith puts you out of yourselves to rest on Jesus Christ. It brings the soul from the covenant of works¹ to a new holding of life by Christ and His righteousness.

¹ **covenant of works** – the covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man’s obligation to obey God, with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17).

1. What is it to believe the Gospel savingly?

We shall not insist at large on the doctrine of faith, but only, in a plain way, glance at what is required of the hearers of the Gospel, viz.,² believing in Christ savingly.

When we speak of believing here, we presuppose these things that are necessary for clearing the Object of faith and capacitating us to believe, though they be not saving faith, as namely that the Object of faith be held out to people in the preaching of the Gospel; that it be told them that there is a way for a sinner's justification through Christ Jesus, and that sinners may be accepted before God on His account and through Him. There must also be an understanding of the Mediator's fullness, the covenant's freeness, and the efficacy of faith to receive Christ as theirs. It is necessary that there be some acquaintance with our own condition, as that we are naturally under sin, that we are lost and under the curse, sick and utterly unable to get ourselves recovered by anything that we can do of ourselves, and that we are undone if we do not get a Savior.

Now when we have gone all this length, saving faith is that which the Gospel calls for, namely the heart's acting according to the sound light and conviction it has on Jesus Christ—as held forth in the promise for obtaining life and salvation through Him. When the soul is lying still under its conviction, then the work of the Spirit prevails with the soul and brings it to embrace and lay hold on Him, not only as One able to save sinners, but to save itself in particular.

When we speak of believing, we would premise this, that saving faith may be considered in its different acts for its different needs. Though the covenant be one, yet the acts of faith are many, because we have to do with the pardon of sin, with sanctification, vivification,³ mortification, peace. etc. Now the faith that we would insist on is the faith that rests on Christ for the pardon of sin, on which all the rest of the acts of faith depend. In other words, the faith we speak of is the faith whereby a sinner receives Christ, the faith whereby he is united to Christ, the faith which puts a sinner off the ground he stood on, viz. the covenant of works, to a new holding of life by Christ and His righteousness.

2. What the act of believing is not

To prevent mistakes we shall speak a little to what we conceive this act of saving faith is *not*.

It is *not* the knowing that Christ is God and man; that He was born, was crucified, dead and buried, and rose again. Speculative knowledge⁴ is needful, but it will not be taken for saving faith.

It is *not* a touch of warmness of the affections in a natural way. If it rises from dispensations of Providence or from temporary things, it is not so much as temporary faith; if it rises from the promises of the Word, and there be no more, it is but temporary faith.

² **viz.** – from the Latin *videlicet*, that is to say; namely.

³ **vivification** – having spiritual life bestowed upon one.

⁴ **speculative knowledge** – mere though profound contemplation of possibilities.

It is *not* convictions, which many take for faith. They take for granted that if they be convinced of sin, they believe; they will say, “Whom should we believe on but Christ?” and yet, they never follow the conviction to put in practice what they are convinced of.

It is *not* simply a resolution to believe, as others take saving faith to be, who being convinced that their own righteousness will not do their turn, resolve to believe on Christ for righteousness. But a bare resolution to believe is not faith; so many think that they have the promise beside them, and they resolve to make use of it when it becomes necessary, but do not presently do it, so that the ship sinks down and they perish, while the promise abides and swims above.

It is *not* prayer. People very often have these two miserable mistakes about prayer: either they put it in the room of Christ, or in the place of faith, not considering that these are different things. Faith exercises itself on Christ as Mediator,⁵ and prayer takes Him as God, the true Object of divine worship—yet if it be not founded on Christ as Mediator, it is not heard. There are many that think that their prayers serve for all, whereas faith not only respects Christ as God, but also His merits and offices as Mediator.

It is *not* a believing this Word of God to be true. It is here as when Abraham’s servant was sent to Rebekah. She and her friends believed all the report that the servant made of his master and of his son to be true; and then it was given to her option whether she would go with the man or no; and she consented to go and actually went. Many when they hear there is a possibility of life to be had in Christ, and much more, when they hear it is to be had on good, easy, and free terms, it will make them smile; but when it comes to that “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, forsake thy father’s house” (Psa 45-10), it halts there, and they hold back and hesitate to close the bargain.

3. What is saving faith?

What is saving faith? What is it to believe in Christ?

To them that desire further clearness or confirmation in this business of concern, we shall speak a little; yet you must know that it is such a thing as is impossible to be made clear to a proud-humored or un-humbled sinner; it is the poor, humbled soul that will understand it; and to such a soul half a word will be enough.

All the Scripture expressions and similitudes that hold forth saving faith in its nature and exercise imply these three things:

- a great hazard and danger that the hearers of the Gospel are in;
- a fullness and sufficiency in Christ Jesus held forth to them as the Object of their faith, as One that can deliver out of that danger;
- an act wherein mainly the exercise of faith is held forth; it is the act of the soul under that danger and distress, betaking itself to Christ’s fullness for help; it is a fleeing from the curse of the Law to Him, as to the city of refuge, a real passing from death in ourselves to life in Him (Gal 3:13; Num 35:25; Joh 5:24).

⁵ **Mediator** – a go-between; one who intervenes between two hostile parties for the purpose of restoring them to a relationship of harmony and unity.

Every name that Scripture gives saving faith, as *fleeing, coming, laying hold, apprehending*, etc., sets out a man betaking himself to Christ's fullness for the removing of the hazard he is in.

II. Fancy: Faith that Does Not Save

Many people think *faith to be a fancy*—a humor,⁶ a guess,⁷ that they think they may have, and never know how they got it; but, it is a real thing, a coming from our own righteousness to His; from a covenant of works to rest on Christ and His righteousness, held forth in the covenant of grace.⁸ This is somewhat explained in Romans 7, where two husbands are spoken of. A woman cannot marry another man till her first husband be dead; so till a sinner be dead to the Law, he cannot marry Christ—there must be a divorcing from the Law and the covenant of works before you can close with Christ.

Many think saving faith to be a *common and easy thing*; however, look at the scarceness and difficulty of it. I shall show you what mainly you should avoid, as that at which people more ordinarily stumble.

A. Errors to watch for in the exercise of faith

The mistakes and deceits in men about the exercise of faith are many; so many that they are more than can well⁹ or easily be reckoned up. We shall nevertheless hint at a few of them, for so long as people continue in the same snares, they must still be pointed out, and endeavors still used to undeceive and deliver them out of them. Therefore:

1. Avoid resting on merely doctrinal, or historical, faith

Beware of resting on a doctrinal faith, which before I called historical. We know it is hard to convince some that they want¹⁰ faith; yet we would have you to consider that it is not every kind of faith, but saving faith, that will do your business. There are many who will not be saved, that take the Word to be the Word of God, and believe what is the meaning of it, because the Word itself says it is so. And the reasons of it are because there is nothing that is not saving but a natural man may have it—a man in the state of nature may have a great persuasion of the truth of the Word of God, and that what it says will come to pass, and yet still continue but a natural man. A second reason is, as much credit may be given to the Word as is given to any other history that is creditably believed. And as it is certain that there may be impressions on the consciences of hearers that this is God's Word, backed with some common work of the Spirit,¹¹ what wonder is it that people believe thus, and drink in this doctrinal faith of the Word, so as they may

⁶ **humor** – one's particular disposition or temperament at the moment; mood.

⁷ **guess** – to conjecture; to form an opinion without certain principles or means of knowledge; to judge at random, either of a present unknown fact, or of a future fact.

⁸ **covenant of grace** – God's gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

⁹ **well** – pour forth.

¹⁰ **want** – lack; need.

¹¹ **common work of the Spirit** – the common grace that God extends to all creatures.

even dare to suffer death for it? And yet in the meantime they may want saving faith. The pangs of a natural conscience in men will assure them of a judgment to come, though they tremble to think of it.

Observe the great and very general mistake of most of the hearers of the Gospel in resting on this doctrinal faith. If you tell them that they have no faith, they will not by any means own that. They believe there is a Savior, and that He is God and man, and that such as believe on Him shall be saved—and on this they rest. It is such as these who think they have believed ever since they had any knowledge, and who know no difference between believing the Word, and believing on Christ held forth in that Word. But as there is a real sorrow that is not the saving grace of repentance unto life, so there is a sort of real faith, that has a real object, and a real being in the judgment, which is yet not a real closing with Christ, and so not saving faith. Suppose a man, pursued by his enemy, should see a strong castle-door standing open, or one in hazard at sea should see dry land, yet if he should stand still while the enemy pursues him, or abide in the sinking vessel, the sight of the open castle-door or of the dry land would not save him. Historical faith is only (as it were) a looking on the Savior, and therefore such as have only this and no more, sink and perish without getting good of Him. We would think it a great step to get many of you to believe as the devil, who believes and trembles (Jam 2:19); the little trembling there shows that there is but little of this historical faith. Yet, as I have often said, this is not all; you may have this, and yet, if you halt there, you will certainly perish if you were never so confident to be saved. The Apostle does well distinguish these, saying, “He that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). There these two are presupposed: first, believing that God is, or has a being; and secondly, believing that His promise is sure and firm, that He is faithful Who has promised and will make good His word; and then, thirdly, on both these follows a coming to Him as a rewarder of diligent seekers of Him. The first two take in historical faith, for to believe that God is, is natural; to believe that God is faithful in His promise, may be in natural man; but to come to Him to get the hazard¹² that the soul is in removed through Jesus Christ, is a thing that few do attain to. This is the first thing we would beware of: not to beware to believe the truth of the Word, but to beware of resting on it as saving faith; it is not enough to look on Christ and to grant that He is, but we must never be satisfied till we can lay the weight of our salvation and peace on Him in His own way.

2. Avoid resting on transient affections

The second thing you should beware of is some common and quickly transient work on the affections that may accompany historical faith, whether the affection of grief or the affection of joy be stirred thereby: both are unsafe to be rested on. It is a serious mistake to take some small work on the affections (which is, at the best, but an effect of historical faith) for a saving work of the Spirit. Though you should tremble as Felix did (Act 24:25), and be under alarming convictions of conscience and fears of your hazard, or though you should be affected with joy, as the temporary believer may be and sometimes

¹² **hazard** – danger; peril; risk.

is, what will that profit you? Or if it be not an effect of historical faith, it is an effect of a challenge of conscience and smiting of the heart, as in Saul, who could say to David, “Thou art more righteous than I, my son David” (1Sa 24:17). Or it is some common work of the Spirit, such as was in Simon Magus, of whom it is said he believed and desired the apostle to pray for him. Now for men to conclude on this ground that they are brought out of nature into a state of grace is to build on a sandy¹³ foundation. The apostle speaks of worldly sorrow as well as of godly sorrow; and as there may be a worldly sorrow, so there may be a carnal joy—a sort of rejoicing in prayer, or at hearing a sermon, or at a sacrament, which is not saving faith. John the Baptist’s hearers rejoiced in his light for a season; they heard his word with joy, yet endured not. There is something like this in temporary faith: some remote expectation of salvation will raise a carnal joy and gladness, but when it comes to this—that a man is called to quit his lusts, or his estate, or in the world to undergo trouble and persecution for the Gospel—by and by he is offended. When the storm blows in his teeth, he turns his back and runs away. We find this often in people that when sick, they have fits of seriousness, and sometimes flashes of sorrow under convictions, and sometimes flashes of joy, that vanish when they come to health again.

When we mention some common work of the Spirit on the affections, we mean among other things some liberty and warmness of spirit in prayer, which, no question, even unrenewed men may find more at one time than another, as when they are in some great hazard or strait, they will be more than ordinarily serious in that duty, and yet this may be but an effect of nature. This proves a great stumbling block and neck-break to many, that they think they are well enough if now and then have utterance in prayer, words beyond what they expected, and upon reflecting find that they have been in earnest, though it was but moral seriousness that moved them in prayer instead of saving faith, so that when they pray with warmness they think they believe. This is another thing we would bid you beware of, that you take not a flash of sense for true faith. Faith is no fancy.

3. Avoid resting on obedience

There is yet a more subtle though no less dangerous mistake that you should beware of, and that is when faith is confounded with obedience, and is looked on in justification as a piece of new obedience, with love, repentance, and other duties of holiness. So some think they believe, because they have some natural awe of God in their minds, with some fear of sin. They perform some duties of religion and walk honestly, as they think according to the rule. But this is to confound the covenant of works with the covenant of grace, and to make the covenant of works a covenant of grace—only with this difference, that though their obedience, their love, their repentance are not perfect but defective, yet wherein they are defective, they think there is worth in their faith to make up that want and to supply that defect. And so by faith they think they will obtain the acceptation of their works of obedience, love, and repentance. They look upon their works as pleasing to God, but because they are not perfect, they will believe or exercise faith to make up

¹³ **sandy** – not firm or solid; as a sandy foundation.

their defects. However, to this the way of grace is quite contrary, which makes the tree first good, and then the fruit. It is warrantable in a believer to draw the evidences of believing from works of holiness, but those found their faith or their hope of heaven on works. The use they make of their faith is to ward off challenges of conscience for the imperfection of their works, and so they make faith procure acceptance of their works, and then expect acceptance of their persons for their works' sake.

4. Avoid resting on feelings of assurance

Beware of that which you ordinarily call a certain assurance, or a sure knowledge of your salvation, and that all the promises are yours, whereby you think yourselves in no hazard: a hope and assurance of heaven that you can give no ground for, nor proof of—only you *think* you are sure of pardon of sin and of coming to heaven, and that you are obliged to maintain that groundless hope. But this is not saving faith, for it is a hope of heaven that can give you no right to Christ and His benefits. There must first be a fleeing to Him and a closing with Him, before you can have any true and well-grounded hope of heaven—but your hope and confidence is: never to question the matter. You are like Laodicea, who thought herself rich and to stand in need of nothing, when she was miserably poor (Rev 3:17); or like those men who, when God was threatening them with judgment, yet would needs presume to think that they leaned on the Lord. I think, among all the persons against whom God has indignation, it is in a special manner against those who have this kind of hope, and to whom God discovers the groundlessness of it, and yet they will still stoutly maintain and stand by their hope. It is to these He speaks in Deuteronomy 29:19, who despise and mock God's threatenings and say, "We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our own hearts, and add drunkenness to thirst." The Lord there pronounces a curse, and to the curse adds an oath, that He will not spare such persons, but will separate them for evil, and cause all the curses of the Law to overtake them. Judge you now what a condition this is for persons to be in: to be believing that all the promises are theirs, and yet, instead of that to be in the meantime liable to all the curses threatened in the Word of God. It is this that we call presumption, and the hope of the hypocrite will perish (Job 8:13). The confidence of such shall be rejected and swept away as a spider's web; it shall be rooted out of His tabernacle and it shall bring him to the king of terrors (Job 18:14).

They think they believe always, and that when they are not troubled nor disquieted they never want faith, but have a great deal of it; which is, however, but a conjecture which cannot support and uphold them when they come to a strait.¹⁴ When they are more secure, they think they believe very well; and when they are more awakened and disquieted, they think they believe less—and their fancied faith quite ebbs on them. When they hear of any exercise of mind or trouble of conscience in others, they wonder that they will not believe, and all their work is to maintain their deep security and strong delusion.

This is then the fourth thing that you should beware of, for it is not saving faith. And yet, how many are there of this sort, who say they shall have peace, and please them-

¹⁴ **strait** – so narrow as to make passage difficult.

selves with their good hopes, say the Word what it will. Oh, be persuaded that this is nothing else but woeful unbelief and presumption, and therefore we must preach to you the terror and the curse of God, though you cry peace to yourselves (Jer 8:11). The Lord complains of such persons, saying by the mouth of his prophet Jeremiah, “They have belied the Lord” (Jer 5:12). He sent His prophets to denounce judgments in the days of Josiah when there was a fair profession of religion and a reformation, yet they would believe and hope that no evil should overtake them.

We therefore exhort you to lay your hand to your heart, and to try narrowly if you have called or accounted any of these to be saving faith, for there are hundreds, nay thousands, that perish under these pretexts, deceiving themselves and deluding others by a faith they were born and brought up with. The only thing they have to prove their faith by is their groundless hope—and this they will stand by, say to them what you will. But be not deceived, for God will discover you. You think a strong presumption is faith, and that by such a faith you can drink in the promises; but God will make you vomit them up, and you shall be declared to be void of faith in the great day. Therefore be more jealous over your faith and seek to have your hold of Christ made sure, which is done when from the belief of your hazard and self-emptiness, and of Christ’s fullness, you flee to Him and close with Him to make up all your wants. I would have you to think that faith is neither an easy, nor an insuperably difficult thing—but that it is easy to go wrong, and difficult to go right, and that, without God’s special and powerful guidance, you cannot believe nor exercise faith, nor walk in the way of believing in Him and dependence on Him—so that you may be helped to make a right use of Christ and to build upon Him, that you may not slip nor stumble and fall on the stumbling stone laid in Zion, on which so many fall every day and break themselves to pieces.

B. Why so little fruit?

If it were not recorded in the infallible Scriptures of truth, we would hardly believe that there could be so much powerful preaching of the most excellent instruments that ever were employed, and yet that there should be so little fruit following on it. Who would believe that Isaiah, so excellent, so sweet, so evangelic a prophet, should have so many sad complaints as he has? That he should be put to bring in the Lord, saying, “All the day long have I stretched out my hands to a rebellious people” (Isa 65:2), and the prophet himself should have cause to say, “Who hath believed our report?” (Isa 53:1). It is, however, a very sad though a very clear truth that there may be much powerful preaching of the Gospel, and yet unbelief general among the hearers of it. This is clearly held forth in the words of the prophet, “Who hath believed our report?” We have called for faith, but it is a rare thing among the multitude of hearers to find *one* that believes savingly. And this was not only in Isaiah’s days, but in Christ’s days and in Paul’s days, who repeated the complaint in the very same words.

Probably you may think that if Isaiah were a preacher *now*, people would be moved by his sermons; that Hosea, who called his hearers to the Most High, would not be compelled to complain now that none at all would exalt Him. Or you may be disposed to think: those were God’s preachers under the Old Testament; under the Gospel, when the

veil is laid by and when Christ Himself and His apostles come to preach the Gospel, it should be otherwise. Yet John the Baptist, who was Christ's harbinger, a burning and a shining light, a staid and fixed man, not a reed shaken with the wind (Mat 11:7) (as many of us are too much), a prophet, yea more than a prophet—yet when he preached, many of his hearers rejected the counsel of God against themselves. John came preaching austere, and they said, "He hath a devil" (Mat 11:18), and if there was any rejoicing in his light, it was but for a season. And Paul, that chosen vessel, how often was he persecuted? He makes in the same words that Isaiah used, the same complaint of his hearers, especially of the Jews, and was constrained to tell them that he and his fellow-preachers be-hooved to quit them and betake themselves to the Gentiles. And how does he complain of the Corinthians and Galatians, and of their being bewitched, and suddenly seduced and drawn away from the truth and the simplicity of the Gospel, by some self-seeking, false ministers, coming with counterfeit glancing¹⁵ among them!

We shall close this with the consideration of our Lord Jesus, who was a none-such preacher, of whom it is said that He spake with power and not as the scribes (Luk 4:36). And when He was opening that sweet text from Isaiah 61, it is said, "They all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth" (Luk 4:22). And the officers that came to take Him said that never man spake as He spoke. Yet His complaint is the same: "How often would I have gathered thy children together...and ye would not!" (Mat 23:37). He came to His own, and His own received Him not (Joh 1:11). Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were lifted up to heaven by the Lord's preaching to them in person, and yet woe after woe is denounced against them, because they believed not, for all His preaching and miracles (Mat 11:21).

It is a wonder, if we look through the history of the Gospel, how many a sweet sermon He made, and with what weight and power He spoke, sometimes with tears, and withal backed His word with miracles that made His hearers acknowledge the finger of God—and yet, how few were brought to believe on Him! So that He makes the very complaint as Isaiah, saying, "Who hath believed our report?" (Joh 12:38).

Is it not a wonder, when He and His apostles preached so much and so long, that the Church was so little a flock, and believers so few in number, even after His ascension? Need we any further proof that the Gospel, where it comes, gets but little welcome? The behavior of many among ourselves is a sad proof of it: we are afraid that many of you do not believe to this day, though there has been amongst you much longing for many years, and powerful preaching of the Gospel, but still live without faith and are perishing.

If this be not enough to clear the complaint, then see how Christ speaks of it in the parable of the sower (Mat 13), where three sorts of ground are mentioned that never bring forth good fruit. There He speaks not only of the time of His own personal ministry, but of all other times. Look to the ordinary and daily effect, or rather consequence, of this preached Gospel, and it will prove the thing. Do not many perish? Do not many

¹⁵ **glancing** – shooting; darting; casting suddenly; flying off obliquely.

crowd thick in the broad way that leads to destruction (Mat 7:13), and but very few fruits of faith appear? Is there not little, lamentably little of a real change in the way and walk of most to be seen? Go through the several ranks of persons that in God's account are unbelievers. Oh, there will be exceedingly few believers in Christ found. First then, consider the grossly profane that are never so much as civilized. Secondly, the ignorant, stupid, and senseless, that never mind their own souls, are never afraid of wrath, nor in the least concerned to make their peace with God. Thirdly, the earthly-minded that think of nothing but the world. Fourthly, those of a civil outward carriage, that have some good works, and, as they think, some good days too, and yet come not near Christ to close with Him. Fifthly, the hypocrites of all sorts, both the presuming hypocrites that will thank God they are better than their neighbors (Luk 18:11), and yet trust not to Christ and free grace through Him, but seek to establish their own righteousness, gross as it is; and the legal hypocrites that never denied their own righteousness, nor submitted to the righteousness of Christ. Lay aside all these, I say, and we leave it to your own consciences to judge how few will be found to have saving faith. Therefore I am persuaded, if there be any truth of God delivered to you, that this is a truth: though the Gospel be preached to many, yet there are but few hearers that do actually believe in Jesus Christ, to the saving of their souls.

I beseech you to let this sink deep into your mind, as the truth of God, for these reasons:

First, because it is a most useful truth, and if it were believed, would make people very watchful over themselves and to tremble for fear, lest they be found among the multitude that believe not, and put them to secure their interest in God, and not to rest on a fashion and form of religion without observing what fruit follows on the Gospel. Among the many evils that undo multitudes we think this is not the least that this truth is never thoroughly fixed in them. They think there are many heathens and Turks without the church—and many gross swearers, drunkards, and other such within it—that will perish, but none others, or at least but very few who, among a professing people, do perish. Neither can they be induced to think it such a hard matter to find one or a very few that are believers in a country; so that if Isaiah were now alive to cry, "Who believes our report," each of them would be ready to answer, I believe.

A second reason is, because for as certain and useful a truth as this is, yet generally it is not believed; people cannot think that so few believe, and that believing is so difficult and rare a thing. I would ask you this question, Was it ever a difficulty to any of you to believe? If not, what is it that makes believing so rare? What should move the prophet thus to complain, "Who hath believed our report?"

1. Evidences that we do not think only few will believe

I shall briefly give you some evidences that many of you do not really believe this truth.

The first is that so few of you tremble at the Word of God. This is given as a property of a suitable hearer of the Gospel to whom the Lord will look (Isa 66:1-2), that he is one who trembles at the Word. But the most part of you that hear the Gospel are like these

pillars on which the house stands who are never so much as once moved by the Word. You either take not faith to be an absolutely necessary thing and that you must perish without it, or you think that the faith that you were born with will do your business. You do not believe that you are by nature under the power of the devil, and led captive by him at his will; and that without holiness and a spiritual, gracious frame and stamp on your heart and way, you shall never see God.

A *second* evidence is that there is so little preparation made to prevent your eternal hazard. It is said of Noah that he, being warned of God, prepared an ark, and this is attributed to his faith (Heb 11:7). It is not possible that you should live so negligently and carelessly, if you believed that the curse of God were pursuing you, and that you will be brought to give an account for that which you have done in the body, and that you will meet God as an enemy. If this were believed, though your hearts were harder than they are, it would make you tremble, and bring you to another kind of thoughts, and to more seriousness.

A *third* evidence is that there is no fruit of faith among many of you, for where it is, it cannot be altogether smothered, but will show itself one way or other. And if you will still assert your faith, I would say to you as James does to those to whom he writes, "Show me your faith by your works" (Jam 2:18). If you say, "God knows"; I answer, you shall find that to be a truth that He knows, and He will make you know that He does so—but alas! That poor shift will not avail you when it comes to the trial. Oh, try your faith by your works: see what mortification of lusts, what repentance from dead works, what growth in knowledge, what shining of holiness in your conversation, is attained to. Many heathens have been as free of vice and more profitable to others than many of you are, and cared as little for the world as many of you do. To live honestly, as you call it, what is that? There are many heathens who have gone beyond you in that. We will not say that moral honesty is nothing, but surely it is not all. All the fruits of mere moral honesty are but sour fruits that will set your teeth on edge. Neither is it your hearing of the Word only, but your believing and doing of it that will profit you.

A *fourth* evidence is the want of that work of the Spirit of God that accompanies faith. Faith is the special work of the Spirit and a gracious gift of God. It is wrought by the exceeding mighty power of God whereby He raised Christ from the dead, and by that same power He works in them that believe. Now did you ever know what this work meant? Did you ever find it to be a difficult work to believe? Did you ever know what it was to have the Spirit of God constraining your heart to believe? I speak not of any extraordinary thing, but certainly faith is not natural, nor does it come from pure nature. Wherever it is, it manifests itself by works, and evidences the power of the Spirit in the working thereof. There are sad evidences of bitter fruits that spring from this root, namely, people's being strangers to the experimental knowledge of the work of faith, as when men know no more difficulty to get Christ and to rest on Christ, than to believe a story of Wallace or of Julius Caesar—when people say that they believed all their days, and believed always ever since they knew good from evil. And though their faith is no true faith, but a fancy, yet they will not quit it; it is impossible for men to get them con-

vinced that they want faith, when men never knew what it is to be without faith. It is one of the great works of the Spirit to convince us of the want of faith. Men, not under the special work of the Spirit, will be easily convinced that Sabbath-breaking, stealing, bearing false witness, etc., are sins; but how many of you have been convinced of the want of faith? We are constrained to say this sad word when we look on Isaiah's complaint, that it is lamentably fulfilled in your eyes, and even in this our congregation. Think not that we wrong such of you who have believed our report; ah, it is few, even very few of you, that receive and believe this Gospel. There may be much powerful preaching of the Gospel, and yet unbelief general among the hearers of it. Do you except yourselves? Perhaps, though you think that the statement is true in the general, you will not; you cannot digest the application, that among so many of you visible professors of faith, there are but few real believers. Therefore we shall follow the conviction a little further by giving you some considerations to make it out that we have but too just ground to make application of the doctrine to you.

Consider of whom it is that the prophet is speaking, and of what times: is it not the times and days of the Gospel? Had not the Spirit (in dictating this text of Scripture, 'who hath believed our report?' an eye on this land? And do not the Lord Jesus and Paul apply it in their days? And why then may not we also in ours? And when the Spirit speaks expressly of the last times that they shall be perilous, and of the falling away of many, should it not give us the greater alarm?

Do not all things agree to us as to them? Is not the Gospel the same? Is our preaching any better than theirs? Nay, had they not much more powerful preaching? And if that preaching, which was most powerful, had not efficacy to work faith in many, what may we expect to do by our preaching? Are not your hearts as deceitful? Are not your corruptions as strong? Are you not as bent to backsliding as they were? What sort of people were they that were unfruitful hearers? Were they not members of the visible church as you are—circumcised under the Old Testament, as you are baptized under the New? Was it not those who had Christ and His apostles preaching to them? Yea, they were not among the more ignorant sort who did not believe, but Scribes and Pharisees, and those not of the profanest sort only, but such as came to church and attended the ordinances, as you do; yea, were such as had gifts, and cast out devils, and preached in Christ's name, as you may see in Mark 6:13 and Matthew 7:22.

2. A warning to those characterized by unbelief

Now when there are so many, and of such rank, who get no good of the Word, and of that multitude a great many that will seek to enter and shall not be able, to whom Christ will say, "Depart, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity" (Mat 7:23), what then can be the reason that many of you do so confidently assert your faith, when there are scarcely any characters of unbelief but you have them? Or, what can be your advantage in keeping yourselves carnally secure, when the strong man in the meantime is in the house? And to shut your eyes, and make your necks stiff, and to resolve, as it were, not only to lie still, but to die in unbelief?

I persuade myself that many of you ere long will be made to wonder that ever you thought yourselves believers, and will be galled when you think upon it that whatever was said to you, you would needs maintain your presumptuous faith. When we bid you suffer the conviction to sink, let none put it from themselves to others, but let every one take it home to himself; although we would not have any of you cast loose what is indeed made fast and well-secured, nor overturn a slender and weak building, though it were, to speak so, but of two stones' height if it be founded on a right foundation, on the Rock; but we speak to you that cannot be brought to suspect yourselves, when we have just reason to do so.

Sure this challenge and charge belongs to some, yea to many, and we would ask: what ground have you to shift it? How can you prove your faith more than others who have none at all? That you *hope* you have faith will not do the business; that is no solid proof. You cannot come to Christ, except you are made *suitably sensible of your distance from Him*, and of that you have never been convinced as yet. Do you think to cast yourselves on Christ sleeping, and you not know how? Certainly when the pins of your tabernacle come to be loosed, you shall find that your fancied faith will not be able to prevent a challenge. You could never endure to think yourselves to be Christ's enemies, or that you wanted faith—but when death comes, conscience will awake, and the challenge will get in upon you whether you will or not.

Many of you think you are wronged when your faith is inquired about or reproved, as if it were an odd and rare thing to be graceless, or to be members of the visible church and yet want faith; and it irritates you to be expostulated with in private for your unbelief. But suffer this word now to take hold of you, I beseech you. If you could once be brought to suspect yourselves, and to think thus within yourselves, "What if I be one of those many that believe not? I fear I be in hazard to be mistaken about my faith," and from that, be urged to see how you will be able to ward off the challenge, and to prove your faith to be sound—we would think you were far advanced.

Oh, if you had the faith of this truth—that among the hearers of the Gospel there are but few that believe—and were brought thereby to examine yourselves! There is no truth on which Christ insists more than on this, that strait is the gate and narrow is the way to heaven, and that but few find it (Mat 7:14), and that there are few that believe and few that are saved. If you did once in earnest look on yourselves as in hazard, and were brought to reflect on matters between God and you, it might be the Lord would follow the conviction. We desire Him to do it, and to Him be praise.

It is a sad matter, and much to be lamented, when the carrying of such good news as is the report of Jesus Christ in the Gospel, becomes unprofitable to them that hear it. Men would think that such glad tidings as make the heavenly host of angels to sing, would be very welcome news to sinners. Though Isaiah brought this news in a very plain, powerful, pleasant, and sweet manner to the people he preached to, and that frequently, yet in the midst of his sweet prophecies he breaks out with this complaint, "Who hath believed our report?"

The prophet's scope is to give warning to the hearers of the Gospel for the time to come of the abounding of unbelief in them that hear it: first, that he may prevent the scandal of unfruitfulness of the Word where it comes; secondly, that he may add a spur of excitement to the hearers of the Gospel to endeavor to make use of it and not to rest upon the means, how powerful and lively soever they be, but to press forward to the end they aim at; and thirdly, that he may put men to the trial, that they may be brought to look in upon themselves, whether they are or are not in this black roll of them that receive not the report. And we think, if anything puts men to be suspicious of themselves and to commune with their own hearts about the state of their soul, this should do it. It should make them put themselves to the trial, and not to take every thing to be saving faith that they fancy to be so.

C. Explanations of unbelief, and a charge

Before we leave this subject it will not be unmeet¹⁶ that we speak a little to these three things:

1. to what may be the cause that there are so few that believe the report;
2. why so many think they believe, and so few suspect their own faith;
3. to the necessity that lies on the hearers of the Gospel to inquire and try themselves concerning their faith.

1. Causes that so few believe

The first thing we assert for a cause of the unfruitfulness of so many hearers of the Gospel is *the want of serious minding the great concernment of the work of our salvation, and that this preached Gospel is the Word of the Lord by which we must be saved*. Want of this consideration fosters security, breeds laziness, and keeps you careless and carnal.

A second cause is that *men think themselves in no hazard*, nor suffer their hazard to affect them, and therefore they seek not after the remedy. You will confess that you are sinners, but *not* the gracelessness of your nature. In your own opinion, you are generally good friends with God already; nearly none of you think that you have hatred to God, and so you carelessly and unconcernedly let the opportunity of making your peace with Him slip by.

A third ground is *the love of money and of the world*, which is the root of all evil (1Ti 6:10). This is given in Matthew 13 as the main *cause* why the Word profits not: it is not oppression, nor stealing, but *entanglement* with and addictedness to the things of this present world; folks allowing themselves too much satisfaction in their riches and pelf,¹⁷ counting themselves as if all were well if they have it, and grieved if they want it; as if there were nothing but that to make happy, being wholly taken up about it and leaving no room for the concerns of their souls, for prayer, and seeking of God, nor for trials to work on them. I am afraid that many more among you who are civil and esteemed virtu-

¹⁶ **unmeet** – not fit; not proper; not worthy or suitable.

¹⁷ **pelf** – money; riches.

ous, shall perish in this pit of worldly-mindedness, than shall perish by drunkenness, gluttony, fornication, or the like. If the Gospel find the love of the world in you, the love of the Father will not be found in you.

A fourth cause, though possibly it be not so frequent, is *a shifting of convictions and self-examination*, a quenching of any begun exercise in the conscience. Some of you, in sickness or under some sad cross, have had convictions, challenges, and frights about your soul's state, but yet you have smothered, extinguished, and put them out again.

A fifth cause (which is as comprehensive as any) is *men's resting* and sitting down before they have any solid ground to rest upon, *taking a counterfeit work for a real one*. Some attain to a sort of outside reformation, and they think on that account they are well enough, and that their peace is made already: they cannot endure to be bid believe or to lay a new foundation, for they think it is laid already.

Sixthly, this wrongs many of you: You are not among the worst sort, and *others esteem well of you*; but it is not the commendation of men, but the commendation of God that you should seek mainly after. This mistake made the foolish virgins so secure: the wise ones (instead of warning them) took them along and retained them in their company. This is the neck-break of many.

A seventh ground (and a poor one) is, folks *sitting down on the means* when they have them, as if when they have got the Gospel they are in no hazard. I make no question but where the Gospel is in any measure powerfully preached, there are many more secure and fearless than if they had it not. It were good to fear while you have the Word, lest you miss the fruit of it. Compare to this purpose Hebrews 3 at the close with Hebrews 4:1, and we will find this commended to us. "So we see," says the apostle, "that they could not enter in because of unbelief. *Let us therefore fear*, lest, a promise being left of our entering into his rest, any of us should come short of it." It is much, yea the first step to faith, to get people suitably afraid of missing the fruit and blessing of the ordinances.

It is very probable somewhat of this is hinted at in Luke 13:26, where some are brought in saying to Christ, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets," who when He thrusts them away from Him at the great day, will in a manner hardly believe that Christ is in earnest when He says to them, "I know you not; depart from me." Does not this import that some will come (as it were) to the very gate of heaven, having no doubt of their faith and interest in God, and of their entry into it, and will therefore in a manner plead with Christ to be let in, and would never once doubt of it nor call it in question, but they were believers and in friendship with Him? Although there will be no such debate or dispute after death or at the day of judgment, yet it says this, that many hearers of the Gospel have drunk in this opinion which goes to death with them, and no preaching will beat them from it: that they are believers, and in good terms with God—till the intimation of the sentence of condemnation does it, and the wrath and curse of God meet them in the face. And Oh, how terrible a disappointment will such meet with in that day!

2. Reasons so few believe

May it not then very reasonably and justly be inquired, what can be the reason that so few question or make any doubt of their faith. I shall give you some reasons of it, which, if you would think upon and suffer to sink down in your hearts, you would not marvel that so many are under this mistake and delusion, and it would put many of you to have quite other thoughts of your own condition than you have. We shall speak to only such reasons as are sinful and culpable on your part.

1. The most part *never seriously think on the matter*, whether they believe or not. If the foolish virgin lights her lamp, and never looks whether there be oil in it, and takes on a fair outward profession of religion, and never looks what is within or how it is lined, to speak so, no wonder she goes up and down with the lamp in her hand, and never knows whether there be oil in her vessel or not, since she never considers, nor puts the matter to proof and trial. In Isaiah's time the people were expostulated with for the making of images (Isa 44:9); that a man should cut down a tree, and with one piece of it he should warm himself, with another piece he should bake his bread, and of a third piece should make a god, and fall down and worship it. And this is given for the ground of it, "They have not known and understood, and none considereth in his heart"; or, as the word is, "seeth to his heart." They consider not that *that* cannot be a God; one would think that natural reason might easily discover this folly. We are persuaded that some of you will think your faith as great a folly, when there shall be as clear evidences to prove the rottenness of your faith and hope, as there were even to common sense, to prove the image made of a piece of tree not to be God; when it shall be found and declared that though you were never convinced of sin, nor of your misery and lost condition, were never humbled nor touched under the lively sense of it, never fled to Jesus Christ in earnest, nor never had the exercise of grace—yet notwithstanding the want of all these, ye would needs keep up a good opinion of your faith and hope. We say, the reason why you entertain this conceit and opinion is because you never sit down seriously and soberly before God to consider the matter, nor do you put yourselves to proof and trial. And do you think that such a faith as that will abide the trial before God that never did abide your own trial? It will doubtless be a dreadful mistake to go off the world with such an opinion of faith, and to have the door shut in your very teeth. Alas! There will be no mending or bettering of your condition after death. The day comes when many of you, if God graciously prevents not, shall curse yourselves that ever you should have been such fools as to have trusted your own hearts, or to have taken up this opinion of your faith without ground. We would therefore seriously recommend to you the putting of your faith more frequently to the trial, and that you would often read and think on that place, 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves." Oh, do not think that a matter of such concernment should be left at a conjecture and utter uncertainty. Who loses when you are so palpably accessory to your own ruin, by not endeavoring to put yourselves to so much as a trial? Do not say here for an excuse, we have no more grace than God gives us. Do not, for the Lord's sake, after all that is said to you, continue deceiving yourselves.

2. A second reason why so few question their faith is, *men's settling themselves on unsound evidences and principles of peace* that will not bear them through before God. I do not say that they have nothing to say in words for themselves, but that all they have to say will be no ground to prove their faith; it will be found at best to be but a lie, as it is said of that man, "A deceived heart hath turned him aside, he feeds on ashes, he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isa 44:20). He may have a seeming reason for his faith, but it is no reason indeed. If many of you were going to die, what reason have you to prove your believing by? Some will say, God has always been good, kind, and gracious to me; I was in many straits and difficulties, and I prayed and had many deliverances. Thus all the ground of your faith is but temporal favors and deliveries, which is even as if Israel should have made their receiving of temporal deliverances and their acknowledging them, and having some sort of faith of them, to be ground enough to prove their receiving of Jesus Christ savingly. There is a doleful proof of the unsoundness of this ground in Psalm 78: "When he slew them, then they sought him and returned and enquired early after God; they remembered that God was their rock and the high God their redeemer." They looked to God's past favors for them when they were in the wilderness and at the Red Sea, and they believed that they could do so still; but "they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongue, for their hearts were not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant" (Isa 66:1-2)—whereupon He destroyed them, and through their unbelief they did not enter into God's rest!

There may be many temporal favors and deliverances, and these acknowledged too, and yet no receiving of Christ for making our peace with God, for removing the quarrel between Him and us, and for making us cease from sin. Consider if it be a good ground to plead with God upon, to say to Him: Lord, thou must bring me to heaven, because I was in sickness, and thou raisedst me up; I was in this or that strait, and under this or that cross, and thou carriedst me through and broughtst me out of it. The Lord will say to such that have no more to say: You had so many evidences of my power, but you sinned still. And yet, this will be all the pleading and reasoning that will be found with many of you, and the sad reply you will meet with from God.

3. A third reason is, *men's giving an external countenance to ordinances*, and their formal going about them. They think they have faith because they attend the church, and are not open contemnners¹⁸ and misregarders of the ordinances as some others are: they pray, they read, they hear, etc. It seems it was something like that the persuasion of those spoken of in Luke 13 is built upon. "Lord," say they, "we have heard thee preach, and have eaten and drunk in thy presence." It is not simply that they heard Christ preach, for many heard Him preach who stoned Him, but that, when others stoned Him, they followed Him and were not openly profane, nor professed contemnners of Him and His preaching as these others were. Such words fall sometimes from your mouths. You will possibly say, what would we have of you? You are not profane; you wait on ordinances and live like your neighbors—and you content yourselves with that! Alas, it is a poor,

¹⁸ **contemner** – one who contemns; a despiser; a scorner.

yea, a doleful fruit of ordinances and of your attendance upon them, if there be more security, more presumption, and desperate hazarding on the wrath of God, and less sense of the quarrel between Him and you on that ground.

4. Men hope even such a hope that, contrary to the nature of true hope, will make the most part of you ashamed: *you think you believe because you hope you believe*; you think that you will get mercy, because you think you hope in God's mercy, and you will not believe anything to the contrary, nor so much as think that you may be deceived. The opinion men have of obtaining mercy that is maintained without any ground but their vain hope, is the most common, the most unreasonable, and the most prejudicial evil among the professors of this Gospel: many are like those spoken of in Isaiah 57:10, "Thou hast found the life of thine hand, therefore thou wast not grieved." They have a faith and a hope of their own making, and this keeps them off that the Word of God takes no hold on them. We preach that you are by nature at enmity with God, and that your peace and reconciliation through Jesus Christ has to be made, but you are deaf, for you think your peace is made already; and but few are sensible of a quarrel with God so as to listen to His word as to the ministry of reconciliation. This is wondered at (in a manner) by the Lord Himself in Micah 3:11, where we have a people whose way is very unlike the Gospel: "The heads judge for a reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets...divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord and say, is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us." It is not for real believing that they are charged, but for their confident asserting their believing when there was no ground for it. So it is with many; they will say they hope to escape hell and to have their sins pardoned and to get to heaven, and they believe it will be so, when in the meantime there is no ground for it, but clear ground to the contrary.

5. A fifth ground is men's spiritual and *practical ignorance of the righteousness of God*, whereof the apostle speaking in Romans 10:3 says, "Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, they go about to establish their own." What I mean is this: people's being ignorant of their natural condition, of the spirituality of God's Law, what it requires, and of the way of faith, and of the command of believing and the nature of it. It is from the ignorance of these three things, namely, of the mischief that is in them by nature, of the spirituality of the Law, and of the spirituality of faith and of the exercise of faith, that they sleep on in security, and think they have faith when they have it not. Though sometimes they will admit their faith is weak, yet they cannot be beaten from it but that they believe: their faith rises and falls as their security does.

This the apostle makes clear from his own experience, Romans 7:9, where he says that before his conversion he was a living man, but after his conversion he begins to think himself nothing but a dead and lost man. The reason is: before his conversion he knew not himself, he knew not the Law, nor the nature of the covenant of grace. "Before the law came," says he, "I was alive." He knew not the spiritual meaning of the Law and therefore he thought he observed it, and so thought himself sure of heaven, and had no doubts nor disputings concerning his interest in God. "But," says he, "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died"; I saw myself then to be lost and gone, and in

everything guilty: that which I thought had been humility, I saw it to be pride; that which I took for faith, I found it to be presumption and unbelief; and my holiness I found to be hypocrisy. Not that his sin grew more upon him, but the sin that before was veiled, was now discovered and stared him in the face.

It is a sad, yet a most real truth: the good believing (as many of you call it) and the faith that you have, is a surer ground of your alienation from God and of your unbelief than any other thing you have can be a ground whereupon to conclude that you have faith and are good friends with God. You are yet alive, strangers to God, strangers to yourselves, strangers to the spiritual meaning of the Law, and to the exercise of faith. If you would set yourselves to ponder seriously this one consideration, I think you might be somewhat convinced of it. Do you not see many that understand more of God than you do, and that are more tender in their walk than you are, who are yet more loath, strained, and afraid to assert their faith and confidence than you are? This is the reason of it: they see their sin, and the spirituality of the law, and the nature of faith, and are dead to the Law; but you are yet alive in your own conceit.

Do you or can you think, that much praying, reading, meditating, and tenderness in men's walk will weaken faith and occasion doubting? Or is it not rather likely that faith will be more confirmed by these than by the neglect of them? How is it then that you are so strong in your faith, when they find themselves so weak and doubting? Or have you an infused faith without the means? Or does God deal with you in a more indulgent way than He uses to deal with His people? How is it then that these of whom you must admit that they are more tender than you are, cannot almost name faith or assert their confidence in God without trembling and fear that they presume—and yet you dare very confidently assert your faith without any hesitation, though you live carnally and without fear? Do not many of you ask in wonder, what ails some people? What need they to be so much troubled, and why do they stand in need of some to pray for them and with them? Why don't they believe? You, meanwhile, need no such thing, and all the reason is: you assure yourselves you believe, and think that the questioning of your security would be the very undoing of your faith. *God help you; you are in a woeful case.*

6. A sixth reason is this: *people drink in some carnal principles* that have no warrant in the Word of God, and accordingly square everything that comes in their way. They lay it down for a ground that men should never doubt of God's mercy. Now we do not say that people should doubt of God's being most real in His revelation of mercy to sinners in the Gospel, but from that it does not follow that none should doubt of God's love to them or of their coming to heaven, whether they close with Christ or not. Are there not many whom God curses? And should not these doubt?

Another carnal principle is that there is no such reality in the *threatenings* of God as there is in His *promises*, as if God were utterly averse from executing His threats and as if it were a rare thing for Him to condemn any. Is there anything more opposite to Scripture than this principle? Has He not said in the same place, to wit Exodus 34, where He proclaims Himself to be gracious, merciful, long-suffering, etc., that He is a God that will not clear the guilty? And has not Scripture said that it is but a remnant that are

saved, as it were here one and there one, and that there are *many* damned for *one* that is saved? But know it for certain that He will make you one day vomit up these principles with exquisite torment, when out of your own mouth He will convince you of your mistake and delusion.

When people lack many things, they think they can make up for these wants with an honest mind; this supplies your want of knowledge, your want of faith and repentance, and everything whereof you are said to be short. Though you live and may die carnal and unrenewed, yet you think still you have an honest mind or heart for all that—and what, I pray, is your honest mind but a rotten and profane heart that veils your hypocrisy with a pretext of honesty? Would you think that man honest, spoken of in Isaiah 44, who with one part of a tree warmed himself, and with another part made a god, and fell down and prayed to it? And yet in your sense he has an honest mind, for he follows his light (which is but darkness) and the deceit of his heart carrying him away from God though he cannot see it. He discerns not, because he considers not that there is a lie in his hand, and that a deceived heart has led him aside. So it is with you—and if many of you saw what is latent under that honest heart and mind, there could be nothing that would make you loathe yourselves more. A little time will convince you that *that* from which you looked for most good was your greatest and most treacherous enemy: “He that trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Pro 28:26), says Solomon. It supposes that people are ready to trust to their heart, and to hearken to the language of their heart concerning their spiritual state. But it says also that they are fools that do so, for it betrays them—and there is no folly comparable to that whereby a man betrays his own immortal soul. And so he does who trusts in his own heart!

7. A seventh reason is from *the deceitfulness of our heart* and the natural corruption that sticks to us. There is naturally in us pride and self-conceit. We are disposed and given to anything that is our own (though it be but a show), that it is as good as others’ reality—to think our own light and knowledge, our own parts and gifts to be as good as those of any others, whosoever they be. And with pride there is joined self-love; we cannot abide to think evil of ourselves or to suspect ourselves, though this self-love is indeed self-hatred, and is but love to our corruptions, and makes us, while we live in enmity to God, to think that we love Him—so that we cannot be induced to think that we love Him not, for we know that the love of God is good, and we love ourselves too well that we cannot endure to think that we have not that love. Hence it is said of some in the last times, in 2 Timothy 3, that they shall be covetous, proud, boasters, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, etc., having a form of godliness and denying the power of it. And the fountain of all is self-love, for *men shall be lovers of their own selves*.

3. *The necessity of self-examination*

And as self-love is the fountain of much evil, so it is the fountain of self-deceit, and keeps out anything that may make men question their own condition—so that if a word comes in and says, You have no ground for your faith, the heart will be ready to answer

and say: It cannot be that I am a self-deceiver. And self-love as a partial judge will offer to vindicate the man, and so makes him shift the challenge.

Now when all these are put together, you may see how many grounds people have to go wrong upon. And men having hearts disposing and inclining them to go wrong, and little pains being taken to discover the deceit of them, is it any wonder that they think they believe, when indeed they believe not—but are empty-handed, having little or nothing to rest upon, while they think they are rich and want nothing?

These are not fancied and far-fetched things, but obvious and at hand, and may easily be gathered from your daily practice. In all which, it is our design and scope to bring you to try your long unquestioned peace. Do not think that it is impossible to be thus persuaded, as many of you are, and yet to be mistaken (which is another ground for men's deceit), for Laodicea was very confident in thinking herself to be rich and increased in goods, and to stand in need of nothing, when she was in the meantime poor, blind, miserable, wretched, and naked (Rev 3:17). And the Galatians, as we may see in chapter 5:8, had a persuasion which was not of God. As there may be a persuasion of a point of doctrine as being right, which yet is an error, so there may be a persuasion of man's spiritual state as being right, and which he will stoutly maintain to be so, while in the meantime that persuasion is not of God that calls him, but a strong delusion (2Th 2:11). If all that is faith that you call faith, then certainly the way to heaven is much broader than the Scripture has chalked it out, and ministers needed not complain, "Who hath believed our report?" for all should thus believe it. It will then, and must then, turn to this: that your persuasion is not of Him that calls you. And if a deceit may lie and lurk under this persuasion of yours, you have certainly so much the more need to put the business to trial.

Need we make use of motives to press you to this trial of your faith, and to this giving of all diligence to make it sure, who have especially hitherto neglected it? If there was so much counterfeit money in the country that it were a rare thing to get one good and genuine piece of money, you would think yourselves greatly concerned and obliged to try it well, lest you were cheated with base and counterfeit coin. Is there not need then, yea infinitely much more need, for them that would be so wise as not to be beguiled about the salvation of their souls, to search and try whether their faith will abide God's trial or not?

III. Faith: True Faith that Saves

You will readily offer this question: What then are the characters or evidences of a solid and real faith that will abide the trial, by which the fancied faith that is among the men of this generation, may be examined and put to a just trial?

I shall first name some direct Scriptures, holding out some things essentially accompanying faith; and then I shall add others having more condescending characters for the more particular differencing of this, and helping to the decision of this great question.

A. Things essentially accompanying saving faith

The first mark whereby you may try your faith is the ground and origin of it, or that whereby it is begotten and cherished. “Faith cometh,” says the apostle in Romans 10:10, “by hearing.” Doctrinal faith comes by the preaching of the Gospel, and saving faith is wrought instrumentally by the same Word of God, it being *the power of God to salvation* (Rom 1:16), it being this Word that is the very ground of our faith.

I would ask you: From whence comes your faith? What hand has the Word of God in it? There are many that have a sort of faith not only without, but contrary to the Word of God, whereby they believe that they will get to heaven, while in the meantime the Word of God does directly exclude them. And how is your faith maintained? Is your faith maintained without ever knowing the necessity of a promise for that effect? Can you maintain your peace, and not have so much as any foundation in the truth and faithfulness of God to build it upon? Never love that faith that hungers not after the Word, a faith that is supposed to be lively without being ever fed by the Word, that cannot claim either its rise and origin, or its growth from the Word; I will not say from this or that Word in particular, or at this or that time read or heard, but from the Word of God—the Word is the very foundation that faith builds upon.

If we look to what either accompanies or follows faith, there are some plain Scriptures that will make that clear.

1). Acts 15:9, “And put no difference between us and them, *purifying their hearts by faith*.” There is an efficacy in faith to circumcise the heart, to purify it, and to banish lusts out of it, for it closes and unites with Christ, and so brings Him home to dwell in the heart—and where Christ dwells He commands, and so whatever opposes Him is banished. Faith gives Christ welcome, and will give nothing welcome to dwell with Him that is opposite and displeasing to Him. Faith improves Christ for the subduing of the lusts of the heart, and mortifying its corruptions. Whereas before there might be a fair outside of a profession and something clean outwardly, and much filthiness and rottenness within; but when faith is exercised on Christ, it purifies from all filthiness of the spirit as well as of the flesh—it applies the promises for that end, even to get the inside made clean as well as the outside. Yea, its main work is to have the inside, the heart, purified, that being the fountain of all the pollution that defiles the man, and brings the other necessarily along with it. Never love that faith that leaves the heart as a swines’ sty to lusts, that leaves it swarming with unclean and vain thoughts, or that leaves the heart just as it was before—or that faith that only cleanses the outside *and does no more*. Such a faith, however esteemed by the man, will never be accounted for true saving faith before God.

I do not, I dare not, say that believers will always discern this heart-purity or cleanness; but this I say, that true faith will set the man at work to purify the heart, and will be making use of Christ for that end; not only to have the arm of the dominion of sin broken, but to have the soul more and more delivered from the indwelling power of it. And to this will be the design that he will sincerely drive, to get the heart purified within as well as the outward man. Inward heart-abominations will be grievous and burdensome to him as well as scandalous outbursts.

2). A second place is Galatians 2:20, "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." If you would know a companion of true faith, here is one: it has a life of faith with it. There is one life killed, and another life is quickened. The life that is killed is that whereby the man some time lived to the Law. "I am dead to the law," says the apostle: a man's good conceit of himself that once he had, is killed and taken away. He wonders how it came that he thought himself holy, or a believer, or how he could promise to himself heaven in the condition in which he was. Another life there is that comes in the place of that and it is a life that is quickened and maintained by Christ and from nothing in the man himself. But it is wholly from and by Christ: from Him the believer has his holiness and strength for doing all duties called for, and his comfort also. His *all* is in Christ. His stock of life, strength, and furniture is not in himself, but he lives by a continual traffic, as it were on bills of exchange, between Christ and him; when he wants, he sends a bill to Christ, and it is answered in every thing that he stands in need of and that is good for him. He is a *dead* man and he is a *living* man; wherever true faith is, there the man is dead and the man is living. Do not, I pray you, mistake it by thinking that true faith is but vented or puts forth itself only in reference to this or that particular, or at this or that particular time only, for faith must be exercised not only by fits and starts, as when we are under accusations for sin or at prayer, but we must design and endeavor to exercise faith through all our life—that is, we must by faith look for every thing that is useful and needful for us from Christ, and be always endeavoring to drive a common trade of living this way. We must be habituating ourselves to seek after peace, strength, and consolation, and whatever else we need, out of the fullness that is in Him.

This life of faith is to see the want of all things in ourselves, and yet to have all things in ourselves—contenting and comforting ourselves: 1) that there is strength in Him though we are weak in ourselves, 2) that He has gotten the victory over all His and our enemies, and 3) that we shall at last through Him be victorious in our own persons—contenting and satisfying ourselves that He has a complete righteousness though we are bankrupt and have none of our own, and betaking ourselves only to that righteousness for our justification before God, thus making a life to ourselves in Him: He living in us by His Spirit, and we living in Him by faith. Oh sweet and desirable, but mysterious, life!

3). The third place is Galatians 5:6, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love." He does not simply say faith, but "faith that worketh by love." For faith is an operative grace, and the main vent of it; the thing by which it works is this: *it works by love*. Faith is the hand of the new creature whereby every thing is wrought, it having life from Christ. And we may say that love is in a manner the hand of faith, or rather like the fingers upon the hand of faith, whereby it handles every thing tenderly, even out of love to God in Christ, and to others for His sake. Faith works, and it works by love.

That is a sound and good faith that warms the heart with love to Christ; and the nearer that faith brings the believer to Him, the more it warms the hearts with love to

others. Therefore love to the people of God is given as an evidence of one that is born of God, in 1 John 5:1, because wherever true faith is, there cannot but be love to the children of God flowing from love to Him that begets them. A faith that is not affected with God's dishonor out of love to Him, and that can endure to look upon the difficulties, sufferings, and afflictions of the children of God without sympathizing and being kindly affected therewith, is not to be taken for a sound faith, but to be suspected for a counterfeit.

4). The fourth place is James 2:14, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" *Can faith save him?* True faith has always sound holiness with it in all manner of conversation in the design and endeavor of the believer, which is withal through grace in some measure attained. What avails it for a man to say that he loves another when, if a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, he bid such a one to depart in peace, to be warmed, to be filled, and yet in the meantime gives him nothing that he stands in need of—would not such a poor creature think himself but mocked? Even so, will not God reckon you to be but mock believers, or mockers of faith, when you profess yourselves to be believers in Christ, while in the meantime you have neither indeed heart-purity nor holiness in your outside conversation? That is but such a faith as devils may have; that will never do you any good.

You would believe this for a truth, that never a faith will pass for faith in God's account (and so there should never a faith pass for faith in *your* account), but that faith that sets a man at work to the study of holiness, that faith that works by love, that faith that purifies the heart, and that faith that puts the person in whom it is, to study to have Christ living in him, and himself living in Christ.

B. Other characters of faith

I promised to name a few Scriptures that speak forth some more condescending characters of faith.

I would think it a good token of faith to have men afraid of missing and falling short of the promises, which may be gathered from Hebrews 4:1, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." That stout confidence that thinks it is impossible to miss the promise, is a suspicious and dangerous faith, not to be loved. A faith that fears is much better than a faith that is more stout, unless there be a sweet mixture of holy stoutness and fear together. It is said that by faith Noah, *being moved by fear*, prepared an ark (Heb 11:7). Noah had the faith of God's promise that he should be kept from being drowned in the deluge with the rest of the world, and yet he was mourning and trembling in preparing the ark. If there were more faith among you, it would make many of you more holily afraid than you are. Do not suspect that faith of them that never hear a threatening but they tremble at it, and are touched by it to the quick.

It is a good token of saving faith, when it has a discovery and holy suspicion of unbelief waiting on it, so that the person dares not so to confide in and trust his own faith as not to dread unbelief, and to tell Christ of it. In Mark 9:23-24 there is a poor man that comes to Christ, to whom the Lord says, "If thou canst believe," or canst thou believe?

Yes, Lord, says he, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. There was some faith in him, but there was also unbelief mixed with it; his unbelief was so great that it was almost like to drown his faith. But he puts it in Christ's hand, and will neither deny his faith nor his unbelief, but puts the matter sincerely upon Christ to strengthen his faith and to amend and help his unbelief. A faith that is at the top of perfection at the very first ere ever you know it, is to be suspected.

There are some serious souls that think, because they have some unbelief, that therefore they have no faith at all; but true faith is such a faith that is joined with a suspected and feared, or seen, unbelief. That faith is surest where people fear and suspect unbelief, and see it. And when they are frightened on account of their unbelief and cry out under it, and make their unbelief an errand to Christ, it is a token that faith is there.

The third characteristic is that it will be accompanied by a cleaving to Christ, and a fear to presume in cleaving to Him. There will be two things opposing one another: an eagerness to be at Him, and a fear to be found presumptuous in meddling with Him and a holy trembling to think on it—yet notwithstanding it must and will be ventured upon. The woman (spoken of in Mark 5:28), reckoned thus with herself, "If I can but touch His clothes I shall be whole." She not only believes this to be truth, but she cuts through the crowds and thrusts in to be at Him; yet when she comes before Christ, she trembles as if she had been taken in a fault, not having dared to come openly to Him, but behind Him. She behooved to have a touch of Him, but she durst not in a manner own and avouch her doing of it till she was unavoidably put to it.

It is a suspicious and unsound faith that never trembled at attempting to believe. There is reason to consider that faith not to be of the right stamp, that never walked under the impression of the great distance between Christ and the person, the sense whereof is the thing that makes the *trembling*—I say not desperation, nor any utter distrust of Christ's kindness, but *trembling*—arising from the consideration of the great distance and disproportion that is between Him and the person. Faith causes the sinner to go to Christ, and the sense of his own sinfulness and worthlessness keeps him under holy fear and in the exercise of humility.

Paul once thought himself a brave man (as we may see in Romans 7:9), but when he was brought to believe in Christ, he sees that he was a dead and undone man before. I give you these three marks of a true faith from that chapter.

C. Other marks of faith from Romans 7:9

a. It discovers a man's former sinfulness, and particularly his former self-conceit, pride, and presumption. I was, says Paul, alive—a man, living upon the thoughts of his own holiness—but when the Law came, I died. He fell quite from these high thoughts.

b. A second mark is a greater restlessness of the body of death; it becomes in some respect worse company, more fretful and struggling than ever it did before. Sin revived, says Paul, though he had no more corruption in him than he had before, but it awaked and bestirred itself more. I dare say that though there is not so much corruption in a believer as there is in a natural man, yet it struggles much more and is more painful and disquieting to the believer, and breeds him a great deal more trouble. For, says the apos-

tle on the matter, when God graciously poured light and life in me, sin took that occasion to grow angry and to be enraged that such a neighbor was brought in beside it; it could not endure that. And as an unruly and currish dog barks most bitterly when an honest guest comes to the house, so when grace takes place in the soul, corruption barks and makes more noise than it did before.

There are some that think they have the more faith, because they feel no corruption stir in them; and there are others that think they have no faith at all, because they feel corruption struggling more and growing more troublesome to them. But the stirring and struggling of corruption (if men are indeed burdened and affected and afflicted with it) will rather prove their having faith than their wanting of it. Love that faith well that puts and keeps men contending in the fight with the body of death: for though it is not good in itself that corruption stirs, yet still is that sinful nature, that it flies always more in the face of them that look God and heavenwards, than of others that are sleeping securely under its dominion.

c. A third mark is, when the soul has never peace in any of its conflicts or combats with corruption, but when it results in faith exercised on Jesus Christ—as it was with Paul after his conversion. That is a sound faith that not only makes peace at first by Christ, but that cannot (to say so) fight one fair stroke in the spiritual warfare, nor look corruption in the face, nor promise itself an issue from any assault of the enemy, but by faith in Jesus Christ, as it was with the apostle, who toward the end of that chapter lamentably cries, “O! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). Yet immediately he subjoins faith’s triumphing in Christ, saying, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is evident that before his conversion he thought he could do well enough all alone, but it is not so now: now he can do nothing without Christ, especially in this war with his corruption.

IV. Conclusion

That is a sound faith that makes the sinner to make use of Christ in every thing he is called to, that joins Him (I mean Christ) in the work on every occasion, and particularly when it comes as it were to grappling and hand-blows with this formidable enemy, the body of death, this monster, whereof when one head is cut off, another as it were starts up in its place.

For a close of this treatise, I beseech and entreat such of you as are strangers to saving faith (who are, I fear, the greatest part), to consider seriously all I have spoken of the nature and native evidences of it, that you may be undeceived of your soul-ruining mistakes about it; and let sincere and sound believers, from all, be more cleared, confirmed, and comforted in their faith.

