

THE BETTER ROAD

by Charles S. Price

CHAPTER III, FROM "THE REAL FAITH" ©1940

I BELIEVE there is a difference between the *faith* of the Old Testament under law and the *faith* of the New Testament under grace. The key word of Paul's epistle to the Hebrews is "better," and this is particularly interesting in the light of the fifth chapter of this remarkable letter. He is trying to get them to see the truth of Christianity by contrast. He does not abrogate the past, but shows them that Christianity grew out of Judaism just as the flower grows out of the root.

Hidden away in the ritual of the root was the color, the fragrance, and the beauty of the flower of grace that was to come later. Was not the flower better than the root? Was not the end better than the beginning? Was not the blood of Christ better than the blood of the lamb on Jewish altars slain? Was not Jesus better than the angels who had visited their fathers from time to time in memorable days of their national history? Was not the voice of God's Son better than the voice of the prophets?

This then was the heart throb of the Epistle. When he comes to the faith chapter, is there any reason for his departure from the purpose of the letter, and the motive of the epistle? I think not. The theme is still better, and the purpose is to show the beauty of the faith of Jesus in comparison to those works and words of the patriarchs and prophets which were counted unto them as faith. It was the faith of that day. It was the faith for that time. Remember that Paul closes that faith chapter with the words, "God having provided some *better* thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

In other words, the acts and testimonies of the ancients were held up like pictures in a gallery for the Christian Jews to behold and admire. There was the story of Abel and Enoch. Noah, Abraham, Sara, Isaac and Jacob were framed in a picture of obedience to the divine word. Then there came Moses and Joshua, followed by a grand parade of the illustrious of the days of old, before Jesus was born in the stable of Bethlehem. But Jesus was born now-and nowhere in the entire epistle does Paul tell them, or us, that our *faith today* should be limited in its pattern, working, or operation to the faith of our fathers. Instead, he tells of something *better*. He introduces the flower which has grown out of the root.

Faith in the old days was manifested by word and deed in obedience to command. But there remains more. The word and deed are only a part, and a small one at that, of what the New Testament teaches us that faith really is. Of course, there will be work, and there will be testimony. But that alone is not faith. Not New Testament faith, at any rate!

In this connection, it is interesting to note that if you turn back to the Old Testament account of the lives of the men and women introduced in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the word *faith* is *never mentioned* in connection with their lives at all. The word faith occurs in the Old Testament only twice, and in one of those instances it is prophetic and in the other is used in a negative way regarding the unbelief of a wicked generation. The two passages are Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2 4.

So we must come then to the unmistakable conclusion that Paul is not holding up the lives of these illustrious Patriarchs as a pattern for them to follow, but rather as the excellent beginning in God's will of something more wonderful which they were to discover in Jesus. The faith they were to possess was *all their fathers had and more*. Seeing that they were surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, they too were to lay aside weights and sins and run with patience the *new race* which was set before them. They were to do what? Look to Jesus who was the *Author and Finisher of their faith*.

If He was the Author and the Finisher of their faith, and the faith of Paul, then He is the Author and Finisher of my faith too. In other words, all true faith begins and ends in Him. It does not say that He is the Author and the Finisher of *His faith alone*, but it states that lie is the Author and Finisher of *my faith* and of yours.

FAITH AND PRESUMPTION

There is nothing before the Alpha and nothing after the Omega. He begins it, and it begins in Him. He ends it and it ends in Him. When I want it, I must seek His face! I cannot get it anywhere else, but from that matchless One of whom it is said, He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith. Not of His alone but of *yours and mine*.

Have we made the mistake, after looking at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and *seeing what they did then*, of rolling up our sleeves to show and prove our faith by what we do? Have you ever done that? If you have, then you have stood in bewilderment at what seemed to be unanswered prayer and the inoperative power of what you thought was faith! Remember that faith acts, but the act comes from the faith, rather than faith from the act. That is why it is very easy to step over the border line from the Faith God imparts into the realm of presumption. This was illustrated to me in a very clear and wonderful way some time ago.

In Victoria, B. C., some years ago, I was entering the Metropolitan Methodist Church in company with a few ministers. At the door of the edifice we saw a kindly old lady being taken out of a truck in a wheel chair. I raised my hat and gave her a "God bless you." Tears welled up in her eyes as she replied, "He has been blessing me, Dr. Price. He is so kind and gracious, and I can feel His presence now."

"Have you come for healing?" I inquired.

"Yes, I have," she replied, "and praise His Name, I know the waters are troubled." Just then the truck driver leaned over and said, "Shall I come back, lady, to take you home after the service?"

She had traveled a good many miles, and the only way to get her home in a wheel chair was by truck, for the chair was too large for an automobile. She hesitated. Then a light came over her face as she replied, "No, I am not going to need a truck. I will leave my wheel chair behind and go home on the train." The driver scratched his bewildered head and grinned at what he thought was a foolish woman. Away he drove. And she did not need him! She went to her house rejoicing, and she went on the train!

I told that story in a meeting I conducted in the middle west. The next day a lady sent a message that she would like to see me for a moment in her cottage. I found her lying on a couch with a group of people around her who were singing a hymn. She looked up at me and said, "Brother Price, I have sent the wheel chair home." She waited for a shout from me. None came. Instead my heart fell. There was no faith and I knew it. She discerned I did not enthuse over her act, so she turned away from me and said, "If God can do it for one woman, He can do it for another."

When I left the building that night she was again the center of a group who were insisting that she arise and walk; but she went away sorrowful. Of her the Lord could say, "There is one thing thou lackest." The two acts were just the same. Two wheel chairs were sent home. In one case it was faith; and in the other it was presumption. In New Testament *faith* the act can be born of faith; but faith cannot be born of the act. The act can come from faith, but the faith must come from God.

This, then, is the *better* way of Paul's epistle to the Hebrews. This is the purpose and the motive back of what we call the Faith Chapter of the Book. Have you not stood in amazement before the unfolding benevolence and generosity of the Lord? Do you not know that no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly? Have you a need? Take it to Jesus. Have you a problem? Lay it at the Master's feet. Begin to trust Him, and as you give Him your confidence and trust, you will find His Faith will become operative in you. Why play with the teacup of our struggles and endeavors when His faith is as boundless as the ocean?

He is no respecter of persons. He loves the weakest and the simplest of us all, but we become so important in our own eyes and so proud of our spiritual accomplishments that our testimonies display only the righteousness which is vainly of self. He looks at it—the righteousness which is filthy rags! We need to come in the guileless spirit of little children: come with the bells of love pealing in the belfry of our hearts! It is useless to wait until we feel we are worthy, for that we will never be. Come as a little child to the One who in the days of old set a little one in the midst of them and said to the Pharisees, "Except...ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Steal away softly to Jesus. In this day of grace, the faith for the Christian can be found only in Christ; but in our blessed Lord you will find sufficient for all your need. What Noah had was good, but what we have is better. Noah had God's Word, but we have God's Son. Noah built on God's Word, but our foundation is Jesus Himself. So we find it in the whole of that remarkable chapter: a recitation of God's glory manifest in the acts of men who believed God and who walked the walk of obedience with Him. One of them, named Enoch, went for a walk with Him one day and forgot to come back. When the faith which is of God came to earth in the form of the Son of God, Paul was constrained to say to the Hebrews, "That was the old faith, but here is the new. That was the good way, but this is the better."

A STORY OF MULLER

Christ was to be all in all. And the love of the Father's heart is shown in the fact that He is not only able, but *willing* to meet our every need. I have been reading the life of George Muller. Pastor Charles Parsons tells of an experience with Muller in the following words:

"A warm summer day found me slowly walking up the shade groves of Ashley Hill, Bristol. At the top there met my gaze the immense buildings which shelter over two thousand orphans, built by a man who has given the world the most striking object lesson in faith it has ever seen.

"The first house is on the right, and here, among his own People, in plain, unpretentious apartments, lives a saintly patriarch, George Muller. Passing through the lodge gate, I paused a moment to look at House No. 3 before me, only one of the five erected at a cost of \$600,000.

"The bell is answered by an orphan, who conducts me up a lofty stone staircase, and into one of the private rooms of the venerable founder. Mr. Muller has attained the remarkable age of ninety two. As I stand in his Presence, veneration fills my mind. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man." (Leviticus 19:32).

"He received me with a cordial handshake, and bade me welcome. It is something to see a man by whom God has accomplished a mighty work; it is more to hear the tones of his voice; far more than either to be brought into immediate contact with his spirit, and feel the warm breath of his soul breathed into one's own. The communion of that hour will be forever graven on my memory.

"I have read your life, Mr. Muller, and noticed how greatly, at times, your faith has been tried. Is it with you now as formerly?" Most of the time he leaned forward, his gaze directed on the floor. But now he sat erect and looked for several moments in my face, with an earnestness that seemed to penetrate my very soul. There was a grandeur and majesty about those undimmed eyes, so accustomed to spiritual visions and to looking into the deep things of God. I do not know whether the question seemed a sordid one, or whether it touched a lingering remnant of the old self to which he alludes in his discourses. Anyhow, there was no shadow of doubt that it roused his whole being. After a brief pause, during which his face was a sermon, and the depths of his clear eyes flashed fire, he unbuttoned his coat, and drew from his pocket an old fashioned purse, with rings in the middle, separating the character of the coins. He placed it in my hands, saying: "All I am possessed of is in that purse—every penny! Save for myself? Never! When money is sent to me for my own use, I pass it on to God. As much as £1, 000 has thus been sent at one time; but I do not regard these gifts as belonging to me; they belong to Him, whose I am, and whom I serve. Save for myself? I dare not; it would dishonor my loving, gracious, all bountiful Father.

"The great point is never to give up until the answer comes. I have been praying for fifty two years, every day, for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but will be! How can it be otherwise? There is the unchanging promise of Jehovah, and on that I rest. The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it. Oh, how good, kind, gracious and condescending is the One with whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I had asked or thought! I am only a poor frail, sinful man; but He has heard my prayers tens of thousands of times, and used me as the means of bringing tens of thousands into the way of Truth. I say tens of thousands in this and other lands. These unworthy lips have proclaimed salvation to great multitudes, and very many have believed unto eternal life."

