

Increase our Faith.

LUKE 17: 5.

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A Prayer for Ability to Obey.—There are many commands in God's Word, regarding which any Christian must feel all these are addressed to me. And yet they are of such a character that obedience is impossible without an association of our own abilities with the irresistible forces of omnipotence. A requisite to the highest standard of discipleship which, even in the present generation of gospel workers, finds comparatively few illustrations. But commands of this nature are as binding as any other. When we meet them in any circumstance, from our weakness, we can only appeal to Divine strength in a prayer for ability to obey. Our general does not issue orders beyond the capacity of his soldiers! Therefore, if we find ourselves unable to do as he directs, it is only level logic that we should ask the Father in His name to so fill us with holy vitality that full obedience will be the natural and immediate response. The mandate thus becomes a source of double benefit. The blessing that comes with the act of obedience, and the sweet inspiration sure to thrill existence in one more visit to the mercy seat. Our text, for those who first uttered the request, and for all believers in innumerable times, situations and circumstances, is the natural heart-appeal from human emergency to the Divine unchangeableness and universal supremacy of the Fatherhood, which has flowed to us through the love-channel of our Elder Brother's mortality.

Reasons for this Prayer are found in a command to be forgiving, far beyond the best inclinations of those to whom it was issued. A command whose honest and literal obedience in the best of us would require such a wholesale carnal sacrifice that, after shaking and tearing us to a terrible extent, the vast demons of selfishness would leave us and leave room for an immediate and important growth in grace. There is constant danger that while we are enjoying the blessings of grace we may forget the obligations that rest upon men and women in Christ Jesus, according to the very genius of the work committed to us, unless we recognize and act upon these obligations, the keen edge of joy in the Lord is soon turned by the flinty rock of a strongly revived longing for the flesh pots of Egypt. Sevenfold forgiveness is an especially hard requirement. Still it is incontestably reasonable. It is simply attempting to treat others as God has treated us.

In any case where we have to deal with those who err against us, to direct every word and act according to the spirit of that celestial forgiveness, which began in the Divine treatment of our first parents, and has been repeated in countless illustrations, continually increasing in number and beauty as the years and the centuries have rolled away, down to this nineteenth century of our Lord, and are destined in the future to be yet more numerous, even unto the end. In the past, attempts to scale this mountain of obedience have furnished the most beautiful examples of Christ-like humanity. The present is marching into a clearer understanding of the sacred requisite, and the future of the church militant will present a panorama of imitations so nearly like the perfect examples that its individual and collective existence will expand into an embodied invocation of the Redeemer's return to receive the fruit of his victory. This command cannot be obeyed without the cardinal attribute of strong faith.

A faith that lays hold on divine promise as a living and tangible reality, as much for today while you are in the full exercise of all your faculties as for some other day, when strength of body and mind are of the past, and expanded mortality will soon lose its last value at the gate of transition, we cannot obey with nothing reserved unless our belief shines in a light unclouded by the faintest shadow of doubt, and the tower from which this golden illumination sends out its radiance is only erected upon the rock of unchangeable and all-including faith. According to the light of their position the apostles realized this always applicable truth, and also realized that for the case in hand they were not thus equipped. Accordingly, as a pre-requisite at any attempt at obedience, with a loving and intelligent desire that they might be prepared to comply with the Master's wishes, they exclaimed, "Increase our Faith." Since that day there have passed about eighteen and three-quarter centuries of Christian development and extension, and in the sharper brilliancy of our day this prayer expresses a richness of longing for an inflow of divine nature, which could not have been felt by those who were with Jesus before his passion.

Increase our Faith in the Trinity.—Faith is not full faith unless it is basal to every good word and work, and this crag rests upon the bed rock of perfect belief in the Trinity, in the Divine Fatherhood. It signifies much to look up and say in faith, my God. But it means much more to say as the overflow of a loving heart, my Father. At present, perhaps, more than at any time in the past, churches and individuals are in need of more faith in the

parental attribute of the power in which we are supposed to repose unlimited confidence. If we believe that God is everywhere, and if we believe in the Divine Fatherhood, we must also believe that this fraternal influence is continually meeting us in every phase of nature, and in every righteous detail of human experience. Therefore it is ours as Christians to continually live in the sanctifying presence of the All Father. The Father of creation, disconnected from his crowning work by the latter's self-separation. And yet beholding the salvation and complete restoration of humanity in the recreation accomplished by his well-beloved Son. The more faith we have in our Father who art in heaven, the better will we be able to act the part of obedient children while carrying out the instructions of the great commission. Behind each redeemed life, and consequently behind our every true action or word, resides the great first cause of all existence. In some way his resplendent features must be photographed upon all our actions that are for his glory. "Great is the mystery of godliness," and as the world more and more is compelled to recognize this beauty of holiness in our deportment, more and more it will be constrained to accept a dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty Father. But to attain this excellence most of us need an increase of faith in the full divinity of our Elder Brother.

Many who are members of our churches are not, in the fullest sense, trinitarians. In a general way they fail to comprehend the threefold nature of the Supreme Personality. In a special sense they are so occupied with our Lord's mortal humanity that they almost completely lose sight of the Divine immortality, whose invisible forces underlie and permeate the marvellous revelations that make the character of Jesus absolutely unique. Failing to realize that this one complete man of all the myriads of our race is such only because he is also a God, they cannot realize the fullness of what his saving grace has done for them. Christians who are not sound on this doctrine of the Trinity are not likely to be strong as Christian workers. If we do not understand the nature of work in which we are engaged, the work cannot awaken our greatest interest or inspire our best efforts; and if through what we are told of Mary's Son, we cannot, in every incident from Bethlehem to Calvary, see the Son of God, we have not learned the central teaching of sacred history. The man Jesus is my teacher and my Brother. But in the Lord Christ I see the fountain of my eternal life. When we fully accept this truth that mortal work which involved every aspiring possibility of sanctified humanity will reveal a new and more glorious significance. And to keep our eyes fixed upon him, to move as he moved, to speak as he spoke, and to even think his thoughts and feel his feelings, will become the object of our every true undertaking and the goal of our every holy ambition. But faith in God the Father and God the Son is not likely to increase without the stimulant of a logical faith in the present personality of God the Holy Spirit.

One result of innumerable theories, advanced by all sorts of investigators, appears in the wide-spread introduction of a vast maze of confused and unbiblical ideas regarding the Holy Spirit. While these heresies differ in degree and character, they are all erected upon a common, quicksand foundation. The absurdity that designates the Divine Comforter, not as an individual, but as simply an influence—an influence of the purest sort, because emanating directly from Father and Son, and yet nothing beyond an influence. This rather indefinite power at times is supposed to come like an irresistible tornado, and for a while sweep everything before it; then die away as mysteriously as it came and leave the churches to a long season of spiritual slumber, disturbed and made thoroughly unrefreshing by that wild panorama of unpleasant dreams, which is so frequently found occupying the space between widely separated revivals. Whatever men may say, in the Bible there is not one word of authority for any such view. The Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost: He came, not as a visitor, but to become a resident, and here he will remain, director and controller of all good, until his work is finished, until he has prepared the church militant to become the church triumphant. He speaks to the Christian by explaining the Bible, which is simply Jesus in language. He extends his life conveying message to the world through the living epistles of disciples whose experience sweetly embodies the eternal truth. His home is our new nature, therefore his work is natural rather than supernatural. When we are educated up to a correct conviction of his status his work in us will become more level and regular. While to the end of time we shall never be able to get along without revivals, in the future the spiritual breeze will gradually approach the character of a steady trade wind, before which millions of human barks will sail across the sea of time and safely enter the Haven of Rest. He is not only the expeller of sin and the injector of Christ-life, he is also our all-faithful and all-efficient School Master. "When he, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." This promise is now being verified. He has come, he is here! It is our constant privilege to receive

his blessed education. A spirit only at home far, far beyond the sky, may be an ideal to command deep respect and reverence. But to hold him with a take-hold-of-and-grip-faith we must consider him as a present, everyday reality, ready to enter the door of every heart that is open to receive him. He is thus a genuine and reliable comforter, who bestows his joyfully companionship right through the ordinary of the most usual experience.

Increase our Faith in Mankind.—Most of us need more faith in our fellow Christians. In viewing our brethren and sisters in the Lord we are often inclined to so magnify their failings, that if the dark prospect does not totally eclipse their good deeds, it throws them into such a shadow that they are not easily distinguished and receive only the slightest consideration. With a closer and more intelligent faith in what our fellow soldiers in the grand army are both able and willing to accomplish, we would be able to treat them with more Christian justice; and therefore, to give them more actual encouragement. Surely it is biblical reasoning to conclude that if Christ, in any soul, is found the hope of glory, that life is worthy of the highest confidence, and its shortcomings very largely should be viewed as head mistakes rather than heart sins. This position will more rapidly advance the interests of that sacred brotherhood which must finally in the fullest and most glorious sense include all of the redeemed. It will also help us to a better faith in our own abilities in Christ.

A Christian who looks upon nearly every Christian acquaintance as a very pronounced backslider does so because he is measuring the church in general by the standard of the man with whom he is best acquainted, that is to say, himself. For this cause many church members waste much time and degrade much ability in unkind and often thoroughly unjust comments upon the lives and characters of other Christians, simply because many easy yieldings to temptation have caused them to lose faith in themselves and they naturally conclude that their affliction is a general malady. The most successful have the most to say about the good qualities and the least to say about the faults of individuals and of the church in general. With better faith in the faculty with which we are endowed by nature and by grace, the best that is in us will come to the surface and we shall rise to the thrilling realization that in the Lord there is no limit to our development and expansion. Among other happy results of this wholesome education will be the generation of more faith in the willingness of the unsaved to be saved. We will understand that they are not likely to reject the truth in any time or situation when it is presented by precept and example as Jesus commands and illustrates. In all Christendom there is not one person of ordinary brain sight who is really satisfied out of Christ. Many times they make many Christians believe that they are, and sometimes they succeed in fooling themselves. But all the time they are victims of a want, a longing, and a heavy burden which always quenches the brightest worldly pleasure just before it becomes a full light, and causes soul ease to remain an unknown value, until, through the channel of a really consecrated disciple, they hear and accept the Master's sweetest invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." With increased faith in our abilities as well as those of our fellow Christians will come an increase of faith in the world's willingness to accept Christianity as fast as by a true appeal to the emotion and the understanding we are able to convince it that we, in Christ, possess the very best; and that the very best is obtainable without limitations, upon the conditions which the Giver has clearly defined. This is the time of all times when every problem must be reasoned out to the last detail; and when we prove as prove we may, that there is no life so logical as that of the genuine Christian, Christianity will become irresistibly attractive, and converts will be numbered by hundreds where they are now numbered by tens. Brother, if you are convinced that you are strictly on the ground of duty and yet do not succeed, pray for an increase of faith in the readiness of your unsaved brother to hear and obey. Then expect to succeed! You will not be disappointed.

Increase our Faith in the Written Word.—We want an honest faith in its perfect inspiration! When we consider that the Word as it now stands, has stood the test of the ages; in every form of critical attack; in every new trial occasioned by change in circumstance; in every enlarging possibility of moral and mental education, and in the array of unique characteristics scattered, as parts of each separate age, from the apostles to the present; in the common sense of faith, we must hold to the literal inspiration of its every correctly translated statement. And if this is really the message of God through men to men, in every feature it must display rounded perfection. All its declarations must be yea and amen. Whatever may be the nature of our journey in Jesus, it must always be a safe guide, and just as much a message of Divine power in our day as in the days of its utterance. All too few Christians are unaffected by a spirit of the present that is continually trying to find ways around the steep hills of the most severe biblical statements. The so called higher criticism, which is really a lower criticism, and an undoubted devil, partially disguised as an angel, simply caters to intellectual pride and would make us believe we are so wise that we can tear to pieces the work of men who heard the voice of God and made the Bible while putting the Divine utterance in writing. But large doses of prayer and works will radically cure this form of spiritual sickness, and the Bible will always mean everything to us—because in its every declaration we will hear the voice of Jesus. This attainment must open the way to a clearer faith in its universal adaptability.

The autobiography of the man without blemish; a perfect literary production; because in a perfect way describing a perfect life. Such a work must signify exactly the same to all ages, races and places, and by its teaching