

Faith the Work of God

by Charles Finney

The work of God is faith, or trust in the character of God, which involves confidence in God's love and wisdom.

Scripture: John 6:28

Topics: "Faith", "True Obedience"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that the true work of God is faith, as expressed in John 6:28-29, where Jesus instructs that belief in Him is paramount. He critiques the tendency to focus on outward actions and rituals, arguing that genuine obedience stems from the heart's intention rather than mere compliance with the law. Finney outlines the importance of understanding the spirit behind God's commandments, warning against delusions that equate external actions with true faith. He asserts that faith is not just intellectual assent but a deep trust in God's character and promises, leading to spontaneous obedience and a life of love. Ultimately, Finney calls believers to cultivate a faith that transforms their actions and aligns with God's will.

Transcript

"Then they said unto Him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." --John 6:28, 29

In the preceding context Jesus rebukes the people for following Him, not because they saw his miracles, and in his miracles the proof that He came from God, but for the sake of the loaves and fishes; and then takes occasion to exhort them to "labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." Upon this they start up with the question--What is this "labor" of which you speak? What shall we do to secure this everlasting life?

To this Jesus answers in our text--"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

In discussing the subject here presented, I shall

- I. NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT OF A COMMANDMENT.
- II. SHOW WHAT IS NOT THE WORK WHICH GOD REALLY REQUIRES.
- III. WHAT IT IS.
- IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN IT.

V. NOTICE SOME DELUSIONS INTO WHICH PERSONS FALL ON THIS SUBJECT.

I. The letter respects the outward doing--the executive act, or as sometimes called, the proximate act, (as being the last in the series,) as distinguished from the ultimate end or intention which in the order of nature comes first in the series. For example, in the act of going to meeting; the mere external act of going is the last or proximate act, and may be obedience to the simple letter of the precept. If all is right, the proximate end may be to join in the singing, the prayer, or to participate in the instructions of the sanctuary; but the ultimate end will be to worship and glorify God. The letter of a precept says--Do this--Abstain from that; and yet every one knows that all acts do in fact proceed from some ultimate end to which the spirit of the precept refers. In the case of going to church, the letter of the precept respects only the outward going, and of course the outward going fulfills the letter of the precept. But the precept has also a spirit, and this refers to the ultimate intention of the act, and requires that this shall be right before God.

This distinction is not only a very plain one, but in morals it is altogether fundamental. An act shall have a bad character, a good character, or none at all, according to its ultimate moral quality. For example: giving to the poor may result from a great variety of motives, and its real character can be determined only from its ultimate end.

God, therefore, not only requires the outward doing, but much more, and above all, the motives; so that a man would obey who had a right spirit even if prevented from the outward act. For example, the precepts requiring attendance on public worship and giving to the poor, would be obeyed in the mere intention, provided circumstances were such as absolutely to forbid the outward act. Yet it should not be forgotten that if the outward act is possible, the sincere intention will always require and secure it. Still it is true that if the intention exists, the deed, so far forth as its morality is concerned is actually done, If the intention be wrong, the command is disobeyed; if right, it is obeyed, whether the man is able to carry it out in external action or not. If the intention be not right, there is no obedience, how much-so-ever the letter may be observed.

II. What is not the work of God. That is--What does not constitute that obedience which is acceptable to God?

1. It is not compliance with the mere letter of any precept whatever. So far as the executive acts of the will are concerned, none of these are the work which God requires.

2. It is not doing any thing whatever with ultimate reference to please ourselves, or promoting our own self-interest. In other words, it is not any action determined by hope of personal good, or fear of personal evil. This can be no more doing God's work than a hired man would do his employer's work who should be purely selfish and aim to please himself only, instead of pleasing his employer. If he feels no interest in his work for his employer's sake, and is interested only to serve himself, his hands may turn off a little business in a poor way for his master; but where no heart is, there is no valuable service.

So, and much more, in religion. Unless a man goes out of himself for his end, he is really serving himself, and not God. Suppose he prays, or preaches, or goes to meeting; if his ultimate object be to secure some good to himself, he is not doing the Lord's work, but only his own. He is as really doing his own work as he who goes to California to dig for gold in its mines. The moral difference does not lie in the business done, but in the spirit of the act. One goes with a spade and mattock to dig for gold--all for himself alone;--another goes to his closet or to church to do his religious services, and to work out his own salvation. If the latter be done as really for self as the other, and as truly without an ultimate regard to the

will and glory of God, it is no more acceptable to God than the former. No matter what the course of life is, if self and self only be the end.

3. It is nothing done in obedience to custom. It is astonishing to see how much is done for no other reason than that the church does so. The usages and customs of the church are held and deemed as law. But obedience to this law is not the work of God to which our text alludes.

4. No obedience whatever to public sentiment is real religion. It is wonderful to see how much that passes for religion is done from regard to public sentiment. In places where the standard of piety as determined by public sentiment is very low, you will scarcely distinguish this class of persons from the most worldly men. But transfer them to other circumstances and relations where public sentiment requires much of them, and you will see their lives greatly modified. They will become very strict in their religious duties, and very careful to meet all the claims which the current public sentiment makes upon them.

It is not strange that in some situations these persons should seem to be very religious. Since I have lived in Oberlin I have conversed with hundreds who have told me how much their religious life had improved since they have been here. But this change may have been simply the result of external circumstances--no principle at bottom controlling their conduct except a regard to public opinion. Such persons are greatly in danger of misjudging their own character, and of becoming very self-complacent in the idea of their making great progress in holiness, while really they ought only to condemn themselves for being under the control of public sentiment rather than of faith working by love.

5. Nothing done in obedience to the commandments of men is doing the work of God. Human laws are well--in civil governments, in the school and in the family; but to suppose that obeying them is doing our whole duty to God is a great mistake. It is a part of our duty to God, no doubt, but it is not the great thing which God requires. And when regard to human authority is the ultimate motive, and we go no farther than this, then plainly we render obedience simply to parents, and not to God--that is, if in this very obedience they have no regard at all to God, they render Him no obedience at all. To do so is not "obeying parents in the Lord."

6. Nothing done from sheer superstition. This is most obvious. If I had time I should like to point out various things done here which are real superstitions. Superstitions are not restricted to the Roman Catholics. They come down among Protestants also, in the form of traditions of the elders, with which persons are exceedingly careful to comply, and thus think to work out great and important righteousness.

7. Nothing done from a mere sense of duty, without faith or love. Every mere legalist knows what it is to do things from a mere sense of duty. In fact nothing is more common than for persons to act on this principle. They meet a demand of conscience, and conscience in some persons seems to be developed only in certain directions and in reference to certain things. Usually men who say they act from conscience have reference only to external acts. They say it is right for me to do thus and thus towards my neighbor; but in this they think only of the external act, not of the internal motive.

But listen to that man who acts from a mere sense of duty: "I have been to meeting twice to-day. I went because I thought it to be my duty." You did, indeed! And is this the spirit of God's requirements? Where is the faith and love of the gospel in this act! It is not there. There is not a particle of evangelical obedience in such doings. No man ever assigns as a reason for true love to God--I did it because I thought it was my duty! To be sure, a man who does right from love to God is conscious of conforming to his conscience; but he does not act because he is lashed up to duty by a scourge he dare not resist and can not endure.

8. No mere doing, whatever, without respect to the ultimate end, is obedience.

9. Nothing done to obtain a hope, or to support or revive an old hope, is doing the work of God. Many toil earnestly for these ends, but toil to no good purpose.

10. Nothing done to obtain comfort is real religion. If they had hope of success, they might toil and labor for this event in hell. The rich man praying for a drop of water to cool his tongue, might as well flatter himself that he is thereby doing the work of God, as they. How vain for persons to suppose that their labors to obtain rest of mind are really the work of God, unless those labors take the direction of faith and love. Intuitively the soul cries out,

"O where shall rest be found,

Rest for the weary soul."

Yet there is the utmost danger lest men seek it as an ultimate end, and otherwise than in the way of God. Men need a monitor to follow them about, crying evermore in their ears--Brother, sister, that is not the work of God. What, you say, perhaps,--what! does not God require me to pray? Yes; but with faith, not without faith. Does not God require me to give to the poor? Yes; but not without faith and love. O, how some men need an angel at their elbow continually to keep them from falling into the pit--they are so prone to make mistakes. Many need to be warned most earnestly and made to see that their great efforts to obtain exemption from agonies of mind, conviction and distress, are not really the work of God.

Indeed, no matter what the effort may be, though made in ever so exact conformity to the letter, yet it is not acceptable obedience unless made in faith. Nothing whatever which is not faith and love, or the spontaneous results of these exercises, can be deemed real obedience to God. This is most manifest, and needs to be thoroughly understood.

III. What is the work of God?

The text embraces all in a word--FAITH.

When Christ's hearers made this enquiry in our text, they had reference merely to executive or outward acts. They had fallen entirely from the spiritual apprehension of God's commands, and supposed their requisitions to lie merely in the external act. They understood God as requiring a mere external course of life. Christ, therefore, understood them as enquiring--Shall we sacrifice? Shall we give alms to the poor? Shall we make many offerings at the temple?

Christ understood their enquiry, and saw that they fell exceedingly short of the truth; therefore He for the time being left out of view, utterly and purposely, all which they called works. No doubt they esteemed this a most marvelous answer. To them his answer must have seemed equivalent to this: Do not anything at all. You ask, says Christ, what acts you shall do that you may work the works of God. I see that you have infinitely misapprehended the case. This is the work--that you believe God--exercise faith. 'Faith? what is that?' they answer. "Do tell us what we shall DO!" Do none of those things which you have in your minds.

Yet we are not to suppose that Christ forbade the doing of any right external acts. He knew perfectly well as we also do, that if the heart could be got into the right state, all would be well. He therefore aimed at one blow to cut them square off from all their vain dependencies. "Do none of those things," said He, "as THE work of God; but believe." Suppose that they had replied, "We do believe already." Many hundreds

have said so to me who yet were in a state similar to that of those Jews. We certainly believe, say they; and there is a sense in which they do; but it is not any such sense as involves obedience and love. It is only a purely intellectual assent to the truth; but this is not gospel faith.

SUBJECT RESUMED IN THE AFTERNOON.

Our text raises the great enquiry--What is the condition of salvation?

You will observe that we are not now enquiring into the grounds, but simply the conditions of salvation. Christ did not intend to teach that faith can be the meritorious ground of salvation; but simply that without which men can not be saved.

It is remarkable that Christ speaks as if faith comprehended all God's requirements. Obviously it is here spoken of just as love is where it is said to be the fulfilling of the law. In real love, we really fulfill the whole law; because love is connected with the whole circle of obedient activities and should be the moving spring of all our external actions. Faith sustains the same relations to all our activities that love does.

But what is this faith which is the work of God?

I answer,

1. It is not a merely intellectual conviction. It is not opinion, or any set of opinions. It is not a mere speculation; nor a system of theology, however firmly or intelligently held; it is no merely intellectual state of mind.

2. But it is trust or confidence in the character of God. There can be no such thing as a rational belief of what God says, only as we believe him to be trustworthy. We never have confidence in the declarations of any being only as we pre-suppose confidence in his character. In faith therefore, we voluntarily cast ourselves upon and confide in the truthfulness, wisdom, love and power of God. Confidence in God is the same sort of thing as confidence in man. In exercising confidence in man, we really repose in the character of those whom we trust. Take for example the case of a student. He has no means of support. It is but natural, therefore, that he should be anxious, restive, and distressed lest he shall be obliged soon to abandon the pursuit of an education. To all human probability he must soon turn away from his books and his studies, and seek some means of livelihood in other pursuits. But to-morrow the mail brings him a letter from a friend--a man of great generosity, integrity and wealth. His letter says--"I have heard of your case, of your anxieties, of your embarrassments, and of your strong desire to go on with your education. It gives me pleasure to say to you that you may draw on me at sight for any amount you need."

Now suppose the student does not believe this--suppose he lacks confidence in the writer. O, he says, this looks very fair, but I am afraid he will fail in his business, or at least that he will change his mind. I don't believe I can rely on his promise. Now in this state of mind, he will not be at rest. Perhaps he will be as anxious as ever. But on the other hand, if he believes, he will be at rest. If he has all confidence in the character of his friend, he will feel as calm as evening. He can sleep as quietly as a babe. No longer will he let his bosom burn up with intense, wasting anxieties

So of all confidence in God's wisdom and power.

If any of you have ever been at sea in a fierce and dreadful storm, when every wave broke over you, every plank creaked as if it must be wretched asunder, you know how anxiously you looked at the captain--how

you watched his countenance, and studied especially his confidence in his ship and in her capacity to weather the storm--and you noticed with what composure he saw his masts twisted almost double and bent up like withes, yet breaking not; then you had an illustration of faith. You trusted in the captain's judgment and skill; he trusted in the seaworthiness of his ship and in his own experience.

So of faith in God. You want faith that God loves both yourself and every body else; for if you believed that He loves you, and yet did not believe that He loves every body else, you might have trouble. So if you admit that He loves others but not yourself, you will find that more faith than this is needful before you can have universal peace.

You know how the little child feels towards his father. You may have an axe in your hand, or a sword;--the child is not afraid, for he knows you are a father. He will seize hold of it and play with it as with a feather, for he can not dream of danger or fear, so long as the instrument is in his father's hand. He believes that you love him; and knows that you will not hurt him, so that even a sword in your hand awakens no fear in his bosom.

So of God. You are no more afraid when God plays with the forked lightning than when he paints his bow on the vaulted sky in the stillness of approaching sunset. This is faith. It trusts God amid the storm as in the calm, assured that He is forevermore the same and always infinitely good and wise.

But you are sick;--yes, you are sick. What then? Suppose your mother could save your life and restore your health at any moment. You would feel very calm;--and why? Because you have so much confidence in her love. Ah, but you say--I have confidence in God's love; but perhaps God does not see it best to save my life. So your mother might not see it best to save your life; and if she were as good as God is, and as wise, she would do the very same thing. You may therefore now be just as peaceful as if your destiny lay in the hands of the kindest and wisest earthly parent, for you may know that you shall live or die just as infinite Love and Wisdom shall appoint.

Christ tasted death for every man;--consequently for both you and me. Now the faith that God requires involves the full belief of this. Faith includes the confidence that Christ is ready, able and willing to save you. Suppose you are in the deep waters, and you seem just ready to sink--when suddenly you see a man just by, and you know that he is both ready, able and willing to save you. The fact that you believe this fully will make you quiet under any circumstances of danger. This confidence will make you as calm as if your feet were already on a rock.

Faith implies that you trust in Christ as sustaining to yourself all his revealed relations--as being of God made unto you wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. You trust in the present sufficiency and fulness of his grace. You know it is adequate to meet and supply every want, and it is ready and at hand now. You see and believe that He can do for you all you need.

You also see in Christ provision made for all the future, so that you have no more occasion to be anxious for the future than for the present. In fact you believe in all his promises--taking every word of them as addressed to yourself, and as good for your present use. You yield yourself up to his providence, assured that he pledges himself to make all things work together for good to his people. To his disposal, therefore, you yield up yourself entirely and most quietly for time and for eternity. You know you can trust his wisdom, and you can cheerfully commit yourself to his safe conduct and preservation.

Some of you have seen the power of this faith illustrated in the dying saints of God. In talking with them you found it impossible to name a thing which gave them any anxiety. "God," said they, "will keep all in his hand of love." You speak to that dying wife and mother;--"Are you going to leave your husband? How can you bear to go?" God will take care of him. "But how can you leave all your children?" God will take care of them. "But your youngest one--that dear feeble thing?" God will take care of that. "Are you not afraid that you may die under a cloud?" God will take care of that. "But you may dishonor God, and may sin against his name in the last struggles?" Aye, God knows how to take care against that. This is the universal answer. Everything is committed to God.

Press this dying mother yet farther. Say--you are to leave your children in a wicked world--a world full of temptations and snares. Your husband may marry badly and your children may suffer for want of a mother's sympathy; you know not how many dangers and evils may befall them. What does she reply? God, she says, will take care of that. This is the antidote for all cares and anxieties. God's immutable character and promises are a great sheet anchor to her soul. Stayed upon them, she is not afraid to leap over hell itself--making the entire sweep over its burning crater.

This faith is no visionary thing--no mere speculation. Nothing has ever been more abundantly attested by living and competent witnesses.

But go to the speculative believer. There he lies, on his dying bed. "Are you near your end?" No doubt I am. "Have you any anxieties?" O yes, anxieties enough. I am afraid about my children, my wife, my property--a thousand things.

Now all this fear and anxiety is real unbelief.

IV. Several things implied in doing the works of God.

1. Having the same end with Him. You must sympathize with God in the great end He pursued. This sympathy will be a natural result of really loving Him. When in the spirit of real love you come to confide in his universal goodness, love and faithfulness, you can not fail to have a universal sympathy with Him in respect to all his course in his government.

2. Spontaneous obedience to the letter of his commands. I have already said that faith and love are connected naturally with the corresponding outward acts; hence the obedience of faith is perfectly spontaneous. How is it with the confiding wife? She has a perfect sympathy with her husband in respect to his ends and motives. Suppose that with a common object they set off upon a journey to realize this object. The wife knows perfectly that her husband understands best how to accomplish this end. Consequently she needs no command; she needs only an expression of his will, for the simple reason that she sympathizes with him in the common object and confides in his wisdom to effect it.

So in regard to God. When you have perfect confidence in his character and sympathy with his ends, you will need only to know his will and obedience will not be forced, but entirely spontaneous,--not less so with you than with an angel, so far as you have real faith in God.

3. Absence of all fear that hath torment. You see this beautifully exemplified in the case of many saints on their death-beds, when you can not name a thing which they do not cheerfully and sweetly commit to God, so as to have no anxieties remaining on their minds.

4. Dominion of the peace of God in the soul. This is the inevitable result of faith. God's faith in Himself, (if I may thus speak,) is the ground of his own peace. He has perfect confidence in his own integrity, and in all his attributes, both moral and physical. Having devoted these attributes to the great work of doing good with the assurance of success, He can not fail of enjoying perfect peace of mind. Now let a Christian believe what God believes, and he will have the very peace which God has. God does not tremble through fear of the future, neither will he.

5. Calmness and equanimity of soul. By this I do not mean that there will not be inequalities in the state of the sensibility; there were in Christ Himself. Yet will the depths of the soul be calm, for the elements of calmness and equanimity are naturally there.

6. Satisfaction with present allotments of providence. Whether sick or health be your lot, all is well, all comes, you plainly see, from God, and you trust Him to do all things in the best possible manner.

7. A quiet state of mind in respect to all the future. All ignorant of the future though he be, yet the believer is at rest about it, and does not wish to catechise the Omniscient One as if he could not wait for time to reveal coming events. He does not say--O that God would let me turn over the leaves of the future--that I might turn over the leaf of tomorrow today; it is enough to know that as the present, so all the future is in the hands of God, who evermore doeth all things well.

8. Divine cheerfulness of temper.

This is the natural and inevitable result of faith, even as sourness and moroseness of temper are of unbelief. Before my conversion I could realize that if I had universal confidence in the present agency, wisdom and goodness of God, it could not fail to make me calm and cheerful under all circumstances. I saw that Christians were the only persons who had any right to be cheerful.

9. Universal sympathy with goodness.

10. Universal opposition to all evil.

11. What are called religious duties are spontaneities; as really so as the affection and the duties of a mother towards her offspring. She sits among her children, in the midst of love--never so much in her element as when she is catching their smiles and responding with her own. Are not her maternal duties and affections the spontaneities of the heart? Even so, are the Christian's when faith works by love and purifies the heart.

V. Delusions incident to this subject.

1. Many look only to the letter.

They have substantially the Jewish notions of religion. All they think of is, doing, doing, without ever falling back upon faith as the main-spring of all.

2. The conscience of many is developed only in respect to the letter. They seem never to have developed their conscience in respect to anything beyond the outward moralities of religion. What a delusion is this! To have a conscience only in respect to the outward life, but one which will not convict of wrong in respect to faith--how wide is this from the doctrine of Christ! He said of the Holy Spirit--when He shall come, "He will reprove of sin, because they believe not on me." Did Christ say--He will reprove the world for not

fasting twice in a week--for not giving tithes of all one's mint, anise and cummin--for lying, for licentiousness? Nay, verily; but for not believing on Him. Christ seemed to have their state perfectly before his mind, and therefore said, the Spirit, coming, should teach them a better lesson than to fast and to make long prayers in the street-corners to be seen of men; he would teach them the sin of unbelief.

How remarkable that men should have such a conscience! A conscience not developed at all toward the real things of religion; but all their ideas of right and wrong relate to matters in which there is not a particle of right and wrong whatever! Shall I call this a conscience? It is not worthy of the name; yet it may answer my present purpose to use the name, for this thing of which I speak supplies to them the place and executes the functions that conscience ought to fill and execute. The delusion often remains unshaken even to death, that religion refers to nothing more or other than to the outward life. For instance, a woman is absent from prayer-meeting because her children are sick, and her conscience is exceedingly troubled. What ails that woman? O she has committed so great a sin! Does she not know that she may have committed more sin in her unbelief than she ever could commit under any circumstances in being absent from prayer-meeting?

An occurrence in my own personal history made impressions on my mind of the sin of unbelief which I can never forget. A friend of mine had manifested so great a regard to my personal wants, and so strong a determination to supply them, that when I came to notice its effect on my own feelings towards him, it struck me forcibly that I had not so much confidence after all in God as I had in that man. This thought came like a wave of death over my soul. Is it possible, said I, that after all the revelations God has made of his love to me, I have not trusted Him so much as I trust one of my fellow-mortals? And shall God never be able to gain my confidence? Shall my unbelief forever grieve his heart and bar me from his bosom?

This train of thought served to show me the greatness of my own sins of unbelief.

3. Many judge themselves more by their outward life than by their faith. They know very well that their faith does not correspond with the claims of God upon them; so they are averse to looking at that point. But their outward life comes nearer their own ideal. So with great pleasure they search that for some favorable testimony to support their hope.

4. Many compel themselves to obey the letter, and then satisfy themselves with this as if they had now done all their duty. What a mistake!

5. Many persons, becoming somewhat convicted, begin to feel dissatisfied with themselves, and then set themselves about right doing and right feelings, instead of believing. Some one says to them--Go and visit, and labor and pray for souls. Then you will get joy and peace. So they rush upon outward doings for relief and for rest of mind. Christ would say to such--Would you know what to do that you may work the work of God? This is the work of God--that you believe. But you say--"I do believe." What do you believe? And do you believe with all your heart? Do you heartily embrace the real gospel and the whole gospel?

6. Others mistake conviction for faith. They think that views of truth are really the same thing as faith. Whereas, one may have strong convictions of truth, and yet be very far from yielding up the heart to the proper dominion of that truth.

7. Others resort to works to get faith. Yes, they go into a perfect effervescence of feeling and agitation to try to get at faith.

Now this all results from misapprehension of what faith is. Many seem not to see that faith is the simplest thing in the world. Little children understand it and exercise it every day. They have faith in their parents and friends, and it does not cost them a terrible struggle and a great fermentation of feeling to get it. It seems as natural to them as their very breath. Why should they not have confidence in their parents? Why not trust themselves implicitly to their parent's care?

8. Others rest in a perfectly spurious faith.

9. Others stumble through a partial faith. They do not embrace all the gospel. They seem to understand only a little of it. Hence their faith does not embrace Christ as a Savior from sin, present and future. They fail to embrace the fulness of the promises of gospel salvation, and go on ever more stumbling for the want of a fuller and larger view of gospel truth.

10. Many begin at the wrong end in their religion. They expend their efforts upon works first and not upon faith. Hence they are forever laboring and toiling up hill. They do not find the Spirit's aid to help them, for the good reason that they do not take hold of God's promises by faith for this blessing. Of course they drag along through life in their wretchedness, crying out as they groan along--"O Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death." In fact they live and die in the experience of Rom. 7. If they would at once believe and act as Paul did, how soon might they pass into the experience of Rom. 8. Let them only thank God through Jesus Christ, their Lord--then open their eyes to see that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," and also to see that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make them free from the law of sin and death;" and how naturally and speedily might they enter upon a new stage of Christian experience! In Rom. 7, Paul describes the case of one who begins at the wrong end, and labors hard up hill because he labors without faith.

11. Those who begin thus at the wrong end do not conceive rightly of a justified or gospel state of mind. Take the man of Rom. 7: what conception has he of a justified state of mind as described in Rom. 8? What does he know in his experience of that spontaneous faith and love, described so beautifully and so vividly in John 4 and 7? There Christ says of the real waters of life--"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life;" and "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The love and the faith of the gospel, having taken root within, develop themselves spontaneously and pour out their gushing influences over all the outward life.

O when will Christians understand the difference between beginning outside as if they thought to work in their religion through the skin, instead of beginning with the heart and planting first of all its deep foundations there in faith and love?

12. One class of legalists have regard simply to the letter, and of course their religion is made up of perpetual doing, doing; while another class have caught a glimpse of the law, and are therefore dissatisfied with themselves, and groaning as in Rom. 7, under a body of sin and death, which they do not come with to Christ for relief and salvation. They have seen so much of the purity of the law and of the sin of their own hearts that they feel condemned; but not coming by faith to Jesus Christ, they remain under condemnation and uncleansed from sin. Occasionally they have seasons of better feelings, occurring perhaps in the hours of Sabbath worship or under some specially exciting circumstances; but ere long these emotions subside, and they are as much disgusted with their experience as ever.

Often it is the case that their class of persons are not only dissatisfied with themselves, but with every body else. They look upon the religious state of their brethren through jaundiced eyes and see nothing as

they think it should be. How is it, say they, that you can be satisfied with your present state, or have any peace of mind at all? I am in as good a state as you are, but I am not by any means satisfied with myself. I live as near right as you do, but I am surely far from being right. You must be altogether deluded. You think yourself nearly, or quite free from sin; but I know you are not, for if you are, I am too; but I know that I am not, and therefore know that you are not.

Now such persons do not seem to consider that the outward life is not always an index to the inward, and that of two persons whose outward life is substantially the same, one may live by faith and walk humbly with God, while the other lives only by works and in the deepest guilt of unbelief.

REMARKS.

1. Christ speaks of faith as if it were the whole of religion. We have seen why he should. It is the natural root from which a religious life springs.

2. We may see why Paul says that faith establishes the law. It does so both because it embraces and honors God's system of atonement, and because it works by love and thus begets a spirit of sincere obedience to law.

3. The exact difference between a legal and a gospel life is this: the gospel life is a spontaneity of faith and love. A legal life is a spontaneity of selfishness. Sincere and hearty obedience flows naturally from faith and from love. It must be so, and always will be. Just as naturally does selfishness, when it aims to be religious at all, put on the type of legality.

4. Sinners look upon religion in a selfish light, and hence regard it as gloomy, cheerless; and its self-denials as a life of painfulness. Judging of its duties by their own state of mind and principles of action, they see it only repulsive and profitless. Since it does not promise them earthly riches, or earthly honor, or sensual delight, they see no beauty in it that they should desire it. Since it demands a reasonable subjection of those appetites which they delight to indulge, they think it a most burdensome system. If they would look at it, in a directly opposite point of view, they might see it as it is. Is it any self denial or hardship for Love to seek to please? There is real affection between that mother and her child. Now why does she make up a little nosegay and bring it in so cheerfully and sweetly to her little one? Is this a grievous act of self denial to the affectionate mother?

Or observe how the sea-captain gathers up the choicest things he can from the ends of the earth to bring home to the wife he loves. Is this a hardship? Does he drag out a miserable bondage in performing services of this sort for his beloved wife? If not, then you may know how to judge of the self-denials and hardships of the true Christian's life. It is not the gospel Christian, but the legalist, who is dragging his snail's pace up the hard hill of his religious life. Ah, his whole religion is nothing better than penance--a penance of such sort as God neither asks nor accepts. Sinner, you misconceive of religion, and your misconception results from your selfishness. If in the place of selfishness you had true love to God, you would see far other things in religion than what you now see. Go and ask that young convert how all these waters of life taste to him. He will tell you that they are sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb. If you would know this, try it. O, when will you understand what religion is, and having understood it, yield your heart at once in obedience to its claims? Then should your peace be like a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.

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