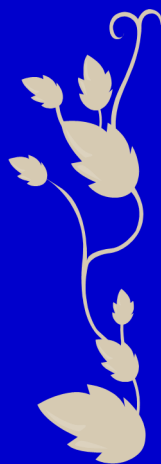
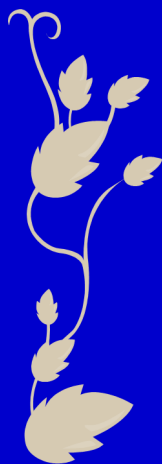


**Brethren, Beware!**  
**[ Unbelief ]**

**Faith as a Masticator,  
as a Shield and  
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**A. W. Pink**

# **Brethren, Beware! [Unbelief]** **Faith as a Masticator, as a Shield and as an Overcomer**

**A. W. Pink**

## **Brethren, Beware! [Unbelief]**

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). In the context, the apostle had brought before his readers the solemn case of the most privileged of all the generations of Israel—namely, the one which had by Jehovah’s mighty hand been delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt, and yet which *failed to enter* the land of Canaan. That generation perished in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. They were the fathers of those to whom he was here writing, their “type” (1 Cor. 10:2), and they are held up as a warning example unto us—for “the best of saints need to be warned against the worst of evils” (John Owen). “Take heed” says the apostle—be on your guard, walk circumspectly with regard to danger. There is a great need for Christians to be constantly watchful, for they are menaced on the right hand and on the left, both from without and from within; and a careless profession is certain to end in making shipwreck of the faith.

The Christian life is not likened to lying down upon “flowery beds of ease,” but to a *warfare*; and if we gird not on our armour and be vigilant in guarding against our enemies, we shall assuredly fall a prey to them. Blind confidence and reckless presumption in a course of profession are a ruinous principle and inevitably leads to disaster. It is “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) that God bids them work out their own salvation. While they be left here below, they are in the Adversary’s territory, for “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). Moreover, sin indwells them, and their corruptions are ever seeking to dominate them. God has faithfully warned us in His Word against our perils, and it is the part of wisdom to lay those warnings to heart. Only the presumptuous fool will disregard them, only the silly trifler will raise quibbles and make objections against them.

If God has issued cautions, it is because we stand in real need of such.

The particular peril which our text warns against is “lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). We take it that all of our readers will allow that unbelief still remains in the Christian, but it is probable that some of them will be ready to exclaim, Surely it is not possible for a real Christian to so yield thereto that he could justly be described as one having “an evil heart of unbelief?” Others are likely to at least raise the question and ask, Is it possible for one truly born again to so give way to his native unbelief in departing from the living God that he can only be characterised as a person with “an evil heart of unbelief?” Really, it seems to us almost like asking, Is it possible; or to go further, is it likely, that a rational and well-balanced person will commit suicide? Deliberately and by premeditation, No; but by carelessness and recklessness, Yes. Many a person reputed to be sane and sensible has neglected a bad cold and died from pneumonia!

One does not have to totally abandon his profession in order to make shipwreck of the Faith—he will do so just as surely if he heedlessly disregards the warnings God has given and pursues a course of blind indifference to the consequences. Perhaps the reader replies, But one who acted thus would make it manifest he was only a dead professor. To which we answer: There are degrees of carelessness and recklessness, and who is competent to draw the line and say when fatal presumption has been reached? It may be said, *We* are not required to “draw that line,” or define what degree of recklessness would prove fatal; sufficient for us to know that God will preserve His own people from reaching that stage. Granting that, yet it must also be insisted upon that God preserves His people—not in a mechanical way, but in a moral way—by enforcing their responsibility, by giving to them, “the spirit...of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7) and causing them to *use* the same.

The fact is that the eternal security of the saint has so often

been presented in such a lopsided way that the accountability of the Christian has been implicitly—if not explicitly—repudiated. It is true, blessedly true, that God “will keep the feet of his saints” (1 Sam. 2:9). But how? Not by preserving them on prohibited territory, but by keeping them in the paths of righteousness; and when they wander therefrom, by restoring them thereto. It is true, blessedly true, that God delivers His people from following a course of recklessness. But *how*? Not by assuring them that all will be well in the end, no matter how negligently they conduct themselves, but by causing them to take heed to the warnings which He has given them, by moving them to avoid the perils that menace them. A small leak will not immediately sink a ship, but it *will* eventually—if it be not stopped! The presence of unbelief in the Christian will not at once destroy him, but it would *if* he offered no resistance thereto and continuously yielded to its inclinations.

“An evil heart *of* unbelief” (Heb. 3:12) is a heart in which unbelief entirely predominates, a heart which is not only under the prevailing power of unbelief, but against which no contrary principle makes opposition. Such is the heart of every unregenerate person, such was the Christian’s heart before he was born again; and it is against such a deterioration of his heart that he is here warned. It is this evil heart of unbelief which makes the unregenerate close their eyes and ears against the Truth. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). The love of sin is the immediate cause of their unbelief. When they discover that the design of the Gospel is to part them from their sins, they will have no more to do with it. But there is also a rejection of the Truth of the Gospel *after* it has been received and professed. In many cases, those who come under the general operations of the Spirit are temporarily impressed—in some cases, deeply so—of the truth of the Gospel, are convicted and brought to acknowledge the same; yet since no supernatural principle or new nature was communicated to them, there is no lasting fruit.

Like the promising blossoms and buds on the trees in the spring, which are blown off by unfriendly winds or nipped by the frost, the salutary effects produced by an illumined understanding and an aroused conscience, sooner or later, wear off. The temptations of the world and the corruptions of their hearts either stifle their convictions, or cause them to deliberately cast them out, and the sequel is that they either avowedly or practically repudiate the Faith they have owned. They may not go so far as to openly disclaim and renounce Christianity, but they cease to maintain practical godliness. Such are those described in Titus 1:16, “They profess that they know God; but in *works* they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” The power of sin in their affections and over their wills is more influential than the light of their understandings. They are regulated neither by the rewards promised in the Gospel to obedience, nor the evils which it threatens against disobedience; but are swept downward by their own lusts. And that is the condition of great multitudes in Christendom today—they are controlled by “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12).

Not only is there the principle of unbelief in the saint, but he is also in more or less close contact with men and women, who, though they bear the name of Christians, are nevertheless completely dominated by this evil principle—the Divine gift of faith never having been communicated to them. It is those two solemn facts which make the exhortation of our text so pertinent to us. Unless the Christian earnestly seeks grace to steadfastly resist the workings of unbelief within him and to mortify the root from which they proceed, then that antagonistic element will become uppermost and gain full control over him. And unless he is much on his guard against the pernicious influence which unregenerate church members will have upon his spiritual life, and has as little to do with them as possible, then he will soon be corrupted by them and conform to their ways. Then “take heed brethren,” first, to the workings of your own hearts, and particularly to the initial oppositions made against the exercise of

faith. Second, “take heed” to those you suffer yourself to become familiar with—if they do not help you toward a closer walking with God, they will inevitably draw you back unto a “departing” from Him.

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). In view of what was pointed out earlier, it is of great importance that the reader should have a right and clear conception of what unbelief really consists. It is a far greater evil than many are aware. Unbelief is not a mere negation and passive thing as the prefix of the word might suggest. Unbelief is much more than a *lack of* believing or failure to assent unto the Truth; more than an error of the judgment. It is not simply an infirmity of human nature, but a vicious and culpable thing. Unbelief is a virulent and vicious principle of opposition to God. So far from being passive, it is an operative and active principle. It has a rooted aversion of God: “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1: 28). It is that which causes the wicked to say unto God, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14). It has an inveterate hatred against a life of holiness (Prov. 1:29; 5:12, etc.).

Take the case of Adam. His unbelief was more than a negative failure to believe the Divine threatening: It was a species of self-will and self-pleasing: “By one man’s *disobedience* many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:12). Consider Israel in the wilderness who never entered Canaan “because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19). In their case, it was not only that they failed to accredit the good report of Caleb and Joshua, but as Moses told them, “ye would not go up, but *rebelled* against the commandment of the LORD your God” (Deu. 1:26)—their unbelief was a positive thing of self-will and defiance. Examine the condition of the Jewish nation in the days of our Lord. They “received him not” (John 1:11). But that was only the negative side of their unbelief—they “will not come to” Him (John 5:40), because they “hated” Him (John 15:25). His holy demands suited not their carnal desires, and therefore, they declared, “We will not have this man to reign

over us” (Luke 19:14). Unbelief with them, too, consisted of a determination to please their own selves at all costs.

Now, this unbelief operates in various ways and takes different forms in people, according to their several temperaments, training or temptations. But in one and all unbelief consists of and acts itself by a *dislike against* the things of God. We have but to read through the first four books of the New Testament to discover what a common thing this was in those who attended on the ministry of Christ. Some found fault with this or that in His doctrinal preaching, others found His practical teaching distasteful. When He read to them from the opening verses of Isaiah 61 and declared, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21), they “bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22), but as soon as He pressed on them the sovereign and discriminating grace of God, they sought to kill Him (Luke 4:28, 29)! The young ruler had such respect for Christ that he came to be instructed by Him, but when faced by His searching requirements, “he went away sorrowful” (Matt. 19:22).

This unbelief expresses itself in a dislike against the purity and *simplicity of Gospel worship*. Noticeably was that evidenced by the Jews of the apostles’ time. They greatly admired the pompous worship of the temple, and would not be drawn off from the same to the plainness of evangelical institutions. It was the principal objection of Pagans that the early Christians worshipped God without temples or altars, a ritualistic priesthood or elaborate ceremonies, and therefore, they regarded them as atheists. It was this dislike of the purity and simplicity of Gospel worship which gave rise to and fostered the progress of the Papish apostasy—for fallen human nature preferred the glitter and tinsel of what appeals to their senses. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12) through a dislike of that worship which must be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23, 24), rather than in outward forms and fleshly display.

This unbelief expresses itself in dislike against *the doctrines*

and mysteries of the Gospel. When Paul preached Christ crucified, it was “unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). Some ridicule the imputed righteousness of Christ, and other mock at the imperative necessity of following the example which He has left us. Others rave against the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty and His predestinating grace, whereby He chose certain ones in Christ unto salvation and passed by all others. Others refuse subjection to God’s moral Law as the believer’s Rule of life, and thereby, display their enmity against Him (Rom. 8:7). Some scoff at there being three distinct Persons in the unity of the Godhead, while others reject the truth of eternal punishment because it squares not with their idea of the Divine character. We know of a denomination, which long boasted of being “sounder” than any other, now rent asunder by some of its preachers rejecting the future resurrection of our bodies. Brethren, beware of refusing anything in Scripture because you find it contrary to your reason or humbling to your pride.

This unbelief expresses itself in a dislike against *the precepts* of the Gospel. The flesh likes not to be placed under restraint and rebels against the strictness of Christ’s demands. The great work and duty of faith is to influence the soul unto universal obedience and an abstinence from all sin, out of a regard for the precepts, promises, and threatenings of the Gospel. But where faith languishes and its efficacy begins to decay, the power of unbelief sets the soul on self-pleasing. The Gospel requires us to mortify our corruptions and lusts, and while the soul be in communion with God, it desires and resolves to do so; but when communion is severed, indwelling sin endeavours to drag the soul down again into the mire. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12) by failing to deny self, take up your cross daily, and follow Christ. Refuse to gratify your lusts by opposing their first risings.

Not only is the principle of unbelief still in the Christian, but it is operative, and ever seeking to bring him under its complete dominance. All of God’s children are to some degree influenced



by “unbelief,” and are in danger of yielding more and more unto its potency. It is for that reason God here calls upon them to “take heed” of this menace. To be forewarned is to be forearmed—if we duly attend to the warning. The warning, as we have said, is pointed by the solemn example of that generation of Israel who were delivered from Egypt and yet never entered Canaan. We, too, are still in the Wilderness—and the wilderness is the place of temptation, of testing, of danger! This warning is also pointed by the case of those described in 2 Peter 2:20-22, who “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” but who afterwards turned from “the holy commandment delivered unto them,” and like the dog, “turned to his own vomit again.” Brethren, beware! Take heed to thyself! “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:23). Cry mightily unto the Lord, “I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

A final word on the *execution* of this duty: “Take heed” is a word of caution, calling for circumspection, being alert and watching against the danger warned against. It is a call to be especially on our guard against temptations, opposition, and the difficulties of the way. We are so to “heed” as to avoid being ensnared by this peril. Our distinctive avocation, our personal circumstances, certain times or seasons each has a tendency to occasion unbelief in some particular direction; and since it is there and then, we are most likely to fail, it is at *that* point, we need to exercise the greatest caution and care. We are not only to consider those special occasions and causes when they are about to assault us, but to watch against all the means and ways by which they are likely to do so. And we are to consider these dangers so as to definitely *oppose* them—by being wide awake, by seeking delivering grace, by exercising our graces. The more faith be in exercise, the less power has unbelief over us; the closer we cleave to the path of obedience, the further removed are we from the guns of the Destroyer.

### **Faith as a Masticator**

In the last article, we sounded an alarm unto our brethren

against the danger of so yielding to the active and hostile principle of unbelief—which is still within us, that it should obtain complete dominion over us; and then, we should only be described as those marked by “an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12)—that is, as *apostates*. It is therefore fitting that we should now consider the grand remedy and preventative. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:1-2).

The exhortation begun at Hebrews 3:12 is not completed unto Hebrews 4:11. The connecting link between the two chapters is found in the words, “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19)—*that* was what gave point to the exhortation of 3:12, and *that* is also made the basis of the warning of Hebrews 4:1 and the injunction of 4:11. Israel had a promise of entering into Canaan, but it profited them not, because they did not mix faith with it (Heb. 4:2). We, too, have a promise of entering the antitypical Canaan, but it will advantage us nothing if it be received with unbelief. The promise made to Israel is recorded in Exodus 6:6-8, yet the fact remains that—excepting only Caleb and Joshua—none of the adult Hebrews who were delivered from Egypt ever entered Canaan! Did then the promise of God fail of its accomplishment?

No. Why not? First, because that promise of Exodus 6 was made to Israel generally and collectively, *as a people*—it did not specify that all, or even any, of that particular generation were to enter in. Second, though no condition was expressly named, yet, as the event proved, it was necessarily implied: The promise must be “mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2)—as the threat of Jonah 3:4 could only be averted by repentance. Had an absolute and unconditional promise been made to that particular generation, it must have been performed. Instead, the fulfilment of that promise was suspended on their believing and acting accordingly. Thus, it was a promise addressed to human responsibility. God made no

promise to Israel that He would bring them into Canaan—whether they believed and obeyed, or no. Nor did their unbelief make the promise of God of none effect. It was accomplished to the next generation, who believed God and obeyed the instructions of His servant—see Joshua 21:43.

God’s dealings with the Hebrews furnish an analogy of the principles which operate in connection with the promise of the Gospel, which is addressed to sinners as moral agents. The promise is indeed “sure to all the [chosen] seed” (Rom. 4:16), for every one redeemed by Christ will verily enter the purchased possession. Yet, the Gospel itself does not testify directly to any individual that Christ so died for him in particular, that it is certain *he* shall be saved by His death. Instead, it proclaims, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). It is only by my *believing* the Gospel that I am secured of eternal life, and it is only as I hold fast the Truth and am regulated by it, that I can legitimately enjoy the comfort of the Gospel. In other words, I can only spell out my election, as I put my trust in the atoning blood of Christ, and then serve Him.

The Gospel is addressed to human responsibility. It demands a believing acceptance from those who hear it. The proclamation that Christ is a Saviour for Hell-deserving sinners avails me nothing, until I make personal appropriation of it. It avails me nothing, until I regard the Gospel as being addressed to me individually. It avails me nothing until I mix faith (Heb. 4:2) with it—that is, until I accept God’s verdict that I am a Law-condemned, lost, and bankrupt sinner, and come to Christ owning myself to be such, and put my trust in the sufficiency of His atoning sacrifice. Then, it is that—on the authority of Him who says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31)—I have Divine warrant to be assured that He is my *own* Saviour, and to say with Job, “I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25)—not because I deem myself of God’s elect, but because I have received the sinner’s Saviour.

God’s Word, whether it be the hearing or the reading of it, only

*profits* the soul as it is “mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2). Faith is so many-sided, and its operations so diverse, that (in condescension to our weakness) it has pleased the Holy Spirit to use quite a number of varied figures to set forth its operations and acts. It is likened unto looking (Isa. 45:22), unto setting to our “seal” (John 3:33), fleeing “for refuge” and laying “hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18), eating (Jer. 15:16), drinking (John 7:37), and committing “unto him” (2 Tim. 1:12). In our text, the similitude of mixing faith (Heb. 4:2) is taken from the mingling of the saliva with our food, which—through chewing it thoroughly and rolling it about in our mouth—is an aid unto digestion; and to the mixing of the juices of the stomach, so that the food is duly assimilated and becomes part of our bodies.

If our food be not properly chewed and mixed with our salvia, it will cause indigestion, and so far from being assimilated and nourishing the body, it will upset us. So it is with our hearing of the Gospel: If we mix not faith therewith, not only will the soul receive no profit, but it will add to our condemnation in the Day to come. We may listen to God’s servant and be duly impressed with his solemnity, or stirred by his earnestness, we may admire the logic of his arguments and the eloquence of his diction, we may be moved by the forcefulness of his illustrations and brought to tears by his descriptions of Christ’s sufferings—and yet, obtain no spiritual benefit therefrom. Why? Because we were occupied only with the preacher and his preaching, admiring a *sermon*. Because we failed to mix “with faith” the Word—and faith has to do solely with *God*.

Faith, my reader, brings in God. He is its sole Object. Faith has to do not with reasonings, feelings, or inward impressions and impulses—but with God and His Word. When a convicted sinner hears the Gospel and mixes faith with it, he realises that *God* is speaking through the minister, that God is speaking directly to *him*, that God is addressing his own immortal soul. It is now that he begins to realise the force of that Word, “he that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 8:8). “Let him hear” means “let him *heed*.” Let him take home to himself *what* he hears and be

suitably affected thereby. It is the same if I am *reading* the Word. If we would “mix [it] with faith,” then I must regard that Word as God speaking through it, speaking directly and personally to *me*, speaking that which is true and for my good, and I must respond thereto and act accordingly.

The Feast is spread and the broad call is made, “Come; for all things are now ready” (Luke 14:17). That invitation is freely made to all who hear it, and there is a place assured at that Feast to every one who responds. In order to respond, I must mix faith with it—that is, I must thankfully recognise that invitation is made to *me*, utterly unworthy and unfit though I feel myself to be. I must believe that God means what He says, and promptly avail myself of His gracious overture. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15). It is not as one who has reason to believe his name is written in the Book of life, nor as one who feels a qualifying work of grace has begun in him, but simply as a *sinner*, I am to come to Christ for salvation. Receive that Truth into your heart as a little child, as addressed to you, and you *have* mixed faith with it, and masticated the Gospel.

What we said earlier under this title was designed chiefly for “seekers”—or awakened sinners—longing for peace of soul. For this occasion, it is to the young Christian we would more especially address our remarks—and to him, we would say, ‘The secret of success in the Christian life is to *continue* as you began. As you obtained the pardon of your sin in the first case by mixing faith (Heb. 4:2) with the Gospel, so you will only grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by mixing faith with the Word of God. Only by so doing, will you become a fruitful branch of the Vine; only thus will you obtain strength for the production of good works; only thus will you glorify God in your spirit and body which are His, adorn your profession, and be a real help to your fellows.

While we may not be able to fully analyse and understand the whole process of physical nutrition, yet there is no mystery about

it—for it is regulated by certain laws of dietetics appointed by our Maker. The growth and development, the health and strength of the body is determined, in the first instance, by our regular partaking of food—wholesome food properly masticated. The analogy holds good spiritually. The food which God has provided for our souls is His own Word, the heavenly manna; and that Word does not act upon us magically, but according to fixed principles instituted by God—the first of which is that it must be received *by faith*. For that reason, it is called “the word of faith” (Rom. 10:8)—it is the Word to which faith is due, the Word which profits us not until received by faith. For the same reason, we read of being “nourished up in the word of faith” (1 Tim. 4:6)—that is, the Word broken up into words and “mixed with faith.”

Seed which is cast into the earth brings forth no fruit, unless it incorporates the fructifying virtues of the soil. And the Word of God, as it falls on our ears, or beneath our eyes, will produce no fruit—unless it be mixed with faith. It is faith which admits the Word into our hearts and gives it a subsistence in the soul. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). That is not a definition of what faith is, but a description of what faith produces. The Divine, spiritual heavenly and supernatural objects, which are presented to us in the Word, appear intangible and nebulous to the unbeliever—but *faith* gives them substance and reality. Though the things hoped for be invisible; yet future, faith makes them sure and solid and gives them a real subsistence in the soul. Faith does for us spiritually what fancy does for us naturally. Faith gives the things promised by God a present actuality in the heart, and makes Christ and Heaven more certain than if seen by the physical eye.

The material food that we eat only advantages us as it is duly mixed with our saliva, swallowed, and then digested by the juices of the stomach. When that food *is* masticated and assimilated, it becomes a means of strength within us, being made a part of our bodies. In like manner, when the Word is properly meditated upon, “mixed with faith” and assimilated, it is a means of

spiritual energy within us and becomes a part of our lives. When Truth is really believed, it becomes so united to the faith which receives it, that it is incorporated with it, is realised in the soul, and is taken up into that new nature whereby we live unto God. Only as the words of God are personally appropriated and spiritually digested do they become a living principle within us, energizing unto obedience. Faith is not a mere assent to the truth of the things presented, but is such a reception thereof, as gives them a real inbeing in the soul so that they produce their proper effects.

We are bidden to “lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the *engrafted* word” (James 1:21). As a “graft” draws all the sap of the stock unto itself, so when the Word is “engrafted” into us, it causes the faculties of the soul—our thoughts, affections, energies and wills—to serve God. When Christ spoke of His disciples as branches of the Vine, He said, “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine.” To which, He added, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you” (John 15:4, 7)—not only do our persons need to be engrafted into Christ, but in order to fruitfulness, His words must be engrafted into us. By receiving the Word in faith and meekness, it becomes incorporated with the soul; and as the nature of the stock and graft become one common principle of fruitbearing, so the Word received by faith into the soul becomes one common principle of obedience.

We are also exhorted to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16), and that can only be done by “mixing faith” with it. One great aid to that is to *ruminare* frequently upon some portion of Scripture. The word “ruminare” signifies to “chew the cud,” as all clean animals do—that is, those that were “clean” under the Mosaic law. But the counterpart in us is to muse upon what we have heard or read, which is the best aid there is for a weak memory. Meditation stands to reading, as mastication does to eating. If we are to “mix faith” with the words of God, we must fix the mind on them. That is the force of the contrast presented in James 1:23-25—the ideal and profitless hearer of the

Word is likened “unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass,” but “straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” “But whoso looketh [bows down and inquires] into the perfect law of liberty, and *continueth* therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

As we meditate upon the Word and mix faith therewith (appropriate it to ourselves), it sets *love* a-work: “While I was musing the fire burned” (Psa. 39:3)! As the Truth is believed, and its purity, its sweetness, its value, its suitability unto our case is realised in the soul—under such a consideration of it, love is drawn forth unto its Author, and obedience becomes easy. In this way, a delight for the things of God is increased within us, and we perceive them to be excellent and precious. Faith makes the soul in love with spiritual things, and love fills us with the desires after them. By the Word being incorporated into the soul, its natural operations are changed and moved to the production of spiritual effects; unto which, previously, it had no virtue, no desire, no strength. Finally, as faith is mixed with the Word of God, it transmutes it into earnest prayer.

What has been pointed out above of the Word in general, pertains to each part of it in particular. Take its doctrinal parts: They will profit you nothing, unless faith be mixed with them; that is, until carnal reasoning on them is completely set aside, and I receive them unhesitatingly as a part of Divine revelation unto me personally. So it is with its precepts. Said the Psalmist, “I have believed thy *commandments*” (Psa. 119:66); that is, he regarded them as addressed to himself personally, as Divine laws which must regulate his life, and he applied them to his own walk. So with the promises: Where they are given in the plural number, faith puts in its claim and individualizes them; and for the personal pronouns, substitutes my own name. Equally so with the Divine warnings and threatenings: Not until I view them as meaning what they say, and as addressed to myself individually, do they have any effect upon me; but when I mix faith with them, I tremble at God’s Word (Isa. 66:2).



## Faith as a Shield

A shield is a weapon of defence, held in front of the person to prevent the missiles of the foe injuring the body. A “shield” then is a means of *protection*. In Scripture, it is used as a metaphor of that which affords security against the assaults of the Devil. Varied indeed are the shifts and shields which professing Christians employ. Some trust in the sufficiency of carnal reasoning to repel the attacks which Satan makes on their souls. Some shelter behind human traditions—and poor protection they give! Some seek refuge beneath the shield of fatalism, but get sorely wounded. It is indeed blessedly true that whatsoever cometh to pass was eternally foreordained by God; yet, that truth was not revealed in Scripture as a rule for us to walk by. Others attempt to hide behind an avowed inability to do anything to help themselves, though they act very differently when menaced by physical perils! Others take presumption for their shield: Heedless of warnings and reckless of dangers, they imagine themselves to be strong and proof against the attacks of Satan. Peter fell through self-confidence!

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16). This is one of the seven pieces of the “armour of God,” which the Christian is bidden to “take unto” himself and “put on,” in order that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil (Eph. 6:11-17)—here likened unto “fiery darts” because his temptations are noiseless, swift, piercing, and dangerous, designed to enflame our lusts. And as we are exhorted to “resist stedfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9), our Adversary the Devil, who “as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8), so here, we are told “above all, [to be] taking the shield of faith” (Eph. 6:16), for that is the only effectual “shield” which will stand the soul in good stead when the Enemy launches his attack upon us. The “above all” has a double force: First, it means *over* all the other pieces of armour, serving as a protecting roof above them. The shield of the ancients was made of light but hard metal, having a loop attached to the inner side, through

which the hand was thrust to secure a firm hold; and then, the shield could be raised or lowered according as need required.

The different pieces of armour represent the various spiritual graces of the Christian, and the “above all” in our text signifies, second, pre-eminently, chiefly, supremely. It is an all-important and essential thing that we should take the shield of faith. First, because it is to guard the whole man. Satan assaults the *head*, seeking to deceive with subtle error and false doctrine, or by unsettling us with doubts. Nothing but faith will enable us to retain what we have received from the Word. When Satan calls that Word in question, faith will interpose with “It is written,” written by Him who “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2)—and that is an effectual shield. He assails the *heart*, seeking to get us to question the love of God in the day of adversity, or to draw out our affections world-ward in the day of prosperity; but faith declares, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15), and will esteem “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:26). Or he may direct his fiery darts at your *knees*, telling you it is vain to pray, for God will not hear you; but faith lays hold of one of the prayer promises and betakes itself to the throne of grace.

But the “above all” signifies not only that “the shield of faith” is for guarding the whole man, but also that it is essential for the preservation of our *other graces*. As Spurgeon well said in his sermon on this verse, “The man of God is to put on the girdle and the breastplate, and he is also to be shod and wear his helmet. Though these are all armour, faith is an armour for his armour; it is not only a defence for him, but a defence for his defences.” In other words, unless faith be kept healthy and active, the other graces will languish and be helpless. As Charnock says, “Other graces may fail and the soul recover, but if faith failed, all would be lost.” Satan will attack our sincerity by attempting to sever the girdle of truth (Eph. 6:14), and only faith in exercise will preserve our sincerity. He will attack our practical righteousness or holiness, seeking to batter in “the breastplate” (Eph. 6:14); and only faith will enable us to say with Joseph, “How then can I do

this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9)! All the Christian graces need Divine grace to preserve them, and that grace is given in response to the exercise of faith.

“Above all, taking the shield of faith” (Eph. 6:16). The faith which God has given to His child is to be *made use of*. It is to perform varied duties and is fitted to accomplish many useful ends. It is not only the instrument by which the soul feeds on God’s Word, but it is also the grand defensive weapon for protecting the soul against Satan’s temptations. Since the Christian’s faith was imparted by God, it turns to God as its Object. Such a faith is not grounded on fancies and feelings, dreams and visions, but is based upon and built up by the Word. Faith credits the testimony of Holy Writ: It does not regard the Devil as a fiction, but as a solemn reality; and views sin not as a trifle, but as that “abominable thing” which God hates (Jer. 44:4). It does not look upon the warnings and threatenings of Scripture as mere bogies, but as danger-signals, which we disregard at our peril. And therefore, as the Psalmist declared, “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler” (Psa. 91:4). If the saint be “girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14), his soul will be more secure against the fiercest assault of Satan than was the body of the knight of old who went forth into battle clad in his coat of mail.

Now, as the best of shields is of no value to the soldier in the day of battle, unless he *uses* it, so faith is of no avail to the Christian when tempted by the Devil, unless he has it in exercise. There is a sacred art in being able to handle the shield of faith, and that art consists of having God’s Word stored in our hearts, and then drawing promptly upon the same in the hour of need. Let us be very simple and practical. If tempted to covetousness, I must use that Word, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Matt. 6:19). If solicited by evil companions, I must heed that injunction, “If sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Prov. 1:10), and that will prove an effectual shield. If the Devil seeks to enkindle anger or bitterness against a brother or sister, and I lay hold of the precept, “Be kindly affectioned one to another” (Rom. 12:10), his fiery darts will be quenched. It is because the *details*

of Scripture have so little place in our meditations that Satan trips us so frequently. How pertinent was the Saviour's responses to the wiles of Satan! Without modification, could He say, "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psa. 17:4).

But faith is not only to deliver from Satan's solicitations to evil, but also from his temptations to fears and frights, despondency and despair; and therefore, it must make use of the Divine *promises*, as well as precepts. There must be full confidence in God's faithfulness and power to make good His pledges. The Devil will tell you, 'Things will be so bad after the war is over, and the coffers of the government so empty, that you will starve;' but faith will repel his dart with, "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19). He may argue, 'Things will come to such a pass that no servant of Christ will be allowed to minister unto the saints;' but faith will quench that dart with the grand promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). He may answer, 'But your corruptions will prove too strong for you;' 'No,' replies faith, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). 'But,' continues Satan, 'you are weak, and I shall yet destroy you!' 'No,' says faith, 'Christ gives to the feeblest of His sheep eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of His hand' (John 10:28-29). That is what we understand by *using* faith as a *shield*.

Some may be inclined to object unto what is said above, by pointing out that the implication throughout is that the Christian has it in his own unaided power to make use of faith whenever he pleases; whereas, in fact, he is as much dependent upon God for the motions of his faith, as he was for the original impartation of it. That is not disputed; but is it relevant? We are not discussing the Christian's ability or his inability, but rather, are pressing one phase of his accountability; and in so doing, we are but emulating the apostle. After telling the saints they were opposed by the whole of the organized forces of Satan, he bade them, "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in

the evil day” (Eph. 6:13); and then, specified the use they were to make of each particular part of their armour. Therein, he was enforcing the Christian’s responsibility, and he did not weaken—or rather, annul the same—by adding, ‘though of yourselves, ye are incapable of so doing.’ Not so did the Divinely-inspired teacher act!

While it is true that the Christian is wholly dependent upon God; yet, it is not true that he is wholly impotent as the non-Christian—to insist that he *is*, is to deny that regeneration has effected any radical change in him, that there is an essential difference between those who have been made new creatures in Christ, and those who are dead in trespasses and sins. If the Christian’s faith be weak and sickly, the fault is entirely his own. The way to obtain more faith is to exercise that which we already have—see Luke 8:18. The best way to exercise the faith we have is to expectantly ask the Lord for an increase of it—Luke 17:5. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

### **Faith as an Overcomer**

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). Four questions call for answer: Why “whatsoever” rather than “whosoever?” What is “the world” which is to be overcome? How does faith overcome it? What is the extent of its victory? The persons spoken of are the regenerate, and “whatsoever” is used because it takes in whatever may be their station or situation in this life. Whosoever is born of God, no matter what his rank or situation, “overcometh the world.” Regeneration is wrought equal and alike in all, and it produces the same fruits and effects in all, as it respects the essentials of godliness. It is not drawn forth into exercise and act in all alike, for there are particular duties to be performed and particular graces to be exercised—according to such times and places as are personal, but not universal—as, for example, one called to endure martyrdom. But “whatsoever [person] is born of God [no matter

how distinguished from others by His providence] overcometh the world.”

The “world” is a term which is used in Scripture with many shades of meaning. Sometimes it means the earth; at others, the Church of Christ; at others, empty professors. When used in an ethical or religious sense, it denotes that system over which Satan presides as “prince” (John 14:30) or as “god” (2 Cor. 4:4)—the supreme director of all false religions. Since there is nothing which the Devil hates so much as the Gospel, his main activities are engaged in the corrupting of it, in deceiving souls by plausible counterfeits. But that “faith” in Christ and His salvation—as results from a Scriptural knowledge of Him, imparted to the spiritual mind by the light and teaching of the Holy Spirit—sees through Satan’s imitations. Only by a believing reception of the Truth can error be overcome. One of the fruits of the new birth, then, is a faith which not only enables its possessor to overcome the sensual and sinful customs, and the carnal maxims and policies by which the profane world is regulated, but also the lying delusions and errors by which the professing world is fatally deceived.

1 John 5:4 opens with “For,” which intimates the reason why that to the regenerate the commandments of God “are not grievous” (1 John 5:3); so in this verse, “the world” signifies whatever has the effect of rendering the Divine precepts distasteful to men. The “world” is in direct antagonism to God and His people, and we may detect its presence and identify it with certainty by perceiving the effect it produces on our hearts in *this* way: The world is that which ministers to the carnal nature—be it persons or things—and which tends to render obedience to God irksome and unpleasant. Any one or any thing which draws your heart away from God and His authority is *for you* “the world.” Whatever lessens your estimate of Christ and heavenly things, and hinders practical piety is, *for you*, “the world”—be it the cares of this life, riches, receiving honour from men, social prestige and pomp, the fear of man lest you be dubbed “peculiar” or “fanatical” is, *for you*, “the world”—and

either you overcome it, or it will fatally overcome you.

Now, the only thing which will or can “overcome the world” is a God-given, but self-exercised faith. And faith does so, first, by receiving into the heart God’s infallible *testimony* of the same. He declares that “the world” is a corrupt, evanescent, hostile thing, which shall yet be destroyed by Him. His Holy Word teaches that the world is “evil” (Gal. 1:4), that “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16), that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19) and shall yet be “burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). As faith accepts God’s verdict of it, the mind is spiritually enlightened; and its possessor views it as a worthless, dangerous, and detestable thing. Second, *by obeying* the Divine commands concerning it, God has bidden us, “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2), “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15), and warns us that “whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). By heeding the Divine precepts, its spell over the heart is broken.

Third, by occupying the soul with more glorious, soul-delighting and satisfying objects. We often hear and see 2 Corinthians 4:16 or 17 quoted, but rarely the explanatory words which follow. The daily renewing of the inner man and our afflictions working for us an eternal weight of glory are qualified by: “*While* we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The more the substance of the world to come engages the heart, the less hold will the shadows of this world have upon it. Thus, faith wrought in the saints of old: “For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: *For* he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:9-10).

Fourth, by drawing out the heart unto Christ. As it was, by fleeing to Him for refuge that the soul was first delivered from the power and thralldom of this world, so it is throughout the Christian life. The more we cultivate real communion with Christ, the less attraction will the baubles of this world have for us. The strength of temptation lies entirely in the bent of our affections, “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). While Christ is beheld as “the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:10) as “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16), the things which charm the poor worldling will repel us. Moreover, as faith beholds in the mirror of the Word, the “glory of the Lord,” the soul itself is “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). The world gains the victory over the unregenerate by captivating their affections and capturing their wills; but the saint overcomes the world, because his affections are set upon Christ and his will yielded to Him.

What is the extent of the Christian’s victory? Through temporary weakness of faith, he may neglect the means of grace and fall into sin, yet his soul will be so wretched that he will return to Christ for cleansing and fresh supplies of grace. “Though the conflict of grace with corrupt nature, and the attractions and terrors of the world, is often very sharp, and though regenerate men may be baffled, cast down, and appear slain in the battle; yet the Divine life within him, being invigorated by the Holy Spirit, will again excite him to arise and renew the conflict with redoubled fortitude and resolution; so that at length, the victory will be his decidedly” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). The life of faith is a “fight” (1 Tim. 6:12), a warfare in which there are no furloughs or “leaves,” and our success therein depends upon renouncing our own strength and counting solely on the sufficiency of Christ’s grace.

Here, then, we have a sure criterion by which we may determine our Christian progress or spiritual growth. If the things of this world have a decreasing power over me, then my faith is becoming stronger. If I am holding more lightly the things most



prized by the ungodly, then I must be increasing in an experimental and soul-satisfying knowledge of Christ. If I be less cast down when some of the riches and comforts of this world be taken from me, then that is evidence they have less hold upon me. If I find the company of the most cultured and charming worldlings have a dampening effect upon my spirit, and I am happy when relieved of their presence, then my faith is overcoming the world. Yet the tense of the verb must not be overlooked: Faith which “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4)—not which “has overcome.” So far from being an immediate achievement, it is a lifelong business, a prolonged and continuous strife.

***“O may my heart be occupied, So wholly, Lord, with Thee,  
That with Thy beauty satisfied, I elsewhere none may see.”***

