

The Fight of Faith

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing firm in the faith, which is the whole body of truth revealed by God, and encourages believers to contend for the faith in its primitive perfection.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:13, Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:23, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 1 Timothy 1:19, 1 Timothy 6:10, 1 Timothy 6:12, Jude 1:3, Jude 1:20

Topics: "Standing In Faith", "Apostasy Warning"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the importance of standing firm in the faith amidst the challenges of modern theology and the rise of new ideologies, emphasizing the need to hold on to the timeless truths revealed by God and expressed in the Scriptures. He highlights the significance of abiding in the faith once given, rooted in God's perfect revelation, and warns against the subtle workings of unbelief and apostasy. Vine encourages believers to be vigilant, strong, and considerate towards one another, focusing on being established in the faith and walking in the truth according to piety. He concludes by urging believers to earnestly contend for the faith, maintaining its purity and awaiting the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Transcript

Some time ago a strange-looking preacher was seen and heard in a city market place. He stood on the Spot where the glad Gospel of God's Son had won many a triumph, and taken many a trophy from the slavery of sin and Satan--trophies that still tell by life and lip of the forgiving and preserving grace of God. And now this preacher of strange manner and appearance, opened his mouth to proclaim that he had adopted new views, and that he no longer held the old truth of the Gospel which he once professed, saying that only a few insignificant people believe in the atonement, and in the inspiration of the Bible, since the New Theology has come to the front. Well, if it be so, it were far better to follow the Son of God in the company of his unlettered but true disciples, few though they were, than be found with the sceptical Sadduces, and Pharisees of learning and letters, who sought His overthrow. Far better to be found firm and steadfast in the faith, than wandering away with the popular apostasy long foretold in the Word of God!

We do not stay to speak of the evident barrenness of modern theology; it is known well enough by those who are of the faith of God's elect. But the fight of faith still remains for such in the presence of the subtle and sinful working of the mind of man against the faith itself. This working will go on with ever-increasing

energy, till the apostasy of which God has forewarned us takes place. To close our eyes to this, is to shut out of our minds the God-given warning, which He knew was necessary for us to receive.

Let us, however, look a little at the faith itself, which is all-important, and at some of the different attitudes towards it, by taking up some of the Scriptures that speak of it. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ draws nigh, and the great question is, How do we stand in relation to the faith? Not, How do we stand in relation to a sect, or a school, or a party?

What is the faith? It is the whole body of truth revealed by God at the beginning; that which was given of God once for all to the saints (Jude 3). As coming from its Divine source, it is (1) God's revelation; as finding expression in Christ and in the Scriptures, it is (2) the truth; as a present unseen system in which believers are to stand fast, it is called (3) the faith; "The faith of God's elect" (Tit. 1:1).

To some who had become sectarian, and who questioned whether Christ spoke in the Apostle Paul, though they had been converted through his preaching, he wrote, "Examine your own selves if ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." A very healthy word indeed, even for today! Men may cry out for something new, and more advanced; but the real remain in that which God gave to the apostles at the start. They know that everlasting blessedness and glory with Christ await those who "abide in the faith" (Col. 1:23, N.Tr.). One says: "We must move on with the new light." Another: "We are looking now for a very new theology." And yet another: "The twentieth century advanced thought is the thing." But unmoved, the faith of the real rests in God's perfect revelation: they abide in the faith once given.

We must not think, however, that this abiding is a sleepy affair. Very real indeed are the peace, and the rest, and the joy, that those know who abide in the faith grounded and firm. Nevertheless wakefulness and watchfulness must mark them. To become formal and lifeless is fatal, even though a name to live remains (see Rev. 3:1). The fact is, the lethal current of unreality rushes against the truth with rising force, gathering fresh energy and increased intensity from every check this mysterious working receives; this "mystery of lawlessness" which seeks to sap the foundations of the "mystery of the faith," as God has told us. Therefore those who have truly received Christ Jesus the Lord need to be exhorted now, as others did at the beginning: "Walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Col. 2:7). And again: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong!" (1 Cor. 16:13).

Of course, there are always the weaker and the stronger in the faith; but those who are strong are to be considerate for the weak, and not simply please themselves, but seek to please others for their good. And instead of raising unessential questions, it is distinctly said: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye" (Rom. 14:1). He is in the faith, and that is the one essential matter. It is in this that we are to be established. It is in this we are to be solicitous for one another's edification. It is in this we are to stand fast. Merely saying: "I hold the faith," is not satisfactory. We need to be rooted and founded in it. We must pray. We must have to do with God. The Scriptures given by the Spirit must be read in the power of the Spirit ungrieved, that we may be complete in all the Will of God.

1. IT HAS BEEN REVEALED. This revelation, however, was not fully made till after our Lord Jesus Christ had secured eternal redemption for us by His work on the Cross, and had ascended as Man to God's right hand. Before He came, the law had been given at Sinai, with its system of outward observances, amidst displays of might and majesty which impressed both sight and sense. How different with the faith! Speaking of the past system in contrast to the present revelation, the apostle said to the Galatians, who

were getting back to the bondage of the old and losing the liberty of the new: "Before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed" (3:23). Along with that came the freedom of sonship before God, as well as forgiveness and justification and a heavenly inheritance. Therefore he wrote further: "Faith having come, we are no longer under a tutor; for ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus" (3:25-26, N.Tr.). No appalling sight meets the eye! No mighty thunders strike the ear! No smoking mountain, as if on fire, that might be touched! But God was manifested in a meek and lowly Man, now exalted to heavenly glory, and the faith is revealed and expressed in the Spirit's vital words. It is complete, there is nothing more to be added. Indeed, the topstone of that revelation was specially given for us Gentile believers, to the same apostle: "Given to me towards you," he wrote, "that by revelation the mystery has been made known to me" (Eph. 3:3, N.Tr.); and, "the dispensation of God which is given me towards you to complete the Word of God; the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to His saints (Col. 1:25-26, N.Tr.). What profound depths and what unscaled heights are to be explored in this Divine revelation, given that the Word of God might be complete! Our apprehension of it may indeed be feeble, but there is nothing lacking in the revelation itself. What grace Divine to give it to us!

2. THE TRUTH EXPRESSES IT. That which in itself is true is expressed by the truth. The faith has been revealed, and the truth expresses that revelation. "The faith" and "the truth" are expressions often found in juxtaposition. If men depart from the faith, they turn away from the truth. Believers are to be "sound in the faith," not giving heed to "Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Tit. 5:14). The house of God, which embraces all true believers in Christ in the world, is the depository of the truth, as the assembly of the living God. The truth is put there; and it is the pillar and base of the truth." The assembly witnesses to the truth which God has given to her; not to herself, for that would be the negation of true piety. Christ, who is the truth personally, is to be enshrined in her heart by faith. He expresses the true God. She is to express Him. We are told that the mystery of piety is great. "God has been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit, has appeared to angels, has been preached among the nations, has been believed on in the world, has been received up in glory. But the Spirit speaks expressly, that in latter times some shall apostatize from the faith," and these are at once contrasted with those who are "faithful and know the truth" (1 Tim. 3:16; 4:1-3, N.Tr.). If two men are named as having got astray as to the truth, then they "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18). The truth is that in which we are to walk. Its teaching is according to piety. Its words are sound, and it produces practical results for God's glory. Where this is refused, and disputes, and "envy, strife, injurious words, evil suspicions," and such things are characteristic, then they are "destitute of the truth" (1 Tim. 6:5). And just as it is "the faith" which becomes the final test, so we are told, that those who are left to perish after Christ has taken the assembly from the earth, are those who received not "the love of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:10). How important it is then that we should "believe the truth" love it, and practise it. The Spirit of truth is the power given for this, thanks be to our God and Father.

3. "THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT." We are told that Paul was a servant of God, and an apostle of Christ according to this; also according to the "knowledge of the truth which is according to piety" (Tit. 1:1, N.Tr.). He held his service and his apostleship according to the faith. This was important in his eyes. He likewise tells us that the service of the gifts given by the ascended Christ, is in view of all the saints coming to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). Some may ask us, What is your faith in contrast to the faith of someone else? But he tells us, There is "one faith." There are many religions, many superstitions, but only one faith given from God. In contrast to the outward observances of Judaism, "God's dispensation" is "in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4, N.Tr.). This embraces a wonderful system of

unparalleled importance, and we are to "further" it in every way possible. Therefore we see in this first letter to Timothy specially, what a tremendous test it becomes to those who profess the name of Christ. In chapter 1:19, some make shipwreck as to it. Those who serve are to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (3:9); and consequently they will obtain much boldness in the faith (3:23). The apostasy is from the faith (4:1). Timothy himself is nourished with the words of the faith (4:6). If anyone does not provide for his own, he practically denies the faith (5:8). Those who are gripped by the love of money pierce themselves through with many sorrows as they aspire after it and wander from the faith (6:10). Therefore, Timothy, the child of Paul in the faith, is exhorted to "strive earnestly in the good conflict of the faith" (6:12, N.Tr.), and his last word in this letter to him is: "Keep the entrusted deposit, avoiding profane, vain babblings, and oppositions of false-named knowledge, of which some, having made profession, have missed the faith. Grace be with thee."

FINALLY. How encouraging and stimulating it is to turn to what the champion of the faith tells us concerning himself in relation to it, as he is faced by the intruding tides of opposition and corruption. Before he lays aside his well-worn weapon, this warrior of the Lord, this faithful minister of Christ, writes his last letter to his child in the faith, and says: "I have kept the faith."

The last epistle in the Bible exhorts us to set ourselves definitely for the faith once given, in view of rising apostasy. Jude does not urge us to contend against the evil. That cannot be stayed. He tells us to earnestly contend for the positive faith in its primitive perfection. Many are wasting their time and energy in vainly fighting the evil, instead of fighting the fight of the faith; trying to put right that which cannot be rectified, instead of maintaining the good. They misread the word in Jude, who exhorts those who are called of God and beloved in God the Father, to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (v. 3).

Dissoluteness and corruption were increasing, and would continue to do so. Only when the judgment of God fell upon the wicked at the coming of the Lord would the evil be stayed. Therefore, he continues, "But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vv. 20-21, N.Tr.). Very soon now He will take us out of the presence of the corruption and of the apostasy altogether, and put us in the presence of the glory with exceeding joy. To Him be "glory and majesty, dominion, and power, both now and ever. Amen."

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