

CHAPTER 5: ON THE LIFE OF FAITH
AND
CHAPTER 6: OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH
BY JOHN BRINE

INQUISITIVE and contemplative men who enjoyed not divine revelation, have written much concerning the happy life. They were greatly divided in their sentiments about it, and really were ignorant of that life. The holy Scripture plainly informs us what it is, and sets before us shining examples of it for our encouragement and imitation. That is a life of faith on Christ. The Apostle Paul acquaints us that such was his life, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” He not only was a subject of divine grace, but he lived in the exercise of it, without which no solid satisfaction and pleasure can be enjoyed, let our circumstances, as men, be ever so easy and affluent. In that life, we shall derive from the glorious object of faith, full contentment, settled tranquility, and permanent joy, how much soever we are tried and afflicted. And, therefore, an enquiry into it may be instructive and beneficial to us.

1. The objects of faith are things invisible. Such as could not have been discovered without revelation, “They are things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which have not entered into the heart of man.” Hence the grace of faith is thus defined: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” The life of faith is taking a frequent prospect of them, and conversing with them. And this is to have our conversation in heaven.

II. This is a life above the delectable things of this world. There is not anything upon earth congruous in its nature to this noble and heaven-born grace, it is of a far more exalted and sublime nature than the most splendid of sublunary enjoyments. They are mere trifles in its esteem. And as this new creature wants them not for its

support and nourishment, it covets them not for its diversion and pleasure. A person who is the subject of this principle, may indeed covet and be delighted with those gaudy toys, but not according to that principle. It is not grace in any man which thirsts after, and is fond of the glittering objects of time and sense, but the opposite of grace; for grace raises the soul far higher than this earthly globe, even to heaven itself, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. And, therefore, if we are strangers to an elevation of mind above the choicest terrene things, we are unacquainted with the only happy life, i.e. , that of faith. For in the exercise of that grace, we “enter into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered.” And the prospects we take of those infinitely excelling objects, which there we view, cause us to disregard the brightest things the world can boast of.

III. Faith carries the mind above the afflictive and distressing things of this world. As it swims not upon a torrent of terrestrial pleasures, so it is not depressed by a heavy weight of worldly sorrows. It smiles not on the gayest things of this mortal state, nor hath it any sadness of countenance when it is deprived of all earthly enjoyments. Its language is: — “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the wines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and fly in the God of my salvation.” Habakkuk 3:17, 18. In prosperity, it is humble and modest; in affliction, it is submissive and patient; because it is persuaded, “that all things work together for good, to them who love God, and are the called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28. “It glories in tribulation, which worketh patience, patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; the love of God being shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost.” Romans 5: 3 to 5.

IV. It is a life contrary to the evil part of the believer, and above his better part. Faith is a combatant with the flesh in all its lusts, and is

a holy resolution to gratify neither those of the sensual, nor intellectual kind; and it vehemently longs for the extirpation of both out of the mind. And as it is a life of opposition to sin, it is a life above itself. Faith feeds upon Christ, the heavenly and hidden manna, and it drinks of the pure delightful streams which flow from the river of God's eternal love, whereby it is refreshed and much invigorated. If grace at any time looks upon its own beauty, it is not in order to self-contentment and admiration, but with an intention to raise the mind cheerfully to engage in the delightful service of adoration and praise to the lovely Redeemer, whose beautiful image it is. And it expects all supplies of wisdom and strength from the Father of Glory, in every needful season. Again, in the matter of consolation, it regards itself only as an evidence to itself of its divine original, as an encouragement to hope for succour in temptations, assistance in all difficulties, and renewed comfort in every trouble, from the gracious and Almighty hand which formed it in the soul. The source of its being is the origin of its joy, i.e., the grace of God in Christ. This is, therefore, a life contrary to our fleshly part, and above our spiritual part. Faith places its trust in another, and derives all its peace, comfort, and pleasures from Christ, who is all in all unto every real Christian.

5. The life of faith supposes a frequent exercise of that excellent grace. A man's life is the general course of his actions. A person is said to live a good life if his conduct in the general is good; an ill life, if his actions in the general course of them are evil. And so the Christian may be said to live a life of faith, if that grace is often acted, and his duties are discharged in faith. That alone denominates them the obedience of faith. If we multiply duties and keep up a regular practice of them, without the exercise of this grace therein, we bring no glory to God, nor do our souls receive any spiritual advantage by them. By this exercise of the grace of faith, I mean direct acts of it on the person, blood, righteousness, and fullness of Christ; and upon the grace, kindness, and mercy of God through Him. This frequent renewal of direct acts of faith is necessary to our

spiritual peace, joy, and fruitfulness in good works, to the praise and glory of God. And, therefore, if we do not seek after this renewing of the acts of this grace, we may go on from month to month, and from year to year, in a low, withering, and starving condition of soul; which, it is to be feared, is the sorrowful condition of many professors at this time. It is not the bare discharge of duties, though ever so many, that will preserve our minds in a heavenly spiritual frame. Without the exercise of faith in them, they are only lifeless, dull, and formal performances, wherein God is not honored, nor our souls profited. It is well if the best are not guilty of too much overlooking this, to their great detriment in the highest interest we can possibly have, to seek after the advancement of, so long as we shall continue in this world.

VI. A life of faith may be maintained in a believer even under darkness, and the hiding of God's face. A ravishing sense of divine love does not always attend the exercise of this grace. It is sometimes acted when the cheering rays of the Sun of righteousness shine not into the mind, and the refreshing light of extraordinary comfort and joy is wanting. And hereby, the mind of a Christian is preserved tranquil and composed, though it hath not that degree of pleasure which springs up in it, from the affecting manifestations of divine love. Nor ought this serenity which is maintained in the soul to be censured as stupidity, or a carnal security, for it greatly differs there from, whatever some may think who seem to have no other notion of faith, than what consists in ravishment and ecstasy.

VII. This faith, is a dependence on the faithfulness God, to all his promises and engagements. As God exhorts the saints to stay upon Him, and trust in His name, "when they walk in darkness, and have no light." It is reasonable to suppose, that such is the condition of believers sometimes, because the exhortation would be needless, nor could it be. put into practice, if no such case ever attended them. In that circumstance to act faith, evidences the strength of it, and brings great glory to God. And when a Christian is enabled to trust in the

Lord, and rely on His fidelity to His gracious promises, he walks with Him, and is concerned for His honor, and yields to him a becoming obedience, though he enjoys not that sweet delight which he does when he is favored with the light of His countenance, and His love is shed abroad in his heart. And the foundation of this trust is firm and stable, and consequently, there is no danger of shame and confusion succeeding it. Divine love is immutable; divine faithfulness is eternal; and therefore, this holy confidence can never be attended with consequences prejudicial to its subject. This dependence is not without some renewed direct act of faith on God and Jesus Christ. Herein it differs from a carnal confidence, and dangerous presumption, which is never attended with real acts of faith.

VIII. This life is a desire and expectation of better things than can be enjoyed in this state. By those things, I do not intend what the world calls valuable, and which money may procure; but jewels and treasures far beyond all comparison, with the choicest of them, i.e. , those gracious visits and heavenly pleasures which the saints are sometimes favored with in the present state, as an earnest of the full enjoyment of God in the world above. To be with Christ is far better. What is that which is excelled? Not the good of this world, but the good of grace, between which and the good things of this world, no comparison can be made. Communion with God, and a view of Christ in His glory by faith, far transcend the enjoyment of all the honors, the riches, and the delights which this world hath to bestow on any mortal, notwithstanding the vain sons of men court these things; and when they attain a considerable share of them are elated with them, in the surprising manner they be. A poor despised believer who walks with God, is far happier than he who possesses most of earth, and is a stranger to heaven. But the future state of glory greatly excels the good of present grace, and present communion with God. And a life of faith is an expectation of that blessed Hope.

CHAPTER 6: OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH

1. ASSURANCE may be considered objectively and subjectively. The former relates to the objects on which faith is supposed to act. This is a firm persuasion of the truth and existence of those objects. For instance, that the Son of God came into our world, and that by his obedience and sacrifice he secured the salvation of some men, or obtained eternal redemption for them. And this is necessarily supposed in all acts of recumbency and dependence on him for deliverance from sin, and the penal consequences of it. By the latter is intended a persuasion in the mind of a poor sinner of his particular interest in Christ, and in His salvation.

2. This latter is not essential to that faith which is of the operation of God, as I apprehend. Several reasons induce me to think that true faith may be, and is sometimes acted where this assurance is wanting.

1. Faith is sometimes expressed by such phrases as do not necessarily include it, i.e., seeing of Christ, coming unto him, hoping in the Lord, and, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. An assurance of the object is plainly supposed in all these, but not the assurance of an interest in Him to whom application is made for help and relief.

2. There is little or small faith, which is attended with fears, jealousies, and doubting. "O! thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

3. There is a strong and a weak faith; the latter cannot well be thought to include this assurance in it; for if it does, it will be

difficult to show wherein the difference lies, between the strong and feeble acting's of this grace.

4. In Christ's family there are different classes of Christians. All are subjects of the same grace in kind, but not in degree. Some are babes, not grown up to any considerable pitch of knowledge, experience, and spiritual strength. And in His fold there are some lambs, who are to be dealt very tenderly with; it does not seem very likely that these, at present, enjoy that strong consolation, which carries the mind above all discouragements and fears. Yet,

3. This favor may be enjoyed.

1. This may be argued with very strong evidence, from the nature of divine promises relating to salvation. A conditional promise of benefits neither ascertains the enjoyment of them, in fact, nor is a proper foundation for an assured persuasion of receiving them; but absolute promises ascertain the possession of that good they express, if the promiser is faithful to his word, and in promising exceeds not his power; and are a firm bottom for an assurance of the reception of it. All divine promises relating to salvation are absolute. I will, and they shall, is the form wherein they run; and therefore, they ascertain salvation, in fact, and are a solid basis of a steady assurance of it. Since their nature is suited to produce and support such a persuasion, God doubtless had this gracious end in expressing them. And if he had such an intention, that must respect either the world or the church. Not the world certainly, and, therefore, the church. Again, the church is triumphant and militant. These promises are intended, then, either to confirm and establish the faith of the church triumphant or militant. Not the church triumphant, and, consequently, this must respect the church militant. And as all generals consist of particulars, every particular is included in the general; hence it follows that all the saints have right to that strong consolation, which the promises of God are fitted in their nature to produce; and it is possible, in the nature of the thing, that they all

may, and not to be doubted but some do, at least at some seasons, enjoy it.

2. God, in confirming His promises with His oath, had this gracious end in view, that those who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them, might have that strong consolation which attends or arises from an assurance of his favor to them, and their security in consequence thereof. Two things are clearly expressed in those words.

(1.) An act of faith on Christ, fleeing for refuge to Him; and this is supposed to be done antecedent to the enjoyment of that strong consolation. True faith, therefore, may be without it.

(2.) That they should enjoy strong consolation, who thus flee to Christ for safety and salvation from sin.

3. The witnessing and sealing of the Holy Spirit evidently prove that an assurance of an interest in the love of God may be enjoyed by the saints: Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:13. The latter text evinces the precedency of faith to sealing, as well as expresses this holy persuasion, through the influence of the Spirit upon the mind, as a witness, after believing. And the very same point of doctrine is deducible from His operations, as the Spirit of adoption. He enables believers to address God as their Father, with boldness, liberty, and confidence, through Jesus Christ; and this He doth at some seasons, wherein they have the greatest sense of their guilt, pollution, and unworthiness.

4. Many of the people of God have expressed their persuasion of an interest in his love, and the glorious benefits springing from that fountain. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” “Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” I might multiply testimonies of this kind, for they are very numerous in the Scripture. Nor is it to be

apprehended that this was peculiar to persons inspired; for the apostle John expresses this matter in the name of Christians in general. “We have known and believed the love that God hath unto us.” If it is not one main design of that epistle to prove this point, it must be allowed that many things are therein delivered, which abundantly confirm it. And this cannot be peculiar to prophets, apostles, or inspired persons, nor arise from inspiration; because some have been inspired, who had no faith at all, as Balaam,' for instance, and holy persons have not always enjoyed it, when under inspiration. Inspiration and this holy persuasion, therefore, are distinct things, and the latter does not necessarily attend or arise from the former.

5. I am of opinion that this great and glorious privilege might be more commonly enjoyed than it is, if professors were wisely cautious in behaving themselves. It is by no means to be thought that this jewel is to be attained, without the diligent use of those means which God hath appointed for our increase and growth in grace; greater self-denial, watchfulness against sin and carnal pleasures, mortification to our worldly interests; with the assiduous practice of religious duties, i.e. , prayer, and reading the Word of God; instead of the fashionable books of our times; meditation, and a frequent review of our spiritual experience, and a conscientious attendance on the worship of God, are the appointed means of our advancement in heavenly knowledge. These are things to which many professors discover but little inclination. Let not such, who doubtless must be destitute of this assurance whereof we speak, dream of attaining it in their present frame of mind and course of behavior; for if they do, their imaginations of this sort will certainly prove deceiving dreams indeed.

6. All believers have a proper and certain evidence within them, of their interest in divine favor. Grace in the hearts of the saints, is an effect of God's love to them, and His gracious purposes concerning them. And, therefore, from the being of grace in their souls, they

may safely infer that they are objects of divine love, and interested in all those blessings which take rise there from.

7. Some, through causeless fears and jealousies, are prevented enjoying this assurance. They are afraid, because sin is in them as an active and restless principle, that they have no contrary principle of holiness; and because in part they are still carnal, that they are not spiritual persons; because grace is but feebly acted in their minds, that they are void of it. And because for a season they enjoy not strong consolation, that they have no title to it, or any spiritual blessings. These jealousies and fears at least evidence a desire of grace, which certainly springs from a gracious principle, for the desire of grace is proper to grace. The want of skill in these persons to distinguish between the motions of the flesh and those of the Spirit; or of attention to both, within themselves, and of a consideration of the new covenant, according to whose nature God will always proceed towards them, are the occasions of their distressing fears.

4. When this holy assurance is maintained in the souls of believers, it influences them unto a humble and close walk with God. Pride, carnality, and neglect of duty are not attendants of the assurance of faith. If lusts, either of the flesh or of the mind, are indulged, and a man is careless and negligent in his conversation, let him not imagine that this favor is vouchsafed to him by the blessed Spirit; for when the Spirit of God operates as a Comforter He also does as a Sanctifier. This strong consolation is never enjoyed, without a heavenly constraint upon the mind to love God, and cheerfully obey Him. It is probable that some may mistake in this matter, and take a merely rational conclusion for this assurance, wherein the Holy Spirit has no concern, i.e. , Thus, a man reflects upon his past experience of divine goodness, as he thinks, in former seasons, and says within himself, this must have been the work of God upon me; I, therefore, am the subject of his grace, and interested in his love. But if he thus reflects, and thus reasons, when his condition and the

general frame of his mind call loudly upon him to the duties of humiliation, and sorrow for sin, spiritual sloth, and criminal indulgences, he may assure himself, that in this the divine Sanctifier has no concern, and that the conclusion he has drawn contains nothing of that holy assurance in it whereof we now speak. There is, I think, such a difference between the merely rational acting's of our own minds in this business, and the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit in our reflecting upon his work on our souls, as is easily discernible to the saints; and they are greatly wanting to themselves, with regard to their spiritual peace and solid comfort, if they neglect to attend to that difference in this review of their past acts. In the former, only ease and quiet are sought after, in which consists carnal security in the latter, strength against sin, and a renewal of the vigour of grace which has fallen under a decay, and present direct acts of faith are put forth in this latter, which are not in the former.

5. It is our duty to endeavor to obtain it. We ought to be thankful for the lowest measure of faith, but not content ourselves with a low degree of grace; because the being of grace in our hearts, though small, is an evidence of our safety. As far as anything of this nature is found in us, so far we have just cause well to examine ourselves, lest at last we prove mistaken in cherishing hopes of a real conversion. This can be no sign of it; for it is in the nature of the new creature to desire both its preservation and improvement; the neglect hereof can only arise from the flesh, its opposite and combatant. Nothing is more inculcated upon us, than this endeavor after an advancement in holiness and spirituality: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" "and, add to your faith, virtue," etc., "and let us go on to perfection;" with various other exhortations of the same kind, which plainly prove that this is a duty indispensably incumbent on us. But, alas! we are very defective herein, which is the cause of that slow progress we make in the knowledge of heavenly things, and to this is owing very much that want of the savour and relish of them, which too visibly appears in most professors at this day.

VI. Great advantages attend it. Spiritual peace, which greatly differs from that carnal security that usually is the concomitant of a backsliding frame. Joy in God, which causes us to despise those low and weak pleasures wherewith our corrupt minds are too apt to be delighted. Freedom and boldness in our addresses at the throne of grace. Thankfulness and gratitude to our heavenly Father, for all the good and inestimable blessings he is pleased to confer upon us. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us,” etc. This strength of faith will enable us to give glory to God, even under such dispensations as are most trying to it. What difficulties will it not surmount; what afflictions will it not bear with calmness, submission, patience, yea, with triumph? Since such advantages arise to ourselves, and such glory to God from this faith, shall we think anything too hard a labor to attain it, or anything too dear and valuable to part with for its enjoyment? It is our folly if we do.

There is no inconsistency at all, between a persuasion of the necessity of a strict and regular attendance to duty, on our part, in order to the enjoyment of a sense of divine favor, and a belief that our growth in grace entirely depends on the efficiency of the Holy Spirit. As to the acknowledgment of the latter, and a steady regard to it as a precious and indubitable truth, I will not give place to any man in the world. But then, on the other hand, I am equally satisfied, that it is only in the ways of holiness that any have reason to hope for the benign influences of the Spirit of God, in order to the strengthening and increase of grace in their hearts. A careless, negligent, and loose walk will always be followed with dreadful effects. The bitter weeds, the briars and thorns of corruption of one kind or other will grow, and grace will decline. Sad instances of the truth of this our times abound with. All pretensions unto the present enjoyment of the assurance of faith in those whose conversation is unbecoming the gospel, are groundless, if they ever enjoyed that favor. In some, it is to be feared, that at last it will appear, that they

never were by the Holy Spirit sealed unto the day of redemption, notwithstanding all that confidence with which they have expressed themselves.

This is an observation not intended for any who are mourning under a sense of their sins and sinfulness, whatever their revolts may have been through the violence of temptation and the strength of lust stirred up by it. Far be it from me to offer anything which hath the least tendency to break the bruised reed, and quench the smoking flax. But the condition of some, who are at ease in Zion, calls for awakening reproof, that at least, they may not have it to say that they were suffered to go down into the chambers of death, without any warning given to them of their danger.

Objection. Some perhaps will say, “This doctrine of assurance of safety and security, or a firm persuasion of an interest in Christ, and in His salvation, is not a likely method to promote holiness; for if a man enjoys a certain hope of being happy hereafter, what need he concern himself about the manner of his behavior? His sins are pardoned, his person is justified, he is an heir of heaven, and his title to eternal life is unalienable; can it, therefore, be expected of him that he should watch, pray and fight, since his future welfare is a thing certain in itself, and he knows it to be so?”

Answer 1. Such who thus object, are of a different opinion from our Saviour, who plainly told some that their sins were pardoned. “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” And “her sins, which are many, are forgiven.” Besides, as He predicted to Peter his denial of Him, He acquainted him with that interest he had in His prevalent intercession. “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;” and expressly mentions his recovery: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” This objection, therefore, is leveled against the wisdom of our blessed Saviour; and if its force is admitted, it must be at the expense of His want of care about the suitable behaviour of His followers. This is a consideration sufficient

entirely to sink the objection, and to cause its authors to blush, if they had the least degree of modesty left. But,

2. Who are the persons, that from an assurance of an interest in Christ, and in His saving benefits, can be supposed, upon that assurance, will grow remiss and careless about the practice of their duty? They must be either unregenerate or regenerate persons. The unregenerate cannot have this assurance, and, therefore, they cannot abuse it in the manner the objection supposes. And, consequently, if it is thus abused, it must be by regenerate sanctified men. From what principle in them can this abuse of so precious a favor spring? It must be either from the flesh or from the spirit. That it cannot arise from the latter, is, I suppose, a truth evident to all. And what if the flesh is inclined to abuse this or any other divine truth, is that a sufficient reason for the rejection of it? Surely it is not. He who is insensible that there is that in him which is inclined to take occasion to sin from the commandment in the law, as well as from the promises of the gospel, is a stranger to the plague of his heart. But is it proper, for that reason, to part with either the law or the gospel? Certainly it is not. This is an undoubted truth, that, that in men which abuses the gospel, it will also pervert and abuse the law; and, therefore, if we admit this shameful objection, we can retain neither the law nor the gospel.

3. Since it is only the flesh which can be guilty of thus abusing the doctrine treated of, how absurd is it to imagine that a man can enjoy this assurance while he is pampering and gratifying the flesh? That man deceives himself who is confident of enjoying future happiness, which consists very much in a perfect freedom from all sin, who allows himself in the present practice of it. I utterly deny that that man desires to be free from sin hereafter, who does not desire to forsake it now. This assurance therefore, cannot in fact give the least encouragement to sin. It is an act of the spiritual part in a believer, which never gives any advantage to the fleshly part in him.

4. It is a sacred truth, and as such it is firmly believed by us, that faith without works is dead. This faith “purifies the heart,” and it produces good works in the life of him who is the subject of it. How then can this excellent grace be, where the genuine fruits of it are not found? This objection is no better than mere calumny, designed to traduce and reproach a precious evangelical truth. But this is nothing new nor strange. If some sort of men did not despise, reject, and slander divine truths, it would be a strong temptation for me to think myself mistaken, in esteeming them such. For the things of the Spirit of God will always be foolishness to some men.

5. Those who thus object, either express the part which they themselves would act, upon such a persuasion, or they do not. If they do not, why is it that they object after this manner? If they do, and are in earnest, I am not afraid nor ashamed to tell them that they are strangers to grace and holiness; and if they have no other principle than what at present influences and determines them, nothing is more certain than that they will descend into the bottomless pit, from whence there is no redemption. That man to whom it would be a satisfaction to continue in sin, upon having an assurance of impunity, most certainly is in the broad road to destruction. He who desires not to be holy now, is dreadfully mistaken, if he imagines that he desires holiness hereafter. The eternal ruin of such sort of persons, whose real principle this objection expresses, is inevitable, without sovereign grace and mercy works a change in their hearts; and their everlasting damnation will be just. If any pretend unto an assurance of the pardon of their sin, and of the salvation of their souls by the blood and righteousness of Christ, who have no experience of hearty sorrow for sin, indignation against it, and against themselves because of their transgressions, they know nothing at all what that holy assurance is. They undoubtedly are “in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity.” Some such bold pretenders and impious boasters it may be there are but their condition is most dreadful, for death, eternal death, in fact can only be expected by them. I am sure that heaven is not their choice, and

that they have nothing to look for, but the fiery vengeance of a holy God. This I know is true, that assurance of pardon through the blood of the Son of God, never fails to produce in the mind the greatest abhorrence of sin, and the most earnest desires of its utter destruction.