

## *Note to the Reader*

New Testament believers enjoyed a far higher level of assurance and consequent joy than the majority of believers do today. This is not only sad: it ought not to be. And I want to do what I can about it. But realising that I might be misunderstood, I must set the record straight right from the start.

I am *not* saying that an unassured believer is not a believer. As I will explain, true believers can lose their assurance – especially when living in the ambience of poor or misguided teaching. Not only ‘can’; many do! And one of my main purposes in writing is to help these unassured believers recover (or find) the joy of their salvation.

Having said that, I have a narrow path to tread. I don’t want to give any *unbeliever* a sense of assurance. Quite the opposite. Until the sinner trusts Christ, he is under the wrath and condemnation of God, is on the high road to perdition, and, unless he comes to Christ, he will eternally perish. Consequently I hope my words will disturb, alarm and awaken all such – before it is too late!

Nor do I want to give assurance to any professing believer who pleads he is ‘a carnal Christian’, citing 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 as his excuse. Such a professor abuses the apostle’s words. Paul was rebuking the Corinthians – not congratulating them! If, reader, you are hiding behind a misuse of the apostle’s words, I want to disturb you – not lull you to sleep!

Furthermore, I am *not* saying that the believer is sinlessly perfect, or has no trials, doubts, afflictions, temptations or struggles. Nor am I saying that sanctification is of no consequence. I have just shown what I think of the ‘carnal Christian’! A believer must be sanctified. A believer will be sanctified. Sanctification is no option: ‘Without holiness no one will see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14). ‘God... has saved us and called us to a holy life’ (2 Tim. 1:8-9). A believer must keep Christ’s commands (John 14 – 16). And he will: ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!’ (2 Cor. 5:17). ‘I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received... So I tell you this, and

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insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do' (Eph. 4:1,17). And take John:

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth... 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: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did... If anyone says: 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 1:5; 2:3-6; 4:20-21).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, we, as believers, can weigh the testimony of others only by the evidence we see (or do not see) in their lives. Sanctification, I say again, is no option!

I make all this clear right at the start so as to forestall any misunderstanding in what is to follow.

I do not pretend that this small book is a learned tome on the doctrine of assurance. Not at all! It must not be bracketed with, for instance, Thomas Brooks' 320 pages, Joel R.Beeke's 412 pages, John Owen's several volumes, or Michael A.Eaton's more than 700 pages on the subject.<sup>2</sup> And the contrast lies in more than page count. I am aiming for a very different audience. Without intending any patronisation, I want to produce a little work that is accessible, simple, and therefore useful to the 'ordinary' believer, something that might serve at least as an introduction to a very important

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<sup>1</sup> See also Rom. 12 – 16; Eph. 4 – 6, for instance.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Brooks: *Heaven on Earth: A Serious Discourse, Touching a Well-Founded Assurance in The Works of Thomas Brooks*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, Vol.2 (also in paperback, 1961, 320 pages); Joel R.Beeke: *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1999. Among Owen's works, see above all his *A Practical Exposition upon Psalm 130...*, in *The Works of John Owen*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, Vol.6 pp321-648. In addition to Eaton's *Encouragement*, see his *No Condemnation: A Theology of Assurance of Salvation*, Piquant Editions, Carlisle, 2013.

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subject, one which is of vital concern to many – even, for some, a matter of anguish: How can I, as a believer, be assured that I am, indeed, a true Christian? And how is this assurance connected with my sanctification?

I hope my book proves to be a help to anxious believers, brings unbelievers to Christ, and, in and through those ends, glorifies the triune God. After all, I can only write about the doctrine of assurance because God the Father decreed the salvation of his elect, God the Son accomplished it for them, and God the Spirit applies it to them.