

Assurance

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ASSURANCE

Being Thoughts on 2 Tim. 4:6-8

J.C. Ryle

Source: [Monergism](#)

"Grace with assurance is no less than heaven let down into the soul." - Bishop Hopkins. 1680.

2 Timothy 4:6-8+ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

READER, In the words of Scripture, which head this page, you see the Apostle Paul looking three ways: downward, backward, forward. Downward to the grave,—backward to his own ministry,—forward to that great day, the day of judgment.

I invite you this day to stand by the Apostle's side a few minutes, and mark the words he uses. Happy is that soul who can look where Paul looked, and then speak as Paul spoke!

He looks downward to the grave, and he does it without fear. Hear what he says.

"I am ready to be offered." I am like an animal brought to the place of sacrifice, and bound with cords to the very horns of the altar. The wine and oil have been poured on my head, according to the custom. The last ceremonies have been gone through. Every preparation has been made. It only remains to receive the death-blow, and then all is over.

"The time of my departure is at hand." I am like a ship about to unmoor and put to sea. All on board is ready. I only wait to have the moorings cast off that fasten me to the shore, and I shall then set sail and begin my voyage.

Reader, these are glorious words to come from the lips of a child of Adam like ourselves. Death is a solemn thing, and never so much so as when we see it close at hand. The grave is a chilling, heart-sickening place, and it is vain to pretend it has no terrors. Yet here is a mortal man who can look calmly into the narrow house appointed for all living, and say, while he stands upon the brink, "I see it all, and am not afraid."

Let us listen to him again. He looks backward to his ministerial life, and he does it without shame. Hear what he says.

"I have fought a good fight." There he speaks as a soldier. I have fought that good battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, from which so many shrink and draw back.

"I have finished my course." There he speaks as one who has run for a prize. I have run the race marked out for me: I have gone over the ground appointed for me, however rough and steep. I have not turned aside because of difficulties, nor been discouraged

by the length of the way. I am at last in eight of the goal.

"I have kept the faith." There he speaks as a steward. I have held fast that glorious Gospel which was committed to my trust. I have not mingled it with man's traditions, nor spoiled its simplicity by adding my own inventions, nor allowed others to adulterate it without withstanding them to the face. "As a soldier,—a runner,—a steward," he seems to say, "I am not ashamed."

Reader, that Christian is happy who, as he quits this world, can leave such testimony behind him. A good conscience will save no man,—wash away no sin,—not lift us one hair's breadth toward heaven. Yet, a good conscience will be found a pleasant visitor at our bed-side in a dying hour. Do you remember that place in "Pilgrim's Progress" which describes Old Honest's passages across the river of death? "The river," says Bunyan, "at that time overflowed its banks in some places; but Mr. Honest, in his life-time, had spoken to one, Good Conscience, to meet him there: the which he also did, and lent him his hand, and so helped him over." Believe me, there is a mine of truth in that passage.

Let us hear the Apostle once more. He looks forward to the great day of reckoning, and he does it without doubt. Mark his words.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." A glorious reward, he seems to say, is ready and laid up in store for me: even that crown which is only given to the righteous. In the great day of judgment the Lord shall give this crown to me, and to all beside me who have loved Him as an unseen Saviour, and longed to see Him face to face. My work on earth is over. This one thing now remains for me to look forward to, and nothing more.

Reader, observe that the Apostle speaks without any hesitation or distrust. He regards the crown as a sure thing: as his own already. He declares with unflinching confidence his firm persuasion that the righteous Judge will give it to him. Paul was no stranger to all the circumstances and accompaniments of that solemn day to which he referred. The great white throne,—the assembled world,—the open books,—the revealing of all secrets,—the listening angels,—the awful sentence,—the eternal separation of the lost and saved,—all these were things with which he was well acquainted. But none of these things moved him. His strong faith over-leaped them all, and only saw Jesus, his all-prevailing Advocate, and the blood of sprinkling, and sin washed away. "A crown," he says, "is laid up for me." "The Lord Himself shall give it to me." He speaks as if he saw it all with his own eyes.

Such are the main things which these verses contain. Of most of them I cannot pretend to speak, for space would not allow me. I shall only try to set before you one point in the passage, and that is "the assured hope" with which the Apostle looks forward to his own prospects in the day of judgment.

I shall do this the more readily, because of the great importance which I feel attaches to the subject of assurance, and the great neglect with which, I humbly conceive, it is often treated in this day.

But I shall do it at the same time with fear and trembling. I feel that I am treading on very difficult ground, and that it is easy to speak rashly and unscripturally in this matter. The road between truth and error is here especially a narrow pass, and if I shall be enabled to do good to some without doing harm to others, I shall be very thankful.

Reader, there are four things I wish to bring before you in speaking of the subject of assurance, and it may clear our way if I name them to you at once.

I. First, then, I will try to show you that an assured hope, such as Paul here expresses, is a true and Scriptural thing.

II. Secondly, I will make this broad concession,—that a man may never arrive at this assured hope, and yet be saved.

III. Thirdly, I will give you some reasons why an assured hope is exceedingly to be desired.

IV. Lastly, I will try to point out some causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained.

I. First, then, I will try to show you that an assured hope is a true and Scriptural thing.

Assurance, such as Paul expresses in the verses which head this tract, is not a mere fancy or feeling. It is not the result of high animal spirits, or a sanguine temperament of body. It is a positive gift of the Holy Ghost, bestowed without reference to men's bodily frames or constitutions, and a gift which every believer in Christ ought to aim at and seek after.

The Word of God appears to me to teach that a believer may arrive at an assured confidence with regard to his own salvation.

I would lay it down fully and broadly, that a true Christian, a converted man, may reach that comfortable degree of faith in Christ, that in general he shall feel entirely confident as to the pardon and safety of his soul,—shall seldom be troubled with doubts,—seldom be distracted with hesitation,—seldom be distressed by anxious questionings,—and, in short, though vexed by many an

inward conflict with sin, shall look forward to death without trembling, and to judgment without dismay.¹

Such is my account of assurance. I will ask you to mark it well. I say neither less nor more than I have here laid down.

Now, such a statement as this is often disputed and denied. Many cannot see the truth of it at all.

The Church of Rome denounces assurance in the most unmeasured terms. The Council of Trent declares roundly, that a "believer's assurance of the pardon of his sins is a vain and ungodly confidence;" and Cardinal Bellarmine, the well-known champion of Romanism, calls it "a prime error of heretics."

The vast majority of the worldly among ourselves oppose the doctrine of assurance. It offends and annoys them to hear of it. They do not like others to feel comfortable and sure, because they never feel so themselves. That they cannot receive it is certainly no marvel.

But there are also some true believers who reject assurance, or shrink from it as a doctrine fraught with danger. They consider it borders on presumption. They seem to think it a proper humility never to be confident, and to live in a certain degree of doubt. This is to be regretted, and does much harm.

I frankly allow there are some presumptuous persons who profess to feel a confidence for which they have no Scriptural warrant. There always are some people who think well of themselves when God thinks ill, just as there are some who think ill of themselves when God thinks well. There always will be such. There never yet was a Scriptural truth without abuses and counterfeits. God's election,—man's impotence,—salvation by grace,—all are alike abused. There will be fanatics and enthusiasts as long as the world stands. But, for all this, assurance is a real, sober, and true thing; and God's children must not let themselves be driven from the use of a truth, merely because it is abused.²

My answer to all who deny the existence of real, well-grounded assurance is simply this,—What saith the Scripture? If assurance be not there, I have not another word to say.

But does not Job say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God"? (Job 19: 25-26.)

Does not David say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me"? (Psalm 23:4.)

Does not Isaiah say, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee"? (Isaiah 26:3.)

And again, "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." (Isaiah 32:17.)

Does not Paul say to the Romans, "I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, not height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"? (Rom. 8:38-39.)

Does he not say to the Corinthians, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"? (2 Cor. 5:1.)

And again, "We are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:6.)

Does he not say to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him"? (2 Tim. 1:12.)

And does he not speak to the Colossians of "the full assurance of understanding" (Coloss. 2:2), and to the Hebrews of the "full assurance of faith," and the "full assurance of hope"? (Heb. 6:11; 10:22.)

Does not Peter say expressly, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure"? (2 Peter 1:10.)

Does not John say, "We know that we have passed from death unto life"? (1 John 3:14.)

And again, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." (1 John 5:13.)

And again, "We know that we are of God." (1 John 5:19.)

Reader, what shall we say to these things? I desire to speak with all humility on any controverted point. I feel that I am only a poor

fallible child of Adam myself. But I must say, that in the passages I have just quoted I see something far higher than the mere "hopes" and "trusts" with which so many believers appear content in this day. I see the language of persuasion, confidence, knowledge,—nay, I may almost say, of certainty. And I feel, for my own part, if I may take these Scriptures in their plain, obvious meaning, the doctrine of assurance is true.

But my answer, furthermore, to all who dislike the doctrine of assurance, as bordering on presumption, is this: it can hardly be presumption to tread in the steps of Peter and Paul, of Job and of John. They were all eminently humble and lowly-minded men, if ever any were; and yet they all speak of their own state with an assured hope. Surely this should teach us that deep humility and strong assurance are perfectly compatible, and that there is not any necessary connection between spiritual confidence and pride.³

My answer, furthermore, is, that many have attained to such an assured hope as our text expresses, even in modern times. I will not concede for a moment that it was a peculiar privilege confined to the Apostolic day. There have been, in our own land, many believers who have appeared to walk in almost uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son,—who have seemed to enjoy an almost unceasing sense of the light of God's reconciled countenance shining down upon them, and have left their experience on record. I could mention well-known names, if space permitted. The thing has been, and is,—and that is enough.

My answer, lastly, is, it cannot be wrong to feel confidently in a matter where God speaks unconditionally,—to believe decidedly when God promises decidedly,—to have a sure persuasion of pardon and peace when we rest on the word and oath of Him that never changes. It is an utter mistake to suppose that the believer who feels assurance is resting on anything he sees in himself. He simply leans on the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the Scripture of truth. He believes the Lord Jesus means what He says, and takes Him at His Word. Assurance, after all, is no more than a fall-grown faith; a masculine faith that grasps Christ's promise with both hands,—a faith that argues like the good centurion, if the Lord "speak the word only," I am healed. Wherefore, then, should I doubt? (Matt. 8:8.)⁴

Reader, you may be sure that Paul was the last man in the world to build his assurance on anything of his own. He who could write himself down "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) had a deep sense of his own guilt and corruption. But then he had a still deeper sense of the length and breadth of Christ's righteousness imputed to him.—He, who would cry, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24), had a clear view of the fountain of evil within his heart. But then he had a still clearer view of that other Fountain which can remove "all sin and uncleanness." —He, who thought himself "less than the least of all saints" (Ephes. 3:8), had a lively and abiding feeling of his own weakness. But he had a still livelier feeling that Christ's promise, "My sheep shall never perish" (John 10:28), could not be broken—Paul knew, if ever man did, that he was a poor, frail bark, floating on a stormy ocean. He saw, if any did, the rolling waves and roaring tempest by which he was surrounded. But then he looked away from self to Jesus, and was not afraid. He remembered that anchor within the veil, which is both "sure and steadfast." He remembered the word, and work, and constant intercession of Him that loved him and gave Himself for him. And this it was, and nothing else, that enabled him to say so boldly, "A crown is laid up for me, and the Lord shall give it to me"; and to conclude so surely, "The Lord will preserve me: I shall never be confounded."⁵

I may not dwell longer on this part of the subject. I think you will allow I have shown ground for the assertion I made,—that assurance is a true thing.

II. I pass on to the second thing I spoke of. I said, a believer may never arrive at this assured hope, which Paul expresses, and yet be saved.

I grant this most freely. I do not dispute it for a moment. I would not desire to make one contrite heart sad that God has not made sad, or to discourage one fainting child of God, or to leave the impression that men have no part or lot in Christ, except they feel assurance.

A person may have saving faith in Christ, and yet never enjoy an assured hope, like the Apostle Paul. To believe and have a glimmering hope of acceptance is one thing; to have joy and peace in our believing, and abound in hope, is quite another. All God's children have faith; not all have assurance. I think this ought never to be forgotten.

I know some great and good men have held a different opinion. I believe that many excellent ministers of the Gospel, at whose feet I would gladly sit, do not allow the distinction I have stated. But I desire to call no man master. I dread as much as any one the idea of healing the wounds of conscience slightly; but I should think any other view than that I have given a most uncomfortable Gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep souls back a long time from the gate of life.

I do not shrink from saying, that by grace a man may have sufficient faith to flee to Christ; sufficient faith really to lay hold on Him, really to trust in Him,—really to be a child of God, really to be saved; and yet to his last day be never free from much anxiety, doubt, and fear.

"A letter," says an old writer, "may be written, which is not sealed; so grace may be written in the heart, yet the Spirit may not set the

seal of assurance to it."

A child may be born heir to a great fortune, and yet never be aware of his riches; live childish,—die childish, and never know the greatness of his possessions.

And so also a man may be a babe in Christ's family; think as a babe, speak as a babe; and though saved, never enjoy a lively hope, or know the real privileges of his inheritance.

Reader, do not mistake my meaning, while you hear me dwell strongly on assurance. Do not do me the injustice to say, I told you none were saved except such as could say with Paul, "I know and am persuaded,—there is a crown laid up for me." I do not say so. I tell you nothing of the kind.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ a man must have, beyond all question, if he is to be saved. I know no other way of access to the Father. I see no intimation of mercy, excepting through Christ. A man must feel his sins and lost estate,—must come to Jesus for pardon and salvation,—must rest his hope on Him, and on Him alone. But if he only has faith to do this, however weak and feeble that faith may be, I will engage, from Scripture warrants, he shall not miss heaven.

Never, never let us curtail the freeness of the glorious Gospel, or clip its fair proportions. Never let us make the gate more strait and the way more narrow than pride and love of sin have made it already. The Lord Jesus is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He does not regard the quantity of faith, but the quality. He does not measure its degree, but its truth. He will not break any bruised reed, nor quench any smoking flax. He will never let it be said that any perished at the foot of the cross. "Him that cometh unto Me," He says, "I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.)⁶

Yes, reader: though a man's faith be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, if it only brings him to Christ, and enables him to touch the hem of His garment, he shall be saved,—saved as surely as the oldest saint in paradise; saved as completely and eternally as Peter, or John, or Paul. There are degrees in our sanctification. In our justification there are none. What is written, is written, and shall never fail: "Whosoever believeth on Him,"—not whosoever has a strong and mighty faith,—"Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." (Rom. 10:11.)

But all this time, I would have you take notice, the poor soul may have no full assurance of his pardon and acceptance with God. He may be troubled with fear upon fear, and doubt upon doubt. He may have many a question, and many an anxiety,—many a struggle, and many a misgiving,—clouds and darkness,—storm and tempest to the very end.

I will engage, I repeat, that bare simple faith in Christ shall save a man, though he may never attain to assurance; but I will not engage it shall bring him to heaven with strong and abounding consolations. I will engage it shall land him safe in harbour; but I will not engage he shall enter that harbour in full sail, confident and rejoicing. I shall not be surprised if he reaches his desired haven weather-beaten and tempest-tossed, scarcely realizing his own safety, till he opens his eyes in glory.

Reader, I believe it is of great importance to keep in view this distinction between faith and assurance. It explains things which an inquirer in religion sometimes finds it hard to understand.

Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root; but it is no less certain you may have the root and not the flower.

Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press and touched the hem of His garment. (Mark 5:27.) Assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56.)

Faith is the penitent thief, crying, "Lord, remember me." (Luke 23:42.) Assurance is Job, sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." (Job 19:25.) "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (Job 13:15.)

Faith is Peter's drowning cry, as he began to sink "Lord, save me." (Matt. 14:30.) Assurance is that same Peter declaring before the Council in after-times, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:11-12.)

Faith is the anxious, trembling voice, "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9:24.) Assurance is the confident challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. 8:33-34.) Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone. (Acts 9:11.) Assurance is Paul, the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know whom I have believed. There is a crown laid up for me." (2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8.)

Faith is life. How great the blessing! Who can tell the gulf between life and death? And yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy,

painful, trying, anxious, worn, burdensome, joyless, smileless to the very end. Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, beauty.

Reader, it is not a question of saved or not saved that lies before us, but of privilege or no privilege.—It is not a question of peace or no peace, but of great peace or little peace.—It is not a question between the wanderers of this world and the school of Christ: it is one that belongs only to the school;—it is between the first form and the last.

He that has faith does well. Happy should I be, if I thought all readers of this tract had it. Blessed, thrice blessed are they that believe. They are safe. They are washed. They are justified. They are beyond the power of hell. Satan, with all his malice, shall never pluck them out of Christ's hand.

But he that has assurance does far better,—sees more, feels more, knows more, enjoys more, has more days like those spoken of in Deuteronomy: even "the days of heaven upon the earth." (Deut. 11:21.)⁷

III. I pass on to the third thing of which I spoke I will give you some reasons why an assured hope is exceedingly to be desired.

I ask your attention to this point especially. I heartily wish that assurance was more sought after than it is. Too many among those who believe begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting and die doubting, and go to heaven in a kind of mist.

It will ill become me to speak in a slighting way of "hopes" and "trusts." But I fear many of us sit down content with them, and go no farther. I should like to see fewer "peradventurers" in the Lord's family, and more who could say, "I know and am persuaded." Oh, that all believers would covet the best gifts, and not be content with less! Many miss the full tide of blessedness the Gospel was meant to convey. Many keep themselves in a low and starved condition of soul, while their Lord is saying, "Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved. Ask and receive, that your joy may be full." (Cant. 5:1. John 16:24.)

1. Let us remember, then, for one thing, that assurance is to be desired, because of the present comfort and peace it affords.

Doubts and fears have power to spoil much of the happiness of a true believer in Christ. Uncertainty and suspense are bad enough in any condition,—in the matter of our health, our property, our families, our affections, our earthly callings,—but never so bad as in the affairs of our souls. And so long as a believer cannot get beyond "I hope" and "I trust," he manifestly feels a degree of uncertainty about his spiritual state. The very words imply as much. He says, "I hope," because he dares not say, "I know."

Now assurance goes far to set a child of God free from this painful kind of bondage, and thus ministers mightily to his comfort. It enables him to feel that the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts, and works, are then by comparison small. In this way assurance makes him patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings; in every condition content, for it gives him a FIXEDNESS of heart. It sweetens his bitter cups, it lessens the burden of his crosses, it smoothes the rough places over which he travels, and it lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes him always feel that he has something solid beneath his feet, and something firm under his hands,—a sure friend by the way, and a sure home at the end.⁸

Assurance will help a man to bear poverty and loss. It will teach him to say, "I know that I have in heaven a better and more enduring substance. Silver and gold have I none, but grace and glory are mine, and these can never make themselves wings and flee away. Though the fig tree shall not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord." (Habak. 3:17-18.)

Assurance will support a child of God under the heaviest bereavements, and assist him to feel "It is well." An assured soul will say, "Though beloved ones are taken from me, yet Jesus is the same, and is alive for evermore. Though my house be not as flesh and blood could wish, yet I have an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." (2 Kings 4:26; Heb. 13:8; 2 Sam. 23:5.)

Assurance will enable a man to praise God, and be thankful, even in a prison, like Paul and Silas at Philippi. It can give a believer songs even in the darkest night, and joy when all things seem going against him. (Job 21:10; Psalm 42:8.)⁹

Assurance will enable a man to sleep with the full prospect of death on the morrow, like Peter in Herod's dungeon. It will teach him to say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." (Psalm 4:8.)

Assurance can make a man rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, as the Apostles did. It will remind him that he may "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:12), and that there is in heaven an exceeding weight of glory that shall make amends for all. (2 Cor. 4:17.)

Assurance will enable a believer to meet a violent and painful death without fear, as Stephen did in the beginning of Christ's Church, and as Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and Taylor did in our own land. It will bring to his heart the texts, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." (Luke 12:4.) "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59.)¹⁰

Assurance will support a man in pain and sickness, make all his bed, smooth down his dying pillow. It will enable him to say, "If my earthly house fail, I have a building of God." (2 Cor. 5:1.) "I desire to depart and be with Christ." (Phil. 1:23.) "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." (Psalm 73:26.)¹¹

Reader, the comfort assurance can give in the hour of death is a point of great importance. Believe me, you will never think assurance so precious as when your turn comes to die.

In that awful hour, there are few believers who do not find out the value and privilege of an "assured hope," whatever they may have thought about it during their lives. General "hopes" and "trusts" are all very well to live upon, while the sun shines, and the body is strong: but when you come to die, you will want to be able to say, "I know" and "I feel."

Believe me, Jordan is a cold stream, and we have to cross it alone. No earthly friend can help us. The last enemy, even death, is a strong foe. When our souls are departing there is no cordial like the strong wine of assurance.

There is a beautiful expression in the Prayer-book service for the Visitation of the Sick: "The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in Him, be now and evermore thy defence, and make thee know and feel that there is none other name under heaven, through whom thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The compilers of that service showed great wisdom there. They saw that when the eyes grow dim, and the heart grows faint, and the spirit is on the eve of departing, there must then be knowing and feeling what Christ has done for us, or else there cannot be perfect peace.¹²

2. Let us remember, for another thing, that assurance is to be desired, because it tends to make a Christian an active working Christian.

None, generally speaking, do so much for Christ on earth as those who enjoy the fullest confidence of a free entrance into heaven. That sounds wonderful, I dare say, but it is true.

A believer who lacks an assured hope will spend much of his time in inward searchings of heart about his own state. Like a nervous, hypochondriacal person, he will be full of his own ailments, his own doubtings and questionings, his own conflicts and corruptions. In short, you will often find he is so taken up with this internal warfare that he has little leisure for other things, little time to work for God.

Now a believer, who has, like Paul, an assured hope, is free from these harassing distractions. He does not vex his soul with doubts about his own pardon and acceptance. He looks at the everlasting covenant sealed with blood, at the finished work and never-broken word of his Lord and Saviour, and therefore counts his salvation a settled thing. And thus he is able to give an undivided attention to the work of the Lord, and so in the long run to do more.¹³

Take, for an illustration of this, two English emigrants, and suppose them set down side by side in New Zealand or Australia. Give each of them a piece of land to clear and cultivate. Let the portions allotted to them be the same both in quantity and quality. Secure that land to them by every needful legal instrument; let it be conveyed as freehold to them and theirs for ever; let the conveyance be publicly registered, and the property made sure to them by every deed and security that man's ingenuity can devise.

Suppose, then, that one of them shall set to work to bring his land into cultivation, and labour at it day after day without intermission or cessation.

Suppose, in the meanwhile, that the other shall be continually leaving his work, and going repeatedly to the public registry to ask whether the land really is his own,—whether there is not some mistake,—whether, after all, there is not some flaw in the legal instruments which conveyed it to him.

The one shall never doubt his title, but just work diligently on.

The other shall hardly ever feel sure of his title, and spend half his time in going to Sydney, or Melbourne, or Auckland with needless inquiries about it.

Which, now, of these two men will have made most progress in a year's time? Who will have done the most for his land, got the greatest breadth of soil under tillage, have the best crops to show, be altogether the most prosperous?

Reader, you know as well as I do. I need not supply an answer. There can only be one reply. Undivided attention will always attain the greatest success.

It is much the same in the matter of our title to "mansions in the skies." None will do so much for the Lord who bought him as the believer who sees his title clear, and is not distracted by unbelieving hesitations. The joy of the Lord will be that man's strength.

"Restore unto me," says David, "the joy of Thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors Thy ways." (Psalm 51:12.)

Never were there such working Christians as the Apostles. They seemed to live to labour. Christ's work was truly their meat and drink. They counted not their lives dear to themselves. They spent and were spent. They laid down ease, health, and worldly comfort, at the foot of the cross. And one grand cause of this, I believe, was their assured hope. They were men who could say, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." (1 John v. 19.)

3. Let us remember, for another thing, that assurance is to be desired, because it tends to make a Christian a decided Christian.

Indecision and doubt about our own state in God's sight is a grievous one, and the mother of many evils. It often produces a wavering and unstable walk in following the Lord. Assurance helps to cut many a knot, and to make the path of Christian duty clear and plain.

Many, of whom we feel hopes that they are God's children, and have true grace, however weak, are continually perplexed with doubts on points of practice. "Should we do such and such a thing? Shall we give up this family custom? Ought we to go into that company? How shall we draw the line about visiting? What is to be the measure of our dressing and our entertainments? Are we never, under any circumstances, to dance, never to touch a card, never to attend parties of pleasure?" These are a kind of questions which seem to give them constant trouble. And often, very often, the simple root of their perplexity is, that they do not feel assured they are themselves children of God. They have not yet settled the point, which side of the gate they are on. They do not know whether they are inside the ark or not.

That a child of God ought to act in a certain decided way they quite feel, but the grand question is, "Are they children of God themselves?" If they only felt they were so, they would go straightforward, and take a decided line. But not feeling sure about it, their conscience is forever hesitating and coming to a dead lock. The devil whispers, "Perhaps, after all, you are only a hypocrite: what right have you to take a decided course? Wait till you are really a Christian." And this whisper too often turns the scale, and leads on to some miserable compromise, or wretched conformity to the world.

Reader, I believe you have here one chief reason why so many in this day are inconsistent, trimming, unsatisfactory, and half-hearted in their conduct about the world. Their faith fails. They feel no assurance that they are Christ's, and so feel a hesitancy about breaking with the world. They shrink from laying aside all the ways of the old man, because they are not quite confident they have put on the new. Depend on it, one secret cause of halting between two opinions is want of assurance. When people can say decidedly, "The Lord He is the God," their course becomes very clear. (1 Kings 18:39.)

4. Let us remember, finally, that assurance is to be desired, because it tends to make the holiest Christians.

This, too, sounds wonderful and strange, and yet it is true. It is one of the paradoxes of the Gospel, contrary, at first sight, to reason and common sense, and yet it is a fact. Cardinal Bellarmine was seldom more wide of the truth than when he said, "Assurance tends to carelessness and sloth." He that is freely forgiven by Christ will always do much for Christ's glory, and he that enjoys the fullest assurance of this forgiveness will ordinarily keep up the closest walk with God. It is a faithful saying in 1 John 3:3: "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure." A hope that does not purify is a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.¹⁴

None are so likely to maintain a watchful guard over hearts and lives as those who know the comfort of living in near communion with God. They feel their privilege, and will fear losing it. They will dread falling from their high estate, and marring their own comforts, by bringing clouds between themselves and Christ. He that goes on a journey with little money about him takes little thought of danger, and cares little how late he travels. He, on the contrary, that carries gold and jewels will be a cautious traveller. He will look well to his roads, his house, and his company, and run no risks. The fixed stars are those that tremble most. The man that most fully enjoys the light of God's reconciled countenance, will be a man tremblingly afraid of losing its blessed consolations, and jealously fearful of doing anything to grieve the Holy Ghost.

Reader, I commend these four points to your serious consideration. Would you like to feel the everlasting arms around you, and to hear the voice of Jesus daily drawing nigh to your soul, and saying, "I am thy salvation"?—Would you like to be a useful labourer in the vineyard in your day and generation?—Would you be known of all men as a bold, firm, decided, single-eyed, uncompromising follower of Christ?—Would you be eminently spiritually-minded and holy?—I doubt not some readers will say, "These are the very things our hearts desire. We long for them. We pant after them: but they seem far from us."

Now, has it never struck you that your neglect of assurance may possibly be the main secret of all your failures,—that the low measure of faith which satisfies you may be the cause of your low degree of peace? Can you think it a strange thing that your graces are faint and languishing, when faith, the root and mother of them all, is allowed to remain feeble and weak?

Take my advice this day. Seek an increase of faith. Seek an assured hope of salvation like the Apostle Paul's. Seek to obtain a simple, childlike confidence in God's promises. Seek to be able to say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed: I am persuaded that

He is mine, and I am His."

You have very likely tried other ways and methods and completely failed. Change your plan. Go upon another tack. Lay aside your doubts. Lean more entirely on the Lord's arm. Begin with implicit trusting. Cast aside your faithless backwardness to take the Lord at His word. Come and roll yourself, your soul, and your sins upon your gracious Saviour. Begin with simple believing, and all other things shall soon be added to you.¹⁵

IV. I come now to the last thing of which I spoke. I promised to point out to you some probable causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained. I will do it very shortly.

This is a very serious question, and ought to raise in all great searchings of heart. Few, certainly, of Christ's people seem to reach up to this blessed spirit of assurance. Many comparatively believe, but few are persuaded. Many comparatively have saving faith, but few that glorious confidence which shines forth in the language of St. Paul. That such is the case, I think we must all allow.

Now, why is this so?—Why is a thing which two Apostles have strongly enjoined us to seek after, a thing of which few believers have any experimental knowledge? Why is an assured hope so rare?

I desire to offer a few suggestions on this point, with all humility. I know that many have never attained assurance, at whose feet I would gladly sit both in earth and heaven. Perhaps the Lord sees something in the natural temperament of some of His children, which makes assurance not good for them. Perhaps, in order to be kept in spiritual health, they need to be kept very low. God only knows. Still, after every allowance, I fear there are many believers without an assured hope, whose case may too often be explained by causes such as these.

1. One most common cause, I suspect, is a defective view of the doctrine of justification.

I am inclined to think that justification and sanctification are insensibly confused together in the minds of many believers. They receive the Gospel truth,—that there must be something done **IN US**, as well as something done **FOR US**, if we are true members of Christ; and so far they are right. But, then, without being aware of it, perhaps, they seem to imbibe the idea that their justification is, in some degree, affected by something within themselves. They do not clearly see that Christ's work, not their own work,—either in whole or in part, either directly or indirectly,—is the alone ground of our acceptance with God; that justification is a thing entirely without us, for which nothing whatever is needful on our part but simple faith,—and that the weakest believer is as fully and completely justified as the strongest.¹⁶

Many appear to forget that we are saved and justified as sinners, and only sinners; and that we never can attain to anything higher, if we live to the age of Methuselah. Redeemed sinners, justified sinners, and renewed sinners doubtless we must be,—but sinners, sinners, sinners, always to the very last. They do not seem to comprehend that there is a wide difference between our justification and our sanctification. Our justification is a perfect finished work, and admits of no degrees. Our sanctification is imperfect and incomplete, and will be to the last hour of our life. They appear to expect that a believer may at some period of his life be in a measure free from corruption, and attain to a kind of inward perfection. And not finding this angelic state of things in their own hearts, they at once conclude there must be something very wrong in their state. And so they go mourning all their days,—oppressed with fears that they have no part or lot in Christ, and refusing to be comforted.

Reader, consider this point well. If any believing soul desires assurance, and has not got it, let him ask himself, first of all, if he is quite sure he is sound in the faith, if his loins are thoroughly "girt about with truth," and his eyes thoroughly clear in the matter of justification. He must know what it is simply to believe before he can expect to feel assured.

Believe me, the old Galatian heresy is the most fertile source of error, both in doctrine and in practice. Seek clearer views of Christ, and what Christ has done for you. Happy is the man who really understands justification by faith without the deeds of the law.

2. Another common cause of the absence of assurance is, slothfulness about growth in grace.

I suspect many true believers hold dangerous and unscriptural views on this point: I do not of course mean intentionally, but they do hold them. Many appear to me to think that once converted, they have little more to attend to, and that a state of salvation is a kind of easy chair, in which they may just sit still, lie back, and be happy. They seem to fancy that grace is given them that they may enjoy it, and they forget that it is given, like a talent, to be used, employed, and improved. Such persons lose sight of the many direct injunctions "to increase,—to grow,—to abound more and more,—to add to our faith," and the like; and in this little-doing condition, this sitting-still state of mind, I never marvel that they miss assurance.

I believe it ought to be our continual aim and desire to go forward; and our watchword at the beginning of every year should be, "More and more" (1 Thess. 4:1): more knowledge,—more faith,—more obedience,—more love. If we have brought forth thirty-fold, we should seek to bring forth sixty, and if we have brought forth sixty, we should strive to bring forth a hundred. The will of the Lord is our sanctification, and it ought to be our will too. (Matt. 13: 23; 1 Thess. 4:3.)

One thing, at all events, we may depend upon,—there is an inseparable connection between diligence and assurance. "Give diligence," says Peter, "to make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter 1:10.) "We desire," says Paul, "that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." (Heb. 6:11.) "The soul of the diligent," says Solomon, "shall be made fat." (Prov. 13:4.) There is much truth in the old maxim of the Puritans: "Faith of adherence comes by hearing, but faith of assurance comes not without doing."

Reader, mark my words. Are you one of those who desires assurance, but have not got it? You will never get it without diligence, however much you may desire it. There are no gains without pains in spiritual things, any more than in temporal. "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing." (Prov. 13:4.)¹⁷

3. Another common cause of a want of assurance is, an inconsistent walk in life.

With grief and sorrow I feel constrained to say, I fear nothing in this day more frequently prevents men attaining an assured hope than this. The stream of professing Christianity is far wider than it formerly was, and I am afraid we must admit, at the same time, it is much less deep.

Inconsistency of life is utterly destructive of peace of conscience. The two things are incompatible. They cannot and they will not go together. If you will have your besetting sins, and cannot make up your minds to give them up; if you will shrink from cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye, when occasion requires it, I will engage you will have no assurance.

A vacillating walk,—a backwardness to take a bold and decided line,—a readiness to conform to the world, a hesitating witness for Christ,—a lingering tone of religion,—all these make up a sure receipt for bringing a blight upon the garden of your soul.

It is vain to suppose you will feel assured and persuaded of your own pardon and acceptance with God, unless you count all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every sin, whether great or small. (Psalm 119:128.) One Achan allowed in the camp of your heart will weaken your hands, and lay your consolations low in the dust. You must be daily sowing to the Spirit, if you are to reap the witness of the Spirit. You will not find and feel that all the Lord's ways are ways of pleasantness, unless you labour in all your ways to please the Lord.¹⁸

I bless God our salvation in no wise depends on our own works. By grace we are saved,—not by works of righteousness,—through faith,—without the deeds of the law. But I never would have any believer for a moment forget that our SENSE of salvation depends much on the manner of our living. Inconsistency will dim your eyes, and bring clouds between you and the sun. The sun is the same behind the clouds, but you will not be able to see its brightness or enjoy its warmth, and your soul will be gloomy and cold. It is in the path of well doing that the day-spring of assurance will visit you, and shine down upon your heart.

"The secret of the Lord," says David, "is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." (Psalm 25:14.)

"To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23.)

"Great peace have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them." (Psalm 119:165.)

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." (1 John 1:7.)

"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." (1 John 3:18-19.)

"Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." (1 John 2:3.)

Paul was a man who exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man. (Acts 24:16.) He could say with boldness, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith." I do not wonder that the Lord enabled him to add with confidence, "Henceforth there is a crown laid up for me, and the Lord shall give it me at that day."

Reader, if any believer in the Lord Jesus desires assurance, and has not got it, let him think over this point also. Let him look at his own heart, look at his own conscience, look at his own life, look at his own ways, look at his own home. And perhaps when he has done that, he will be able to say, "There is a cause why I have no assured hope."

I leave the three matters I have just mentioned to your own private consideration. I am sure they are worth examining. May you examine them honestly. And may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

1. And now, in closing this important inquiry, let me speak first to those readers who have not given themselves to the Lord, who have not yet come out from the world, chosen the good part, and followed Christ.

I ask you, then, to learn from this subject the privileges and comforts of a true Christian.

I would not have you judge of the Lord Jesus Christ by His people. The best of servants can give you but a faint idea of that glorious Master. Neither would I have you judge of the privileges of His kingdom by the measure of comfort to which many of His people attain. Alas, we are most of us poor creatures! We come short, very short, of the blessedness we might enjoy. But, depend upon it, there are glorious things in the city of our God, which they who have an assured hope taste, even in their life-time. There are lengths and breadths of peace and consolation there, which it has not entered into your heart to conceive. There is bread enough and to spare in our Father's house, though many of us certainly eat but little of it, and continue weak. But the fault must not be laid to our Master's charge: it is all our own.

And, after all, the weakest child of God has a mine of comforts within him, of which you know nothing. You see the conflicts and tossings of the surface of his heart, but you see not the pearls of great price which are hidden in the depths below. The feeblest member of Christ would not change conditions with you. The believer who possesses the least assurance is far better off than you are. He has a hope, however faint, but you have none at all. He has a portion that will never be taken from him, a Saviour that will never forsake him, a treasure that fadeth not away, however little he may realize it all at present. But, as for you, if you die as you are, your expectations will all perish. Oh, that you were wise! Oh, that you understood these things! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!

I feel deeply for you in these latter days of the world, if I ever did. I feel deeply for those whose treasure is all on earth, and whose hopes are all on this side the grave. Yes: when I see old kingdoms and dynasties shaking to the very foundation,—when I see, as we all saw a few years ago, kings, and princes, and rich men, and great men fleeing for their lives, and scarce knowing where to hide their heads,—when I see property dependent on public confidence melting like snow in spring, and public stocks and funds losing their value,—when I see these things I feel deeply for those who have no better portion than this world can give them, and no place in that kingdom that cannot be removed.¹⁹

Take advice of a minister of Christ this very day. Seek durable riches,—a treasure that cannot be taken from you,—a city which hath lasting foundations. Do as the Apostle Paul did. Give yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek that incorruptible crown He is ready to bestow. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him. Come away from a world which will never really satisfy you, and from sin which will bite like a serpent if you cling to it, at last. Come to the Lord Jesus as lowly sinners, and He will receive you, pardon you, give you His renewing Spirit, fill you with peace. This shall give you more real comfort than the world has ever done. There is a gulf in your heart which nothing but the peace of Christ can fill. Enter in and share our privileges. Come with us, and sit down by our side.

2. Lastly, let me turn to all believers who read these pages, and speak to them a few words of brotherly counsel.

The main thing that I urge upon you is this,—if you have not got an assured hope of your own acceptance in Christ, resolve this day to seek it. Labour for it. Strive after it. Pray for it. Give the Lord no rest till you "know whom you have believed."

I feel, indeed, that the small amount of assurance in this day, among those who are reckoned God's children, is a shame and a reproach. "It is a thing to be heavily bewailed," says old Traill, "that many Christians have lived twenty or forty years since Christ called them by His grace, yet doubting in their life." Let us call to mind the earnest "desire" Paul expresses, that "every one" of the Hebrews should seek after full assurance and let us endeavour, by God's blessing, to roll this reproach away. (Heb. 6:11.)

Believing reader, do you really mean to say that you have no desire to exchange hope for confidence, trust for persuasion, uncertainty for knowledge? Because weak faith will save you, will you therefore rest content with it? Because assurance is not essential to your entrance into heaven, will you therefore be satisfied without it upon earth? Alas, this is not a healthy state of soul to be in; this is not the mind of the Apostolic day! Arise at once, and go forward. Stick not at the foundations of religion: go on to perfection. Be not content with a day of small things. Never despise it in others, but never be content with it yourselves.

Believe me, believe me, assurance is worth the seeking. You forsake your own mercies when you rest content without it. The things I speak are for your peace. If it is good to be sure in earthly things, how much better is it to be sure in heavenly things. Your salvation is a fixed and certain thing. God knows it. Why should not you seek to know it too? There is nothing unscriptural in this. Paul never saw the book of life, and yet Paul says, "I know, and am persuaded."

Make it, then, your daily prayer that you may have an increase of faith. According to your faith will be your peace. Cultivate that blessed root more, and sooner or later, by God's blessing, you may hope to have the flower. You may not, perhaps, attain to full assurance all at once. It is good sometimes to be kept waiting. We do not value things which we get without trouble. But though it tarry, wait for it. Seek on, and expect to find.

There is one thing, however, of which I would not have you ignorant:—You must not be surprised if you have occasional doubts after you have got assurance. You must not forget you are on earth, and not yet in heaven. You are still in the body, and have indwelling sin: the flesh will lust against the spirit to the very end. The leprosy will never be out of the walls of the old house till death takes it down. And there is a devil, too, and a strong devil: a devil who tempted the Lord Jesus, and gave Peter a fall; and he will take care

you know it. Some doubts there always will be. He that never doubts has nothing to lose. He that never fears possesses nothing truly valuable. He that is never jealous knows little of deep love. But be not discouraged: you shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved you.²⁰

Finally, do not forget that assurance is a thing that may be lost for a season, even by the brightest Christians, unless they take care.

Assurance is a most delicate plant. It needs daily, hourly watching, watering, tending, cherishing. So watch and pray the more when you have got it. As Rutherford says, "Make much of assurance." Be always upon your guard. When Christian slept, in Pilgrim's Progress, he lost his certificate. Keep that in mind.

David lost assurance for many months by falling into transgression. Peter lost it when he denied his Lord. Each found it again, undoubtedly, but not till after bitter tears. Spiritual darkness comes on horseback, and goes away on foot. It is upon us before we know that it is coming. It leaves us slowly, gradually, and not till after many days. It is easy to run down hill. It is hard work to climb up. So remember my caution,—when you have the joy of the Lord, watch and pray.

Above all, grieve not the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit. Vex not the Spirit. Drive Him not to a distance, by tampering with small bad habits and little sins. Little jarrings between husbands and wives make unhappy homes, and petty inconsistencies, known and allowed, will bring in a strangeness between you and the Spirit.

Hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

The man who walks with God in Christ most closely will generally be kept in the greatest peace.

The believer who follows the Lord most fully will ordinarily enjoy the most assured hope, and have the clearest persuasion of his own salvation.

Endnotes:

1. "Full assurance that Christ hath delivered Paul from condemnation, yea, so full and real as produceth thanksgiving and triumphing in Christ, may and doth consist with complaints and out-cries of a wretched condition for the indwelling of the body of sin"—*Rutherford's Triumph of Faith*. 1645.
2. "We do not vindicate every vain pretender to 'the Witness of the Spirit;' we are aware that there are those in whose professions of religion we can see nothing but their forwardness and confidence to recommend them. But let us not reject any doctrine of revelation through an over-anxious fear of consequences."—*Robinson's Christian System*.
"True assurance is built upon a Scripture basis: presumption hath no Scripture to show for its warrant; it is like a will without seal and witnesses, which is null and void in law. Presumption wants both the witness of the Word and the seal of the Spirit. Assurance always keeps the heart in a lowly posture; but presumption is bred of pride. Feathers fly up, but gold descends; he who hath this golden assurance, his heart descends in humility."—*Watson's Body of Divinity*. 1650.
"Presumption is joined with looseness of life; persuasion with a tender conscience: this dares sin because it is sure, this dares not for fear of losing assurance. Persuasion will not sin, because it cost her Saviour so dear; presumption will sin, because grace cloth abound. Humility is the way to heaven. They that are proudly secure of their going to heaven, do not so often come thither as they that are afraid of going to hell."—*Andrews on 2 Peter*. 1633.
3. "They are quite mistaken that think faith and humility are inconsistent; they not only agree well together, but they cannot be parted."—*Traill*.
4. "To be assured of our salvation," Augustine saith, "is no arrogant stoutness; it is our faith. It is no pride; it is devotion. It is no presumption; it is God's promise."—*Bishop Jewell's Defence of the Apology*. 1570.
"If the ground of our assurance rested in and on ourselves, it might justly be called presumption; but the Lord and the power of His might being the ground thereof, they either know not what is the might of His power, or else too lightly esteem it, who account assured confidence thereon presumption."—*Gouge's Whole Armour of God*. 1647.
"Upon what ground is this certainty built? Surely not upon anything that is in us. Our assurance of perseverance is grounded wholly upon God. If we look upon ourselves, we see cause of fear and doubting; but if we look up to God, we shall find cause enough for assurance."—*Hildersam on John 4*. 1632.
"Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, "I imagine so," or "It is likely;" but the cable, the strong rope of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal ver-ity. Our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and Christ's own strength, to the strong stake of God's unchangeable nature."—*Rutherford's Letters*. 1637.
5. "Never did a believer in Jesus Christ die or drown in his voyage to heaven. They will all be found safe and sound with the Lamb on mount Zion. Christ loseth none of them; yea, nothing of them. (John vi. 39.) Not a bone of a believer is to be seen in the field of battle. They are all more than conquerors through Him that loved them." (Rom. viii. 37.)—*Traill*.
6. "He that believeth on Jesus shall never be confounded. Never was any; neither shall you, if you believe. It was a great word of

- faith spoken by a dying man, who had been converted in a singular way, betwixt his condemnation and execution: his last words were these, spoken with a mighty shout,—' never man perished with his face towards Jesus Christ;'"—*Traill*.
7. "The greatest thing that we can desire, next to the glory of God, is our own salvation; and, the sweetest thing we can desire is the assurance of our salvation. In this life we cannot get higher than to be assured of that which in the next life is to be enjoyed. All saints shall enjoy a heaven when they leave this earth; some saints enjoy a heaven while they are here on earth."—*Joseph Caryl*. 1653.
 8. "It was a saying of Bishop Latimer to Ridley, "When I live in a settled and steadfast assurance about the state of my soul, methinks then I am as bold as a lion. I can laugh at all trouble: no affliction daunts me. But when I am eclipsed in my comforts, I am of so fearful a spirit, that I could run into a very mouse-hole."—*Quoted by Christopher Love*. 1653.
"Assurance will assist us in all duties; it will arm us against all temptations; it will answer all objections; it will sustain us in all conditions into which the saddest of times can bring us. 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'—*Bishop Reynolds on Hosea 14*. 1642.
"We cannot come amiss to him that hath assurance: God is his. Hath he lost a friend?—His Father lives. Hath he lost an only child? God hath given him His only Son. Hath he scarcity of bread?—God hath given him the finest of the wheat, the bread of life.—Are his comforts gone?—he hath a Comforter. Doth he meet with storms?—he knows where to put in for harbour.—God is his portion, and heaven is his haven."—*Thomas Watson*. 1662
 9. These were John Bradford's words in prison, shortly before his execution. "I have no request to make. If Queen Mary gives me my life, I will thank her; if she will banish me, I will thank her; if she will burn me, I will thank her; if she will condemn me to perpetual imprisonment, I will thank her."
This was Rutherford's experience, when banished to Aberdeen. 'How blind are my adversaries, who sent me to a banqueting house, and not to a prison or a place of exile.' "My prison is a palace to me, and Christ's banqueting house."—*Letters*.
 10. These were the last words of Hugh Mackail on the scaffold at Edinburgh, 1666. "Now I begin my intercourse with God, which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations; farewell, the world and all its delights; farewell, meat and drinks; farewell, sun, moon, and stars. Welcome, God and Father; welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; welcome, blessed Spirit of grace and God of all consolation; welcome, glory; welcome, eternal life; welcome, death. O Lord, into Thy hands I commit my spirit; for Thou hast redeemed my soul, O Lord God of truth."
 11. These were Rutherford's words on his death bed. "O that all my brethren did know what a Master I have served, and what I have this day! I shall sleep in Christ, and when I awake, I shall be satisfied with his likeness." 1661.
These were Baxter's words on his death bed. "I bless God I have a well-grounded assurance of my eternal happiness, and great peace and comfort within." Towards the close he was asked how he did? The answer was, "Almost well." 1691.
 12. The least degree of faith takes away the sting of death, because it takes away guilt; but the full assurance of faith breaks the very teeth and jaws of death, by taking away the fear and dread of it."—*Fairclough's Sermon in the Morning Exercises*.
 13. "Assurance would make us active and lively in God's service; it would excite prayer, quicken obedience. Faith would make us walk, but assurance would make us run; we should think we could never do enough for God. Assurance would be as wings to the bird, as weights to the clock, to set all the wheels of obedience a-running."—*Thomas Watson*.
"Assurance will make a man fervent, constant, and abundant in the work of the Lord. When the assured Christian hath done one work, he is calling out for another. What is next, Lord, says the assured soul: what is next? An assured Christian will put his hand to any work, he will put his neck in any yoke for Christ; he never thinks he hath done enough, he always thinks he hath done too little, and when he hath done all he can, he sits down, saying, I am an unprofitable servant." —*Thomas Brooks*.
 14. "The true assurance of salvation, which the Spirit of God hath wrought in any heart, hath that force to restrain a man from looseness of life, and to knit his heart in love and obedience to God, as nothing else hath in all the world. It is certainly either the want of faith and assurance of God's love, or a false and carnal assurance of it, that is the true cause of all the licentiousness that reigns in the world."—*Hildersam on 51st Psalm*.
"None walk so evenly with God as they who are assured of the love of God. Faith is the mother of obedience, and sureness of trust makes way for strictness of life. When men are loose from Christ, they are loose in point of duty, and their floating belief is soon discovered in their inconstancy and unevenness of walking. We do not with alacrity engage in that of the success of which we are doubtful: and therefore when we know not whether God will accept us or not, when we are off and on in point of trust, we are just so in the course of our lives, and serve God by fits and starts. It is the slander of the world to think assurance an idle doctrine."—*Manton's Exposition of James*. 1660.
"Who is more obliged, or who feels the obligation to observance more cogently,—the son who knows his near relation, and knows his father loves him, or the servant that hath great reason to doubt it? Fear is a weak and impotent principle in comparison of love. Terrors may awaken; love enlivens. Terrors may 'almost persuade;' love over-persuades. Sure am I that a believer's knowledge that his Beloved is his, and he is his Beloved's (Cant. vi. 3), is found by experience to lay the most strong and cogent obligations upon him to loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. For as to him that believes Christ is precious (1 Peter ii. 7), so to him that knows he believes Christ is so much the more precious, even the 'chiefest of ten thousand.'" (Cant. v. 10)—*Fairclough's Sermon in Morning Exercises*. 1660.
"Is it necessary that men should be kept in continual dread of damnation, in order to render them circumspect and ensure their

attention to duty? Will not the well-grounded expectation of heaven prove far more efficacious? Love is the noblest and strongest principle of obedience: nor can it be but that a sense of God's love to us will increase our desire to please Him."—*Robinson's Christian System*.

15. "That which breeds so much perplexity is, that we would invert God's order. 'If I knew,' say some, 'that the promise belonged to me, and Christ was a Saviour to me, I could believe:' that is to say, I would first see, and then believe. But the true method is just the contrary: 'I had fainted,' says David, 'unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord.' He believed it first, and saw it afterwards."—*Archbishop Leighton*.

"It is a weak and ignorant, but common, thought of Christians, that they ought not to look for heaven, nor trust Christ for eternal glory, till they be well advanced in holiness and meetness for it. But as the first sanctification of our natures flows from our faith and trust in Christ for acceptance, so our further sanctification and meetness for glory flows from the renewed and repeated exercise of faith on Him."—*Traill*.

16. The Westminster Confession of Faith gives an admirable account of justification. "Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other Evangelical obedience, to them, as their righteousness: but by imputing the obedience and righteousness of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith."
17. "Whose fault is it that thy interest in Christ is not put out of question? Were Christians more in self-examination, more close in walking with God; and if they had more near communion with God, and were more in acting of faith, this shameful darkness and doubting would quickly vanish."—*Traill*.

"A lazy Christian shall always want four things: viz., comfort, content, confidence, and assurance. God hath made a separation between joy and idleness, between assurance and laziness, and therefore it is impossible for thee to bring these together, that God hath put so far asunder."—*Thomas Brooks*.

"Are you in depths and doubts, staggering and uncertain, not knowing what is your condition, nor whether you have any interest in the forgiveness that is of God? Are you tossed up and down between hopes and fears, and want peace consolation, and establishment? Why lie you upon your faces? Get up: watch, pray, fast, meditate, offer violence to your lusts and corruptions; fear not, startle not at their crying to be spared; press unto the throne of grace by prayer, supplications, importunities, restless requests: this is the way to take the kingdom of God. These things are not peace, are not assurance; but they are part of the means God hath appointed for the attainment of them."—*Owen on the 130th Psalm*.

18. "Wouldst thou have thy hope strong?—Then keep thy conscience pure. Thou canst not defile one without weakening the other. The godly person that is loose and careless in his holy walking will soon find his hope languishing. All sin disposeth the soul that tampers with it to trembling fears and shakings of heart."—*Gurnall*.

"One great and too common cause of distress is the secret maintaining some known sin. It puts out the eye of the soul, or dimmeth it and stupefies it, that it can neither see nor feel its own condition. But especially it provoketh God to withdraw Himself, His comforts, and the assistance of His Spirit."—*Baxter's Saints' Rest*.

"The stars which have least circuit are nearest the pole; and men whose hearts are least entangled with the world are always nearest to God, and to the assurance of His favour. Worldly Christians, remember this. You and the world must part, or else assurance and your souls will never meet."—*Thomas Brooks*.

19. "They are doubly miserable that have neither Heaven nor earth, temporals nor eternals, made sure to them in changing times."—*Thomas Brooks*.
20. "None have assurance at all times. As in a walk that is shaded with trees and checkered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark, and others are sunshine: such is usually the life of the most assured Christian."—*Bishop Hopkins*.
- "It is very suspicious that that person is a hypocrite that is always in the same frame, let him pretend it to be never so good."—*Traill*.

Signs of True Assurance (Romans 8:14-16)

by Steven Cole

Assurance of salvation is a problem in two opposite ways. Some think that they are saved when in reality they are not. When it is too late to repent, they will hear the shocking words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). They thought that they had saving faith, but they were mistaken. So they have false assurance.

Others are truly saved, but they wrestle with doubts about their salvation. Their uncertainty causes them a lot of anxiety and grief. They're like insecure children who live in an unloving home with a mean father who threatens to disown them. They miss out on the joy of experiencing the Heavenly Father's love. They are unable to come to God with the assurance that He will welcome them into

His loving arms. They need true assurance.

Romans 8 is all about assurance of salvation. If you are walking in the flesh but think that you are saved, this chapter will jar you into examining your heart. Only those who walk according to the Spirit can have true assurance that they belong to Christ. One ministry of the Holy Spirit is to assure us that we are His children.

In the New Testament, assurance rests on three pillars. First, have you abandoned all trust in your own good works so that you're trusting in Christ alone for right standing before God? If you answer yes, then the question arises, "How do you know that your faith is genuine saving faith?"

That leads to the second pillar: If your faith is genuine, then you possess new life in Christ and that new life always manifests itself in changed thinking and behavior. There will be evidence in your life that God has changed your heart. You love God and desire to love Him more. You want to please Him by a life of obedience to His Word. You hunger to feed on His Word. You're growing in godly character and behavior, as summed up by the fruit of the Spirit.

The third pillar is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, who testifies that we are children of God (Ro 8:16). Although some would dispute any subjective element in this, it seems to me that this is a subjective, experiential matter. But, as I will explain, it is based on the objective promises of the gospel as revealed in God's Word. In our text, Paul is giving us the signs of true assurance:

If the Spirit is leading us to kill our sin and confirming to us the promises of the gospel, then we can be assured that we are children of God.

Note two main things:

1. If the Spirit is leading us to kill our sin, then we can be assured that we are children of God (Romans 8:14).

Romans 8:14: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." It is important to note the first word of that sentence: "For." Paul is explaining verse 13 and showing how it applies to the matter of assurance. In the context, he is not talking about how the Spirit may lead you to go to one college or another or to one career or another. Rather, Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit is leading you to put to death the sinful deeds of the body (8:13), it is evidence that you are a child of God.

No one who is living according to the flesh kills his sin on the heart level. Some legalists or ascetics may control their sin outwardly, so that they can look good to others (Gal. 6:12-13). But they are filled with pride about their performance. They don't kill their sin to glorify God, but to glorify self. But here Paul is saying that if the Spirit is leading you to kill your sin on the thought or heart level out of a desire to please and glorify the God who saved you, that is evidence that you are His child. To be led by the Spirit of God means to have the whole direction of your life determined by the Spirit, so that His fruit is growing in your life (Gal. 5:18-23).

Note that the verb is passive: "led by the Spirit of God." As Thomas Schreiner (Romans [Baker], p. 422) explains, this "suggests that the Spirit is the primary agent in Christian obedience, that it is his work in believers that accounts for their obedience. Although this does not exclude the need for believers to follow the Spirit, it emphasizes that any human obedience is the result of the Spirit's work." John Murray (The Epistle to the Romans [Eerdmans], p. 295) expresses the balance: "The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit's activity and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer's activity." This is the mystery that we saw in verse 13, where by the Spirit we kill our sin. God gives the power but we must take action to obey.

So Paul's point in 8:14 is that if the Spirit of God is leading us to kill our sin, then we can be assured that we are "sons of God." Some commentators see significance in the fact that Paul changes from "sons" (8:14, 15) to "children" (8:16, 17), but I agree with the majority who say that there is no significant difference. But it is significant that this is the first time in Romans that Paul mentions this wonderful truth, that we are children of God. We have been born into God's family through the Spirit who imparts new life to us (8:2, 6, 10). And, we have been adopted into God's family as His chosen heirs (8:15, 17).

Charles Hodge (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Eerdmans], p. 265) points out three implications of being "sons" of God: (1) There is similarity of disposition, character, or nature. After commanding us to love our enemies, Jesus explains (Matt. 5:45), "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Sons reflect the character of their father because they share his nature. (2) "Sons" are the objects of special affection (Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18). I love all children, but I have a special love for my own children. God has a special love for His chosen children (John 13:1; 14:21). (3) "Sons" have a title to some peculiar dignity or advantage. They are heirs of the riches of their father (Rom. 8:17). They have special access to his presence that others lack. If the President is greeting a crowd, the Secret Service will prevent unknown children from breaking through the barrier and running up to the President. But his own children can be right at his side.

We could probably come up with many more privileges that are ours because we are God's children. Paul's first point is that if we are killing our sin on a daily basis, that didn't come from us. It is an indication that the Spirit is leading and governing our lives. John Piper puts it ("The Spirit-Led Are the Sons of God," on DesiringGod.org), "When you fight sin by trusting in Christ as superior to what

sin offers, you are being led by the Spirit.” And that is a sign that we are sons and daughters of God.

2. If the Spirit is confirming the promises of the gospel to us, then we can be assured that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16).

Paul goes on to explain some of the implications of 8:14. First (8:15), he shows that the gospel has given us the Spirit of adoption as God’s sons so that we are on intimate, childlike terms with the Father. Then (8:16) he shows how the Spirit confirms the gospel promises to us through His inner witness. He follows (Ro 8:17a) by showing the implication, that if we are God’s children, then we are heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ. Then in 8:17b he responds to an anticipated objection: If we are God’s beloved children, then why does He allow us to suffer? This theme runs like a thread through the rest of the chapter. I originally planned to cover 8:17 in this message, but it will have to wait until next time.

A. The Spirit confirms the gospel promise that through adoption we become children of God (Romans 8:15).

Romans 8:15: “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”

There is a difficult interpretive matter in this verse that we need to tackle before we apply it: How should we understand the two “spirits”? Some (such as the NASB) take both to refer to the human spirit in the sense of an inner attitude or disposition. But in light of the context, where the Holy Spirit is prominent and the parallel in Galatians 4:6, which clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, most understand the second reference in Romans 8:15 to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit brings us into this relationship as adopted sons of God.

But what about the first “spirit”? It could refer to the human spirit of unbelievers, in the sense that people are in slavery to sin and in fear of God’s judgment. But not all unbelievers fear God’s judgment. Or it could refer to the general spirit of those who were under the Law, which was a yoke of bondage that brought condemnation and fear of judgment (Acts 15:10; Gal. 4:7, 21-31).

But many argue that it is unlikely that Paul uses “spirit” to refer to both the human spirit and the Holy Spirit in the same verse. If it refers to the Holy Spirit, it may refer to way that He worked during the era of the Law (similar to the second view above). Others apply it more specifically to the work of the Spirit when He uses the Law to bring conviction of sin just prior to conversion (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Sons of God* [Zondervan]. Pp. 197-205). And still others contend that Paul is saying, negatively, that the Spirit we receive at salvation is not a Spirit of bondage, but a Spirit of adoption. Because of Galatians 4, I think that Paul is referring to the human spirit of bondage and fear that the Law brought (Heb. 12:18-24). By way of contrast, the Holy Spirit now transforms us from slaves to sons through adoption.

There are two ways that the New Testament speaks about our becoming sons of God: through the new birth and through adoption. Adoption is relatively rare, occurring only three other times with reference to Christians (Rom. 8:23; [9:4, the Jews]; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). The last reference attributes our adoption to God’s predestining us “according to the kind intention of His will.” Like justification, adoption refers to a legal transaction that results in a change of status. Leon Morris (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Apollos/Eerdmans], p. 315) says, “It signifies being granted the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by nature.”

William Barclay (*The Letter to the Romans* [Westminster Press], rev. ed., p. 106) explains the consequences of adoption in Roman society, from which Paul borrowed this concept:

- (i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father.
- (ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father’s estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them.
- (iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do.
- (iv) In the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father.

When the Holy Spirit enables us to believe in Christ and to understand our new standing as adopted sons of God, all of these privileges apply to us and result in a great change in us. We have a new legal status before God, but also we have a new relationship with God as Father. Paul says that the result of our adoption is that by the Spirit we cry out, “Abba! Father!” “Cry out” is an emotional word, used about 40 times in the Psalms (LXX) for crying out to God in urgent prayer (e.g., Ps. 3:4; 18:6). God’s adopted children often cry out to Him as their Father when they are in need.

“Abba! Father!” combines the Aramaic and the Greek words for Father. Jesus addressed the Father in this way in Mark 14:36 as He prayed in the Garden just prior to His arrest. He taught His followers to pray to God as “Our Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). When Paul applies “Abba! Father!” to us as God’s adopted children, it means that we can draw near to God in our distress or time of need with the same sense of intimacy and assurance of being heard that Jesus had!

James Boice (Romans: The Reign of Grace [Baker], 2:841) points out that in the Old Testament, father was used of God only 14 times and never in a personal sense. In Jesus' time, God's name was so revered that the Jews would not even pronounce it. They would substitute "Lord" instead of "Yahweh" when they came to it in the Scriptures. But Jesus always addressed God as Father, except for when He cried out on the cross as He bore our sins (Mark 15:34), "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" And, astoundingly, He taught us to pray, "Our Father."

Some have picked up on Abba by addressing God in prayer as "Daddy," since it was the word that little children used in Aramaic to address their daddies. I confess that I'm a bit uncomfortable with that because Jesus adds that we should acknowledge that our Father is in heaven and that His name is to be hallowed, or set apart as holy. In other words, while Father or Abba connotes intimacy and dependency, we must also remember as we draw near that He is the sovereign of the universe and that His name is holy. So we should come to Him as a little child does to his father, knowing that He loves us and that He delights to meet our needs. But we also must come before Him reverently.

J. I. Packer has a wonderful chapter in [Knowing God](#) (BORROW THIS BOOK) (p181-208, "Sons of God," on the subject of our adoption as children of the Father. He writes (p. 182),

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (Evangelical Magazine 7, pp. 19-20)

So the Spirit assures us by confirming the promises of the gospel to us, teaching us through the Word that we are God's adopted children and that, as such, we can cry out to Him in any need as our loving Father, knowing that He cares for us.

B. The Spirit confirms the gospel promises to us through His inner witness (Ro 8:16).

Romans 8:16: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." There is some debate here as to the meaning of the verb. Strictly interpreted, it means "to testify or bear witness with." Thus, there would be two witnesses, our spirit and the Holy Spirit. Many reputable commentators understand it in this way, but I confess that I do not understand how my spirit bears witness to me apart from the Spirit's bearing witness.

But the verb can also mean "to bear witness to." C. E. B. Cranfield (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [T. & T. Clark], p. 403, italics his) asks a pertinent question, "But what standing has our spirit in this matter? Of itself it surely has no right at all to testify to our being sons of God." And so I understand this to mean that the Holy Spirit confirms to our spirit the promises of the gospel. It is an immediate and direct inner sense that the gospel is true and that it is true in my life.

If you believe personally in the truth of the gospel, where did that faith come from? It didn't originate in you. "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God" (Rom. 3:11). To understand and believe in the gospel requires a supernatural work of God's Spirit in your heart. When you say, both at the point of conversion and many times in the years afterward, "Yes, I do believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord," that is the inner witness of the Spirit to your spirit that you are God's child.

When you're feeling guilty and condemned because of your sins and you read, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1) and something inside of you exclaims, "Thank God!" where does that inner sense of joy come from? It is the Holy Spirit testifying to your spirit that you are a child of God.

Or, maybe you're feeling all alone and wondering if anyone cares for you or is concerned about your problems and you read that you can cast all your cares on God, because He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7). As you read that promise, your spirit is buoyed up with renewed hope in the Lord. Where did that hope come from? It is the Spirit of God testifying to your spirit that you are God's child.

On one occasion many years ago in California I was going through the most difficult time of my then 14 years of ministry. An associate was spreading half-truths (or, half-lies) about me, causing a lot of problems in the ministry there. Many were criticizing my preaching. I was very discouraged. One night as I was about to get into bed, out of nowhere, the reference, Acts 18:9-10 popped into my head. I had not been reading in Acts recently. There was no human explanation for why that reference came to mind.

I grabbed a Bible that was on the nightstand and opened to Acts 18 and read how Paul was afraid during his ministry in Corinth. The Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” It was the Lord’s word to me, to go on preaching the truth and not be concerned about my critics. It was the Spirit’s witness to my spirit that I am a child of God.

Conclusion

Are you a child of God? Are you sure that you’re a child of God? How can anyone be sure? First, have you abandoned all trust in your own good works and trusted in Christ alone to save you from God’s judgment? That is the main source of assurance. But, how can you know if your faith is genuine? Is the Holy Spirit governing your life so that you fight against and kill your sin every day? Is the Holy Spirit confirming to you the wonderful truth that God has adopted you into His family? Part of that confirmation is that you often find yourself crying out to the Father for help and grace in your time of need. And the Spirit repeatedly confirms to you the many promises that God gives to His children. You can sing (author, Carolina Sandell-Berg),

More secure is no one ever
Than the loved ones of the Savior
Not yon star on high abiding
Nor the bird in home nest hiding.

Application Questions

1. Should professing Christians who are continuing in a life of sin be assured of their salvation? Why/why not?
2. Are some by personality or upbringing more prone to insecurity and doubt than others are? What can they do to overcome this and gain assurance of salvation?
3. How important is assurance of salvation? How does the presence of lack of assurance affect one’s walk with God?
4. Is there a danger in focusing on feelings of assurance or on the subjective inner witness of the Spirit? Where should we focus? Where is the balance?

Assurance of Salvation

By [Gregory Brown](#)

How can a professing Christian have assurance of salvation? How can he know that his faith is genuine and that he is truly saved? The New Testament clearly teaches that not all who profess Christ as Lord are saved. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus said,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Also, in the Parable of the Weeds, Christ taught that God’s kingdom was full of wheat, which God had sown, and weeds, which Satan had sown. They would dwell together until the harvest, when the angels would throw the weeds into the fire (Matt 13:36-43). This seems to illustrate how within the church there are true believers and false ones. Likewise, in the Parable of the Net, Christ illustrated this same truth. The kingdom is like a net, let down into a lake by fishermen, which gathered both good fish and bad fish. At the end of the age, the unrighteous in the kingdom, represented by the bad fish, were thrown into the fire (Matt 13:47-52).

The Parable of the Virgins and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25 seem to teach the same (v. 1-12, 31-46). To the foolish virgins who called Christ, “Lord,” Christ replied, “I do not know you” (v. 11-12), and with the goats who also called Christ, “Lord,” they were sent into “eternal punishment” (v. 44, 46). Both groups were apparently unconverted believers.

Because of this reality, in 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” Likewise, in 2 Peter 1:10, Peter exhorted the Roman Christians, “make every effort to be sure of your calling and election.” Though true believers can never lose their salvation, as God protects it, believers must confirm that they are truly saved.

While many Scriptures help one develop assurance of salvation (i.e. the Beatitudes, the book of James, 2 Pet 1:5-10, etc.), 1 John was specifically written for this purpose. In 1 John 5:13, John said, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Throughout the book, he gives a series of tests to help believers know they have eternal life. We’ll consider a few:

1. The Test of Obedience

1John 2:3-5 says,

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him.

Similarly, James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." What is the person deceived about? If he listens but doesn't obey God's Word, he is deceived about his faith—it is not genuine (cf. James 2:26). True faith is demonstrated by a lifestyle of obedience.

Are our lives characterized by obedience to God?

2. The Test of Love for Christians

1John 3:14-15 says,

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Similarly, John 13:35 says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." When someone is born again, God supernaturally gives them a great love not only for God but for other believers. Romans 5:5 says "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit." True believers love one another, and it shows up in their gathering to worship God, studying his Word together, and serving one another, among other things. As an example, in Acts 2:45, the early church sold all they had and gave to those who had needs among them. This was God's supernatural love working within them to love and care for one another. It was proof that God had saved them.

Are we loving other believers by meeting with them, caring for them, and sacrificing for them?

3. The Test of Doctrine

1 John 4:15 says, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." If we don't believe and profess orthodox doctrine about Christ—that Jesus was fully God and fully man, that he came to earth as a man to die for the sins of the world and was raised from the dead, then we are not saved. A right understanding of the gospel, including who Christ is, is needed for salvation. And this belief in orthodox doctrine continues throughout the life of a true believer. Colossians 1:22-23:

but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him—if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has also been preached in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become its servant.

Do we believe what the Bible says about Jesus?

4. The Test of Not Loving the World

1John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." According to John, one of the characteristics of a person who is saved is that they do not love the world or the things of this world. Furthermore, 1 John 5:19 says, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."

Because believers understand the world is passing away and that the devil is the controlling force behind the world system, believers reject the world. They reject materialism, lust, the devaluing of human life, perverted views about marriage and sexuality, and other worldly philosophies and ways of life. Certainly, believers still go through progressive sanctification where they continually let go of sin and worldliness and look more like Christ. However, at salvation, there is a distinctive break in allegiance. It is not a perfect break, but it is progressive. A true believer lives for God and not the world. James 4:4 says, "Adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever decides to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy."

Are we rejecting the world and its evil ways to continue to follow God?

5. The Test of Decreasing Sin

1John 3:6, 9 says,

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

John says “no one who lives in him” keeps on sinning. In 1 John 1:8, he already told us that if we claim to be without sin, we are liars and the truth is not in us. So, he is not talking about perfectionism. He is talking about a decreasing pattern of sin in the life of a believer.

Yes, believers will still struggle with sin, but they struggle because they have been saved. The world welcomes sin and often celebrates it! But, it’s not the same for true believers. At times, they will fall into sin and often repeatedly, but they won’t quit fighting sin by rejecting Christ and living for their lusts. It’s impossible for them to ultimately do that because God’s seed is in them. God has given them a new nature, which is empowered by his Spirit. God’s Spirit convicts them of sin, disciplines them by trials, and always ultimately turns them back to God, even if that’s by a premature death (cf. Acts 5:1-10, Heb 12:5-11, 1 John 5:16-17).

6. The Test of Persecution for Righteousness

1John 3:12-13 says,

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

John says that believers might be hated by the world. In fact, Scripture teaches that in some form or another every truly born again believer will experience persecution. In Matthew 5:10, Christ said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

He says those who receive persecution for their faith are part of the kingdom of God. This doesn’t mean all believers will be beaten, stoned, or jailed. This suffering is often displayed in less extreme forms such as being disliked, considered strange, verbally abused, and/or ostracized because of one’s beliefs or actions. Consider what 1 Peter 4:3-4 says,

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

Do others find us strange because we don’t practice drunkenness like the world? Do others find us strange because we don’t practice sex outside of marriage? Do others find us strange because of our beliefs about creation, abortion, homosexuality, gender roles in the home, and other controversial topics? Being considered strange will be normal for a person who is a Christian. True believers will experience persecution from the world.

7. The Test of Perseverance

1John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” For John, the fact that the cultists in Ephesus left the church (presumably, never to return), proved that they were not truly saved. Christ handled those in the church who professed Christ but weren’t truly saved in the same way. In Matthew 7:23, he said, “I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!” Therefore, persevering in the faith is a proof of true salvation. Likewise, in Matthew 24:13, after Christ described the growing false teaching, persecution of believers, and apostasy which would occur in the end times, he said, “but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” True believers will persevere.

Great examples of this are Peter and Judas. Peter denied Christ but ultimately returned to him—proving that he was saved. Judas denied Christ and never repented—proving he wasn’t a true believer (John 6:70).

Assurance as a Subjective Experience

As we consider the perseverance of the saints, it must be realized that eternal security is an objective reality based on what Christ has done for us. He gives us eternal life, and he keeps us to the end (John 10:27-30). However, assurance is not eternal. It is a subjective experience given by the Holy Spirit that many times is temporary. In Romans 8:15-16, Paul said: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Therefore, when not walking with Christ faithfully, we quench the testimony and power of the Spirit in our lives—leading us, at times, to doubt our salvation (cf. 1 Thess 5:19).

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness of our salvation? He does this by changing us and making us look more like God (Gal 5:22-23) and also by building intimacy in our relationship with God (Rom 8:16). As he bears the fruits of the Spirit in our lives—love, joy, peace, patience, and perseverance—we have confidence that we are God’s children (cf. 2 Pet 1:5-10). When we look like the world, we are more prone to doubt if our salvation is even real.

Proving One’s Salvation

Therefore, as believers, we have a role in gaining assurance of salvation. Paul, in fact, commands us to “prove” our repentance (in referring to our salvation) by our good deeds. In Acts 26:20 (NIV 1984), he said, “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

We are not proving our salvation to God; he knows who are saved (cf. 2 Tim 2:19). We are proving it to ourselves and all who look at us (cf. 2 Cor 13:5, John 13:35). Peter says something similar in 2 Peter 1:10: “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall.” He describes how to make our election sure in the previous verses.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 2 Peter 1:5-7

In order for us to have assurance, we must prove our salvation by continued repentance—fighting and turning away from sin—and continued growth in godly character.

Protection in Spiritual Warfare

In addition, assurance is very important not only to confirm that we are saved but also for our spiritual protection. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul mentions assurance of salvation as a necessary part of the armor of God, which protects us in spiritual warfare. He said to put on “the helmet of our salvation.” What is this helmet? Since Paul is writing to believers, it doesn’t seem to refer to salvation but the assurance of salvation. In a physical battle, like a fist or sword fight, an opponent often aims for the head because a damaged head will severely weaken a foe. Likewise, in a spiritual battle, doubting one’s salvation opens the door for the enemy to severely weaken believers by leading them into doubt, shame, depression, addiction, inactivity, and other sins. We must realize that Satan always attacks our “head”—our assurance of salvation; therefore, as believers, we must be diligent in making our calling and election sure, so we can avoid Satan’s trap (cf. 2 Pet 1:10).

Reflection

1. Which test of true salvation stood out most to you and why?
2. What is the difference between eternal security (i.e. perseverance of the saints) and assurance of salvation?
3. Why is gaining assurance of salvation so important?
4. Have you ever experienced a lack of assurance of salvation, and if so, why?
5. How would you help someone struggling with assurance of salvation?
6. What questions or applications did you take from the reading?

ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION What It Is; How To Attain It; Why More Do Not Enjoy It

By William S. Plumer

I. "Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God and estate of salvation: which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God—which hope shall never make them ashamed.

II. "This certainty is not a bare and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, grounded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces, unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

III. "This assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

IV. "True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit, by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and allowing even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light; yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair."

This view, set forth by the ablest body of divines which has met for several centuries, has been accepted by more Christian people than any other full statement of the same matter. It is eminently scriptural. Had the Westminster Assembly done no more than to give to the Church this one short paper, it would have deserved the respect and gratitude of the people of God.

The general idea running through the word assurance in the New Testament, is that of persuasion. He who is assured is persuaded. At least once assurance means belief, or ground of belief, as in Acts 17:31, where the Greek word is the same we commonly render faith. But when the New Testament speaks of assurance in the sense already explained, it uses a peculiar word (plerophoria) properly rendered full assurance, or much assurance. The four places where it occurs are Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 6:11; 10:22. The kindred verb is used in Luke 1:1, where it is rendered are most surely believed; in Rom. 4:21, where it is rendered being fully persuaded; and in Rom. 14:5, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Some have defined assurance to be a firm persuasion of the certainty of anything, or a certain expectation of something future. Its general import is that of entire confidence, firm expectation, certain persuasion. In this discussion it is used in the sense of full confidence of one's interest in Christ ending in final salvation.

Respecting assurance, many ERRORS have been taught. From them have arisen great troubles in many minds. Let us briefly consider some of them:

A. Some have asserted that assurance is of the essence of faith; that whoever has true faith knows and feels that he has it, and is certain that it is the faith demanded by God's word. It must be admitted that from the sixteenth century to the present there have been writers who used rash language on this subject. But let us note a few things:

1. When many of these men wrote they were combating a dangerous idea very prevalent in their day, namely, that a true faith might be wholly inoperative, inspiring no solid and lively hopes, and producing no change in men's lives. The error which they opposed was common, dangerous, and, if persisted in, fatal. They warred against a dead faith, and we must admit that there can be no more dangerous state than to settle down in a faith which produces no saving or powerful change in time, and inspires no good hopes for eternity.

2. Some have not sufficiently admitted that, as in other Christian graces, so in true faith there are degrees. The word of God clearly admits that all the graces, faith in particular, may be very weak, even when genuine. So that we have the very phrase, weak in faith, with instructions how such shall be treated. Because of the feebleness of their believing, the disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." Feeble faith may be as genuine as strong faith, though it administers comparatively little comfort in the day of trial; yet such "shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4). In Scripture we have also the phrase strong in faith.

3. It is not safe to deny that any man can have an exercise of mind or heart without being conscious of all that passes within him; but that is very different from knowing that such an exercise of the soul is true faith. All our exercises of soul are to be tested and proved by God's word. True faith purifies the heart, works by love, overcomes the world, and quenches the fiery darts of Satan. Time and self-examination by God's word must show what is the true nature of all fair appearances in religion. Besides, there is surely a great difference between a persuasion that Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient Savior of lost men; and believing that we are savingly interested in His righteousness and intercession.

4. On a careful examination of all that is said by those who teach that assurance is included in the very essence of faith—it is apparent that many of them confound reliance with assurance. It is certainly true that no man believes a promise of God if he does not rely on it, and that no man believes in Jesus unless he looks to Jesus, leans upon Him, and relies on Him. Reliance is therefore of the essence of faith; and if by assurance is meant no more than reliance, there is no error taught, albeit there is a very unhappy use of terms.

Still it cannot safely be denied that some have pertinaciously taken the ground that no man had true faith without assurance of a saving interest in Christ.

B. Another error maintains the opposite extreme, and asserts that assurance of our personal interest in Christ is not attainable, and that a claim to it is mere presumption. Now let it be said—

1. Perhaps those who have taken this ground have been led to do so by noticing that a certain class of vain pretenders, who give no evidence of being regenerate, and who have none of the fruits of the Spirit, make a boast of their confident expectation of eternal

life. There are some under this strong and strange delusion to such an extent that it will stick to them to the last. Even at the judgment day they will hug their delusions, and plead them before the face of the Son of God (Matt. 7:22-23).

2. Then some have, perhaps, stated the doctrine of assurance in a loose or harsh way, as if a wicked life could not disprove any such profession, or as if known or allowed sin ought not to shake all confident expectations of eternal happiness.

3. All sober writers, who maintain the truth on this subject, agree that there are degrees of assurance, some being sufficient to produce calmness, others a high degree of boldness, and others leading to a triumphant defiance of all fears and foes, and to a joyful expectation of all good.

But it is neither safe nor scriptural to maintain that one cannot be on good and scriptural grounds assured of an interest in Christ, and of life eternal consequent thereon.

The way is now open to say, that none but ignorant or carnal people will say—that there is no man who is grounded and settled in the truth of the Christian religion, in the divine inspiration and canonical authority of holy scripture; no man who walks by faith and not by sight; no man who has proven every doctrine he holds, and can give with meekness and fear a reason of the hope that is in him; no man who can say that the life he now lives, he lives by the faith of the Son of God; no man who can truly, modestly and unswervingly say that the Lord Christ is precious to his soul; no man who does constantly renounce all self-righteousness as filthy rags, and esteem himself the least of all saints; no one who can safely say, Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You; no one who does heartily and joyfully take the Lord Jesus Christ as his sole Mediator, his only Prophet, Priest, and King, as all his desire and all his salvation; no one who does truly and habitually say, I shall be satisfied when I awake with Your likeness, and until then I shall never rest contented with my state; no one who can say, I have a hearty respect to all God's commandments, and I do hate all sin in myself and others, but especially in myself; I do repent and humble myself for all my known sins; yes, I do abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes, as I often have clear discoveries of the glory of God, especially in the person of Christ; no one who can truly say, I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness; no one who habitually and prevailingly loves the light and comes to the light, both to find the path of duty and to detect his own secret faults; no one who hungers and thirsts after holiness more than he longs for necessary food and drink, and who is willing and ready at all times to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts; no one who is in the fear of the Lord all the day long, who lives as seeing Him who is invisible; no one who has a just and abiding sense of the vanity of all earthly things, of the shortness of time and, of the nearness and solemnity of eternity; no one who can be calm and quiet in God when all the world is in an uproar; no one who delights himself in God's being, name, perfections, government and glory; no one who, in the depth of his trials, says, Your will, O God, not mine, be done; no one who can say, This is my rejoicing, the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and Godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have my conversation in the world; no one who gives all diligence to make his calling and election sure; no one who is clothed with humility, and abhors pride and all its hateful ways; no one who is vigilant day and night, never trusting in his own wisdom or strength, but habitually looking to the Most High for light and might; no one who has made up his mind to follow Christ even unto death, and not count his life dear if he may but win Christ and be found in Him; no one, who can either explain sufficiently to his own satisfaction the dark dispensations of God's providence, or with adoring reverence say, What I know not now, I shall know hereafter; no one whose character is well proportioned, especially leading him to trust in God alone for every victory; no one who is so intent on doing and suffering the will of God that he is more anxious to know what will please God than what will please himself and all his fellow men; no one who blames himself more for wronging his fellow man than he blames another for injuring him, and who absolutely refuses to carry in his own bosom a grudge against any mortal; no one who so fears God as to be able habitually to maintain a control over his thoughts, affections, words, and actions; no one who is delighted with conversation and discourses which abase him in the dust and exalt his Redeemer, and lift his own thoughts to God's right hand, where are pleasures forever more; no one who loves his neighbor as himself, is fruitful in devices of usefulness, and counts that day lost on which he has done nothing for human virtue and happiness; no one who loves God's people with a love so tender and constraining that all who know him see that he is a lover of godly men; no one whose word is as good as his bond or his oath, and who says what he means, and means what he says; no one who is peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and is full of kindness, even to slanderers and persecutors; no one who is unblamably observant of relative duties as husband, parent, child, subject, citizen, magistrate.

Can any sober, honest person say that such people cannot be found on earth? Well, if they can be found here, why should they not attain the assurance of grace and salvation? Does any say that while there are some such professors of religion on earth, yet the number of such is not large? In reply, it may be said, with sorrow, that there are not very many consistent, devoted, thorough-going followers of the Lamb. But the greater is the pity, and the greater is the shame. But let us go to the highest authority.

The word of God speaks of full assurance of understanding. The language is very strong: "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3). The word rendered understanding in this place is so translated in every verse where it is found in the New Testament. Assurance

of understanding supposes that intellectual doubts of the truth of the Bible, and of the system of doctrine really taught in the Scriptures, are all gone; and that if any difficulties on any branch of revealed truth remain, they are not such as to weaken confidence in the word of God; and the godly man is willing to give God His own time to make plain either hard texts or dark providences, not doubting that the Lord can easily do so at the right time.

Then the Scripture speaks of the full assurance of faith: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). This assurance does not chiefly relate to one's personal interest in Christ, but rather to the undoubted veracity of God in all He has spoken, particularly in the unerring truth of all He has told us in His word respecting the scheme of salvation, and a hearty and cordial reliance upon Christ as thus revealed. This assurance has every needed basis. It is most reasonable firmly to believe all God has said. It is a great dishonor to God when we lack a "thorough conviction of the truth of what is revealed in Scripture," or entertain "a cherished disposition to doubt or question the doctrines of the gospel." "The faithfulness of God is above all faithfulness." To question it is a sin. We ought steadfastly to believe everything God has made known to us. We ought to come to Him in full assurance of faith.

Then we have the full assurance of hope. Paul says, "And we desire that everyone of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. That you be not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:11-12). The Scriptures say much of hope. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God;" "Hope makes not ashamed." "We are saved by hope." "You are called in one hope of your calling." "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." "Take for a helmet the hope of salvation" (Rom. 5:2, 5; 8:24; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 5:8). These are mere samples of what abounds in the word of God. Though faith is always accompanied by hope, yet they are not the same. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." The Syriac reads, "Faith is the persuasion of things in hope." That is, faith gives to things hoped for a present subsistence in the soul. "Faith credits the promises, hope looks to the things promised, and expects them. . . . Faith, eyeing the power and veracity of God, gives credit to the promises; hope, viewing them as not actually accomplished, desires them, delights in them, longs for their fulfillment, and expects it in faith." Another judicious writer says, "Faith is the credit we give to the truth of what is testified or promised in the gospel, and is founded on the veracity and faithfulness of God. The hope which attends this faith is a mixture of desire and joy, and an anticipation of enjoyment."

In the order of nature, assurance of understanding precedes assurance of faith, and both of these precede assurance of hope. When we have all three, we are happy indeed, and can defy all the assaults of fear and temptation.

But there are other forms of speech found in the word of God, which show that some of God's people, under every dispensation, have attained assurance. Thus, among the patriarchs, Enoch walked with God, and was not; for he "was translated, that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). His translation was a great event; but it was preceded by a satisfactory and full persuasion, founded on good testimony, that he pleased God. The testimony was to himself, and preceded his translation. Then, too, another patriarch, the man of Uz, in the midst of as dark providences as ever surrounded a mere man, still held fast his confidence in the Son of God, saying "I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25). Not only was he confident that there was a Redeemer to others, but he was sure that that Redeemer was his Redeemer, and should accomplish all He had led His people to expect; and not merely that this great person should at some future time live, but that He was then living; as Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." Here, then, under the patriarchal dispensation, we have two clear cases of full assurance.

Under the Mosaic dispensation David often expresses his assurance. Over and over again he says, "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant" (Ps. 116:16; 119:125; 143:12). In other terms no less confident does he declare the same thing in the twenty-third, the seventy-first, and the eighty-ninth Psalms, thus: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." "In You, O Lord, do I put my trust." "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever"—and many like phrases. Even poor Asaph, a man of a sorrowful spirit, and sometimes sunk in despondency and perplexity, did sometimes rise to the heights of a sublime assurance. Hear him: "You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You. My flesh and my heart fails; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." One can hardly find a more solemn or joyful declaration of blessed assurance than this. All this is in accordance with that glorious truth taught us by the evangelical prophet: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever" (Isa. 32:17).

Under the gospel dispensation we have abundant proofs that assurance is attainable. Thus, poor Peter, though he had not long before behaved very badly, yet, having bitterly repented of his sad fall, said to the Searcher of Hearts, the Son of God Himself: "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17). In his last epistle, written shortly before his death, he says much of assurance, and tells Christians how they may attain unto it. In like manner blessed Paul, in his very last epistle, professes his assurance: "I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day. . . . I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 1:12; 4:7-8). From other things said by Paul

and by the beloved John, it seems clear that assurance was a common attainment in the primitive Church. (See Rom. 8:14-17, 35; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 3:12; 1 John 3:14, 19; 4:13; 5:19). The reader can easily refer to these several passages, where strong confidence is expressed, the words we know frequently occurring.

Nor can one examine with care the writings of the early Christians or of the Reformers without seeing that the confessors and martyrs of the early Church, and the heroes of the sixteenth century, did, to a large extent, attain to a blessed assurance. It is a question worthy of careful consideration whether, for the last hundred and fifty years, there has not been an error in some godly men in "preaching a low experience." Even our hymnology has been modified from the same cause.

Seeing that these things are so, why is it, that in our day so few have assurance of grace and salvation? This is a solemn and a practical question. Let us dwell upon it a little.

1. Some, who seem assured that they are now in a state of grace, do, sometimes from bad instruction, fear that God will at last forsake them, and leave them to perish. They seem assured of grace, but not of final salvation. Such do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. Jehovah says such things as these: "As your days, so shall your strength be." "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." "My grace is sufficient for you." "The weak brother shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand." "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you shall perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Whole pages might be filled with quotations from God's word just as appropriate to the cases we are considering as those already given. Evidently, therefore, what this class of doubting souls needs is a better acquaintance with Scripture and a firmer reliance on the plain and precious promises.

2. Others do not make proper distinctions in their own case. If they find their strength to be small, they infer that they have none at all. Weak faith may be as genuine as strong faith. Faint hope may be as truly from God as the most joyful expectation. Quality, not quantity, should be the first matter of inquiry. An infant is as truly a human being as its giant father. It is a great matter to be raised above tormenting fears; but it is better to be disturbed with alarms than to live in carnal security. It is true that it is of the nature of all real graces to advance. We are required to see to it that they do grow. God has provided for such increase. But let no one say, "I am a man of the world and a child of perdition," because he is not as bold as Peter, as tender as John, or as zealous as Paul. The main question for such is, Have I any true faith, any lively hope, any real humility, any godly sorrow for sin, any measure of the Spirit of Christ?

3. Then some have naturally feeble minds. They cannot reason soundly and logically. They are almost like children all their days. True religion has a tendency to rectify the disorders of our minds, but it would be a physical, and not a moral regeneration, to make a powerful reasoner out of a simple soul. Probably not a few of those who live in uncertainty of their final salvation are thus afflicted. Oftentimes you cannot tell them the real cause of their sadness. If they cannot see it themselves, you can hardly persuade them of it.

4. Others have morbid minds. They have a "slough of despond" in them. It seems almost impossible to get them to take cheerful views of anything concerning their religious state. In some such cases a good physician, or a change of diet, or a change of scene, is more needed than labored Biblical instruction. Great tenderness should be shown them by their spiritual guides. Much prayer should be made for them by their friends. They should be exhorted and encouraged to take fast hold of the covenant and promises of God. They should be taught that humility, if genuine, is pleasing to God; but that distrust of Him is a sin. They should be taught earnestly to call on their souls to hope in God. If melancholy is their master, but little can be done for them by pious teachers. If reason is not quite dethroned, they should be encouraged to visit the poor and the needy, and to practice self-denial in attempts to benefit others. "He who waters shall be watered himself."

5. It is a strange and troublesome opinion, more or less prevalent, that uncertainty of our own salvation is a mark of humility. I know not how such a notion ever gained prevalence. But I have often met it among professors of considerable respectability. It is right to avoid presumption and vain boasting. God's word strongly condemns false hopes and unwarranted confidences. But it is not humility; it is rather distrust in God to continue in doubt about anything concerning which God has given us ample means of attaining at least a degree of certainty.

6. Then there is a class of volatile minds, which, as soon as they reach a state of light and cheerfulness on religious subjects, seem to be almost invariably carried into frivolity. To keep such sober minded, the Lord seems to see it necessary to leave them very much under the power of beneficial fears. When they wax fat, they kick; when they mount, they fly away. By this painful discipline God often checks or cures worldly-mindedness, vanity, and levity. Anything is good for us, if without it we would lead lives of levity, or be high-minded.

7. Others are in habitual uncertainty about their eternal happiness, because they are ignorant of what is and what is not evidence of genuine piety. Perhaps they have regarded their fondness for frequenting religious assemblies as proof of a new heart. Then they

discover that others, who make no pretensions to piety, are as regularly at the house of God as they are, and this ground of confidence is destroyed. A relish for the spiritual worship of God's house, and a desire of communion with Him, are sure tokens of a renewed nature. But these people fail to make such useful distinctions as seem to be called for. Should such read Ezek. 33:31-32, they would be apt to see that the people there described by the prophet had, or seemed to have had, more piety than these modern doubters. Oh that men would study the marks of true piety, so as to be able to apply them when necessary! It is sad when men judge of themselves by their neighbors, measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves. Such are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12).

8. Even where there is some sound knowledge of the true rules by which to judge of Christian character, they are sometimes so little applied to one's own case that a cloud of uncertainty still hangs over one's prospects. One may have a good plummet and square, but he must often apply them to the wall he is building, or they will be of no service. It would not seem surprising that one whose spiritual state was very bad should be strongly disinclined to search and try his ways. But when one has been born again, and has the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance in some good measure abounding in him, it seems strange that he does not use every proper means to make his calling and election sure. Perhaps, however, he still finds so much that is bad in his case that self-examination is painful. It discloses so much that is wrong. But if the poor polluted heart is ever to be thoroughly cleansed, we must not be driven from our heart-searchings by unpleasant sights.

9. Many are kept in comparative darkness as to their acceptance with God because they have so very imperfect views of the glorious riches of divine grace. They are like a man born and reared among high mountains, who has never seen any great body of water. Ask him if there is water enough in the world to cover the peaks of his native region, and he promptly says, No. But take him across the Atlantic; let him witness the deep soundings and the interminable waste of waters for thousands of miles around him; and then ask him about covering the heights in sight of which he was born, and he will tell you, O yes, they could very easily be buried here.

Just so, we often look at our sins. We have long seen them rising like mountains to heaven. But we have not duly considered the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that love of God which passes knowledge. God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts, is a glorious truth uttered to enlarge our conceptions of the divine mercy in the pardon of our sins. Study, oh study the fullness, the richness, the freeness, and the everlasting glories of divine grace.

10. Others live on in uncertainty about their eternal happiness, because they pursue some sinful or at least doubtful course, which takes away their comfort. To doubt of the lawfulness of a course, and yet pursue it, is to bring condemnation on our own souls (Rom. 14:23). Such, of course, burden their consciences. Much more will anyone destroy his peace who clearly condemns himself in that which he practices. It is mercy in God not to let such a one have peace like a river. Perhaps the sin that burdens the conscience is one of omission. Let everyone do his whole duty; let him meet every obligation; shun every sin and every course of doubtful propriety; and see if there is not soon a change for the better.

11. We all know what a tyrant fashion is; and religious fashions are perhaps as tyrannical as any others. Now it has become fashionable for many professors to live in confessed uncertainty about their eternal well-being. When a sinner is converted, he for a while perhaps seems lively in religion. At some unhappy hour he wounds his conscience by some unguarded step. He falls into distress. He prays. He consults some professed believer, who daubs up the wall with untempered mortar, and heals slightly the hurt. From that day perhaps religious declension begins.

The sum of the whole is that most men doubt their piety because it is doubtful, or because it is feeble, or because they have none at all.

How, then, may we attain to this happy state of full assurance of understanding, of faith, and of hope? This is a practical and most weighty inquiry.

1. One means is love sincere, ardent love—to God and His people. Paul would have the hearts of his Colossians "comforted, being knit together in love, and unto the full assurance of understanding." There is no way in which this can be done if we live in malice or bitterness, or in coldness towards spiritual things. Love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who loves not, knows not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). For this grace there is no substitute. Let us not deceive ourselves, and think that we can attain to a blessed assurance, if we do not lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, and cultivate that charity so well described in 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

2. If we would have a permanent and delightful assurance of acceptance with God, we must die unto sin; we must be crucified unto the world, and the world must be crucified unto us. Sin must die—or our souls must die. Our obedience to God's law must be prompt, hearty, universal. So says David: "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all Your commandments" (Ps. 119:6). Jesus Christ taught the same when He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Compare John 14:21; 15:14. "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (Rom. 14:22). Are you walking in any course

condemned by God's law or your own conscience? Turn from it—forsake it utterly!

3. Practice entire consecration to God's service. Keep back no part of the price. Give Him all your powers. Hear Paul: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Hear him again: "Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of grace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:22-23). Our duty, our comfort, and our usefulness all urge us to lives of holiness—scriptural holiness, not holiness falsely so called, the rules of which are invented by men.

4. In all this business we must use great diligence (Heb. 6:11; 2 Pet. 1:5-10). We have a great undertaking on our hands. Let us say so to ourselves, and act accordingly. The Christian's life is a race, and a race well run is not easy. It is a wrestling with flesh and blood; and, more than all, with spiritual wickedness in high places; and wrestling is not easy. It is a fight—a good fight to be sure, but a fight; and fighting never was easy.

The prize set before every godly man is worthy of his best efforts. It is a crown—a crown of life, a crown of righteousness, an unfading crown of glory. "For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay." (1 Peter 1:4)

QUESTION - [How can I have assurance of my salvation? Watch associated video](#)

ANSWER - We tend to seek assurance of salvation in the things God is doing in our lives, in our spiritual growth, in the good works and obedience to God's Word that is evident in our Christian walk. While these things can be [evidence of salvation](#), they are not what we should base the assurance of our salvation on. Rather, we should find the assurance of our salvation in the objective truth of God's Word. We should have confident trust that we are saved based on the promises God has declared, not because of our subjective experiences.

How can you have assurance of salvation? Consider 1 John 5:11–13: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life*" (emphasis added). Who is it that has the Son? It is those who have believed in Him (John 1:12). If you have Jesus, you have life. Not temporary life, but eternal. And, according to 1 John 5:13, you can *know* that you have this eternal life.

God wants us to have assurance of our salvation. We should not live our Christian lives wondering and worrying each day whether we are truly saved. That is why the Bible makes the plan of salvation so clear. Believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). Do you believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins and rose again from the dead (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21)? Do you trust Him alone for salvation? If your answer to these questions is "yes," you are saved! Assurance means freedom from doubt. By taking God's Word to heart, you can have no doubt about the reality of your eternal salvation.

Jesus Himself assures those who believe in Him: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28–29). Eternal life is just that—eternal. There is no one, not even yourself, who can take Christ's God-given gift of salvation away from you.

Take joy in what God's Word is saying to you: instead of doubting, we can live with confidence! We can have the assurance from Christ's own Word that our salvation will never be in question. Our assurance of salvation is based on the perfect and complete salvation God has provided for us through Jesus Christ. Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? If the answer is "yes," rest assured, you are saved. The assurance of salvation is, simply put, knowing for sure that you are saved. Many Christians throughout history have written about their struggles in being assured of their salvation. The problem is that many followers of Jesus Christ look for the assurance of salvation in the wrong places. [GotQuestions.org](#)

Related Resources:

- [Is once saved, always saved biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Can a person believe in some sense but not be saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Are Catholics saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who can be saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does it mean to be saved by grace? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [If you doubt your salvation, does that mean you are not truly saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does it mean that he who endures to the end will be saved \(Matthew 24:13\)? | GotQuestions.org](#)

- [What if I don't feel saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [If I feel no guilt for my sin, am I truly saved? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Questions about Salvation \(All\) | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What can I do when I don't feel any love for God? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Doubt & Assurance

Editor is R C Sproul but see the list of contributors below - [Read some reviews on this book.](#)

NOTE - This book can be read online at no charge. The resource is made freely available by archive.org but they have several caveats - (1) they do not allow copy and paste, (2) they can only be checked out for one hour (but can be checked out immediately when your hour expires giving you time to read or take notes on a lengthy section) and (3) they require creating an account which allows you to check out the books free of charge. To set up an account click [archive.org](#) and then click the picture of the person in right upper corner and enter email and a password. That's all you have to do. Then you can read [Doubt & Assurance](#) and other more modern resources free of charge! I have read or used many of these resources but not all of them so ultimately you will need to be a Berean (Acts 17:11+) as you use them.

From the Preface - R.C. Sproul

I remember our high school senior prom. The school buzzed with excitement when it was announced that live entertainment would be provided by “The Smooth-Tones.” The Smooth-Tones was a Rhythm-and-Blues singing group that made it briefly to the top of the charts with their hit record “No Doubt About It.” The song celebrated the certainty that floods the heart of a boy in love.

Love—especially puppy love—admits to no uncertainty.

Few things, however, are met with such assurance and conviction. Many things that matter most to us are shrouded in the cloud of the dubious. To be sure about urgent matters, such as our health, our job security, our performance, is often a luxury that eludes us. We hope, but we are not sure.

This book explores doubt and certainty with regard to ultimate questions concerning the existence of God and especially our relationship with him.

We usually oscillate between the two poles of doubt and certainty. There are degrees of doubtfulness. I am not equally certain about everything I believe. To some questions I respond by saying, “I’m sure.” But answers to other questions remain uncertain. The Bible itself allows for uncertainty in matters where God is silent; yet where God has spoken the matters are now certain. Nothing is more certain than that God cannot lie and cannot err. He is the ground basis for all genuine assurance. His Word may be attacked or denied, but never falsified.

I know of only two sources of absolute certainty: God and reason. The first source is denied by the atheist or agnostic. The second source is denied by irrationalists. God is the source of certainty because he is the infallible source of truth. Reason yields absolute certainty in a formal way.

Rational certainty operates through logical deduction within a framework of ideas or propositions. For example, if it is true that all men are mortal, and it is also true that Socrates is a man, then the conclusion “Socrates is mortal” is absolutely certain. This “certainty” of reason, however, rests on a formal relationship of propositions. We may question the propositions themselves but not the validity of the conclusion.

Premises are propositions that may be true or false. Arguments are not true or false; they are valid or invalid. Logic is a tool to determine the formal validity of those arguments. Through logic we can test that validity with absolute certainty. But keep in mind the limitations of this test. The concluding premise in an argument may be true while the argument is invalid. Or the conclusion may be false while the argument is valid.

For example we might argue:

- All fat animals are rats.
- Socrates is a fat animal.
- Socrates is a rat.

Here, the argument is formally valid though the conclusion is untrue because its premises are untrue.

But why introduce questions of logic and reason into a discussion about doubt and certainty? If God says it, doesn't that alone remove all doubt? Certainly there is no doubt about the truth of what God says. He is an infallible source. But in making that judgment I already am using reason to banish doubt. Someone else might say, "Just because God says it, doesn't make it true." If, however, we mean by God a Being who is infallible then we can say, "Indeed it does, because God is infallible, and whatever infallible beings say must be true."

Reason also enters at the level of understanding what God says. If God says, "Boojiems live on Mars," I may not know what Boojiems are, but I know they are alive and that they live on Mars. Then suppose God says, "If you believe in Jesus you will be saved." My reason is involved in an attempt to understand what it means to believe, what it means to be saved, and who it is who is called "Jesus."

This is simply to say that doubt and assurance are matters of the mind. My arm doesn't doubt anything. My foot has no convictions. My thumb understands nothing. I may have feelings in my stomach or other physical symptoms related to issues of doubt or assurance, but they flow from the mind, not apart from it. Assurance floods my heart and fills my soul only when my mind has been convinced of the truth.

This is why it is urgent that we fully apply our minds to the Word of God. Faith—and assurance—come from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17). We hear sounds with our ears. But before we can distinguish meaning the sounds must be processed by the mind. An ear severed from the mind hears and understands nothing.

Not all our beliefs are self-evident truths. Indeed, we can rest assured that error invades our thinking at many points. If we knew which points we would dispense with error. Doubt can help lead us from error to truth. Doubt can be a vital tool for the achievement of assurance. To gain assurance of crucial truths often requires that we doubt premises we've accepted uncritically. Doubt forces us back to first principles.

Doubt does not, indeed cannot, exist in a vacuum. Without some knowledge I cannot doubt at all. It is in the light of truth that doubt becomes a possibility. But doubt cannot ever have the last word. Only truth can establish doubt. Truth demands that we doubt what does not conform to truth.

When we build our house on truths that are sure, then we can dwell in the comfort of assurance. It is the foundation that is most crucial. Only with a sound foundation can we safely and rightly say, "No doubt about it."

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How we know whether we love God?

He who loves God—desires his presence. Lovers cannot be long apart, they soon have their fainting fits, for lack of a sight of the object of their love. A soul deeply in love with God, desires the enjoyment of Him in His ordinances, in the Word, prayer, and sacraments. David was ready to faint away and die when he had not a sight of God. "My soul faints for God" (Psalm 84:2). Such as care not for ordinances, but say, "When will the Sabbath be over?" plainly reveal their lack of love to God.

He who loves God—does not love sin. "You who love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10). The love of God, and the love of sin, can no more mix together than iron and clay. Every sin loved, strikes at the being of God. He who loves God, has a hatred of sin. He who would part two lovers is a hateful person. God and the believing soul are two lovers; sin parts between them, therefore the soul is implacably set against it. By this try your love to God. How could Delilah say she loved Samson, when she entertained correspondence with the Philistines, who were his mortal enemy?

He who loves God—is not much in love with anything else. His love is very cool to worldly things. His love to God moves swiftly, as the sun in the skies; to the world it moves slowly, as the sun on the dial. The love of the world eats out the heart of piety; it chokes good affections, as earth puts out fire. The world was a dead thing to Paul. "I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me" (Gal. 6:14). In Paul we may see both the picture and pattern of a mortified man. He who loves God, uses the world—but chooses God. The world engages him, but God delights and satisfies him. He says as David, "God my exceeding joy!" That is, God is the gladness or cream of my joy (Psalm 43:4).

He who loves God—cannot live without him. Things we love we cannot be without. A man can do without music or flowers, but not food; so a soul deeply in love with God looks upon himself as undone without Him. "Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit" (Psalm 143:7). He says to Job, "I went mourning without the sun" (Job 30:28). That is, "I have starlight, I lack the Sun of Righteousness; I want to enjoy the sweet presence of my God." Is God our chief good, and we cannot live without Him? Alas! how do they show they have no love to God, who can do well enough without Him! Let them have food and drink, and you shall never hear them complain of the lack of God.

He who loves God—will be at any pains to get him. What pains the merchant takes, what hazards he runs, to have a rich return from the Indies! Jacob loved Rachel, and he could endure the heat by day, and the frost by night, that he might enjoy her. A soul that loves God will take any pains for the fruition of Him. "My soul follows hard after God" (Psalm 63:8). Love is the weight which keeps the clock going. It is much in prayer, weeping, fasting; it strives as in agony that he may obtain Him whom his soul loves. Plutarch reports of the Gauls, an ancient people of France, that after they had tasted the sweet wine of Italy, they never rested until they had arrived at that country. He who is in love with God, never rests until he has a part in Him. "I sought him whom my soul loves" (Song of Sol. 3:2). How can they say they love God, who are not industrious in the use of means to obtain Him? He is not in agony, but lethargy. If Christ and salvation would drop as a ripe fig into his mouth, he would be content to have them; but he is loath to put himself to too much trouble. Does he love his friend, who win not undertake a journey to see him?

He who loves God—prefers him before estate and life.

(1) Before estate--"For whom I have suffered the loss of all things" (Phil. 3:8). Who that loves a rich jewel, would not part with a flower to obtain it? Galeacius parted with a great estate to enjoy God in His pure ordinances. When a Jesuit persuaded him to return to his popish religion in Italy, promising him a large sum of money, he said: "Let their money perish with them who esteem all the gold in the world worth one day's communion with Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit."

(2) Before life--"They loved not their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11). Love to God carries the soul above the love of life, and the fear of death.

He who loves God—loves his favorites, the saints (1 John 5:1). To love a man for his grace and the more we see of God in him, the

more we love him—that is an infallible sign of love to God. The wicked pretend to love God, but hate and persecute the saints, who are his image. Does he love his prince who abuses his statue, or tears his picture? They seem indeed to show great reverence to saints departed; they have great reverence for Saint Paul, and Saint Stephen, and Saint Luke; they canonize dead saints, but persecute living saints. Do they love God? Can it be imagined that he loves God—who hates His children because they are like God? If Christ were alive again, He would not escape a second persecution.

If we love God we cannot but be fearful of dishonoring him. The more a child loves his father—the more he is afraid to displease him, and will weep and mourn when he has offended him. "Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). Peter might well think that Christ dearly loved him, when He took him up to the mount where He was transfigured, and showed him the glory of heaven in a vision. That Peter should deny Christ after he had received such signal tokens of His love—this broke his heart with grief "He wept bitterly." Are our eyes dropping tears of grief for sin against God? It is a blessed evidence of our love to God; and such shall find mercy. "He shows mercy to thousands of those who love Him."

Use. Let us be lovers of God. We love our food—but shall we not love Him who gives it? All the joy we hope for in heaven is in God; and shall not He who shall be our joy then, be our love now? It is a saying of Augustine, "Is it not punishment enough Lord, not to love you?" And again, "I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God."

Genuine Assurance

Thomas Brooks, ("The Crown and Glory of Christianity, or, HOLINESS, the Only Way to Happiness", 1662)

Genuine holiness will yield you a heaven hereafter; but genuine assurance will yield you a heaven here. He who has holiness and knows it, shall have two heavens —a heaven of joy, comfort, peace, contentment, and assurance here—and a heaven of happiness and blessedness hereafter.

Genuine assurance will be a spring of joy and comfort in you. It will make heavy afflictions light, long afflictions short, and bitter afflictions sweet. It will make you frequent, fervent, constant, and abundant in the work of the Lord. It will strengthen your faith, raise your hope, inflame your love, increase your patience, and brighten your zeal. It will make every mercy sweet, every duty sweet, every ordinance sweet, and every providence sweet. It will rid you of all your sinful fears and cares. It will give you ease under every burden, and make death more desirable than life. It will make you more strong to resist temptation, more victorious over opposition, and more silent in every difficult condition.

Genuine assurance will turn . . . every winter night into a summer's day, every cross into a crown, and every wilderness into a paradise.

Genuine assurance will be . . . a sword to defend you, a staff to support you, a cordial to strengthen you, a medicine to heal you, and a star to lead you.

Well, remember this—next to a man's being saved, it is the greatest mercy in this world—to know that he is saved.

Why Professors Have No Assurance

James Smith, 1860

How many professed Christians I meet with who have no confidence in the goodness of their state, no assurance of their acceptance with God, no certainty of being forever with the Lord. How is this? It does not appear to have been so with primitive Christians. It does not appear to be the proper state of believers in Christ. We ought to know if we are born again. We ought to know if we are in Christ. We ought to know if the Spirit of God dwells in us. Or in a word, if we are Christians, we ought to be satisfied of it, and rejoice in it.

How is it that so many are uncertain, uneasy, and almost always in doubt and fear. Perhaps they do not look simply to Jesus. Now, Jesus is presented to us to be the object of our faith. He has all that we need — or can need. He is willing to bestow all upon us — and do all for us that we require. It is for us therefore to look to him for all we need — and away from all we fear. We are to look to him at all times, and under all circumstances, remembering that he changes not. Now if I look to Jesus to be my present, perfect, and everlasting salvation — I shall have peace. If I look to him for all I need at present and in future — I shall enjoy confidence.

We must trust alone in his atoning blood. That blood cleanses from all sin. That blood justifies the sinner before God. That blood gives an unquestionable title to everlasting life. That blood is set before us in the gospel, that we may trust in it, plead it before God, and expect to be saved by it. Now, if I receive God's testimony concerning the blood of his Son, and if I place my simple and entire dependence on that blood — I shall enjoy certainty, and my soul will be at ease. But, if I am not satisfied with the blood of Christ alone — but must look into myself for something else, or to my conduct for something beside, as the ground of my confidence before God — I shall never be happy for long together.

We must rely on his word alone. The word of Jesus to the sinner is, "Come unto me." "Him that comes I will never cast out." "He who believes shall be saved." Coming to Christ is believing on him, and believing on him is coming to him. For faith is the outgoing of the heart to Christ, relying on Christ, and entrusting its eternal interests to Christ. The word of Jesus to the soul who has come to him, or believes on him, is, "He who believes on him has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." Now if I come to Jesus, I shall be received, to doubt this, is to question the truthfulness of Christ. If I believe in Christ — I have everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation; not to believe this, is to make the Son of God a liar. If therefore, I am uncertain about my salvation, or uneasy about my state, either:

I do not simply look to Jesus, or

I do not really trust in his atoning blood, or

I do not rely on his infallible word.

But why is this? Well, it may be that self-righteousness is not destroyed. If we look to self at all — we cannot look wholly to Jesus. If we depend on self at all — we cannot depend on Christ alone. We must therefore renounce all dependence on our good works, and pleasant feelings — and take Christ to be our perfect Savior. And it is as necessary to take the eye off our feelings — as our works; and to renounce all dependence on the one as on the other, if we would enjoy settled peace, and constant confidence in God.

Perhaps the world is not wholly given up. If not, there can be no positive assurance of our acceptance with God, for the friendship of the world is enmity with God; if any man therefore will be the friend of the world, he is the enemy of God. While therefore, there is a clinging to the world, its pleasures, its customs, its fashions, and its spirit — there can be no settled peace. But, if perceiving that the world is at enmity with God, and is doing all it can to dishonor God, we come out of it, and we separate from it — God will receive us, become a Father to us, and send the Spirit of adoption into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" Therefore says the Apostle John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for if any man loves the world — the love of the Father is not in him."

Or perhaps, the warrant of the gospel is not seen. The gospel warrants any sinner, and every sinner to believe in Jesus; and gives to every one who believes, the positive assurance of everlasting life. If therefore I believe in Jesus, the gospel warrants me to feel assured that eternal life is mine — that I am saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation.

If then I am in a state of uncertainty as to my state, if I am uneasy about my salvation, let me inquire, is self-righteousness destroyed in me? Is the world fully given up by me? Do I understand the warrant the gospel gives me to believe in Jesus, and then to feel assured of my salvation? If so, do I look to Jesus, trust in his atoning blood, and rely on his infallible word? If so, to doubt, fear, or feel uncertain — is unscriptural, and improper.

What is needed in many cases of uncertainty? Self-despair. Until we are brought to despair of all help and hope in ourselves, and in everything we can do or suffer — we shall never trust in Christ alone. Slight convictions of sin, or faint impressions of divine truth, do not bring us to this; and therefore it is that so many hang between works — and grace, between their own feelings — and the blood of the Lamb, between self — and Christ. We must be brought to despair, absolutely to despair of ever doing anything to recommend us to God, or of suffering anything, in whole, or in part — to satisfy the claims of his law and justice. Self-despair drives us out of self entirely — and then we build on Christ wholly and alone.

The work of the Holy Spirit is needed. It is his work to strip us of everything of our own. To empty us of self entirely. To lead us entirely away from self. To enable us to cast ourselves upon Christ. To apply the blood to our consciences. To assure our hearts, and to bear witness with our spirits — that we are the children of God. Until there is a deeper work of the Holy Spirit in many doubters — they will not have confidence, or enjoy settled peace. And yet they are not to look at the work of the Spirit, in order to have peace — but at the work of Jesus.

Our peace was made on the cross. Our peace flows from the cross. And peace flows into our souls — by our looking to the cross. Yet, realizing the fact that we need the teaching, enlightening, and enablings of the Holy Spirit — we may, and should pray for the same. But even while we do so, we should endeavor to keep the eye fixed on what Jesus has done for sinners, and look for pardon through his blood, acceptance through his righteousness, and life through his death.

To conclude, the more we look away from self — the better! The more we are taken up with the person, sacrifice and death of Christ — the better. For it is only by looking away from self, and being taken up with Jesus — that we shall enjoy peace of

conscience, confidence toward God, and certainty in the prospect of eternity.

Holy Spirit, teach us to look simply to Jesus, enable us to trust alone in his blood, and bring us to rely confidently on his word. Destroy all our self-righteousness, bring us clean out of the world, and instruct us that we may clearly and fully understand the gospel warrant. Bring us to feel self-despair, and empty us, and strip us of everything of our own — and fill us with Christ, clothe us in the garments of salvation, and cover us with the robe of his righteousness. Fill, O fill us, with all joy and peace in believing — that we may abound in hope, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and live in the joyful expectation of eternal life through his glorious work!

QUOTES ON ASSURANCE

Source - [The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians](#) (excellent resource, highly recommended)

That faith which is never assaulted with doubting is but a fancy. Assuredly that assurance which is ever secure is but a dream.
Robert Bolton

A soul under assurance is unwilling to go to heaven without company.
Thomas Brooks

A well-grounded assurance is always attended by three fair handmaids: love, humility and holy joy.
Thomas Brooks

Assurance is glory in the bud, it is the suburbs of paradise.
Thomas Brooks

Assurance is optimum maximum, the best and greatest mercy; and therefore God will only give it to his best and dearest friends.
Thomas Brooks

Assurance makes heavy afflictions light, long afflictions short, bitter afflictions sweet.
Thomas Brooks

Assurance makes most for your comfort but holiness makes most for God's honour.
Thomas Brooks

Faith cannot be lost, but assurance may; therefore assurance is not faith.
Thomas Brooks

Many a Christian has his pardon sealed in the court of heaven before it is sealed in the court of his own conscience.
Thomas Brooks

Perfect signs of grace can never spring from imperfect grace.
Thomas Brooks

Reason's arm is too short to reach the jewel of assurance.
Thomas Brooks

The more the soul is conformed to Christ, the more confident it will be of its interest in Christ.
Thomas Brooks

Though no man merits assurance by his obedience, yet God usually crowns obedience with assurance.
Thomas Brooks

Without the diligent use of means a lazy Christian has no right to expect to receive assurance.
Thomas Brooks

Let us not seek any other ground of assurance than God's own testimony.
John Calvin

The inward testimony of conscience, the sealing of the conscience, the sealing of the Spirit ... far exceeds all the evidence of the senses.

John Calvin

There is no better assurance of salvation to be found anywhere than can be gained from the decree of God.

John Calvin

Assurance is the fruit that grows out of the root of faith.

Stephen Charnock

Assurance is from God every bit as much as faith is.

J. C. P. Cockerton

Assurance does not grow like a hothouse plant, pampered in an even temperature and sheltered from every puff of wind! It is an outdoor species, meant to flourish in the ever-changing weather conditions of the world.

J. C. P. Cockerton

The gospel is the ground of the believer's assurance, while the Holy Spirit is its cause.

J. C. P. Cockerton

Assurance does not lie in what we are, be we great or small. It lies in what God has done in his plan of salvation to secure us to himself.

Sinclair Ferguson

Assurance is our reaction to the gift of salvation and our reflection on our trust in Christ.

Sinclair Ferguson

Faith alone justifies, through Christ alone. Assurance is the enjoyment of that justification.

Sinclair Ferguson

Assurance hath a narrow throat, and may be choked with a small sin.

Thomas Fuller

Fear to fall and assurance to stand are two sisters.

Thomas Fuller

Assurance is, as it were, the cream of faith.

William Gurnall

A well-grounded assurance of heaven and happiness, instead of puffing a man up with pride, will make and keep him very humble.

Matthew Henry

I think the first essential mark of the difference between true and false assurance is to be found in the fact that the true works humility.

A. A. Hodge

None have assurance at all times. As in a walk that is shaded with trees and chequered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark and others are sunshine. Such is usually the life of the most assured Christian.

Ezekiel Hopkins

Faith rests on the naked Word of God; that Word believed gives full assurance.

H. A. Ironside

Sin can never quite bereave a saint of his jewel, his grace; but it may steal away the key of the cabinet, his assurance.

William Jenkyn

The Holy Spirit is no sceptic, and the things he has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions—surer and more certain than sense or life itself.

Martin Luther

None walk so evenly with God as they who are assured of the love of God.

Thomas Manton

Our assurance must be founded, built up and established on the mercy of God alone.

Will Metzger

The doctrine of assurance, biblically understood, keeps the saint on his toes.

J. A. Motyer

Faith is our seal; assurance of faith is God's seal.

Christopher Nesse

Feelings of confidence about our salvation need to be tested before they are trusted.

J. I. Packer

The assurance that we are called of God, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, affords a safe and secure anchorage from which no tempest can ever dislodge us.

James Philip

Where the eternal interests of the soul are concerned only a fool will give himself the benefit of the doubt.

A. W Pink

Your Rock is Christ, and it is not the Rock which ebbs and flows, but your sea.

Samuel Rutherford

Assurance ... enables a child of God to feel that the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease and the great work a finished work.

J. C. Ryle

Assurance is a most delicate plant. It needs daily, hourly, watering, tending, cherishing. So watch and pray the more when you have got it.

J. C. Ryle

Assurance of hope is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, and beauty.

J. C. Ryle

No less a person than God is needed to assure us of God's love.

Richard Sibbes

Christians should never rest until the soul evidences that it is the Lord's ... While our interest in his favour is doubtful, what happiness can we enjoy?

Charles Simeon

Our assurance is only as strong as our faith.

R. C. Sproul

Assurance is a jewel for worth but not for rarity.

C. H. Spurgeon

Assurance of faith can never come by the works of the law. It is an evangelical virtue, and can only reach us in a gospel way.

C. H. Spurgeon

Faith saves us, but assurance satisfies us.

C. H. Spurgeon

Full assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to satisfaction.

C. H. Spurgeon

No believer should be content with hoping and trusting, he should ask the Lord to lead him on to full assurance, so that matters of hope may become matters of certainty.

C. H. Spurgeon

We count it no presumption to say that we are saved, for the Word of God has told us so in those places where salvation is promised to faith in Christ. The presumption would lie in doubting the Word of God.

C. H. Spurgeon

If the priesthood of all believers is the first fruit of justification, 'assurance' is the second.

John R. W. Stott

A letter may be written, when it is not sealed; so grace may be written in the heart, and the Spirit may not set the seal of assurance to it.

Thomas Watson

Faith will make us walk, but assurance will make us run.

Thomas Watson

Sanctification is the seed; assurance is the flower which grows out of it.

Thomas Watson

The jewel of assurance is best kept in the cabinet of the heart.

Thomas Watson

The inward witness, son, the inward witness; that is proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.

Samuel Wesley