

# *The Proof of Faith*

A Topical Sermon

by Earl I. West

When we put forth any sort of effort to accomplish something and nothing comes of it, we are ready to jettison the whole idea and turn to something entirely different. For example, when you become ill, the doctor diagnoses the problem and prescribes some medicine; then, you go and pay the huge bill for the medicine. After you have tried it for a while, you go back to the doctor and say, "Look, I don't see any benefits coming from this medicine. Can you prescribe something else?" And, sometimes he does. The businessman soon learns that if one method doesn't make money, he must try something else. Whatever effort we put forth, we always expect to see something good come from it.

We believe faith in our hearts is going to produce something beneficial and worthwhile. If my faith is a dormant, lifeless thing I would immediately conclude there is not much value in having it. I might even wonder why God requires faith if it doesn't produce any lasting results.

The fact is, real faith does produce wonderful results. James affirms this truth in the second chapter of his great epistle. He goes back to Abraham and Rahab to prove his point. Their faith was manifested by their good works.

As we think about the practical aspects of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian, we can easily see that faith in our hearts must have something on the outside that goes along with it. Unless there is something resulting from our faith, faith is not very meaningful. It is certainly not the kind of faith God wants His people to have.

## **I. THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH**

An overview of the Bible shows God has always interlaced faith with works. Belief in Jesus Christ is important, and without it we can never have any promise of salvation. Without it we can never enter into the kingdom of God; without it we can never be a member of the

church of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Word of God also says faith must express itself in obedience to the gospel. Unless faith manifests itself in obedience, it is of no value.

In the first chapter of Romans the apostle Paul uses, in a broad sweep of thought, some of the most majestic language to be found in any literature anywhere. He links the past with the present in order to help us understand this fundamental principle of faith and obedience. He says,

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake (Romans 1:1-5).

Paul is unfolding to us the great book of faith, the book of Romans, and he wants us to understand in the very introduction that he is going to preach the gospel to the entire world. He says that at the center of that gospel message is the idea of the "obedience of faith." What does Paul mean by that expression? He says the whole Gentile world did not know or understand God, and it must come to know Him by the obedience of faith.

When the gospel of Christ was taken from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the Roman world, it always went with the principle that no man can ever come to God unless he has a faith that expresses itself by his obedience to the gospel of Christ.

Hebrews 11:18 reminds us that this principle of the obedience of faith was not new at all. It operated in the Old Testament. We are told that by faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out into a land he was afterward to receive as an inheritance.

Most of the members of the church clearly understand that none can ever become a Christian except through faith that expresses itself through an obedience to God. But has it ever occurred to you that once you make your entry into the church of the Lord, you will not continue as a servant of Christ unless your faith produces a life of obedience? You must be constantly giving yourself to God. Remember when the children of Israel were about to settle into the land of Palestine? The Law had just been given them, and in Deuteronomy 5:33 God said through Moses to the children of Israel, "Ye shall walk in all the way which Jehovah your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess." What Moses said to the children of Israel is this: When you settle in the land that God gave you, it is yours only so long as you obey the commandments of God. Obedience to God on a daily, routine basis was expected of all the children of Israel as long as they remained the chosen people of God.

John said in 1 John 2:3-5, "And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected." It would be very difficult for anyone to express himself more explicitly than John did. If we say we know God, and yet we are not obeying Him, John says with a staggering bluntness that we are just not telling the truth.

Demosthenes was once "asked what he thought were the first, second, and third priorities to becoming an orator. He said, the first, second, and third priority is action. Martin Luther once said he would rather obey God than have the power to perform miracles. No reality, no privilege you possess is greater than the privilege you have to obey God every day you live. Faith and obedience interlocked all the way through the Bible. They compose the expectations of God for His people throughout all ages of time.

## II. THE FRUITS OF FAITH

Works or fruits of faith are clearly defined in the Scriptures. This brings the matter of being a

Christian down to something that is intensely practical.

*First, faith in our hearts will strengthen the inner man.* Don't you want your inner self to be stronger? Has it ever dawned upon you that the most important thing for you is for your inner man to always be strong? Without this strong inner self you will not be able to live through the storms of life.

Years ago, we had an elm tree at our back door. It was a very beautiful tree, and I was thankful for it. But, little things began to happen to it. A type of fungus began to attach itself to it. On the inside, its heart was eaten out. It was a very tall tree, and from the outside it looked like a very strong tree. We had an expert to come and look at it. He said it had a fungus that had eaten the center out of it. He told us we could leave it there if we wanted to, but the chances were great that it would soon come toppling over on our house and do a lot of damage. On the other hand, we could cut it down and haul it away. On the surface, it seemed a little odd. Here was a tree that looked strong and healthy on the outside, but something was happening to it on the inside. It was slowly dying because the inside was dying.

It often happens that way in a Christian's life. We think of ourselves as strong stalwart Christian men and women. But, we haven't given attention to our inner selves. Slowly, we are decaying spiritually—on the inside. Nobody else notices it, and we may not be aware of it ourselves. Then what happens? One day a storm comes up in our lives. It blows hard against us. And it blows us away from Christ. What really happened is that a long time ago, our inner life began to deteriorate, and because we were weak, when the storm came we fell.

Often this is true, isn't it? Here are Christians whom you think are the finest people; but, after a while, they become drop-outs. You wonder why. When you talk to them, they blame it on a lot of things. But, in the long run, the real problem is something has gone awry with their inner selves. They did not have the inner strength to live in all the tumults that came into their lives.

We need to give time to prayer to draw closer to God. I heard brother Willard Collins at David Lipscomb College tell about the begging of the little booklet of daily devotions called *Power for*

*Today*, a publication made up of Scripture readings and daily devotions. Brother Collins said as they were getting ready to begin the publication, they were trying to decide on what to call it. No one knew an appropriate name for it. They went to see a Christian businessman. While visiting with him in his office, they pointed to a little room and asked what he kept in it. He said, "Nothing. That is my *power* room." "Your power room? What do you mean by that?" asked the visitors. He answered, "In this job, I need all the strength I can find. Every day, I go into this room, and there I am alone with God. I pray to God and I get the power that enables me to live the day correctly." Later, when they were talking about this little magazine, they recalled their visit with this businessman, and decided a good name for the little booklet would be "Power for Today." They said they would call it "Power for Today" because they wanted it to provide every person with that which was needed to give him power to live through the day.

All of us need a greater trust in God. We need more confidence that God will see us through. We need to believe that we can put everything in God's hands and He is going to take care of us. In Proverbs 3:5, 6 Solomon said,

Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart,  
And lean not upon thine own understanding:  
In all thy ways acknowledge him,  
And he will direct thy paths.

Do you remember the time the young man David went out to fight Goliath, the great Philistine giant? Some of the soldiers said, "You're just a young man. Goliath is a giant, strong and powerful. He will soon destroy you." But David said, "Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the bear will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (cf. 1 Samuel 17:31-40). David was the only person in the whole army of Saul who was not worried. He was not concerned about it because he believed God would take care of him. Isn't it often the case that we are nervous and frustrated because we do not have anyone we can trust? We need a greater trust in God that will enable us to endure the sorrows and tragedies that often beset us.

But the inner man needs not only a stronger trust in God, he also needs a determination to constantly seek ways and means to live without

sin. Although we are not ever going to completely accomplish this goal in our lives, a Christian by his growth can get to the place where sin no longer has any allurements to him. He may occasionally fall because of the weakness of the flesh but to live and be conquered by sin is not part of his plans.

Those of us who have studied American religious history know that about the time of the American Civil War, there was a large movement in America that came to be called "Christian Perfectionism." The name itself was a misnomer in many respects, but it represented the idea that the more one grows as a child of God, the more he will someday come to the place that sin has lost its allurements, and the Christian can live with love in his heart just for the will of God. The Christian will not reach perfection in this life but he must daily seek a closer walk with God. Often we sing,

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;  
Abide in Him always, and feed on His word;  
Make friends of God's children; Help those who are weak,  
Forgetting in nothing His blessings to seek,

Take time to be holy, The world rushes on;  
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone;  
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;  
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul;  
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.  
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,  
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

If we have faith in our hearts we will be aware of the continuing need of strengthening the inner man.

*Second, faith in our hearts will produce a concern for spreading the gospel into all the world.* I have noticed as I survey history from the Reformation Movement on down that when there is someone who emerges on the pages of time who becomes a very strong spiritual giant, that that person almost invariably possesses zeal to see the gospel of Christ spread throughout the world.

Our Lord tells us that the Word of God is like seed. He told His parable of the sower who sowed his seed into four different kinds of soil. How much fruit is going to be produced without the seed ever being planted? I am not a farmer at all; but I have known a few farmers, and I have seen a few farms, and I know one thing about it. The farmer has to go out in the

springtime, plow his ground, and plant the corn in the rows. If he does not do it in the fall of the year he is not going to have a crop. I have seen farmers who have complained about it. They have said, "We planted the corn, but the weather was too dry and it did not do any good." This sort of complaint will be made, but I know one thing: Nobody can ever expect the corn crop unless he first plants the corn. That is obvious.

In the same way, we can never convert anyone to Christ unless we plant the seed, the word of God, in their hearts. This is indispensable to making Christians. Think about yourself. Aren't you grateful you are a Christian today? Aren't you thankful for all the church has meant to you and your family for many years?

What do you suppose would have happened to you if someone at sometime in your life had not seen to it that the Word of God was planted in your heart? Maybe it was your mother or father; perhaps it was some friend or a grandparent. But if someone had not put the Word of God in your heart it would never have germinated to make you a Christian. All that you are spiritually today, you owe to the fact that someone put the Word of God in your heart.

How many thousands of people there may be in this world who are just like you, waiting for someone to teach them the gospel. These may be people who, if they knew and understood the gospel, would be glad to become Christians.

When we were in Vienna, brother Otis Gatewood was telling us about a recent trip they had made to Moscow to try to teach the gospel to some people. He said, "We had one man who was going to go along with us whom I had baptized not very many months before. In his early days he was a Nazi soldier. He fought in the German army on the Russian front. I told him I wanted him to go with me to Moscow to preach the gospel." The man remembered the hardships and said, "I am not going to Moscow. I have nothing there I want to do." But brother Gatewood kept on talking to him. He finally got the man to agree to go with him. A party of about a dozen set out for Moscow. Brother Gatewood said the man was a mighty nervous man when they got to the city and just couldn't wait to get out. But, what kind of man would he be if some-

one had not preached the gospel to him and changed his life.

When our Lord was sending out His chosen disciples, He told them, "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20). He also said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Did the Lord really want the gospel preached to the whole world? There doesn't seem to be any doubt about it. When He told the apostles to do it, He must have meant it. He was certainly clear about His instructions. I hardly imagine we can misunderstand this commandment of Christ.

The whole world is the field in which the Word of God needs to be planted. If we are generous enough in our contributions, if we are zealous enough in our hearts, and if we have faith enough in our hearts to know what God wants us to do, we can do it, and it will be good for us when we do it.

If the children of Israel could not live in prosperity and happiness in their land unless they obeyed God day by day, how can we as people of God prosper unless we see the cause of Christ grow and men and women led to Christ? Unless there is within us some desire to see the whole world benefit from the faith we have as Christians, we are not the kind of Christians we ought to be.

Great opportunities are before us. Any faith in our hearts is going to express itself with a firm desire to spread the gospel of Christ, the Word of God, into the whole world. This is the least we can do to show our appreciation to God and to demonstrate the proof of our faith.

## CONCLUSION

Faith in our hearts is to express itself in works of righteousness. In our works, we ought to be privately and personally trying to strengthen the inner man, and then, as people of faith, we should express the firm desire to do all we can to see the whole world benefit from the gospel of Christ. This kind of faith will benefit mankind and bring us to everlasting life.

# ***ILLUSTRATION***

## ***Protected from Difficulties***

It is said that the father of the future Gautama

Buddha hid from the young boy's sight all elderly, poor, diseased, or disfigured persons so that his son, the young Prince Siddhartha, might believe that all the world was young, wealthy, healthy, and beautiful.

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