

Faith in God and His Word, the Establishment and Prosperity of His People.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in God and His Word for the establishment and prosperity of His people, highlighting the role of prayer and the gift of special faith in Christ.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:20, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 11:9, Mark 9:24, Romans 10:17, 2 Corinthians 7:5, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 11:1, James 2:26, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Prosperity"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of faith in God and His Word for the establishment and prosperity of His people, drawing parallels between the challenges faced by Jehoshaphat and the modern church. He illustrates how prayer and reliance on God's promises can lead to spiritual strength and victory over adversities. Gill explains that true faith is not merely intellectual assent but involves a deep trust in God and His prophets, which results in both stability and spiritual prosperity. He encourages believers to seek a deeper faith that is rooted in the grace of God, leading to a fruitful and victorious Christian life. Ultimately, Gill warns against the dangers of unbelief and the importance of nurturing one's faith.

Transcript

FAITH IN GOD AND HIS WORD,

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND PROSPERITY OF HIS PEOPLE:

A Sermon,

Preached at a Wednesday's Evening Lecture,

in

GREAT EAST-CHEAP, Dec. 27, 1753.

2 Chronicles 20:20

Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established blessed; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

In the beginning of this chapter, we have an account of an invasion of the land of Judea in the time of Jehoshaphat, by the neighboring nations, who joined in confederacy against the Jews. These people were always a typical people, and in this their case and circumstances were an emblem of the church and people of God; who in their present state are militant. They are surrounded with enemies, as the Jews were, which are many, lively and strong; they have numerous fleshly lusts which war against their souls; and some enemies that are not flesh and blood, but spiritual wickednesses, with whom they wrestle; and even the whole world is against them, and hate, oppose, and persecute them, in one shape or another, to the uttermost; so that upon one account or another, for the most part, without are fightings, and within are fears (2 Cor. 7:5).

The method of Jehoshaphat and his people took in this their distress, was to seek the Lord by prayer, and ask help of him. Prayer is a special piece of the Christian armor; it is the last that is mentioned in the account of it; it is the dernier resort of believers, and which they often use to good purpose and great advantage. There were some sort of devils in Christ's time, who could not be dispossessed by any other means; Satan has often felt the dint of this weapon of our warfare, and dreads it; and dreaded it has been by some of his instruments.

Mary queen of Scots used to say, that she dreaded more the prayers of John Knox, a famous Reformer, than ten thousand armed men; so effectual is the fervent prayer of the righteous, as for the bringing down the blessings of the covenant of grace upon them, so for the intimidating of their enemies, and for their protection from them. The excellent prayer of Jehoshaphat on this occasion is recorded; which begins with taking notice of the place of the divine residence, heaven; in like manner as our Lord taught his disciples to pray, saying first of all, Our Father which art in heaven (Matt. 11:9); and of the sovereignty of God over all the kingdoms of the world: and of his uncontrollable and irresistible power; and of his being the covenant God and Father of his people; all which are necessary to be observed by us in our addresses to him, to raise in our minds just ideas of him, and to encourage our faith and hope in him.

The royal saint goes on to make mention of the works of God of old; his works of power and might, of grace and goodness, in driving the heathens out of the land of Canaan, and giving it to the seed of Abraham for ever; from whence he hoped and concluded, it would not be given up again into the hands of their enemies. He takes notice of the sanctuary or temple that was built in it, where Jehovah dwelt, granted his presence to his people, and heard and helped them in the times of their distress; which was a type of Christ's human nature, the temple of his body, the true tabernacle which God pitched, and not man, in which dwells all the fulness of the Godhead; and for the sake of him the Lord hears and answers the prayers of his people, when they look, as Jonah did, towards his holy temple (Jonah 2:4); and which, with great pertinency, is here observed.

Next the ingratitude of their enemies is taken notice of; when Israel came out of Egypt, and passed through the wilderness, they were bid not to meddle with or distress the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, but turn away from them, as they did; who now reward them evil for good, by attempting to dispossess them of the land given them to inherit: and therefore it was hoped the Lord would judge their cause, and right their wrongs; since the king and his people had no power to oppose such a numerous army that was come up against them; but their eyes were to the Lord, and on him was their dependence, and with him they left the issue of things.

The Lord presently showed himself to be a God hearing and answering prayer; for immediately, as the king and all the people stood before the Lord to hear what he would say unto them, the Spirit of the Lord

came upon Jahaziel a Levite, who stood up and prophesied, and bid the people not to be dismayed at the number of their enemies; told them where they were to be met with; assured them of victory, nay, that they had no need to fight, the Lord would fight for them; and that they had nothing to do, but to stand still and see the salvation of God; which message Jehoshaphat and the people received with faith, with holy fear, bowing their heads and worshipping; and so fully assured were they of the truth of what was promised them, that they sung praises of God, before the deliverance was wrought; upon which they marched out to meet the enemy, when Jehoshaphat at the head of his army addressed it in the words first read; believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established blessed; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper: "do not trust in your numbers, nor in your strength, courage, and skill; but trust in your covenant-God, so shall ye be strengthened, confirmed, and animated to engage your enemies with true fortitude of mind; believe what he has said by his prophets, particularly Jahaziel, who has just now delivered a message from him to you; so shall ye succeed against your enemies, and obtain a complete victory over them."

This is the sense of the words respecting the present case; but they may be applied to believers in any age or period of time, in whatsoever case or circumstances they may be; the main and principle thing in them is faith or believing; concerning which, I shall consider the kind and nature of it. The objects of it, as here expressed, the Lord God and his prophets. The advantages arising from it, establishment and prosperity. I shall consider the kind and nature of faith: There are various sorts of faith, as the apostle suggests, when he says (1 Cor. 13:2), though I have all faith; that is, all sorts of faith, which he supposes a man may have, and not have charity, love of true grace; he means all sorts but one, namely, special faith; for whoever has that, has charity or love: for faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6): however there are several sorts or kinds of faith.

There is a faith of miracles, or of doing miracles; and which the apostle in the above words has in view, since it follows, so that I could remove mountains; referring to what our Lord said to his disciples; if ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; nothing shall be impossible unto you (Matt. 17:20). Christ, when he gave his disciples a commission to preach the Gospel, gave them power of working miracles to confirm it; he gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of diseases; and Judas no doubt had this power as well as the rest; for a man in these times might have such a faith, and such a power, and yet not have that special faith which issues in salvation.

We read (Matt. 7:22, 23) of some that cast out devils in the name of Christ, and yet are not, and will not be known and acknowledged by him as his. There is a faith which is commonly called an historical faith; which is a mere assent to a set of propositions as true, and which are true in themselves as, That there is but one God: that there is a God may be known and believed by the light of nature, may be concluded from the things that are made by him; and that this God is but one, is the voice of reason and revelation; the language both of the Old and of the New Testament; the faith of Jews and Christians; and it is right to believe it; and which may be done where there is not true special faith: thou believest that there is one God, thou dost well; the devils also believe and tremble (Jam. 2:19); that is, they believe there is one God, and know there is but one, and tremble through fear of his awful majesty.

With this sort of faith, a man may believe all that is said and is true of Jesus Christ; as that he is God over all blessed for ever, the true God of eternal life: that he is the Son of God, and Savior of the world; that he is God and man in one person; that he became incarnate; that he suffered and died for the sins of men; that he was buried, and rose again from the dead; that he ascended up to heaven, is set down at the right hand of God, and will come a second time to judge the world; all which a man may believe, and yet be

destitute of the true grace of God.

There are indeed some strong expressions in the epistle of the apostle John, where he says, that every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God (1 John 4:2); and whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God (1 John 5:1): whereas now there are whole nations that believe these things, of multitudes of whom it cannot be thought that they are regenerate persons. It will help us over this difficulty a little, by considering times, and times: in the apostles times, these truths were generally denied; the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, opposed them; and then for a man to believe and profess them in the face of all opposition, and under the scandal of the cross, was a great matter; it was reckoned a proof of true grace, and a criterion of a man's regeneration: but now, since Christianity is established, and become the religion of nations, to believe all this is no mark or sign of being born again; for such a national faith is no better than the faith of Indians and Mohammedans, only it happens to have a better object; for the ground and reason of it is the same; namely, being born and brought up among those who generally believe in the same way.

Though it may be, the true sense of the above expression is this; that Christ is come in the flesh, or is become incarnate, is on the side of God and truth; and that whoever believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah, is a regenerate person; that is, not barely assents to this truth; but whereas his work, as the Messiah was to make atonement for sin, and procure the pardon of it, and bring in everlasting righteousness, and obtain salvation for men; he deals by faith with him for these things; with his atoning sacrifice for the expiation of sin; with his blood for pardon and cleansing; and with his righteousness for justification; receives him as a Savior, and depends upon him for life and salvation; otherwise, barely believing him to be the Messiah, is no other than what the devils themselves do; who in the days of his flesh knew and owned him to be the Christ, the Son of God (Luke 4:34, 41).

With this sort of faith a man may believe all the doctrines of the gospel, and yet not have the root of the matter in him, or true grace. Men may have the whole form of gospel-doctrine in their heads, and deny the power of it, or not feel it in their hearts; they may believe the things concerning the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ, as Simon Magnus did, or however professed to do, and yet be, with him, in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Yea, many have had such a degree of knowledge in evangelical things, as to be able to preach the gospel clearly and distinctly, to prophesy or preach in Christ's name, and yet knew him not spiritually and experimentally, nor were known by him; they may speak with the tongues of men and angels, have all knowledge and all faith of this kind, and yet be without charity or true love to God, to Christ, and to divine and spiritual things.

Indeed, without believing the gospel of Christ, and the things concerning him, there can be no true faith in him; men cannot be children of light without believing the light of the gospel, or giving credit to the gospel-revelation; and therefore our Lord exhorts men to believe in the light, that they might be children of the light (John 12:36): the way and means of being so, is to attend unto and believe the gospel-scheme; but then this may be believed, and yet men fall short of the true light of special grace.

This faith is but temporary faith, a believing for a while; and it need not be thought strange if persons that have only this should make shipwreck of it, and put away a good conscience; and which is no instance of a true believer's falling away from grace; whereas those who have true faith, and live by it on Christ, are not of them that draw back into perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul; which brings me to observe, That there is a special and spiritual faith, to which salvation is annexed; with which he that believes shall be saved, according to the gospel-declaration; and which directs and encourages sensible

sinner to look to Christ, and believe in him, assuring them they shall be saved.

The scheme of salvation the gospel publishes and proclaims, is, that it is by grace through faith in Christ: hence, I suppose, it is, that this sort of faith is commonly called saving faith, to distinguish it from others; though I think not with strict justness and propriety, and could wish the phrase was disused; since it seems to derogate and detract from the glory of Christ, who is the only Savior, and to carry off the mind from the object of faith, to the act of it. But be this as it will: This sort of faith is not of a man's self; it does not owe its original to the creature; it is expressly denied to be of man; that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8); it is not the effect of pure nature; it is not the produce of man's free-will and power; all men have not faith (2 Thess. 3:2): there are few that have it, and those that have it, have it not from nature, but by the grace of God.

No man, says Christ, can come unto me; that is, believe in him, for coming to Christ, and believing in him, are the same thing, except it were given him of my Father (John 6:65). And again, no man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him (John 6:44); that is by the influence of his Spirit and grace. Nor is this sort of faith of the law of works; for as the law is not of faith (Gal. 3:12), so neither is faith of the law; the law is not so much as the means of it, nor does it reveal the object, nor require the act, or direct and encourage to it; it is not the means of true faith in Christ; faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17); but by what part of it? not the law, but the gospel; received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2)?

That is, by the preaching of the law, and works of it, or by the preaching of the doctrine of faith? By the latter, and not the former: and as the Spirit is not received in that way, or by such means, so not the graces of the Spirit, and particularly faith. How should it come this way, since the law does not reveal the object of it, Christ, or give the least hint concerning him? By the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20); but not the knowledge of a Savior from sin: did it reveal Christ to a poor awakened sinner, it would not work that wrath in his conscience, or leave him without hope of mercy, as it does; and if it knows nothing, and makes known nothing of the object of faith, how can it be thought it should require the act of it? does it require an act upon an unknown object? does it require men to believe in an object it does not reveal, or give the least discovery of?

How should they believe in consequence of such a requirement, of whom they have not heard the least title from the law? Nor does the law give any direction or encouragement to souls to believe in Christ; its language is, do this and live (Gal. 3:12), but not believe in Christ and be saved (Acts 16:31); this is the voice of the gospel, and not of the law. Should it be said that faith is reckoned among the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23); this is to be understood either of fidelity, of faithfulness among men, or of trust in God, as the God of nature and providence, &c., giving credit to the revelation of his will, and the worship of him according to it.

True faith in Christ, comes from another quarter than from the covenant of works, and flows in another channel; it is a blessing of the covenant of grace, of that covenant which is ordered in all things and sure (2Sam. 23:5); for the glory of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and for the good of the covenant-ones; it provides all blessings of grace for them for time and eternity, and among the rest faith in Christ Jesus. This lays open and exposes a mistaken and false notion of some, who assert, that faith and repentance are conditions of the covenant of grace, when they are the blessings of it, included in that promise; a new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26); and these are gifts without repentance,

which God never revokes or takes back, or suffers to be of no effect.

Faith in Christ is the fruit of electing grace, and is as sure as salvation itself; the one is in the decree of the means, the other in the decree of the end; that decree of election which secures the end, salvation, secures also the means, sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13); or faith in Christ, who is the truth; so it has been in all ages, now is, and ever shall be, that as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed (Acts 3:48). Hence true faith is called the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1); it being certain, proper and peculiar to them; and this is the true reason why one believes, and another does not; as our Lord says of some, ye believe not, because ye are not my sheep (John 10:26): the sheep which the Father gave unto me in election, and in the covenant of grace: let any man rise and give a better reason if he can, that this that Christ has given, why one believes in him, and another does not.

Believing in him is the pure gift of God, of his rich, sovereign and distinguishing grace; he gives it to one, and denies it to another, as he pleases: he hides the things of Christ, and of the gospel, from the wise and prudent, and does not vouchsafe unto them faith in them; and reveals them unto babes; and gives them faith in his Son; and no other reason can be given than his sovereign pleasure: even so, Father, says Christ, for so it seemed good in thy sight (Matt. 11:26).

Special faith in Christ is of the operation of the Spirit of God: he produces it by his mighty power in the soul; he enlightens the mind, reveals the object, brings near Christ, his righteousness and salvation, and enables the sensible sinner to look unto him, lay hold on him, and receive him as his Savior and Redeemer; hence he is called the Spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13); because he is the author of it, who begins and carries on, and will perform the work of faith with power: the principal use of which grace is to receive all from Christ, and give him the glory.

God has put this honor upon it, to constitute and appoint it to be the receiver-general of all the blessings of grace. It receives Christ himself as the Father's free-gift; it receives out of the fulness of Christ, even grace for grace, or an abundance of it; it receives the blessing of righteousness from the Lord of justification; it receives the remission of sins through his blood, according to the gospel-declaration; it receives the adoption of children, in consequence of the way being opened for it through the redemption which is in Christ; it receives the inheritance among them that are sanctified, the right unto it, and the claim upon it; and to this post it is advanced, that all the glory might redound to the grace of God; it is of faith, that it might be by grace (Rom. 4:16): there are other uses of faith, and actings of it, which will be observed under the following head.

I now proceed to consider, The objects of faith, as in the words directed to, the Lord God and his prophets. 1st, The Lord our God, who is the one Lord to be believed in; hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord (Deut. 6:4); from which passage the ancient Jews^[1] have established the doctrine of a Trinity of persons in the godhead, as well as the doctrine of the Unity of the divine Being; and certain it is, that Father, Son, and Spirit, are the one God; and each, and every one of them, are to be believed in, and are the proper objects of faith.

God the Father is the object of faith, who is to be believed in; and to believe in him is not merely to believe his existence and perfections, for he is a fool indeed that believes there is no God; nor merely to believe in him as the God of nature and providence, and to trust in him for the preservation of life and the continuance of the blessings and mercies of it, and to glorify him for them; though there are some who believe there is a God, yet do not glorify him as such, nor trust in his goodness, nor are thankful for

providential favors: but to believe in him with a special faith, is to believe in him as he has proclaimed his name in Christ, a God gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin (Ex. 34:6); it is to believe in him as our covenant-God and Father, for so he is to his people in Christ; he is to them what he is to him, as he says, I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God (John 20:17): it was a noble act of faith expressed by David, I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, thou art my God (Ps. 31:14); and such should believe that this God, who is their God, will be their God and guide even unto death; since covenant-relation always subsists, and can never be made void.

And whereas the Father of Christ stands in the relation of a Father to his people; it becomes them, having had the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing to their spirits that they are the children of God, to call him in faith, and with a filial fear and reverence, their father, and not turn away from him: to believe in him, is to believe in his everlasting and unchangeable love; and to believe that it is so, and their interest in it, it being shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit given unto them; this love being declared unto them by the Lord himself, and affirmed in the strongest terms, saying, I have loved thee with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3); of which he has given full proof, not only by his choice of them in Christ, and by the redemption of them through him, but by drawing them with loving-kindness to himself in effectual vocation; it should be believed: it is a glorious act of faith of the apostle's when he says, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39); this is to be rooted and grounded in it.

To believe in God the Father, is to believe in him as the God of all grace, the author of it; that his grace is sufficient for us in all times of need; that he is able to cause all grace to abound toward us; and that he will supply all our wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus: it is to believe in his promises, which are exceeding great and precious; that he is faithful who has promised, and will perform; that he will never suffer his faithfulness to fail, nor any good word which he has spoken; that all his promises are yea and amen in Christ: it is to believe in his power, that he is able also to perform and make good what he has said; and likewise that there is in him everlasting strength, and that, according to his promise, as our day is, our strength shall be; and that we are, and shall be kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is also the object of faith: ye believe in God, believe also in me (John 14:1), says Christ himself; who is God as well as the Father, and to be believed in equally with him: the gospel directs to faith in Christ, and it is the principal thing it encourages; the ministers of it point him out to sensible and distressed sinners, saying, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved (Acts 16:31): the sum of the gospel of the word of faith is, that if thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9, 10).

The Targum, or Chaldee paraphrase of our text, is, believe in the word of the Lord your God; where the Paraphrast, by the memra Jehovah, or word of the Lord, does not mean the written word of the Lord, the scriptures; nor the oral word of the Lord, what was spoken by the prophets, as it is said he sometimes does; since it follows in the same paraphrase, believe in his law, and in his prophets; wherefore it is to be understood of the essential Word, the Son of God, who is to be believed in; and various are the acts of faith which are exercised on him, or believing on him is expressed by various things.

Faith in Christ is signified by seeing him, and looking unto him; an unknown Christ cannot, but an unseen Christ is, and may be, the object of faith: faith is the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1), the principal of which is an unseen Christ: the believer by faith beholds the glory of his person, the fulness of his grace, the excellency of his righteousness, the preciousness and efficacy of his blood, and the suitableness of his salvation; and it looks to him, for peace and pardon, for righteousness, eternal life and happiness; and keeps looking to him as the author and finisher of faith.

It is a motion of the soul towards Christ; it looks at him, gazes with admiration and pleasure on the glories of his person, and the riches of his grace, but goes out unto him; faith is the soul's coming to Christ, which it is encouraged to do, by his kind invitation; come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28); and by his gracious declarations and resolutions, that he will in no wise cast out him that cometh to him (John 6:47): yea, it is expressed by a swift motion to him; by a fleeing to him for refuge under a sense of sin and danger; by running to the name of the Lord for safety, which is as a strong tower; and by turning into the strong-hold Christ, as prisoners of hope: to believe in him, is not only to behold him with an eye of faith, to flee and come unto him in a way of believing, but to lay hold upon him, and embrace him; for Christ is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon him, and happy is every one that retaineth him (Prov. 3:18): it is to lay hold upon the skirt of him that is a Jew; to lay hold upon his righteousness; to lay hold upon his strength; to lay hold on him as the mediator of the of the covenant; to hold him fast, and not let him go; saying with Job, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him--he also shall be my salvation (Job 13:15, 16).

Faith in Christ is a leaning on him, while passing through this wilderness; it is a recumbency, a relying upon him for salvation; a staying a man's self upon the mighty God of Jacob; laying the whole stress of his salvation on him; casting all his care, and all his burdens on him, who has promised to sustain him and them; believing he is able to keep him from falling, and to keep what he has committed to him: for to believe in Christ, is to give up all into his hands, our souls, and the eternal concerns of them; to expect all grace, and all the supplies of it from him, even all grace here, and glory hereafter: it is in one word, to deal with his person for acceptance with God; with his blood for pardon and cleansing; with his sacrifice for atonement: with his righteousness for justification; with his fulness for every supply of grace, looking for his mercy unto eternal life.

The Holy Spirit of God is likewise the object of faith; we read and hear of faith in God, and of faith in Jesus Christ, but very little of faith in the Holy Ghost; and yet as he is the one God with the Father and the Son, he is equally to be believed in as they are: and we are not only to believe his being and perfections, his deity and personality, his offices as a sanctifier and comforter, and the operations of his grace on the souls of men; but there are particular acts of faith, trust, and confidence, to be exercised on him: as he is God, he is to be worshipped, and this cannot be done aright without faith; he is particularly to be played unto, and there is no praying to him, nor praying in him, without faith; we are to trust in him for his help and assistance in prayer, and indeed in the exercise of every religious duty, and even of every grace.

I fear ministers of the word do not trust in him as they should do in the discharge of their work, nor private Christians in the performance of theirs: and besides all this, there is an act of special faith to be put forth upon him, as upon the other two persons; for as we are to trust in God, the Father to Keep us through his power to salvation, and to trust in Christ for the salvation of our souls, and to trust the salvation of them with him; so we are to trust in the Holy Spirit for carrying on and finishing the work of grace on our souls, who is equal to it; we are to trust the whole of it with him, and be confident of this very thing; as we may be, as of any one thing in the world, that he, the Spirit of God, which hath begun a good work in us, will

perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). 2dly, The prophets of the Lord are to be believed; first the Lord, and then his prophets, being set by him, and coming from him, bringing a message from him, and declaring his will; so the children of Israel at the Red sea believed the Lord and his servant Moses (Ex. 14:31).

By the prophets are meant the prophets of the Old Testament, who are to be believed, since they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; the Spirit of the Lord spoke by them, and his Word was in their tongue (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Sam. 23:2): he dictated to them what they should say; he led them into all the truths they delivered; he indited the scriptures of truth, and therefore they ought to be credited as such: nay, not only all scripture is given by inspiration of God, even all the writings of the prophets; but whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope; the whole of scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (Rom; 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16); which several advantageous uses should the more recommend the writings of the prophets to our faith and love; and especially since they contain many things in them concerning Christ, the more immediate object of special faith; there are many things in the Psalms, and in the law, and in the prophets, concerning him; Moses wrote of him, and all the prophets bear witness of him, of his person, offices, and grace, of what he should be, and what he should do and suffer; they testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; and especially we, at this time of day, have great reason to believe the prophets, since the far greater part of what they prophesied of, is exactly come to pass.

The prophecies of Isaiah, concerning the captivity of the Jews, and their deliverance from it by Cyrus, who is mentioned by name a hundred and fifty years or more before he was born, have been punctually fulfilled. Also Daniel's prophecies concerning Darius king of Persia, and Alexander the Great, under the names of the ram and he-goat, and of the kings of Egypt and Syria, and what should be done in their times; and not only these, but others of greater importance, concerning the Messiah, his birth of a virgin, the place of his birth, his miracles, sufferings, and death; his resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, and session at the right hand of God, the effusion of the Spirit, and the spread and success of the gospel in the Gentile world, as well as the destruction of the Jewish nation, for their rejection of him; on account of all these things, and more, the prophets of the Old Testament claim our faith and credit.

The prophets of the New Testament are to be believed. The apostles of our Lord are by him called prophets and wise men; some of which, he says, the Jews would kill, and crucify, and others scourge (Matt. 23:34): they are so called, both because they were extraordinary preachers of the word, and foretellers of things to come, and on both accounts were to be believed. John the divine, was eminently a prophet in both respects, as he was a faithful dispenser of the word, and bore record of it, and of the testimony of Jesus, and as he foretold things to come under a divine inspiration: his Revelation is a prophecy of what should be in the world and church, from his time, to the second coming of Christ: great part of which has already been fulfilled; and there is all the reason in the world to believe the rest will be accomplished.

The sayings in it are the sayings of God, and they are faithful and true; believe what he has said by this his prophet. The ordinary and common preachers of the word are called prophets and their preaching prophesying (1 Cor. 14: 3, 4, 5, 29, 32, 37); and though we are not to believe every spirit, and every man that pretends to be a spiritual man and a prophet, but try the spirits whether they are of God, by his word, the standard of faith and practice; because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1): yet such who bring the doctrines of Christ with them, such as are agreeable to the word of God, which are

taken out of it, and established by it, ought to be believed and received, not as the word of man, but as in truth the word of God.

The whole of divine revelation is to be believed, which God has made by his prophets, whether of the Old or of the New Testament; and which is all comprehended in these words our Lord began his ministry with, believe the gospel (Mark 1:15); not to believe this, is the damning sin of unbelief, so much spoken of in the New Testament; this was the sin of the Jews, and in which the greater part died, that they believed not the Jesus was the Messiah, and other important truths concerning him, though they came with such full evidence; this is the sin of all, to whom the external revelation of the Gospel comes, and they believe it not; this is the sin of the Deists of the present age, of all deniers, rejecters, and despisers of the Gospel; who either neglect to examine the evidence of it, or notwithstanding the evidence of it, reject and condemn it: what will the end of such persons be, that obey not the gospel of Christ, that do not embrace, but neglect or despise it?

They will be punished with everlasting destruction; he that believeth not this revelation shall be damned. This is the condemnation, the cause and aggravation of it, that light is come into the world and men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19); the darkness of nature, rather than a divine revelation. This sort of unbelief, and not want of special faith in Christ, is the cause of men's damnation. No man will be lost or damned, because he has not this faith; to say that God will damn any man because he has not this special faith in Christ, is to represent him as the most cruel of all beings, as the Arminians say we make him to be; to damn a man for that which is solely in his power to give; for no man can believe in Christ with this sort of faith, unless it be given him of his Father; and which yet he determines not to give unto him, as unto all the non-elect: and which man never had in his power to have or to exercise, no, not in the state of innocence.

Can any man believe, that God will ever damn a man on such an account as this? This is just such good sense, as if it should be said, that a malefactor dies at Tyburn, for want of receiving the king's pardon, he did not think fit to give him; it is true, if the king had given his pardon, and he had received it, it would have saved him from dying; but then it is not the want of the king's pardon, or of his receiving it, that is the cause of his condemnation and death, but the crimes he was charged with, and convicted of in open court.

So, though if it pleases God to give men special faith in Christ, for the remission of their sins, they will certainly be saved; but then it is not the want of this faith in the blood of Christ, for the pardon of sins, that is the cause of any man's condemnation and death, but the transgressions of the law of God, and the contempt of his gospel they have been guilty of. As is the revelation which is made to men, such is the faith that is required of them. If there is no revelation made unto them, no faith is required of them; and unbelief, or want of faith in Christ, will not be their damning sin, as is the case of the heathens; for how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?

And how shall they hear without a preacher (Rom. 10:14)? No, they will be condemned, not for their want of faith in Christ, or his gospel, which they never heard of, but for their sins committed against the law and light of nature; as many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without law (Rom. 2:12): if a revelation is made, this is either external or internal; if only an external revelation is made, the faith required is an assent unto it, and a reception of it; and such who do not attend to the evidence it brings with it, or reject and despise it, shall be damned: but if besides the external revelation and internal revelation is made by the spirit of wisdom, in the knowledge of Christ; or God by his word calls men effectually by his grace, and reveals his Son in them, as well as to them; this sort of revelation comes with such power and influence upon the mind, as certainly to produce a true and living faith in the soul, which

infallibly issues in eternal life and happiness; and of such persons, and such only, acts of special faith in Christ, are required: and though the sin of unbelief is often found in them, it is such as is consistent with true faith in Christ, and which in the issue is overcome by it: this is the sin of unbelief, that is opposite to special faith, and obstructs it in its acts; but partly because it is pardoned with the other sins of believers, and partly because it is finally subdued and vanquished, it is never the damning sin of any.

So I think the truth of things stands. I proceed, To consider the advantages arising from faith in God, and in his word, establishment and prosperity. Now, though establishment is annexed to faith in the Lord our God, and prosperity to faith in his prophets; yet this is not so to be understood, as if establishment only followed upon faith in God, and not upon faith in his word; and as if prosperity was the consequence of faith in the word only, and not of faith in God; whereas, as on the one hand, the prophets and ministers of the word, are the means of establishing believers; hence the apostle Paul was desirous of imparting the spiritual gifts he had received, to the end the saints might be established (Rom. 1;11), and speaks of God as of power to establish men, according to his gospel (Rom. 16:25); so, on the other hand, spiritual peace and prosperity flow from faith in God, who keeps such in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusteth in him (Isa. 26:3); wherefore these things are to be considered, not in a strict separate sense, but promiscuously, as they are the joint effects of both faith in God, and in his word. 1st, Establishment; which is to be understood, not of the state of believers, but to their hearts, frames, graces and duties.

Not of the state of the people of God, which is in itself firm and stable, and cannot be made more so: they are safe in the arms of everlasting love; they are not only engraven by the Lord upon the palms of his hands, and set as a seal upon his arm, but also as a seal upon his heart. Nothing in heaven, earth, or hell, can separate them from his love; it is invariably the same, in whatsoever condition or circumstance they are; when he hides or chides, he still loves; he rests in his love; it is more immovable than rocks or mountains.

They are fixed in the hands of Christ, out of whose hands neither sin, nor Satan, nor the world can pluck them, and out of which they shall never fall. What was said by the queen of Sheba, concerning Solomon, with respect to Israel; because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them (2 Chron. 9:8), may be said of Christ, with respect to his people; that because he loved the saints, and in order to establish them for ever and ever, he put them into the hands of Christ, where they are safe from all danger, and from every enemy.

They are secured in the covenant of grace, which is sure and immovable; its blessings are the sure mercies of David; its promises are yea and amen in Christ; it is established on better promises than any other covenant; and the persons in it can never be removed out of it. They are settled on the rock of ages, on which the church is built, against which the gates of hell can never prevail; they are built on a sure foundation God has laid in Zion; so that, though storms and tempests of corruption, temptations, and afflictions should beat upon them, they stand unmoved against them all, being built on a rock.

They are in a state of grace, in which they will ever remain; they are in a state of justification, and shall never enter into condemnation; they are in the family of God, by adopting grace, out of which they will never be turned; for, if a son, no more a servant, but an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 4:7); they are in a state of regeneration, and can never be unborn again; they have the principle of grace, which springs up unto eternal life: these things are so chained together, that not one link can ever be broken; whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them

he also glorified (Rom. 8:30).

Now this establishment does not arise from faith, nor is it by it; if all the faith that ever was in the world, from Adam to this moment, was engrossed and possessed by one man, it would not make his state, God-ward, a whit the surer and firmer that it is. But, The hearts of God's people are very unsettled, and need establishing; they melt like wax, and flow like water, through fear, and want of stronger faith. They are unstable as water, as is said of Reuben, and do not excel (Gen. 49:4); their frames are changeable and various; one while their mountain stands strong, and they say they shall never be moved; presently God hides his face, and their souls are troubled (Ps. 30:6, 7): one that could say, the Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him, soon comes into such distress as to put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope (Lam. 3:24, 29); he whose love is as strong as death, exceeding fervent and ardent, the coals thereof give a most vehement flame, which many waters cannot quench (Cant. 8:6, 7); through the prevalence of corruption, the force of temptation, and the snares of the world, waxes chill and cold.

And he that seemed to be steadfast in the faith, falls from some degree of his steadfastness in it; and instead of quitting himself like a man, is like a child tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, wavers in his profession, slackens in his duty, and is negligent of it. Now faith in God, and in his word, has a tendency to establish the heart, and make it fearless; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, even he whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; his heart is established, he shall not be afraid (Ps. 112:7, 8): as is a man's faith, so are his other graces; if faith is in lively exercise, hope will be lively too, and be as an anchor sure and steadfast; his love will abound, for faith works by it; he will become established in the truths of the gospel he believes, and has an experience of; he will be more stable and constant in the discharge of duty; he will be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). 2dly, Prosperity arises from faith in God and his word; not temporal, but spiritual prosperity; not prosperity of body, but prosperity of soul, such as Gaius had, whom the apostle John thus salutes, Beloved, I wish above all things, that they mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth (3 John 2); on which soul-prosperity faith has a very great influence.

The soul is in good health and in a prosperous condition, when there is an appetite for the word; when it hungers and thirsts after righteousness; when it desires the sincere milk of the word; when it finds it, and eats it by faith; when the word is mixed with faith upon hearing, and it is taken in and digested by it; as also when a soul has a comfortable view by faith of the forgiveness of its sins through the blood of Christ: sins are diseases, pardon is the healing of them; and then is a believer in a prosperous condition, when the sun of righteousness rises on him with this healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2); and when he, the inhabitant of Zion, shall not say I am sick; the reason of which is, because the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity (Isa. 33:24): so likewise when a man has much spiritual peace and joy through believing in the righteousness of Christ for his justification; in his blood for the remission of his sins; and in his sacrifice for the atonement of them; and spiritual joy is such a certain concomitant or consequence of faith, that it is called the joy of faith (Phil. 1:25); and whoever is possessed of it must, in a spiritual sense, be in prosperous circumstances.

Such a one is fat and flourishing, and all he does prospers: and as prosperity in the text carries in it an idea of victory over enemies, this may be ascribed to faith; it is by faith the believer resists Satan and his temptations: by holding up the shield of faith, he quenches his fiery darts, and obtains a conquest over him; as he does also over the world, the men, things and lusts of it: This is the victory the overcometh the world, even our faith; who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4, 5)?

What heroic actions, what wonderful things have been done by faith! Men through faith have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, &c (Heb. 11:36), and such must be in prosperous and flourishing circumstances. From the whole we learn, what an excellent and precious grace the grace of faith is; what use it is of, what purposes it serves, and what influence it has upon the stability and prosperity of the believer; it is a pity it should be put out of its place; for when it keeps its place, it is very useful and serviceable; but if it is put in the room of Christ, it is good for nothing.

Careful we should be, not to ascribe that to the act, which belongs to the object. It may be known, whether a person has this grace or no; for where it is, Christ is precious, to them that believe he is precious (1 Pet. 1:7); it works and shows itself by love to him, his word and ordinances, his people, and his ways; and it is attended with good works, the fruits of righteousness; for faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:26): and if persons are satisfied that they have this grace, they should be thankful for it, and attribute it, not to the power of their own free-will, but to the free Grace of God, whose gift it is; for it comes along with the abundant and superabundant grace of God in conversion.

And such who have it should pray for an increase of it; since their stability and prosperity have such a connection with it; and should guard against unbelief; and upon every appearance of it, pray as the poor man did, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief (Mark 9:24). To conclude, since such are the advantages of believing in God and his word, Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). ENDNOTES

[1] See my Exposition of 1 John 5:7

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/faith-in-god-and-his-word-the-establishment-and-prosperity-of-his-people/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net