

Manifest Faith

Stop trying so hard to serve God. Let God serve you.

Since faith is hidden from human eyes and is invisible, it must be manifested by its fruits, inasmuch as faith creates from Christ all that is good, righteous, and holy.

Now, if faith waits the promised blessings, hope arises out of faith. What else is hope but a constant and persevering expectation, in faith, of promised blessings? But if faith shares with a neighbor the blessings that it has itself received, love arises out of faith, and imparts to the neighbor that which it has itself received from God. If faith endures the test of the cross, and submits itself to the will of God, patience grows out of faith. If it sighs under the cross, or offers thanks to God for mercies it has received, prayer is born. If it compares the power of God with the misery of man, and submits and bends to God, humility is born. If faith is concerned that it not lose the grace of God, or, as St Paul says, worketh out its salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 3:12), the fear of God is born.

Johann Arndt (1555-1621), *True Christianity* (Paulist Press, 1979), p. 23

My good friend, Lloyd Ahlem, former president of North Park College (now University) and Seminary, once told a group of young ministers in California that from his perspective as a clinical psychologist the most difficult struggle Christians have throughout life is to keep removing their own ego from the center of their being and allowing Christ to dwell there.

It is over 400 years now since the Johann Arndt, the father of Pietism, made that abundantly clear in his epic study on *True Christianity* (1606). And it is nearly two millennia since the Apostle Paul stressed the same truth in all his *New Testament* epistles. *Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.... Living, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you do not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him* (Romans 12:1-3, paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*).

Why is it so hard for us to accept the fact that the fruits of the Spirit which manifest faith are gifts of God that grace alone, by faith alone, supplies? The motion toward true spiritual life is not from us to God. It is rather from God to us. All the fruits of the Spirit which we are called to

manifest are generated in us by the Vine which is Christ. We do not create them. They are created in us by the nutrients that flow from the Vine to which we are joined by faith—which is itself a gift from God.

Note with me the cascading affect of manifest faith to which Johann Arndt gives witness:
Faith creates from Christ all that is good, righteous, and holy. How, you may ask? Follow his logic:

*If faith waits the promised blessings, **hope** arises out of faith. What else is hope but a constant and persevering expectation, in faith, of promised blessings?*

*If faith shares with a neighbor the blessings that it has itself received, **love** arises out of faith, and imparts to the neighbor that which it has itself received from God.*

*If faith endures the test of the cross, and submits itself to the will of God, **patience** grows out of faith.*

*If it sighs under the cross, or offers thanks to God for mercies it has received, **prayer** is born.*

*If it compares the power of God with the misery of man, and submits and bends to God, **humility** is born.*

*If faith is concerned that it not lose the grace of God, or, as St Paul says, worketh out its salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 3:12), **the fear of God** is born.*

Thus does faith manifest in us the fruit we cannot produce by ourselves. Surely we must pay attention as gardeners to the soil of the Word God has supplied, the seeds of good news offered there, and the promptings of his Spirit. But God gives the increase. Each of the fruits is supplied to us, as is the very faith that supplies them. It is all of God, given to create and sustain life in us, so that through us others may be joined by the same grace through the same faith to the same Vine.

Stop trying so hard to serve God and thus, hopefully, please him. Let him serve you. “Come to me,” Jesus still says, “all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” Matthew 11:28-30).

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The Covenant Companion
February, 2009