

# Spiritual Faith and Outward Profession

By Arthur W. Pink

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6)

“But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2).

The linking together of these verses shows us the worthlessness of all religious activities where faith be lacking. The outward exercise may be performed diligently and correctly, but unless faith be in operation God is not honoured and the soul is not profited. Faith draws out the heart unto God, and faith it is which receives from God;—not a mere intellectual assent to what is revealed in Holy Writ, but a supernatural principle of grace which lives upon the God of Scripture. This, the natural man, no matter how religious or orthodox he be, has not; and no labours of his, no act of his will, can acquire it. It is the sovereign gift of God.

Faith must be operative in all the exercises of the Christian if God is to be glorified and he is to be edified. First, in the reading of the Word: “But these are written that ye might believe” (John 20:31). Second, in listening to the preaching of God's servants: “The hearing of faith” (Galatians 3:2). Third, in praying: “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6). Fourth, in our daily life: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7); “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). Fifth, in our exit from this world: “These all died in faith” (Hebrews 11:13). What the breath is to the body, faith is to the soul; for one who is destitute of faith to seek to perform spiritual actions is like putting a spring within a wooden dummy and making it go through mechanical motions.

Now an unregenerate professor may read the Scriptures and yet have no spiritual faith. Just as the devout Hindu peruses the Upanishads and the Mohammedan his Koran, so many “Christian” countries take up the study of the Bible, and yet have no more of the life of God in their souls than have their heathen brethren. Thousands in this land read the Bible, believe in its Divine authorship, and become more or less familiar with its contents. A mere professor may read several chapters every day, and yet never appropriate a single verse. But faith applies God's Word: it applies His fearful threatenings, and trembles before them; it applies His solemn warnings, and seeks to heed them; it applies His precepts, and cries unto Him for grace to walk in them.

It is the same in listening to the Word preached. A carnal professor will boast of having attended this conference and that, of having heard this famous teacher and that renowned preacher, and be no better off in his soul than if he had never heard any of them. He may listen to two sermons every Sunday, and fifty years hence be as dead spiritually as he is today. But the regenerated soul appropriates the message and measures himself by what he hears. He is often convicted of his sins and made to mourn over them. He tests himself by God's standard, and feels that he comes so far short of what he ought to be, that he sincerely doubts the honesty of his own profession. The Word pierces him, like a two-edged sword, and causes him to cry “O wretched man that I am.”

So in prayer. The mere professor often makes the humble Christian feel ashamed of himself. The carnal religionist who has “the gift of the gab” is never at a loss for words: sentences flow from his lips as readily as do the waters of a babbling brook; verses of Scripture seem to run through his mind as freely as flour passes through a sieve. Whereas the poor burdened child of God is often unable to do any more than cry “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Ah, my friends, we need to distinguish sharply between a natural aptitude for “making” nice “prayers” and the spirit of true supplication: the one consists merely of words, the other of “groanings which cannot be uttered”; the one is acquired by religious education, the other is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit.

Thus it is too in conversing about the things of God. The frothy professor can talk glibly and often orthodoxly of “doctrines,” yes, and of worldly things, too: according to his mood, or according to his audience, so is his theme. But the child of God, while being swift to hear that which is unto edification, is “slow to speak.” Ah, my reader, beware of talkative people; a drum makes a lot of noise but it is hollow inside! “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs

20:6). When a saint of God does open his lips about spiritual matters, it is to tell of what the Lord, in His infinite mercy, has done for him; but the carnal religionist is anxious for others to know what he is “doing for the Lord.”

The difference is just as real between the genuine Christian and the nominal Christian in connection with their daily lives: while the latter may appear outwardly righteous, yet within they are “full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:28). They will put on the skin of a real sheep, but in reality they are “wolves in sheeps’ clothing.” But God’s children have the nature of sheep, and learn of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart,” and, as the elect of God, they put on “mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12). They are in private what they appear in public. They worship God in spirit and in truth, and have been made to know wisdom in the hidden parts of the heart.

So it is on their passing out of this world. An empty professor may die as easily and as quietly as he lived— deserted by the Holy Spirit, undisturbed by the Devil; as the psalmist says, “there are no bands in their death” (73:4). But this is very different from the end of one whose deeply- ploughed and consciously- defiled conscience has been “sprinkled” with the precious blood of Christ: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psalm 37:37)—yes, a peace which “passeth all understanding”: Having lived the life of the righteous, he dies “the death of the righteous” (Numbers 23:10).

And what is it which distinguishes the one character from the other, wherein lies the difference between the genuine Christian and he who is one in name only? This: a God-given, Spirit-wrought faith in the heart. Not a mere head-knowledge and intellectual assent to the Truth, but a living, spiritual, vital principle in the heart—a faith which “purifies the heart” (Acts 15:9), which “worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6), which “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4). Yes, a faith which is Divinely sustained amidst trials within and opposition without; a faith which exclaims “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15).

True, this faith is not always in exercise, nor is it equally strong at all times. The favoured possessor of it must be taught by painful experience that as he did not originate it neither can he command it; therefore does he turn unto its Author, and say, “Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.” And then it is that, when reading the Word he is enabled to lay hold of its precious promises; that when bowing before the Throne of Grace, he is enabled to cast his burden upon the Lord; that when he rises to go about his temporal duties, he is enabled to lean upon the everlasting arms; and that when he is called upon to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, he triumphantly cries “I will fear no evil for Thou art with me.” “Lord, increase our faith.”