

Demonstration 1 (Of Faith)

by Aphraates

Faith is like a building that rises to perfection, with Christ as the foundation and the works of faith as the structure.

Scripture: Proverbs 20:6, Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 66:16, Matthew 5:14, Matthew 9:28, Mark 16:17, John 1:1, John 14:20, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 11:33

Topics: "Faith Foundations", "Righteous Living"

Description

Aphraates preaches about the importance of faith as the foundation of all good works, emphasizing that faith in Christ is the cornerstone upon which the entire structure of a believer's life is built. He delves into the significance of various biblical figures like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, showcasing how their faith led to remarkable deeds and divine interventions. Aphraates highlights the power of faith to conquer challenges, perform miracles, and transform lives, drawing examples from both the Old and New Testaments. He stresses the necessity of genuine faith in God, belief in Christ's resurrection, and adherence to the teachings of the Church, while urging believers to abstain from sinful practices and embrace righteous living.

Transcript

Letter of an Inquirer

1. Beloved, I send you inquiries and questions, for I am compelled to seek further instruction of you on many points. Do not refuse to hear me. My spirit urges me to warn you about many topics that you may unfold for me the spiritual perceptions of your mind, and may show me of all that you have apprehended from the holy books, that so my deficiency may be supplied by you and my hunger satisfied by your doctrine, and that you may assuage my thirst from the fountain of your instruction. Yet though many things are set in my thought to ask you, they all are notwithstanding reserved with me, that when I come to you, you may instruct me on all subjects.

2. But before all things I desire that you would write and instruct me concerning this that straitens me, namely, concerning our faith; how it is, and what its foundation is, and on what structure it rises, on what it rests, and in what way is its fulfilment and consummation, and what are the works required for it. For I of myself firmly believe that God is one, Who made the heavens and the earth from the beginning; that He adorned the world by His handiwork; that He made man in His image; He it is that accepted the offering of Abel. He translated Enoch because of his excellence. He preserved Noah because of his righteousness.

He chose Abraham because of his faith. He spoke with Moses on account of his meekness. He it is that spoke in all the prophets, and furthermore He sent His Christ into the world. Since then, my brother, I thus believe in these things that so they are, I therefore, brother, request of you that you would write and show me what are the works required for this our faith, that so you may set me at rest.

The Demonstrations begin

1. I have received your letter, my beloved, and when I read it, it greatly gladdened me that you have turned your thoughts to these investigations. For this thing that you have asked of me shall be freely granted, Matthew 10:8 for freely it was received. And whosoever has, and desires to withhold from him that seeks, whatsoever he withholds shall be taken away from him. Whoever of free grace receives, of free grace also does it behoove him to give. And so, my beloved, as to that which you have asked of me, so far as my insignificance has apprehended, I will write to you. And also whatsoever you have not sought of me, invoking God, I will explain to you. Hear then, my beloved, and open the inward ears of your heart unto me, and the spiritual perceptions of your mind to that which I say unto you.

2. Faith is compounded of many things, and by many kinds is it brought to perfection. For it is like a building that is built up of many pieces of workmanship and so its edifice rises to the top. And know, my beloved, that in the foundations of the building stones are laid, and so resting upon stones the whole edifice rises until it is perfected. Thus also the true Stone, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all our faith. And on Him, on [this] Stone faith is based. And resting on faith all the structure rises until it is completed. For it is the foundation that is the beginning of all the building. For when any one is brought near unto faith, it is laid for him upon the Stone, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. And his building cannot be shaken by the waves, nor can it be injured by the winds. By the stormy blasts it does not fall, because its structure is reared upon the rock of the true Stone. And in this that I have called Christ the Stone, I have not spoken of my own thought, but the Prophets beforehand called Him the Stone. And this I shall make clear to you.

3. And now hear concerning faith that is based upon the Stone, and concerning the structure that is reared up upon the Stone. For first a man believes, and when he believes, he loves. When he loves, he hopes. When he hopes, he is justified. When he is justified, he is perfected. When he is perfected, he is consummated. And when his whole structure is raised up, consummated, and perfected, then he becomes a house and a temple for a dwelling-place of Christ, as Jeremiah the Prophet said:-- The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are you, if you amend your ways and your works. Jeremiah 7:4-5 And again He said through the Prophet:-- I will dwell in them and walk in them. Leviticus 26:12 And also the Blessed Apostle thus said:-- You are the temple of God and the spirit of Christ dwells in you. And also our Lord again thus said to His disciples:-- You are in Me and I am in you. John 14:20

4. And when the house has become a dwelling-place, then the man begins to be anxious as to that which is required for Him Who dwells in the building. Just as if a king or an honourable man, to whom a royal name is given, should lodge in the house, there would be required for the King all the appurtenances of royalty and all the service that is needed for the King's honour. For in a house that is void of all good things, the King will not lodge, nor will he dwell in the midst of it; but all that is choicest in the house is required for the King and that nothing in it be deficient. And if anything be deficient there in the house in which the King lodges, the keeper of the house is delivered over to death, because he did not make ready the service for the King. So also let the man, who becomes a house, yea a dwelling-place, for Christ, take heed to what is needed for the service of Christ, Who lodges in him, and with what things he may please

Him. For first he builds his building on the Stone, which is Christ. On Him, on the Stone, is faith based, and on faith is reared up all the structure. For the habitation of the house is required pure fasting, and it is made firm by faith. There is also needed for it pure prayer, and through faith is it accepted. Necessary for it too is love, and with faith is it compounded. Furthermore alms are needed, and through faith are they given. He demands also meekness, and by faith is it adorned. He chooses too virginity, and by faith is it loved. He joins with himself holiness, and in faith is it planted. He cares also for wisdom, and through faith is it acquired. He desires also hospitality, and by faith does it abound. Requisite for Him also is simplicity, and with faith is it commingled. He demands patience also, and by faith is it perfected. He has respect also to long-suffering, and through faith is it acquired. He loves mourning also, and through faith is it manifested. He seeks also for purity, and by faith is it preserved. All these things does the faith demand that is based on the rock of the true Stone, that is Christ. These works are required for Christ the King, Who dwells in men that are built up in these works.

5. And if perchance you should say:-- If Christ is set for the foundation, how does Christ also dwell in the building when it is completed? For both these things did the blessed Apostle say. For he said:-- I as a wise architect have laid the foundation. 1 Corinthians 3:10 And there he defined the foundation and made it clear, for he said as follows:-- No man can lay other foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 And that Christ furthermore dwells in that building is the word that was written above-- that of Jeremiah who called men temples and said of God that He dwelt in them. And the Apostle said:-- The Spirit of Christ dwells in you. 1 Corinthians 3:16 And our Lord said:-- I and My Father are one. John 10:30 And therefore that word is accomplished, that Christ dwells in men, namely, in those who believe in Him, and He is the foundation on which is reared up the whole building.

6. But I must proceed to my former statement that Christ is called the Stone in the Prophets. For in ancient times David said concerning Him:-- The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the building. And how did the builders reject this Stone which is Christ? Luke 19:14 How else than that they so rejected Him before Pilate and said-- This man shall not be King over us. John 19:15 And again in that parable that our Lord spoke that a certain nobleman went to receive kingly power and to return and rule over them; and they sent after Him envoys saying:-- This man shall not be King over us. Luke 19:13-14 By these things they rejected the Stone which is Christ. And how did it become the head of the building? How else than that it was set up over the building of the Gentiles and upon it is reared up all their building. And who are the builders? Who but the priests and Pharisees who did not build a sure building, but were overthrowing everything that he was building, as is written in Ezekiel the Prophet:-- He was building a wall of partition, but they were shaking it, that it might fall. Ezekiel 13:10 And again it is written:-- I sought among them a man who was closing the fence and standing in the breach over the face of the land, that I might not destroy it and I did not find. Ezekiel 22:30 And furthermore Isaiah also prophesied beforehand with regard to this stone. For he said:-- Thus says the Lord, Behold I lay in Zion a chosen stone in the precious corner, the heart of the wall of the foundation. Isaiah 28:16 And he said again there:-- Every one that believes in it shall not fear. Isaiah 28:16 And whosoever falls on that stone shall be broken, and every one on whom it shall fall, it will crush. Matthew 21:44 For the people of the house of Israel fell upon Him, and He became their destruction for ever. And again it shall fall on the image and crush it. Daniel 2:34 And the Gentiles believed on it and do not fear.

7. And He shows thus with regard to that stone that it was laid as head of the wall and as foundation. But if that stone was laid as the foundation, how did it also become the head of the wall? How but that when our Lord came, He laid His faith in the earth like a foundation, and it rose above all the heavens like the head

of the wall and all the building was finished with the stones, from the bottom to the top. And with regard to the faith about which I said that He laid His faith in the earth, this David proclaimed beforehand about Christ. For He said:-- Faith shall spring up from the earth. And that again, it is above, he said:-- Righteousness looked down from the heavens.

8. And again Daniel also spoke concerning this stone which is Christ. For he said:-- The stone was cut out from the mountain, not by hands, and it smote the image, and the whole earth was filled with it. Daniel 2:34-35 This he showed beforehand with regard to Christ that the whole earth shall be filled with Him. For lo! By the faith of Christ are all the ends of the earth filled, as David said:-- The sound of the Gospel of Christ has gone forth into all the earth. And again when He sent forth His apostles He spoke thus to them:-- Go forth, make disciples of all nations and they will believe in Me. Matthew 28:19 And again the Prophet Zechariah also prophesied about that stone which is Christ. For he said:-- I saw a chief stone of equality and of love. And why did he say chief? Surely because from the beginning He was with His Father. And again that he spoke of love, it was because when He came into the world, He said thus to His disciples:-- This is My commandment, that you love one another. John 15:12 And again He said:-- I have called you My friends (lovers). John 15:15 And the blessed Apostle said thus:-- God loved as in the love of His Son. Of a truth Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. Ephesians 5:2

9. And definitely did He show concerning this stone:-- Lo! On this stone will I open seven eyes. Zechariah 3:9 And what then are the seven eyes that were opened on the stone? Clearly the Spirit of God that abode on Christ with seven operations, as Isaiah the Prophet said:-- The Spirit of God shall rest and dwell upon Him, (a spirit) of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of courage, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:1-2 These were the seven eyes that were opened upon the Stone, and these are the seven eyes of the Lord which look upon all the earth. Zechariah 4:10

10. And also with reference to Christ was this (which follows) said. For he said that He was given as a light to all the Gentiles as the Prophet Isaiah said:-- I have given You as a light to all the Gentiles, that You should be My redemption to the ends of the earth. Isaiah 49:6 And furthermore David also said-- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my paths. And also the word and discourse of the Lord is Christ, as is written in the beginning of the Gospel of our Saviour:-- In the beginning was the Word.

John 1:1 And with regard to the light there again he bore witness:-- The light was shining in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. John 1:5 What then is this:-- The light was shining in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not? Clearly Christ, Whose light shone in the midst of the people of the house of Israel, and the people of the house of Israel did not comprehend the light of Christ, in that they did not believe in Him, as it is written:-- He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

John 1:11 And also our Lord Jesus called them darkness, for He said to His disciples-- Whatsoever I say unto you in the darkness, speak in the light, Matthew 10:27 namely, let your light shine among the Gentiles; Matthew 5:16 because they received the light of Christ, Who is the Light of the Gentiles. And He said again to His Apostles:-- You are the light of the world. Matthew 5:14 And again He said unto them-- Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 And again He showed with regard to Himself that He is the light, for He said to His disciples:-- Walk while the light is with you, ere the darkness overtake you. John 12:35 And again He said to them:-- Believe in the light that you may be children of light. John 12:36 And again He said:-- I am the

light of the world. John 8:12 And again He said:-- No man lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel or under a bed, or puts it in a hidden place, but puts it upon the lamp-stand that every one may see the light of the lamp.

And the shining lamp is Christ, as David said-- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my paths. 11. And furthermore the Prophet Hosea also said:-- Light a lamp and seek the Lord. Hosea 10:12 And our Lord Jesus Christ said:-- What woman is there who has ten drachmos and shall lose one of them, and will not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek her drachma that she lost? Luke 15:8 What then does this woman signify? Clearly the congregation of the house of Israel, to which the ten commandments were given.

They lost the first commandment-- that in which He warned them saying:-- I am the Lord your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Exodus 20:2 And when they had lost this first commandment, also the nine which are after it they could not keep, because on the first depend the nine. For it was an impossibility that while worshipping Baal, they should keep the nine commandments. For they lost the first commandment, like that woman who lost one drachma from the ten. So the Prophet cried unto them:-- Light a lamp and seek the Lord.

Hosea 10:12 And furthermore the Prophet Isaiah also said:-- Seek the Lord and when you shall have found Him, call upon Him; and when He is near let the sinner abandon his way and the wicked man his thought. Isaiah 55:6-7 For that lamp shone and they did not by it seek the Lord their God. And its light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it. And the lamp was set up on the lamp-stand and those who were in the house did not see its light. And what then means this, that the lamp was set up on the lamp-stand?

Clearly His being raised up upon the cross. And by this all the house was made dark over them. For when they crucified Him, the light was darkened from them, and shone among the Gentiles, because that from the time of the sixth hour (of the day) on which they crucified Him even unto the ninth hour there was darkness in all the land of Israel. And the sun set in midday and the land was darkened in the shining daytime, as is written in Zechariah the Prophet:-- It shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, I will cause the sun to set in midday, and will make dark the land in the shining daytime. 12.

Now I must proceed to my former subject of faith, that on it are reared up all the good works of the building. And again, in what I said with regard to the building, it was in no strange fashion that I spoke, but the blessed Apostle wrote in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, saying-- I as a wise master-builder have laid the foundation, but every one builds on it. One builds silver and gold and goodly stones; another builds reed and straw and stubble. In the last day that building shall be tried by fire; for the gold and silver and goodly stones shall be preserved in the midst of the fire, because they are a firm building.

But as for the straw and reed and stubble, the fire shall have power upon them and they shall be burned. And what is the gold and silver and goodly stones by which the building is raised up? Clearly the good deeds of faith, which shall be preserved in the midst of the fire; because Christ dwells in that secure building, and He is its preserver from the fire. And let us consider and understand (this) from the example that God has given us also in the former dispensation, because the promises of that dispensation will abide sure for us.

Let us then understand from (the case of) those three righteous men who were cast into the midst of the fire and were not burned, namely, Hananiah, Azariah and Misael, over whom the fire had no power,

because they built a secure building and rejected the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar the king and did not worship the image that he made. And as for those who transgressed the commandment of God, the fire at once prevailed over them and burned them, and they were burned without mercy.

For the Sodomites were burned like straw and reed and stubble. Furthermore, Nadab and Abihu were burned, who transgressed the commandment of God. Again, two hundred and fifty men were burned, who were offering incense. Again, two princes and a hundred who were with them were burned, because they approached the mountain on which Elijah was sitting, who ascended in a chariot of fire to heaven. The calumniators also were burned because they dug a pit for righteous men. Accordingly, beloved, the righteous shall be tried by the fire, like gold and silver and goodly stones, and the wicked shall be burned in the fire like straw and reed and stubble, and the fire shall have power upon them and they shall be burned; even as the Prophet Isaiah said:-- By fire shall the Lord judge and by it shall He try all flesh.

Isaiah 66:16 And again he said:-- You shall go out and see the carcasses of the men who offended against Me, whose worm shall not die, nor shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an astonishment to all flesh. Isaiah 66:24

13. And again the Apostle has commented for us upon this building and upon this foundation; for he said thus-- No man can lay another foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 Again the Apostle said about faith that it is conjoined with hope and love, for he said thus:-- These are three which shall abide, faith and hope and love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 And he showed with regard to faith that first it is laid on a sure foundation.

14. For Abel, because of his faith his offering was accepted. And Enoch, because he was well-pleasing through his faith, was removed from death. Noah, because he believed, was preserved from the deluge. Abraham, through his faith, obtained blessing, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Isaac, because he believed, was loved. Jacob, because of his faith, was preserved. Joseph, because of his faith, was tried in the waters of contention, and was delivered from his trial, and his Lord established a witness in him, as David said:-- Witness has he established in Joseph. Moses also by his faith performed many wonderful works of power. By his faith he destroyed the Egyptians with ten plagues. Again, by faith he divided the sea, and caused his people to cross over and sank the Egyptians in the midst of it. By faith he cast the wood into the bitter waters and they became sweet. By faith he brought down manna and satisfied his people. By faith he spread out his hands and conquered Amalek, as is written:-- His hands continued in faith till the setting of the sun. Also by faith he went up to Mount Sinai, when he twice fasted for the space of forty days. Again by faith he conquered Sihon and Og, the Kings of the Amorites.

15. This is wonderful, my beloved, and a great prodigy that Moses did in the Red Sea, when the waters were divided by faith, and stood up on high like mountains or like mighty cliffs. They were checked and stood still at the commandment; they were closed up as in vessels, and fast bound in the height as in the depth. Their fluidity did not overflow the boundary, but rather they changed the nature of their creation. Irrational creatures became obedient. The billows became rigid and were awaiting the vengeance, when the people should have passed over. Wonderful was it how the waves stood still and expected the commandment and the vengeance. The foundations (hidden) from the ages of the world were revealed, and that which from the beginning had been liquid suddenly became dry. The gates lifted up their heads and the everlasting gates were lifted up. The pillar of fire entered and illuminated the entire camp. The people passed over by faith. And the judgment of righteousness was wrought upon Pharaoh and upon his host and upon his chariots.

16. Thus also Joshua the son of Nun divided Jordan by his faith, and the children of Israel crossed over as in the days of Moses. But know, my beloved, that this passage of the Jordan was three times laid open by its being divided. First through Joshua the Son of Nun, and secondly through Elijah, and then through Elisha. For the word of the Book makes known that over against this passage of Jericho, there Elijah was taken up to heaven; for when Elisha turned back from following him and divided the Jordan and passed over, the children of the Prophets of Jericho came out to meet Elisha and said:-- The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha. 2 Kings 2:8-15 Furthermore when the people crossed over in the days of Joshua the son of Nun (it was there), for thus it is written:-- The people passed over, over against Jericho. Joshua 3:17 Also Joshua the son of Nun by faith cast down the walls of Jericho, and they fell without difficulty. Again by faith he destroyed thirty-one kings and made the children of Israel to inherit the land. Furthermore by his faith he spread out his hands towards heaven and stayed the sun in Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. Joshua 10:13 And they were stayed and stood still from their courses. But enough! All the righteous, our fathers, in all that they did were victorious through faith, as also the blessed Apostle testified with regard to all of them:-- By faith they prevailed. Hebrews 11:33 Again Solomon said:-- Many men are called merciful, but a faithful man who can find? Proverbs 20:6 Also Job thus said:-- My integrity, shall not pass from me, and in my righteousness will persist. Job 27:5-6

17. Also our Saviour used thus to say to every one who drew near to Him to be healed:-- According to your faith be unto you. And when the blind man approached Him, He said to him:-- Do you believe that I am able to heal you? That blind man said to Him:-- Yea, Lord, I believe. Matthew 9:28 And his faith opened his eyes. And to him whose son was sick, He said:-- Believe and your son shall live. He said to Him:-- I believe, Lord; help my feeble faith. And by his faith his son was healed. And also when the nobleman came near to Him, by his faith was his boy healed, when he said to our Lord:-- Speak the word and my servant will be cured. Matthew 8:8, 10 And our Lord was astonished at his faith, and according to his faith it happened to him. And also when the chief of the Synagogue requested Him concerning his daughter, He said thus to him:-- Only firmly believe and your daughter shall live. Mark 5:23-36 So he believed and his daughter lived and arose. And when Lazarus died, our Lord said to Martha:-- If you believe, your brother shall rise. Martha says unto Him:-- Yea, Lord, I believe. John 11:23-27 And He raised him after four days. And also Simon who was called Cephas because of his faith was called the firm rock. And again when our Lord gave the Sacrament of Baptism to His apostles, He said thus to them:-- Whosoever believes and is baptized shall live, and whosoever believes not shall be condemned. Again He said to his Apostles:-- If you believe and doubt not, there is nothing you shall not be able to do. Matthew 21:22 For when our Lord walked on the billows of the sea, Simon also by his faith walked with Him; but when in respect of his faith he doubted, and began to sink, our Lord called him, you of little faith. Matthew 14:31 And when the Apostles asked of our Lord, they begged nothing at His hands but this, saying to Him:-- Increase our faith. He said to them:-- If there were in you faith, even a mountain would remove from before you. And He said to them:-- Doubt not, lest you sink down in the midst of the world, even as Simon when he doubted began to sink in the midst of the sea. And again He said thus-- This shall be the sign for those that believe; they shall speak with new tongues and shall cast out demons, and they shall lay their hands on the sick and they shall be made whole. Mark 16:17-18

18. Let us draw near then, my beloved, to faith, since its powers are so many. For faith raised up to the heavens (Enoch), and conquered the Deluge. It caused the barren to bring forth. It delivered from the sword. It raised up from the pit. It enriched the poor. It released the captives. It delivered the persecuted. It brought down the fire. It divided the sea. It cleft the rock, and gave to the thirsty water to drink. It satisfied the hungry. It raised the dead, and brought them up from Sheol. It stilled the billows. It healed the sick. It

conquered hosts. It overthrew walls. It stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the flame of fire. It humiliated the proud, and brought the humble to honour. All these mighty works were wrought by faith.

19. Now thus is faith; when a man believes in God the Lord of all, Who made the heavens and the earth and the seas and all that is in them; and He made Adam in His image; and He gave the Law to Moses; He sent of His Spirit upon the prophets; He sent moreover His Christ into the world. Furthermore that a man should believe in the resurrection of the dead; and should furthermore also believe in the sacrament of baptism. This is the faith of the Church of God. And (it is necessary) that a man should separate himself from the observance of hours and Sabbaths and moons and seasons, and divinations and sorceries and Chaldæan arts and magic, from fornication and from festive music, from vain doctrines, which are instruments of the Evil One, from the blandishment of honeyed words, from blasphemy and from adultery. And that a man should not bear false witness, and that a man should not speak with double tongue. These then are the works of the faith which is based on the true Stone which is Christ, on Whom the whole building is reared up.

20. Furthermore, my beloved, there is much besides in the Holy Books about faith. But these few things out of the much have I written to recall them to your love that you may know and make known and believe and also be believed. And when you have read and learned the works of faith, you may be made like that tilled land upon which the good seed fell, and produced fruit a hundred-fold and sixty-fold and thirty-fold. And when you come to your Lord, He may call you a good servant and prudent and faithful, who on account of His faith, that abounded, is to enter into the Kingdom of his Lord.

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