

XXXVIII.

The Faculty of Faith.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”—*Rom. viii. 14.*

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Saving faith should always be understood as a disposition of man’s spiritual being by which he can become assured that the Christ after the Scripture, the *only* Savior, is *his* Savior.

We write purposely a “*disposition*” by which he *can become* assured. As water is in the pipes, altho not running just now, or as gas is in the tubes, altho not burning so by virtue of regeneration is faith present as a disposition in man’s spiritual being, even tho he believes not yet, or believes no more. If the house is connected with the city’s water-works the water can run; but for this reason it does not always run; nor does the gas always burn. That in your house the water *can* flow, and gas *can* burn, is the difference between your dwelling and your neighbor’s which is not so connected.

There is a similar difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate; that is, between him who is united to Jesus and him *not* so united. The difference is not that the former believes and always believes, but only this, that he *can* believe. For the unregenerate can *not* believe; he has purposely destroyed the precious and divine gift whereby he could have joined himself to the life of God. God gave him eyes to see, but he has purposely blinded himself. Hence he does not see Jesus. The living Christ does not exist for him. Not so the regenerate child of God. True, he also is a sinner; he also has purposely blinded himself; but an operation is performed upon him, restoring his eyesight, so that now he can see. And this is the implanted *faculty of faith*. This faculty touches the consciousness. As soon as the fact that Christ is the *only* Savior and *my* Savior, as an undoubted, firmly established, and fundamental truth, is introduced to my consciousness—which is the clear representation of my whole being, and is perfectly adapted and joined to it—I *believe*.

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But this truth does not suit the consciousness of the natural man. He may insert it now and then by means of a temporary or historical faith, but only as a foreign element, and his nature immediately reacts against it, in precisely the same manner as the blood and tissue react against a sliver in one’s finger. For this reason a temporary faith can never save a man, but, on the contrary, it injures him; for it causes his soul to fester.

The human consciousness as it is by nature, and the Christ after the Scripture, are in principle diametrically opposed. The one excludes the other. That which suits and fits the consciousness of the natural man is the persistent *denial* of Christ. This natural consciousness is the representation of his sinful existence; and since an unconverted sinner always asserts himself and thinks himself savable, and proposes to save *himself*, he can not tolerate Christ. Christ is unthinkable to him; therefore he can not acknowledge Him. No, there is no need of Him; he can save, too, with Jesus, or just as well as Jesus, or after the example of Jesus; wherefore this Jesus is by no means the *only* Savior.

But if the Christ after the Scripture fits his consciousness, that consciousness must have been changed from what it was by nature; and being the *reflection and representation* of his being and all that it contains, it follows that to make room for Christ, not to oblige Him, but from his own absolute necessity, his *being* must first be changed. Hence a *twofold change*:

First, the *new birth*, changing the position of his inward being.

Second, the change affecting his consciousness, by introducing the disposition to accept Christ. And this disposition, being the organ of his consciousness whereby he can do this, is the *faculty of faith*.

The fathers have correctly observed that this disposition imparts itself also *to the will*. And it can not be otherwise. The will is like a wheel moving the arms of a windmill. In sinless Adam this wheel stood squarely upon its shaft, turning with equal ease to the right and to the left—*i.e.*, it moved as freely toward God as toward Satan. But in the sinner this wheel is partly moved from the shaft, so that it can turn only to the left. When he wants to sin, he can do so. In this direction the shaft is clear; he has the power to sin. But the wheel can not turn the other way; a little perhaps, with much difficulty and much squeaking, but never sufficiently to grind corn. The working of his will can never produce any saving good. He can not make the wheel of his life run with the energy of the will toward God.

Even after he is inwardly changed, and the faith faculty has entered his consciousness, it is useless so long as the powerless will enters the consciousness to expel his Christian assurance. Therefore the will must be divinely wrought upon to serve the changed consciousness. Hence the disposition of faith is imparted not only to the consciousness, but also to the will, to adapt itself to the Christ of the Scripture. The will of the saint is made to move again freely toward God. When the ego is turned and the will changed, then only can the new disposition enter the consciousness, to be assured that Christ after the Scripture is the only Christ and his Christ.

The faculty of faith is therefore something complex. It can not be independent from the consciousness and knowledge; for it implies a change of man's being and the will's liberty to move toward God. Hence this faculty is not a spontaneous growth from the implanted life, neither is it independent of it; but as a disposition it can enter us only after regeneration, and even then it must be given us by the grace of God.

Of course, the man in whom the faculty of faith begins to work believes in Scripture, in Christ, and in his own salvation; but without it he continues to the end to object against Scripture, Christ, and his own salvation. He may be almost convinced; wholly convinced he will never be. This is temporary faith, historical faith, faith in ideals, but never saving faith.

But if a man has received this disposition, is it possible for him immediately and always to believe? Surely not, no more than a normal infant can read, write, or think logically. And

when at sixteen he can do these things, it is owing not to new faculties received since his birth, but to the development of those born in him. A new-born child of God possesses the faculty to believe; but there is no immediate and actual believing. This requires something more. As a child can not learn and develop without teachers and in connection with his own environment, so the faculty of faith can not be exercised without the guidance of the Holy Spirit in connection with the contents of Scripture.

How this was effected in deceased infants we can not tell; not because the Holy Spirit can not work in them as well as in adults, but because they do not know the Scripture. However, since the Scriptures testify only of Christ, He may have a way to bring the not-thinking child into connection with Christ, as He provided Scripture for thinking men.

In either case, the faith faculty can not produce anything of itself, but must be stimulated and developed by the Holy Spirit's training and exercise, gradually learning to believe—a training continued to the end; for until we die the working of faith increases in strength, development, and glory.

But this is not all. A man may have the faculty of faith fully developed and exercised, but it does not follow that therefore he *always believes*. On the contrary, faith may be interrupted for a season. Hence faith should not be called *the breath of the soul*; for when a man ceases to breathe he dies. No; the faculty of faith is more like the power of a tree to blossom and bear fruit: apparently dead one season, and beautiful with blossoms the next. That I possess the faculty to think is evident, not from my uninterrupted thinking, for when asleep I do not think; but it is evident from my thinking when I *must* think. Even so with the faculty of faith, which occupies the same position as the faculties of thinking, speaking, etc.

Regarding these faculties, we distinguish three things: (1) the faculty itself; (2) its necessary development; (3) and its exercise when sufficiently stimulated. Hence we notice not only the Spirit's first operation, *implanting* the faith faculty; nor only the second, *qualifying* that faculty for exercise; but also the third, *stimulating* and calling out the act of believing whenever it pleases Him.

There is no man possessed of the faith faculty but the Holy Spirit has thus *endowed* him. There is no man enabled by this faculty to believe but the Holy Spirit has also *qualified* that faculty. Nor is there a man using this qualification, actually believing, unless the Holy Spirit has *wrought* this in him.

Life has its ups and downs. We see it in our love. You have a child whom you love tenderly. But in the daily life you do not always feel that love, and sometimes you charge yourself with being cold and without warm attachment for the child: But let somebody injure him, or let him be taken ill—or worse, let his life be in danger—and your slumbering love will at once be aroused. That love did not come to you from without, but it dwelt in the depths of your soul, slumbering until fully awakened by the sharp sting of sorrow. The same

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applies to faith. For days and weeks we may have to reproach ourselves for the faithless condition of our own heart, when the soul seems dry and dead, as tho there were no bond of love between us and our Savior. But lo! the Lord reveals Himself to us, or distress overwhelms us, or the earnestness of life suddenly lays hold of us, and at once that apparently dead faith is aroused and the bond of Jesus's love is strongly felt.

And more than this: inspired by love, you are constantly doing something for your darling without saying: "I do this or that for him because I love him so much." So also regarding faith: saving faith is a disposition whose activity we do not always notice, but like other faculties it works continually, its functions unnoticed. Hence we frequently exercise faith without being specially conscious of it. We prepare ourselves especially to think or speak when special occasion calls for it; and so we act from faith with conscious purpose when, peculiarly circumstanced, we must boldly stand up as witnesses or make some important decision.

But our comfort is this, that faith's saving power depends, not upon some special believing act; nor upon acts less conscious; nor even upon the acquired ability of faith, but solely upon the fact that the germ of faith has been planted in the soul. Hence a child can have saving faith, even tho it never performed a single act of faith. And so we continue saved, even tho the act of faith slumbers for a season. The man, once endowed with saving faith, is saved and blessed. And when by and by the act of faith appears, he is not saved in *higher degree*, but it is only the evidence that, through the infinite mercy of God, the germ of faith has been planted in him.

XXXIX.

Defective Learning.

“He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.”—*1 Peter ii. 6.*

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St. Paul declares that faith is the gift of God (*Ephes. ii. 8*). His words, “And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” refer to the word “faith.”

A new generation of youthful expositors confidently assert that these words refer to “by grace are ye saved.” The majority of them are evidently ignorant of the history of the exegesis of the text. They only know that the pronoun “that” in the clause “and that not of yourselves” is a Greek neuter. And without further examination they consider it settled that the neuter pronoun can not refer to “faith,” which is a Greek feminine.

Allow us to put our readers on their guard against the thoughtless prattle of shallow school-learning. It should be remembered that while our exegesis is and always has been the one accepted almost without exception, the opposite opinion is shared by only a few expositors of later times. Nearly all the church fathers and almost all the theologians eminent for Greek scholarship judged that the words “it is the gift of God” refer to *faith*.

1. This was the exegesis, according to the ancient tradition, of the churches in which St. Paul had labored.

2. Of those that spoke the Greek language and were familiar with the peculiar Greek construction.

3. Of the Latin church fathers, who maintained close contact with the Greek world.

4. Of such scholars as Erasmus, Grotius, and others, who as philologists were without peers; and in them all the more remarkable, since personally they favored the exposition that faith is the work of man.

5. Of Beza, Zanchius, Piscator, Voetius, Heidegger, and even of Wolf, Bengel, Estius, Michaelis, Rosenmüller, Flatt, Meier, Baumgarten-Crusius, etc., who to the present day maintain the original tradition.

And lastly, Calvin, altho he is said to have favored the other exegesis. But if he had surrendered the original interpretation, he would have given some reason for it; for he was thoroughly acquainted with it. And this makes it probable that he never intended to discuss the question. That he adhered to the traditional exegesis is proven from his own words, in his “Antidote Against the Decrees of the Concilium of Trente” (page 190, edition 1547): “Faith is not of man, but of God.”

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Even our educated Reformed laymen are acquainted with the fact, if it were only from the study of the magnificent commentary on the Ephesians by Petrus Dinant, minister at Rotterdam, who flourished in the latter part of the seventeenth century. He published it in 1710, and the book had such a large sale that it was reissued in 1726; even now it is in great demand. We quote from it the following (vol. i., p. 451): “And that not of yourselves, it is