

## "An Encouraging Exhortation"

Sermon preached at Uffington, Berkshire, by Mr. H. DAWSON, on Tuesday evening, 20th November, 1951.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."—Heb. 10. 35.

Your interest,—my interest, in such a subject as this, hinges on whether our confidence is such a one as the apostle Paul was persuaded the godly Hebrews possessed, to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. It should be a solemn consideration to us as to whether our confidence is one that God is the Author of. All of us are sinners with never-dying souls; all are journeying through this life to an eternal destiny, either to heaven or hell, and which of the two will it be? Our lives, as we journey along, only hang on a breath:

"Only this frail and fleeting breath  
Preserves me from the jaws of death;  
Soon as it fails, at once I'm gone,  
And plunged into a world unknown."

O that you and I might have grace given to us to examine ourselves as to what our confidence is built upon, whether it is one that God has wrought, or whether, alas, in a dying hour, it will have "Tekel" stamped upon it, "Weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

This word was a salutary, a reasonable word to the church of Christ in Judæa to whom this Epistle to the Hebrews was penned. Those in the church there, being what they were, believing Jews, had many a trial to endure, many a searching and testing as to whether their religion was of God or no; and some of them were hard put to it, and it is evident that some did give up altogether, and dropped back into the world at large, proving that they had a name to live but they were dead. A wonderful mercy if you and I shall prove to have some religion that will shut us up in this word of God in the context:—"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

I would like, as the Lord shall help me for a little while, to look at this word from two or three viewpoints, as grace is given and light shall shine upon it. It might be well first of all to say something about what your confidence must *not* be, as well as what your confidence will be if it is of God. The apostle Paul tells us elsewhere:—"We are the true circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh." If there was any man who could have had some confidence in the flesh, if it had any value, the apostle Paul was that man; for he threw on the dunghill a thousand times better religion than many people are building their hopes upon, and think they will get through the gates of pearl with it. Remember that! Your confidence must not, in any way whatever, be built upon the doings of the great "I". Such a confidence is vain; as you read in the Book of Job, (VIII. 14.) "Whose trust shall be as a spider's web;" and you all know that a spider spins its web from its own bowels. There are heaps of people, (and they may have been either sprinkled, baptized or confirmed), if you seek to get down to bedrock as to what their hope of heaven is built upon, they will begin to tell you: "I have done this, I have done that; I have *not* done this, I have *not* done that." No! Such a confidence will prove vain in that hour when our heart and flesh shall fail. The Lord grant to you and me grace to give

diligence to make our calling and our election sure. Remember that picture the dear Saviour drew of the wise builder who dug deep. In such digging there is an exercise unto godliness; and the wise builder proved, when the floods raged, and the rain descended, and the wind blew, his house stood the test, and fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. You and I must, by the grace of God, get some religion like that!

"On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand."

You remember the man who is designated "foolish;" and I hope you realize that he sat side by side in the same pew with the man who was wise. If you had gone down the street where both houses were built, as it were, you could not have told, as far as the house was concerned, which was the one the wise builder lived in, or which one the foolish man dwelt in.

Would you like some scripture for that? Read it! "Every man that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not; . . . every man that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not;" both in the same cause of truth, maybe, sang "our" hymns, heard "our" gospel, amongst "our" people, coming up to worship God, hearing these sayings in the gospel of the grace of God, but one was wise, and he digged deep,—he wanted God to do something for his soul, he wanted to be assured "it is well." The other man had a name to live, but he was building on the sand; he had got what I like to call 'religiosity,' not religion that is of God. O then, my friends, your confidence must not be such a one:—what you are, what you can do, for that will not avail as a foundation on which to build your hope of heaven. "Ye must be born again,"—that is the starting point. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Much might be said along that line of thought.

But I would like to come, as the Lord shall help me, to what your confidence *must* be if it is to avail you, living and dying; and, as I said at the outset, the apostle Paul was persuaded that these godly Hebrews had got such a confidence. In this injunction—"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth was speaking" when the apostle Paul penned it, inspired of God: "Cast not away therefore your confidence." However much you may find it tested, and hardly know what you are or where you are, God is at work in it, and He will maintain it because He is the Author of it. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

Now, how does a sinner taught of God come by such a confidence as this word refers to? "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He shall convince the world of sin." "The entrance of Thy word giveth light," the word of God declares. When that mighty transaction takes place in a sinner's breast, such a one is illuminated, and he begins to weigh matters up before God, and he awakes to a solemn, awful awareness: "I have a soul, a never-dying soul, and what will become of it?" And he does want God to do something for it. He begins to sigh and to cry, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation;" "O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul!"

But I want to amplify that, as the Lord shall help me. This character whose case I would try to describe being convinced of sin, such work goes on all through life's journey, and that is how you tell the great distinction between a conviction of sin that is of God and one that is only sparks of nature's kindling. The conviction of sin that is but sparks of nature's kindling will die a natural death when the man who is the subject of it becomes "religious." As he becomes a chapel-goer or a church-goer, and he keeps up some outside show in religion, his natural convictions die, as I said, a natural death; and so he lives his life, unless the Lord in mercy opens his eyes to see the deception he is living in. Now, conviction of sin that is of God is lasting as long as you live; and when the sinner is first made the subject of it, under the law, there he is,

"Stripped of all his fancied meetness  
To approach the dread I AM."

There is a great word that sinner is made to ponder, "Pay me that thou owest."

"Righteousness to full perfection  
Must be brought, lacking nought,  
Fearless of rejection."

That sinner is made to realize his sad state through the Adam fall, his utter ruin, his undone condition. He may try to reform his life, he may do his best, as he thinks, to renovate it, but he finds that, with all that he does, he can do nothing as God desires it to be done. That brings him at length to stand before God in the exact truth of his condition, "Naked I come to Thee for dress." That man has no confidence in the flesh, for there he is under the law which thunders in his ears: "Pay me that thou owest," and he has nothing to pay. That brings him to a place called, in the word of God, a place of the stopping of the mouth. (Rom. III. 19.) O that poor sinner then stands before God guilty, and he has to do what you read of in the Book of Leviticus, as it were, in his conscience,—accept the punishment of his iniquity, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm CXXX. 3.)

"If my soul were sent to hell,  
Thy righteous law approves it well."

Here is this sinner, then; he is being taught of God, but he has no confidence as yet. No! He has no hope yet to cheer his soul and inspire him to press on in life's journey. He is helpless under the law, and being under the law, as yet is hopeless, too. But the blessed Spirit of truth, having opened that sinner's eyes—(What did you sing? [Gadsby's 113.] O that blessed truth rejoices that sinner's heart in God's good time),—he is brought from being under the law, helpless and hopeless, to be under the gospel in his soul's exercises, and then he finds this, (as you sang,)—what the gospel says—

"Sinner, if thou art taught to see  
How great thy guilt and misery,  
In every thought and act impure,  
The blood of Christ thy soul can cure."

And now that truth, not only heard but *received*, inspires the dawn of hope, and from that time on, under the gospel, confidence is born, and being born, is built up in the sinner's breast as he realizes that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, and as he ponders that beautiful, blessed truth,

"Jesus' blood through earth and skies  
Mercy, eternal mercy cries."

O, that sinner begins to ponder in his heart, like Mary did, the things of God, and what does he say? "Who can tell but what God will be gracious unto me?" Now he gets encouragement to draw near to God. In his heart is found a sigh, a cry, a groan, a something going on, an exercise unto godliness; yea, he has got something like this,

"I'll to the gracious King approach  
Whose sceptre pardon gives.  
Perhaps He will command my touch,  
And then the suppliant lives."

I said that this sinner was now under the gospel and beginning to realize it as "good tidings of great joy," inspiring a confidence in his breast. He is, as it were, brought before Calvary's cross, and there he realizes where his confidence must be fixed. "The Lord shall be thy confidence," in what He is, in what He has done, and what He will yet do in heaven's high courts above as our Advocate on high. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." You might ask that sinner, if you met him at such a time in his present experience, though it is but the dawning of the day, and as yet the bright light of the mid-

day sun has not shone, to shine all his 'ifs' and 'buts' and fears away, and put the great question out of question;—I say, ask that sinner, 'On what do you build your confidence of being with the people of God another day in the realms of bliss?' and this will be the answer, (or at least something like it),

"My soul looks back to see  
The burdens Christ did bear  
When hanging on the accursed tree,  
And hopes her guilt was there."

Yes! Now that man is digging deep, and he is getting down, down to bedrock. He is not building on the sand. No, no! And when he desires to worship God as the dear Saviour said: "He that heareth these sayings of mine;" how does that man listen who is made wise? "Show me a token for good." "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour Thou bearest unto Thy people; O visit me with Thy salvation." "Lord, I am here with Thy people, and in the attitude of worship," but "What is the house to me, unless the Master I can see?" "Lord I want something with authority Divine, a 'Thus saith the Lord'; I want something for my never-dying soul; I want to know it is well with my soul." That is how that man, in a right mind and a right spirit, hears the sayings of God as revealed in the gospel. And the Saviour says of such a one, "Blessed are your ears, for they hear." "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." "Cast not away therefore your confidence," (if you have got such a one,) "which hath great recompence of reward." Yes! "He which hath begun a good work in you" will not fail to finish it.

I would look at this viewpoint also, as the Lord shall help me;—if your confidence is indeed one that is of God, then it will be tried and proved. O, it will be tried and proved by earth and hell alike; and God will test it, too, and make it manifest as being His. His word is, "I will bring the third part through the fire;" and that means, the dross and tin,—and there is plenty of it with all who are taught of God,—the dross and tin have got to be consumed that the real gold might be seen. It is that real gold which is your confidence, and that alone, which will give you peace when you come down to die. It is very surprising—you will find it out as you journey on through life: (you dear younger ones as yet may not know so much about it, but that knowledge is ahead of you as God shall lead you in His truth;—) you will be surprised, maybe, as you journey on in life, how your confidence is tested and tried, and sometimes all the evidences concerning it seem to be obscured. You see that in the word of God itself with some of the most notable saints. Think of Jeremiah. That dear man had his confidence raised as much as it could be in a poor sinner's breast:—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." You might think that if God would be pleased to say such a great word to you, you would go on as long as you lived without any 'ifs' or 'buts' or doubts as to your soul's estate. What did Jeremiah say when he was grey-headed? "My hope is perished from the Lord;" that is to say, as to any comfort it affords me, any happiness. "Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off." Think of godly Job. What did he say? "I know that my Redeemer liveth." What did he say also? "As for my hope, who shall see it? Mine hope hath He removed like a tree." "O that I knew where I might find Him." Yes, you will find your confidence, if it is of God, will be tested from within and without; earth and hell alike will conspire together to undo it and undo you in your profession of Jesus' Name, and seek to cause you to draw back, but if your confidence is of God, God will acknowledge it to be His, God will maintain it, because,

"His honour and His Name's at stake,  
To save thee from the burning lake."

However much earth and hell, and what goes on within you arising from what

you are by nature, threaten to consume you and your religion, the word of the Lord is, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."

Your confidence will be tried at times because of what you feel within, the plague of the heart known and felt; and very solemn it is that when you feel a gracious concern within to live the life of the righteous, and desire godly fear to govern you, yea, to be

"An unctuous light to all that's right,  
A bar to all that's wrong,"—

then you find this, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Your confidence is tried, and you think, as you weigh matters up, "Can ever God dwell here?" "Can I be a real Christian, and be as I am and feel as I do?" "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." You are learning "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

Sometimes the devil will assail you, and he is a mighty foe; not almighty, blessed be God, but a mighty foe is he, and he comes upon poor sinners who have some religion *that is of God*,—remember that! If your religion is not of God, the devil will leave it alone, for he has no need whatever to deal with a case like yours. But if your religion is of God, then he will seek to undermine it; rob you, spoil you of whatsoever peace it affords, whatever happiness you have had in it, and he will try also to obscure your evidences, and sometimes you will feel,

"Zeal extinguished to a spark,  
Life is very, very low,  
All my evidences dark,  
And good works I've none to show."

Then you think of your name having been on a church roll, maybe ten, twenty, thirty or forty years or more, as it is with some of us nowadays; and your confidence is so tested then that you hardly know what to conclude about it; and that brings you back to the starting point, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles."

Sometimes your confidence will be hidden by a thick darkness, a solemn, indescribable despondency, a gloom that emanates from hell itself,—(I nearly said, the smoke of hell,)—and you are brought into deep distress: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." How Isaiah states such a case: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?" Think of such an experience! "Walketh in darkness and hath no light." I understand it to mean, no bright shining, nothing clear, nothing definite, nothing that stands out. No light when you read the Word of God. You turn over pages where, in bygone experiences, you have grazed in green pastures, but there is no light; you try to pray, but you are so much at the ends of the earth in your soul's feelings that there is no light; like godly Jeremiah, "When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer"—No light when you gather with the people of God to worship His holy Majesty; service after service you follow through the routine of it, but there is no light. The songs of Zion are sung, and good they are; the Word of God is read, and "Good is the Word of the Lord;" the gospel is preached, and a good gospel it is; but you have no light in your soul's experience, and your confidence sinks down, down, O so low, and you look on the people of God and wonder if, after all, you have a real warrant to be considered one of them, because you feel so much in the dark. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."

I would say another word about that darkness, as the Lord shall help me. Remember the word in Isaiah which I quoted; how does it read? "Who is

among you that feareth the Lord, *that obeyeth the voice of His servant.*" Here is a person living a life that is consistent, with a name on a church roll, and who has been obedient, but is walking in darkness.

Sometimes darkness in the experience of a sinner taught of God is a question of sowing and reaping. If you should be negligent,—do not balk at the word 'negligent'; you *can* be negligent; in fact, the apostle Paul says in this same epistle, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" How shall we escape chastening if we grow slack, and let the potato patch take precedence of the Prayer Meeting, and things like that; and the things of this life take up our time and thoughts over much, and the kingdom of God be pushed into the background in our souls' exercises? Listen! You will not escape this if you are taught of God: "If my people transgress, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." (Psalm LXXXIX, 32.). That is what I mean. Sometimes this darkness within is a question of sowing and reaping.

But the case Isaiah states is not a case like that. You may say, "How do you account for it, then?" I account for it like this: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." Jesus Christ as verily Man,—what did He say? "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Sometimes God sees fit that His dear people should know somewhat of a darkness like that, and it brings them into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings;—not a question of sowing and reaping because backslidings in their life have brought it upon them. If you remember, it was not so with dear Job. What did God say? "My servant Job, Satan, you can look at his life, and he is a perfect man, one that feareth Me, and escheweth evil." Yes, but dear Job was put to the test, and he found the dealings of God then were hard to be understood, but God maintained his confidence, and brought him forth into the light ultimately. If any of you people taught of God are now walking in darkness and have no light, the Lord bless you and give you grace to humble yourself under His mighty hand in the matter, and you will find this in the ultimate issue; "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Then sometimes your confidence will be tested when you look back over life's journey, and all the Ebenezers, and Hill Mizars are unseen because there seems to be a mist, a thick fog settled down on your spirits, and you say with the church of Christ in the Psalms, "We see not our signs." In the realm of nature without, when winter time is coming and the trees are stripped and bare, because the fruit has been gathered, the leaves have fallen, and the blossoms have faded long ago,—are the trees dead? No! And you know, poor sinner, deep down there is still a confidence that is of God, although you feel anything but fruitful, you seem just like a leafless tree according to your soul's feelings.

"Though bleak winds the boughs deface,  
The rooted-stock shall still remain;  
Leaves may languish, fruit decrease,  
But more shall grow again."

"Cast not away therefore your confidence."

There is one more aspect of this subject I would like to touch on, and that is, some of you who have been asking the way to Zion with your faces thitherward,—it may be you dear younger people here,—(the Lord bless you!),—some of you, it may be, do hope in God; you do hope that within you there is just a little confidence that you treasure up, as it were, and desire to have it made manifest that it is indeed of God, but as yet you cannot feel what you want to feel; you have not got, deep down, that sweet, blessed assurance of the forgiveness of sins. No. The topstone has not yet been put on your confidence, and O how glad you would be if you could say, "My Lord and my God"! "Cast not away

therefore *your* confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." "Blessed are they which *do* hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

"Whene'er to call the Saviour mine  
With ardent wish my soul aspires,  
Can it be less than power divine  
That animates these strong desires?"

You say, 'Alas! as for me, I have nothing very definite about my confidence as to the beginning of it; I cannot go back to the day when I was born again, as I should like to. I know many people can do it, but I cannot.' Look you,—in my journeying I have passed hundreds of acres of autumn sown corn, making the fields look quite green. I know not the day when the seed drill went over the farmers' fields, but I know those fields have been tilled and sown, and those blades springing up are the best of all evidences. Is this the truth about you? And you must know when there was a beginning to that, "Behold, he prayeth." Here is the blade, Yes! And

"Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,  
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek."

"Cast not away therefore *your* confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

Another aspect of this truth I would like to look at a little is this, if your confidence is of God, then God will acknowledge it to be His. He will confirm your soul in the possession of it. "In all places where I record My Name, will I come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Sometimes when you gather, as you are, in the worship of God, when you sing the songs of Zion, you can make melody in your heart because while you sing you offer up petitions which the hymn-writer worded, but which you feel the truth of, and you and the hymnwriter walk in sweet agreement. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Good it is when "as in water face answereth to face, so does the heart of man to man." Sometimes your confidence will be brightened, strengthened, of a truth, when you obtain a promise. Did you ever do that? You remember, in this epistle to the Hebrews, the next chapter, they "obtained promises." Sometimes the Word of the Lord is dropped in a poor sinner's breast, and O, it does beget a blessed confidence within. "Remember the Word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to *hope*." Not only so, when you hear people pray, (I am referring to prayer in public,) and you listen, you say many a time, "Amen" inside as this and that petition is uttered before God, and he who prays speaks on your behalf. You say, "It is good for me to draw near unto God," when out of the abundance of the heart the mouth is speaking, and it does beget a beautiful, blessed unity of spirit. It is at the throne of grace

"where spirits blend,  
And friend holds fellowship with friend;"

and indeed it strengthens your confidence. But most of all, when you hear the gospel preached; and poor men sent to preach it with divine authority do get a little help in preaching it; you listen, and maybe what you have been feeling before God in private is all told out in public. Yes! The preacher, as far as he feels, may be making quite a stammering set out in preaching, but it is *this* that builds up your confidence: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power." When that gospel of the grace of God comes to you in somewhat of the power of it, what do you say then? "The watchmen that go about the city *found me*." And if they do, and your hope is brightened, and your confidence built up, do you realize you can only be found like that *inside Zion's city*?—not outside! You know—you often hear it quoted—that preachers are designated "watchmen" upon Zion's walls, and they go round about Zion, inside it, and they deal with cases, Yes! "Cast not away therefore your confidence."

Your confidence will sometimes be wonderfully helped and built up when

God, as I have said, drops a word in, or He gives you some special experience, and you have not said, as yet, a word to any other soul about it, and then maybe you get an amazing confirmation of it when you come up to worship the Lord your God. The preacher may take it up, or it may be a hymn that is sweet to you, and lo, it is given out for the people to sing together, and that confirms you. Also this will help you in your confidence, when you meet a brother or sister and this happens,—(quite an amazing thing,)—"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another;"—not *about* each other,—“one to another.” When that happens,—(I have found it many a time, and so have you,)—when you hear a poor singer tell out the dealings of God with his or her soul, what a beautiful knitting that produces! O, there is nothing like it! “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” And your confidence is strengthened when you know such brotherly love as that.

“Could I joy His saints to meet,  
Choose the ways I once abhorred,  
Find at times the promise sweet,  
If I did not love the Lord?”

“He that loveth is born of God.” So then, I say, God will acknowledge your confidence to be His. He will maintain it; and if you tell the truth, (and you surely should do that,) if you remember the way that God has led you, how have you come along? You have had an Ebenezer here, and a Hill Mizar there, sometimes a gracious answer to prayer, sometimes what you call “a good hearing,”—which is not always a comfortable hearing. I should like to be helped to preach and for people sometimes to get a downright uncomfortable hearing, and that would be for good, to stir them up! And that will be what happens when God, in His great mercy, returns to Zion and revives His work in the midst of the years. People *under the gospel* will be saying, “Guilty! guilty!” But when you get, as I said, a good hearing, whether it be comfortable or uncomfortable, and there is in it power, and it brings you to have to do with God, it helps your confidence. Yes! And you must say, if you say what you ought to say, some of you, “Ebenezer. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

If at this time your confidence seems to be at a low ebb, you have got this to encourage you,—He that hath helped you hitherto will not fail to help you all your journey through; and you will find—God has guaranteed it,—living or dying, it shall be well.

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.”

Amen.

LIBRARY OF THE  
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS