

The Foundation of Faith

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the foundational role of faith in the Christian life and its implications for union with God and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:10

Topics: "Faith", "Perseverance in Trials"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that faith is the foundational element of the Christian life, linking it to the divine seed born from Christ's suffering. He explains that true children of God are those of faith, not merely of flesh, and that faith is essential for union and communion with God. Sparks highlights that all virtues such as love, joy, and peace depend on faith, and that the absence of faith leads to spiritual calamities. He uses Abraham as an example of faith, illustrating that despite trials and delays, true faith perseveres and is ultimately rewarded. The sermon calls believers to trust in God's character and promises, regardless of circumstances.

Transcript

"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:10,11).

"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children... That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed" (Romans 9:6-8).

"Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7).

In our further consideration of this matter of "his seed", "the travail of his soul"; in our seeking of a fresh apprehension of that upon which the heart of the Lord is set -- a divine and spiritual seed, born out of His travail -- we will turn to another fragment of Scripture: "Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham."

There is one supreme characteristic of this divine seed, and that is faith. Whether we like it or not, Christianity rests upon one word and that word is FAITH. The beginning, the continuation, and the consummation of the Christian life rests upon that one thing -- faith. It relates to salvation, initially; it relates to and governs the whole course of progress, spiritually; it relates to service; it relates to prayer; it relates

to the perfecting of the believer; it relates to final victory. There is no phase, no aspect, no stage of the Christian life which is not bound up with this issue. It is, from beginning to end, at all times, in all things, just a matter of faith, and it is just here that we find the weakest point in human nature. There is no doubt about it, sooner or later, we discover that this is our weakest point. There was a time when I used to look at certain people who seemed to have natural faith, with whom it seemed not to be a difficult thing at all to believe in God; it seemed quite natural to them to believe in God, they seemed to have no difficulty about it. Here was I, born with an unbelieving heart and an infidel mind, and they seemed to have none of those difficulties. But I have lived a few years, and I have watched those people, and I have seen them come to a time and a place where the most difficult thing in all the world for them was to believe God. Sooner or later we discover that this is our weakest point.

Faith and God's Good Pleasure

But, on the other hand, this is the strongest point in the divine nature. This matter of faith, then, is basic to our union with God. This strength of faith in the divine nature, and weakness as to faith in our nature, cannot exist and obtain together in a true union; they are contradictions, they are quite against one another. And the issue is: it is either God or ourselves. Union with God always rests upon this matter of faith. The same is true of communion, the continuation of union and living in the good of it, the expression of union -- communion. It is all a matter of faith. It is a matter of God's pleasure in us, and that is an important matter: "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him." Now that goes very deep. It is possible for God to bless us and to use us as instruments, but at the same time not to take pleasure in us; we are just being used by the Lord, and yet we know that the Lord is not taking pleasure in using us: He is doing it all in sheer grace and mercy. You may not be able to understand that, but it is true. Somewhere, even in the servant, there may be a reservation about the Lord, which holds up the Lord's good pleasure in His servant. There is something more than having blessing from the Lord; something even more than being used by the Lord -- the Lord having delight in us. And, mark you, the point at which the delight factor comes in is just this matter of faith. It does not say "without faith it is impossible to get any blessings from the Lord, it is impossible to do any work for the Lord", but it does say, "without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to the Lord."

Faith and the Divine Virtues

And then what a great number of other things depend upon and rest upon this foundation of faith. I only mention them and leave you to think them out. Love rests upon faith. Think about that. It depends upon faith, does it not? Joy rests upon faith. We know how miserable we are, if we have lost our faith, or if we have got any doubts or questions. It is only when faith is clear and bright that we are really happy. You see, joy hangs upon faith. And does not peace hang upon it? If you like, change the word for rest, that is the biblical way of putting it -- rest. Peace just rests upon faith. There is no rest or peace unless there is faith. Then again, meekness. What is the opposite of meekness? Well, it is a trying to force things, to assert ourselves; doing out from ourselves, trying to hold our own ground, vindicate ourselves. Faith undercuts all that, does it not? We need not worry at all about anything; we can be perfectly restful about issues if we have faith. Patience -- well, it is so obvious, is it not? Patience rests upon faith. Those two things are put together in the Word of God. And so are all the other things -- hope and longsuffering and kindness -- all the divine virtues rest upon the foundation of faith. And if the faith is not there, these other things are either wanting or they are weak. It is a tremendous matter, this matter of faith. If you look in the Bible you will see that all the tragedies and the calamities there resulted from a lack of faith. The first great tragedy and calamity of what is called the Fall came about simply because faith failed, was not there.

Israel's tragedy in the wilderness? -- it was the same reason. Israel's going into exile and captivity? -- the same reason. And perhaps worst of all, it is the cause of Israel's present setting aside. There are personal instances, such as Abraham's lapse resulting in Ishmael, and the bringing in of a perpetual open sore in the history of God's interests in this world. There are many more, but we pass on: the tragedies and calamities, whether personal, national, or collective, can all be traced to this one cause: a breakdown somewhere in this matter of faith.

Faith and the Character of God

Now faith is always faith. That may sound like a platitude, but faith will always be objective; it will always focus upon the very character of God. That is faith's focal point -- the very character of God. And remember that any weakness or absence of faith -- I am speaking of course about spiritual faith -- is an impugning of the character of God. That is where our Bible begins: "Hath God said...?" Man's initial and all-inclusive breakdown began with an impugning of the character of God, a calling into question of the character of God, a throwing of doubt upon the character of God. And so it has always been, because, you see, the focal point of faith is nothing less or other than the very character of God. Whether we will believe that God is what He says He is -- that is the ultimate matter in relation to faith. But it is always FAITH. We are always wanting faith to be something other than faith, trying to substitute something else, either sight, or experience, or what we get, what God does for us. But God always keeps things in the realm where, after all, it is faith. He never moves out of that realm.

"True Israel" -- the Seed of Faith

Look at the tremendous implications of this one fragment of Paul's statements on this matter of faith in Galatians 3:7: "They which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" -- are Abraham's seed. He has said that not all they that be of Abraham are children -- are the seed: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). This is the true seed, the seed which is of and by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1) The covenant

For a moment or two let us look at this further implication of Abraham's seed with whom the covenant was made. We are referring now not to "Israel after the flesh", but to the spiritual counterpart which, as we see in the Scriptures, is that which is born out of the travail of Christ, the fruit of His Cross, the reproduction and multiplication of Himself as THE corn of wheat, the fruit of His having fallen into the ground and died. This is the seed. All the covenant promises made to Abraham are fulfilled and realised in Christ and His seed. We inherit all that. Of course, we are familiar with this as truth, but it all comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ, because we are the true seed promised to Abraham. Let us, then, look briefly at Abraham as God's great example of faith. God carried through the whole system of His purpose from eternity to eternity -- in creation, in redemption and in established fulfilment -- through the soul of one man. Yes, Abraham rightly has a large place. It is as though God, in prospect, forced through the very soul of that man the whole plan of His divine purpose and redemption, and it was all on the principle of faith, by a long succession of demands for faith. It is here written for our instruction.

2) The land

First, there is the promise of a land. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee." Then He promised him that land -- "I will give thee" was

His promise and His covenant. Abraham left his country and, subsequently, his father's house, and came into the land. All his lifetime he went up and down in it, dwelling in tents, and never obtained a foothold. That is true, if we view things in strict accordance with the covenant and promise. We can read the story in a few minutes, but the record covers many years.

There was plenty of scope for question and doubt through the years with all the demand for patience. The difficulties, the trials, and the adversities of many years, provided plenty of evidence for saying, "I have made a mistake, a fundamental mistake, I had an idea: evidently I was wrong. Something happened and I have come out on a wrong line altogether. Nothing that I imagined I was told is being supported" -- there is plenty of room for all that sort of thing. We could enlarge upon it, but I do not think we could exaggerate what Abraham had to encounter in his own soul on that one question of the land.

3) The seed

But that is not all, he was promised a seed -- "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" -- "thy seed", "thy seed", again and again that word is spoken by God in covenant to Abraham. He was promised a seed -- and, not a child, not one! On natural grounds, there was little or no prospect of anything like that. His own situation utterly contradicted God's promises concerning this seed. There is plenty of room there, is there not, to have a controversy with the Lord and to have all sorts of tangles in the soul? What a mess one could get into with a situation like that! And it was not just for a day, or a week, or a month, or even a year, that Abraham had to cope with this problem.

And further, God came and repeated this, reiterated this, and focused down this matter of faith upon the child Isaac. He promised him this child when all natural hope had receded, and went away and left him with the promise for a few more years! It was just something said to him, and there was nothing to support or bear it out in actuality. God went away and left him! If the hope had receded far back to the horizon before the promise was actually crystallised, surely it has gone beyond the horizon now. God had said it would come to pass and is leaving him with THAT situation! And then, the child is given. Yes, the son is born. We know the great test of faith that came in with that period between the promise and the realisation. Even Abraham broke down and failed. We know about Ishmael, but we leave that. In spite of everything, the child is born, there is the infant, and with what wonder they must have looked at that child. There is the little child growing up in their home, and how they must have cherished him in the light of all that God had bound up with his life. He grows up to youth, no doubt an object of great love, care, devotion, watchfulness and expectation. And then the blow fell: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest" -- God seems to be rubbing salt into the wound, does He not? "Thine ONLY son", he had no other, "whom thou lovest... and offer him". Well, we need not press this further. Abraham went on, came to his very old age, and died -- not having received the promise. "These all died in faith," says the writer to the Hebrews, "not having received the promises." No, he had not inherited the land, he had not seen the seed in any commensurate way, but he died in faith -- that is the point. Through it all faith survived.

Now we must break off there. "They which be of faith" are Abraham's seed, THIS seed, these children, this people, this true Israel of God is on that basis, on that principle, and after that kind. Let us make no mistake about it. I started by saying, "whether we like it or not", and we do not like it. It is the hardest, the most difficult thing, but there it is -- the matter of believing God, not because of what He can do or will do, but because of what He IS. That goes a long way, and very deep down; it tries us on everything -- God's postponements, God's delays, God's seeming contradictions and paradoxes, a thousand and one things. The end is, after all, what are we going to do about it? IS God? And is God WHAT HE SAYS HE IS OR

NOT? Our interpretation, our argument, our position, our mind about things -- does it really set God aside? Does it? Or is our attitude that of faith? -- GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING.

We could carry that into the realm of spiritual life. You know, in our spiritual lives, in our spiritual growth and the perfecting of us in the likeness of Christ, there are many things that we think the Lord ought to have removed long ago, and He has not removed them -- even matters of our character. If we could, we would have God make us absolutely sinless this very moment, and He does not! He is dealing with us on the matter of faith, even over spiritual transformation. And how many other things would we have God do for His own glory, and He does not do them; for the facilitation of His own interests and work, and He does not do them. Well, either God is, or He is not; either He is faithful or He is not; either He is consistent or He is not. You see, after all, we are brought back to this question of faith. "They which be of faith" are Abraham's seed. What is Abraham's seed? -- Christ and those born out of His travail. And what travail there is related to the fruit of faith! Now there is no real fruit that is not the fruit of travail, and travail is always a matter of faith.

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