

Christian Behavior - Good Works Flow From Faith

(This article is part of a modernized series in which John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, discusses four observable characteristics of Christian behavior)

I begin with the first. *That good works flow from faith.* This is evident in several ways. First, from the impossibility of their flowing from any other thing; they must either flow from faith, or not at all: 'For whatsoever is not from faith is sin' (Rom 14:23). And again, 'Without faith it is impossible to please him' (Heb 11:6). Every man by nature, before faith, is an evil and a corrupt tree; and a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit: 'Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?' (Matt 7:16,17). Now a man is made good by faith, and by that produces the fruits that are acceptable to God (Heb 11:4; Col 1:4-6). For this reason, sinners, before faith, are compared to the wilderness, whose fruits are briars and thorns; and whose hearts are the home of dragons; that is, of devils (Isa 35:6,7; Heb 6:7,8). As a consequence, they are said to be Godless, Christless, Spiritless, faithless, hopeless; without the covenant of grace, without strength; enemies in their minds by wicked works, and possessed by the spirit of wickedness, as a castle by a conqueror (Eph 2:12; Jude 19; 2 Thess 3:2; Col 1:21; Luke 11:21).

Because these things are true, it is impossible that any unconverted man under heaven should be able to do one work rightly good; just as it is impossible for all the briars and thorns under heaven to produce one cluster of grapes, or one bunch of figs; for indeed they lack what is necessary. A thorn doesn't make figs, because it lacks the nature of the fig-tree; and so does the brier lack the nature of the grape vine. Good works must come from a good heart. Now, this the unbeliever lacks, because he lacks faith; for it is faith which purifies the heart (Luke 6:45; Acts 15:9). Good works must come from love to the Lord Jesus; but this the unbeliever lacks also, because he lacks faith: For faith 'works by love,' and by that means does good (Gal 5:6). Consequentially, though the carnal man does many things which he calls good, yet it is rejected, slighted, and turned as dirt in his face again; his prayers are abominable (Prov 15:8), his ploughing is sin (Prov 21:4), and all his righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). So you see that without faith there are no good works.

Now then, to show you that good works flow from faith: Faith is a principle of life, by which a Christian lives (Gal 2:19-20), a principle of motion, by which it walks towards heaven in the way of holiness (Rom 4:12; 2 Cor 5:7). It is also a principle of strength, by which the soul opposes its lust, the devil, and this world, and overcomes them. 'This is the victory, even our faith' (1 John 5:4,5) Faith, in the heart of a Christian, is like the salt that was thrown into the corrupt fountain, that made the naughty waters good, and the barren land fruitful (2 Kings 2:19-22). Faith, when it is wrought in the heart, is like leaven hid in the meal, (Matt 13:33) or like perfume that lights upon stinking leather, turning the smell of the leather into the savory smell of the perfume; faith being then planted in the heart, and having its natural inclination to holiness. Thus it follows an alteration of the life and conversation, and so brings forth fruit accordingly. 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good' (Luke 6:45). Which treasure, I say, is this faith (James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:7). And therefore it is that faith is called 'the faith according to godliness,' (Titus 1:1) and the 'most holy faith' (Jude 20).

Second, good works must flow from faith, or not at all; because that alone carries in it an argument sufficiently prevalent to win upon our natures, to make them comply with holiness. Faith shows us that God loves us, that he forgives us our sins, that he accounts us for his children, having freely justified us through the blood of his Son (Rom 3:24,25; 4; Heb 11:13; 1 Peter 1:8). Faith receives the promise, embraces it, and comforts the soul unspeakably with it. Faith is so great an artist in arguing and reasoning with the soul, that it will bring over the hardest heart that it has to deal with. It will bring to my remembrance at once, both my vileness against God, and his goodness towards me; it will show me, that though I deserve not to breathe in the air, yet that God will have me an heir of glory. Now, there is no argument greater than this. This will make a man run through ten thousand difficulties, to answer God, though he never can, for the grace he has bestowed on him.

Further, faith will show me how distinguishingly this love of God has set itself upon me; it will show me, that though Esau was Jacob's brother, yet he loved Jacob (Mal 1:2). That though there were thousands more besides me that were as good as me, yet I must be the man that must be chosen. Now this, I say, is a marvelous argument, and unspeakably prevails with the sinner, as the apostle says: 'For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died

for all, then all were once dead: And that he died for all; that they which live,' that is, by faith, 'should not therefore live for themselves, but for him who died for them, and rose again' (2 Cor 5:14,15). 'Love, 'says the wise man, 'is strong as death; Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be scorned' (Song 8:6,7).

Oh! when the broken, dying, condemned soul, can but see, by faith, the love of a tenderhearted Saviour, and also see what he underwent to deliver it from under that death, guilt, and hell, that now it feels and fears; which also it knows it hath most justly and highly deserved; 'Then bless the Lord, O my soul' (Psa 103:1,2,3); and 'What will I give to the Lord for all his benefits?' (Psa 116:1-14). Thus faith is a prevailing argument to the sinner, whereby he is rescued from what he was, and constrained to bend and yield to what he neither would nor could do before (1 Cor 2:14; Rom 8:7). That is why gospel obedience is called 'the obedience of faith,' as well as obedience to the faith (Rom 16:26). For it must be by the faith of Christ in my heart, that I submit to the word of faith in the Bible, otherwise all is to no profit: as the apostle says, 'The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it' (Heb 4:2). For faith alone can see the reality of what the gospel says; and so I say, argue over the heart to the embracing of it.

Third, faith is such a grace that is will represent to the soul all things in their proper colors. Faith does not, as does unbelief and ignorance, show us all things out of order; putting darkness for light, and bitter for sweet; but will set every thing in its proper place before our eyes; God and Christ will be with it, the chiefest good, the most lovely and amiable; a heavenly life will be of greater esteem, and more desirable, than all the treasures of Egypt! Righteousness and sanctification will be the thing after which it will most vehemently press; because it sees not only death and damnation as the fruits of sin, but sin also in itself, distinct from the punishment belonging to it, a detestable, horrible, and odious thing (Heb 11:25-27; Phil 3:7-12; Rom 12:9). By faith we see that this world has no abiding in it for us, nor no satisfaction if it were otherwise (Prov 3:35; Heb 11:15,16; 13:14; 1 Cor 7:9-31). As a consequence, the people of God have groaned to be gone from this world into a state that is both sinless and without temptation. They have run through so many trials, afflictions, and adversities because of that love for holiness of life that faith prompted in their hearts, by showing them the

worth and durableness of that which was good and the irksomeness and evil of all things (2 Cor 5:1-8; Heb 11:33- 39).

Fourth, faith lays hold of that which is able to help the soul to produce good works: it lays hold of, and engages the strength of Christ, and by that overcomes that which oppresses; 'I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13). In a word, a life of holiness and godliness in this world, does so inseparably follow a principle of faith, that it is both monstrous and ridiculous to suppose the contrary. What, will not he that has life have motion? (Gal 2:20). He that has by faith received the spirit of holiness, will not he be holy? (Gal 3:2). and he that is called to glory and virtue, will he not add to his faith virtue? (2 Peter 1:4,5). We are by faith made good trees, and will we not produce good fruit? (Luke 6:43). They that believe are created in Christ Jesus for good works; and God has, before the world was, ordained that we should walk in them; and will both our second creation and God's foreordination be stopped? (Eph 1:4; 2:10). Besides, the children of faith are the children of light, and of the day (1 Thess 5:5). Lights upon a hill, and candles on a candlestick, and will they not shine? They are the salt of the earth, will they not be seasoning? (Matt 5:13-16). The believer is the alone man, by whom God shows to the world the power of his grace and the operation of his people's faith. The unbelievers read indeed of the power of grace; of the faith, hope, love, joy, peace, and sanctification of the heart of the Christian; but they feel nothing of that sin-killing operation that is in these things; these are to them as a story of Rome or Spain.

For this reason, to show them in others, what they find not in themselves, God works faith, hope, and love in a generation that will serve him; and by them they will see what they cannot find in themselves; and by this means they will be convinced that though sin and the pleasures of this life be sweet to them, yet there is a people otherwise minded; even such a people that do indeed see the glory that others read about and from that sight take pleasure in those things which they are most averse unto. To this, I say, are Christians called; through this is God glorified; through this are sinners convinced; and by this the world condemned (1 Thess 4:7; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:1; Heb 11:7).

Objection. But if faith does so naturally cause good works, what then is the reason that God's people find it so hard a matter to be fruitful in good works?

Answer 1. God's people are fruitful in good works according to the proportion of

their faith; if they are weak in good works, it is because they are weak in faith. Little faith is like small candles, or weak fire, which though they shine and have heat; yet but dim shining and small heat, when compared with bigger candles and greater fire. The reason why Sardis had some in it whose works were not perfect before God was because they did not hold fast by faith the word that they had formerly heard and received (Rev 3:1-3). 2. There may be a great mistake in our judging of our own fruitfulness. The soul that is candid and right at heart is taught by grace to judge itself, though fruitful, yet barren upon two accounts. (1.) When it compares its life to the mercy bestowed upon it: for when a soul considers the greatness and riches of the mercy bestowed upon it then it must cry out, 'O wretched man that I am,' (Rom 7:24) for it sees itself wonderfully to fall short of a conversation becoming one who has received so great a benefit. (2.) It may also judge itself barren, because it falls so far short of that it would attain unto, 'it cannot do the thing that it would' (Gal 5:17). 3. The heart of a Christian is naturally very barren; though the seed of grace is the most fruitful of all seeds sown, the heart is naturally subject to produce weeds (Mat 15:19). To have a good crop from such ground does argue the fruitfulness of the seed. I conclude upon these three things, (1.) That the seed of faith is a very fruitful seed in that it will be fruitful in so barren a soil. (2.) That faith is not in obligation to the heart, but the heart to faith, for all its fruitfulness. (3.) That therefore the way to be a more fruitful Christian, it is to be stronger in believing.