

The Christian Life

by William Edwin Boardman

The Christian life is sustained by the abiding graces and forces of faith, hope, and charity, which are gracious, grateful, and powerful.

Scripture: Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Hebrews 11:1

Topics: "Christian Living", "Faith And Hope"

Description

William Edwin Boardman preaches about the abiding graces and forces of the Christian life, emphasizing the importance of learning to live by the true principles of faith, hope, and charity, not just when facing death. He highlights how these graces and forces, graciously given by God, are essential for the development and progress of the Divine Life in the soul, leading to transformation and outreach to a dark world. Boardman discusses how faith, hope, and charity work together, with faith being the foundation that sustains and develops the Christian life, while hope looks towards the future and love is the fruit of faith. Through the example of a miner in Potosi, he illustrates the power of faith as both the evidence of unseen present realities and the substance of hoped-for future glories, showing how faith in God's wisdom and love sustains believers through trials and privations.

Transcript

ITS ABIDING GRACES AND ABIDING FORCES.

Too many learn how to live just when they come to die. The great principles which give men peace in the hour of death, would have given them power, had they known them throughout their lives. These great principles have been the property of the few in the past, as the joy of their pathway and the power of their usefulness in life, while the many ten thousands of Israel have waited until driven into them by the stern necessities of the dying hour, and then with Dr. Payson and Gov. Duncan, they have poured into the ears of God and man, the singularly commingled notes of extatic delight in their newly made discoveries of the wonders of God's wisdom and grace in the plan of salvation -- and of regret that these discoveries had not been made by them with the rising instead of the setting sun of their Christian course in the world.

The experience in question -- in the main -- is the whole-hearted reception of the true principles of the Christian life in their full-orbed proportions. Learning to live, not simply learning to die.

Mainly we have been content to present these, the true principles, in contrast with the false, in the vain struggles of struggling ones in their futile attempts to find peace and purity by the wrong course, and in the

triumphant issue in every case the moment the right course was entered upon. It is due yet more fully to present the true and the false in contrast in their subsequent manifold workings in all the practical progress of the subsequent life, and in all the questions of duty and difficulty by which the disciple of Jesus may be perplexed in his course.

A field for a volume in itself, which however must be compressed to a space bounded by the lines and landmarks of a few chapters at most.

According to St. Paul, the abiding graces of the Christian life, are Faith, Hope and Charity; these are also its abiding forces, at once gracious, grateful and powerful. Gracious as the merciful gifts of God's ineffable love, and graceful as chief ornaments of the disciples of Jesus -- the royal regalia of kings and priests unto God -- the clothing of wrought gold all beautiful within of the bride, the Lamb's wife -- they are also the great permanent forces wrought and employed by the Spirit of God for the development and progress of the Divine Life in the soul, and for its outraying influence, giving light to a world sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. All the progress vouchsafed to the disciple of Jesus, whether in the transformation of his own character into the image of his Master, or in aiding others to become with him partakers of the divine nature, is traceable directly to these three graces and forces of the life of God in the soul.

The germinal start of Christianity in the world, was given it, it is true, by these three permanent forces -- not alone -- but aided by three others, occasional in their nature -- inspiration, miracles and persecutions. These three occasional forces, each in its own measure and way, but all with the hand of the mighty, came in as helpers in producing the three permanent forces, faith, hope and charity, tending directly, like the protecting glass of the green house in aid of the sun to give a vigorous and early expansion to that which otherwise had been of much slower growth.

Inspiration caused the unmingled and undimmed light of the Sun of Righteousness to shine forth in the apostolic teachings vouchsafed to the primitive church. The simplicity and directness with which the apostles, like the herald of Christ on the banks of the Jordan, pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away -- beareth away -- purgeth away the sins of the world, is wonderful. And wonderfully contrasted too with subsequent instructions, miracles, like inspiration, pointed also directly to Jesus, in aid of faith in his name.

No miracle ever wrought by the hand of an apostle, was ever wrought save in the name of Jesus. And even to the face of their fierce persecutors, before whom to confess Jesus, was a crime punishable with death, the apostles gave always and only the name of Jesus, as him who through faith in his name made the cripple to leap for joy, the blind to see and the diseased to stand up in their presence made whole. Every miracle was therefore a demonstration that all power on earth and in heaven was centered in Jesus, and every miracle proclaimed therefore the name of Jesus as the only name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved. And moreover every miracle was in itself a practical ocular proof, that Christ was then and there present in power -- though absent and invisible in body -- a very present help, mighty and able to deliver, able to do exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think according to the power which they saw at work with their own eyes.

Persecution, also in its own bloody way, tended, though far from its wish, to build up the faith, which in its impotent wrath it sought to destroy. Most effectually persecution crucified the disciple of the crucified Jesus to the world, and the world to him.

With bloody hand it pointed to Jesus, and bade the disciple choose between him and the world -- Jesus, with imprisonment, torture and death -- or the world, with life, liberty and peace -- was the alternative persecution proposed. And he who chose the Redeemer, could be no half-hearted one, either in his faith, or his hope, or his love, centered in Christ.

Martyrdom made martyr spirits of thousands who were not themselves called to the stake or the cross. And the martyr spirit which shines out with such lustre from dungeon cells and fiery faggots, is bright also, and beautiful and powerful, in the bosom of a church unmolested, and in times of profoundest peace.

These, however, were only the conservatory influences, especially used by the Great Husbandman above, for the early and vigorous development of Christianity in the days of its budding existence in the world. The vine in its maturity, transplanted into every chime and soil under the whole heaven was left, as it has now been left nearly eighteen hundred years, to battle with the elements under divine training and culture by virtue of its three great permanent forces, faith, hope and love.

Inspiration passed away when the sacred oracles were filled up and complete.

Miracles, as the seal of divine inspiration, ceased with inspiration itself.

And persecution, always fitful, employed, only as the wrath of man could be made to praise God, was restrained in its remainder, and long since has nearly passed away forever.

Now abide these three, Faith, Hope and Charity. And if the greatest of these three is charity, because by and by faith is to be swallowed up in sight and hope in fruition, leaving charity only as the finally abiding one of the three in heaven. Yet faith in another sense is the greatest here upon earth, as the first in the order of enumeration not only, but also of reception and working.

If love is necessary to faith to make it saving, faith is necessary to love for its very existence.

If faith without love is but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, love without faith would be less yet, nothing at all, it could not be.

The plan of God in its profound wisdom and powerful working is simply this, to charm the sinner into love for God by making him see God's love for the sinner. The fulness of his love God has shown in the gift of his only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. And faith, while it is the hand of the soul to receive and appropriate the gift as offered from God in his gospel, is also the eye of the soul to perceive the ineffable love which dictated the gift, and it is the sight of this wonderful love of God for the sinner which melts the heart of the sinner into love for God in return.

Faith then, in the absence of vision, and until sight takes its place, is the mainspring of love and so the mainspring of life.

Angels and the just made perfect have no need of faith, because they stand in the presence of Jehovah, Jesus, and behold his glory and are kindled into rapture thereby.

Faith, to us, supplies the place of sight, as far as it can, and as far as we have it, by depicting our God and Saviour to us as revealed in his works and word.

Hope is only another aspect and application of faith.

Faith is the second sight of the soul given of God to enable us to realize invisible things of the present. And hope is this same second sight of the soul turned toward the realities of the future.

The apostle himself in his epistle to the Hebrews, xi. 1, includes both faith and hope in the one definition, while yet in that definition he distinguishes clearly the distinctive aspects and powers of the two.

"Faith," he says, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Faith in the aspect of hope, pushes forward to the end of the world and beyond into the kingdom of glory, and brings back the olive leaf promise; nay the very substance of all the glories which are outspread in their infinite duration and boundless blessedness, this side and especially beyond the tomb and beyond the judgment, while faith, as the second sight of invisible realities in the present, is the evidence to us, of what Christ has already done for us, in tasting death for our sins, and what he is now to us in his living presence, power, care and love watching over us from day to day, and guiding us in all the struggles and issues of the present here upon earth, and what he is now for us also, as our advocate, mediator and friend in heaven above.

The apostle illustrates this, his two-fold definition of faith by calling up as witnesses, the illustrious cloud of the holy men of old, from Abel onwards, until he himself is swallowed up in the cloud and ceases from sheer inability to enumerate the bright host gone before.

Enoch exemplified both the faith which realizes the presence of God here, and the faith which is the substance of glory hoped for hereafter. Enoch walked with God by faith as the second sight of invisible realities in the present. By faith he saw God and saw what would please him -- and gained this testimony that he did please him in the then present time.

By faith as a second sight, a prophetic vision of things in the future, Enoch was not, for God took him. He looked up to, and longed for, and was translated into the kingdom of glory, without having died.

So Enoch's faith was first and efficaciously the evidence of things not seen in the present, and then, and most gloriously, the substance of things hoped for in the future.

Noah, by faith of invisible realities in the present, feared God more than he feared the scoffs and jeers and violence of the bloody generation who filled the world with their deeds of terror, and in spite of all they could do and say built the ark amongst them, animated and sustained by the presence of the invisible God realized to him through faith.

And by faith as a hope of the future he entered the ark and outrode the flood, which swallowed up the whole infidel world, and saw the morn of a new world even this side of death.

Abraham, like Enoch, by faith evidencing to him the invisible realities of the present, walked also with God, abandoning his home, dwelling in tents in a strange land, and offering up Isaac, the son of his love and his hope, counting God able to raise him up from the dead.

And by faith as the substance of things hoped for in the future, Abraham also grasped the mighty future of God's covenant promise, both as it related to his seed after him to be as the stars of heaven innumerable, and also as it related to the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God, eternal in the heavens, for himself and his seed.

Moses, by faith as a hope, making the future as real to him as the actual present, and far more glorious, while yet his faith was imperfect and weak, and his character undisciplined, abandoned Pharaoh's court, and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, because he had respect unto the recompense of reward, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

And afterwards -- forty years after -- when called of God to the work of delivering his people -- which forty years before he had presumptuously undertaken, being as yet uncalled -- failed not as in the first attempt, because God was now with him as he was not before. And he was sustained by faith as the evidence of invisible realities in the present, mightier than the visible realities opposing him; and so, in the strength of a present God, he was able to endure the wrath of the king, the murmurs of the people, and all the toils and trials incident to breaking the yoke of a tyrannical monarch, and leading out a vacillating, ignorant multitude, and sustaining, training, organizing and disciplining them into the form and order of a compact nation.

In all these, and all the others instanced by the apostle, if time permitted us to cite them, we have illustrations of the two aspects of faith -- one as the substance of things hoped for in the future, and the other as the evidence of things unseen in the present.

Faith and hope, then, although different as forces in the development of the Christian life, are yet only one and the same thing in their nature in two different aspects; the one turned toward the invisible realities of the present, and the other toward the certainties of the future; the one resting upon Jesus for what he has already done for us and what he now is for us in heaven, and to us upon earth, and the other resting also upon Jesus for what he is yet to do for us and be to us in time and eternity; the one is the gift of present sight, revealing present things to the blind, else all unseen, and the other is telescopic vision, penetrating far away into the future, and bringing near the glorious things else all hidden from view in the dim distance ahead.

Love, as we have already seen, and seen how, is the offspring of Faith begotten of Grace.

By grace are ye saved -- saith the apostle -- through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

God's gift is faith. Faith beholds the glorious grace of God in Christ Jesus, and kindles into hope and melts into love.

We see, then, that faith is the all-inclusive gift of God, as the great force for sustaining and developing the Christian life, as we have already before seen that it is the all-inclusive condition of its commencement, verifying the apostle's saying, and the Reformer's experience, that "The just shall live, as well as be made alive by faith." For faith includes hope and produces love.

Before passing to consider the false principles too frequently substituted for the true, as the means of advancing in the divine life, it may be well to have an illustration of the sustaining power of faith.

It happened to the writer to become personally acquainted and associated with one whose life deserves to be sketched by the pen of a Legh Richmond, or a Hannah More, and placed side by side with the Dairyman's Daughter and the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, in every household of the world.

THE MINER OF POTOSI,

We met, first of all, and repeatedly, at the cabin of a woman who opened her doors to a prayer-meeting from week to week on Tuesday evening.

At this proseuchia, (prayer-place) -- as yet there was no synagogue (church) in the Hollow, as it was called -- the miner had long been wont to meet a fellow-disciple, and sometimes two, or even three, to pour out their hearts before God, and hold up the standard of the cross amidst the surrounding darkness.

It seems that Satan had his seat there, and when the disciples of Jesus came there, he stoutly withstood them as in days of old. It was first called Snake Hollow, from the circumstance of finding a snake in the cavern, where the lead ore was first discovered, and for years the trail of the serpent seemed to be upon everything. The name was afterwards changed to Potosi, and the new name, suggestive of mineral wealth, was not without its significance as to spiritual riches. The pearl of great price was there found by not a few; pearls and diamonds also, were there polished into rare brilliance and beauty for the Master's crown in the day when he shall make up his jewels.

The first Herald of the Gospel who was known to pass through the winding street down the Hollow, was followed by certain lewd fellows of the baser sort -- bearing rule there at the time -- with empty whiskey barrels. Loose stones were put in at the hung for the noise they would make. They rolled the barrels rapidly on, up to the very heels of the minister's horse, with hootings and howlings, if possible to frighten the horse, and make him run with his rider and throw him. But both horse and rider were too cool for their assailants. They made their way in safety out of the place.

The next minister -- fared better -- shall I say? Hardly. He sent an appointment before, and in due time following his appointment he went on for its fulfilment. The place selected was a vacant log cabin, and his pulpit the clay hearth at one end of the cabin, under the open hole in the roof, which, when a fire was kindled on the hearth, served as a chimney of escape for the smoke as it rose. There on the hearth the preacher took his stand, while before him a dozen or twenty men were seated on boards across stones, and upon boxes and nail-kegs, butter-firkins and other extempore affairs, common to such places and times.

He had not gone far in his service, however, before strange sounds were heard over his head -- a terrible thumping, as of men's hands striking hard upon a table -- a sort of table-rapping above; and oaths, the loudest and vilest imaginable, showing the spirits not to be disembodied at least. Looking up, what should be seen there but these same lewd fellows of the whiskey-barrel affair, seated around the hole in the roof, with a board laid across from knee to knee, with their feet dangling below, playing cards. He went on, however, in spite of it, to the end, and the worship of God triumphed over the attempts at disturbance.

An occasional exercise of the Sabbath there was this: In the morning, they gathered in force a hundred, or two hundred, strong, at the head of the Hollow. Organized in mock-Indian-military order, with one of themselves as a chieftain in command. And after copious refreshings of whiskey, they marched in single file -- a fiddle solo ahead for their band -- with yells a la Indian, making the bluffs reverberate on either side of the Hollow, down the whole length of the winding-way, stopping to refresh and dance, and screech at each of the many drinking-places by the street side. God had better things, however, in store for them. Amongst others -- and one of the best -- the Lord sent our miner there to pitch tent and delve both for the lead ore in the earth, and for the unfading and unfailing treasures above. One of the early standard-bearers, he, with the consent and to the delight of the good woman at whose house we first met, planted the standard at her house, and gave his colors to the breeze in sight of all in the place. By-and-by,

the place filled up, even to overflowing. Then other cabins were open on other evenings of the week. Then a long, log-store was rented and fitted up as a church. Then a church was built. So the prosenchia grew at last into a synagogue, and many will date their conversion to God at that Bethel in the mines.

We met afterward at his own house, or cabin -- for cabin it was -- one room with a loft, reached by a ladder in one corner. A chest serving the purpose of bureau and sofa, between meals, and settee at the table; a bed in each of the two corners farthest from the hearth, two or three stools, a few pots, skillets, crocks and dishes, and a looking-glass, comprising the furniture. He was tall and manly, graceful and dignified -- accustomed to refinement and good society.

He had previously told me that he was reared in old Virginia, in the ease and affluence of heirship to a plantation and servants; and had left there, for conscience sake, with his servants, to provide for them and set them free in a free State. That he had then embarked what had remained to him, in merchandise, in a promiscuous credit-trade in the prairie land of the Northwest, and there had lost almost everything through failure of debtor after debtor to pay him their dues. That he had followed one of the largest of these to the mines, hoping there -- by patient waiting in the presence of his debtor, the turn of the wheel, that he might sometime realize the fair promises the debtor was abundant in making. And that there, little by little, all he had left had gone to feed and clothe himself and his family, until now, stripped of all, he was dependent upon the daily earnings of his own naked hands, delving with spade and pick, for ore in the earth for the daily support of his wife and little ones.

But the cheerful tone and happy face of the man as he told the tale of his losses, could not but strike one as wonderful.

Meeting him at his cabin, he welcomed me heartily, gave me a stool, took my hat, and urged me to stay. After the warm greetings were over I asked him how many children he had. Looking fondly upon the three little girls and one little boy gathered at his knees and mine, he answered:

"Five -- four here as you see, and," looking up with an expression which seemed to have borrowed both its peace and its joy from heaven above, "one there."

Ah! there spoke out the faith, with its telescope turned heavenward, the very substance of things hoped for!

And then I saw the power which sustained him so joyously in his privations, and toils, and trials, her upon earth.

A cabin could well serve him -- as a tent served the patriarchs of old, for his eye was fixed upon a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

But this was not all. We met often afterwards and always with pleasure and profit to me. Once in particular, when his words gave me an insight into his faith in its other aspect as the evidence of things present not seen.

A missionary excursion was suggested, requiring a journey of eighty miles in all, and an absence of several days from our homes. The miner was always ready for every good word and work, and his excellent wife, whose faith was as strong and whose heart was as warm, as her husband's, was always ready to consent to his absence when the service of the Master seemed to require it.

Calling at his cabin to consult him, his good wife directed me to his diggings, a mile or so over the hills. There was a little snow on the ground, and I traced his path until I found him. But I should have never known him by his looks. Always before when I had seen him, it was in dress of former days -- a little rusty as to fashion, but really rich and genteel, and very becoming to his large and graceful person, but now he was in miner's garb, covered with red clay from the crown of his slouched hat to the sole of his feet -- face, hands, clothes and all -- a red clay man in appearance. And as I came up to the heap of earth thrown up from the hole where he was digging, and looked down upon the planter-merchant in his miner's disguise, I could not believe it was him, although I looked down full into his upturned face. "Ah, my friend," I exclaimed, "is this you?"

He caught all that was in my heart in the tone of wonder with which the question was asked. But instead of being saddened by the thought of his poverty and toil, he was kindled into joy at the thought of Him who, in his wisdom had permitted it all. And with an expression which made the very clay on his face radiant with the peace of God, he in turn exclaimed, pointing upward,

"'Tis He, appoints our daily lot, and He does all things well."

There spoke out the faith which realizes a very present God in all his wisdom, power and love, working all things together for good to them that love him, the called according to his purpose.

And here again, as in the case of Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, we have the twofold aspect of faith exemplified, the faith of the present and the faith of the future. And in the two we have the combined force appointed of God, to sustain His children in the crucible discipline of life, and bring them forth from the fires, if seven times heated, only by it, seven times purified from the dross of corruption.

Like Paul and Silas, in prison, thrust into the innermost dungeon, fast in the stocks, lacerated with stripes, and covered with blood, yet singing praises to God spite of all, our miner was not only sustained from sinking into despondency and despair, but made more joyous than he had ever been in the sunniest hours of his youth and in the brightest days of his highest prosperity.

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