

THE RIGHT FAITH.

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Evening March, 21st, 1858,

(To upwards of Ten Thousand Persons.)

Preached By

MR. JAMES WELLS (of the Surrey Tabernacle)

IN THE ROYAL SURREY MUSIC HALL,

On Behalf of “The Aged Pilgrims’ Friend Society.”

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“Faith which worketh by love.” — Galatians v. 6.

THE glorious gospel of the blessed God is designed for universal diffusion amongst all classes of men. The Lord will have a people out of all nations, and therefore the gospel is intended for general diffusion. The apostle Paul was well established in the truth that I am now stating. Therefore, when he saw Judaizing teachers throwing in the ceremonies of the law as a kind of condition of salvation, he saw that it was contrary to the general diffusion of the gospel, which God had designed; because the Jewish dispensation was not at all applicable for universal diffusion. Why, the Jews now in their dispersion cannot practice their own ceremonies! But let Christians be scattered where they may; let them wander in sheepskins, or in goatskins; let them be cast into the caves and dens of the earth; let them wander in deserts, or be shut up in jails; wherever they are, their God is with them; they are still in the light of heaven; they still breathe the breath of eternal life; they still drink of the river of God’s pleasures, and they still rejoice in the infallibility of God’s truth. “Not, therefore, in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem,” but “in spirit and in truth,” they who worship God acceptably, must worship him. Now, the apostle, seeing that men were thus trying to put the sun under a bushel—that men were trying to hold the waters of the gospel in the hollow of their hand— protested against such attempts, and called the gospel thus perverted, “another gospel:” and he said, “if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Now what can be more simple, more essential, or more vital, than that truth

which is embodied in our text— “Faith which worketh by love?” Why, “he that believeth, shall be saved.” Therefore, if we have that faith which works by love, we shall be saved. “He that believeth, hath eternal life.” He that believeth is called the friend of God; and, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Our text may appear, perhaps, not very striking; but if the Lord is with me in speaking to this assembly, I hope and trust, before we close, that most of you may not only feel, but enter into the solemn meaning of these few words, “Faith which worketh by love.”

I will take up the subject under four ideas. First, the nature of faith; secondly, the works of faith: thirdly, the life of faith, and then, fourthly, the reward of faith.

Now first then, THE NATURE of FAITH. There are two faiths spoken of in the Word of God, one is the duty of every man: wherever the Bible comes, it is the duty of every man to believe the Bible; but a man may be a firm believer in the Old and New Testaments, he may have undergone that moral and mental conversion that makes him a Christian after the flesh, and makes a believer of him of some sort, and at the same time he may be utterly destitute of the faith spoken of in our text. Therefore, we must distinguish here. I shall show that there is something more than a mere assent to God's truth required in the nature of true faith, you say, “If I believe, it is enough”; but I am told in my Bible that devils believe and tremble, they believe every iota of God's Word, and yet that does not bring them any nearer the gospel. So you may have a good natural faith in God's Word, and it is your duty to have it, but you must not rest upon this as that faith which is essential to the salvation of the soul. Now, wherein lies the secret then of the distinction between the two faiths. There is not perhaps in all the New Testament a better example of both the faiths to which I have referred than that of Nicodemus himself. He came to the Savior, and he said, “We know that thou art a Preacher come from God; for no man could do the mighty works that thou doest, except God were with him.” Here is a believer in God's word. Nicodemus came by faith, a natural faith, and so far so good; and in our day there are plenty of so called Christians, who would conclude that Nicodemus was a Christian, since he believed that Jesus Christ was Jesus Christ, and that God was with him. He believed that he could not do those miracles, except God were with him. Why, thousands in our day would set such a man down for a Christian; but how did the savior deal with him? Why, he dealt with him as I pray he may deal with any Nicodemuses who may be here this evening. He came at once to that matter which was essential, “Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Here begins real faith. I will notice here four or five parts of this work of regeneration, by which those who are true believers are distinguished from those who are not true believers at all, and who are merely intellectual believers. Now, “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This refers especially to the gospel government of God. Let me bring the Apostle's definition to this matter, “As sin hath reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.” When the Lord is about to make a true believer, he makes the sinner feel that sin has reigned unto death; he makes the sinner feel and see that he is by nature dead in sin, dead in the eye of God's law; he makes the sinner feel that he has but three things belonging to him: —sin, death, and hell. My hearer, what know you of this? You have nothing but sin as your possession, death as your destiny, and hell as your everlasting portion. But, “grace is to reign through righteousness.” Where a sinner is thus convinced of sin, it brings him to where grace reigns. He learns that it is Christ's blood that cleanses from all sin, and that it is Christ's righteousness that justifies from all things; he learns that unless grace reigns by its two-fold charter, namely, by pardon and by power, there can be no salvation. Now, if your eyes are open to see this, then you are one step on the path of regeneration; you are beginning to be a believer, the word is beginning to take root in your soul.

Now let me take you another step in this path of which I am speaking. How is it with you, my hearer? For I have but one testimony for the unconverted and for the converted. As far as preaching is concerned, I am to preach the gospel to every creature. Let me, then, lead you one more step forward, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The savior in his dealings with Nicodemus steps on a little farther, and he says, "Except a man be born of water." Here is something fresh. There was nothing said about water in the first sentence. What water is this? Well friends, not literal water. The savior is speaking of spiritual things, and therefore this water means spiritual water. It means the word of God, my hearer; and when a man is born of water and the spirit, then he enters into the kingdom of heaven. The savior himself shall tell you what this water is, "Now ye are clean, through the word I have spoken to you." "He loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might wash and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word." So, the word is the water. Now, poor sinner, you are brought the first step. You see yourself lost; you see the way in which you must be saved, if you are to be saved at all; but perhaps you has not reached the second step, perhaps this healing water has not yet been applied to your conscience, but it will be: "Wait on the Lord, and he shall strengthen thine heart;" and by and bye a cleansing word will come home, and give thee a sense of pardon, and you will by precious faith and sweet enjoyment, take possession of the kingdom for ever and ever. This second step means an experimental acquaintance with the power of truth through being born of water and the Spirit.

Let me now take you a third step in this heavenly path, and this will relieve you mightily, and help you very nicely, for as you go on you will learn the depravity of your heart, and you will wonder at it. And the third step informs you that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." And the more the evil of your nature rises to view, the more glorious he will be in your eye, the more precious he will be to your soul. Oh, may the eternal spirit open up and explain the mysterious conflict which the believer has within him.

I will now mention a fourth step, and that shall close this part of the subject. The fourth step is the mystery of this, "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the spirit." Now the meaning of this is, that when a sinner becomes concerned about his state, he says, I am miserable and wretched, I can no longer join in the vanities of the world; I do not know where this wretchedness comes, I am afraid my Maker is against me, I do not know where it comes from or where it leads to; but, by and bye, the Lord will give you to see where it comes from, and he will give you to see where it leads to. It comes from him, and it leads you to him. "He that hath begun the good work in you will carry it on to the day of Christ;" and when you see this, others will be as much at a loss concerning you as you were concerning yourself. You can now understand yourself, but others will not be able to understand you. And so says the apostle, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Now recollect that in the after part of the third chapter of John from which I have been quoting, it is said, "Whosoever believeth in him shall have eternal life." Do not forget the nominative; you are always sure to be wrong in the several parts of speech if you forget that. The nominative of the chapter is regeneration, and therefore, do not explain the believing spoken of in the after part of the chapter apart from the regeneration in the beginning of the chapter. For if you do, it will be the same as if you have never begun at all.

I now notice that this faith has a certain order. The apostle gives us in connection with our text a five-fold contrast between those who are converted after the flesh, born after the flesh, believers after the flesh, Christians after the flesh, professors after the flesh, and those who are converted by the Spirit of God. He

says "Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh. Both of them were the sons of Abraham. And so, ministers now are the means of fleshly conversion. Sometimes they have stony - ground hearers, and way-side hearers, and thorny-ground hearers, while they have some that are good ground hearers. Hear what the apostle says, "But he that was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." That is Isaac, he was constituted a child of God; by the good pleasure of God, he was constituted a child of promise. Whereas the promise that is in Christ Jesus is nothing to a natural believer, it is the poor helpless sinner that knows and feels the yea and amen promise, and who sings nicely, with Toplady, that the promise is "yea and amen," and never was forfeited yet. Are you brought to feel that if you have any promise it must be from the infallible promise of God in Christ Jesus? Then again, "These are two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above." That is the Jerusalem which you read of in the 20th and 21st chapters of Revelation; where, as Goodwin says, "our worst things are their best." They pave their streets with gold, they build their walls with precious stones; they do not have our common things there at all, and if you ask what their best things are, the answer is, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it; and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." This is the Jerusalem to which all the ancients looked, and to which all look now that are taught of God. Again, "He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit." Let us be clear upon this matter, because we live in a day when the Puseyite may light his candles, and Priests may put wafers in our mouth, and we must not spit them out again; and we must take all things very easily; but not so did the ancients, they rejected error and abode by the truth. Now let us look at the nature of this persecution. Go to the 21st chapter of the book of Genesis. Ishmael, as we there find, was now sixteen years old, and he was old enough to have some idea of Isaac's standing, not that he saw his standing spiritually, but could see that Isaac was a very high doctrine man; he could see that Isaac came into that possession without any doings of his own, and Ishmael persecuted Isaac just as some of you do the people of God. Some of you who are here will say, "I suppose that minister is one of the elect; I suppose he is one of the few favored ones." That is the way Ishmael talked. Those who stand out for the truth never have a good name in the world. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Do I dream that you are all come here to hear the gospel? Some of you have come to see what a number of people there would be; some of you to see what a magnificent building it is. It is not for me to judge of motives. All I say is, whatever the motive may be, may the Lord make the word a blessing to you; may the Lord send you away asking yourselves the solemn question, whether you be in the faith or not, for without this faith it is impossible to please God. But I dare not dwell longer on this point. I intended to have set before you the Lord's dealings with the bondwoman, but I proceed to the next part of my subject.

II. THE Works of FAITH. That faith that has no works is a dead faith. I have two classes of works to set before you. First, spiritual works. I will set before you very concisely the four acts of faith recorded in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, of that servant of God, Moses. Believing in eternal things, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." If he had retained Pharaoh's adoption of him, he must have sided with the idolatries of Egypt, but rather than do that, although the Hebrews were in a state of slavery, he suffered affliction with them, and rejected that position in which he could not walk consistently with God's truth. Just so, now, if you are a real believer, there will be a coming out from the world, and there will be a siding with the people of God. It was so with Ruth. Her faith had works. "Thy people shall be my people, thy God shall be my God; where thou go I will go." True faith will unite you with the spiritually poor and needy. Moses's second act of faith was coming out of Egypt; so will you come out of all bondage into the liberty of the gospel. His third act was to keep the Passover, and so you will feel that Jesus Christ is your

hiding-place; that you have no rest but in him. And his fourth act was, his passage through the Red Sea. And so with you, you will feel that if you cannot go on in the right way, you had better stand still than go back in the wrong way. But what shall I say of the works of this faith? Subduing kingdoms, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire. Let me tell you that are born of God, and are one with Christ, that all things are possible to God; you will meet with circumstances that will seem too much for you, but you must never reckon yourselves beaten till your God is overcome. Never despair until Jesus Christ is so perplexed that he does not know what to do. All things are possible unto him that believeth.

III. I will now step into the third part of our subject, and that is the LIFE of THIS FAITH. This faith is said to work by love. The idea intended is, that Christians love what they believe: as they believe in Christ, they love him; as they believe in God, they love him; as they believe in the Holy Ghost, they love him; as they believe in the Gospel, they love it. But where is God's love? Not in the law: he is wrath there, and only wrath. Nor must I look for it in his providences; for there are great diversities in them. Witness Job, and thousands of others. I cannot find that God is love unmixedly in his providences; for there is a mixture of prosperity with adversity. And again, I cannot find that there is unmixed love in his discipline. There is fatherly wrath, not penal wrath there. I want to take you this evening to where God is love without any mixture, drawback, or interruption—where you can walk freely, and where you can walk well. First, it is in the conquest of Christ; secondly, it is in the oath of God; and thirdly, it is in that paradisiacal state of things that Christ has established. First: God is love in the conquest of Christ. In the 30th chapter of Isaiah, you have these beautiful words, that in that day, "there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall." Now what day of great slaughter is this? Why, when Christ shall slay sin, death, and Satan. And now, mark what follows: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days," referring to the perfecting of the creation in seven days, and therefore to the eternal perfection in the new heavens and the new earth, "when the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound." You see there is no drawback there: the enemy is conquered; every breach is made up; the stroke of every wound is healed, and there is perfect peace and perfect love. Oh! how little we know of our God; if we knew him more, we should love him more. We see this also in the oath of God; "for the Lord hath sworn that he will not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee." If I am speaking to some sensible, despairing sinner, may these words be to thee as green pastures, and as still waters, and bring you into fellowship with the blessed God, that will enable you to rejoice, and to say, "Lord, I count not my life dear unto me," if I can finish my course with joy. Thirdly, we see the love of God in the paradisiacal state of things which he has established. If the following language were not written in the Bible, we should look upon any man using it, as fearfully presumptuous; "I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valley. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake not my love, till he please. The voice of my beloved behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Sol. Song ii. 2–10. Christians are thus brought to love the Lord. I do not wonder at martyrs dying, rather than giving up such love. And if this be not enough, hear him speak again; "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. (verse 14.) Thus, if you are a believer in God, it will

bring you into that conquest of Christ, and into that oath of God, and into that paradisiacal scene, that Christ has established.

IV. But lastly; THE REWARD of FAITH which works by love, and what is reward. Why, friends, here is the ultimate reward; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." There is no fault found with these servants; I have never preached a sermon without weakness in it, and you have never heard one without infirmity in it. But the Lord knows that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, and lets it pass.

We are workers also in the sense of brotherly love, and those who work in this sense, are no losers by it. Perhaps, you say, "are you going to tell us after all, that if we do not these things, we cannot enter heaven." I will tell you this, that if you see your brother in need, and have it in your power to help, "and shut up your bowels of compassion against him," and say, "be clothed, be warmed," I will tell you this, "that he who sheweth no mercy, shall have no mercy;" if you walk in no acts of kindness to the brethren, you have no right to conclude that you are a Christian. But, let us ask a few questions. First, go to Rahab, and say, "Rahab, you were very kind in receiving the spies, you hazarded your life for them; did you lose anything?" "Oh no, (she would say,) my life, and the lives of my father and mother were saved by it; my brothers and sisters were saved by it; I lost nothing by it." Ask the woman of Sarepta whether she lost anything. I will tell you this, that if she had not been blessed with faith to have been kind to Elijah, and to give him a part of what she had, I venture to say, that her barrel of meal would have failed, and her cruise of oil would have wasted. Again; when the woman of Shunam saw Elisha coming to her, and put a few things for his necessities; he being a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, ask her if she lost anything by that kindness? Why, she would say "my son fell ill, and the prophet prayed to God, and he came to life again." I am sure also that the disciples lost nothing by their liberality, for the disciples had but five loaves and a few fishes to give to the multitude, yet they were so increased that there was plenty, and to spare; and

"There was a man, though some did count him mad;
The more he gave away, the more he had"

No doubt the devil went to those who brought gold and frankincense, and said, "you might have left the frankincense; but what a fool you were to leave the gold. You might have left the myrrh, but why leave the gold." Nevertheless, God took charge of them, and sent them another way. God paid their expenses back again, and they lost nothing by it. Oh, you may depend upon it, that acts of brotherly love never cause anybody to lose anything, and never will; he that giveth a cup of cold water to a disciple shall not lose his reward. "Faith which worketh by love" has its present as well as its future reward.

One object of my coming here this evening, although I should not have consented to come merely to preach a charity sermon, is to appeal to you on behalf of "THE AGED PILGRIMS' FRIEND SOCIETY." In truth, I never preach anything but charity sermons. You ask, "Do you have a collection every time then? No; but I think the gospel is a great charity to poor sinners, and that is what I preach. It would be a waste of time to state to you the claims of this good Society. It accommodates forty-two aged persons in the Asylum, and there are between four and five hundred Christians of all Protestant denominations receiving from one shilling to four shillings a week. It is wonderful what great good this Society has done, and our object to-night is to give you an opportunity of ministering to poor pilgrims. I have known men who have built alms-houses, and have become the inmates of them themselves. Therefore, we none of us know what we may require. But apart from that selfish view of the subject, what an honor it is to contribute. Pray give all you can, because you will not live much longer. I may not have an opportunity of getting a shilling out

of you again. Give freely and fully. Money cannot be of much use to you much longer; yet an aged hand will hold money with a firmer grasp than any other; but I hope that the warmth of the place, and the warmth of the subject will just slacken your hand, and that you will get up some of the yellow pieces out of your pockets, and go home comfortable, and be thankful that while the Lord has prospered you so long, he has constrained you to give to such an object as this. Shall I speak to you that are young: Do you wish to prosper in the world! I will give you this text, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and so shall thy barns be filled with plenty." I would say to the middle-aged, how many mercies have you received from the Lord? and after having come so far by his goodness, you do not wish to travel the rest of your journey alone. Then honor the Lord with your substance by giving to his poor people this evening And as to you who are very aged, now honor your old age by giving a thank-offering for his mercies to you.