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TRUE CONVERSION.

A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN HOPEFUL AND CHRISTIAN.

FROM BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

CHRISTIAN. How came you to think at first of doing what you do now?

HOPEFUL. Do you mean, how I came at first to look after the good of my soul?

CHR. Yes, that is my meaning.

HOPE. I continued a great while in the delight of those things which were seen and sold at our fair; things which I believe now would have, had I continued in them still, drowned me in perdition and destruction.

CHR. What things are they?

HOPE. All the treasures and riches of the world. Also, I delighted much in rioting, revelling, drinking, swearing, lying, uncleanness, Sabbath breaking, and what not, that tended to destroy the soul. But I found, at last, by hearing and considering of things that are divine, which, indeed, I heard of you, as also of beloved Faithful that was put to death for his faith and good living in Vanity Fair, that the end of these things is death; and that for these things' sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of men?

CHR. And did you presently fall under the power of this conviction?

HOPE. No, I was not willing presently to know the evil of sin, nor the damnation that follows upon the commission of it; but endeavored when my mind at first began to be shaken with the Word, to shut mine eyes against the light thereof.

CHR. But what was the cause of your acting thus under the first workings of God's blessed Spirit upon you?

HOPE. The causes were: 1. I was ignorant that this was the work of God upon me. I never thought that by awakenings from sin, God at first begins the conversion of a sinner. 2. Sin was yet very sweet to my flesh, and I was loth to leave it. 3. I could not tell how to part with my old companions, their presence and actions were so desirable unto me. 4. The hours in which convictions were upon me, were such troublesome and such heart-affrighting hours, that I could not bear, no, not so much as the remembrance of them upon my heart.

CHR. Then, as it seems, sometimes you got rid of your trouble?

HOPE. Yes, verily, but it would come into my mind again; and then I would be as bad, nay, worse, than I was before.

CHR. Why, what was it that brought your sins to mind again?

HOPE. Many things, as: 1. If I did but meet a good man in the streets; or, 2. If I heard any read in the Bible; or, 3. If my head did begin to ache; or, 4. If I were told that some of my neighbors were sick; or, 5. If I heard the bell toll for some that were dead; or, 6. If I thought of dying myself; or, 7. If I heard that sudden death happened to others. 8. But especially when I thought of myself, that I must quickly come to judgment.

CHR. And could you at any time, with ease get off the guilt of sin, when by any of these ways it came upon you?

HOPE. No, not I; for then they got faster hold of my conscience: and then, if I did but think of going back to sin—though my mind was turned against it—it would be double torment to me.

CHR. And how did you do then?

HOPE. I thought I must endeavor to mend my life; or else, thought I, I am sure to be damned.

CHR. And did you endeavor to mend?

HOPE. Yes, and fled from not only my sins, but sinful company too, and betook me to religious duties; as praying, reading, weeping for sin, speaking truth to my neighbors, etc. These things, did I, with many others, too much here to relate.

CHR. And did you think yourself well then?

HOPE. Yes, for awhile; but at the last my trouble came tumbling upon me again, and that over the neck of all my reformatations.

CHR. How came that about, since you were now reformed?

HOPE. There were several things brought it upon me, especially such sayings as these: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." "By the works of the law shall all flesh be justified." "When ye have done all these things, say, We are unprofitable;" with many more such like. From whence I began to reason with myself thus: If all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags, if by deeds of the law no man can be justified, and if, when we have done all, we are yet unprofitable, then is it but a folly to think of heaven by the law. I farther thought thus: If a man runs a hundred pounds into the shopkeeper's debt, and after that shall pay for all that he shall buy; yet if his old debt stand still in the book uncrossed, the shopkeeper may sue him for it, and cast him into prison till he shall pay the debt.

CHR. Well, and how did you apply this to yourself?

HOPE. Why, I thought thus with myself: I have by my sins run a great way into God's book, and my now reforming will not pay off that score. Therefore, I would think still, under all my present amendments, but how shall I be freed from that damnation that I brought myself in danger of by my former transgressions?

CHR. A very good application; but pray go on.

HOPE. Another thing that hath troubled me ever since my late amendments is, that if I look narrowly into the best of what I do now, I still see sin, new sin, mixing it-

self with the best of that I do; so that now I am forced to conclude that, notwithstanding my former fond conceits of myself and duties, I have committed sin enough in one day to send me to hell, though my former life had been faultless.

CHR. And what did you do then?

HOPE. Do! I could not tell what to do, until I broke my mind to Faithful; for he and I were well acquainted. And he told me, that unless I could obtain the righteousness of a Man that had never sinned, neither mine own, nor all the righteousness of the world could save me.

CHR. And did you think he spake true?

HOPE. Had he told me so when I was pleased and satisfied with my own amendments, I had called him fool for his pains; but now, since I see my own infirmity; and the sin which cleaves to my best performance, I have been forced to be of his opinion.

CHR. But did you think, when at first he suggested it to you, that there was such a man to be found, of whom it might justly be said, that he never committed sin?

HOPE. I must confess the words at first sounded strangely; but after a little more talk and company with him, I had full conviction about it.

CHR. And did you ask him what man this was, and how you must be justified by him?

HOPE. Yes; and he told me it was the Lord Jesus, that dwelleth on the right hand of the Most High. And thus, said he, you must be justified by him, even by trusting to what he hath done by himself in the days of his flesh, and suffered when he did hang on the tree. I asked him further, how that man's righteousness could be of such efficacy, to justify another before God. And he told me he was "the mighty God," and did what he did, and died the death also, not for himself, but for me; and to whom his doings, and the worthiness of them, should be imputed, if I believed on him.

CHR. What did you do then?

HOPE. I made my objections against believing, for I thought he was not willing to save me.

CHR. And what said Faithful to you then?

HOPE. He bid me go to Him and see. Then I said it was presumption. He said, No; for I was invited to come. Then he gave me a book of Jesus' inditing, to encourage me the more freely to come; and he said concerning that book, that every jot and tittle thereof stood firmer than heaven and earth. Then I asked him what I must do when I came; and he told me I must entreat upon my knees, with all my heart and soul, the Father to reveal him to me. Then I asked him further, how I must make my supplications to him; and he said: Go, and thou shalt find him upon a mercy-seat, where he sits all the year long to give pardon and forgiveness to them that come. I told him that I knew not what to say when I came; and he bade me say to this effect: God be merciful to me a sinner, and I make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ; for I see, that if his righteousness had not been, or I have not faith in righteousness, I am utterly cast away. Lord, I have heard that thou art a merciful God, and hast ordained that thy Son Jesus Christ should be the Saviour of the world; and moreover, that thou art willing to bestow him upon such a poor sinner as I am. And I am a sinner, indeed. Lord, take, therefore, this opportunity, and magnify thy grace in the salvation of my soul, through thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHR. And did you do as you were bid?

HOPE. Yes; over, and over, and over.

CHR. And did the Father reveal the Son to you?

HOPE. Not at the first, nor second, nor third nor fourth, nor fifth, no, nor the sixth time neither.

CHR. What did you do then?

HOPE. What? Why, I could not tell what to do.

CHR. Had you not thoughts of leaving off praying?

HOPE. Yes; and a hundred times twice told.

CHR. And what was the reason you did not?

HOPE. I believed that it was true which hath been told me, to wit: that without the righteousness of this Christ, all the world could not save me; and, therefore, thought I with myself, if I leave off, I die, and I can but die at the throne of grace. And withal, this came into my mind: "If it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, and

will not tarry." So I continued praying until the Father showed me his Son.

CEP. And how was he revealed unto you ?

HOPE. I did not see him with my bodily eyes, but with the eyes of my understanding; and thus it was: One day I was very sad, I think sadder than at any one time in my life; and this sadness was through a fresh sight of the greatness and vileness of my sins. And as I was then looking for nothing but hell, and the everlasting damnation of my soul, suddenly, as I thought, I saw the Lord Jesus looking down from heaven upon me, and saying, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

But I replied, Lord, I am a great, a very great sinner; and he answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Then I said, "But, Lord, what is believing?" And then I saw from that saying, "He that cometh to me shall never thirst," that believing and coming was all one; and that he came, that is, that ran out in his heart and affections after salvation by Christ, he, indeed, believed in Christ. Then the water stood in mine eyes, and I asked further, "But, Lord, may such a great sinner as I am be indeed accepted of thee, and be saved by thee?" And I heard him say, "And him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." Then I said, But how Lord, must I consider of thee in my coming to thee, that my faith may be placed aright upon thee? Then he said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. He is the Mediator between God and us. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. From all which I gathered, that I must look for righteousness in his person, and for satisfaction for my sins by his blood; that what he did in obedience to his Father's law, and in submitting to the penalty thereof, was not for himself, but for him that will accept it for his salvation, and be thankful. And now was my heart full of joy, mine eyes full of tears, and mine affections running over with love to the name, people, and ways of Jesus Christ.

CHR. This was a revelation of Christ to your soul, indeed. But tell me particularly, what effect this had upon your spirit.

HOPE. It made me see that all the world, notwithstanding all the righteousness thereof, is in a state of condemnation. It made me see that God the Father, though he be just, can justly justify the coming sinner. It made me greatly ashamed of the vileness of my former life, and confounded me with the sense of mine own ignorance; for there never came a thought into my heart before now that showed me so the beauty of Jesus Christ. It made me love a holy life, and long to do something for the honor and glory of the name of the Lord Jesus. Yea, I thought that had I now a thousand gallons of blood in my body, I could spill it all for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

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