Devotional Thoughts :: William Bridge ~ A Lifting Up For the Downcast

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You will say, then, but what is the difference between these? A man is to be humbled, and not discouraged; not discouraged and yet to be humbled! What is the difference between these two, being humbled and being discouraged?

It is a profitable question, and worth our time. By way of answer, therefore, thus:

When a man is humbled, truly humbled, the object of his grief or sorrow or trouble is sin itself, as a dishonour done unto God. The object of discouragement is a man's own condition, or sin producing that condition, the ultimate object of discouragement being a man's own condition. When a man is discouraged, you will always find that his trouble is all about his own condition. Oh, says a discouraged person, I have sinned; I have thus and thus sinned, and therefore my condition is bad, and if my condition be bad now, it will never be better; Lord, what will become of my soul? His trouble is always abou ut his own condition. But when a man is grieved and truly humbled for sin, his trouble is about sin itself, as a dishonour done unto God. To clear this by Scripture: you know Cain was discouraged, but Cain was not humbled. How may that appear? Cain was troubled about his condition. Ah, says he, my punishment is greater than I can bear. On the other side, t he poor prodigal was humbled, but not discouraged. How may that appear? His trouble was about his sin, and not about his condition: "I will return unto my Father (says he), and I will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." David was sometimes both discouraged and humbled, and then you find his repentance and humiliation to be very brackish; but if you look into the 51s t Psalm, you will find David humbled but not discouraged, for it is a penitential Psalm. He was humbled but not discourag ed, for still he did keep his assurance; verse 14, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation." But what was his repentance, his trouble, about? It was about his sin, and not about his condition. Read verses 2 and 3, and so on: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions, an d my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: Â…behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." All the time, you see, his eye is upon his sin, and not upon his con dition only. So that I say, when a man is truly humbled and grieved for sin, the object of his grief is sin, as a dishonour done unto God: when a man is discouraged and not humbled, then his trouble is all about his condition, and what will become of him.

True humiliation, it is no enemy, but a real friend unto spiritual joy, to our rejoicing in God. The more a man is humbled for sin committed, the more he will rejoice in God, and rejoice that he can grieve for sin. He grieves, and rejoices that he can grieve for sin. Therefore humiliation, is said by our Saviour Christ to be an effect of the work of the Comforter: "I will send the Comforter, and he will convince the world of sin." Because comfort always goes along with true humiliation, it is not an enemy but a friend to our spiritual rejoicing; but discouragement is an enemy to spiritual joy. A man that is discour aged is grieved, and his grief makes him sad. If you tell him that he must rejoice in God, and call upon him to rejoice in God, Oh no, says he, it is not for me to rejoice; I am a man of another disposition; joy does not belong to me, or to one in my condition. But, when a man is truly humbled, the more he is humbled for sin, the more he can rejoice in God; but the more a man is discouraged, the less he rejoices in God.

The more a man is humbled, truly humbled for sin, the more he is found in duty; the more a man is discouraged, the mor e his hands are weakened for duty. As it is with water; if the water continues in its true stream, it does not overflow the b anks, it does not break down the dam. Sometimes you have a great fall of water, a great and mighty flood, and then the river overflows the banks, and the water breaks down the dam. So here, duty is the bank of sorrow and grief and humiliation for sin. I say, your duties are the banks of all your godly sorrow; and when a man's sorrow or grief rises to such a hei ght that it swells over duty, and a man says, I will pray no more, for it is to no purpose; and I will hear no more, for there is no hope for my soul; and I will examine my own heart no more -- when thus sorrow swells over duty, and breaks down the dam of duty, then it is discouragement and not humiliation. Be not mistaken; this is not humiliation, this is a plain disc ouragement. There is a great difference then, between discouragement and humiliation. Many people indeed think their discouragements to be humiliation. But the Lord knows, there is not a drop of humiliation in a flood of discouragement. Would you therefore be humbled? Oh, then, be not discouraged; for the more you are discouraged, the less you will be humbled; and the more humbled you are, the less discouraged you will be.

But you reply, if there be such a great difference between these, and if it be our duty, to be humbled for sin, but not to be discouraged, what should a man do to bear up his heart to the work of humiliation, and yet bear up against all discourag
lement? How shall I be so humbled without being discouraged? Or what shall a man do that he may be humbled, and yet not be discouraged in his humiliation?

Let Christians carry this rule always up and down with them, namely, That a man is to be humbled for his sin, although it be never so small, but he is not to be discouraged for his sin, though it be never so great. Both these parts are true. A man is not to be discouraged under his sin, though it be never so great, because discouragement itself is a sin, and that cannot help against sin. Sin cannot help against sin. A man is to be humbled for his sin, though it be never so small, for it is a dishonour to God, and little sins make way to great sins. So, then, if you would be humbled, and not discouraged, carry this rule up and down with you, and remember it upon all occasions: It is my duty, and I have reason to be humbled for my sin, although it be never so small; but I have no reason to be discouraged under my sin, though it be never so great.