

## Studies on Saving Faith

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Part 4

Chapter 22

## DIALOGUE 4

"Good evening, Mr. Editor. I trust I am not intruding." "No, indeed, you are very welcome Bro. Humble Heart, and I am thankful to see from your countenance that your heart is lighter" (Proverbs 15:13).

Brother Humble Heart: "I am glad to say it is so at present, for the Lord has been very gracious to me, and I cannot but think that it is in answer to your prayers, for the Scriptures declare, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'" (James 5:16).

Editor: "If the Lord has deigned to hear my feeble intercessions on your behalf, all the praise alone to Him. But tell me something of His goodness towards you."

Brother Humble Heart: "May it please the Lord to direct my thoughts, anoint my lips, and help me to do so. My story is rather a long one, but I will be as concise as the case allows. "A poor woman, known among the Lord's people as Sister Fearing, was left a widow some months ago, and having buried all her children, I knew she had no one to spade her garden; so this spring I called on her, and asked if she would allow me to do it."

Editor: "I am glad to hear that: if godliness be not intensely practical, then it is only a name without the reality. It is written 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (James 1:27). And did this poor sister avail herself of your kind offer?"

Brother Humble Heart: "Yes, with tears running down her face, she told me she was quite unable to express her gratitude. After a while she said, It was not so much my offer to help which moved her so deeply, but that it gave her a little hope she was not completely abandoned by God. "I asked her why she ever entertained the thought that God had cast her off? She told me that most of the time she felt herself to be such a vile and polluted creature that a holy God could not look with any complacency upon her. She said she was so constantly tormented by doubts and fears that God must have given her over to an evil heart of unbelief. She added that, in spite of all her reading of the Word and crying unto the Lord for strength, her case seemed to grow worse and worse, so that it appeared Heaven must be closed against her."

Editor: "And what reply did you make to her sorrowful complaint?"

Brother Humble Heart: "Why, there flowed into my mind a verse which I had not thought of for a long time: I felt it was from the Lord, and looking to Him for wisdom and tenderness, I addressed the dear soul as follows: "Sister Fearing, I think you are too hasty in your conclusion. I have been just where you now are. I read in God's Word, 'the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power' (1 Corinthians 4:20), and I reasoned that if

God had set up His kingdom in my heart, then the power of sin would be broken; but alas, I found sin in me stronger than ever. I read 'he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him' (1 John 4:16), but I could not believe He dwelt in me while I was in such bondage to slavish fear. I read 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba, Father"' (Romans 8:15), but I could not cry 'Abba, Father': so I was afraid God had nothing to do with me. I read, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin' (1 John 3:9), and though I was preserved from bringing public reproach upon the name of Christ, yet I found myself continually overcome by sin within. My guilty conscience daily condemned me, and unto peace I was a stranger."

Sister Fearing: "You have accurately described my sad lot; but go on please."

Brother Humble Heart: "Suffer me, then, to ask you a few honest questions. Have you been chastised, rebuked, made tender and sore for sin? And after feeling God's reproofs, was your spirit revived and refreshed under the Word, so that you hoped for better days?"

Sister Fearing: "Yes, I have been conscious of God's rod upon me, and have owned with David, 'Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me' (Psalm 119:75). And there have been times, all too brief, when it seemed I was softened and revived, and had a little hope; but the sun was soon again hidden behind dark clouds."

Brother Humble Heart: "Well, that proves God does dwell within you, for He declares, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15)!

Sister Fearing: "Yes, I am familiar with that verse, but it makes against me, for had God truly 'revived' me, the effects of it would remain; instead, I am dry and parched, lifeless and barren."

Brother Humble Heart: "Again you are too hasty in writing 'bitter things against' yourself (Job 13:26). Such 'revivings' of faith, hope, and love in the soul are evidences of the Spirit's indwelling. But let me now give you the verse which flowed into my mind at the beginning of our conversation: it exactly fits your case, 'And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage' (Ezra 9:8). Ah, dear Sister, do you not see that this 'little reviving,' even though it be for 'a little space,' is a manifestation of God's dwelling in a broken and contrite heart?"

Editor: "That was indeed a word in season, and evidently given you by the Spirit. There are many hindered from enjoying assurance through unnecessary fears; because sin is in them as an active and restless principle, they imagine they have no contrary principle of holiness; and because in part they are carnal, judge that they are not spiritual."

Because grace is but feebly active, they conclude they are void of it; and because for a long season they enjoy not strong consolation, suppose they have no title to it. They fail to distinguish between the motions of the flesh and the motions of the spirit: as surely as sin manifests the flesh to be in us, so does grieving over it, striving against it, repenting for it, and the confessing of it to God, show the spirit or new nature indwells us. The Christian's sighs and groans are among his best evidences that he is regenerate."

Brother Humble Heart: "May I ask, exactly what you meant when you said, Many are hindered from enjoying assurance through unnecessary fears? My reason for asking is, because in Philippians 2:12 God bids His people work out their salvation with fear and trembling."

Editor: "Your question is well taken. We must distinguish sharply between the fears of godly jealousy and the fears of unbelief the one is a distrusting of self, the other is a doubting of God; the former is opposed to pride and carnal confidence, the latter is the enemy of true peace. The eleven apostles manifested the fear of godly jealousy when the Savior announced that one would betray Him, and each of them inquired, 'Lord, is it I?' David gave way to the fear of unbelief when he said, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul' (1 Samuel 27:1). But I have interrupted your narrative; tell me how Sister Fearing responded to your giving her Ezra 9:8."

Brother Humble Heart: "Really, it seemed to make little impression. She sighed deeply, and for a while said nothing. Then she continued, I fear it would be presumption for me to say that I have ever been revived for a dead soul cannot be—he must first be quickened; probably the raising of my spirits under the reading or hearing of the Word is nothing more than the joy of the stony-ground hearer (Matthew 13:20, 21). To which I replied, But one who has never been quickened has no pantings after God, never seeks Him at all, but seeks to banish Him entirely from his thoughts. True, he may go to church, and keep up a form of godliness before others, but there is no diligent seeking after Him in private, no yearnings for communion with Him.

"Perhaps, dear Sister, it may be a day of 'small things' (Zechariah 4:10) with you. Often there is life where there is not strength. A child may breathe and cry yet cannot talk or walk. If God be the object of your affection, if sin be the cause of your grief, if conformity to Christ be the longing of your heart, then a good work has begun in you (Philippians 1:6). If it is indwelling sin which makes you so wretched from day to day, if it be deliverance from its polluting effects you yearn and pray for, if it be the lustings of the flesh you are struggling against, then it must be because a principle of holiness has been implanted in your heart. Such godly exercises are not in us by nature; they are the products of indwelling grace. Despair not, for it is written of Christ, 'a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench'" (Matthew 12:20).

Sister Fearing: "Yes, it is one thing to understand these things intellectually, but it is quite another for God to apply them in power to the heart: that is what I long for, and that is what I lack. My wound is far too deadly for any man to heal. O that I could be sure as to whether my disrelish of sin arises from mere natural convictions of

conscience that every ungodly person feels more or less, whether they are suggestions from Satan for the purpose of deceiving me, or whether they actually are the strivings of the new nature against the old. Nothing short of the personal, mighty, and saving power of the Holy Spirit realized in my heart will or can give me genuine relief."

Brother Humble Heart: "I am thankful to hear you say this. Human comforts may satisfy an empty professor, but such a plaster will not heal one of the elect when stricken by God. It is His purpose to cut off every arm of flesh from them, to strip them and bring them, in their helplessness, as empty-handed beggars before the throne of His grace. As to whether or not the life of God be actually planted in the soul, therein lies the grand mystery: that is the pivot on which eternal destiny must turn. And no verdict from man can satisfy on that point. Only the Lord Himself can give such a testimony or witness as will satisfy one of His children. But when He does shine into the soul, when He applies His Word in power, when He says 'thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace,' then no word from a preacher is needed. The Lord keep you at His feet till He grants this.

"Until very recently I too was much exercised over the great danger of Satan instilling a false peace, and making me believe that all was well, when it was not so; as I was also much perplexed to know how to distinguish between the convictions of natural conscience and the exercises of a renewed conscience. But the Lord has shown me that as a tree is known by its fruits, so the nature of a cause may be determined by the character of the effects it produces. They who are deluded by the false peace which Satan bestows are filled with conceit, presumption, and carnal confidence: they do not beg God to search them, being so sure of Heaven they consider it quite unnecessary. The convictions of natural conscience harden, stop the mouth of prayer, and lead to despair. The convictions of a renewed conscience produce penitent confession, lead to Christ, and issue in honesty and uprightness before God.

"In conclusion, let me earnestly counsel you, dear Sister, to have nothing to do with those who profess their experience to be all peace and joy; and who, if you ask them whether they are tormented by the plague of their own heart, or whether they have felt the blood of Christ applied to their own conscience, laugh, and say they have nothing to do with feelings, but live above them. Such deluded creatures can be of no more help to a groaning saint than one suffering anguish from bodily ills would receive any relief from the so-called Christian Scientists, who tell him his pains are mental delusions, and to think only of health and happiness: one and another are equally physicians of no value. Instead, pour out your woes into the ears of the great Physician, and in His own perfect time He will pour oil and wine into your wounds, and put a new song into your mouth."

Brother Humble Heart: "Since then I have said nothing more to her on the subject, believing it best to leave her alone with God."

Editor: "I am glad to hear that: none but blind zealots will attempt to do the Holy Spirit's work for Him. Much damage is often done to souls trying to force things: when God begins a work, we may safely leave it in His hands to continue and complete the same. And how happy am I, dear Bro., to perceive the dew of the Spirit upon your own soul. It

appears that 'the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear.' and 'the time of the singing of birds is come' (Song of Solomon 2:11, 12) with you."

Brother Humble Heart: "Thanks be unto God for taking pity upon such a wretch: it is much better with me now. The strange thing is, though, I had little or no real assurance myself when I commenced speaking to Sister Fearing, but as she mentioned the different things which so troubled her, God seemed to put into my mouth the very words most needed, and as I spoke them to her, He sealed them unto my own heart."

Editor: "Yes, it is as we read in Proverbs 11:25, 'The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself': in communicating the Word of God to His children, our own hearts are refreshed and our own faith is established. To him that useth what he hath shall more be given."

"I have long perceived the truth of what the apostle says in 2 Corinthians 1:4, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' It is God's way to take His people, and especially His servants, through trying and painful experiences, in order that they may use to His glory the consolation wherewith He has comforted them. It is those who know most of the plague of their own heart, who are best fitted to speak a word in season to weary souls. It is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and it is he who has passed through the furnace who can best deal with those now in the fire. Let us pray that it may please God to be equally gracious unto Sister Fearing."

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