

Studies on Saving Faith

Part 4 – Chapter 2

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Part 4

Chapter 20 – DIALOGUE 2

Mr. Humble Heart: Good morning, Sir. May I beg the favor of an hour of your valuable time?"

Editor: "Come in, and welcome. What can I do for you?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "I am sore troubled in spirit: I long so much to be able to call God 'my Father,' but I fear I might be guilty of lying were I to do so. There are many times when I have a little hope that He has begun a good work within me, but alas, for the most part, I find such a mass of corruption working within, that I feel sure I have never been made a new creature in Christ. My heart is so cold and hard toward God, that it seems impossible the Holy Spirit could have shed abroad God's love in me; unbelief and doubtings so often master me, that it would be presumptuous to think I possess the faith of God's elect. Yet I want to love Him, trust Him, serve Him; but it seems I cannot."

Editor: "I am very glad you called. It is rare indeed to meet with an honest soul these days."

Mr. Humble Heart: "Excuse me, Sir, but I do not want you to form a wrong impression of me: an honest heart is the very blessing I crave, but I am painfully conscious, from much clear evidence, that I possess it not. My heart is deceitful above all things, and I am full of hypocrisy. I have often begged God to make me holy, and right after, my actions proved that I did not mean what I said. I have often thanked God for His mercies, and then have soon fretted and murmured when His providence crossed my will. I had quite a battle before I came here to see you tonight, as to whether I was really seeking help, or as to whether my secret desire was to win your esteem; and I am not sure now which was my real motive."

Mr. Humble Heart: "To come to the point, Sir, if I am not intruding. I have read and re-read your articles on 'Assurance' which appeared in last year's magazines. Some things in those articles seemed to give me a little comfort, but other things almost drove me to despair. Sometimes your description of a born-again soul agreed with my own experience, but at other times I seemed as far from measuring up to it as the poles are asunder. So I do not know where I am. I have sought to heed 2 Corinthians 13:5 and 'examine' myself, and when I did so, I could see nothing but a mass of contradictions; or, it would be more accurate to say, for each one thing I found which seemed to show that I was regenerate, I found ten things to prove that I could not be so. And now, Sir, I'm mourning night and day, for I feel of all men the most miserable."

Editor: "Hypocrites are not exercised about their motives, nor troubled over the deceitfulness of their hearts! At any rate, I am thankful to see you so deeply concerned about your soul's eternal interests."

Mr. Humble Heart: "alas, Sir, I am not half as much concerned about them as I ought to be. That is another thing which occasions me much anguish. When the Lord Jesus tells us that the human soul is worth more than the whole world put together (Mark 8:36), I feel that I must be thoroughly blinded by Satan and completely under the dominion of sin, seeing that I am so careless. It is true that at times I am alarmed about my state and fearful that I shall soon be in Hell; at times too, I seem to seek God more earnestly and read His Word more diligently; but alas, my goodness is 'as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away' (Hosea 6:4). The cares of this life soon crowd out thoughts of the life to come. O Sir, I want reality, not pretense; I want to make sure, yet I cannot."

Editor: "That is not so simple a task as many would have us believe."

Mr. Humble Heart: "It certainly is not. I have consulted several Bible-teachers, only to find them 'physicians of no value' (Job 13:4); I have also conferred with some who boasted that they never have a doubt, and they quoted to me Acts 16:31, and on telling them I did believe, they cried 'Peace, peace,' and there was no peace in my heart."

Editor: "Ah, dear friend, it is not without reason that God has bidden us 'give diligence to make your calling and election sure' (2 Peter 1:10). And even after we have given diligence, we still need the Holy Spirit to bear 'witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (Romans 8:16). Moreover, spiritual assurance may easily be lost, or at least be clouded, as is evident from the case of him who wrote the 23rd Psalm, for at a later date he had to cry unto God, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.'"

Editor: "Before proceeding further, had we not better seek the help of the Lord? His holy Word says, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' (Proverbs 3:6). And now, dear Brother, for such I am assured you really are, What is it that most causes you to doubt that you have passed from death unto life?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "My inward experiences, the wickedness of my heart, the many defeats I encounter daily."

Editor: "Perhaps you are looking for perfection in the flesh."

Mr. Humble Heart: "No, hardly that, for I know the 'flesh' or old nature is still left in the Christian. But I have met with some who claim to be living 'the victorious life,' who say they never have a doubt, never a rising of anger, discontent, or any

wicked feelings or desires; that Christ so controls them that unclouded peace and joy is theirs all the time.

Editor: "Bear with me if I speak plainly, but such people are either hypnotized by the Devil, or they are fearful liars. God's Word says, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8). And again, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And again, 'In many things we offend all' (James 3:2). The beloved apostle Paul, when well advanced in the Christian life, declared, 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members'" (Romans 7:21-23).

Mr. Humble Heart: "That relieves my mind somewhat, yet it scarcely reaches the root of my difficulty. What troubles me so much is this: when God regenerates a man, he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus: the change wrought in him is so great that it is termed a 'passing from death unto life.' It is obvious that if God the Holy Spirit dwells in a person, there must be a radical difference produced, both inwardly and outwardly, from what he was before. Now it is this which I fail to find in myself. Instead of being any better than I was a year ago, I feel I am worse. Instead of humility filling my heart, so often pride rules it; instead of lying passive like clay in the Potter's hand to be moulded by Him, I am like a wild ass's colt; instead of rejoicing in the Lord alway, I am frequently filled with bitterness and repinings."

Editor: "Such experiences as you describe are very sad and humbling, and need to be mourned over and confessed to God. They must never be excused nor glossed over. Nevertheless, they are not incompatible with the Christian state. Rather are they so many proofs that he who is experimentally acquainted with the 'plague of his own heart' (1 Kings 8:38) is one in experience with the most eminent of God's saints. Abraham acknowledged he was 'dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27). Job said, 'I abhor myself' (Job 42:6). David prayed 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed' (Psalm 6:2). Isaiah exclaimed 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). In the anguish of his heart, Jeremiah asked, 'Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?' (Jeremiah 20:18). Daniel once owned, 'There remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption' (Daniel 10:8). Paul cried, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Romans 7:24). "One of the principal things which distinguishes a regenerate person from an unregenerate one may be likened unto two rooms which have been swept but not dusted. In one, the blinds are raised and the sunlight streams in, exposing the dust still lying on the furniture. In the other, the blinds are lowered, and one walking through the room would be unable to discern its real condition. Thus it is in the case of one who has been

renewed by the Spirit: his eyes have been opened to see the awful filth which lurks in every corner of his heart. But in the case of the unregenerate, though they have occasional twinges of conscience when they act wrongly, they are very largely ignorant of the awful fact that they are a complete mass of corruption unto the pure eyes of the thrice holy God. It is true that an unregenerate person may be instructed in the truth of the total depravity of fallen man, and he may 'believe' the same, yet his belief does not humble his heart, fill him with anguish, make him loathe himself, and feel that Hell is the only place which is fit for him to dwell in. But it is far otherwise with one who sees light in God's light (Psalm 36:9); he will not so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven, but smites upon his leprous breast, crying 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'"

Mr. Humble Heart: "Would you kindly turn to the positive side, and give me a brief description of what characterizes a genuine Christian."

Editor: "Among other gifts, every real Christian has such a knowledge of God in Christ, as works by love, that he is stirred up to earnestly inquire after the will of God and studies His Word to learn that will, having a sincere desire and making an honest endeavor to live in the faith and practice of it."

Mr. Humble Heart: "I cannot boast of my knowledge of God in Christ, yet by Divine grace this I may say: that I desire no other Heaven on earth than to know and to do God's will, and be assured that I have His approval."

Editor: "That is indeed a good sign that your soul has been actually renewed, and doubtless He who has begun a work of grace in your heart, will make the great change manifest in your life and actions. No matter what he thinks or says, no unregenerate man really desires to live a life which is pleasing to God."

Mr. Humble Heart: God forbid that I should flatter myself, yet I hope I have often found delight when reading God's Word or hearing it preached, and I do sincerely meditate upon it, and long that I may 'grow in grace.' Yet, at times, I am tempted with vain and vile thoughts, and I strive to banish them, my heart rising up against them; yet sometimes I yield to them. I loathe lying and cursing, and cannot endure the company of those who hate practical godliness; yet my withdrawal from them seems nothing but pharisaical hypocrisy, for I am such a miserable failure myself. I pray to God for deliverance from temptation and for grace to resist the Devil, but I fear that I do not have His ear, for more often than not I am defeated by sin and Satan."

Editor: "When you thus fail in your duty, or fall into sin, what do you think of yourself and your ways? How are you affected therewith?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "When I am in this deplorable condition, my soul is grieved; my joy of heart and peace of conscience gone. But when I am a little recovered out of this sinful lethargy, my heart is melted with sorrow over my folly; and I

address myself to God with great fear and shame, begging Him to forgive me, pleading 1 John 1:9, and humbly imploring Him to 'renew a right spirit within me.'"

Editor: "And why is it that you are so troubled when sin conquers you?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "Because I truly wish to please the Lord, and it is my greatest grief when I realize that I have dishonored and displeased Him. His mercy has kept me, thus far, from breaking out into open and public sins, yet there is very much within which I know He hates."

Editor: "Well, my dear brother and companion in the path of tribulation, God has ordained that the Lamb shall be eaten with 'bitter herbs' (Exodus 12:8). So it was with the apostle: 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2 Corinthians 6:10) summed up his dual experience: 'sorrowful' over his sinful failures, both of omission and commission; yet 'rejoicing' over the provisions which Divine grace has made for us while we are in this dreary desert—the Mercy-seat ever open to us, whither we may draw near, unburden our heavy hearts, and pour out our tale of woe; the Fountain which has been opened 'for sin and for uncleanness' (Zechariah 13:1), whither we may repair for cleansing. I am indeed thankful to learn that your conscience confirms what your tongue has uttered. You have expressed enough to clearly evidence that the Holy Spirit has begun a good work in your soul. But I trust you also have faith in the Lord Jesus, the Mediator, by whom alone any sinner can draw near unto God."

Mr. Humble Heart: "By Divine grace I do desire to acknowledge and embrace the Lord Jesus upon the terms on which He is proclaimed in the Gospel: to believe all his doctrine as my Teacher, to trust in and depend upon the atoning sacrifice which He offered as the great High Priest, and to submit to His rule and government as King. But, alas, in connection with the last 'to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not'" (Romans 7:18).

Editor: "No real Christian ever attains his ideal in this life; he never reaches that perfect standard which God has set before us in His Word, and which was so blessedly exemplified in the life of Christ. Even the apostle Paul, near the close of his life, had to say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3:12). But may I ask if you are sensible of how you arrived at the good desires you mentioned? Do you suppose that such a disposition is natural to you, or that it has resulted from your own improvement of your faculties?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "No, Sir, I dare not ascribe to nature that which is the effect and fruit of Divine grace. If I have any measure of sanctification (which is what I long to be assured of), then it can only be by the gift and operation of God. I am too well acquainted with my wretched self: I know too well that by nature I am alive to vanity and sin, but dead to God and all real goodness; that folly

possesses my soul, darkness shrouds my understanding; that I am utterly unable to will or to do what is pleasing in God's sight, and that my natural heart is set contrary to the way of salvation proposed in the Gospel, rising up against its flesh—condemning precepts and commandments. I see, I know, I feel that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing."

Editor: "Then do you realize what must be the outcome if God were to leave you unto yourself?"

Mr. Humble Heart: "Yes, indeed. Without the assistance of His Holy Spirit, I should certainly make shipwreck of the faith. My daily prayer is 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe' (Psalm 119:117). My earnest desire is that I may watch and pray against every temptation. There is nothing I dread more than apostatizing, relaxing in my duty, returning to wallow in the mire."

Editor: "These are all plain evidences of the saving grace of God at work within you, which I beseech Him to continue, so that you may be preserved with a tender conscience, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and obtain a full assurance of His love for you."

Mr. Humble Heart: "I thank you kindly, Sir, for your patience and help. What you have said makes me feel lighter in heart, but I wish to go home and prayerfully ponder the same, for I dare take no man's word for it. I want God Himself to 'say unto my soul, I am thy salvation' (Psalm 35:3). Will you not pray that it may please Him to do so?"

Editor: "You shall certainly have a place in my feeble petitions. The Lord be very gracious unto you."

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