

From: The Editors Private Corner

"Foundational Principles"

"Do you regard the following fundamental principles as the right principles for our guidance through life? namely, on the spiritual side, faith and good works; and on the temporal, health, judgment, employment, self-dependence, self-defence, contentment, freedom."

The question indicates a little confusion of thought, inasmuch as some of the things named are not principles at all, but results. For instance, health is not a principle to be followed, but a result to be gained by following right principles; and the same is true of some of the other items. But we may nevertheless profitably spend a few moments considering this list.

FAITH THE FOUNDATION.

In the first place we have faith and good works. Now faith is not only a foundation principle, but it is the real foundation; for there is no true faith except "the faith of Jesus," which is His life. To exercise faith is to build upon a solid foundation. When we read that "Abraham believed God," we may read, without doing violence to the text, "Abraham built upon God." And this idea is suggested in Isa. 28:16: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." He that believeth, that is, builds upon the sure foundation, will stand fast when "the overflowing scourge" passes through. We can build upon faith, because it is substantial; it is "the *substance* of things hoped for."

He who has a foundation of faith, and who does not swerve from it, will build upon it a superstructure of good works. Good works are not the foundation principles, but the building that is erected upon them. They are not the root, but the fruit.

FAITH THAT WORKS.

It is very commonly supposed that faith and works are co-ordinate terms, as though they were two branches of a tree. Indeed, we often hear faith and works likened to the two oars of a boat. But this is altogether a mistake. We are not saved by faith *and* works, but by the faith *that* works. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Gal. 5:6. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9. He who builds upon his good works will find that he has built upon quicksand.

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS.

Right here the question comes up: "Does not the Apostle James say that 'a man is justified by works, and not by faith only'?" Yes; he does; and some, including Martin Luther, have supposed that James wrote in opposition to Paul. Indeed, it has been stated by some that James wrote to correct Paul's strong statements concerning faith. But all such ideas are most unwarranted. There is not the slightest contradiction between Paul and James; but, as we shall presently see, James emphasises the truths set forth by Paul. The second chapter of James is good to study, to learn the true relation of faith and works. Read verses 14-26.

WORKS THE PROOF OF LIVING FAITH.

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" Or, as in the Revision, "Can *that* faith save him?" What faith?—Why, the faith that he *says* he has. No; the faith that he says he has will not save him, because the truth is that he hasn't any. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead by itself." The apostle challenges the man who *says* that he has faith, but has not works: "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." The man who has no works has no means of showing that he has faith; while the man who has works can exhibit them as the fruit of faith. Good works cannot come except from faith; and faith, if it exists, must work.

A man may say, "I have wealth," but he cannot exhibit a penny; can that wealth support him? There we have a parallel to the question in James 2:14. What profit is there in wealth which a man says he has, when he cannot give security for a penny?—None whatever. That does not prove that wealth has no purchasing power; far from it. It simply shows that wealth which a man only *says* he has, will not buy him a meal. A very little money that a man has, and says nothing about, is worth millions of pounds that a man boasts of, but which he doesn't possess.

"Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

THE WORKING OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

To emphasise this statement, and to put the case in the strongest possible way, the question is asked, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

But before anybody has a chance to exclaim, "There! I told you so," the apostle continues: "Seest thou how *faith wrought* with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" It was faith that wrought that work. The faith existed before the work, else the work could never have been born. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Heb. 11:17.

Now note the conclusion of the matter about Abraham. James has admitted that he was justified by works, but shows that faith was at the bottom, performing the works;

and then comes this: "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God."

So we see that the offering of Isaac on the altar—the works by which Abraham was justified,—was the fulfilment of the statement that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness. That was justification by faith. The works are absolutely essential, but they cannot exist without faith; and their appearance is the proof of faith.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER OVER THE FLESH.

We have now considered the spiritual side of the case, and passing to the physical side, we find that it also is settled. "The just shall live by faith," and that covers the question of health. For the term "life" is not qualified. The just have to live their lives on this earth in the flesh, and that life is the life which they live by faith. The physical life of the just person is by faith. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2:20. The life of Jesus is to be "made manifest in our mortal flesh." 2 Cor. 4:11. The health, the readiness to every good work, so that His work was never interfered with by any physical ailment, as well as the goodness that was in the life of Christ, is to be manifest in our mortal flesh. When the secret of Christ's life is known to us, and the life is perfectly manifested in us, we shall know by experience that God forgives all our iniquities and heals all our diseases.

JUDGMENT.

"Behold, My servant shall deal prudently," says the Lord. Isa. 52:13. So the Apostle Paul prays for those in whom God has began a good work, confident that God will make it perfect (note that it is not we who build on good works, but God who works in us), and asks that their "love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and in all judgment," that we may "approve things that are excellent," or, be able to try the things that differ. Phil. 1:6-9.

Christ is the one who sets judgment in the earth. Isa. 42:4. The wisdom of this world is foolishness. "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." 1 Cor. 8:2. We have nothing except that which comes from God; and the Holy Spirit is given to us, "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12); therefore it follows that without the Holy Spirit we cannot really know anything.

In Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), and He is made unto us wisdom, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. 1 Cor. 1:30. Again, since nothing is real that is not true, one who does not know the truth does not really *know* anything; and Christ is the truth. Apart from Him, therefore, there is only speculation, theory. There may be a knowledge of certain facts, but no perfect knowledge of *the truth* concerning the origin and relation of the phenomena observed.

Men without Christ are therefore, even at their best, aptly described as "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Good judgment, therefore, is not a fundamental principle, but the result of receiving Christ fully into the life. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Job 28:28. "For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous; He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the path of judgment, and preserveth the way of His saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." Prov. 2:6-9.

SELF-DEPENDENCE.

What has been said about judgment will apply equally here. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. 28:26. There is, indeed, a Christian independence which passes among men for self-reliance; but it is only trust in God. The man who distrusts himself, and depends wholly on God, can be the boldest, and the most unmoved by the opinions of others; but the worst folly any man can commit in this world is to depend on himself.

What folly for a man who did not bring himself into the world, and who cannot create a single thing necessary to sustain his existence for a moment, and who has no power over his own breath, to talk about depending on himself! Depend on himself! What for? "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Isa. 2:22.

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His Servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

"Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Isa. 50:10, 11.

SELF-DEFENCE.

If a man is nothing (and the Lord says that all men together are less than nothing) how can he depend upon, or support, himself? And when a man has no power to support himself, how can he defend himself? The thing is impossible. Self-defence is self-destruction. Hear the words of the Lord:

"Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath; and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee." Job 40:9-14.

Self-defence has no place whatever in the kingdom of God. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Wherefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give

him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. 12:19-21.

Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matt. 5:38, 39. He carried out His own instruction; for "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." Isa. 53:7. When He was reviled, He "reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed His cause to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Peter 2:23. And He declared that all they that take the sword, even though it were in defence of Him, should perish with the sword.

Therefore, "trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

"Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for Thy name's sake." This leaves us no room to doubt that God will deliver us, and cleanses us from sin, since it shows us that He Himself is personally interested in the matter. He does it, not for our sakes, but to clear His own name. With what boldness, then, we may come to the throne of grace for mercy and help.

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