

# A Lifestyle of Assurance (Part 2)

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## The Benefits of Assurance of Salvation

### I. The importance of assurance of salvation (2 Pet 1:10-11).

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

Assurance is the essence of hope. The grace (or essence) of hope is, according to Scripture, a personal, confident expectation of personal salvation (Rom 5:2, 5; Phil 1:1-20).

A well-grounded assurance is important because it is related to joy, comfort, and Christian service. And, as we will see assurance of salvation is also intensely practical for progress in personal holiness (Ernest C. Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, p. 110). (Note that the title of Thomas Brooks' excellent treatise on Christian assurance alludes to the great joy and comfort of assurance, *Heaven on Earth*, Banner of Truth.)

- 1.) Assurance of salvation is a God-given conviction of our standing in God's grace; it is 'stamped' on the mind and the heart supernaturally by God's Spirit (Reisinger, p. 113). "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Rom 8:16).
- 2.) True believers may have assurance in this life. God desires that His redeemed know that they belong to Him: "*These things I have written to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life*" (1 Jn 5:13).

#### B. There may be hypocrites and there may be 'temporary believers' who think they are Christians, but are not—there is such a thing as false assurance (Matt 7:21-23).

The Bible teaches that some unconverted men and women *presume* that they are saved but are not. They are deceived; they have placed their hope upon faulty or insufficient grounds. "*Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord*" (Heb. 12:14).

- 1.) People are easily deceived in religious matters. Because self-deception is common (Jer 17:9), there are many warnings in the Bible. "*The hope of the hypocrite shall perish*" (Job 8:13). The Pharisees of Jesus' day imagined that they possessed eternal life. Jesus warned them: "*Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one convert, and when he is won, you make him twice the son of hell as yourselves*" (Mt 23:15).
- 2.) Jesus will say to the 'religious' who were unconverted, "*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*" (Mt 7:23). Those who make confident claims of assurance of salvation are in reality deceived if they have no corresponding holiness of life. Holiness is the 'warranty' of assurance of salvation (see 2 Pet 1:5-9) (Samuel Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, p. 227).

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

God promises in His Word that true believers may have assurance in this life (Rom 8:16; 1 Jn 2:3; 3:14, 18-19, 24; 2 Pet 1:10). The genuine assurance that God gives will not deceive or fail.

Christians who possess God-given assurance are *not mistaken* regarding the confidence that they stand in God's grace. Therefore, believers who desire assurance should *not* be fearful about the possibility of deceiving themselves. God offers to true believers an assurance which will not deceive. It is assurance about which a true believer will not be mistaken (Rom. 5:1-5.)

## II. The Benefits of Assurance of Salvation

### 1.) *Confidence in the Day of Judgment is a great benefit of assurance (1 Jn 4:17).*

In the first epistle of John, the apostle seeks to instill confidence in the heart of the believer. Abiding in Christ produces confidence, boldness, and openness toward God. Believers who live in close communion with the Lord (who is our Great High Priest—Hebrews 7:25) are free from the fear of punishment.

Without this confidence, there is always a degree of misery. The person who fears is not experiencing God's love in his or her spirit. Unbelief leaves the person disturbed. Nothing is more agitating than being harassed by the disquiet of the soul. Even one unresolved sin bouncing around in the conscience can steal our joy, peace, and confidence before God. Praise God for the boundless provision of ongoing forgiveness in the new covenant (Heb 8:12; Col 2:13-14).

***Only the knowledge of God's love can bring calmness and peace to the soul.*** When God's love is known by faith, peace is given to our conscience (Rom 15:13). So how do we apprehend the kind of perfect love that dispels fear? Fear is dispelled when we learn to flee to God in Christ as a habit. We need to learn proficiency in faith. Present boldness comes from experimental knowledge of our shared relationship with God—that's a precious byproduct of abiding in Christ. "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 Jn 2:28-29).

Thus, assurance not only instills confidence in view of the coming Day of Judgment, assurance also frees us from fear.

### 2.) *Freedom from fear is a great benefit of assurance (1 Jn 4:18).*

Love and fear are incompatible. In verse 18 the Apostle highlights the excellence of assurance by describing its contrary, or opposite effect, namely fear. By nature we all have a certain dread of God; we prefer estrangement from Him. Thoughts of His judgment bring to mind the concepts of *shame, humiliation, condemnation, guilt, exposure, terror*. Because of our sin, we do not wish to draw near.

***The fear of punishment brings a certain anticipated torment.*** Conscience "holds court," and we get a little taste of just how much we fear judgment. We reason, "If my conscience does this to me now, what would God's anger do to me?"

This is why it's so important for the believer to live a life of assurance. Without assurance, we will not be prepared to greet the Lord in confidence (1 John 2:28). We won't be ready. And, without confidence, we are unable to express God's love to others now.

***By contrast, the believer who abides in Christ manifests a mature, or "perfected love" (1 Jn 4:18).*** He has made the Gospel the "food" of his meditation. Therefore he understands that Christ's death answered the claims of divine justice against him. He is free to be a channel of God's love to the brethren.

He rejoices that Christ's propitiation has removed every obstacle to a love relationship with God. For Christ's death has secured ***our not being under condemnation***. Thus, when you are

*being perfected in love (v. 18)*, you have boldness before God because you KNOW that the wages of your sin was reckoned to the Son of God. As a result, love has a free course. There is no more judicial reckoning.

***Coming to this mature conviction involves abiding as a matter of practice especially by means of Scripture meditation.*** Your conscience itself resists your consent to be loved freely by God. As John MacArthur has pointed out in his book on the conscience, your conscience is “wired” for strict justice. It only understands law and punishment. It’s not interested in mercy. No wonder we need to constantly ‘educate’ our consciences by means of the Gospel of grace.

### **3.) A growing ‘savor’ for spiritual things is a great benefit of assurance.**

250 years ago Jonathan Edwards penned his magnum opus, *The Religious Affections*. He wrote this work in order to address the problem of false conversions. His book is a masterful exposition of the marks of true salvation with particular emphasis placed upon the supreme mark of salvation known as the religious affections. Edwards argued that true salvation must have a foundation that goes deeper than self-interest. Genuine salvation is characterized by a Spirit-engendered sight and savor of God’s glory (including a reverential awe of God’s holiness).

***Hypocrites lack this mark of salvation. In his book Edwards presses his case stating that the truly converted man has seen Christ spiritually whereas the world has not seen Christ in this way*** (Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, p. 23). Edwards constantly stresses that the religious affections are the fruit of a new heart, and that these affections are what moves the Christian life like a watch spring (Ibid., pp. 28-31). The Holy Spirit takes up residence forever in the true child of God and confirms to His child that God’s glory and our happiness are bound up together (Ibid., pp. 166-167). Satan cannot counterfeit this sentiment—no natural man sees God’s glory and the creature’s happiness woven together in Christ.

We might also express it in this way: in false conversion, Christ is added to one’s life. In true conversion, Christ is one’s life (Phil 1:21; Col 3:4). The true believer daily ‘feeds’ upon Christ.

***The hypocrite, says Edwards, speculates about spiritual things whereas the soul of the truly converted feeds on spiritual truths, upon Christ’s perfect suitability to save*** (Ibid. pp. 172-173, 197-200). The true believer is always growing in his affection for divine holiness, and as a consequence his disgust for what is unholy grows (Ibid. p. 317). Strong love for Christ expresses itself in fruitfulness, self-denial, and mortification of our lusts (Ibid. pp. 352-354, 371, 374-375).

### **4.) The joy of sonship is a great benefit of assurance. God’s promise of assurance is His pledge to His redeemed children.**

*“In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us”* (Heb 6:17-18ff.).

***How we need strong encouragement from Scripture.*** “Most Christians live between fears and hopes, and hang, as it were, between heaven and hell. . .they hope that their state is good, at other times they fear that their state is bad” (Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 11).

Spirit-given assurance moves salvation from the realm of probability to that of absolute certainty. Thus the command, *make your election and calling sure* (2 Pet 1:10) involves the exercise of diligence necessary to NOT content oneself with probability of salvation; but to press

all the way to certainty of salvation.

*Assurance is attainable; it is worth the effort and diligence necessary to gain it.* God's free and gracious promises of salvation (purchased by the blood and righteousness of Christ) are the central basis for this *certain* (or infallible) assurance (Waldron, p. 228).

**5.) *The benefits of true assurance stand in stark relief to false assurance:***

- ***True assurance produces genuine humility and overflowing gratitude (Col 2:6-7).***
- *False assurance produces spiritual pride.*
- ***True assurance leads to increased diligence in pursuing holiness (Ps 51:12-19).***
- *False assurance leads to laziness, self-indulgence, and lack of caution concerning sin.*
- ***True assurance leads to transparency before God and self-examination—a desire to be searched and corrected by God (Ps 139:23-24).***
- *False assurance leads to an attitude of self-satisfaction with appearances; an avoidance of accurate self-examination by Scripture.*
- ***True assurance seeks after intimacy with God and makes it a priority to abide in Christ (Jn 15:1-10).***
- *False assurance does not seek after greater intimacy with God (A. A. Hodge, "Assurance of Salvation," in *Confession of Faith*, p. 239).*