

A.B. Simpson:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1:5, 6, 7).

There is nothing in the world more practical than faith. It may seem to the naturalist a very dreamy, speculative thing, but when we stop to think, we shall readily see that the most practical thing in life is confidence. Like the law of gravitation which holds the universe together, the principle of cohesion that binds human society is confidence between man and man. Take it away from the home and where would the family be? Take it away from business and where would your bank and stock exchanges be? Take it away from the State and we have revolution, anarchy, socialism and the uprooting of the foundations of society.

A few months ago a certain stock went up from 16 points to 160 points. When the manipulation was sufficient to make several millionaires, then confidence failed. We were told in the newspapers of yesterday that fifty millions of dollars were waiting for a certain financial scheme, the moment a franchise was secured, and across yonder Hudson a mighty structure would be spanned, and all our complicated lines of transportation directly connected with New York. The money is ready for this, but all that is necessary is confidence. If confidence is a fortune in business, how much more in the higher realm?

The scientist believes, and risks everything for his belief. The Prince of Wales was standing beside Professor Playfair once, near a cauldron of boiling lead at white heat. The professor said: "I am going to ask you to put your hand in that cauldron and ladle out a handful of that lead." "Do you tell me to do it?" asked the Prince. "Yes, but wait a moment." He then washed the Prince's hand with ammonia that there might be no oil on his flesh. The Prince put his hand in the cauldron, and poured out some of the boiling lead without injury. He believed the word of the scientist, and risked his life upon it, just because he had confidence.

We owe this continent to the fact that a humble Italian believed in a great West, to him a great East, and he plodded on in his faith and met rebuffs and refusals, but his vessels were at last launched, and Christopher Columbus discovered America, because he believed in it.

Palissy worked a long time to develop the secrets of his exquisite art. His wife reviled him, and his children pleaded with him to give up his foolishness and settle down to honest work. He only saw this mighty secret, he believed in it and he worked it out; his faith became a fact and in consequence was crowned with triumph and success.

So it is that everything that is of value in the world has come from the confidence of some great soul, who pressed on till triumph was achieved and his efforts were crowned with success.

And so in the higher world, the mightiest force is faith. It is the law of Christianity. Paul calls it the "law of faith." It is just as mighty a law in the spiritual world as gravitation is in the material. It binds us to God, and then to one another. So Abraham goes out, leaving the culture and wealth of that ancient civilization, out into the wilderness, an emigrant, and God gives him a new kingdom, and all our hopes have sprung from that old pioneer believer who dared to risk everything upon God.

Thus Joseph goes down and down for years, until his life is crushed and "the iron enters his soul." But he believes through it all in the vision of his youth, and he comes up again, as every true believer does at last, and becomes the lord of Egypt, and transforms the destiny of two nations.

We find the Old and the New Testament full of the triumphs of faith until at last Jesus Himself becomes the "Prince Leader" of our faith, and achieves His miracles and works His mighty deeds by faith in God.

When asked why the fig tree withered, He said faith had caused it. At the grave of Lazarus He said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always." It was faith. He never doubted God. He always expected the thing to come to pass that He claimed.

So He has left to us the secret. He has told us we may "have the faith of God," the very same touch that He had; we may link on with Omnipotence just as He did. There are just two things that are almighty, God and faith. The man that believes God just comes into partnership with God and shares His all-sufficiency. We know that in the natural world the mightiest forces are those we do not see; not the mountains, but the principle that holds them

together; not the worlds, but the law that moves them; not the things we touch, but the hidden forces that control them. And we are being taught by the progress of our age to believe in nature's forces and to use them as levers to lift our loads and as motors to move our engines. So in the spiritual world faith is the power to attach ourselves to God.

There are two ways to do things -- faith and works; one to do them yourself, the other to let God do them. Faith means that God does them. The power of faith is not how much can I do, but how much can God do? Faith saves us just because it puts us into God's hands. It drops us into the salvation that He has already finished, and we have only to accept. Faith sanctifies us, not because it would have us do better, but it brings the power to do it. So faith heals, not by slowly building up the tissues and blood, but by putting a new electric fountain of vitality in your frame that makes an old man young, and although ready to drop into the grave keeps you by a second life. Faith brings the answers to your prayers, because it takes God's prayers instead of yours, and then they must be answered, because they are His asking, claiming and commanding. Faith puts us out and brings God in, and our life becomes a supernatural one. Faith is, therefore, a practical force, the secret of all real power, and a secret which can be applied to everything in our life. Let us now examine the exposition of faith as we find it in the Epistle of James.

I. WE ARE TAUGHT THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH -- "WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT COMES."

It must be absolute and unwavering. You cannot have a half faith. It must be "nothing doubting." The element of uncertainty destroys the vitality of faith just as much as a scratch defaces a mirror, and as a little chip in the side of your grain of corn kills the germ. The faith which accomplishes omnipotent results is confidence, boldness, and the full assurance of faith.

Next we are told that faith is the receiving organ of the soul, that without it we cannot receive anything of the Lord. "God giveth to all men liberally," or "of course," as Alford translates it. God always gives. But the unbelieving heart cannot receive. It is fettered and paralyzed by its doubts, and like the sensitive plant shrinks helpless, and misses the blessing that His love would gladly have bestowed.

"Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." (Jas. 1:7.)

II. FAITH AND WISDOM.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," . . . "but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," vs. 5-6. Wisdom is that quality which enables us to suit the right means to the end in view. It is wholly practical and concerned not with theories and ideas, but with actual conditions and the way to meet them. It teaches us how to live, and enables us to meet every emergency rightly and successfully. It does not mean that we are infallible. It is not the wisdom of our common sense and level-headedness. It presupposes our ignorance and fallibility, and takes God's wisdom instead of our own. Even when we cannot understand His leading, faith still can trust Him that it will be right in the end. Even when we err, God's wisdom can still overrule our mistake and bring blessing out of it in the end.

Mr. Spurgeon used to tell about a weather-vane which had the text inscribed above it "God is love." When he asked the old miller why he put the verse on top of it, he said that it might speak to the people at all points of the compass and say to them, "God is love, whichever way the wind blows." So faith in God's wisdom counts upon His goodness and faithfulness in the face of all conditions and in spite of all hindrances.

John Vassar used to say that he doubted whether our so-called mistakes were mistakes always. Knocking at a door one day in quest of a woman with whom he wished to speak about her soul, a different person met him, and told him that he had made a mistake, and that she did not live there. The good man answered, "I guess it is not a mistake after all, but the Lord wants me to talk to you instead." And so tactfully breaking through the barrier of her strangeness, he reached her heart, and ended by leading her to the Savior.

The writer recalls an incident in the early history of this work through which he was strangely led to lease as his residence for a year the dwelling in which all the Alliance work began in this city. He had been offered the house by a friend who owned it, and after much prayer had decided that it was the Master's will that he should take it. But on almost the last day of the season he was informed that the house had just been sold to a neighbor, who was determined to live in it himself. All efforts to induce this man to consent to my occupying the house were vain, and the only thing left was to accept the house that the man was leaving instead, as the season was late, and moving day came within twenty-four hours. Against every inclination the writer became convinced that it was the Lord's will for him to consent to this arrangement, and after a great struggle he called

to sign the lease for the unwelcome house, which was most unattractive in every way. To his surprise, however, the gentleman came out to greet him, and immediately explained that he had changed his mind, and decided to stay where he was, and that he would be glad to lease the other house that he had just purchased, as we desired. The strange reason of it all was that that very day he had attended a funeral of an old friend in the country, and that he and his wife had come home with the feeling that if they moved something might happen to them. It was a mere superstition, but God had allowed it to come in order to change his mind and accomplish the purpose to which He had been leading all the time.

There is nothing in the whole circle of our common-place life that we may not bring to God in faith, and thus find a hundred Ebenezers every day all along the path of life.

III. FAITH AND WORKS.

In the second chapter of James the apostle takes up the practical side of faith, and shows that it is not idle dreaming, but stepping out and acting according to our convictions. There are works that are not the works of faith, but the works of fear, doubt and human dependence. But there are works which must follow it, if it is genuine and vital. When the nobleman believed the word that Jesus had spoken for the healing of his boy, he was bound to stop his praying, and go back to meet the answer that had been promised. When the cripple at Lystra believed the Gospel which Paul preached, immediately he rose up and leaped and walked. "If I believed," said an infidel, "as you say you do, that the world was perishing and that Christ alone could save it, I would abandon every interest and fly to the ends of the earth to tell men the story of salvation." As poor crippled Tom used to say, "Knowin' is lovin' and lovin' is doin', and if we're not a doin' on it, we don't love Him, that's all."

IV. FAITH AND HEALING.

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." Surely this is practical faith, a faith that comes down to the level of our daily life and all our physical needs. This was the sort of faith that James believed in. And was he not right? If God cannot help us in the things we see, how can we expect Him to help us in the world of the future and the unseen?

In these days of materialism and unbelief on one hand, and fanaticism on the other; when the supernatural and Scriptural conceptions of divine healing are in danger of being confounded with the vagaries of Christian Science and the extravagances of modern apostles and faith healers, it is more important than ever that a sober and conservative, yet bold and uncompromising testimony be given to the true doctrine of the Lord's healing. While this truth has not the first place in our testimony, it has a very important place, and the experience which it has brought us has become a turning point in the life and work of multitudes whom God has used in the teaching of deeper truth and the work of missions. While we do not go forth to be the special apostles of divine healing, yet we owe much of our ministry on the higher and more spiritual planes to this truth and its blessed influence.

It is most distinctly promised here to the prayer of faith. What the prayer of faith is the apostle James has already told us in the first chapter. It is the prayer of the man who believes, nothing wavering, that he receives the things he asks. It involves three steps: First, to believe that divine healing is provided for us in the Word of God and in the work of Christ. Next, to come to God and actually claim it for ourselves by a definite act of committal. And third, to act as if we had it, and step out and prove our faith by our works.

Over in Flamborough, Ontario, there lives a young farmer named Patterson, whose parents are well known to the writer, and whose brother is one of our most prominent official workers. A few years ago he broke his leg, and the village doctor came and set it, showing the family beforehand how serious the compound fracture was, so that the father told afterwards how he had with his own hand felt the great void between the broken bones. The limb was tied with splints as usual, and stretched out in a horizontal position, and the patient told to keep in that position for several weeks. Next morning to the surprise of the family, young Patterson was out feeding the cattle at the usual hour, and doing his work as if nothing had happened. The explanation was this: During the night the Lord had spoken to him something on this wise: "Have I not healed you often before, and can't you trust Me now? Then, if you trust Me what are you going to do about it? Lie here for two months like a helpless cripple? or take My healing and get up and act as if you had it?" The young man knew the Lord and had proved Him. And so he quietly got up, took off the splints, and lay down again until daylight, and then arose and dressed himself and went about his work, and has been going about it ever since. That is the prayer of faith.

V. FAITH AND SERVICE.

Higher than healing, infinitely more important than helping people out of their troubles, is the climax to which James conducts us in the closing verses, after having told us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Here is its highest triumph and its noblest ministry. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (Jas. 5:19-20.) How is this to be accomplished? It is given to the ministry of faith, the faith that worketh by love. How shall your children be saved? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved AND THY HOUSE." Read the story of Jerry McAuley and you will find that after his conversion, he often "erred from the truth," and had to be reconverted, or, rather, brought back to the fold, and but for the patient, untiring love of an humble missionary, who used to pursue him, when he tried to slip out of the meeting unobserved, and hold him back from the river thieves, and was always saying to him, "Jerry, keep on trying, keep on trying, and it will be all right at last," -- but for this, the story of his wondrous life and his harvest of precious souls would never have been told.

In a wretched attic in London there lived a lad named Tom Reed, a poor cripple, who was sometimes able to drag himself to the corner and sweep the street crossing for a penny, and sometimes even to find his way to the little mission round the corner, where they told about Jesus and His love. His only earthly friends were Granny, who gave him a scant living, and Jack Lee, his chum. One day Jack called to say good-bye, as he started to the country for a new field of operations in his humble trade. And he brought Tom a shilling as his parting gift, telling him that he must use it for something he "wanted partikler." Then Tom told him that what he wanted "most partikler" was a Bible. Jack tried to laugh him out of it, for "these here books," he said, were only for scholars, and not for such as they. But Tom begged hard, and at last Jack went out and got the Bible, adding as he left him that the bookseller had told him that the book was all right and might make his fortune yet. It wasn't long till Tom had devoured it, and was so full of it that he felt he must do something for his Savior and his fellow sinners. So he denied himself his daily mug of milk to buy some paper and a pencil, and began to write verses of his Bible on bits of paper, and after praying over them and watering them with his tears, he would address the outside, "Passerby, please read," and drop them out of the window. One day a handsome gentleman climbed the rickety stairs and asked if that was the boy who dropped the papers out of the window. And then he told Tom with much feeling that he had come to thank him for the blessing he had brought him, and how his own son in the country, a suffering and dying boy, had been pleading with him to find some service to do for God, so that he would not go empty-handed to meet his Master. The verse that he had picked up was this: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is called today," and it had changed his whole purpose and life. Tom did not want any thanks. "I only do the writin'," he said, "He does the blessin'." But the gentleman undertook the care of Tom henceforth in his little attic, and went to live out his lesson. He built a mission chapel for his boy, and souls were saved, and Tom's warning message to him was faithfully lived out. "Tell your rich friends that if they are not workin' for Him they don't know Him, for workin' is lovin', and lovin' is doin'." One day there came a little parcel to the mission. It was Tom's old Bible, underlined and stained with many a tear, for Tom had gone above, where "their works do follow them." And for many a day the old Bible continued to live out its owner's life, and "being dead he yet speaketh." God give us the faith that knows and loves and does for Jesus' sake. Amen.