

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

OCTOBER 26, 1879.

FAITH AND WORKS.—James 2: 14-26.

EXPOSITION.

Verse 14.—If a man say he has faith; say, boast of it to others, or says it to himself. Have not works, the fruits and actions of holiness. Can faith save him? That is, such a pretended, unreal faith; for the following verses show that it is an unreal faith against which he is contending. Verse 15—naked and destitute of daily food: ill-clothed (1 Cor. 4; 11. Job 22: 6); without that food which can sustain life from day to day; daily bread, Matt. 6: 11. 31. 1 Tim. 6: 8. Verse 16—and one of you, who has the ability to render help, if he will but use it. Depart in peace, courteous words, equal to "I wish you well," Mark 5: 34. Luke 7: 50, 8: 48. Notwithstanding ye give them not; compare 1 John 3: 18. What doth it profit; can you get the applicant or any one else to believe that there is any real love in the heart? Verse 17—even so faith; a naked profession of faith is of no more value than a charity which contents itself with words. Is dead being alone; a similitude borrowed from a dead body, which has an apparent similitude to a living one, but no action. Verse 18—fully states the point of the apostle's argument. Both the supposed speakers say they have faith; which of the two is worthy of credence? He that shows his faith by his works. Verse 17—thou believest that there is one God; more assent to abstract truth is not the faith from which works of piety spring up, and is in no degree saving faith, though good as far as it goes, Deut. 6: 4. Such a faith works no change in fallen spirits. Verse 21—was not Abraham our father justified by works; Saint Paul says he was justified by faith, Rom. 4: 2; yet Saint James does not contradict him, for he does not speak of the same justification. "St. Paul speaks of that which Abraham received many years before Isaac was born, Gen. 15: 6; St. James, of that which he did not receive till he had offered up Isaac on the altar. He was justified, therefore, in St. Paul's sense (that is, accounted righteous), by faith antecedent to his works. He was justified in St. James' sense (that is, made righteous), by works consequent to his faith. So that St. James' justification by works is the fruit of St. Paul's justification by faith."—Wesley. Verse 22—seest thou how faith wrought with his works; works do not give life to faith, but faith begets works, and is "made perfect" by them; reaches its full growth and manifestation. Verse 23—and the Scripture was fulfilled, Gen. 15: 6; these words were twice fulfilled—when Abraham first believed, and when he offered up Isaac. The friend of God, 2 Chron. 20: 7. Isaiah 41: 8; a title that expressed the terms of communion and covenant which existed between God and the great patriarch. Verse 24—ye see how that by works....not by faith only. There is no contradiction between this statement and that of St. Paul, Rom. 3: 28; because the apostles, "I do not speak of the same faith; St. Paul speaking of living faith; St. James here of dead faith. 2. They do not speak of the same works; St. Paul speaking of works antecedent to faith, St. James of works subsequent to it."—Wesley. Verse 25—Rahab the harlot: the story is told in Joshua 2. Justified by works: she proved the sincerity of her faith in God's promise to deliver Canaan into the hands of the Israelites, by letting the messengers depart in peace. She therefore escaped the ruin of the city, was admitted amongst the chosen people, and afterwards married a prince of Israel. Verse 26—for as the body without the spirit is dead; "Here the apostle concludeth the whole dispute, showing how little is to be ascribed to an empty profession of faith without works; it is but as the body without the vital spirit—useless but noisome."—Manton

LESSON.

I. A doctrine implied.—The reader cannot but feel that throughout this Lesson there is a suppressed reference to the doctrine of justification by faith, of which Saint Paul was the chief and able exponent. That apostle states the doctrine in most unqualified terms, Rom. 8: 3. Gal. 2: 16, 3: 11. Titus 3: 4, 5. He had illustrated his doctrines by the same examples as those referred to in these verses: Abraham, Rom. 4: 3. Rahab, Heb. 11: 17, 31. Nothing in the words of Saint James contradicts this doctrine, to which indeed Saint James pledged his adherence at a very early period of the apostolic history, Acts 15: 13-21. No interpretation can be admitted as correct which obscures the free grace of God in the justification of a sinner, understanding that phrase to signify the remission of the penalty of sin, and the restoration of the sinner to the favor of God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God," Rom. 5: 1.

II. An abuse exposed.—Men had already begun to wrest this Gospel teaching to their own destruction, by turning God's grace into wantonness. The nature of justifying faith exposes to this abuse. Its exercise is secret, known only to God and the believing soul. Its first results are confined to the believer's heart,—peace, joy, love. But these results may spring up from a very slight and superficial work of faith, like the wheat in the parable of the sower, which sprang up hastily and as soon withered away, because it had no root. Meanwhile profession had been assumed, and is sustained in spite of carelessness of life.

"Errors in life breed errors in brain, And these, reciprocal, these again." Thus, if not in words, at least in thought, the abuse is reached against which Saint James directs his argument.

III. An abuse corrected.—v. 17-20. The argument is the same as is found in the discourses of our Lord and in the writings of Saint Paul, namely, that where there is true faith there will be works. Faith brings into the soul a principle of

great force, namely, the love of God; and where there is love there will be work, Heb. 6: 10. 1 Thess. 1: 3. Faith secures the mighty aid of the Holy Spirit. Man's great excuse is want of power, but we can "do all things through Christ that strengtheneth" us. By faith this influence is obtained from Christ, John 15: 4. Faith proposes to itself a great aim, even the glory of God. "We thus judge that if one died for all, then all are dead; that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again." Here, then, is the test of a profession of faith, which should be applied to himself by him who makes it. Where there are no works, there is no union with Christ, no grace of the spirit, no faith.

IV. Illustrations.—ver. 16, 26. Our dealings with God may be discovered to be deceitful by drawing a parallel case in our dealings with men. This was the plan pursued by Nathan when he told to David the story of the little ewe lamb, 2 Sam. 12. So the apostle draws a parallel between faith and charity. A fellow-Christian is the applicant. In what condition? With what words is he dismissed? Here we have courteous words and kind wishes, but no help! Who would believe in a charity like that? Not man, and certainly not that God who has taught us that he who "mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker," Prov. 17: 5. If your charity be real, it will justify itself in doing. "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth," 1 John 3: 18. So no faith is real from which there are no works or fruits. In ver. 22 we have a similitude by which an unreal faith is set forth. Suppose you should stand by a corpse wrapped in its shroud, and some one should foolishly assert that the person lying there was not asleep, not dead. You listen, there is no pulse; you hold a mirror before the lips, there is no breath; you shake the body, there is no motion. No words from the other could persuade you from the conclusion, "the man is dead." So is a profession of faith without its reality. A faith that brings no glory to God and confers no benefit upon man, is not worthy of belief, it is dead, it has no real existence.

V. The issue.—verse 14, last clause. "Can faith save him?" Much of the apostle's argument turns upon the reason of things, upon the evidence of life. But there is a more solemn reference, even to the judgment of the great day. We should cherish no other confidence than that which will bear the light of the eternal judgment. The solemnity of that great event is often used in Scripture as a means of detecting underground hopes. "Watch and pray, that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man," Luke 21: 36. Compare 1 John 4: 17. No plea is sufficient but what may be urged before the throne of the Lamb. Nothing should satisfy me, but what can save me in that day.

LIGHT ON THE GOLDEN TEXT. James 2: 26.—"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

I. The text presents a melancholy object to our observation,—a body without the spirit. Note it has all the organization of life: limbs, lips, eyes, and the noble brow, are all there, and they are all there in union and in symmetry. But there is no evidence of life. Place your hand over the heart, it does not beat; call the sleeper by the tenderest name of love, there is no response. Hold up the portrait of one nearest before the eyes, there is no recognition; entreat the sleeper to arise for the daily round of duty, there is no motion. Every one leaves the bedside with the same conviction, "he is dead."

II. This sad object is an illustration of a sadder fact,—a dead faith. In such a faith, there may be the form of the real: correct knowledge of the truths of the gospel, the observance of worship, union with the church, an apt employment of religious phraseology. But there is only one evidence of life, action which results in works. Recall what we have learned in some of the previous lessons: the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. 5: 22, 23; the object of a good man's pursuit, 1 Tim. 6: 11. If we find no movement in this direction; if the heart gives no pulsation of desire for these graces; if the eye of the soul does not contemplate them with love; if the ear is deaf to every summons to arise and follow them, only one word can designate such a faith—dead.

III. Take heed to the warning.—The young life of a child shows itself in childish actions: in play, in song, in winsome ways about a mother's knees, over the lesson-book. Even the faith of a little child should be living. A child's knowledge of the Gospel, and a child's trust in Jesus, should show itself real in such actions of piety and virtue as fall within the sphere of the life of a child.

"Faith if it hath not works is dead."—Faith and works go together, just as the two wheels of a conveyance move together when it is in motion. It is warmth from the sun which causes the fruits of the earth to grow, but we cannot have the warm sunshine without light. So we are justified by God, without the deeds of the law, on the exercise of simple trust in Christ. But we cannot have this faith without its producing good works. A locomotive, and various conveyances, cannot move without noise, and the noise gives you warning of their approach; so faith cannot be exercised without its leading a person to live as he ought, and this Christ-like life is an evidence to the world that he has true faith. In this sense Abraham was "justified by works when he offered Isaac upon the altar," for then his profession of faith in Jehovah was shown to man, as well as to God and angels, to be a reality. Leaves and fruit show the nature of a tree, so a man's life is an evidence of his spiritual state, Matt. 7: 16-23. Devils have the dead faith which is of the head or intellect alone. But this neither brings benefit nor produces holy living. Living faith and holy works go together, just as in breathing we inspire and then expire the air. In rowing the boatman must pull at both oars, in flying, the bird must use both its wings;

in order to human life, the body and soul must remain united; so in order to true christian life, as a good man once said,— "You must believe with all your heart, and then work like a horse."

TRUSTING AND WORKING.

James 2: 26.—"So faith without works is dead also."

I. Faith.—Our last lesson told us what faith is, and what it can do. Can you tell to-day what faith can do for us? It is indeed a great and blessed thing, and can do much, but it is not all we need. So great is the good which it brings, that often it has been mistaken for everything that is wanted. If God's power and love are so great, may we not just have faith in him, and trust that he will give and do for us all we want? If we believe that Jesus died for us, and that God has forgiven us and taken us into his favour, is there need for anything more? If Jesus has saved us, does it matter how we live? and what do we do? So men have sometimes asked, Now, what is the answer to these questions? Let us think again what faith does for us. Faith in God gives strength to the soul. But what is strength given for? Is it not that we may work, and endure, and strive against wrong? Through faith we are saved, but if Jesus has made us safe, shall we not show our love by all that we can do for his sake? What did faith make Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and David do? So then, besides faith, we must have—

II. Works.—What are they? They are what we do. The ways by which a child shows the love it has for its mother are works. Doing what we know to be right; striving against evil; keeping from evil; bearing what we cannot avoid; serving Jesus in any way, these are works. Now, some people have made a mistake about works, like the mistake of others about faith. Does it matter about faith, if we do well? Yes; not only must we thus work, but we must care also about how and why we work. And so it is the Bible tells us there must be—

III. Believing and doing. We cannot do right without faith in God; we cannot have true faith in him without doing right. When Auelek came against Israel, Moses prayed on the hill, and Joshua and the people fought on the plain; when David fought Goliath, he trusted in the Lord, but he put forth all his strength and skill in the fight. Trusting is worth nothing if it lead not to doing. "Faith without works is dead." It is as though a man had strength, or knowledge, or skill, or wealth, and did nothing whatever to put to use these great gifts. Pray for faith, pray also that God may help you to use it well, showing it forth in good works.

SECTION VI.—QUESTION 19. (FOURTH LESSON.)

Q. Has he not also given us certain rules to direct us in our conduct towards our enemies?

A. To direct us in our conduct towards our enemies, our Lord has given us this rule: "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Matt. v. 44.

STORY FOR LITTLE FOLKS.

"BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS."

BY MRS. VIRGINIA C. PHIBBS.

"THERE she comes, sucking her thumb as usual," said Harry Jones, as his little sister, Mary, came bounding into the room.

Mary's face flushed. She said, "O Harry! you know I can't help it;" then looking up and seeing Aunt Lena's eyes fixed on her, she hung her head as though guilty of some grave misdemeanor and left the room. Aunt Lena tried not to notice it, but she saw, as Mary turned in closing the door, that there were tears in the child's eyes and on her cheek.

Aunt Lena was a stranger; this was her first visit to the mother of these children since Harry was a babe, and she found him a great, frolicsome, fun-loving boy of nine years, fond of gentle, three-year-old Mary, but very much in the habit of teasing and worrying her. She had now been with Mrs. Jones but two days, but she had determined to do all in her power to break Harry of this habit.

But first she wanted to win his love. "Come here, Harry, and sit by my side," she said; "I want to show you these pictures." Harry gladly obeyed. His bright eyes twinkled and his tongue rattled away as they turned over leaf after leaf, and Aunt Lena explained and told tales.

Suddenly one picture pleasing him more than any others, he commenced to whistle very loudly.

"You should not whistle in the house, Harry," said his aunt, "I think it very rude."

"I beg your pardon, Auntie," he replied. "Mother often says I must stop it, but, you see, I can't help it; I have got in the habit of it, and now I can't help it. I always whistle when I am pleased."

"And how long since you formed this habit, that is so strong that it cannot be broken?" said Aunt Lena, with a quiet smile.

"I can tell you just exactly, because I know the day when I first learned to whistle. You see, I was a proud boy that day. I had been trying for months. I had pucker and pucker my mouth, and blown the air through my lips, but

the whistle would not come, and some of the whistling boys used to make fun of me, and that made me mad. But last Fourth of July, I learned to make the whistling noise, and before night I could whistle Yankee Doodle and Hail Columbia. You see this was the way I learned. Our school was going on a picnic, and—"

"You can tell me that another time," said his aunt. "I want to know just how long since you began the habit. Now calculate."

"Well this is the twelfth of this month let me see. Just eight months and eight days."

"Now, another question, Harry: How long since little Mary commenced to suck her thumb?"

"Why she has been at that pretty much all her life. Oh! she was such a funny little brown eyed baby, and she used to lie with her feet kicking up in the air, and her thumb in her mouth; and after she got older, she always put herself to sleep sucking it. And now Auntie—would you believe it?—that thumb, the right-hand one, is smaller than the other, and I have made so much fun of her, and she is so ashamed you can't speak of it now without seeing the tears come in her eyes."

"Let me tell you of some children about whom I was reading lately. They all belonged to the same school (a small school of about a dozen scholars), and one of them was in the habit of sucking his thumb. The teacher had tried to get him to stop, and while he was thinking about it, he would keep his thumb from his mouth, but as soon as his attention was called to something else, up went his thumb again. One day when he and his teacher were alone in the room, she said:

"Charlie, I see you try very hard to leave off that ugly habit, but I think you need my help. I think I must tie your hand behind you—not as a punishment but to correct the habit. Would you be willing? Do you want to break off a bad habit so much that you will submit to such an inconvenience to do it?"

"But all the children will laugh at me."

"I think I can manage that, answered the teacher. If I can be right sure they will not laugh at you, would you be willing then?"

"Yes, ma'am, answered the brave little fellow."

The next day the teacher said to the school:

"If I had a scholar who had lost his right hand, how would you treat him?"

"We would pity him. We would love him, answered the little children."

"And if he dropped his book, or had more books to carry than he could manage with his left hand?" questioned the teacher.

"We would help him, was answered by all.

"And would you make fun of him?"

"No ma'am," was the response.

"Well, I have no little boy who has lost his arm, but I have one who is willing to have it tied up that he may break himself of a bad habit. Little Charlie sucks his thumb; now if I tie it behind him, he will need to have much help from the rest of you who can use both hands; will you help him?"

"All agreed, and the little boy's hand was tied—the others all standing round and feeling sorry. Charlie was the hero of the school that day; one would put his cap on, and one would carry his book, and when the teacher untied his hand at the close of school-hours, one bigger boy took his hand in his and walked all the way home with him that he might still keep the offending member from the mouth.

"The next day it was decided that Charlie's thumb was to remain unbound so long as it committed no offence, but before school-hours were over, the little fellow, who really, you see, meant to battle with the habit and to conquer, walked up to the teacher and held out his hand to be tied. And so it passed, some days the hand free and sometimes bound, till at length the binding was no longer needed. Charlie had conquered; and, remember, Master Harry, his habit was not of eight months and eight days' formation, but a life-long habit—a seven years' habit."

Harry was quiet for a little while, and Aunt Lena turned over her book in silence. Then Harry said:

"Aunt Lena, I will try to break my whistling habit, and I will try to help Mary too!"

"And will you learn this verse, my boy?"

Aunt Lena held in her hand an open Testament, and Harry read:

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Aunt Lena's visit lasted for more than a month, and when she left; Harry was trying hard to be more loving and gentle with little sister Mary, and Mary had left off sucking her thumb.

CONSERVATIVE CHURCH POLITY.

It is quite plain, then that so eminently respectable a thing as is conservatism may approve and do some things not quite to be praised. And yet it is sometimes useful. The rudder that steers the ship over the waters does its work entirely by checking the ship's headway; the "breecing" of the carriage horses is valuable when going down a declivity, and the ballast is useful in regulating the motion of balloons. And then beyond mere matters of utility something may be granted to simple reverence for the antique and "venerable." Some things are retained in use because they are useful and some others because they have the prestige of an honorable prescription. So thought the rustic who instead of dividing his bushel of corn into two parcels, one for either end of his bag, when about to hang it across the back of his horse, put the corn in one end of the sack and a stone in the other, and defended his action by saying that so his father had taught him. A still stronger case is given in the legend, that when in the divine council the creation of the material universe was about to be decreed, one embodying this spirit expressed some doubt, declaring that Chaos was a venerable institution, and on the whole, had worked very well—it might not therefore, be best to disturb it. It was speaking of this—but calling it by another name—that a certain shrewd observer remarked, that no doubt prudence is a great virtue, but it is also very near akin to some most despicable vices, which not unfrequently put on its livery.

There are also in our Methodism those who would style themselves conservatives and who have a special horror for "radicalism" and "radicals." A few years ago it was somewhat the fashion to talk ominously about "loyalty" to the Church and its polity, which meant, however, only fealty to the party of those who used such language. The title chosen is not only respectable but also indicative of an essential element of a vital organism; and yet change, not less than stability, is a necessary condition of all living things. The living human body is perpetually changing its substance and conditions; but a mummy remains the same through the ages. The attire of the strapping, even did it not become worn and tattered, would scarcely suit the veteran of three-score. Life and growth demand perpetual changes of conditions and methods of action; and this is especially the case with such a vital organic entity as is Methodism, which, beyond the fundamental elements of Church-hood, is the creature of circumstances, and a body of expedients, the maintenance of any of which can only be justified by their continued utility.—National Repository for October

THE CROSS.

I hold that the surest means of preserving to the pulpit its power is to detract nothing from that great and sublime folly of the cross; which alone can confound human wisdom, because it contains the response, at once to the greatness of the divine love and to the deepest needs of the human soul. To seek to commend Christianity by putting the cross to the back-ground is to capitulate before the enemy, and the enemy will be no wise placated by it; for to the philosophers of our day by whom these questions are raised, a vague deism, with a slight evangelical tinge, would be as unacceptable as the true Christian doctrine. The idea of a personal God and of creation is treated as no less absurd than the doctrine of redemption. Nothing would be gained, therefore, by making a Jonah of the supernatural and casting it out of the ship; but what would be lost would be the very same power, spirit, savor of the gospel, and, let me add, its supreme attraction for the conscience. After all, the infidel is never convinced till he is vanquished; and he is only vanquished when he falls to the earth, like Saul of Tarsus, overwhelmed with the convictionsof sin. And then nothing avails to lift him up but the Cross of Calvary and its divine folly. Christian preaching, if it would be powerful, must be faithful to this doctrine, which is to the Jew a stumbling-block and to the Greek foolishness, but which has always brought comfort and life to the human conscience when bleeding from some arrow of conviction that has pierced through the armor of false philosophy and Pharisaic pride. Let us be sure of this, that no arrow will thus reach its mark but one drawn from the divine quiver, of which the prophet speaks, one of those words from His lips which wound before they heal. Redemption—to use the Bible language—this is the great lever in the hands of the preacher of the nineteenth century, as in the hands of all who have gone before him, to uplift the heart of man.—E. De Pressens.