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Lecture 1

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Lecture 1

ON FAITH

1. Faith, being the first principle in revealed religion and the foundation of all righteousness, necessarily claims the first place in a course of lectures designed to unfold to the understanding the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

2. In presenting the subject of faith, we shall observe the following order:

3. First, faith itself—what it is;

4. Secondly, the object on which it rests; and,

5. Thirdly, the effects which flow from it.

6. Agreeable to this order we have first to show what faith is.

7. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews gives the following definition of the word faith:

8. “Now faith is the substance [assurance]* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1).

9. From this we learn that faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen and that it is also the principle of action in all intelligent beings.

10. If men were duly to consider themselves and turn their thoughts and reflections to the operations of their own minds, they would readily discover that it is faith, and faith only, which is the moving cause of all action in them; that without it both mind

* Brackets in the 1835 edition. “Assurance” comes from the JST.

and body would be in a state of inactivity, and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental.

11. Were each of you in this class to go back and reflect upon the history of your lives from the period of your first recollection, and ask yourselves what principle excited you to action, or what gave you energy and activity in all your lawful avocations, callings, and pursuits, what would be the answer? Would it not be that it was the assurance which you had of the existence of things which you had not seen as yet? Was it not the hope which you had, in consequence of your belief in the existence of unseen things, which stimulated you to action and exertion in order to obtain them? Are you not dependent on your faith, or belief, for the acquisition of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence? Would you exert yourselves to obtain wisdom and intelligence unless you did believe that you could obtain them? Would you have ever sown if you had not believed that you would reap? Would you have ever planted if you had not believed that you would gather? Would you have ever asked, unless you had believed that you would receive? Would you have ever sought unless you had believed that you would find? Or, would you have ever knocked, unless you had believed that it would be opened unto you? In a word, is there anything that you would have done, either physical or mental, if you had not previously believed? Are not all your exertions of every kind dependent on your faith? Or, may we not ask, what have you or what do you possess which you have not obtained by reason of your faith? Your food, your raiment, your lodgings—are they not all by reason of your faith? Reflect, and ask yourselves if these things are not so. Turn your thoughts to your own minds and see if faith is not the moving cause of all action in yourselves, and if it is the moving cause in you, is it not also the moving cause in all other intelligent beings?

12. And as faith is the moving cause of all action in temporal concerns, so it is in spiritual. For the Savior has said, and that truly, that “he that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16; emphasis in 1835).

13. As we receive by faith all temporal blessings, so we in like manner receive by faith all spiritual blessings. But faith is not only the principle of action, it is also the principle of power in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. Thus says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews:

14. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (11:3).

15. By this we understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which he framed the worlds, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity that all created things exist; so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth exist by reason of faith as it existed in him.

16. Had it not been for the principle of faith, the worlds would never have been framed, neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute (for it is an attribute) from the Deity and he would cease to exist.

17. Who cannot see that if God framed the worlds by faith, it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and faith is the principle of power? And if it is the principle of power in the Deity, it must be so in man as well? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers and the lesson which they have been endeavoring to teach to man.

18. The Savior says the reason the disciples could not cast out the devil was their unbelief: "For verily I say unto you," said he, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt 17:19-20).

19. Moroni, while abridging and compiling the record of his fathers, gave us the following account of faith as the principle of power. He says on page 563 of the 1830 Book of Mormon that it was the faith of Alma and Amulek which caused the walls of

the prison to be rent (Ether 12:13), as recorded on the 264th page (Alma 14:27). It was the faith of Nephi and Lehi which caused a change to be wrought upon the hearts of the Lamanites when they were immersed with the Holy Spirit and with fire, as seen on the 421st page (Hel 5:43-45). And it was by faith that the mountain Zerin was removed when the brother of Jared spake in the name of the Lord. See also the 565th page (Ether 12:30).

20. In addition to this we are told in Hebrews that Gedeon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets “through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again” (11:33-35), etc.

21. Also Joshua, in the sight of all Israel, bade the sun and moon to stand still, and it was done (Joshua 10:12-13).

22. We here understand that the sacred writers say that all these things were done by faith. It was by faith that the worlds were framed—God spake, chaos heard, and worlds came into order by reason of the faith there was in him. So with men also, they spake by faith in the name of God and the sun stood still, the moon obeyed, mountains removed, prisons fell, lions’ mouths were closed, the human heart lost its enmity, fire its violence, armies their power, the sword its terror, and death its dominion; and all this by reason of the faith which was in them.

23. Had it not been for the faith which was in men, they might have spoken to the sun, the moon, the mountains, prisons, lions, the human heart, fire, armies, the sword, or to death in vain!

24. Faith, then, is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things. By it they exist; by it they are upheld; by it they are changed; or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence!

Questions and Answers for Lecture 1

1. *Question*—What is theology?

Answer—It is that revealed science which treats the being and attributes of God, his relations to us, the dispensations of his providence, his will with respect to our actions, and his purposes with respect to our end (*Buck's Theological Dictionary* 582).

2. Q—What is the first principle in this revealed science?

A—Faith (Lecture 1:1).

3. Q—Why is faith the first principle in this revealed science?

A—Because it is the foundation of all righteousness. “Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]” (Heb 11:6). “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he [God]** is righteous” (1 John 3:7; Lecture 1:1).

4. Q—What arrangement should be followed in presenting the subject of faith?

A—First, it should be shown what faith is (Lecture 1:3); secondly, the object upon which it rests (Lecture 1:4); and thirdly, the effects which flow from it (Lecture 1:5).

5. Q—What is faith?

A—It is the “assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (JST Heb 11:1); that is, it is the assurance we have of the existence of unseen things. And being the assurance which we have of the existence of unseen things, it must be the principle of action in all intelligent beings. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3; Lecture 1:8-9).

6. Q—How do you prove that faith is the principle of action in all intelligent beings?

A—First, by duly considering the operations of your own mind; and secondly, by the direct declaration of scripture. “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved

* Bracketed material in 1835 edition, but without brackets.

** Brackets in 1835 edition.

with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 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” (Heb 11:7-9). By faith Moses “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27; Lecture 1:10-11).

7. Q—Is not faith the principle of action in spiritual things as well as in temporal?

A—It is.

8. Q—How do you prove it?

A—“Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]” (Heb 11:6). “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (Rom 4:16; Lecture 1:12-13).

9. Q—Is faith anything else besides the principle of action?

A—It is.

10. Q—What is it?

A—It is the principle of power also (Lecture 1:13).

11. Q—How do you prove it?

A—First, it is the principle of power in the Deity as well as in man. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3; Lecture 1:14-16).

Secondly, it is the principle of power in man also. Book of Mormon, page 264: Alma and Amulek are delivered from prison (Alma 14:27). Page 421: Nephi and Lehi, with the Lamanites, are immersed with the Spirit (Hel 5:43-45). Page 565: The mountain

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Zerin, by the faith of the brother of Jared, is removed (Ether 12:30). “Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day” (Joshua 10:12-13). “Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt 17:19-20). “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb 11:32-35; Lecture 1:16-22).

12. Q—How would you define faith in its most unlimited sense?

A—It is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things (Lecture 1:24).

13. Q—How do you convey to the understanding more clearly the idea that faith is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things?

A—By it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, and by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence! (Lecture 1:24).