

Assurance of Salvation

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSURANCE.

A. Assurance of salvation is not assurance that God's promises are *true*; it is assurance that God's promises are *ours*.

- 1.) Assurance is the essence of hope. The grace (or essence) of hope is, according to Scripture, a personal, confident expectation of salvation (Rom 5:2, 5; Phil 1:19-20).
- 2.) A well-grounded assurance is important because it is related to joy, comfort, and Christian service (Ernest C. Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, p. 110). (Note that the title of Thomas Brooks' excellent treatise on Christian assurance alludes to the great joy and comfort of assurance, *Heaven on Earth*, Banner of Truth.)
- 3.) Assurance of salvation is a God-given conviction of our standing in God's grace; it is 'stamped' on the mind and the heart supernaturally by God's Spirit (Reisinger, p. 113).
- 4.) True believers may have assurance in this life. God desires that His redeemed *know* that they belong to Him: *These things I have written to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life* (1 Jn 5:13).

B. There may be hypocrites and there may be 'temporary believers' who think they are Christians, but are not (there is such a thing as false assurance).

- 1.) The Bible teaches that some unconverted men *presume* that they are saved but are not. They are deceived; they have placed their hope upon faulty or insufficient grounds. *Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord* (Heb 12:14).
- 2.) People are easily deceived in religious matters. Because self-deception is common, there are many warnings in the Bible. *The hope of the hypocrite shall perish* (Job 8:13).
- 3.) The Pharisees of Jesus' day imagined that they possessed eternal life. Jesus warned them: *Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one convert, and when he is won, you make him twice the son of hell as yourselves* (Mt 23:15).
- 4.) Jesus will say to the 'religious' who were unconverted, *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness* (Mt 7:23). Those who make confident claims of assurance of

salvation are in reality deceived if they have no corresponding holiness of life (Samuel Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, p. 227).

C. The fact that false assurance does exist should not keep us from genuine assurance.

- 1.) God promises in His Word that true believers may have assurance in this life (Rom 8:16; 1 Jn 2:3; 3:14, 18-19, 24; 2 Pet 1:10).
- 2.) The genuine assurance that God gives will not deceive or fail. Christians who possess God-given assurance are *not mistaken* regarding the confidence that they stand in God's grace. (Therefore, believers who desire assurance should *not* be fearful about the possibility of deceiving themselves. God offers to true believers an assurance which will not deceive. It is assurance about which a true believer will not be mistaken—Romans 5:1-5.)
- 3.) God's promise of assurance is His pledge to His redeemed children. *In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us* (Heb 6:17-18ff.).
- 4.) How we need strong encouragement from Scripture. *Most Christians live between fears and hopes, and hang, as it were, between heaven and hell. . .they hope that their state is good, at other times they fear that their state is bad. . .* (Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 11). Assurance is attainable; it is worth the effort and diligence necessary to gain it.
- 5.) God's free and gracious promises of salvation (purchased by the blood and righteousness of Christ) are the central basis for this certain (or infallible) assurance (Waldron, p. 228).
- 6.) Believers ought to know the differences between true and false assurance:
 - *True assurance* produces genuine humility.
 - *False assurance* produces spiritual pride.
 - *True assurance* leads to increased diligence in pursuing holiness (Ps 51:12-19).
 - *False assurance* leads to laziness, self-indulgence, and lack of caution concerning sin.
 - *True assurance* leads to transparency before God and self-examination—a desire to be searched and corrected by God (Ps 139:23-24).
 - *False assurance* leads to an attitude of self-satisfaction with appearances; an avoidance of accurate self-examination by Scripture.

- *True assurance* seeks after intimacy with God and makes it a priority to abide in Christ (Jn 15:1-10).
- *False assurance* does not seek after greater intimacy with God (A. A. Hodge, “Assurance of Salvation,” in *Confession of Faith*, p. 239).

II. THE THREE BIBLICAL PILLARS OF ASSURANCE.

A. The first ‘pillar’, or ground of assurance, is *the promises of God in the Gospel*. *Saving faith* in the Gospel, and *knowing for certain* that we saved are not the same thing. Faith bears a relationship to assurance as a root does to a flower. The root may exist without the flower; but the flower cannot exist apart from the root. Assurance is supported by our faith in the Gospel. *We will have assurance in proportion to our faith in the promises of God.*

- 1.) The unsaved sinner *dead in sins* (Eph 2:1-3) is blind to the things of God. The sinner needs both *sight* and *light*. He needs *sight* (spiritual illumination, 1 Cor 2:12-15), and he needs *light* (the ‘light’ is God’s truth in His Word). In regeneration, the Spirit applies the Word of God opening up the sinner’s understanding. *Lydia, ...a worshipper of God, ...was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul* (Acts 16:14b).
- 2.) The promises of God in the Gospel are ‘made alive’ by the Spirit of God. It is not just the promises of God alone; they are *applied* to the believing sinner by the Spirit’s gracious work. The promises of salvation in Scripture are made *real* to us by the Holy Spirit.
- 3.) The above aspect of assurance is the essence of saving faith because the principle acts of saving faith consists of accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life (Reisinger, p. 119).
- 4.) To believe in Christ alone for salvation is to be persuaded or assured that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (ibid.). When clouds of doubt cast shadows over the soul; must continue to look to Christ alone for salvation. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever* (Heb 13:8).
- 5.) The following questions provide an additional way to personalize the first ‘pillar’ of assurance: *Do you take great delight in God’s way of salvation? Do you see God’s holiness, kindness, love, and wisdom in His plan to send His only begotten Son for sinners? Has the Gospel reconciled you to God so that you are no longer His enemy and so that you no*

longer walk according to the flesh and the world? Can you attest with joy that the only possible solution to your guilt and enslavement was for Christ to die in your place?

B. The second ‘pillar’, or ground of assurance, is *the witness of the Spirit*.

- 1.) The Spirit imparts assurance to the hearts of believers of their salvation and sonship. *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God* (Rom 8:16).
- 2.) The ‘Spirit of adoption’ is given to all believers (Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:4-6; 3:2). The indwelling Holy Spirit gives believers the *consciousness*, or *awareness*, that we have been adopted by God. Therefore, it is natural for the true Christian to behave toward God as Father, and to call upon God as his Heavenly Father in prayer. *You have received the spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”* (Rom 8:15b).
- 3.) The Spirit’s testimony gives believers the assurance of their adoption and consequent safety. The internal witness of the Spirit is not divorced from our faith and behavior. The Apostle John says, *He who believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself* (1 Jn 5:10).
- 4.) Questions to help *personalize* the second ‘pillar’ of assurance: *Do you have peace with God so that you know your standing before God? Do you have the confidence God has forgiven you? Do you bring your hopes, fears, requests, and sins to your Heavenly Father? Do you count it your greatest treasure to be an heir of God?* (Wegter, *A Three-fold Witness to Assurance*).

C. The third ‘pillar’ of assurance is *Christian character and conduct (a changed life)*.

- 1.) Christian character and conduct give evidence that a person is regenerated (born again). Theologians refer to Christian character as *evidence of grace*, or the ‘*marks of grace*.’ Regarding these ‘marks’, the epistle of 1 John provides four major ‘tests’ of eternal life: ***The test of belief***—*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God* (1 Jn 5:1). The ‘belief’ mentioned here is not merely *mental agreement*. It is belief in which the sinner responds to the Savior in faith and repentance. It is belief which reaches the whole man—his mind, affections, and will.
The test of obedience—*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him* (1 Jn 2:3-5).

***The test of love**—We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren (1 Jn 3:14). Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 Jn 4:7). To be a child of God is love those who are members of God’s ‘forever family’.*

***The test of doing righteousness**—You know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him (1 Jn 2:29). Righteous living is evidence of the new birth and genuine faith. Faith without good deeds is worthless (James 2:20).*

- 2.) The true believer is *led* by the Spirit away from sin and lust. He welcomes his ‘obligation’ to put sin to death. *So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom 8:12b).*
- 3.) Questions to help *personalize* the third ‘pillar’ of assurance: *Do you find that you have a whole new principle operating in you with new affections for the Lord, His Word, and the things of God? Do you have a new bias and power against sin? Does your gratitude for salvation motivate you to please God and to daily fight indwelling sin (by the power of the Holy Spirit)? Do you have a solid, well-grounded Gospel hope that Christ will receive you favorably into His eternal kingdom?*

III. THE BIBLICAL WAY OF GAINING AND KEEPING ASSURANCE.

A. Keep the three pillars of assurance together! The Word of God keeps them joined.

- 1.) The three ‘pillars’ of assurance are: a.) faith in the Gospel promises of God, b.) the witness of the Spirit, and c.) Christian character.
- 2.) The believer’s assurance of salvation rests upon all three pillars. To eliminate any one of the pillars is to distort the meaning of assurance. In the case of *false assurance*, one or more of the ‘pillars’ is missing in that person’s life.

B. Be diligent in seeking solid biblical assurance; Scripture regards assurance to be our duty.

- 1.) The Scriptures command us to be diligent in seeking to attain a solid assurance. *Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling you and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble (2 Pet 1:10).*
- 2.) In the above passage, Peter bids his readers to seek full assurance by adding to their faith the graces of the Spirit—in other words pursue Christian character and sanctification (1:5-9). Determine to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (3:18).

C. Utilize the biblical means of gaining assurance.

- 1.) We cannot expect to enjoy biblical assurance if we do not utilize the means of grace that God has given. The means of grace are: *baptism, the study of the Word of God, prayer, Christian fellowship, the Lord's Table, corporate worship, and the preaching of the Word.*
- 2.) Solid assurance is only enjoyed by those who walk uprightly before God. Allowing secret sins to remain in one's life will erode one's assurance. Obedient Christians live a *sin-judged life*—they keep 'short accounts' with God (1 Jn 1:5-10).

D. Realize that assurance is not for our comfort only; it promotes our sanctification.

- 1.) Assurance does not produce pride, presumption, and wickedness. According to God's Word, it produces purity. *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1 Jn 3:3).
- 2.) Assurance 'enlarges' our peace, joy, hope, and comfort (Rom 15:13). In so doing, it adds strength and joy to our duties and Christian service (Rom 6:11; Col 3:1-4).

E. Accept the fact that a Christian's sense of assurance may vary.

- 1.) A true Christian may lack assurance. The answer is still to be diligent in seeking it. *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you be not sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises* (Heb 6:11).
- 2.) The pressures of life can also impact our assurance. Doubt can enter when we face any of the following: *sudden temptation, emotional trauma, overwhelming trials*. At times God hides His smile that we may seek Him more diligently. Note the prayers of the Psalmists.

QUESTIONS:

(I.A.1-4) 1.) In what ways is assurance not only comforting; but also valuable for one's Christian walk?

(I.B.1-4) 2.) Why are there so many warnings in Scripture about false assurance?

(I.C.1-5) 3.) How would you counsel a young believer who said the following: "I don't dare seek assurance because I don't trust my own heart."

(I.C.6) 4.) What positive marks of true assurance made the greatest impression on you? What marks of false repentance are the most sobering to you?

(II.A.1-5) 5.) Using ‘pillar’ one as a reference; how would you answer a person who said, “Assurance is only a feeling; no one can be ultimately sure of their salvation in this life.”

(II.B.1-4) 6.) Read Romans 8:14-16. How does the Holy Spirit let a true believer know that he is really saved?

(II.C.1-3) 7.) Why do you suppose that the third ‘pillar’ of assurance (Christian character) is the most neglected pillar in the church today? (Hint: Note that it is very common to offer people full assurance of salvation even when the third pillar is missing from their lives.)

(III.B.1-2) 8.) Is assurance a duty, a privilege, or both? Why?

(III.C.1-2) 9.) If a professing Christian is neglecting the *means of grace*; should it be a surprise if they lack assurance? Why or why not?

(III.D.1-2) 10.) How would you answer a person who said that assurance promotes a careless, sinful lifestyle?

(III.E.1-2) 11.) Read Psalm 88. Is it possible for a strong believer to doubt his salvation?

