

New-Covenant Assurance

This could be a very short chapter indeed. It ought to be! What does the New Testament say about assurance? Not much! Surprising as it may seem, the New Testament simply does not have a highly developed doctrine of assurance, certainly nothing to compare with what is set out in the works produced by legal teachers; apparently in those early days there was no call for such detailed instruction. This silence needs to be taken fully into account. Why does the New Testament not have anything along the lines of those books I mentioned at the beginning – books with many closely-argued pages on assurance?¹ Why, especially, is there nothing in the sacred pages that comes anywhere near Beeke’s title: *The Quest for Full Assurance*? Why does the New Testament not tell us of believers who are engaged in a ‘long and arduous search’ for assurance? Since nearly all the New Testament letters were written to combat some sort of misunderstanding or error, some malady, or bondage to some sort of false teaching, I can only deduce that the early believers would be utterly fazed if they came back and could read the literature on the life-long ‘quest’ for assurance; the problem had not figured in their experience. Let me add a little to an earlier extract from Stibbs and Packer:

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

¹ I realise the same may be said about, say, justification. But there’s a difference between the need to write a treatise on justification in order to refute false teaching on the subject, and the need for complicated explanations of what was common knowledge and experience in New Testament times. Applying to the matter in hand, to defend assurance against attack is one thing, but we are talking about *establishing* it. The apostles did the latter, and did it very briefly. So why is my chapter as long as it is? Because the New Testament doctrine of assurance has largely been forgotten, side-lined or denied, and replaced by a very different experience. Baptism is a parallel. The titles of my *Infant Baptism Tested* and *Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists* speak for themselves.

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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.²

So where has our problem come from? Where have we lost our way? Surely, we cannot allow that, while New Testament believers were assured, assurance is beyond the reach of most of us today. Of course not! The problem must be of our own making. It is! It comes largely from (overtly or incipiently) preaching law (in some form or another) instead of gospel: preaching the law to sinners to prepare them for Christ, and then, once they are converted, preaching the law to them in order to get them sanctified. This emphasis on law, this primacy of the law, has made a direct contribution to the bondage, introspection and lack of assurance of believers today. How? Legal preachers do not stop at sanctification: they compound the problem by their teaching on assurance. Hence the need for them to write their tomes on the subject, trying to deal with the grief and misery they themselves have produced. I will return to this in the following chapter. My present task is to establish the New Testament position.

Even though the New Testament does not have anything like the weighty books I mentioned, it does speak of assurance, and does so dogmatically and unequivocally. What is more, I make bold to say that it speaks simply. I say that, because 'ordinary' believers – in those early days, some of whom were slaves and probably couldn't even read – were assured! Apparently, today, we need a PhD in theology, and another in church history, plus more than a smattering of philosophy, to enable us to understand what we are talking about, and then to nerve us to set out on the gruelling and drawn-out search for the peace, hope and rest that comes from the

² Stibbs and Packer p87. As I have said, I will look at passages which seem to command believers to probe themselves as to the reality of their faith. But even if we take these at face value, the idea of a life-long, often fruitless, quest for assurance is utterly foreign to the text.

assurance that we truly are the Lord's! But we aren't discussing how many angels we can cram onto the head of a pin. Doesn't every believer want to have assurance? Isn't assurance basic to the Christian life? How can believers have 'inexpressible and glorious joy' (1 Pet. 1:8) if they don't even know that they are believers? What books on the subject of assurance did Peter's readers need or have? Indeed, as I will show, if they had possessed such volumes as law teachers produce, they would have discovered that most of them would never get the joy they were seeking – or, rather, they would learn that they were either among the elite, or else they were presumptuous. The fact is, however, Peter's readers did not even seek joy: they had it! Assurance was not a grind, a duty, a struggle; in those early days, it was a fact of spiritual life!

What is the ground of the believer's assurance in the New Testament? This is the real issue. Let us bring our experience or theological system into the picture only after we have established scriptural teaching. What is the New Testament ground of assurance? Is it sanctification? That is, is a believer to gain assurance by testing himself as to his works and sanctification? Is *this* the way of assurance? It is usually regarded as such today. But, even though the majority of believers are taught that it is so – and, by believing it, are struggling with the consequences – this is not the New Testament way. As the apostles made perfectly clear, the way to assurance is not through the believer's sanctification, but by the witness of the Spirit.

In saying this, I don't want to be misunderstood. Just as the *unbeliever*, in his conversion, believes the promise of God – the promise drawn from 'the holy Scriptures, which are able to make [him] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15) – so the *believer* bases his hope and assurance on Christ revealed and contained in that promise (John 6:35; Rom. 5:1; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:8). This ought to be taken as read! Faith comes by hearing the word of God, the word concerning Christ (Rom. 10:17), and faith involves trust of that word leading to trust in Christ. So it is with assurance. The believer trusts God's promise to him: if he believes, he will be saved (Acts 16:31). As a consequence, he trusts Christ. But just as the *unbeliever* needs the power of the Spirit to enable him to repent and believe (John 6:44; Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8-

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10), so the *believer* needs – and is given – the power and grace to believe God’s promise for assurance. God gives him the grace and power so to trust – and he does so trust the promise for assurance by the same Spirit who taught him to believe for salvation in the first place. The child of God is persuaded, not only that when he trusted Christ, God kept his word, and saved him, but that he will go on keeping his word, and will save him right to the end: ‘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). That ‘believing’ comes, under the terms of the new covenant, from the Scriptures by the Spirit’s inward instruction:

It is written in the prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God’. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me (John 6:45). I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying: ‘Know the Lord’, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest (Heb. 8:10-11; 10:16).

But this, marvellous as it is, far from exhausts the Spirit’s work in the believer in this matter of assurance. He graciously does far more than enable the believer to rely on God’s promise. At conversion, something far more wonderful occurs. Listen to Paul:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory... We... have the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9,14-17,23).

Now it is God who... 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).

God... has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 5:5).

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our [your] hearts, the Spirit who calls out: ‘Abba, Father’. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:6-7).

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You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory... Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

And then John:

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:20-27).

This is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13).

It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:6,9-11).³

This is New Testament assurance. Here we meet the three great phrases which lie at the heart of that assurance: 'the witness of the Spirit', 'the sealing of the Spirit' and 'the anointing with the Spirit'. Although there has been a debate as to whether or not these three are one and the same, I take them to be so. If they aren't, what scriptures tell us how to distinguish them, and speak of believers who have one or the other, but not all? In any case, notice how the terms are used almost interchangeably within the extracts above.

Working on the basis, then, that these different phrases speak of one and the same thing – the witness, anointing or sealing of the

³ In addition, we have the repeated experience of 'being filled with the Spirit' (Luke 1:15,41,67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 9:17; 11:24; 13:52; Eph. 5:18).

Spirit – observe how the New Testament takes it absolutely for granted – *absolutely for granted, I say* – that every believer has been anointed and sealed with the Spirit, and has the witness of the Spirit. There is not the slightest whiff of a hint of a suggestion that this experience of the Spirit is something extraordinary, reserved for just a few special believers, who, perhaps, after years of desperate struggle and earnest longing for it, come into a second, further, more glorious experience beyond conversion.

Let us remind ourselves of the obvious! Take the Ephesian extracts. Paul wrote to the *believers* at Ephesus, opening his letter thus: ‘Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 1:1); that is, he was addressing believers. Further, all these believers, as he said, ‘were included in Christ when [they] heard the word of truth, the gospel of [their] salvation’ (Eph. 1:13). They were included in Christ *as* they believed. The apostle was not writing to the elders, to the experienced and aged saints on their death-bed. No! He was writing to the *believers* at Ephesus, all the believers. Moreover there is no reason to think that these Ephesian believers were any different to us. There was nothing exceptional about them. Some, no doubt, were strong believers, some were weak; some were old believers, some were young; some had been believers a long time, some were new converts. They were men and women just like us – if we are believers. That’s the only thing we can say about them: they were all believers. No! That’s *not* the only thing we can say about them: they were all believers, they were all included in Christ, *and they were all sealed with the Spirit; all of them were.*

Take the Corinthian passages. We know that Paul wrote to the *believers* at Corinth: ‘To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours’ (1 Cor. 1:1-2). ‘To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia’ (2 Cor. 1:1). Now we know that the Corinthian believers, as a church, as a body of believers, were in a dreadful condition,⁴ spiritually speaking. And yet, even so, as believers, all of them had the seal of

⁴ Party spirit, yielding to contemporary culture, incest, indiscipline, disorder, doctrinal misunderstanding, and so on.

the Spirit, marking them out as believers, guaranteeing them their eternal glory, and witnessing to them that they were indeed the children of God: ‘Now it is God who... anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come... God... has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come’ (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5). Even though the apostle rebuked them over several issues, although they urgently needed to repent and reform themselves, nevertheless they were still believers, and as such they were all sealed with the Spirit, this being fundamental to the Christian experience.

Let me work this out by returning to Ephesians 1:13-14:

You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.

Paul is explicit. Every believer is sealed with the Spirit at the time of his conversion; as the sinner comes to Christ by faith, he is united to Christ and is given the witness of the Spirit. Before we go any further, let me quote the passage in the AV. I do so because it has been the source of a great deal of misunderstanding about this very important subject:

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

It is the second ‘after’ in the above which is the point at issue: ‘*After* that ye believed, ye were sealed’. As far as I know, the AV stands alone – if not, then almost alone – in including the ‘after’.⁵ *And it is quite wrong.* The second ‘after’ was inserted by the AV translators, who were acting as interpreters and commentators at this point, not translators. Sadly, this totally unwarranted insertion has led many (mistakenly) to think there is a gap between believing

⁵ Tyndale’s Bible translation had: ‘In whom also ye (after that ye heard the word of truth I mean the gospel of your salvation wherein ye believed) were sealed’.

and being sealed. There is no such suggestion in the Greek; none whatever. Indeed, Paul's very point is that it is as the sinner believes – when he believes, in his believing – that he is sealed by the Spirit. The hearing, the believing, the union to Christ and the sealing of the Spirit are all simultaneous. Let me give the literal rendering of the apostle's Greek:

In whom also you, having heard the word of truth, the glad tidings of your salvation – in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Spirit of promise the Holy, who is [the] earnest of our inheritance, to [the] redemption of the acquired possession, to [the] praise of his glory.

The point is, there is no thought of any time lag between believing, inclusion in Christ, and the sealing of the Spirit. Any notion of such a gap is an unwarranted intrusion into the text. As Gordon D.Fee, speaking of 'the believing' and 'the receiving of the Spirit', declared:

These are two sides of the same coin... There is simply nothing in the context, not anything in this bit of grammar, that would cause [or allow – DG] one to think that Paul intends to refer here to two distinct experiences.⁶

Herman Bavinck:

When those who are pre-ordained by God are called in time... then at that very moment they obtain faith and by that faith they receive justification and the adoption as children (Rom. 3:22,24; 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:26; 4:5; *etc.*), with the assurance of sonship by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30)... In that moment... God acquits believers in their conscience and by his Spirit bears witness with their own spirits that they are children of God and heirs of eternal life (*cf.* Rom. 8:15-17)... By that Spirit, they are continually led... assured of the love that God has for them (Rom. 5:5,8) and of their adoption (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6), and are now already the beneficiaries of peace (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7,9; 1 Thess. 5:23), joy (Rom. 14:17; 15:13; 1 Thess. 1:6), and eternal life (John 3:16)... In Christ... the law has attained its end (Rom. 10:4): believers are free from the law (Gal. 4:26 – 5:1)...⁷ and have received this spirit

⁶ Fee: *God's* p670.

⁷ Bavinck wrongly limited this to 'the curse of the law'.

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of adoption, the spirit of freedom (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 3:16-17; Gal. 5:18).⁸

According to Ephesians 1:13-14, then, every believer, coming to faith, is included in Christ when he hears the word of truth; better, *as* he hears the word of truth. At that moment – the moment he believes and is included in Christ – he is marked with a seal, sealed with the Holy Spirit.

And this can only mean assurance.

Let me reinforce the point from Romans 8:14-16. Paul declares: ‘Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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’. In this apostolic statement, there is no break anywhere, no hint of one. *We must not insert any gap or pause*. In particular, we must not insert a gap between: ‘And by him we cry: “Abba, Father”’, and: ‘The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children’. There is no break in the text, and there is no interlude in the believer’s experience. It is all one episode, one encounter with God through Christ by the Spirit. We are talking about conversion. In his conversion (which is brought about by the Spirit), the believer has his fear removed, is given a sense of sonship, is enabled to call God his Father, and is given the witness of the Spirit. Indeed, it is all one, all of a piece. There is no suggestion that the believer has his fear removed, is given the spirit of sonship and enabled to call God his Father, but is *not*, at the same time, given the witness of the Spirit – indeed, that he has to embark on what will almost certainly turn out to be a fruitless quest for it! The Spirit grants all four experiences to the believer at the point of conversion. In truth, they form one experience.⁹

Let me summarise the ground we have covered. Assurance comes by trusting God’s promise, yes, but supremely it comes by the direct witness of the Spirit to the believer’s spirit: the Spirit seals

⁸ Bavinck pp50,219,227,451.

⁹ Not only so, the experience is not only a one-off; it is continuous, as I will show.

the believer, anoints him, and bears witness to him that he is indeed a child of God, an adopted son of God.

There's a missing note. Did you spot it? Sanctification! I have been paraphrasing Scripture – nothing else – and from trust in Christ to assurance there is no mention of 'sanctification'. Now that is remarkable! Why? Because sanctification is *the* way of assurance today – or so a good many teachers tell us. According to them, it is the sovereign way. As you can see, reader, this must be wrong. Sanctification is not the main way of assurance.

Let me prove it. Since, according to the New Testament, assurance comes immediately upon conversion by the anointing of the Spirit, sanctification (which is a life-long progressive growth) cannot possibly be the fundamental ground and way of assurance. The newest convert has the Spirit,¹⁰ has the witness of the Spirit, is sealed by the Spirit, is anointed by the Spirit, is led by the Spirit, has been adopted as a son and been given the spirit of sonship, and is given the Spirit to confirm all this to his spirit, granting him the confidence, at once, to call God his Father, Abba – possibly, even Daddy (or its equivalent) – (Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:5-7; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 2:20-27; 4:13; 5:6,9-11). *But he has only just begun to live a life of sanctification. Yet that believer has the joy of assurance, must have that assurance to be able to call God his Father.* The believer's assurance, in the first instance, therefore, must arise from the witness of the Spirit, and not from his sanctification – as law teachers maintain. The witness of the Spirit must be fundamental to assurance, and assurance by the witness of the Spirit must precede any assurance by evidences of sanctification. Thus the apostle could demand of the Galatians: 'Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?... He who supplies the Spirit to you... does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:3-5, NKJV). The Galatians, having listened to law teachers, had suffered loss: 'What has happened to all your joy?' demanded the apostle (Gal. 4:15). These words, as a health warning to potential readers, need to be written large over all the tomes which

¹⁰ He couldn't be regenerate without the Spirit. And, of course, we have: 'If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ' (Rom. 8:9).

teach legal-assurance-by-sanctification. Assurance is by the witness of the Spirit, which witness starts¹¹ the moment the sinner believes.

I give two scriptural examples to support my case: the eunuch and the jailer. The eunuch was converted under Philip's teaching and was baptised by him: 'Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing' (Acts 8:38-39). The jailer, converted under the ministry of Paul and Silas, 'was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God' (Acts 16:34). I admit that Luke does not say that the eunuch and the jailer were assured, but what else can his words mean?¹² Both men had 'joy'. In the eunuch's case, Luke used a word based on *kairō*, 'to rejoice, to be glad'; in the jailer's case, *agalliaō*, 'to exult with extreme joy, to rejoice exceedingly'.¹³ I cannot see how these two men were anything but assured, yet in neither case could their assurance have come from their sanctification. Their joy preceded their sanctification which could hardly be said to have begun. Their assurance could have come only from the witness of the Spirit.

Now what is this witness of the Spirit? To whom does he witness? And to what does he witness?

In order to answer that, we need to go back to the beginning, starting with the unbeliever and the Spirit's work in conversion. No, this is not a digression!

The Spirit's work in the unbeliever leading to conversion

Conversion. What does the Bible mean by it? We must not take this for granted. Since, as I will show, poor – not to say, false – teaching can and does damage believers over this matter of assurance, we must be clear what we are talking about when we speak of conversion. The truth is, inadequate handling of the souls of men *at the point of conversion* leads to serious residual trouble for the

¹¹ I will return to this idea of 'starts'.

¹² In any case, there's no record of either man – or any other convert in those days – being told to set out on a life-long struggle for assurance, being given a detailed route-map for the journey, and yet warned that the quest will, in all probability, be fruitless.

¹³ Thayer.

believer. Going wrong here is akin to the kind of serious damage that can be caused by defective care at a natural birth.

Consider Ephesians 1:13-14 once again. What can we learn about conversion from these two verses?

You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

First of all, we have to hear the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. Let me underline this. It has to be the gospel that we hear, and we have to hear it. It must, therefore, be the *gospel* – not law – that has to be preached.¹⁴ How little gospel preaching there is today! Not only do we too often hear something other than the gospel, too often we are fed on lectures and not preaching. We have historical lectures, lectures on doctrine, lectures on theology, lectures on creeds, lectures on Confessions, lectures on personal relationships and self-fulfilment, lectures on social matters... and I don't know what else! We must follow the apostle and preach the gospel. And what is it to preach the gospel? It is to preach Christ:

I resolved to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

By setting forth the truth plainly... our gospel... the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... We... preach... Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:2-5).

This – the preaching of the gospel – is what converted sinners at Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. It wasn't preaching the law! It wasn't a talk on personal relationships, it wasn't a talk on self-fulfilment, it wasn't a historical lecture. It was the preaching of Christ to them as sinners. That was what brought them to Christ. If we do not preach

¹⁴ When I say 'preached', it could be standing in a pulpit, but it could be in a multitude of other ways: a mother talking to a child on her lap or by her knee, a father witnessing to his son, a neighbour talking to a friend, a college student talking to a fellow-student, a conversation at the bus stop, in a supermarket, and so on.

the gospel, and preach it properly, we can damage sinners as they come to faith, *and that damage can afflict them for the rest of their pilgrimage*. This fact alone is sufficient to show that we must avoid the common misconception that teaching for the saints is difficult, but preaching to sinners is a doddle. Not only do I abhor the notion that we should not preach the gospel to saints – we should always preach the gospel (Acts 20:20-21,24-27; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:1, and so on) – bringing sinners to Christ needs sensitive care. Much damage can be caused by poor handling at this most sensitive point.

Returning to Ephesians: Paul went on: ‘You heard the word of truth’. You *heard* it. What does that mean? Does it mean we have to hear with the ear? Well, that’s the first thing we have to do – we have to hear it. Yet even here we need to be clear. A man might be deaf, and yet he can still hear the gospel preached. Is that possible? Yes! He can read the text. In some way or another the word can reach him. The word must reach the sinner.

But that’s just the start. When Paul said ‘hear’, he was going much further than physical hearing. The sound must go deeper than the ear. I’m afraid that many, when they listen to preaching, hear it only physically. Their minds are miles away: they’re thinking about the golf match, the bowling tournament, their holiday, what they can have for lunch, what they’re doing tomorrow, what’s on the television, or whatever. The truth has reached the ear, and that’s all. When Paul says: ‘You heard the word of truth’, he means that it penetrated their ear and got into their mind.

Yet even this is not enough. I’m afraid that many stop there. They think that it’s enough for the truth to reach the mind, and that’s all there is to it. *But this is not saving*. A man may assent to the truth, and not be saved. The truth must reach the heart, the will, the emotions, the very centre of the man. The truth must reach the soul.

And it must be appropriated. The sinner has to believe, to trust Christ. Saving trust in Christ is essential.¹⁵ As Paul put it: ‘The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). ‘I have heard the truth’, he says. ‘I knew it was right. But, above all, I

¹⁵ More is involved: conviction, repentance and so on, but Eph. 1:13-14 concentrates on ‘faith’.

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believed, I knew, I felt, it was for me. I trusted Christ. And now I know that Christ is mine'. The sinner has to hear about Christ, and believe the gospel record, yes, but saving faith is more than 'believing the record'. The sinner has to call upon Christ, to trust Christ: 'believing', 'hearing', 'receiving', 'welcoming', 'trusting' Christ – it's all the same. And 'trust' lies at the heart of conversion.

Now, at the very moment the sinner believes, in the act of believing, something remarkable takes place: he is included in Christ (Eph. 1:13). What is this being 'in Christ', a phrase written large across the New Testament? The GNB translates the phrase excellently as 'union with Christ'. 'In Christ' is union with Christ. This is the great theme of the new covenant. Believers are in Christ, united to Christ.

What does that mean? It means that as God views his Son, so he views the believer. Just let that sink in! As God sees his Son, he sees the believer. But Christ is perfect! That's how God sees the believer! There is no condemnation to any man who is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). He has passed from death to life (1 John 3:14). He is out of Adam and in Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22,45). He has been transferred out of Satan's realm into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). As Christ is to the Father – loved, perfect, sinless – so is the believer: he is without spot or wrinkle or stain or any such thing in his sight (Eph. 5:27; Heb. 10:14). The believer is completely free of sin before God. All the sinner's sin has been laid on Christ (Isa. 53:6; Gal. 3:13), and all Christ's righteousness has been accounted to the believer (Rom. 3:22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). This is what Paul means by telling believers they are 'included in Christ'. Other passages speak of Christ being in the believer. Just so! The believer is united to Christ, one with Christ. And having begun a good work in the believer, God will go on perfecting it, even to the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). This is the gospel. And the gospel has to be taught and preached in order to bring sinners to Christ. As Paul told the Corinthians:

Christ... [sent] me... to preach the gospel... For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... God [is] pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:17-18,21).

What role does the Spirit play in all this? An absolutely vital role! Paul made this the acid test: ‘If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ’ (Rom. 8:9). He explained: ‘No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says: “Jesus be cursed”, and no one can say: “Jesus is Lord”, except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:3). The gift and work of the Spirit are essential.

But all is well: Christ promised to give his Spirit for this very work: ‘I will pour out my Spirit’, he said, Peter declaring the same on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17-18). As the apostle went on to tell his enquirers during that same discourse:

Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38-39).¹⁶

Christ’s promised Holy Spirit comes to the sinner in order to regenerate him – that’s how the sinner believes. No sinner can believe until the Spirit gives him life and the will to believe (John 6:44-45). The sinner, being dead, will never come to me, said Christ, and all men are dead in sins by nature (Eph. 2:1-3). Sinners have to be regenerated, born again before they can believe. The dead can’t believe, the deaf can’t hear, and the blind can’t see, but Christ can do the impossible! As he physically raised the dead man, made the blind man see, opened the ears of the deaf, and enabled the man to stretch out his withered arm, so spiritually: by his Spirit, Christ makes the spiritually dead live, the spiritually blind see, the spiritually deaf hear, the spiritually lame leap (Isa. 35:5-6). He regenerates them by his Spirit. As Jesus told Nicodemus:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying: ‘You must be born again’. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

As Paul reminded Titus, speaking of all believers:

¹⁶ That there is more in this promise than I speak of here, I freely admit. See my *Baptist*.

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[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour (Tit. 3:5-6).

That's just the start. In regenerating the sinner, the Spirit works yet more grace in him; he convicts him of his sin, and the glories of Christ and his work:

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:8-11).

Christ, having regenerated the sinner, and convicted him of his sin by his Spirit, gives him the grace to believe:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9).¹⁷

Thus the Spirit comes to the unregenerate sinner, regenerates, convicts him, and brings him to Christ, to trust in Christ.

This, then, is the Spirit's work in conversion. In thinking of the believer's assurance, this work of the Spirit in the unbeliever must not be skipped. No sinner can have biblical comfort and assurance until he has first been regenerated, come under conviction of sin, and been converted to Christ: conviction of sin before conversion, and conversion before comfort.

All this would seem self-evident. But today it is not! As I have shown, contemporary Sandemanians are in danger – to put it no stronger – of claiming assurance without conviction and conversion. *Mental assent to certain facts (even gospel facts) is not saving.* So I say again: conviction of sin before conversion, and conversion before comfort. I go further. The Spirit who convicts and converts the unbeliever, is the same Spirit who assures the believer: *conviction and conversion by the Spirit will lead to comfort by the Spirit.*

¹⁷ Christ gives grace to believe *and to repent* (Acts 5:31). Repentance is essential (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38).

So much for the unbeliever.

The work of the Spirit in the believer leading to assurance

The Spirit's work does not stop with regeneration, conviction, faith and conversion. As the sinner believes, something else happens to him. *And this is the material point.* As he believes, the believer is joined to Christ, included in Christ: 'You also were included in Christ... having believed' (Eph. 1:13). As I have explained, through his union with Christ, the believer stands as Christ in the sight of God. All that Christ is, all that Christ has done, all that Christ has, is made over and accounted to the believer. And this transaction, of course, is carried out by the Spirit.

But even this does not exhaust the Spirit's work in the believer at conversion. As the sinner believes, he is not only included in Christ, but he is marked in Christ, sealed in Christ, sealed with the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit, the Spirit bearing witness to him and with him that he is indeed a child of God. In fact, the Spirit himself is the seal, the guarantee, the deposit and foretaste of the eternal glory which is eternally prepared for him as a child of God. The believer, therefore, having the Spirit, must have the work of the Spirit, *including the witness of the Spirit*, within himself: if any man is not regenerate, does not trust Christ, does not have the seal, does not have the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to him (Rom. 8:9).

But, of course, the believer has it all, because he has Christ through the Spirit. Finally, all this is in Christ. In himself, the believer is a sinner, but in Christ he is perfect in the sight of God, and marked as a child of God, and has the witness of the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is indeed in Christ, a child of God. Christ has taken away his sin, and the Spirit takes away his fear: the sinner is free from sin, law, death and fear – and the Spirit tells him so.

Let me trace this out a little more fully. The question is: How does the Spirit assure the believer? Jesus told us what the Spirit would do in and to the believer. I say 'would do'; now it is 'will do', even 'does'! Every believer has the Spirit (John 7:39; 14:17; Acts 10:47; Rom. 8:9-17; 1 Cor. 2:12; 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 3:2,14; 4:4-7; 5:5,16-26; 6:8; Eph. 1:13-14,17; 2:22; 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 2:20,27; 4:13; 5:6-11), but this cannot be in

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order to regenerate him, since he is a believer already, and so must be regenerate.

So what does the Spirit do in every believer? Christ made it clear that it is the Father's will that all men (believers now – and all men in the day of judgement – Philippians 2:10-11) must glorify Christ, that they should 'honour the Son just as they honour the Father' (John 5:23). And it is precisely at this point that the Spirit works in the believer, bearing witness in and to him. Paul could say: 'The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). Where did he get such assurance? Can there be any doubt? The Spirit bore witness with his spirit, giving him his sense of sonship and adoption.

Christ promised the Spirit to every believer:

'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him'. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:38-39).

As Christ went on to say:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16-17,26).

And Christ was explicit as to the Spirit's mission with regard to the believer:

When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 15:26; 16:13-15).

And the Spirit's witness with our spirit that we are one of God's children is a vital part of this.¹⁸ Let me re-quote the relevant scriptures:

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17).

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our [your] hearts, the Spirit who calls out: 'Abba, Father'. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:6-7).

How does the Spirit do this? How does he bear witness to us? What did Paul mean when, on another issue, he said: 'My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit', 'my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit' (NASB) (Rom. 9:4)? According to Gill, Paul was saying:

Either that his conscience was influenced and directed by the Holy Ghost in what he was about to say, or [that] it bore witness in and with the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost with [it]. So that here are three witnesses called in: Christ, conscience, and the Holy Ghost. And by three such witnesses, his words must be thought to be well established.

I ask again: How does the Spirit bear witness to us and with us? The answer takes us to the very heart of the new covenant. Let me

¹⁸ Modern-day Sandemanians, taking faith as assent, argue that the Spirit does not witness *to the believer*, but joins the believer in witnessing *to God* that the believer is indeed a son of God: 'The Holy Spirit bears witness along with our human spirit that we are children of God. But to whom does he bear witness?... Our witness is to God the Father. If the Spirit is bearing witness *with* our human spirits, then he, too, must bear witness to God the Father... God the Father is the one to whom our human spirits, and the Holy Spirit, bear witness' (Wilkin, emphasis his). Why the Father 'needs' this witness, I fail to see. *The believer* needs it! Sandemanians give the impression, at least, that they are determined to avoid any suggestion of heart-feeling, warmth or delight in the believer. What an arid experience! Sadly, because of incipient Sandemanianism, too often 'arid experience' seems to be the norm! Coupled with an emphasis upon law (again, often incipient) things could hardly be worse.

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begin at the beginning – with the original, great promise of the new covenant:

All your sons will be taught by the LORD (Isa. 54:13).

‘The time is coming’, declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them’, declares the LORD... ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying: “Know the LORD”, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest’, declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’ (Jer. 31:31-34).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness (Ezek. 36:25-29; see also Ezek. 37:1-28; 39:21-29).

As Christ explained:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God’. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me (John 6:37-45).

As the writer to the Hebrews told us:

The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to [that of the priests of the old covenant] as the covenant of which he is Mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The

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time is coming', declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying: "Know the Lord", because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more'. By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear...

When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time', says the Lord. 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds'. Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more'. And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin (Heb. 8:6-13; 10:12-18).

And this work and witness of the Spirit in the believer can only lead to joy for the child of God. After all, we know that Christ had the Spirit, and joy through the Spirit. Luke recorded that 'Jesus [was] full of joy through the Holy Spirit' (Luke 10:21), that he 'rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit' (NASB). And this, surely, is the experience granted to believers: 'God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us' (Rom. 5:5). This is how 'the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13:52). Can the believer not join with Mary: 'My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour' (Luke 1:47)? Paul, reminding the Thessalonians of their conversion, could say that they had 'welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit' (1 Thess. 1:6).

And while I do not endorse everything about the way Spurgeon put it, nevertheless he made a valid point:

Brothers and sisters, let us learn our need of a personal revelation! Let us seek it if we have not yet received it! With a childlike spirit let us

seek it in Christ, for only he can reveal the Father to us! And when we have it, let it be our joy that we see him revealing it to others and let this be our prayer, that the God of Jacob would yet bring others unto Christ who shall rejoice in the light of God that has made glad our eyes! The Lord be with you. Amen.¹⁹

Naturally, this witness of the Spirit, this sealing of the Spirit, this anointing of the Spirit, must exceed our comprehension, but we are told enough for us to come to an understanding of what we are talking about. It must be so! Believers have it! So let us look into it a little more.

Let me start by making a very important point, a negative point, but one which we must keep hold of when thinking about the witness of the Spirit.

The Spirit's witness is a continual experience

As I have already noted, the witness of the Spirit is not a one-off experience, something done and dusted. Right from the moment of our conversion, the Spirit witnesses with our spirit. Not only that. The Spirit goes on maintaining this witness throughout our entire earthly pilgrimage. How do we know this? By Paul's use of verbs: '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' (Rom. 8:15-16). We *received* (aorist tense) the Spirit at conversion (Rom. 8:15); that is, we received the Spirit as a one-off experience, with abiding effect. And it is as we *cry* (present tense, we go on crying), that the Spirit *bears witness* or *testifies* (present tense, the Spirit goes on witnessing), with us. In other words, the reception of the Spirit is an initial experience with abiding results. The Spirit resides in us, constantly carrying out his ministry within us: at conversion the Spirit removes our fear, confirms us as sons, enables us to call God our Father, and witnesses to us that we are Christ's, *and he continually goes on doing the same throughout the rest of our days*. In short, we are talking about a moment-by-moment authentication to our spirits, the Spirit assuring us, leading us to God through Christ and

¹⁹ Sermon number 1571.

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confirming our standing in Christ. Likewise, the Spirit seals us and anoints us, both the seal and the anointing being permanently ours.

And it is not only a question of the apostle's use of verbs. As I have explained, there is no break anywhere in Paul's statement in Romans 8:15-16, no suggestion of one. There is no break in the text, and there is no interlude between the believer's experience of the removal of his fear, his realisation that he is free to address God as his Father, his sense of sonship, and the witness of the Spirit. It is all one instantaneous and yet continuous episode, one encounter with God through Christ by the Spirit. It starts at conversion, and it abides. The Spirit deals with us in this way at the beginning, and he never stops dealing with us in this way. It is a present, not merely historical, experience for us.

Let me illustrate. While crossing the Atlantic, John Wesley, in contrast to his own sense of fear, had been deeply challenged by the courage and confidence displayed by the Moravians in the violent storm through which they had passed. On reaching Savannah, Georgia, he opened his heart to August Spangenberg, seeking his help. The Moravian responded: 'I must first ask you one or two questions'. Spangenberg wanted to know if Wesley was truly converted: 'Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?' Wesley was stumped. 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' Spangenberg asked. Wesley replied: 'I know he is the Saviour of the world'. 'True', came the reply, 'but do you know he has saved you?' The best Wesley could say was: 'I hope he has died to save me'. Spangenberg: 'Do you know yourself?' Wesley: 'I do'. But, as Wesley later recorded in his Journal: 'I fear they were vain words'.

Spangenberg had shown Wesley that the Spirit's witness in bringing assurance was a mark of true faith. But now for the vital nuance. Pay careful attention to Spangenberg's questions (I am not playing with words): '*Have* you the witness within yourself? *Does* the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you *are* a child of God?' He did not ask: '*Did* you *have* an explosive one-off experience of the witness within yourself? *Did* the Spirit of God, in

some sort of dramatic experience, bear witness with your spirit, that you *were* a child of God?²⁰

This is of such importance, I must stress it. Some look upon assurance, the witness of the Spirit, as a striking, one-off vision, sensation, mystical experience or whatever.²¹ Lloyd-Jones, for one, certainly gave that impression, advocating the kind of experience he and various others – whom he cited, on more than once occasion and at length²² – had enjoyed. *But this is not what the apostles were speaking of.* According to Scripture, the witness of the Spirit is a continual experience, an ever-present witness with our spirits, the Spirit continually taking away our fears, continually enabling us to call God our Father.

This witness of the Spirit is not to be likened to having one's appendix removed. A better comparison is with the way our

²⁰ George Whitefield reinforced this point when, in his letter which he wrote to John Wesley after the latter had published his sermon on predestination, he stated: 'For these five or six years, I have received [not 'I *did* receive'] the witness of the Spirit [I have made it upper case – DG]. Since then, blessed be God, I have not doubted a quarter of an hour of having a saving interest in Jesus Christ. But with grief and humble shame I do acknowledge I have fallen into sin often since that' (Gillies). For more from Whitefield, see below and Appendix 2.

²¹ Gospel Standard Strict Baptists are mistakenly waiting for a manifestation of their eternal justification (actual justification in eternity past) as one of the elect, this being their 'conversion' and assurance rolled in one (see my *Eternal; No Safety*). As can be seen from the Gospel Standard Articles, the witness of the Spirit is the very acme of Christian experience: 'We believe that there are various degrees of faith, as little faith and great faith ; that when a man is quickened by the blessed Spirit, he has faith given him to know and feel that he is a sinner against God, and that without a Saviour he must sink in black despair. And we further believe that such a man will be made to cry for mercy, to mourn over and on account of his sins, and, being made to feel that he has no righteousness of his own, to hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness; being led on by the Spirit until, in the full assurance of faith, he has the Spirit's witness in his heart that his sins are for ever put away'. Unfortunately, J.H.Gosden in his definitive commentary on the articles, when commenting on the article in question (number 35), said nothing about the witness of the Spirit.

²² See, for instance, Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching* pp315-324; *Joy* pp105-107,112-113,125; *Sons* pp315-360.

ductless glands work, with the way we breathe, or with the beating of our pulse, something which is going on all the time, and – when all is well – free of dramatic sensation. The illustration, I confess, is poor, but we must get away from the notion of assurance as some sort of vivid one-off explosion, a crisis, or the switching on of a light, and hold to the idea of a continual basking in the enjoyment of the warming rays of the sun.

If we do look upon the witness of the Spirit as some sort of mystical occurrence or dramatic encounter, we run the risk of relying on that experience. If so, we will be placing our confidence entirely in the wrong place, and on the wrong object; namely, on experience, rather than on Christ. This is a mistake of immense proportions. The Spirit bears witness to Christ – to Christ – not to himself, not to his gifts, nor to some phenomenon or incident which we look back on.

The same may be said of conversion. We must not draw our assurance from the circumstances of our conversion. As I said, assurance does not arise from the historical; it arises in the ‘today’, the present, the here and now. It’s not what happened to me on a certain date (which I may know – or think I know!). What really matters is the preciousness of Christ to me at this very moment, and the reality of my walk with him today. Peter tells us: ‘To you who believe, [the Lord Jesus Christ] is precious’ (1 Pet. 2:7). He does not say that Christ *was* precious to you on a certain date – maybe long in the past – as an experience you look back upon with fond and somewhat faded memory, *and that is all*. Christ became precious to you then, yes, but he *is* precious to you *now*. This is assurance.

There is a parallel with Christ’s ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s supper. Both are symbolic. Both speak of Christ and the believer’s relationship to him. Baptism represents and speaks of the sinner’s conversion, his union with Christ as he comes to faith.²³ And baptism is undergone once by the believer, and once only: he is dipped, immersed, as a representation and declaration of his union with Christ and of his being washed in the blood of Christ.

²³ Rom. 6:3-4 speaks of the believer’s actual union with Christ by spiritual baptism. Although Paul is not speaking about water baptism in that passage (see my *Hinge*), water baptism certainly represents it.

But the believer observes the Lord's supper repeatedly – ‘as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup’ (1 Cor. 11:26, NKJV) – and this speaks of his constant feeding upon Christ, his unending rest in Christ, his continual cleansing in the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9).²⁴ Thus the believer is saved at his conversion, and is being saved continually.²⁵ It takes the two ordinances to fully speak of this once-for-all and yet conscious moment-by-moment experience of salvation in, through and by Christ. That, of course, is why Christ gave both of them to us. So it is with the witness of the Spirit. The Spirit is not only given to the sinner in his conversion, and witnesses to him at that time, but, residing with the believer throughout his pilgrimage, he is always actively bearing witness with the believer, always confirming him as a child of God.

To sum up: the believer does not rest on any event – conversion or some supposed mystical experience which he may call ‘the witness of the Spirit’. No! He rests on Christ. He rests entirely and only on Christ for his justification, he rests on Christ for his assurance, he rests on Christ for his sanctification, he rests on Christ for his liberty, he rests on Christ for his glory, he rests on Christ only and entirely for his all: ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11). ‘Christ is all’ is not a slogan. For the believer, it is a reality: ‘Christ is all’.

And this is the very area in which the Spirit works. Day by day, he takes of the things of Christ, takes of the person of Christ himself, and makes Christ, and all that belongs to Christ, to be known and felt by the believer. In this way, the Spirit unceasingly enables the child of God to sense the glory of his Redeemer (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7,13-15), and to enjoy the thought that Christ is his (John 5:11; Rom. 5:2,11; 14:17; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:6,8, for instance). This is the witness of the Spirit. And one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22).

But is there no danger in all this talk of the Spirit? As with every aspect of the new covenant, the answer must be: Yes, of course. Even so, unless we expose ourselves to this danger, to this

²⁴ This verse is written to believers, don't forget.

²⁵ He is also saved in eternity past in God's decree, and will be finally and utterly saved in eternity to come (see my *Eternal*).

accusation, we are not thinking and speaking biblically.²⁶ Some believers, however, dwelling on this danger, might raise two objections.

Two objections answered

Is there not a danger in this emphasis on the Spirit? Moreover, what will prevent a believer deluding himself that his own feelings are indeed the witness of the Spirit?

These are serious objections. In reply, we need to remember that I have drawn my doctrine that assurance comes primarily by the witness of the Spirit and not by sanctification – which, I admit will seem to be excessive and strange to many today – directly from the New Testament. I have been quoting Christ and his apostles. And the New Testament always speaks of the work of the Spirit in the highest terms, and speaks unequivocally, even to the extent that no member of the new covenant needs a human teacher. Take, for example, these statements – which are true of every believer:

No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying: ‘Know the Lord’, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest (Heb. 8:11).

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:20-21,27).

Clearly, these verses cannot possibly mean what they appear to be saying at first glance. After all, both John and the writer to the Hebrews were teaching as they were saying it; in fact, they were writing Scripture. But, even so, the promise still stands.

²⁶ Let me explain: preaching free grace always leads to accusation of antinomianism (Rom. 6:1-2). Unless men can accuse us of it, therefore, we are not preaching the gospel properly. Likewise with assurance. Unless men can accuse us of over-emphasising the Spirit, we are not preaching biblically on the matter. We must leave ourselves open to the accusation of antinomianism. See below for the 17th century New England crisis.

And herein lies the key to the answer to the question as to how we are to avoid the pitfall of relying on mere feeling. Do not miss my use of ‘mere’. Feeling is essential! There’s far too much sterility and dryness about these days! The key to all this, however, is the balance we must maintain between the Spirit and the word. It is not a question of the Spirit or the Scriptures; it is not the Spirit above the Scriptures; it is the Spirit and the Scriptures! Indeed, as we have seen repeatedly, in the new covenant God gives all his people the Spirit, he writes his law – the gospel, Christ – on their hearts, and he, at the same time, gives them the Scriptures.²⁷ The believer, therefore, is under all three: the Spirit, the law written in his heart, and the Scriptures, all three of them mutually calibrating each other, and all three stirring the believer to assurance and sanctification.

So, how do we know that believers have the witness of the Spirit? Because the Bible tells us so! How are believers able to understand, enjoy and obey the Scriptures, and, above all, find Christ in them? Because they have the gospel, Christ, written on their hearts. How do they weigh their feelings? By the law of Christ in their heart and by the written word. It is the word and the Spirit – not the Spirit above the word. But neither is it the word above the Spirit!²⁸ It is word and Spirit, the word written on the heart by the Spirit. So, while there is always a danger of coming down on one side or the other – the word or the Spirit – it has to be both.

So much for the objections.

But that digression leads me to the ultimate point. I have hinted at it in passing, but it is time for me to set it out more fully.

And what, especially, does the Spirit witness to us about?

It’s not a ‘what!’ It’s a ‘whom!’ Christ! As he himself told us, the supreme work of the Spirit is to take of the things of the Lord Jesus and make them known to believers, and so to glorify the Saviour. In other words, by making Christ known to believers, and doing so more and more, the Spirit confirms and assures them of their

²⁷ As just *one* example, link Rom. 8:1-4,9 with Gal. 6:2 and 2 Tim. 3:15-16. See my *Christ* for my argument.

²⁸ I will return to this when speaking of ‘legal assurance’.

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standing in Christ. He does this by witnessing to them about the person and the name of Christ, his love for sinners, his work for sinners, his blood shed for sinners. But not only that! It gets far more personal, praise God! The Spirit speaks to *us* about the person and the name of Christ, his love for *us*, his work for *us*, his blood shed for *us*. Above all, every believer can say the Spirit witnesses to *me*, and tells *me* of the person and the name of Christ, his love for *me*, his work for *me*, his blood shed for *me*.

By way of example, I have already quoted Galatians 2:20, in which Paul shows how he appropriated Christ by the Spirit: ‘The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). Now for some further testimonies. Consider the following scriptures:

Jesus our Lord... was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Rom. 4:24-25).

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God... And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-5,8-11).

God, who said: ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

The Spirit takes those scriptures – and all like them – and underscores the personal – to *me*:

Jesus *my* Lord... was delivered over to death for *my* sins and was raised to life for *my* justification (Rom. 4:24-25).

Therefore, since *I* have been justified through faith, *I* have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *I* have gained

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access by faith into this grace in which *I* now stand. And *I* rejoice in the hope of the glory of God... And hope does not disappoint *me*, because God has poured out his love into *my* heart by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given *me*... God demonstrates his own love for *me* in this: While *I* was still a sinner, Christ died for *me*. Since *I* have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall *I* be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when *I* was one of God's enemies, *I* was reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall *I* be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but *I* also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *I* have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-5,8-11).

God, who said: 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in *my* heart to give *me* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for *my* sake he became poor, so that *I* through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

And so on. And it is this witness of the Spirit, enabling us to speak in such personal terms, that gives us assurance.

The glory of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, the fact that Christ is all – is the constant refrain of the New Testament (John 13:31-32; 17:1-5,24; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Col. 1:27; 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:14; Heb. 13:21; 2 Pet. 3:18, and so on). Right at the start of his public ministry, as Jesus was baptised, God announced: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17). The Greeks demanded to see Jesus (John 12:21) – and the Spirit makes sure believers do see him! By the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:13-15), Peter, James and John never forgot the lesson they learned at Jesus' transfiguration. Peter might think of equating Christ with Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets), but the Father let him know how mistaken he was, and in no uncertain terms: the cloud immediately descended, blotting everything out. When they could see again, Moses and Elijah had been removed, leaving Christ to stand alone. And then God spoke: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' So: 'When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus' (Matt. 17:5-8). As I say, Peter never forgot it:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from

God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying: ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:16-19).²⁹

All this speaks volumes. The Spirit’s work is to magnify Christ; to magnify Christ, I stress. There’s no cult of the Spirit here. We are talking about ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (Rom. 8:9). There are only two places in all Scripture where the Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of Christ’: here and 1 Peter 1:11.³⁰ Is it not significant that Paul used the phrase – uniquely for him – when leading up to the witness of the Spirit to the child of God? Notice also the parallel expression in the corresponding passage in Galatians: ‘Because you are sons, God sent *the Spirit of his Son into our [your] hearts*, the Spirit who calls out: “Abba, Father”’ (Gal. 4:6). Nothing could be clearer. The Spirit of Christ bears witness to the believer, and bears witness by pointing him to Christ, and glorifying Christ to him. And this is the believer’s assurance, just as the Spirit himself is the believer’s seal (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14). ‘To [those] who believe, [the Lord Jesus Christ] is precious’ (1 Pet. 2:7).³¹

James Dunn:

²⁹ In his second letter, how many times did Peter mention the Spirit? How many times did he refer to the written word of God (not forgetting allusions)? How many times did he refer to Christ? The answer to the first is once; the second and third, I gave up counting! Notice how Peter brought his letter to a close: ‘Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also *wrote* you with the wisdom that God gave him. He *writes* the same way in all his *letters*, speaking in them of these matters. His *letters* contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other *scriptures*, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of *our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen’ (2 Pet. 3:15-18). No emphasis on the Spirit, please note.

³⁰ But see also 1 Cor. 12:3; 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19.

³¹ I will return to this scripture.

It is fundamental to this role of the Spirit as the Spirit of sonship that the Spirit is also the Spirit of the Son. Indeed, the Spirit is the Spirit of sonship precisely because [he] is the Spirit of the Son. That is to say, the Spirit for Paul links the believer directly to Jesus; the Spirit defines the person as [a] Christian precisely by establishing this link. And [he] makes this plain by reproducing the prayer relation of Jesus himself with God in believers: like Jesus, believers cry ‘Abba, Father’. and thus attest that they are children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17)... Notable is the interaction of divine Spirit and human spirit. Divine voice and human voice: the Spirit ‘by whom we cry “Abba, Father” [and thereby]³² the same Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children’ (Rom. 8:15-16); ‘having the firstfruits of the Spirit we ourselves groan within ourselves (Rom. 8:23); ‘the Spirit [himself] intercedes on our behalf with inarticulate groans, and he who searches the hearts knows that is the Spirit’s way of thinking’ (Rom. 8:26-27). In the intensity of prayer and abandonment to God in what would otherwise be total human despair, Spirit speech and heart language become as one.³³

And 1 Peter 1:10-11 has something to say in this regard:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Peter uses the phrase ‘the Spirit of Christ’ when he wants to speak of the Spirit’s work in directing the prophets to... to what? To Christ and his work of salvation. The parallel is unmistakable.

In short: Christ, not the Spirit, is the focus of attention. And this is at the heart of the new covenant. In what follows, do not miss the link between the Spirit and Christ, but, equally, do not miss where the emphasis lies; namely, Christ:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirement of

³² Brackets original.

³³ Dunn: ‘Spirit’ pp84,91.

the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what that flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the flesh but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Rom. 8:1-17).³⁴

Again, consider the exchange between Jesus and his disciples as he approached the cross. He told them: 'I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come' (John 7:33-34). As his sufferings drew ever nearer, Christ told the crowds: 'You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light' (John 12:35-36). He reminded his disciples of the sad news that he was leaving them: 'My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come' (John

³⁴ It's not just here. We see the same throughout Romans. Nothing must get in the way of Christ. Not even talk of the Spirit. See Rom. 6:1-12; 12:1 – 15:13. And it's not just Romans!

13:31). On learning of this, the disciples were afraid and sorrowful (John 14:1,27; 16:6,22). But Jesus reassured them. To their amazement (I am sure), his departure would make things even better for them: 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you' (John 13:31; 14:18). 'It is for your good [advantage, NASB] that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you' (John 16:7). And the Spirit, once he had come, would never leave them: 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth' (John 14:16-17).

There's a depth of meaning in all this. The disciples knew that Christ was the Son of God and spoke the words of eternal life, Peter's confession being poignant in the extreme: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (John 6:68-69). What would they do, how would they manage, without Jesus with them to counsel and teach them? And yet the Lord said it would be better for them after he had gone! The Spirit would come! Whatever could he mean?

Now, whatever a counsellor and companion does, he talks, doesn't he? Have you ever been in a room with somebody who will not speak? I stress the 'will not'. The gentle silence of companionship is precious; the wilful silence of barely disguised enmity or separation is grim. Such silence is not reassuring. It is oppressive, sullen, hurtful. The Spirit does not reside with his people to be silent! And he's more than *with* his people! He is *in* them! As Jesus said: 'He lives with you and will be in you' (John 14:17). And a vital part of his ministry is to bear witness to the believer, to talk to him and with him, giving him the words of eternal life. When Christ said: 'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life' (John 6:63), coupled with: 'The Spirit of truth... he will testify about me... He will guide you into all truth... He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you' (John 15:26; 16:13-14), he surely meant that the Spirit would continue Jesus' ministry within believers, even when the Lord was no longer with them in person.

When the two disciples on the Emmaus road were depressed, Jesus joined them and took away their sadness. How? By speaking

to them, speaking to them about himself, about his sufferings and his glory, and doing so out of the Scriptures (Luke 24:13-35). This is precisely the way in which the Spirit witnesses to us and with us as believers, and gives us assurance: he shows us Christ, Christ in his sufferings, and present and future glory – and the Spirit makes us know that it is all for us.

Thus the Spirit goes on assuring us, leading us to Christ. It is as we *continue* to see more of Christ, the more the Spirit *makes* us continue to feel and enjoy our interest in the Redeemer, even increasing our joy and sense of glory and enabling us to live more Christ-like in this fallen world: ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Thus we fulfil Peter’s command: ‘Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen’ (2 Pet. 3:18). This is the Spirit’s great work in the believer, day by day.

Anticipating what is to come, relying on evidences, works, sanctification for assurance is to rely on shifting sand. Christ is the believer’s assurance! ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (Heb. 13:8). ‘All may change, but Jesus never’. The Spirit bears witness to Christ, and he bears witness to us about Christ. The weight of the Spirit’s witness falls not on the gift – the Spirit – but on the giver – Christ. And herein lies the root of our assurance: Christ! He is the very substance and centre of it all. Of it all, I say.³⁵ Christ is all!³⁶

³⁵ Take sanctification. Take the last three chapters of Ephesians, and see how often the apostle links his commands for godliness to the person and work of Christ. See my series: ‘Thoughts On Ephesians’ (David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com).

³⁶ ‘Oh, that’s verging on antinomianism!’ That’s how some dismiss what I have set before you, reader: ‘Antinomianism!’ Let them! Believer, in Christ you *are* sinless in Christ – not in yourself, but in Christ. You *are* marked in Christ. It is because of Christ, and through Christ, and with Christ, that you are marked with a seal. God stamps you with his mark: ‘This is mine! This man, this woman, is mine. This believer is my son, my daughter, my child, my adopted child. He has my Son’s righteousness clothing him. I see him as righteous as Jesus. I love him immeasurably – as

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As we listen to Paul's prayers for believers, we can surely see the part played by the Spirit in his witness to the children of God:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe... I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph. 1:17-19; 3:16-21).

This is New Testament assurance.

Stibbs and Packer will bring this chapter to a close:

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. Whence came this certainty? From the ministry – that is, from the attitudes, convictions and habits which he implanted. It was the Spirit who gave those first Christians confidence and liberty, and made it their deepest instinct to call on God as 'Father'; and, writes Paul: 'When we cry: "Abba, Father"... it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom. 8:15f; see also Gal. 4:6)... Earlier in Romans he had written that the love of God, as shown forth at the cross, 'has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5)... 'By this we know that he

I love my Son. I love him without end. And this child of mine, this sealed and adopted child of mine, shall be brought to everlasting glory'. And it's the work of the Spirit to bear witness of all this to you, believer, and to confirm and assure you of all that you have in the Lord Jesus. He does this by making Jesus more and more precious to you (1 Pet. 2:7).

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abides in us, by the Spirit he gave us'... 'By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit' (1 John 3:24; 4:13)...

Moreover, the gift of the indwelling Spirit, of which Christians become aware in the manner described by discovering the change that the Spirit has wrought in them, is intended to assure Christians of their future resurrection and glory with Christ, no less than their present standing in grace through Christ... (2 Cor. 5:1-5)... (Eph. 1:13f).

Finally, a most important observation made by Stibbs and Packer, one which will take us into the next chapter:

It appears that so far from the present enjoyment of assurance indicating that one is presumptuous, conceited, and self-deceived, the non-enjoyment of it proclaims an unhealthy and sub-normal spiritual condition. It appears, too, that those who oppose the teaching and decry the experience of assurance are themselves guilty of presumption and conceit, in their audacious preference for anti-scriptural doctrine.³⁷

And that leads us to think a little more about why so many of today's believers are prone to doubt.

But just before I leave this chapter, let me return to the way I opened it, drawing attention to the simplicity and brevity of the New Testament on assurance. Since I have so clearly broken my own rubric, let me restate the apostolic teaching on this vital matter. If we want to know the way of assurance, all we have to do is read and appropriate Romans 8:9,14-17,23; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 5:5; Galatians 4:6-7; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 2:20-27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6,9-11. It's all there. And in a nutshell, at that.

³⁷ Stibbs and Packer pp87-89. For comments from other writers in support of what I have set out, see Appendix 2.

