

Of the Practical Influence of Faith

by John Newton

Faith has a profound impact on a believer's daily life, giving them evidence and subsistence to things not seen, and realizing the great truths of the Gospel.

Scripture: Romans 12:2, Galatians 5:6, Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 4:6, James 2:26, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Sanctification"

Description

John Newton emphasizes the importance of faith not only for a sinner's justification before God but also in daily life, guiding believers through challenges and decisions. He highlights the discrepancy between professing faith and displaying ungodly behaviors, stressing the need for true transformation and sanctification. Newton urges believers to walk worthy of God, emphasizing that faith should lead to a life that glorifies God and reflects Christ's character. He explains how faith enables believers to find strength, peace, and guidance in all circumstances, fostering a deep relationship with God and influencing interactions with others.

Transcript

In the days before the telephone, letter writing was done far more frequently than it is today. Since it was the mode of long-distance communication, the writers were far more polished at it than we are. For an earnest Christian, a letter was an opportunity to edify, instruct, sermonize, or otherwise encourage souls toward heaven. It is not surprising, then, that of godly men and women of the past, their letters were prized and often published in collections even in their own lifetime! Of such collections, the two most famous are the letters of Samuel Rutherford and the letters of John Newton (1725-1807). John Newton is, of course, known for writing the words to the hymn Amazing Grace. One of his letters on faith is reproduced below.

The use and importance of faith, as it respects a sinner's justification before God, has been largely insisted on; but it is likewise of great use and importance in the daily concerns of life. It gives evidence and subsistence to things not seen, and realizes the great truths of the Gospel, so as that they become abiding and living principles of support and direction while we are passing through this wilderness. Thus, it is as the eye and the hand, without which we cannot take one step with certainty, or attempt any service with success. It is to be wished, that this practical exercise of faith were duly attended to by all professors. We should not then meet with so many cases that put us to a stand, and leave us at a great difficulty to reconcile what we see in some of whom we would willingly hope well, with what we read in Scripture of the inseparable concomitants of a true and lively faith. For how can we but be staggered, when we hear

persons speaking the language of assurance,--that they know their acceptance with God through Christ, and have not the least doubt of their interest in all the promises,--while at the same time we see them under the influence of unsanctified tempers, of a proud, passionate, positive, worldly, selfish, or churlish carriage?

It is not only plain, from the general tenor of Scripture, that a covetous, a proud, or a censorious spirit, are no more consistent with the spirit of the Gospel, than drunkenness or whoredom; but there are many express texts directly pointed against the evils which too often are found amongst professors. Thus the Apostle James assures us, "That if any man seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain;" and the Apostle John, "That if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and he seems to apply this character to any man, whatever his profession or pretences may be, "who having this world's goods, and seeing his brother have need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him." Surely these texts more than intimate, that the faith which justifies the soul does likewise receive from Jesus grace for grace, whereby the heart is purified, and the conversation regulated as becomes the Gospel of Christ.

There are too many who would have the ministry of the Gospel restrained to the privileges of believers; and when the fruits of faith, and the tempers of the mind, which should be manifest in those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," are inculcated, think they sufficiently evade all that is said, by calling it legal preaching. I would be no advocate for legal preaching; but we must not be deterred, by the fear of a hard word, from declaring the whole counsel of God; and we have the authority and example of St. Paul, who was a champion of the doctrines of free grace, to animate us in exhorting professors to "walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory." And indeed the expression of a believer's privilege is often misunderstood. It is a believer's privilege to walk with God in the exercise of faith, and, by the power of his Spirit, to mortify the whole body of sin, to gain a growing victory over the world, and self, and to make daily advances in conformity to the mind that was in Christ. And nothing that we profess to know, believe, or hope for, deserves the name of a privilege, farther than we are influenced by it to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness. Whosoever is possessed of true faith, will not confine his inquiries to the single point of his acceptance with God, or be satisfied with the distant hope of heaven hereafter. He will be likewise solicitous how he may glorify God in the world, and enjoy such foretastes of heaven as are attainable while he is yet upon earth.

Faith, then, in its practical exercise, has for its object the whole word of God, and forms its estimate of all things with which the soul is at present concerned, according to the standard of Scripture. Like Moses, it "endures, as seeing him who is invisible." When our Lord was upon earth, and conversed with his disciples, their eyes and hearts were fixed upon him. In danger he was their defender; their guide when in perplexity; and to him they looked for the solution of all their doubts, and the supply of all their wants. He is now withdrawn from our eyes; but faith sets him still before us, for the same purposes, and, according to its degree, with the same effects, as if we actually saw him. His spiritual presence, apprehended by faith, is a restraint from evil, and encouragement to every service, and affords a present refuge and help in every time of trouble. To this is owing the delight a believer takes in ordinances, because there he meets his Lord; and to this, likewise, it is owing, that his religion is not confined to public occasions; but he is the same person in secret as he appears to be in the public assembly; for he worships Him who sees in secret; and dares appeal to his all-seeing eye for the sincerity of his desires and intentions. By faith he is enabled to use prosperity with moderation; and knows and feels, that what the world calls good is of small value, unless it is accompanied with the presence and blessings of Him whom his soul loveth. And his

faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him, that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by Infinite Wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his day. Thus, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord, to whom he has committed all his concerns; and knowing that his best interests are safe; he is not greatly afraid of evil tidings, but enjoys a stable peace in the midst of a changing world. For, though he cannot tell what a day may bring forth, he believes that He who has invited and enabled him to cast all his cares upon him, will suffer nothing to befall him but what shall be made subservient to his chief desire--the glory of God in the sanctification and final salvation of his soul. And if, through the weakness of his flesh, he is liable to be startled by the first impression of a sharp and sudden trial, he quickly flees to his strong refuge, remembers it is the Lord's doing, resigns himself to his will, and patiently expects a happy issue.

By the same principle of faith, a believer's conduct is regulated towards his fellow creatures; and in the discharge of the several duties and relations of life, his great aim is to please God, and to let his light shine in the world. He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. Humbled under a sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others, if he has aught against any. A due sense of what he is in the sight of the Lord, preserves him from giving way to anger, positiveness, and resentment: he is not easily provoked, but is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;" and if offended, easy to be entreated, and disposed, not only to yield to a reconciliation, but to seek it. As Jesus is his life, and righteousness, and strength, so he is his pattern. By faith he contemplates and studies this great Exemplar of philanthropy. With a holy ambition he treads in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, and learns of him to be meek and lowly, to requite injuries with kindness, and to overcome evil with good. From the same views, by faith he derives a benevolent spirit, and according to his sphere and ability, he endeavours to promote the welfare of all around him. The law of love being thus written in his heart, and his soul set at liberty from the low and narrow dictates of a selfish spirit, his language will be truth, and his dealings equity. His promise may be depended on, without the interposition of oath, bond, or witness; and the feelings of his own heart, under the direction of an enlightened conscience and the precepts of Scripture, prompt him "to do unto others as he would desire they, in the like circumstances, should do unto him." If he is a master, he is gentle and compassionate; if a servant, he is faithful and obedient; for in either relation he acts by faith, under the eye of his Master in heaven. If he is a trader, he neither dares nor wishes to take advantage either of the ignorance or the necessities of those with whom he deals. And the same principle of love influences his whole conversation. A sense of his own infirmities makes him candid to those of others; he will not readily believe reports to their prejudice, without sufficient proof; and even then, he will not repeat them, unless he is lawfully called to it. He believes that the precept, "Speak evil of no man," is founded upon the same authority with those which forbid committing adultery or murder; and therefore he "keeps his tongue as with a bridle."

Lastly, Faith is of daily use as a preservative from a compliance with the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. The believer, though in the world, is not of it: by faith he triumphs over its smiles and enticements; he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures. He will mix with the world so far as is necessary, in the discharge of the duties of that station of life in which the providence of God has placed him, but no farther. His leisure and inclinations are engaged in a different pursuit. They who fear the Lord are his chosen companions; and the blessings he derives from the word, and throne, and ordinances of grace, make him look upon the poor pleasures and amusements of those who live without

God in the world with a mixture of disdain and pity. And by faith he is proof against its frowns. He will obey God rather than man; he will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them." And if, upon this account, he should be despised and injuriously treated, whatever loss he suffers in such a cause, he accounts his gain, and esteems such disgrace his glory.

I am not aiming to draw a perfect character, but to shew the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, worketh by love, and overcomes the world. An habitual endeavour to possess such a frame of spirit, and thus to adorn the Gospel of Christ, and that with growing success, is what I am persuaded you are not a stranger to; and I am afraid that they who can content themselves with aiming at any thing short of this in their profession, are too much strangers to themselves, and to the nature of that liberty wherewith Jesus has promised to make his people free. That you may go on from strength to strength, increasing in the light and image of our Lord and Saviour, is the sincere prayer of...

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