

THE WITNESS WITHIN.

A Sermon

PREACHED BY

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“He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself” —
JOHN v. 10.

CHRISTIANITY is a blessed reality, a divine production, ennobling the possessor; enlivening, enriching and enlarging the soul where it reigns; for it is “Christ in you the hope of glory.” It matters not what else we possess, what we are or what we do; if Christ be absent, we lack the one thing needful; but possessing him, we possess all things needful, and truly good.

From the text, consider three things.

I. — The *Subject*. It is *faith* in the Son of God. Faith is a divine gift, a fruit of the Spirit, called the faith of God’s elect; none others obtain it, it dwells alone in them, it hangs on the elect head.

It is distinguished from the faith of formalists, inasmuch as it works by love. It has to do with unseen things which are spiritual, and eternal: for it is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;” and whether it is strong enough to remove mountains, or only strong enough to creep to the foot of the cross, it is “*like precious faith*,” comes from the same root, rests on the one object, tends to the same end — even the salvation of the soul. This faith sees in the dark, it is not aided by sense; and its quality is best proved when most tried. A man that is always

at his ease, and has all things at hand, does not know much about the quality of *his* faith, it has not been much tested, therefore we hear many saying, they fear they have no faith. It is true, there are times, when to our apprehension, it seems extinct; but this cannot be, for it is always present, though not always in exercise.

The seeing faculty of our natural eye is always present — asleep or awake; yet we see nothing with it when asleep; and when our faith lies dormant we *think* we have none; and we can see everything, and everybody, except Christ; but like the disciples on the mount, when we are awakened we see no *man*, but Jesus only; nor do we wish to see or trust in any other.

This faith in its first communication is the gift of God; consequently, above human command; and in its after exercise he must direct it; consequently, beyond human control. Thus we require “grace for grace:” we need grace, to put the faith of grace in exercise. Herein it differs from the natural faith of professors; for *that* acts when it likes; it does not go far, nor is it far-fetched; its source is within, and its object is near; but the Lord’s people are obliged to cry, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

The Lord’s people feel that they cannot either increase it, or exercise it when they have it: they are not duty-faith men; and the little they have is genuine; for it is directed to Christ, feeds on him the living Bread; trusts in him the living Head; feels at home at Calvary; breathes in heavenly communion, and rejoices in a free grace gospel.

Moreover, there is connected with this true faith — hope and desire; but the *hope* is a good hope, which shall never be cut off; for it is cast within the vail; whilst the hope arising from natural faith must perish. And the *desire* is a spiritual desire for spiritual blessings, which shall be granted; not like the desire of the sluggard, for that killeth him — because his hands refuse to labour. Prov. xxi. 25.

We must not, therefore, content ourselves with merely saying, “I hope and desire;” we must *examine*, to see whether we be in the *faith*, and possess the true faith. We must not buoy up the formalist with false graces, or else at last they will wake up deceived.

It will not do to substitute *natural* faith for *saving* faith: there is a wide difference. Natural faith is earthly and sensual, and cannot rise above its natural source; therefore it is out of its latitude when Christ is the subject of discourse. Natural men may hear a discourse concerning the ups and downs of life, losses in business, disappointments in worldly affairs, trials and afflictions of a temporal nature, and they will give their assent to it all, for it is *their* experience; and they go away, pleased that the preacher has described *their case*; and they take to themselves that they are the Lord’s afflicted, because they know *these changes*. They may even hear their fears and hopes described: how they feared they should not succeed in this thing, and how anxious about that; and how they hoped such an obstacle would be removed, and how it *all* really happened better than they could do it themselves. And what is this, after all? All this is in the experience of a Christian; but it is not *vital* Christian experience: *we* must go a little higher than this for evidence of our sonship. The multitude can reach this, but *we* must get up a little higher in the mountain with Christ to be taught as his disciples — (Matt. v. 1) — something more sublime, spiritual and savoury, before we can realize the witness within ourselves.

“There are Three that bear record in heaven: the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost: and these Three are One.” One in their will — no confusion or opposition; they willed the salvation of the church. One in their love, — the Father loved no more than the Son redeemed, and the Spirit regenerates all the Son died for; therefore no loved one can miss his seat and harp, for they shall be all called, clothed and conducted safe to heaven; and the objects of this love feel the constraining power of it; and though they may not be able to explain the *mystery* of the *Trinity*, yet they realize the preciousness of it; they feel the Father’s love constraining, and

they say, “We love him because he first loved us.” They feel the Son’s blood applied, and they feel the peaceful effects produced; they enjoy the unction of the Spirit in their souls, and know what blessedness it affords, and what a change it effects. He it is that works this faith within, and it has *three* features we do well to examine.

It *confides* in the Father’s word. Does he speak? It knows his voice, and listens to him. Does he promise? It pleads that promise. Does he declare things to come? It trusts in his faithfulness for full manifestation, and by-and-bye it shall be turned into sight.

It *clings* to Christ’s cross, and says, I will go in unto the King; and if I perish, I will perish at his throne. It says, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” It says, “When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord is a light unto me.”

Natural faith is lost here; it cannot act in the dark. True faith says, “If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole;” and there is a large crowd to press through, too; and the greater the opposition the more conspicuous it is. *My* faith never had any aid from men — companions, parents, employers, and circumstances always opposing it, and pecuniary losses attending it; but hitherto *He* has sustained it and me; and I can speak of the witness within. Some cannot speak of the witness within; do not know whether their faith is real. Test it. Can you give up a situation rather than transgress God’s laws, or act contrary to your conscience? Some cannot: some have more faith in their employers than in God.

Moreover, this faith *claims* relationship to a Triune God. It says, “Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us.” It says, “Christ is mine, and I am his; and there shall be no separation;” but if we cannot deny self for Christ, we cannot *claim* relation. If we are gone down to Moab, and reside there, and are taken up with worldliness, we lose sight of our husband, and our two sons also will disappear. Naomi’s two sons were *Mahlon* and *Chillion*, the Hebrew names; *Perfection* and *Song*. If we lose sight of our *Elimelech*, we shall certainly lose sight of

our *Perfection*, and then naturally follows the loss of our *Song*. This is all in accordance with the promise, “If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you.”

Observe, that the object of true faith is the “*Son of God*,” Christ in his *Person*; it looks upon him as the Chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely; whilst natural men are saying, “What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?” Faith sees in his Person greater dignity than any earthly crown could confer upon him; though to nature he appears wearing a crown of thorns; and although he only appears as a Man of sorrows, and in the form of a servant, yet faith sees in him greater attractions than any earthly honours or royal robes could impart; and this is the reason why *nature* sees no beauty in him, nor comeliness, to cause her to desire him.

Faith also has to do with his *name*. “He shall be called Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.” That is the name above every name to faith. His name is an alabaster box of ointment, very precious to his people. When the Spirit breaks up the mystery of this name, explains the suitability of this name, develops the saving, cheering virtues contained in this name, to the soul, it fills the whole house with the fragrance thereof, and imparts a peace and joy that cannot be misunderstood.

Faith also has to do with his *offices*. It looks to him as a Prophet to teach; he is wise, and well qualified to teach; for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and anointed him to preach the acceptable year of the Lord; to preach to the spirits in prison and say unto them, “Shew yourselves.”

It looks to him as a faithful High Priest, who provides a pure and perfect sacrifice for us, without fee, and presents it for us too; and he never dies, either, so that we have no need to provide a successor, or make friends with another. He abideth for ever, and he is perfect. He is all that the law required; neither law nor justice can find fault with him; and I am sure faith will not, for he has no blemish. He is not blind, he can see well; nor lame, he can stand firm, and walk straight: his steps are equal. He is neither broken-footed or broken-handed; his hands can perform their

enterprise; he performs all his work, and maintains a firm hold upon his people. He is not crook-backed; he can stand erect, and bear all the burden laid upon him. He is not a dwarf; he stands higher than all the people, and looks upon them. Neither has he a blemish in his eye; no defect of vision; no mote to take out; his eyes are as a flame of fire; they bring to light hidden things: they give light and heat.

We own him as a King, also; and are well pleased with his rule and authority, and pray for his kingdom to come, extending over all the nations of the earth; and even now faith hears in the distance the trampling of his war horse, and the rolling of his chariot wheels on the pavement, rapidly advancing, according to ancient prophecy, “conquering and to conquer.”

II. The declaration — “*Hath the witness in himself.*”

God calls the ancient people his witnesses — (Isaiah xliii. 12). And if we believe on his Son, we are witnesses for him, and have a witness within; for the Holy Spirit, which produced that faith, is within, and he is the witness in our heart for God.

John says there are three that bear record on earth — Spirit, water, and blood; and these three agree in one. They witness to the one truth that salvation is by Christ. The *Spirit* testifies the fact that we are quickened to life by his influence; that we need salvation; that there is salvation in Christ; that there is none other can save. *He* takes the things of Christ — (names, offices, blood, righteousness) — and shews them to us; and thus witnesses within our interest in him.

The *blood* testifies to the one truth that there is no remission without it; that Christ our sacrifice is slain; that we have redemption through *his* blood; and when that blood is brought home to our wounded conscience, it testifies pardon; when sprinkled in our hearts it testifies reconciliation, and peace ensues to the troubled spirit; so that we have the witness within, though our neighbours may not be in the secret thereof. There is no

mistaking the significant language of *blood*; we know we love the *peace* it speaks; the pardon, the rest and the triumph it secures.

The *water* also bears witness to the death, burial and resurrection of our Forerunner; it seems to preach to us the fact, that he died and rose again; that he was immersed in sufferings, but that he rose triumphant out of them, and above them; that although all the waves and billows of divine wrath went *over* him, yet they did not remain *upon* him. And when we are baptized in his name, it is not to make us worthy, or qualify us for heaven, but shew our obedience to him as King and Lawgiver, and confess openly that we are in him, in his death and resurrection. For know ye not, that “therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death?” The Spirit, water and blood, therefore, bear witness to the truth of the Father’s *word*, and the perfection of the Son’s *work*.

This witness within is real — not fancy, not notion; but it is demonstrated by its influences, and the effects produced. — “He that hath the Son hath life.” We can understand effects better than causes. Well, *life* is the effect of the cause: if this Spirit of Christ be in us, we feel a little of this *life*; we have *motion* within; a something we did not always possess. He is like a new lodger come in; we feel more company than we had; and it sets us wondering what is going on, and what will be the end of the thing; and while it makes us seek, cry and work, our friends are much concerned about the result, fearing that reason has lost its seat; and whilst they prescribe every remedy but the right one, this life still struggles, and is not satisfied till it rises to its native element, and finds supplies suited to its heaven-born taste.

Light, also, is the effect of this witness dwelling within. Yes, the Lord’s people are enlightened souls; the beams of the Sun of righteousness shines in, and illuminates the dark chambers of the mind, and brings to light the *hidden* things of darkness, and we obtain a view of ourselves which we never had before; we see now; our eyes are open, and the light makes manifest that we are unclean, leprous, weak, lost and ruined, and that we

cannot help ourselves. We see Christ, too, in a new light; we see him now as our Friend, instead of viewing him as our Foe; as our Physician, able to cheer and heal; as our Surety, who paid our debts; as our Deliverer, who liberates our souls. We see the brethren in a new light; we see them no longer as the offscouring of all things, but as the excellent of the earth; and our delight is in them because of the image of our Elder Brother, which we discover impressed upon them. If we see these things, these are the *effects* of his indwellings and we have passed from death unto life, from darkness unto light.

And *liberty*, too, is an effect of this divine witness within: — “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Yet some of whom we have a good hope, are in bondage often and long; but when Christ comes, and makes them free, they shall be *free indeed*. Men may liberate them for a time, but they will fall back again to their bondage; but when the Breaker comes and breaks the chains, his work will be well done; for he came to deliver them who were all their life subject to bondage, through fear of death.” His indwelling, then, produces liberty. These are three effects to help you a little to the knowledge of this blessed Witness; and if he has done any of these things to you, you will be sensible of it.

Having this witness, we enjoy a sight of Jesus, and see perfection in him for us. We hear his voice, and enjoy the peace which he breathes within. We smell the sweet fragrance of his sacrifice, and trust in it; we feel the influence divine which his love imparts, and spread our wings towards the cross, as doves unto their windows, and birds of Paradise to shelter in the Tree of Life, and pluck the fruit which is for meat, and leaves which are for healing.

But there are some who are called little ones, who cannot thus testify to God’s faithfulness, and speak of the experience of these things; and have perhaps often been tempted by satan to believe themselves outcast, led to write bitter things against themselves; almost constrained to give up the pursuit, because they find so many difficulties to contend with, so many

obstacles to surmount, so many fears to distress, and so many disappointments marking their onward journey. To such I would say, whence arose these anxieties to learn your standing — these desires to obtain spiritual blessings — and these fears lest you should eventually be disappointed? Not from nature. You had no such thoughts, desires, fears and hopes in a state of nature; no such views when blind; no such hungering when dead; no desire after Christ when you loved satan's service. I therefore perceive in you desires and hopes which emanate alone from a *new* nature. I hear the language of those who are quickened by the Spirit; and these are the *witness* that *you* have *within*, and these lead you to Christ for salvation, peace and rest. I knew you have many scruples to overcome; and satan will do all he can to maintain them as long as possible; and your unbelieving hearts being in league with him, are not backward in the affair. Whilst, therefore, the Lord is revealing to you your native depravity and helplessness, by giving you to see *greater* abominations like Ezekiel of old, you misconstrue his meaning, and the end he has in view. He intends preparing you for the reception of a free grace salvation; but you think it is in wrath he is dealing with you, and that he designs your destruction; and like Jacob *you* say, "All these things are against me," whereas they were all working together for his good, even to bring about that which he most desired; although he could not see it, they were all gradually leading him to the sight of his beloved Joseph.

And the things we experience by the way, though not exactly what we like, yet they are in the appointments of his purpose, gradually leading us to a discovery of our perfection and safety in Christ. They gradually develop the love intentions of our Father, and are for the trial of our faith; and if our faith be genuine, it will endure; but if it be natural, it will assuredly fail under the ordeal. We have a great deal of faith as we think in sun-shiny weather; but when it is required for use in the storm, we find a great deal of it was worthless chaff. It is like the farmer's crop in the field; it appears great in quantity whilst lying with the straw and chaff — but when it is threshed out, the straw laid aside, and the chaff separated

from it, then the quantity of pure grain appears very small compared with what it was when lying in the field.

Genuine faith loses nothing by trial. It is only the natural confidence that is removed. Neither is gold injured by being put in the furnace; the bulk may be diminished, but it is only the dross that is removed from it. And the reason some of you are not sure about the nature of your faith, is because you have had such smooth times of it, and your faith has not been sufficiently tested. When this happens, you will find that *true* faith is attracted as with a heavenly magnet towards Jesus Christ, as the true centre of rest for the weary, weak and worthless.

Think, therefore, no longer about your qualifications — good deeds or bad deeds. Think not about preparing yourselves for him; you are prepared if you feel your need.

“If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all.”

What qualifications had Mary — the woman who was a sinner? She had great qualifications; for she had seven devils for him to cast out, and she found him *able*, and *willing*, too; and when it was done, she had the witness within; for when the devils were out, peace, purity and pardon dwelt therein. What qualification had Saul? Great qualification: for he was a persecutor, injurious, and a blasphemer; and he found Jesus merciful to pardon and heal him; and he had the witness within; for when he was tamed he sat at Jesus’ feet, and said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Think he did not know what Jesus did for him? Peter, too, had qualifications — but what were they? He who professed so much, promised so much, and professed so much enjoyment as he did, yet with oaths and curses denied his Lord. Nevertheless, his crime, though great, was pardoned, and his diseases healed by that blood which still retains its efficacy for all the election of grace.

III. The blessedness enjoyed, and the effects produced by the possession of the witness within.

Dignity. The Lord is theirs — *on* their side — *with* them, and not ashamed to call them brethren; related to the King of kings; heirs of heaven; sons of God. The Spirit is their Teacher; entitled to the feast, the shoes, the robe and ring.

This relationship confers more dignity upon us than heirship to England's crown could produce. We may be poor and despised on earth, but not in heaven. We are like our Elder Brother — princes in disguise. Rejoice! ye righteous!

Decision. Having the witness within, we are decided for God; that makes us bold; we hoist our colours; we wear our uniform; we are engaged by him, and fight under his standard — the cross; decided that *truth* is good; that *purity* is dignifying; that *vital* experience is from God: and God's *glory* is our aim.

Dependence. Yes, we know our weakness, and are led out of self; for supplies we look to heaven. We cannot depend on man any longer; his breath is in his nostrils; he dies, or changes; the *friend* of to-day becomes the *foe* of to-morrow; I have proved it often: they are like the streams of the summer brook, they dry up; like swallows feeling the chill of winter, they fly off to seek a warm air in sunnier climes: so with many friends. The more we can depend upon God, then, the happier we shall be; he will not forsake us.

Dedication. “Whose I am, and whom I serve,” said Paul. We are desirous of serving him, for he is a good Master; desire to glorify him, for he hath redeemed us: we are not our own.

Delight. What pleasure it affords the soul that can read his title clear to mansions in the skies! the soul that realizes pardon by the peace-speaking blood of the Lamb, enjoys an earnest of heaven. And *we*, having the witness within, are enabled to rejoice, in hope of the glory to be revealed;

and those who cannot rejoice in *having* it in possession, *desire* it when they hear of it, and hope by and by to realize it. May we ever live by faith, and rejoice in hope, till faith be turned into sight, and hope into fruition. Amen.