

The Three Steps of Faith

Sermon #0826

Study given by W. D. Frazee—June 22, 1957

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" Ephesians 2:8-9.

You are saved by grace, through faith. It is the gift of God. Grace is, as often said, un-merited favor. In other words, God treats us better than we deserve.

We deserve death and He gives us life. We deserve damnation and He gives us pardon. That's God's free grace, His un-merited favor.

There is something that must respond to that grace. We are told in Titus 2:11 that the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, yet all men aren't saved. While the grace of God appears to all men, only a small portion accept it.

It is, of course, through faith that we accept salvation. Faith is the hand that lays hold on that promise of God. Paul tells us that faith, through which we are saved in accepting the grace of God, is not of ourselves.

Humanity originates nothing. We have not one good thing. The grace that God offers us, and the faith by which we lay hold of it, are His gifts. Nevertheless, while faith is God's to give, it is ours to exercise.

We can illustrate that in many ways. God gave manna out there in the desert, but the children of Israel had to do pick it up and eat it. Although it was a gift of God, unless they put forth the effort to eat it, they would starve to death with manna all around them.

So millions of people today are starving to death spiritually with the grace of God within reach all around them because they do not stretch forth the hand of faith and lay hold of it.

This morning I have something good I want to share with you. I want to study with you this matter of faith, and it has come to me very simply as I have been meditating on it.

I want you to think of it as the three stories of a house. First the foundation. We might say the basement level. Next the ground floor that is seen by everyone on the outside. Then the second story.

The first, second, and third steps in faith are all necessary. They are all essential. Each one is very simple and made very plain in the Scriptures.

I love this text. It makes it so plain:

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" Romans 10:17.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. That's the first point we want to get clear in our thinking this morning. Suppose you want more faith. What will you do? Hear more of the Word of God.

If you only hear a little of the Word of God, how much faith will you have? Just a little. But if you will hear more, you will have more. And the more you hear, the more faith you will have.

That's the way it works. In other words, there is a spiritual diet which will build up faith in your mind and character. That spiritual diet is the Word of God. But if you only get a teaspoon full a day, that's hardly enough to keep a bird alive, let alone a man.

We need at least two good square meals a day. The Word of God is food for the mind and soul, and it builds faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

It is not enough to just hear the Word of God. If that is all you do, it is like a man who is forever building a foundation. Jesus talked about a man who started a tower. The people stood around and looked and finally said:

"This man began to build, and was not able to finish it"
Luke 14:30.

According to the 29th verse he got as far as the foundation. Is the foundation important? It is very important, but I would hate to live in a foundation all my life. Wouldn't you? Yes. It wouldn't be very encouraging or satisfying.

There are some that have been years building their spiritual house of faith, and all they have is a foundation. It may be a good foundation. They may have read the Word of God for five, ten, twenty years, but there is something lacking. All the reading in the world will never give it to them. All the study in the world will never bring it to them. No.

There is something else that must be done. Let's see if we can find out what it is:

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9,10.

We are not only to hear, we are to speak. We are not only to use our ears, but our mouths. Do you see? We are to say something. What do you suppose we are to say? We are to say what we have heard.

"The spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come" Revelation 22:17.

Our words are to be the echo of what we have heard. Is that correct?

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" Psalm 107:1-2.

What do you have to do to say so? Open your mouth. That's right. And this is the next step. We are to hear, and then we are to say. We are to listen, and then we are to speak. And the thing we are to say is what we heard. The thing we are to speak is what we listen to. We are to hear the Word of God and then say it. We are to listen, and then speak it. We are to see what God says, and then say, That's just what I believe.

Amen is a word that is often used in the Bible. It means "may it be so". When you and I hear the Word of God in the sermon on Sabbath morning, or any other time, God intends that we should express our faith, our belief, our confidence, and our agreement with the word read from the Bible by saying, Amen.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen" Psalm 106:48.

I have heard of places where they have an Amen corner. Someone over hear or over there say, Amen. But the Bible says let all the people say, Amen.

Are you one of the people? Well, God wants you to say, Amen. Do you know why He wants you to? Expression deepens impression. When the impression has been made upon our ears through hearing, then it is to be deepened by expression. We are to speak out what was spoken in. And unless we do that, we can come to church years on end and still feel a lack in our souls.

That is what is the matter with a lot of people. They are dried up, shriveled up Christians. They keep hearing the Word of God. They come to church. They study their Sabbath School lesson and read the Spirit of Prophecy, but they feel a lack. What's the matter? Ah, they need to express. They need to express everything that is impressed.

Speak out what God speaks in, not just on the Sabbath, but all through the week. Why, bless your heart, that's why God has given us seven days. Sometimes it takes all week to express the blessings we got in one Sabbath. Let's keep pouring them out. Let's tell those in the home and in the neighborhood the good things we have found in the Word of God.

I think someone here this morning is going to take this literally, and go from this service and start telling about the things we are studying this morning.

And friends, they are worth telling. They are worth sharing. They are wonderful. As you express them, remember that it builds something in your spiritual house that all the reading and studying and listening and hearing in the world will never do.

By the way, I might call attention to the man that talks without studying and listening. He is a man that tries to build a house without a foundation. The Word of God says he is a foolish man.

A man that tries to talk without first listening and tries to speak without first studying is a foolish man indeed. But on the other hand, the man that builds a foundation should go on and build the next story. He should not only hear the Word of God, but say it. And that applies to every one of us. "Let all the people say, Amen."

There is another story on this house.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves" James 1:22.

It is all right to hear, but be doers of the Word as well as hearers. Oh how pitiful it is to hear a man that is talking all the time and not doing anything about it. That's about as bad as a man that hears and doesn't say anything. In fact, it may be worse.

But how wonderful to hear the Word of God, say the Word of God, and do the Word of God. That is faith, my friends. Faith leads us to hear the Word of God. The more we hear, the more faith we have. Faith leads us to echo the Word of God, to speak it. The more we speak it, the more faith we have. Faith leads us to do the Word of God. The more we do it the more faith we have.

"Blessed are they that do His commandments"
Revelation 22:14.

Blessed are they that do what He says. How can you do the commandments unless you first hear them? You can't. You have to hear them, and then accept them. You have to say what the commandment says.

If the commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," you say, Yes Lord, I believe that. I will do that. I will remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Then you proceed to go and do that very thing.

If the commandment says, "Honor thy father and thy mother," You say, All right Lord, if that's what you say, that's what I say. I will honor my father and my mother. I will be obedient and cooperate. I will honor my parents. Then you proceed to go and do that very thing. That is faith friends.

Let's see if we can get something that will make it just a little plainer, if possible:

"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" James 1:21.

Receive what? The engrafted Word. That agrees with what we read in Romans 10:17: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Let's go to John 3:16 and say it together:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" John 3:16.

We are not only to receive, we are to believe.

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" John 1:12.

We are to receive the Word of God, we are to believe it, and we are to say so. That belief is to be expressed. We believe with our hearts, and we confess with our mouths the truth of what God has said. But as we have already seen, it is not enough to hear and to speak. Our actions must be in harmony.

The kind of listening and believing that God is talking about finds expression in doing something.

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams" 1 Samuel 15:22.

I am going to put some other words to help us. I am going to put read. I am going to put testify. I am going to put live. We are to live out.

Let's apply this. We are to hear the Word of God and receive it. All that means the same thing, doesn't it? We take the Word of God, open it, and let it talk to our hearts. Then we are to believe it. We are to say that we believe it. We are to testify to the fact that God is true. We are to speak out the same thing that we read in the Word of God.

Having done that, we are to proceed to live it. We are to obey it and do what it says. That's the three stories in the house of faith.

I have another illustration for you. In the ground we put a seed. It is a little kernel of corn. It spreads out at the root. What comes up? There is a shoot that begins to come up. Watch it grow.

What are you looking for? You are looking for some ears of corn. And if that doesn't happen, you would say it isn't worth much. We have the root and the shoot and the fruit. That's it.

This is the plant of faith, and the seed is the Word of God. If you want a plant, put seed in the ground. But a shoot of corn is nothing but a promise. The fulfillment is in the ear of corn filled with grain just like that seed down there in the ground. So when you and I talk good fruits, when we say what we have read in the Word of God, all we are doing is giving a promise of what our lives are supposed to be. And God pity the fellow that's talking all the time, but has no fruit.

You remember the fig tree that Jesus came to one morning. It was covered with leaves, but when He looked all through it He found no fruit. He cursed it because it had leaves and no fruit. If you and I are talking and reading all the time, but our life is not in harmony, and we are not doing what it says, then there is no fruit. And Jesus says, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit. So shall ye be My disciples."

I know what someone is thinking. Someone is thinking they are to be careful and not talk or say anything until they are sure that their life is like what they talk. Some of you were thinking that, weren't you?

Please see how unreasonable and impossible that is. That kind of thing is like a man that would say, I am not going to put a single timber on the main floor of the house until I have built the second story. That would be a very hard thing to do.

It would be like a corn plant that would say, See here, I am not going to put out a single green leaf until I first have a well developed ear of corn. I am not going to spread my green banner. Look at all those green corn plants out there. They are waving their green stalks, but I am not going to do that. I am going to hold back. I am not going to say anything. And when I get a fine ear of corn, then I am going to put out a green leaf and tell folks about it.

Tell me, would it work? No, it would not work. And neither will the idea work of your reading the Word of God, and when you are sure your life is in harmony with it on every point, begin to talk it. No, my brother. It is not God's way. Every time you hear the Word, God wants you to express it. He wants you to believe it now and to express it now. And if people would do that, how their faith would grow.

Someone says, Suppose I fail.

Well, suppose you should. I can tell you that unless you do this, you will fail and fail utterly and miserably. That's the biggest failure of all. God has made full provision for us. First, He said He would keep us from falling (Jude 5:26). He has also made provisions in case we should fall.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" 1 John 2:1-2.

You remember the man that was possessed of evil spirits. He was chained up, and would brake the chains with the super-human strength that came to him because he was possessed of the Devil. Jesus came and delivered him from all that bondage. And when Christ was about to sail away from the shore, that man came and begged that he might be allowed to go with Jesus. Jesus said:

"Go home to thy house, and tell what great things God
hast done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee"
Luke 8:39.

Jesus didn't tell him to go home and keep quiet, and after he have lived his life for a year, then begin to tell about it. No. The very first day that he was delivered from Satan's power, he was to go home.

"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the
Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee"
Mark 5:29.

Go home and tell. Go home and show. Let God do something for you and then tell it to others. That's as simple as I know how to make it this morning. I think everyone can get hold of it and do it. Don't you?

This very Sabbath we read the Word of God. Tell someone else. And it isn't just telling someone else. We ought to tell God first of all that we believe what He says.

Did you ever hear one end of a telephone conversation? That's all you usually hear unless you are listening in on an extension. Somebody is talking on the other end of the telephone, but every now and then the person at this end may say yes. You suppose someone on the other end is talking.

But did you ever find yourself talking on the telephone, and finally it dawned on you that nobody was making any response on the other end? It is a queer feeling to find you have been talking, and apparently nobody responding.

When you read the Word of God, have a two way conversation with God. This is very important. When you read the Word of God, don't treat it like a book of history or law. Don't treat it like an ordinary book. It isn't.

God is speaking directly to your soul through those words. Treat it that way. And when God says something to you, look right up to God and talk to Him. Tell God that you believe what He says. Express faith all alone with God in the secret place of prayer and study. Let your heart go out in a living testimony.

That will develop faith. It will be just like a shoot coming up out of the ground, and God is so happy when He sees living green shoots of faith coming up in your heart and life. Oh, let's do it. What do you say?

Think of it as three great steps in faith. Read what He says. Believe what He says. Do what He says.

This morning I want to give my testimony that I believe the Word of God. I thank God for these promises. I thank God that I know His Word is not yea and nea, but it is yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. I thank God for what it has meant to me, and what it means to me. I thank God that I do not just have to think of an experience that I had thirty years ago or thirty days ago. I thank God for the experience He gives me this morning in the living fresh promises of God flowing from His Word which have been received into my heart.

By His grace I propose to do what He says, and I am happy in it this morning.

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