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The Spirit of Faith

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The Spirit of Faith



BY

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The Spirit of Faith



THERE is nothing more completely practical than religion; not only does it prepare a person for eternal life, but—and this seems more important to the average individual—it helps him to take the best advantage of his temporal experience.

People in general have lost sight of the real and demonstrable power of God in their affairs. Probably the reason for this is that spiritual knowledge

has been almost entirely shrouded in sectarian cant and medieval mysticism. By stripping off the hampering weight of religious ideology, the most wonderful and valuable truths are brought to light; and when these truths are taken to heart and practised, the result is a very remarkable transformation both in experience and in character.

Let us take for example the subject of faith, and after extricating it from the burden of creeds and dogmas we may

see just how vital it is to us.

Faith is very definitely the first principle of religion but it is also an essential of everyday life; this shows clearly the folly of disregarding spiritual knowledge as an aid to better and happier living. The extreme importance of faith is made evident by the fact that the more one has of it the better equipped he is to meet the world successfully; on the contrary, when faith inspired by religion fails, life is no longer worth living.

Modern psychologists affirm that the lessening of the intensity of religious faith or its failure to engross its adherents has brought about the increased number of depressions in these latter days.

The head of the personnel department in the New York Stock Exchange once said to a friend of mine who had grown discouraged in looking for a position, "Go to church and build up your faith." Yet faith is not acquired in church, although it is preached there;

nor is it acquired by listening to sermons, by attending services, or by executing any of the outward forms of religious practice; rather faith is gained by arousing within ourselves that wonderful element of spiritual life which has been planted in our hearts by God.

Few people realize how they depend on faith even in the most trivial things they do such as eating, sleeping, and walking. It is by faith that people are constantly provided with the means of

enjoying a world which exceeds their radius of understanding. The less knowledge one has the more he has to resort to faith to expand his horizons. We live in a world full of mysteries to which we must constantly submit our ignorance. Most of that which is above, below, around, and in us, is a mystery. Few know how or why fire burns, how air enables us to breathe, how light shines, how a seed cast into the ground multiplies and grows; yet we accept all this wonderful energy of nature on

faith.

Faith was defined by the Apostle Paul as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. In other words, faith is that God-given spirit in us which enables us to arise and move on, to liberate ourselves from blind materiality, and to grasp the wealth of our own natures.

Every human being possesses faith in some degree and the object of religion is to help to cultivate what we already have and to show us how to

transfer it to the place where it will do the most good. Faith entangled in the world's affairs fluctuates with their changeable nature, but faith in God inspires one with a permanent sense of confidence and security. One of the first steps toward establishing balance then is to transfer faith from changing personalities and situations to God by an action within our hearts.

There is a mystical significance in the Old Testament account of Moses leading the children of Israel out of

Egypt. They were not taken directly to Canaan but on a long journey through the wilderness where the life of nature and history stood still and the people were alone with their God. The same adventure occurs in us as we meditate on faith—our own wilderness of wandering becomes a very important process of spiritual education. When people experience the position of being thrown entirely on God they begin to discover what He really means to them; they begin to realize

what Paul meant by saying that faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Every day in the world faith is demonstrated as the evidence of things not seen. Confidence derived from scientific induction is very different from the certainty derived from deduction obtained by means of faith; the latter is more profound, and cannot be shaken by argument.

But strange to say, faith is not foreign to science; great discoveries have all come as the result of faith. Just as the

astronomer trusts the telescope for an acquaintance with worlds which the naked eye cannot behold, so the really intelligent person learns to depend on faith to develop latent potentialities in his own being. Without the assistance of faith none of the unexplored regions of science could have been penetrated.

It is faith that allows the questioning mind to reach out beyond its definable boundaries. It took indomitable faith for Columbus to sail out into un-

charted seas in search of a new land. A country which is historically the result of faith and which nationally has had the constant motto, "In God we trust," cannot afford to let scepticism, suspicion, and doubts undermine the tradition of its constitution. As faith is not an abstract doctrine to be preached but is a personal principle of life, each individual must take on the universal responsibility; for national faith is only as strong as each person's faith.

When Nehemiah was sent by Ar-

taxerxes, in the year 445 B. C., to effect the restoration of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, he introduced a unique and revolutionary plan to overcome hostility both within and without the city. He divided the work in such a way that each family agreed to build a section of the wall as a monument to its loyalty and zeal. Our program for restoring the bulwarks of national faith could successfully follow such a plan today for the time has come to begin the work of restoration in ourselves

and to wait no longer for our neighbor to do it for us. Instead of adopting the policy of having faith in things that have proved themselves worthy of faith—which is actually no faith at all—it would be better to arouse pure faith by which one may discover that which he can honestly believe in; for faith is the evidence of things not seen.

We are constantly confronted by circumstances which if permitted would kill faith. But the spirit of faith is stronger than appearances and by

means of a spiritual certainty derived therefrom we are able to see one thing and to believe another. Thomas, the disciple who came to Jesus after His resurrection, said that unless he could put his fingers into the actual nailprints and thrust his hand into Jesus' side he could not believe. Jesus compassionately allowed him to do as he wished; then Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" He saw the man but he believed Him to be God.

Jesus said to Thomas, "Because thou

hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." We have an opportunity for such a blessing every day of our lives—to believe in a spiritual power which we cannot see.

If people could only be made to realize how dependent they are on faith for the functioning of their bodies they might also recognize its necessity for every form of higher development. It is the atrophy of this higher faith that has undermined man's character.

Saint James, the Apostle, said that as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. The tragedy is that the faith of most people is like deadwood—they struggle to carry its load when if they could arouse the spirit of faith it would carry them.

God planted the seed of spiritual faith in every heart but it depends upon each person to keep the ground of his soul suitable for the development of this gift. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," said Jesus to His dis-

principles, "ye shall say unto this mountain, 'Remove hence to yonder place,' and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Every day we have examples of the way in which faith moves mountains. Sometimes they are of dirt and stone which the faith of some scientific engineer removes; sometimes they are figurative mountains—but none the less formidable obstacles to remove.

"But," you say, "a steam shovel is ineffectual against the kind of troubles I

have to contend with. My problems are poverty, sickness, failure, discouragement. These are not mountains; they are depressions, and how could faith help me to overcome any one of them?" Perhaps you go even further and admit that you have given the power of faith a trial. You have spent hours affirming that you are healthy, successful, rich, and happy, believing in the promise that if you ask you shall receive. But it was of no avail; when you checked up on yourself you found

your trouble still with you.

If this has been your way of trying out faith you are like the woman—whose oft-repeated story you have heard—who tried moving mountains with her faith. She began by praying to have a little hillock removed from her front yard. She went to bed repeating, "Be thou removed to yonder place." In the morning at the first ray of dawn she ran to her window to see the results. There was the little hillock unmoved. "Well," said the

woman, "just as I expected, anyway."

This is the way in which most people turn to faith. They decide to give it a trial. If it fails to work they are greatly disappointed but soothed because it was just as they expected anyway. Certainly this is not the spirit in which to work miracles. The surprise should be the other way round—that is, if the miracle does not take place; for nothing is impossible to God and to them that believe.

The Apostles prayed for increased

faith and their petition is most instructive to us; no prayer is more needed than this. The spirit of faith is indispensable to Christian life; yet in most people who call themselves Christians there is great lack of it. Unfortunately those in whom it is most wanting fail to pray for it for the reason that they feel no lack of it. To feel the need of faith is to have its spirit stirring in you.

The faith to which Jesus and His Apostles referred is not merely one that

makes us accept religious dogmas and creeds; it is instead a practical virtue which influences our whole conduct, which supports us in trying and difficult circumstances, which provides the mind with a standard in judgment and the will with motive in resolutions, which in short makes us act on principles that transcend the principles of nature. One could not possibly enumerate all the wonderful effects of faith; but it is quite evident that it transforms us into a different kind of people,

giving us different ideas and feelings, and establishing new values on the very ruins of human experience.

Faith transforms the life of man into something most beautiful; but undoubtedly true faith seems scarce, for the fact that the ordinary person's life is anything but beautiful is proof that the majority of people possess this faith in only a limited amount. The trouble is that we fail to make faith in God the ruling principle of life; we perform only by routine, or from conventionality, or

from human respect, and all in quite a different spirit from that of faith in God.

There is no need to profess faith by word; in fact to do so often condemns rather than justifies its spirit. True faith needs no words to back it up for it proves itself by the manner in which a person lives and acts.

To live after the manner of faith one must have not only the faith but also the spirit which so thoroughly imbues the Christian life that it forms the basis

of one's whole conduct and completely harmonizes daily life with the principles of belief.

It is not enough in this day and age merely to adopt maxims and then fail to support them. People who belie their own doctrine are a reproach to the spirit of faith. Yes, it depends on us. We already possess the germ of faith or we could not breathe, eat, or sleep. But how are we to increase our faith to the place where it transforms our lives? The answer is: by prayer. We can ask

God for anything that we can acknowledge as a gift from Him. The germ of faith is in every one but it needs to be nourished and cultivated.

Now the most effective way to cultivate any faculty is to exercise it; so prayer is the solution. The rule for prayer is, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them." Prayer then is the exercise of faith. We should ask God fervently, urgently, and perseveringly, to develop this

power within us and to make it active. First of all we must desire faith, and to desire faith is to open the door to it.

Those who have once possessed this great power realize its value and try to preserve it. But like a flame it must be always active and so must be constantly provided with fuel. It can never remain fixed in any permanent condition; it must grow and increase or it will diminish. Like life it shows itself in vital action. One cannot devise any program for the exercise of faith,

for a program—a rigid armor of regulation—would stifle its spirit. Nothing must be allowed to imprison the potentialities of faith within the limits of our minds; the spirit of faith must be given opportunity to burst its restrictions and enter the realms of the incredible, because nothing is impossible to God and to them that believe in God.

—Genevieve Burnell Forgey



