

OBEDIENT FAITH

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I take pleasure in presenting this lesson on the most important subject, OBEDIENT FAITH. I shall give many scriptural references, some of which I shall quote; but time being limited, I shall not be able to quote all in their entirety. These I hope you will write down, and read for yourself, from your own Bible, that you will know if the things we preach are true.

First, I want to call your attention to the power of example. All nations have their heroes, legendary and historical characters whose lives ~~and~~ <sup>HAVE BEEN</sup> handed down from generation to generation, as examples of and for the greatness of their people. These heroes play an important part in the education of the people, either for good, or for bad. The world knows the power of example. The recorded lives of the worldly great have an influence on the heart of youth, as he reads them, and longs to be like his hero.

God, too, knows the power of example to instruct the human heart. The inspired writers of the Bible point out long lists of examples of the heroes of faith--men who devoted their lives to setting examples of the power of faith in God. Paul, in Hebrews the eleventh chapter, names an honor roll of men who acted by faith.

It is a great mistake to think that the trials and tribulations we endure here in this world are greater than, or different from those which men have always endured. History is a repetition of itself. I would like to read I Corinthians 10:13, where Paul says, quote: "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man." Unquote. And, I Peter 4:12: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

The heroes of faith encourage us; they stand upon the peaks, with

palms of their hands, beckoning unto us. Their lives assure us that they traveled the same road as we; they encountered the same obstacles; they had the same trials that we have. They say to us, "We won the victory by faith." Thus, so can we.

God's plan for saving the human <sup>race</sup> has been the same in all ages. Walk through the sorrowing centuries--2,500 years, from blooming Eden, to trembling Sinai--and God's plan was, Hear God, never doubt him! And from Sinai to Calvary, the plan is the same: Hear God, never falter, believe on the Lord! And from Calvary to now, and until the end of time, the plan shall be, Believe believe, believe!

Let us turn, now, to Hebrews the eleventh chapter, where Paul gives us a powerful essay on the value of faith. First, he defines the word: "Faith," he says, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith, he goes on, enables us to understand that "the worlds were framed by the word of God", a thing that might require something beyond the human capacity to understand, were it not for faith. In fact, says Paul, "without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

This statement covers the crux of the whole matter--the one indispensable thing which is essential to an understanding of God: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." The whole thing, then, rests on faith! What a simple solution, for the lost soul in the depths of despair Believe! For the mother, whose child has died: Believe! For the soul lost in sin, whose eyes are opened, and his heart cries out for the truth: ~~Only~~ believe!

To take God at his word, trustingly, unquestionably, to submit one's self to his will--that is faith. It requires an effort, without a doubt,

in these days of tremendous strides by men in the realm of science, in the understanding of the universe, and the mysteries of its depths. But there comes a point where men's understanding stops--where science no longer can answer--where doubt and uncertainty make chaos of the wisdom of the human mind!. That is the time for faith--and the smarter the man, the more forcefully he realizes this fact. Our greatest scientists assert that at the end of their researches, they come to an impasse: and then begins faith!

"Abel," says Paul, in Hebrews eleven, "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain," because of faith; and by faith, "Enoch was translated that he should not see death." "By faith," he goes on, "Noah prepared an ark, to the saving of his house." God had said that there would be a flood that would destroy the earth; certainly, it took considerable faith to go ahead with the building of a huge ark, and endure the fun-making of the masses, to carry out in full detail the Lord's instructions, and thus save the world the seed of generations to come!

Abraham acted by faith, Paul says, when he went, at God's command, to a strange land, not knowing where he was going, or why. And by faith, Abraham's wife, Sarah, received strength to conceive, and bare a son, when she was long past the age. This case of Abraham and his wife will bear elaboration, for they were the parents of a great nation--the chosen people of the Lord. God said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee; and I will make thee a great nation." (Genesis 12:1,2)

Paul says about Abraham, in this case, "he obeyed,...not knowing whither he went." It was God leading, and Abraham walked by faith. All of Abraham's natural instincts must have been against going out of his father's country, and the land where he had been reared, and going into a

strange land. He was leaving the fertile valley of Mesopotamia, the house of his childhood, and going, blindly, into strange country. But "he obeyed." Every step was by faith, for, according to Paul, he looked for a city whose builder and maker was God!

But God had yet a test of Abraham's faith. Abraham had been promised that through him, all the seed of the earth should be blessed. But, one morning, God commanded Abraham to take his son--his only son--up into the mountains, and offer him up as a burnt offering. Abraham did not hesitate. Drastic as the command was, he evidently believed, as Paul says, that God would raise up Isaac from the dead, so as to fulfill his promise to him. At any rate, he got up early, split the wood for the burnt offering, took Isaac and two other young men as helpers, and started for the mountains. This account is in Genesis 22:1-13. God, at the last minute, when it was evident that Abraham was going to obey the Lord, and offer up his son as a sacrifice, stopped the offering, and substituted a ram instead.

This, indeed, was faith! How natural that Abraham should love this only son of his old age--he was one hundred years old, and his wife, Sarah, was ninety at the birth of Isaac. This, too, was the child of promise: "Through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." How could he leave posterity, if he offered up his only begotten son?

But Abraham arose early in the morning, gathered the little company together and set out on the three days' journey. Can we not feel something of the great wave of sorrow that overflowed the soul of Abraham, on this toilsome road of death? He could not tell Isaac, of course, or his wife, Sarah, of the sad purpose of their journey. Abraham bore it all in silence, faith unfaltering sustaining him. Isaac, seeing the wood, and the fire for the burnt offering, asked his father, "But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, sorrowfully, "The Lord will provide

himself a lamb."

So he built an altar, laid the wood on it, and seized his son, bound him, and laid him upon the wood of the burnt offering. Then he took his knife, and was just ready to plunge it into the heart of his son, when God stopped him. And Abraham looked, and close by, a ram was caught in the thicket, and Abraham offered it up for a burnt offering, instead of his son. God, then, blessed Abraham, and promised him that because of his faith, in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Now I want to quote another passage of scripture concerning Abraham, which has a singular meaning. It is James 2:21-24: "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by faith was works made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled, which said, Abraham believe God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

This passage, combined with that of Hebrews 11:17, offers an enlightening Biblical view of faith. Faith is necessary, to be sure. But to have faith without obedience is of no value! By faith Abraham obeyed. "Faith" and "obey"! Those two words contain the whole duty of man. Let us follow, for a moment, the formula of Abraham's experience: In the first place, Abraham HEARD the word of the Lord. He BELIEVED it--believed that God meant it when he said that through him, all the nations of the world would be blessed--believed, when he realized that the very fact that God had given a command, left no room for disobedience. Thisd, Abraham proceeded to OBEY the voice of the Lord. ~~This is God's perfect~~

This is God's perfect example of justification by faith. There is no possibility of misunderstanding it. It is the same plan that has always

prevailed, from the beginning of time, until now: Hear God, believe, and obey!

Faith is, indeed, a powerful offensive weapon, and a strong bulwark of defense. Through faith in God, Daniel held at bay a den full of lions, hungry for human blood; through faith, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego were delivered from the fiery furnace. Through faith, Noah "prepared an ark, to the saving of his house," When God determined to destroy the earth by water, because of its wickedness.

Now, let us look at the example of Noah. The account is contained in the sixth chapter of Genesis. The population of the earth had multiplied exceedingly, and had grown so wicked that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Only Noah and his three sons, and their wives, found favor in the sight of God, and so God commanded Noah to build an ark to save them from destruction. Also to be saved in the ark were two of every living thing, so that the seed would not be destroyed.

Now God told Noah exactly how to make this ark--the kind of wood for its construction, how long, how wide, how high to make it; how many stories, the number of openings, and what to take into it. Thus, God was the architect of this project, and his word was law. Noah was obedient unto God. "Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (Genesis 6:14).

Suppose that Noah had been like some people today--dissatisfied with the commands of God! God said, "Make the ark of gopher wood." Suppose Noah had preferred oak, or pine, God said, "the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the heights of it thirty cubits." Suppose Noah had fancied himself a better ship-builder than God, and had decided to make it FOUR hundred cubits long, SIXTY cubits wide, and FORTY cubits high. Make it with "lower, second, and third stories,"

said God. Suppose Noah had decided that TWO stories would be enough!

But Noah had faith in God, and he did exactly as God commanded. Every stroke of the hammer was a stroke of faith; every beam put in the ark was put there by faith; the door in the side, and the window "finished a cubit above," all were by faith. Here we have the eternal plan of God again, as it occurs again and again in the scriptures: God speaking; man hearing, and obeying. This is the attitude of faith; here is the trust in God that wins the victory.

In the garden of Eden, while Adam and Eve were in direct contact and conversation with God, faith was unnecessary. Knowledge was there in its stead--direct knowledge of God. Man was then a perfect soul, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God was well pleased with his handiwork; he "saw every thing that <sup>he</sup> had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31.) But Adam sinned, and "through one man, sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so, death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." (ROMANS 5:12)

Being expelled from the garden, because of disobedience, Adam and Eve lost direct communication with God. From that time on, their descendants have had to rely on faith for their knowledge of God. And every human being who has lived since Adam has had tendencies toward sin, in opposition to the divine law; all possess a corrupted nature, which is the nature of sin. It was this sinful nature for which Christ gave himself as sacrifice for atonement. These things we know by faith--"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

And faith comes by hearing the word of God. This is where the preacher becomes an important part of God's plan of salvation. "How can they hear without a preacher?" asks the apostle, "And how shall he preach unless he be sent?" The preacher can be the agent of the Holy Spirit in carrying

the gospel to every nation, and can wield the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17) He "must not shun to declare" the gospel of Christ; and he must know his subject thoroughly, through sincere study of the word. Nothing can hurt the spread of the gospel more than a preacher who is confused, and uncertain, or is inconsistent in his arguments. On the other hand, nothing can be more instrumental in bringing souls to Christ, than a preacher who is so full of the faith that, in his very soul, he knows he is "handling aright the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

Humans are basically religious; every race, no matter how primitive, have their concepts of God, and a life in the here-after. Man is thirsty for the knowledge of God, but he cannot truly be religious, until he has come into a living relationship with God, through faith. This can be accomplished through the "teaching" which was commanded by Christ; it cannot be "felt," or "sensed." "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7.) "We speak," said Paul, "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth." (I Corinthians 2:13.)

Man's reasoning faculties do not assure him of the existence of God, because his reasoning power is not equal to such a task. But the FACT of the existence of God is a basic truth! The scriptures themselves do not attempt to prove that there is a God, but they do assert: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7,8.) Paul recognized, too, that men could never, of themselves, conceive of things pertaining to the spirit. "The natural man," he wrote, "receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." (I Corinthians 2:14.)

But the realization of the existence of "a higher power", is basic in the very nature of man. He cringes in fear of the unknown; he looks



instinctively up into the heavens for guidance, for reproof, for aid. Even when he says in his heart, "There is no God," he is asserting God's existence in the very breath he inhales! The fact that he has a mind capable of debating the point, is proof that a supreme being gave him that mind!

When distress covers his soul, something whispers, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord." (Psalms 121:1,2.) He instinctively fears the vengeance of God for his misdoings. "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" he cries; "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in hades, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Psalms 139:7-11)

It is not necessary, then, to teach men God; we must teach them the ONE true and living God! We must teach them of Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of men! We must teach them of his death on the cross as the great atonement for our sins! We must teach them the gospel of Christ, which has revealed the commands of God for our salvation!

Then, "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved" Faith! Faith in the truth of the gospel--faith and trust in God's word! We are told that those who believe shall be saved. But something else is added: baptism. Our faith has prompted us to repent--to change our sinful ways; it has prompted us to confess Christ as being the son of God; and it has prompted us to be baptized, because we are told that it is for the remission of our sins. But even that is not enough. All through our lives, after we have become Christians, we shall need faith!

There will be trials and tribulations which will beset us; there will be temptations to bear. There will be times when the future will look

dark. Then, through faith, we can look toward heaven, "from whence cometh our help." Through faith we will continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. Then, when the end has come, we may, through faith, be able to say: "I have kept the faith; I have fought a good fight. Therefore, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give me on the last day."

So, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1,2.)

Thus, with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, and the rest of the saints, the children of God, may, with God's help achieve the victories of Faith!

We invite you to attend the services of the Church of Christ in your community today. There you will hear the gospel in word and in song, and I assure you that ~~xxxxx~~ you will be no stranger there.

Supply  
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Full of  
TWITTY SINGING  
MANNING