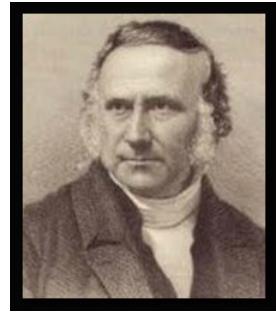


I Can't Feel



From early spring down to the autumn of the year, a very sedate and contemplative man had been accustomed to call upon me, in respect to his religious thoughts and anxieties. At first he seemed to have thoughts only, but they ripened by degrees into anxieties. He began by asking about theories, or doctrines, apparently without any idea of making an application of the truth to himself. He had points of difficulty which he wished to have explained, and then he found other points; and these gradually changed in character from abstract questions to those of the application of the truth. From the first, I tried to lead him on to the personal application; but months passed away before he appeared to have much sense of his sin, or much anxiety about himself.

But he came to this; and after quite a struggle of mind, as it appeared to me to lead himself to believe in salvation by personal merit, he gave that up; he said to me, "I have become convinced that sinners are saved, not by their own goodness, but because they are pardoned on account of Jesus Christ. Faith in Him is the only way for them."

After this, I had conversed with him several times, when he appeared to me to be not far from the kingdom of God; but I was as often disappointed, for he would come back to me again in as much trouble and unbelief as before. Again and again I had answered all his inquiries, teaching him out of the Scriptures; had brought up to his mind all the doctrines of truth, the divine promises and directions, sin and salvation; but all in vain. He had become very solemn, and seemed to be entirely candid and really in earnest. His Bible had become his constant study; he

was a man of prayer; he attended upon all our religious services with manifest interest; he appeared to have a deep sense of his sin and danger. But he had no hope in Christ.

I finally said to him one evening,—

“I do not know, my dear sir, what more can be said to you. I have told you all that I know. Your state as a sinner lost, exposed to the righteous penalty of God’s Law, and having a heart alienated from God; and the free offer of redemption by Christ; and your instant duty to repent of sin and give up the world and give God your heart; and the source of your help through the power of the Holy Spirit assured to you, if you will ‘receive’ Christ: all these things have become as familiar to you as household words. What more can I say? I know not what more there is to be said. I cannot read your heart. God can, and you can by His aid. Some things you have said almost made me think you a Christian, and others again have destroyed that hope. I now put it to your own heart—if you are not a Christian, what hinders you?”

He thought a moment,—said he,—“I can’t feel!”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“I never thought of it before, sir:”

“How do you know this hinders you?”

“I can think of nothing else. But I am sure I shall never be converted to God, if I have no more feeling than I have now. But that is my own fault. I know you cannot help me.”

“No sir, I cannot; nor can you help yourself. Your heart will not feel at your bidding.”

“What then can I do?” said he, with much anxiety.

“Come to Christ, now. Trust Him. Give up your darling world. ‘Repent: so iniquity shall not be your ruin.’”

He seemed perplexed—annoyed—vexed; and with an accent of impatience, such as I had never witnessed in him before, he replied,—

“That is impossible. I want the feeling, to bring me to that; and I can’t feel!”

"Hear me, sir," said I, and heed well what I say. I have several points:

"1. The Bible never tells you that you must feel but that you must repent and believe.

"2. Your complaint that you 'can't feel,' is just an excuse, by which your wicked heart would justify you for not coming to Christ now.

"3. This complaint that you 'can't feel,' is the complaint of a self-righteous spirit." (He started—rose upon his feet, and stood as in amazement.)

"How is it?" said he.

"Because you look to the desired feeling to commend you to God, or to make you fit to come, or to enable you to come."

"Yes, to enable me," said he.

"Well, that is self-righteousness, in the shape of self-justification for not coming, or the shape of self-reliance, if you attempt to come. That is all legalism, and not the acceptance of a gracious Christianity. You cannot be saved by Law.

"4. Your complaint is the language of the most profound ignorance. To feel would do you no good. Devils feel. Lost spirits feel.

"5. Your complaint that you 'can't feel,' tends to lead you to a false religion—a religion of mere self-righteous feeling. Religion is duty."

"But, sir," said he, "there is feeling in religion."

"But, sir," said I, "there is duty in religion; and which shall come first? You ought to feel: you ought to love God; and grieve that you are such a senseless sinner."

"I know I am a sinner; but I can't feel any confidence to turn to God, to draw me to Him."

"You are like the prodigal in the fifteenth of Luke, when he thought of saying to his father, 'make me as one of thy hired servants.' Poor fool! Say that, to his father? Why, the very idea is a libel on his father's heart! But he didn't think so. Poor fool! he knew no better. And you are a greater fool than he. He went home. And where he met his father, he found his heart. He could "feel," when he found his father's arms around

him, and felt the strong beatings of his father's heart. Do as he did. Go home and you will feel, if you never felt before. You will starve where you are; your 'husks' will not save you."

As I was uttering this he hung his head, cast his eyes upon the Door, and stood like a statue of stone. I let him think. There he stood for some long minutes. Then turning suddenly to me, reaching to me his hand, says he,—

"I am very much obliged to you; good night."

I let him go.

About a month afterwards I met him riding alone in his wagon, and he insisted upon my taking a seat with him, for he had "something to say" to me, and he would "drive wherever I wanted to go." I was no sooner seated in the wagon than he said to me,—

"The human heart is the greatest mystery in the world; inexplicable, contradictory to itself; it is absurd. Man is a riddle. Who would imagine that when a sinner really wishes to feel his sins more, and wishes to have the love of Christ in his heart, it is because he is not willing to give up the world. He says, (as I said to you that last night,) "I can't feel," as an excuse for holding on to it. I found as soon as I was willing to "go home," as you called it, the road was plain enough."

"Were you hindered long with that want of feeling?"

"No; I never thought of it till that night. It came upon me like a flash; and then, just as I was thinking it was a good reason in my favor, you dashed it all into shivers."

"And can you 'feel' now?"

"Oh, yes; I have no trouble about that. I find, if a poor creature will turn to God, in the name of Jesus, he will learn to feel as he never felt before.

Sinners, not willing to give up the world, and wanting an excuse for their irreligion, exclaim, "I can't feel."