

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH Part IV

DIALOGUE 3 Editor Visits Humble Heart

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Transcript

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In the communicating of His Word God was pleased to speak 'at sundry times and in divers manners' (Heb. 1:1). In the Scriptures of Truth we have clear doctrinal instruction and plain precepts for the regulation of conduct, but we also find "dark parables' and mysterious symbols. Side by side are history and allegory, hymns of praise and practical proverbs, precious promises and intricate prophecies. Variety stamps all the works and ways of God. This illustrates a principle which should guide those whom the Lord has called to teach His Word: there should be variety both in the matter of their messages and the methods employed in delivering them. Many are unable to apprehend abstract statements, comparatively few have minds trained to follow a course of logical reasoning. The teacher then, ought to adapt himself to the capacity of his hearers. Blessedly do we find this exemplified in the ministry of the perfect Teacher. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was largely by question and answer. Having this in mind, we feel it may be wise to follow the last two articles on "Assurance" by another one in dialogue form. "Good evening, friend Humble Heart." "Good evening, Mr. Editor. This is a pleasant surprise for I was not expecting to be favored with a visit from one of God's servants: I do not feel worthy of their notice." Editor: "According to my promise, I have been seeking to remember you before the Throne of Grace, and while in prayer this morning there was impressed on my mind those words, 'lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees' (Heb. 12:12). I have been impressed of late by that lovely prophetic picture of Christ found in Isaiah 40:11, 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' The Saviour devotes special care and tenderness upon the weak of the flock, and in this He has left an example which the under-shepherds need to follow. Brother Humble Heart: "It is indeed kind of you, Sir, to bestow any trouble upon such a poor, worthless creature as I am: I should have thought your time had been more profitably employed in ministering to those who can take in the Truth quickly, and who grow in it by leaps and bounds; as for me, I am so dull and stupid, so full of doubtings and fears, that your labours on me are wasted." Editor: "Ah, my friend, all is not gold that glitters. The great majority of those who 'take in the Truth quickly' only do so

intellectually—it has no power over the heart; and those who ‘grow by leaps and bounds,’ grow too swiftly for it to be real, or worth anything spiritually. Truth has to be bought (Prov. 23:23): bought by frequent meditation thereon, by taking it home unto ourselves, by deep exercises of conscience, by wrestling with God in prayer, that He would apply it in power to the soul." Brother H. H.: "Yes, I realize that, and it makes me feel so bad because God's Word has not been written on my heart. I have gone over in my mind, again and again, all that you said at our last interview, and I am sure that I am unregenerate." Editor: "What leads you to such a conclusion?" Bro. H. H.: "This, if I had been regenerated the Holy Spirit would be dwelling within me, and in that case He would be producing His blessed fruit in my heart and life. It is written, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance’ (self-control)—Galatians 5:22-23; and as I have endeavored to examine and search myself, I discover in me the very opposite of these heavenly graces." Editor: "God's workings in grace and His ways in the material creation have much in common, and if we observe closely the latter, we may learn much about the former. Now in the natural realm the production of fruit is often a slow process. Glance out now at the trees, and how do they look? They are lifeless, and seem to be dead. Yet they are not; the vital sap is still in their roots, even though no signs of it be apparent to us. But in a little while, under the genial warmth of the sun, those trees will be covered with blossoms. Then, after a few days, those pretty blossoms will all have disappeared—blown off by the winds. Nevertheless, if those trees be examined closely it will be found that where those blossoms were are now little green buds. Many weeks have to pass before the owner of those trees is gladdened by seeing the buds develop into fruit. "A further lesson may be learned from our gardens. The orchard teaches us the need for patience: the garden instructs us to expect and overcome disappointments. Here is a bed, which has been carefully prepared, and sown with seed. Later, the seed springs up and the plants appear, from which the flowers are to grow. But side by side there spring up many weeds too. The uninstructed gardener was not expecting this, and is apt to be discouraged. Before he sowed the flower-seed, he thought he had carefully rooted up every nettle, thistle, and obnoxious plant; but now the bed has in it more weeds than flowers. So it is, my Brother, with the heart of the Christian. Though the incorruptible seed of God's Word is planted there (1 Peter 1:23), yet the heart—neglected all through the years of unregeneracy—is overgrown with weeds (the lusts of the flesh), and to the anointed eye the heart looks more like the Devil's weed plot than ‘the king's garden'" (2 Kings 25:4). Brother Humble Heart: "What you have just referred to in the natural realm is quite obvious, but I am not so clear about the spiritual application. Does not your last illustration belittle the work and power of the Holy Spirit? You have often quoted in your articles that Christ saves His people ‘from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21); how, then, can any person rightfully regard himself as saved, while he is conscious that many sins still have dominion over him?" Editor: "I am glad you raised this point, for many dear souls are often troubled over it. Concerning the work and power of the Holy Spirit: light is thrown on this by various expressions which God has used in His Word. For example, in 2 Corinthians 1:22 (cf. Eph. 1:13, 14)) we read that God has ‘given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.’ Now an ‘earnest’ means a part, and not the whole—an installment, as it were; the fullness of the Spirit's power and blessing is communicated to no Christian in this life. So again in Romans 8:23, ‘ourselves also, which have received the firstfruits of the Spirit’—a pledge, a sample only, of future greater abundance. "Let me call your attention to the words which immediately follow those just quoted from Romans 8:23, namely, ‘even we ourselves groan within ourselves’ which is the more striking because this same thing is seen again in 2 Corinthians 5:4, 5. So those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God are a ‘groaning’ people! It is true that the unregenerate ‘groan’ at times: when suffering great bodily pain, or over some heavy loss; but the ‘groaning’ of the Christian is occasioned by something very different: he groans over the remains of depravity still left within him, over the flesh so often successfully resisting the Spirit, over seeing around him so much that is dishonoring to

Christ. This is clear from Romans 7:24 and its context, Philippians 3:18, etc." Brother Humble Heart: "But only a few days ago I mentioned some of these very scriptures to one whom I regard as an eminent saint, and he told me that he had 'got out of Romans 7 into Romans 8' long ago." Editor: "But as we have seen, the Christian in Romans 8 'groans' (v. 23)!" Brother H. H.: "The one I had reference to laughed at me for my doubts and fears, told me I was dishonoring God by listening to the Devil." Editor: "It is much to be feared that he is a complete stranger to those exercises of heart which are experienced by every regenerate soul, and knows nothing of that heart-anguish and soul-travail which ever precedes spiritual assurance. The Lord Jesus did not laugh at fearing souls, but said, 'Blessed are they that mourn.' It is clear that your acquaintance does not understand your case. Brother H. H.: "But do you mean to say that all of God's children are as wretched in soul as I am?" Editor: "No, I would not say that. The Holy Spirit does not give the same degree of light on the exceeding sinfulness of sin to all alike, nor does He reveal so fully unto all their own inward depravity. Moreover, just as God has appointed different seasons to the year, so no true Christian is always the same in his soul: there are cheerful days of spring and gloomy days of autumn, both in the natural and in the spiritual. 'But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Prov. 4:18), nevertheless, 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God,' (Acts 14:22). Both are true, though we are not always conscious of them both." Brother H. H.: "I do not believe that any real Christian is ever plagued as I am: plagued so often with a spirit of rebellion, with unbelief, with pride, with such vile thoughts and desires that I would blush to mention them." Editor: "Ah, my Brother, few unregenerate souls would be honest enough to acknowledge as much! The very fact that these inward workings of sin plague you, is clear proof that you are regenerate, and there is within you a nature or principle of holiness which loathes all that is unholy. It is this which causes the Christian to 'groan,' nevertheless this brings him into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. While here the Lord Jesus was 'the Man of sorrows,' and that which occasioned all His grief was sin—not His own, for He had none: but the sins of others. This then is one reason why God leaves the sinful nature in His people even after regeneration: that mourning over it they may be conformed to their suffering Head." Brother H. H.: "But how does this tally with Christ's saving His people from their sins?" Editor: "Matthew 1:21 in nowise clashes with what I have been saying. Christ saves His people from the guilt and punishment of their sins, because that was transferred to and vicariously suffered by Him. He saves us too from the pollution of sin: His Spirit moves us to see, grieve over, confess our sins, and plead the precious blood; and as this is done in faith, the conscience is cleansed. He also saves us from the reigning power of sin, so that the Christian is no longer the absolute and abject slave of sin and Satan. Moreover, the ultimate fulfillment of this blessed promise (like that of many others) is yet future: the time is coming when the Lord Jesus shall rid His people of the very presence of sin, so that they shall be done with it forever." (See A Fourfold Salvation by NW. Pink) Brother H. H.: "While on that point I wish you would explain to me those words 'sin shall not have dominion over you' (Rom. 6:14). Editor: "Observe first what that verse does not say: it is not 'sin shall not haunt and harass you' or 'sin shall not trip you and occasion many a fall': had it said that, every Christian might well despair. To 'have dominion over' signifies the legal right to command another, such as a parent over his child, or as one nation has over another which has been completely conquered in war. Such legal 'dominion' sin has not over any Christian: Christ alone is his rightful Lord. But sin oftentimes usurps authority over us, yet even experimentally it has not complete 'dominion': it can lead no Christian to apostatize, that is, utterly and finally renounce Christ. It can never so dominate the believer that he is thoroughly in love with sin and repents not when he offends." Brother H. H.: "Thank you; but may I ask another question: Why is it that some of God's children are not plagued by sin as I am?" Editor: "How can you be sure that they are not? 'The heart knoweth his own bitterness'" (Prov. 14:10). Brother H. H.: "But I can tell from their peaceful countenances, their

conversation, their joy in the Lord, that it cannot so be the case with them.' Editor: "Some are blest with a more cheerful natural disposition than others. Some keep shorter accounts with God, making it a point of conscience to confess every known sin to Him. Some are more diligent in using the means of grace: they who neglect the reading of God's Word, meditation thereon, and approach the throne of grace only occasionally and formally, cannot expect to have healthy souls." Brother H. H.: "I admit I cannot meet your arguments. What you say is doubtless true of God's people, but my case is far worse than you realize: I have such a sink of iniquity within, and so often find myself listless toward all that is spiritual, that I greatly fear there can be no assurance for me." Editor: "It is the Devil who tells you that." Brother H. H.: "How can one distinguish between the harassing doubts which the Devil injects, and the convictions of sin and piercings of conscience which the Holy Spirit produces?" Editor: "By the effects produced. Satan will tell you that it is no use to resist indwelling sin any longer, that it is useless to pray any more. He seeks to produce despair, and tells many harassed souls they might as well commit suicide and put an end to their misery. But when the Holy Spirit convicts a Christian, He also works in his heart a godly sorrow, and moves him to acknowledge his transgressions to God. He leads to the throne of grace and gives again a sight of the cleansing blood of Christ; and this not once or twice, but to the end of our earthly lives. 'For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again' (Prov. 24:16). If then this agrees with your own experience, you must be a Christian." Brother H. H.: "I cannot but be struck with the fact that your counsel and instruction is the very opposite of what was given to me by the last person I spoke to about my sorrows. He is a man very wise in the Scriptures, having scores of passages at his finger's end. He told me that the only way to get rid of my doubting was to believe the Word, and that every time I felt miserable to lay hold on one of the promises." Editor: "I think I know the company to which that man belongs. All they believe in is a natural faith, which lies in the power of the creature; a faith which is merely the product of our own will-power. But that is not the 'faith of God's elect.' Spiritual faith is the gift of God, and only the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit can call it forth into action in any of us. Shun such a people, my Brother. Avoid all who give no real place to the Holy Spirit, but would make you believe that the remedy lies in your own 'free-will.' Seek more the company and communion of God Himself, and beg Him for Christ's sake to increase your faith and stay your mind upon Himself."

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