

## XXXIV.

**Faith in General.**

“Through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”—*Ephes. ii. 8.*

When the judicial act of the Triune God, justification, is announced to the conscience, faith begins to be active and expresses itself in works. This leads us to call the attention of our readers to the work of the Holy Spirit, which consists in the *imparting of faith*.

We are saved through faith; and that faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. It is very specially a gift of the Triune God, by a peculiar operation of the Holy Ghost; “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. xii. 3). St. Paul calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of faith (2 Cor. iv. 13). And in Gal. v. 22 he mentions faith as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In salvation nearly everything depends upon faith: hence a correct conception of faith is essential. It has always been the aim of error to poison faith’s being, and thus to destroy weak souls as well as the Church itself. It is therefore the urgent duty of ministers to instruct the churches concerning faith’s being and nature; by correct definitions to detect prevailing error, and thus to restore the joy of a clear and well-founded consciousness of faith.

For years the people have listened to the poorest and vaguest theories of faith. Every minister has had his own theory and definition, or worse, no definition at all. In a general way they have felt what faith is, and presented it eloquently; but these brilliant, metaphorical, often flowery descriptions have frequently been more obscuring than illuminating; they have failed to instruct. The definition of faith being left to the inspiration of the moment, it often occurred that the minister unconsciously offered to his people on Sunday the very opposite of what he had eloquently proclaimed the week before. This should not be so. The Church must increase in knowledge also; and what sufficed for the apostolic Church is not sufficient now. The ideas of faith were confused then; and the earliest writings show that the various problems regarding faith had not been solved.

But not so in the apostolic writings, whose inspiration is proven from the fact that they contain a clear and definite answer to nearly all these questions. But after the apostles had passed away, the depth of their word not yet understood, there was a childlike confusion of ideas in the Church of the first centuries; until the Lord allowed various heretical forms of faith to appear, which the Church was compelled to oppose by the real forms of faith. To do this successfully it had to emerge from that confusion and to arrive at clearer distinctions and conceptions.

Hence the many differences, questions, and distinctions which subsequently arose regarding faith’s being and exercise. Owing to the earnest debates, the real being of faith became gradually more defined and clearly distinguished from its false forms and imitations. That in the present time every path, good and bad, has its own distinctive sign-post, so that no



one can turn in the wrong direction ignorantly, is the fruit of the long conflict waged with so much patience and talent.

Undoubtedly ignorance has caused much misunderstanding. But we maintain that a guide who neglects to examine the roads before he undertakes to guide travelers is unworthy of his title. And a minister of the Word is a spiritual guide, appointed by the Lord Jesus to conduct pilgrims traveling to the heavenly Jerusalem through the high Alps of faith, where the ordinary communications of the earthly life have ceased, from one mountain-plateau to another. Hence he is inexcusable when, merely guessing at the location of the heavenly city, he advises his pilgrims to try the path which *seems* to lead in that direction. By virtue of his office he should make it his chief business to know which is the shortest, safest, and most certain way, and then tell them that this and none other is the way. Formerly, when the various paths had not yet been examined, it was to some extent praiseworthy to try them all; but now, since their misleading character is so well known, it is unpardonable to try them again.

And when the easy-going people say, "Above all things let us retain our simplicity; what is the use in our Christian faith of all those wearisome distinctions," we would ask of them whether in the case of a surgical operation they would prefer a surgeon who in his simplicity only cuts no matter where or how; or in case of sickness, an apothecary who simply puts a mixture together from his various jars and bottles, regardless of the names of the drugs; or, to take another example, in case of a sea-voyage, would they embark in a vessel whose captain, chary of the use of charts and instruments, in sweet simplicity steers his ship, merely trusting in his luck?

And when they answer, as they must, that in such cases they demand professionals thoroughly acquainted with the smallest details of their professions, then we ask them in the name of the Lord and of their accountability unto Him, how they can go to work so simply, *i.e.*, so carelessly and thoughtlessly, when it concerns spiritual disease, or the voyage across the unfathomable waters of life, as tho in these matters thoughtful discrimination were immaterial.

We refuse, therefore, to be influenced by that sickly talk about simplicity regarding faith, or by the impious cry against a so-called dogmatism, but shall diligently seek to give an exposition of the *being of faith*, which, eradicating error, will point out the only safe and reliable path.

As a starting-point, let it be plainly understood that there is a sharp distinction between saving faith and the faith which in the various spheres of life is called "*faith in general*."

When Columbus is incited, by internal compulsion, to direct his restless eye across the western ocean to the world which he there expects with almost absolute certainty, we call this faith; and yet, with this instinctive inclination in the mind of Columbus *saving faith* has



nothing to do. And the preacher, using this and similar examples otherwise than as a faint analogy, does not explain but obscures the matter, and leads the Church in the wrong direction.

Sometimes we have among our children one whose mind is constantly occupied by an unconscious aim or idea, that leaves him no rest. In after years it may appear to be his life's aim and purpose. This is the compulsion of an inward law belonging to his nature; the mysterious, constraining activity of a ruling idea governing his life and person. People thus constrained conquer every obstacle; however opposed, they come ever nearer to that unconscious purpose, and at last, owing to this irresistible impulse, they attain what they have been so long aiming at. And this is also frequently called *faith*; but it has little more than the name in common with the faith of which we are about to speak. For while such faith excites human energy, and exalts and glorifies it, saving faith, on the contrary, casts down all human greatness.

The same is true of the so-called *faith in one's ideas*. One is young and enthusiastic; he dreams beautiful dreams of a golden age of happiness and sees delightful ideals of righteousness and glory. That beautiful world of his fancy seems to comfort him for the disappointments of this matter-of-fact world. If that were the real world, and if it were always to remain so, it would have broken his youthful heart and prematurely quenched its enthusiasm; and, grown old when still young, he would have joined the pessimists who perish in despair, or the conservatives who find relief in the silencing of the higher dictates of the conscience. But fortunately their number is small. In this painful experience many discover a world of ideals, *i.e.*, they have the courage to condemn this sinful world, full of misery, and to prophesy of the coming of a better and happier world.

Alas! youthful presumption, chasing after its ideals, often fancies that the cause of all evils lies in the fathers. "If my fathers had only seen and planned things as I do now, our progress would have been much greater." But those fathers did not see it so. They went wrong; hence our ideals are not yet real. But there is hope; a young generation, clearly understanding these things, will soon be heard; then great changes will occur: much of the existing misery will disappear, and our ideal world will become real. And cruel is the answer of unvarnished experience. For the son acts as foolishly as the father did before him. Consequently the ideal world is not realized. He cries aloud, but men will not hear; they refuse to be delivered from their misery, and the old sadness goes on forever.

At this point the company of idealistic men is divided. Some abandon the effort; call their dreams delusive, and, accepting the inevitable, increase the broad stream of souls trampled down to the same level. But a few nobler souls refuse to submit to this debased and ignoble wretchedness; and preferring to run their heads against the granite wall, with the cry, "Adviene qui pourra," cling to their ideals. And these men who can not be suffi-

ciently loved and appreciated are said to *believe*. But even this faith has nothing in common with saving faith; to speak of this as the same is but profusion of tongues and a joining together of things dissimilar.

Finally, the same is true of a much lower form, ordinarily called faith, which is the light-hearted expression of cheerfulness; or the lucky guessing at something which accidentally comes to pass. There are cheery, mirthful souls, who in spite of adversity never seem to be cast down or harmed, who, however much suppressed, have always enough of elasticity in their happy spirits to let the mainspring of their inward life rebound into full activity. Such people have always an encouraging and hopeful eye for all their surroundings. They are strangers to gloomy forebodings, and unacquainted with melancholy fears. Care does not rob them of sleep, and nervous restlessness does not send the blood to the heart at quickened pace. However, they are not indifferent, only not easily affected. Things may go against them, the clouds may overcast their sky, but behind the clouds they see the sun still shining, and they prophesy, with cheerful smile, that light will soon break through the darkness. Therefore it is said that they have faith in persons and in things.

And this faith, if it be not too superficial, should be appreciated. With millions of melancholy souls, life in this country would be unbearable; and it is cause for gratitude that our national character, otherwise so phlegmatic, cultivates sons and daughters in whose hearts the faith of the cheerful burns brightly. And sometimes their prophecies are really fulfilled; everybody thought that the little craft would perish, and, behold, it safely reached and entered the harbor; and it appeared that their cheerful faith was actually one of the causes of its happy arrival. And then these prophets ask you: Did we not tell you so? Were you not altogether too gloomy? Do you not see that it came out all right?

But even this faith has nothing but the name, in common with saving faith. We must note this especially because, in Christian institutions and enterprises, we frequently meet with men and women who are upheld by this spirit of cheerfulness and unquestioning confidence, and who by this hopeful spirit pilot many a Christian craft, which otherwise might perish, into a safe harbor. But this spiritual cheerfulness which, in the Christian, is perhaps *fruit* of the genuine faith, is by no means the genuine *faith itself*. And when it is said, "Do you now see what faith can do?" the saving faith is again confounded with this general faith which is found sometimes even among the heathen.



## XXXV.

**Faith and Knowledge.**

“He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see Life.”—*John iii. 36.*

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In the discussion of saving faith, faith in general can not afford us the least assistance. To understand what “faith” is, we must turn in an entirely different direction, and answer the question: “What is, among the nations, the universal root-idea and original significance of faith?”

And then we meet this singular phenomenon, that among all nations and at all times faith is an expression denoting at one time something *uncertain*, and at another something *very certain*.

It may be said: “I believe that the clock struck three, but I am not certain”; or, “I believe that his initials are H. T., but I am not certain”; or, “I believe that you can take a ticket directly for St. Petersburg, but it would be well first to inquire.” In every one of these sentences, which can be translated literally in every cultivated language, “to believe” signifies a mere guess, something less than actual knowledge, a confession of *uncertainty*.

But when I say, “I believe in the forgiveness of sin”; or, “I believe in the immortality of the soul”; or lastly, “I believe in the unquestionable integrity of that statesman”; “to believe” does not imply doubt or uncertainty about these things, but signifies *strongest conviction* concerning them.

From which it follows, that every definition of the being of faith must be wrong which does not explain how, from one and the same root-idea, there can be derived a twofold, diametrically opposed use of the same word.

Of this difficulty there can be but one solution, viz., the difference in the *nature of the things* in regard to which certainty is desired; so that, with reference to one class of things, highest certainty is obtained by faith, and, with reference to another, it is not.

This difference arises from the fact that there are things *visible* and *invisible*, and that certainty regarding things visible is obtained by *knowledge* and not by faith; while certainty in regard to things *invisible* is obtained exclusively by *faith*. When a man says regarding visible things, “I believe,” and not, “I know,” he impresses us as being *uncertain*; but in saying regarding invisible things, “I believe,” he gives us the idea of *certainty*.

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It should be observed here that the expressions “visible” and “invisible” must not be taken in too narrow a sense; by things visible must be understood all things that can be perceived by the senses, as in Scripture; and by things invisible, the things that can not be so perceived. Wherefore the things that pertain to the hidden life of a *person* must ultimately rest on faith. His deeds alone belong to the visible things. Certainty in regard to these can be obtained by the perception of the senses. But certainty regarding his inward personality,