

Now, if you will remember how many times you fail; if you know how easy it is to be discouraged, you will be able to sense the truth of this doctrine laid down here, that in order to exercise faith in God you must know something of His character and of His attributes. For example, we must know that He is slow to anger, abundant in mercy and in goodness, willing—nay, anxious—to forgive the repentant. If we did not have these ideas of the character of God, we would fail, we would faint by the way, we would be unable to continue the struggle to arise to the full majesty of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus our Lord. But when the Lord repeats for our consolation, over and over and over again, this truth, that He is slow to anger, that He is merciful and longsuffering, gracious and kind beyond our comprehension—when we remembre that, though we fail daily, yet will we arise, trusting in the grace and mercy of God.

The beauty of this principle, I think, is very forcibly drawn out in a conversation that takes place between Jesus and the Apostles. Peter came to Him with some of his brethren, and he said: "Lord, how oft shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" I suppose that Peter thought that his proposition was a wonderfully merciful one, very gracious; that it would be a remarkable man who would forgive his brother seven times. He wanted to be "magnanimous." Peter was one of the most generous of men, too, by nature. It seems to me, in the glimpses we get of this great Apostle's life, that you find in him a largeness of soul, a magnanimity of temper, a nobleness of bearing, which really exalts him among his brethren. He was a broad, liberal-minded, noble man. "Shall I," said he, "forgive my brother seven times?" Mark you the answer of Jesus. "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." That gives you an opportunity of comparison between the littleness of man, even at his best, with the noble magnanimity of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the reflex, as you know, of His Father—or, rather, through Him shone the attributes of God the Father. Then how noble and even above the petty conceptions of man is the mercy of God, and how we may rely upon it! Yet, do not think this attribute out of proportion with the other attributes of God; in Him all the attributes of His character are most beautifully blended and perfected. While the quality of mercy, perhaps greater than He dared reveal unto the children of men, is in Him; yet, balancing that quality—mercy—stands that of justice—a justice which preserves His mercy from becoming maudlin and unworthy of God. Justice and judgment are the habitations of His throne as well as mercy; are parts of His supreme, exalted character. Mercy, the quality of which is not strained, is His—mercy, blessing him that gives and him that takes, mightiest in the mightiest, becoming the throned monarch better than his crown, making earthly governments most like God's when mercy seasons justice—mercy, grand and great as it is, will not in the administration of God be allowed to rob justice. This All-merciful Being, compassionate as He is, will not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Sin He will condemn, for it is hateful to Him. But the sinner who repents and desires to turn away from transgression and thirsts after righteousness, blessed is he; for God's hand shall be extended to him, and He will help all those who seek after righteousness. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

It seems to me pretty clear that it is

necessary for us to know something about the character of God, in order to exercise faith in Him. We must know something of His mercy; we must be able to trust His justice; we must have abiding faith in His judgment and power, or we cannot exercise faith unto life and salvation. And that we might have this knowledge so essential to our faith, He has sent Jesus Christ into the world, and He was God manifested in the flesh. If therefore you would know God; if you would become acquainted with the personage that sits enthroned in the heavens, and that by His power called worlds and systems of worlds into being, and who governs and controls in them according to His sovereign will; if you would know something of the might, the majesty and the power of this Supreme Mind that stands behind all the phenomena to be seen in the universe, look, I pray you, upon the great Peasant Teacher of Judea, and in Him shall you find all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; for He was in the image of God, and He was and is the Mediator between God and man, the true representative of the Father. When Philip, puzzled somewhat with the seeming mystic sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ about the Father, said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." He said—and there is a world of agony in the tone of it—"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" Oh! slow of heart and unready to believe the great mission of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the representative of the Godhead here upon the earth, to hold all power in heaven and in earth—to be God manifested in the flesh! I say to you, study God through the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will find in Him every mercy, every power, every principle of justice, of judgment and truth that are the habitation of the throne of God; for in Him, as saith the scripture, dwell all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. I know of no better recommendation to men who would become acquainted with God than to ask them to study Him through Jesus Christ.

The third thing necessary to the exercise of faith in God unto life and salvation is an actual knowledge that the course of life one is pursuing is according to His will.

I feel that this is not only the most difficult part of this subject to treat in speech, but also the most difficult thing for men to do, that is, to get into a habit of living so that you shall know continually that the course of life you are pursuing is in harmony with the will of God. Let me point out to you how unrighteousness affects faith; how failure to arrive at this knowledge that your course of life is in accordance with God's will destroys your ability to exercise faith. And let me say here, without entering into too nice distinctions, that there is a difference between having faith and exercising it, just as there is a difference between having strength and putting that strength to use. I take it that you have all seen a man of splendid physique, in whose joints and limbs, muscles and sinews there reside wonderful strength; and yet if that strength is put to no particular use, what good is it to him? So, to some extent and in a certain way, men may have ideas concerning these great truths of which I have spoken—that is, ideas of the existence of God, and some idea about His character; but they never exercise that faith, it does not become an incentive to action—it is dormant, and consequently it is like the strength in the man I have spoken of—it is of little service to them or to anybody else.

But we will say that here is an Elder in Israel who believes in God's existence, knows something about His character and attributes, and he is called upon to exercise himself in the ministry, to exercise himself, say, in the healing of the sick; and it does seem to me that if there is one position in which a man can feel his weakness more than in another, it is when he is brought face to face with those who are sick and who desire to be healed through his ministration. Speaking for myself, I can say that at such moments every weakness, every imperfection of my own nature rises up like a mountain in front of me. The unrighteous acts, the blundering mistakes made by me in my life, all come trooping in to break down, if possible, the faith I would exercise. Suppose now a man is placed under those circumstances, and he suddenly remembers that only yesterday he gave way to a fit of anger and passion, and he blasphemed the name of God; can that man proceed with the ordinance of the house of God for the sick? I know not how he could proceed. The recollection that he had spoken blasphemy against the name of Jesus Christ ought to seal—and I believe, so far as strength and power is concerned, would seal—his lips; and while he may speak the words, the power cannot be there, until he gets forgiveness of his sins. He remembers perhaps that only last Sabbath he transgressed the law of God, and unnecessarily violated the quiet of the Sabbath day by the noise of his labor. I know not how such a man can exercise faith even to heal the sick, to say naught of a faith that shall take hold on salvation. Or perhaps he remembers that he oppressed his brother in his wages; that he was cruel and unnecessarily harsh in his household; or that he had staggered as he walked through the streets under the influence of intoxicants; or perhaps he has walked after the lusts of the eyes and the heart. Loaded down with the recollection of sins and transgressions such as these I have enumerated where is the possibility of exercising faith in God under such conditions? Call him to the pulpit; let him strive for the faith that lays hold of the powers of heaven and calls them down in inspired utterances to instruct and bless the Saints of God—let him stand there and attempt to exercise faith with all the recollections of these evils about him, and what must be the result? With bowed head, with fainting heart. It seems to me, he must quit the pulpit, and first seek repentance and forgiveness of God, relying upon His mercy, before he can wield the powers of heaven for the salvation of the children of men; for be it remembered, the powers of heaven can only be handled and controlled upon the principles of righteousness.

Now, my brethren and sisters, I hope you see what I mean in dealing with this third principle essential to the exercise of faith unto salvation. Having looked at it from the obverse side first, let us look at the other side now just a moment—the positive side—and see what strength comes when there is resident in the soul of man the consciousness that, notwithstanding human weaknesses and imperfections yet God approves of the course of life he leads. The pages of Scripture are luminous with instances of this kind! Look, I pray you, at the father of the faithful, Abraham. Tried every way; tested at every point; touched upon the tenderest chord of all his soul: required by the commandment of God to take the son of promise and to place him upon the altar, and let the smoke that should consume his flesh ascend up as incense unto God—tested to that very point, and yet he stood the test, believing in and trusting the justice and mercy of God. Though the general