

~Other Speakers S-Z: Hannah Whitall Smith:

There is much misunderstanding about the subject of the life and walk of faith because its two sides are not seen clearly. People are apt to think that there is only one side to it. They dwell exclusively upon the one they happen to see more clearly, without even thinking of any other. It is no wonder then, that there are distorted views of the whole matter.

Now, there are two very distinct sides to this subject, and like all other subjects, it cannot be fully understood unless both of these sides are kept constantly in view. I refer of course to God's side and man's side. In other words, to God's part in the work of sanctification, and man's part. These are very distinct and even contrasting, but they are not really contradictory.

At one time this was very strikingly illustrated to me. There were two preachers holding meetings in the same place at alternate hours. One spoke only of God's part in the work, and the other dwelt exclusively upon man's part. They were both in perfect sympathy with each other, and realized fully that they were each teaching different sides of the same great truth. This was also understood by a large proportion of their listeners. But some of the listeners did not comprehend this and one lady said to me in great perplexity, "I cannot understand it at all. Here are two preachers undertaking to teach just the same truth, and yet to me they seem flatly to contradict each other." I felt at the time that she expressed a puzzle that, very often, causes great difficulty in the minds of many honest inquirers after this truth.

Suppose two friends go to see a famous building and return home to describe it. One has seen only the north side, and the other only the south. The first says: "The building was built in such a manner and has so many stories and ornaments." "Oh, no," says the other, interrupting him, "you are altogether mistaken. I saw the building, and it was built in quite a different manner, and its ornaments and stories were so and so." A lively dispute might follow upon the truth of the respective descriptions, until the two friends discover that they had been describing different sides of the same building, and then all would be reconciled at once.

I should like to state, as clearly as I can, what I judge to be the two distinct sides in this matter. I would like to show how looking at one, without seeing the other, will be sure to create wrong impressions and views of the truth.

Man's Part In Faith

To state it briefly, I would say that man's part is to trust, and God's part is to work. It can be seen at a glance how these two parts contrast with each other, and yet are not necessarily contradictory. I mean this: there is a certain work to be accomplished. We are to be delivered from the power of sin, and are to be made perfect in every good work to do the will of God. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," we are to be actually "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is good, acceptable, and the perfect will of God.

A real work is to be wrought in us and upon us. Sins with which we constantly struggle are to be conquered. Evil habits are to be overcome. Wrong attitudes and feelings are to be rooted out. A positive transformation is to take place. So, at least, the Bible teaches. Now, somebody must do this. Either we must do it for ourselves, or another must do it for us. Most of us have tried to do it for ourselves at first, and have grievously failed. We then discover, from the Scriptures and from our own experience, that it is something we are unable to do. But, the Lord Jesus Christ has come on purpose to do it. He will do it for all who put themselves into His hands and trust Him completely.

God's Part In Faith

Now, under these circumstances, what is the part of the believer, and what is the part of the Lord? Plainly the believer can do nothing but trust. The Lord, in whom he trusts, actually does the work entrusted to Him. Trusting and doing are certainly contrasted things, often indeed contradictory, but are they contradictory in this case? No, because it is two different parties that are concerned. If we should say that one party in a transaction trusted his case to another, and yet attended to it himself, we should state a contradiction and an impossibility. But, when we say that one party in a transaction trusts the other to do something, and that the other goes to work and does it, we are stating something that is perfectly simply and harmonious. When we say, therefore, that in this higher life man's part is to trust, and God's part is to do the thing entrusted to Him, we do not

present a very difficult or puzzling problem.

The preacher, who is speaking man's part in the matter, cannot speak of anything but surrender and trust, because this is positively all the man can do. We all agree about this. And yet such preachers are constantly criticised as though, in saying this, they had meant to imply there was no other part, and that nothing but trusting is to be done. And the cry goes out that this doctrine of faith does away with all realities. Souls are told to trust, and that is the end of it. They then sit down in a sort of religious easychair, dreaming away their life, fruitless of any actual result.

All this misunderstanding arises from the fact that either the preacher has neglected to state, or the hearer has failed to hear that the Lord works not by us, but by Him. Actual results are reached by our trusting, because our Lord undertakes the thing entrusted to Him and accomplishes it. We do not do anything, but He does it, and it is done all the better because of this. As soon as this is clearly seen, the difficulty disappears entirely.

On the other hand, the preacher who dwells on God's part is criticized on a totally different ground. He does not speak of trust, for the Lord's part is not trust, but to work. The Lord's part is to do the thing entrusted to Him. He disciplines and trains by inward exercises and outward divine care or direction. He brings to us all the refining and purifying resources of His wisdom and His love. He makes everything in our lives and circumstances subservient to the one great purpose of causing us to grow in grace, and of conforming us, day by day and hour by hour, to the image of Christ. He carries us through a process of transformation, longer or shorter as our particular case may require. And soon, we see actual results concerning what we have given Him in trust. We have dared, for instance, according to the command in Romans 6:11, to believe ourselves dead unto sin by faith. The Lord makes this a reality.

The Potter And The Clay

Sanctification is both a step of faith and a profit in the oven, and finally turns it out of his workshop, a vessel to his honour, and fit for his use."

Before, I was speaking of the clay's part in the matter. I am now speaking of the potter's part. These two are necessarily contrasted, but are not in the least contradictory. The clay is not expected to do the potter's work. It only yields itself to his working. It seems to me that nothing could be clearer than the perfect harmony between these two apparently contradictory sorts of teaching.

What can be said about man's part in this great work is that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust. But when we come to God's side of the question, much can be said about the many wonderful ways in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him. It is here that growing is important. The lump of clay could never grow into a beautiful vessel if it stayed in the claypit for thousands of years. But when it is put into the hands of a skilful potter it grows rapidly under his fashioning into the vessel he intends it to be. In the same way the soul, abandoned to the working of the Heavenly Potter, is made into a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use.

The Maturing Process

Having, therefore, taken the step of faith by which you have put yourself completely and absolutely into His hands, you must now expect Him to begin work. His way of accomplishing that which you have entrusted to Him, may be different from your way. But He knows, and you must be satisfied.

I knew a lady who had entered into this life of faith with a great outpouring of the Spirit and a wonderful flood of light and joy. She supposed, of course, this was a preparation for some great service and expected to be put forth immediately into the Lord's harvestfield. Instead of this, almost at once her husband lost all his money, and she was shut up in her own house to attend to all sorts of domestic duties with no time or strength left for any Gospel work at all. She accepted the discipline and yielded herself up as heartily to sweep, dust, bake, and sew, as she would have done to preach, pray, or write for the Lord. As a result, through this training He made her into a vessel "meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

Another lady entered this life of faith under similar circumstances. She also expected to be sent out to do some great work, but instead was confined with two invalid children, to nurse, humor and amuse all day long. Unlike the first lady, this one did not accept the training. She worried, rebelled, and lost all her blessing, retreating into a sad spiritual condition. In the beginning, she understood her part of trusting but did not understand the divine process. She took herself out of the hands of the Heavenly Potter and the vessel was marred on the wheel.

I believe many a vessel has been similarly marred by not understanding these things. The maturity of a Christian experience cannot be

reached in a moment. It is the result of the work of God's Holy Spirit, who, by His energizing and transforming power, causes us to "grow up into (Christ) in all things" (Ephesians 4:15). We cannot hope to reach this maturity in any other way than by yielding ourselves completely and willingly to His mighty working. However, the sanctification the Scriptures encourage, as a present experience upon all believers, does not consist in maturity of growth, but in purity of heart.

From the moment the lump of clay comes under the transforming hand of the potter, it is, during each day and hour of the process, just what the potter wants it to be at that hour or on that day. Therefore, it pleases him, but it is far from being the vessel he intends it to be in the future.

A little baby may be all that he or she could be or ought to be, and may perfectly please its mother. Yet it is very far from being what that mother would wish it to be when it reaches maturity.

The apple in June is a perfect apple for June. It is the best apple that June can produce. But it is very different from the apple in October, which is a perfected apple.

God's works are perfect in every stage of their growth. Man's works are never perfect until they are in every respect complete. In this life of sanctification, all we can claim is that by an act of faith we put ourselves into the hands of the Lord for Him to work in us all the good pleasure of His will. Then, by a continuous exercise of faith, keep ourselves there. This is our part in the matter. And when we do it we are truly pleasing to God. It may require years of training and discipline to mature us into a vessel that will be in all respects to His honour and fitted to every good work.

Trust Is The Foundation

Our part is the trusting. His part is to accomplish the results. When we do our part He never fails to do His. No one ever trusted in the Lord and was confounded. Do not be afraid to trust or tell others to trust. Trust is the beginning and the continuing foundation. When we trust, the Lord works, and His work is the important part of the whole matter.

This explains that apparent contradiction which puzzles so many. They say, "In one breath you tell us to do nothing but trust, and in the next you tell us to do impossible things. How can you make such statements agree?" They can be understood just as we understand the statements concerning a saw in a carpenter's shop. We say, at one moment, that the saw has sawed the log, and the next moment declare that the carpenter has done it. The saw is the instrument used. The power that uses it is the carpenter's.

And so we, yielding ourselves unto God, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto Him, find that He works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. We can say with Paul, "I laboured. . . yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15: 10). In the divine order, God's working depends upon our cooperation. It was said that our Lord could do no mighty work at a certain place because of the unbelief of the people. It was not that He would not. He could not. I believe we often think that God will not, when the real truth is that He cannot. The potter, however skilful, cannot make a beautiful vessel out of a lump of clay that is never put into his hands. Neither can God make out of me a vessel unto His honour, unless I put myself into His hands. My part is the essential revelation of God's part in the matter of my salvation. As God is sure to do His part all right, the vital thing for me is to find out what my part is, and then do it.

In this book, I will dwell mostly upon man's side. I am writing for human beings, in the hope of making it plain as to how we are to fulfil our part in this great work. But I wish it to be distinctly understood, that unless I believed with all my heart in God's effectual working on His side, not one word of this book would ever have been written.