

Moveable Feast

Life and faith are dishes served up one moment at a time

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Whoever wants to live Christianity that's not a sham must reckon with a little noted peculiarity about life: It is a dish served up one moment at a time. Failure to reckon sufficiently with this fact renders faith an abstraction, and there is no such thing as faith in the abstract. There is faith or there is sentimentality.



Angels do not have to contend with this particular wrinkle of reality. And apart from the grace of God, I wonder if they do not wonder how Mary could sing the Magnificat at one moment and in a successive moment fret that her Son has gone mad. They must wonder why Solomon, Mr. Wisdom, proceeded to make such unwise choices in marriage and horse breeders. They must tremble at this created thing called Time when they see pastors — godly men for years — inexplicably fall into adultery.

Francis Schaeffer put it this way: “This morning’s faith will never do for this noon. The faith of this noon will never do for supper time. The faith of supper time will never do for the time of going to bed” (True Spirituality). Because life is a new thing every moment, faith must be new every moment too.

The faith we are talking about, of course, is the confidence that Jesus — the radiance of God’s glory, the One for whom and by whom all things were created — made purification for your sins and then called you His brother and joint heir for the present age and ages to come. We said we believed that once. Have we, over time, come to treat the blood of Jesus like it’s nothing more than “getting registered to vote or choosing our HMOs,” as one woman I know put it? Are we bored?

Satan doesn’t mind our faith as long as it stays in the voter registration category. The demon Screwtape tries to be sanguine on the disastrous occasion of one “patient’s” conversion to Christianity: “The great thing is to prevent his doing anything. As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance.”

It’s partly the fault of that other created thing the angels are unsaddled with: these darned tents we live in. We’re so tied to them. One day they’re a hot red fire engine, and we think we soar spiritually. The next day they’re cranky and creaky and they pull the soul right down with them. I just got a letter from a guy who’s normally doing back-flips praising the Lord. In today’s letter he writes, “I think I’m going through a dry spell.” The fella thinks it’s spiritual but it could be just a touch of flu.

There is an easy way to “test yourselves” and check “whether you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5) at any given moment: anxiety. I am talking about a handy self-diagnostic tool — a kind of spiritual breathalyzer — and I check myself several times a day. Most times I am dismayed to find an indictable anxiety level that tells me that, in this moment, I am not trusting in God’s unfailing love, not believing the promises, not being aware of the practical present value of Christ’s work for this very moment’s struggles. I am stumbling around in defeat and fear because I have lapsed once again into lies.

My friend David calls them “red flags” and “green flags” — the red ones, a nagging discomfort alerting you to slippage in trust; the green ones, a peaceful disposition of heart that accompanies pinpoint present walking in the truth, even in the midst of daunting outward circumstances.

The Apostle goes on to counsel the Corinthians, “Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” Realize it, my soul, dagnabit! Good Lord, why does it slip away a thousand times a day, and always present itself to me again as something new?

How about we start immediately? Drop whatever you’re doing and take inventory. What’s the dull pebble in your shoe this very second? Anxiety? Fear? Covetousness? Panic? Chase down the source. What exactly are you afraid of? Shall we pray: Lord, forgive us. Give us grace that we may trust in You this moment, that we may reign with You right now.