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When Paul declared: ‘The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20), he was speaking with resounding confidence, telling us that he had a solid assurance that he was Christ’s, and that Christ was his. The question is, of course, was he speaking as an apostle, as one specially favoured to be able to make such a declaration, or was he speaking as a typical believer? Can we, as believers, be as sure as Paul? Or was he simply telling the Galatians a wonderful fact about himself, but one which they could hardly hope to share, even after years of struggle?

Such scriptural examples and consequent questions could be multiplied. Is it only Paul, and a select few with him, who can say: ‘In [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence’ (Eph. 3:12)? Is it only the select few who can declare: ‘I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12)? Of whom, and to whom, was John speaking when he said: ‘We know and rely on the love God has for us... We will have confidence on the day of judgement... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment’ (1 John 4:15-18)? Of whom was Paul speaking when he declared: ‘God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline’ (2 Tim. 1:7)? And when he told the Romans: ‘You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship’ (Rom. 8:15), were the Romans special – or did the apostle’s words apply to all believers in his day? Indeed, do they apply to all believers today? Or do these words apply to a spiritual elite only: ‘Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come’ (2 Cor. 1:21-22)? And so on.

Can there be any doubt? These words, all of them, were applicable to all believers at the time they were written, they remained so for all believers in all succeeding generations, and they are still applicable to all believers today. Or should be.

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Reader, let me ask you another question: What is your basic overall view of Romans 7:14-25? I am not asking for detailed exposition of every word, you understand; just your overall view of the passage. Let me put it like this: Do you look upon Romans 7:14-25 as the description of the spiritual man at his most spiritual? Let me remind you of the words in question:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?... So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the flesh a slave to the law of sin (Rom. 7:14-25).<sup>1</sup>

Is the wretchedness, the defeat, the utter confusion, here spelled out by the apostle, typical of the believer? Is it representative of the Christian experience, the believer at his best?

Speaking for myself, I am not at all sure 'the man of Romans 7' exists. I am persuaded that above all the apostle is talking about the inadequacy of the law – the law's utter weakness, utter powerlessness and uselessness to save the sinner (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 2:16; 3:21; Heb. 7:19; 9:9; 10:1); that is, its total inadequacy to justify, sanctify, liberate and glorify. In particular, in Romans 7, Paul is concerned to show the absolute incapability of the law when it comes to justification and sanctification. *That* is what Paul is teaching here. Of *that* there is not the slightest doubt. The context is invincible. And by 'the context', I mean Romans

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<sup>1</sup> I have omitted: 'Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!' in order not to lose the sense of wretchedness and defeat which the apostle so clearly intends to delineate. The omitted words really belong to Romans before and after this particular section.

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5:12 – 8:39; then the whole of Romans; then the whole of the New Testament dealing with events and people after Pentecost. Quite a context! Answering my own question, therefore, I am convinced that Romans 7:14-25 does *not* represent the believer at his best.

Putting all this together, it is clear that the New Testament speaks of believers as assured, confident of their position in Christ, full of joy – even in the most dire of circumstances, suffering and persecution – and very far from being wretched, doubting and lacking assurance.

As Alan Stibbs and James Packer noted:

James Denny once observed that the touchstone of any version of Christianity is its doctrine of assurance, and he illustrated his meaning by saying that, whereas in conventional Catholicism assurance is a sin, and in conventional Protestantism it is a duty, in the New Testament assurance is simply a fact. He was right. The New Testament never discusses assurance as a topic, because lack of assurance was not in those days a problem... Throughout the New Testament it is taken for granted that Christians are joyfully certain of their standing in God's grace, their sonship in his family, and their hope of his glory – all the good things, in fact, which are spelled out in sequence as belonging to 'us' – Paul and all his Christian readers – in chapter 8 of the letter to the Romans.<sup>2</sup>

Very well. New Testament believers were assured. That, surely, is a given. And this should be the lot of all true believers today. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it:

All Christian people are meant to have assurance of salvation... God has not only provided a way whereby we can be saved,<sup>3</sup> and not only saved us, but he has let us know that he has done so. This is a glorious aspect of the Christian life. The Christian is not meant to remain in doubt and uncertainty... In addition, the Christian is meant to know peace and joy.<sup>4</sup>

But many, today, are not assured – or, at least, they are struggling with the question.<sup>5</sup> John Newton: 'What is *now* thought so

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<sup>2</sup> Stibbs and Packer p87.

<sup>3</sup> For my reservations on 'provide', see my *Particular*.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Warfare* pp221-222.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, although I have just quoted Lloyd-Jones with approval, it is ironic that he himself preached and wrote in a way that discouraged believers,

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*uncommon*, in early days was spoken of as *the common portion of Christians*.<sup>6</sup> And he was referring to assurance.

And that is what I am concerned with here. I am trying to help believers who are in trouble over their assurance. I am convinced that in this matter, a gulf exists between the experience of most believers today and that of the believers in the New Testament. And I see one over-arching reason for this: we have moved away from the new covenant, and in two respects. Hence my title: *Assurance in The New Covenant*.

First, Sandemanianism is having a debilitating – not to say, devastating – effect in the lives of many professing believers. I will say little about this here since I intend to publish on it, but Sandemanianism is one of the great curses of our day.<sup>7</sup> In essence, it is an emphasis on the mind at the expense of the heart; an emphasis on doctrine, rather than felt experience; an emphasis on word, rather than Spirit. Do not miss my use of ‘emphasis’. We must have mind and heart, doctrine and experience, word and Spirit, but where Sandemanianism gets a hold, mind, doctrine and word predominate at the expense of heart, experience and the Spirit. Today’s Sandemanianism takes one of two forms – overt and incipient.

As for overt Sandemanianism, consider this:

Saving faith... A person either believes the offer of eternal life or he doesn’t... If someone does believe the offer of eternal life – as the Bible presents this offer – he will also be sure that he has eternal life. This is what we mean when we say that assurance is of the essence of saving faith<sup>8</sup>... Let me just restate the matter in order to make it clear.

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and actually manufactured difficulties for them in this matter of assurance – as I will prove.

<sup>6</sup> Pratt p221, emphasis his.

<sup>7</sup> A Sandemanian thinks saving faith is nothing more than mental assent. If a sinner accepts the facts of the gospel, he is saved. To talk about the heart, or feelings, is to introduce works, and ruin the grace of God in salvation. Sandemanianism was developed by the Scotsmen, John Glas (1695-1773) and his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), more especially the latter. It is not a mere historical aberration. Rather, it is, forgiving the oxymoron, very much alive, and wreaking massive damage.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The essence of faith’ plays a big part in this debate. Although Hodges and Calvin are poles apart on the nature of faith, they are one in

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The nature of the gospel message is such that, when a person believes it, he necessarily has assurance of eternal salvation. No matter what else he might believe, if he is not assured, he has not believed the gospel.

And what, in this system, is saving faith? Nothing more than mental assent:

To believe in Jesus is shorthand for to believe that Jesus is the Christ... There is no difference in kind between believing that Elvis [Presley] is alive and believing that Jesus is the Christ. Both are acts of faith. Of course, the former faith is unfounded. The latter is divinely sanctioned. The former is misplaced faith. The latter is saving faith.<sup>9</sup>

Sandemanianism, pure and simple! Utterly and fatally wrong! And such teaching leads to a wrong view of salvation (and, quite possibly, even to not being saved), false assurance and carnality, a toxic combination indeed!

Just one further example. This is how N.T.Wright described conversion: ‘Understand... how to learn your lines and join in the drama’. This is a highly significant statement. ‘Conversion’, in Wright’s scheme, has been replaced by becoming ‘an actor in the play’ and ‘learning your lines’.<sup>10</sup> Coming (much) closer to home, there is a great deal of ‘coaching’ sinners into ‘faith’ these days. Those who run introductory courses (and I am thinking of other courses, far better courses, than Alpha – but not excluding it) and Bible studies for unbelievers ought, at the very least, to be aware of the exceedingly serious consequences of spoon-feeding them so that they can ‘learn their lines’, and so be counted converts. So much for overt Sandemanianism.

Incipient Sandemanianism – that is, Sandemanianism which is unrecognised, low-level, and part of ‘the hidden curriculum’<sup>11</sup> – is

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(mistakenly) believing that assurance is the essence of faith. See Appendix 1.

<sup>9</sup> Hodges. See Sawyer.

<sup>10</sup> Wright. Wright went further. Babies join in the play by being sprinkled.

<sup>11</sup> When I was a schoolmaster, I taught according to two curriculums. In the first, I taught Pythagoras’ Theorem, Quadratic Equations, Integration by Parts, and so on. ‘The hidden curriculum’ was what I taught by my attitude and actions. For instance, I might say that homework is essential –

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very common today, showing itself in a barren, ‘intellectual’, dry, detached, ‘tick the boxes’ experience – for the individual and the church. Let me be explicit. I am talking about lecturing instead of preaching, the delivering of boring addresses directed to the mind (if that!) at the expense of the heart and will, merely dealing out facts, describing the gospel, preaching sanctification by rule and recipe, and so on; this will produce incipient Sandemanians. The Bible shows us that the truth has to enter the mind, penetrate the heart, and govern the experience (Rom. 6:17; 10:8-13). The truth must warm and move. Incipient Sandemanianism fails miserably in this respect. And when this is combined, as it often is, with legal preaching instead of gospel preaching, one of the main casualties is the believer’s assurance.<sup>12</sup> That is why, I remind you, I have called my book: *Assurance in The New Covenant*.

As I say, I hope to publish on all this, our first departure from the new covenant, that which has done so much damage to the doctrine and experience of assurance. But it is the second aspect of our move away from the new covenant – legal preaching – which I have in my sights at this time.

Under this legal system, we are told that we must preach the law to sinners to prepare them for Christ, bringing them to a sufficient sense of their sin to make them fit for trusting Christ,<sup>13</sup> and, once they are converted, take them back to the law for sanctification. Believers, so we are told, are lazy asses, and must be whipped by the law, driven by the law, to sanctification.<sup>14</sup> Then, we are told, for his assurance the believer must look to his sanctification – which he gets under the law. Hence I have (as far as I know) coined the expression ‘legal assurance’.

In my preaching and my books, I have argued that legal preaching is wrong, both for the unbeliever and believer. In particular, for his sanctification and his assurance, the believer must not look to himself, must not look to his feelings, must not look to

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but if I never marked a book, my pupils would grasp ‘the hidden curriculum’: homework doesn’t matter!

<sup>12</sup> See Lloyd-Jones: *Warfare* p225.

<sup>13</sup> This is known as preparationism.

<sup>14</sup> For full documentation, see my *Christ*.

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his works, must not look to the law, but must look to Christ; he must look to Christ for all.

But how does this square with John's first letter? Didn't the apostle set out a series of tests for the believer, tests which involve the believer in self-examination, making him look at his sanctification, and all in order to gain assurance? And what about passages such as: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?' (2 Cor. 13:5)? Or: 'A man ought to examine himself' (1 Cor. 11:28)? Don't these passages tell a believer to look to himself and his works, and do so for his assurance? And what about Peter's command: 'My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure' (2 Pet. 1:10)?<sup>15</sup> How can my teaching survive when confronted by such scriptures?

I want to address this question, but not merely to justify what I have preached and written. I want to do that, of course. I *must* do that. Even so, I have bigger fish, far more important fish, to fry. Just as, when I was preaching on passages of Scripture to do with the law, the believer, sanctification and assurance, and publishing books on the same, I hoped to glorify God in the edification of his people and the conversion of sinners, so here. In particular, I am still aiming to help those many believers who are in bondage over their sanctification and assurance, in bondage because they are being reared on a diet of law (in some form or another) and fear; in bondage because they are tied to a grinding treadmill of rule and regulation and consequent introspection. As far as I can judge by the literature, a high percentage of believers must be plodding on, gritting their teeth, burdened with fears and doubts, poring over their lack of sanctification, hoping against hope that on their death-

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<sup>15</sup> And what about the warning passages (Heb. 6:4-20; 10:26 – 11:1; 12:14-29)? I take these warnings as real, and apply them to sanctification as an essential mark of conversion (Heb. 6:11-12; 10:14). Eaton thought they refer to rewards (Eaton: *Encouragement* pp214-217). 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:5 would bear this out. The writer to the Hebrews included immediate assurances for his readers concerning their salvation (Heb. 6:9; 10:39; 12:22-24,28).

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bed they might – just might – get full assurance.<sup>16</sup> According to some teachers, the height of the believer’s spirituality is to be in doubt and, consequently, to be miserable and fearful. And when such doubting saints come across someone who claims he is assured, ‘presumption!’ can often spring to the lips or into the mind.<sup>17</sup>

Well, of course, presumption is a distinct possibility, but is lack of assurance the hallmark of true spirituality? I fail to see it in the New Testament. I am most decidedly of the same opinion as Stibbs and Packer:

God, unlike many men, is utterly straightforward, and wants people to know where they stand with him. He wants unbelievers to be quite clear that without Christ they are lost, and equally he intends believers to be out of doubt that in Christ they are both saved and safe.<sup>18</sup>

A.W.Tozer got very close to what I want to say:

One distinguishing mark of those first Christians was a supernatural radiance that shined out from within them. The sun had come up in their hearts, and its warmth and light made unnecessary any secondary sources of assurance. They had the inner witness. It is obvious that the average evangelical Christian today is without this radiance. Instead of

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Full assurance’ needs care. The phrase gives the impression that some believers get *full* assurance but, perhaps, most believers have to put up with a *lesser* assurance. This is quite wrong. The ‘full assurance’ in certain versions of Col. 2:2; 4:12; Heb. 6:11; 10:22 means ‘complete, to make full, having been made full’ – yes, ‘assured’, ‘confident’, *but not in the sense we are thinking about*; namely, personal assurance of being in a state of grace. The context in each case makes this clear. Take Col. 2:2, for instance. Believers must be fully confident in their understanding and knowledge of the mystery of God; namely, Christ. Take Heb. 6:11. Believers should always be diligent to make sure they persevere, and so guarantee their entrance into all that God has prepared for his people.

<sup>17</sup> A reader told me that, when she was converted as a teenager, she wrote to her former Sunday School superintendent to let him know the good news. The gentleman replied with ‘a blistering letter’ telling her ‘she should not be concerned to know she had an interest in Christ, but whether or not he had an interest in her!’

<sup>18</sup> Stibbs and Packer p85.



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the inner witness, we now substitute logical conclusions drawn from texts.<sup>19</sup>

If Tozer had included ‘works’ along with ‘texts’, he would have made my point precisely.

One final word before we begin. When tackling this subject, we must not start with our experience and try to make Scripture fit that. Rather, we must start with Scripture, discover what that teaches, and then apply what we have learnt from God’s word to our lives. Far too many teachers – not excluding some of the greatest – wrongly take the first course. Little wonder that they get themselves, and their hearers and readers, into serious difficulties.

Now let me set about the work.

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<sup>19</sup> Tozer p18.

