

The Characteristics of a True Christians Pt.1

Philippians 3:1-3

3 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe.

² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Introduction:

In 1654 the Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote, "Assurance is the believer's ark where he sits, Noah-like, quiet and still in the midst of all distractions and destructions, commotions and confusions.... [However] most Christians live between fears and hopes, and hang, as it were, between heaven and hell. Sometimes they hope that their state is good, at other times they fear that their state is bad: now they hope that all is well, and that it shall go well with them for ever; [then] they fear that they shall perish by the hand of such a corruption, or by the prevalency of such or such a temptation They are like a ship in a storm, tossed here and there" (Heaven on Earth, p. 11).

All of us as Christians have times when doubt makes us question if we're saved. For some, those times are but fleeting moments; for some, they last a long time; and for others, they seem like a way of life. Before we explore the reasons so many Christians lack assurance, there are two issues we need to consider.

Undeserved Assurance

Some people have assurance who have no right to it. The old slave spiritual put it simply: "Everybody talkin' about heaven ain't going there." Some feel all is well between them and God when it isn't. They don't understand the truth about salvation and their own spiritual condition.

People often ask me why I speak so frequently about salvation and spiritual self-examination. It's because Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you'" (Matthew 7:21-23). Many people are deceived about their salvation. That's why the apostle Paul said, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

How did those people get their false assurance? By receiving false information about salvation. Much of our modern-day evangelism contributes to that through what I call "syllogistic assurance."

A syllogism has a major premise and a minor premise that lead to a conclusion. Let's consider John 1:12: "As many as received

Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

The major premise: anyone who receives Jesus becomes God's child.

The minor premise: the person you just witnessed to received Christ.

Conclusion: the person must now be a child of God.

That seems logical, but the problem is, you don't know whether the minor premise is true--whether the person truly received Christ. Beware of trying to assure people of their salvation based on an untested profession. Assurance is the reward of tested and proven faith. It is the Holy Spirit who gives it, not a human being.

With that understanding, let's get back to our basic question, Why do people lack assurance? One obvious reason is that some aren't saved, but let's go beyond that. Why do Christians lack assurance? There are eight basic reasons.

Eight Reasons for Shaken Assurance

1. Strong Preaching

Some lack assurance because of being under strong biblical preaching on God's holy standard. Such preaching forces people to see their sinfulness and acknowledge that the holiness of God calls them to a lofty standard of living. Is that bad? No, the pulpit should be the creator of anxious hearts. How else can it unsettle those who have false assurance? However, the consistent call to righteousness may unsettle some Christians, particularly those who are frequently succumbing to temptation.

But that kind of preaching is rare. Churches across our country are filled with smug people who don't feel particularly insecure because nothing in their life is ever confronted. Rather than leading their people to examine themselves and make sure their assurance is valid, many preachers feel it's their duty to make everyone feel good. However, those who preach as they should will find some in their congregation plagued with doubt. Recently I received the following letter:

Dear John, I've been attending Grace church for several years. As a result of a growing conviction in my heart, your preaching, and my seeming powerlessness against the temptations which arise in my heart and which I constantly succumb to, my growing doubts have led me to believe that I'm not saved.

How sad it is, John, for me not to be able to enter in because of the sin which clings to me and from which I long to be free. How bizarre for one who has had advanced biblical training and who teaches in Sunday School with heartfelt conviction! So many times I have determined in my heart to repent, to shake loose my desire to sin, to forsake all for Jesus only to find myself doing the sin I don't want to do and not doing the good I want to do.

After my fiancée and I broke up I memorized Ephesians as part of an all-out effort against sin, only to find myself weaker and more painfully aware of my sinfulness, more prone to sin than ever before, and grabbing cheap thrills to push back the pain of lost love. This occurs mostly in the heart, John, but that's where it counts and that's where we live. I sin because I'm a sinner. I'm like a soldier without armor running across a battlefield getting shot up by fiery darts from the enemy.

I couldn't leave the church if I wanted to. I love the people and I'm enthralled by the gospel of the beautiful Messiah. But I'm a pile of manure on the white marble floor of Christ, a mongrel dog that sneaked in the back door of the King's banquet to lick the crumbs off the floor, and, by being close to Christians who are rich in the blessings of Christ, I get some of the overflow and ask you to pray for me as you think best.

Is the author of that poignant letter a Christian? One thing that jumps out at me is his desire to do right, which sounds more like Paul in Romans 7 than an unbeliever. The pulpit is the creator of anxious hearts, but it is also to give comfort and assurance to those who love Christ.

2. Guilt

Other people lack assurance because they can't accept forgiveness. They are tyrannized by their emotions and feel they are too bad to be forgiven. There are several reasons for that. First, conscience speaks against forgiveness. The only thing your conscience knows about is guilt and conviction. It knows nothing of grace and mercy. Also, holiness and justice speak against forgiveness. They focus on sin and know nothing of excusing it.

Be warned: Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He will do all he can to obscure the love and graciousness of God. One Puritan wrote,

He that lacks assurance of God's love, converses too much with Satan.... [He says to himself:] "The devil is always following and tempting me to suspect the love of Christ, and he does it that he may attain his mind upon me. For the devil knows well enough

that the more I suspect Christ's love, the more I shall embrace Satan's love."

The truth is, beloved, this lack of assurance of God's love, or interest in Christ, is an inlet to many sins and miseries; for first a man doubts of his own salvation. Afterwards he has continued doubting, then he rises up unto a full conclusion saying, "Now know I that Christ does not love me. I did but doubt before, but now I know He does not love me." And after he has risen to this conclusion, then shortly he rises higher, and he goes further thus: "If Christ does not love me now, He will never love me; and if I have not an interest in Christ now, after all the preaching I have heard, and ordinances I have enjoyed, I shall never have it; and so the longer I live, the more I shall aggravate my condemnation." (William Bridge, *A Lifting Up for the Downcast*, pp. 129-30)

Another Puritan draws us back to Scripture, saying,

Manasseh is saved. O despairing souls, the arms of mercy are open to receive a Manasseh, a monster, a devil incarnate; he caused that gospel prophet Isaiah to be sawed in the midst with a saw.... He turned aside from the Lord to commit idolatry, and caused his sons to pass through the fire, and dealt with familiar spirits, and made the streets of Jerusalem to overflow with innocent blood.... The soul of Mary Magdalene was full of devils; and yet Christ cast them out, and made her heart his house.... Why dost thou then say there is no hope for thee, O despairing soul?

Paul was full of rage against Christ and his people, and full of blasphemy and impiety, and yet behold, Paul is a chosen vessel, Paul is caught up into the heaven, and he is filled with the gifts and graces of the Holy [Spirit] Why should thou then say there is for thee no help, O despairing soul! ... The apostle tells you of

some monstrous miscreants that were unrighteous, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners; and yet these monsters of mankind, through the infinite goodness and free grace of God, are washed from the filth and guilt of their sins, and justified by the righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and decked and adorned with the precious graces of Christ ... Why then, O despairing soul, shouldst thou fear that thy unworthiness and unfitness for mercy will so stop and turn the stream of mercy, as that thou must perish eternally for want of one drop of special grace and mercy? (Thomas Brooks, Heaven on Earth, pp. 93-94)

If you allow Satan to crush your head with the holy requirements of God stripped of the love of God, you will doubt.

3. Ignorance

Many people lack assurance because they do not understand that salvation is an utterly divine, totally sovereign operation. Assurance is built on the historical reality of what Jesus Christ accomplished. It is not a feeling without reason, and you will never have the subjective feeling of assurance until you comprehend the objective truth of the gospel.

You must realize that God knew you were a sinner, which is why He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to completely pay the price for all your sins--past, present, and future. The salvation Jesus offered was secured forever by the omnipotent power of God. It is irreversible. As Romans 11:29 says, "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

In the Old Testament, God said, "Come now, and let us reason together ... Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18). When God forgives you, it is complete. He Himself said, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25). Does that sound like good news to you? What you can't forget, God can't remember! "You may never be able to forget the years of wandering, the many sins of which you have been guilty. But that which gives peace is the knowledge that God will never recall them again. He has blotted them from the book of His remembrance, and He has done it in righteousness, for the account is completely settled. The debt is paid" (H.A. Ironside, Full Assurance, p. 23).

When Israel was preparing to leave Egypt, the last plague, the death of the firstborn, was about to fall on the land. God instructed His people to slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the front door of their houses. The angel of death passed over every blood-sprinkled house. Inside the house some might have worried about sins they had committed, but their security depended not on their frame of mind, their feelings, or the record of their past deeds, but on the blood.

So it is today. We can't see the blood shed on Calvary for our redemption, but God does. He doesn't look at the believer and say, "Hey, he cheated"--or lied, or lacked kindness, or acted like a hypocrite. Your security from divine judgment doesn't depend on living a perfect life, but on being sheltered by the blood of Christ. There's one element of gospel truth I want to mention specifically because of its major role in the issue of assurance: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It proves that the Lord's work on the cross brought about a salvation that's eternally secure. There could have been no better attestation to the truthfulness of His

claims. Jesus said He was God and rose from the dead to prove it. He said He came to accomplish the work of salvation, and God raised Him from the dead to show He was successful.

Jesus Christ bore a world of sin—all the guilt of all who would ever believe—in His body on the cross. God can gaze upon a sinner who bears much less sin than the crucified Christ and exalt that sinner to His own right hand, even as He did to His own Son (Ephesians 1:19--2:1).

A young convert once said, "If anyone is ever to be kept out of heaven for my sins, it will have to be Jesus, for He took them all upon Himself and made Himself responsible for them. But He is in heaven already, never to be turned out, so now I know that I am secure" (Ironsides, p. 75). The matter is settled for those of us who trust in Christ. God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Assurance is an inextricable part of saving faith. The apostle John said, "I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). The Christian faith is a secure faith. As one hymn triumphantly declares, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word."

4. Uncertainty

Some Christians lack assurance because they don't know the exact time of their salvation. They can't remember when they

believed. Some can't remember ever not believing. Because they can't pinpoint the exact moment, they doubt whether the moment actually occurred. But if you didn't know the date of your birth, you wouldn't wonder if you were alive. Far too much has been made of isolating the moment by some little formula, whether it be praying a prayer, signing a card, raising your hand, or walking down an aisle.

Many Christians--especially those reared in a Christian environment--can't identify the exact moment they were saved. I can't. I don't know when I passed from death to life, but I know I did. There were times as a little child when I prayed special prayers. I specifically remember praying with my father on the steps of a church in Indiana when he was holding a revival meeting. His sermon convicted me because I had done some things that week that weren't right. I remember as a fourteen-year-old going forward at camp and throwing a pine cone in the fire, teary-eyed and wanting to make my life right with God. I was in a serious auto accident when I was a freshman in college, which vividly reinforced God's claim on my life, but I can't say for sure that was the time of my salvation.

I don't look for a past event to make my salvation real to me. I look at the present pattern of my life. Some people have a false assurance because they can remember a past event, but their life doesn't follow a righteous pattern. So don't worry if you can't tie in a specific time or event with the moment of your salvation. Focus on your lifestyle instead.

5. Temptation

Another reason Christians lack assurance is they feel the pull of their unredeemed flesh and wonder if they have a new nature. As

Christians dwelling in this fallen world, we are new creations incarcerated in unredeemed flesh. In fact we "groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for ... the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23) at our Lord's return, when it "will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21).

However, until our liberation comes, we will occasionally be drawn into the Romans 7 battle between flesh and spirit, doing what we don't want to do and not doing what we want to do. If sin is overwhelming and overpowering you at any given point, you will lack assurance. You'll wonder, Did I repent enough? Am I sorry enough for my sin? Do I have enough faith?

It's easy to read Romans 7:14-25 in an imbalanced way. If you see only the parts that say, "Nothing good dwells in me" and "wretched man that I am," you'll become overly introspective. Focusing on the flesh will warp your perspective and lead you to overstate your spiritual condition. However, if you see only the parts that say, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" and "the willing [of doing good] is present in me" you'll fail to deal with the reality of the flesh.

You need to keep a balance. Here's a helpful suggestion:

Test yourself in this way. You once lived in sin and loved it. Do you now desire deliverance from it? You were once self-confident and trusting in your own fancied goodness. Do you now judge yourself as a sinner before God? You once sought to hide from God and rebelled against His authority. Do you now look up to Him, desiring to know Him, and to yield yourself to Him? If you can honestly say "Yes" to these questions, you have repented ... And remember, it is not the amount of repentance that counts: it is the

fact that you turn from self to God that puts you in the place where His grace avails through Jesus Christ.

Strictly speaking, not one of us has ever repented enough. None of us has realized the enormity of our guilt as God sees it. But when we judge ourselves and trust the Saviour whom He has provided, we are saved through His merits. As recipients of His lovingkindness, repentance will be deepened and will continue day by day, as we learn more and more of His infinite worth and our own unworthiness. (Ironsides, p. 89)

Do you see the impulses of the new nature in your life? If so, that's indicative of salvation. If God's will has become your highest joy, and submission to His lordship your greatest delight, you are indeed a child of God--no matter how strong the pull of sin.

6. Trials

Some Christians become spiritually unstable because they can't see the hand of God in all their trials. They say things like, "How could God love me and let me go through this? How could He take my husband--or wife or child? How could He not hear my prayer and deliver me? Where is God when I need Him?" People who think like that not only sentence themselves to doubt but also miss what's actually the strongest source of assurance: proven faith.

Romans 5 says, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been

poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (vv. 1-5). We're to rejoice in our trials because they produce hope and assurance.

"Consider it all joy," says James, "when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (1:2-4). Rather than causing you to doubt, the trials of life are to prove God's love and power in your behalf.

Through all you must endure in life, remember this: "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints... [therefore] show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:10-12, emphasis added). Handle your difficulties by being diligent and patient. The reward is a full assurance of hope.

Trials are the crucible in which assurance is formed. Remember Paul's great statement that nothing could separate him from the love of God? Note the context of his assurance: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered'" (Romans 8:35-36). Paul had experienced all that, yet he was certain of his relationship with God. What convinces you of your salvation? Hopefully it's the Word of God and your tested faith.

7.Fleshliness

One of the most important ways the Holy Spirit ministers to believers is by assuring them of their salvation. A believer who's not living by the Spirit's power forfeits that important ministry. Let's look again at Romans 8: "You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (v. 15). ("Abba" is the Aramaic equivalent of "Daddy.") We have been adopted into God's family and are on intimate terms with Him. How do we know that's true? Because "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (vv. 16-17).

In Rome it was very common to adopt, and each adoption had to be verified by seven witnesses. That was to ensure someone would be around to confirm the legitimate claim of the heir to his inheritance. Now if anyone questions your claim to your eternal inheritance, there is a witness who was present at the moment of your adoption: the Holy Spirit, whom Isaiah 11:2 describes as the sevenfold Spirit. He will step forward and bear witness that you are indeed an adopted child of God and have a lawful claim to an eternal inheritance.

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness that we are God's children? In a number of ways. The first is by illuminating Scripture so we can understand it. First Corinthians 2 says, "It is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.' For to us God revealed them through the Spirit" (vv. 9-10). As we study the Word of God about those promises, the Spirit makes them real to us.

The second way the Spirit bears witness is through salvation. First John 4:13-15 says, "By this we know that we abide in Him

and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." The Holy Spirit came and showed us the gospel--that Jesus is the Savior of the world and that by confessing Him as such, we come to know God.

Another way in which the Spirit bears witness is by drawing us into fellowship with God. Galatians 4 says, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (v. 6). The Spirit produces prayer, praise, and worship--a crying out to God as our Father.

Yet another way He bears witness is the fruit He produces in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The flesh certainly doesn't produce those things. It knows lust, but not true love. It knows momentary happiness, but not settled joy. It knows a moment of calm, but not a deep inner peace. The fruit of the Spirit is evidence that you belong to God. So is the outworking of His mighty power in us through evangelism and other Christian ministries (cf. Acts 1:8).

The Spirit's witness is not some little voice that says, "Yes, yes, you really are a Christian." It's so much more. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word of God for us, leads us to a greater faith and love for Christ, draws us into intimate fellowship with God through worship and prayer, produces in us the graces characteristic of a redeemed nature, and makes us effective in Christian service.

Thomas Brooks concludes the matter: "The Spirit is the great revealer of the Father's secrets, he lies in the bosom of the Father, he knows every name that is written in the book of life; he is best acquainted with the inward workings of the heart of God

towards poor sinners; he is the great comforter and the only sealer up of souls to the day of redemption. If you grieve by your willful sinning he that alone can gladden you, who then will make you glad?" (Heaven on Earth, p. 152, emphasis added). If you grieve or quench the Spirit by walking in the flesh, you short-circuit His ministries to you and will lack assurance as a result.

8. Disobedience

Perhaps the most obvious reason for lacking assurance is disobedience, because assurance is the reward for obedience. Hebrews 10:22 strongly points that out: "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." It's been well said that high degrees of assurance cannot be enjoyed by those who persist in low levels of obedience. To live in sin is to live in doubt.

Listen to the testimony of Charles Spurgeon:

Whenever I feel that I have sinned and desire to overcome that sin for the future, the devil at the same time comes to me and whispers, "How can you be a pardoned person and accepted with God while you still sin in this way?" If I listen to this I drop into despondency, and if I continued in that state I should fall into despair, and should commit sin more frequently than before; but God's grace comes in and says to my soul, "Thou hast sinned; but did not Christ come to save sinners? Thou art not saved because thou art righteous; for Christ died for the ungodly." And my faith says, "Though I have sinned, I have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and though I am guilty yet by grace I am saved and I am a child of God still." And what then? Why the tears begin to flow and I say, "How could I ever sin

against my God who has been so good to me? Now I will overcome that sin," and I get strong to fight with sin through the conviction that I am God's child.

Here's a practical way of dealing with sin: deal with a major sin in your life and the rest will follow. When the general is killed, the troops scatter. By the means of grace available to every believer, slay the sins you find most compelling and familiar--your pet sins--and the others will soon disappear. And when you fall into sin, quickly set out to conquer that sin and be aware that Satan will try to make you doubt your salvation. Fall back on the forgiving grace of God, and it will strengthen you for battle.

Conclusion

If you're lacking assurance--if you're plagued with doubts and have lost your joy, become useless in Christian service, empty in worship, cold in praise, passionless in prayer, and vulnerable to false teachers--whatever the problem, know there is a cure: obeying God's Word in the power of the Spirit.

Let's take the first step toward doing that by applying an ancient technique--a question-and-answer process known as a catechism--to help us think through what God's Word teaches about assurance. The Greek word *katacheo* means "to echo back." So echo back God's truth as you slowly and thoughtfully read the following:

Question: What is the essential duty a person has in this world? Consummating a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, which is to recognize His work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead as the satisfying atonement for sin, and to walk in accordance with that relationship.

Question: Don't all members of the church have a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? No, only those who are truly saved.

Question: How can I be certain I have that saving relationship? The Lord will have done in your soul His own sovereign will--that of calling you to Himself through a work of conviction and humiliation so you will have discovered your sin and misery, and, being so seriously agitated and threatened by it, you long for the Savior.

Question: How can I know if I've made sufficient discovery and admission of my sin? By taking salvation to your heart above any other pursuit in life. It will make Christ, your Redeemer, very precious to your soul. It will make you fear sin, repent, and seek to be saved on God's terms.

Question: What's another way of discerning a saving relationship to Christ? A strong and serious affection that reaches toward Christ as He is progressively revealed to you in the gospel. Such love is the product of saving belief.

Question: Are there other marks of a relationship with Christ? You are truly saved when you have been made a whole new person, graciously changed and renewed. That is best evidenced by a desire to shun sin and pattern your life in obedience toward God's righteous demands.

Question: What if I find sin prevailing over me? Although every sin deserves eternal vengeance, if you regularly confess your sins with unhypocritical repentance and shame before God--fleeing to Christ for forgiveness for all known and unknown iniquities--He will grant you mercy and pardon because you stand in grace, and your salvation is forever secure.

Question: What if my sins are serious and repeated? Whatever they are, Jesus Christ has paid the price for them so that if you sincerely and earnestly have turned to Him in repentant faith, you will never enter into condemnation. Moreover, His gracious

provision for those who believe includes power to overcome sin and live righteously.

Question: Is faith alone the requirement for salvation? Yes, it is the only basis upon which God offers peace and pardon to mankind. However, faith--if it is genuine--will not be alone in the soul, but will always be accompanied by true repentance and an eager desire to conform to God's will and way.

Question: How can I be sure I've settled my eternal destiny with the Lord? Express with your mouth to God what the Holy Spirit through Scripture has led you to believe in your heart.

Question: What are the results of a relationship with Christ? Union and communion with God here, and blessed fellowship and glory hereafter.

Question: How can I come to full assurance that I have such a relationship? By affirming the promises of God as revealed in Scripture by the internal witness of the Spirit, and by manifesting real and righteous fruit born out of love for the Person of Christ and the desire to bring Him honor and glory.

Don't continue to live with doubts about your eternal salvation. Rather, live with the blessed assurance God wants you to enjoy as His child.

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I. THE POSSIBILITY OF CONTAMINATION

Is it possible to understand the gospel message, have strong religious convictions, serve in a Bible-believing church, and be convinced you have a saving relationship with God, and yet still not get into heaven when you die? The Bible couldn't be any

clearer on the answer. Yes, many people will one day stand before God and be shocked as they hear Him say, "I never knew you; depart from Me."

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19 NKJV).

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble" (James 2:19).

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:21-23 (NKJV)

There are a number of things that can contribute to the contamination of assurance.

1. A DILUTED GOSPEL GALATIANS 1 this is the additions and subtractions of the gospel

2. A POLLUTED GOSPEL MATT 13 SOILS this is the pollution of the world and its desires

3. A CONCLUDED GOSPEL JOHN 6 this the arminian gospel result driven gospel

Charles Finney who literally took basic solid sound, historic, reformed theology and threw it out the window and in its place he brought manipulation and basically a personalized mystical approach to religion. It found its way into the fabric of American evangelism, no less a person who had such a great ministry is D.L. Moody, and I quote, said this, "It makes no difference how you get a man to God provided you get him there. My theology, I wasn't aware I had any." Surprised to hear that from someone like D.L. Moody, but not surprised in another sense because coming after **Finney** was this whole legacy of practical approach to evangelism without regard to theology

At the end of his life, he said, "**It seemed to have been my lot in life to have produced many temporary converts.**" That's what he said about his life, because he was into a method.

That's very dangerous today. Because, as Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium has become the message." And we are fast producing in the church the exercise of methods without content.

II. THE NECESSITY OF EXAMINATION

Undermined Assurance

Another preliminary issue you need to be aware of is that some think no one has the right to assurance--not even a true Christian. They think it's presumptuous to think you can be spiritually secure. That's the historic Arminian view. It asserts that if a person

thought he was secure forever, he would do whatever he wanted and be spiritually negligent.

That is also the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent in the mid-1500s declared it anathema to say "that a man who is born again and justified is bound [of faith] to believe that he is certainly in the number of the predestined" (can. 15 on justification). Modern Catholic teaching upholds that position.

G.C. Berkhouwer's *The Conflict with Rome* explains that Rome's denial of the assurance of salvation is consistent with its conception of the nature of salvation (pp. 118-19). Since it conceives of salvation as a joint effort by man and God, something that's maintained through the doing of good works, it concludes the believer can never be absolutely sure of his or her salvation. Why? Because if my salvation depends on God and me, I might mess up.

When you have man involved in salvation, whether through Arminian or Roman Catholic theology, there can be no security because man can default. But historic biblical theology declares that salvation is entirely the work of God, which leads to the concomitant doctrines of security and assurance.

Let us examine the first question and answer it more fully. When we affirm that a believer can indeed be sure of his justification before God we immediately part company with religions like

Roman Catholicism. The question of assurance was one of the primary points of contention between Rome and the Reformers. Rome called assurance of salvation "the Sin of Presumption." For anyone to dare believe he went straight to heaven upon dying was tantamount to an unwarranted presuming on the grace of God. It was and is literally a mortal sin.

This view teaches that no man can be sure, while he is in this life, that he is justified in God's sight. No man can be certain that all of his sins are completely forgiven and that when he dies he is sure to see the face of God in peace and acceptance. The Roman Catholic Church is the premier representative of this view. She is also the most adamant in her deliberate opposition to the Biblical doctrine of assurance. Gregory the Great, a seventh century pope, not only denied assurance was possible, he taught it was dangerous and not even desirable.

The greater our sins, the more we must do to make up for them ...whether we have done enough to atone for them we cannot know until after death ... We can never be sure of success ... assurance of salvation, and the feeling of safety engendered by it is dangerous for anybody and would not be desirable even if possible.

The Council of Trent, in answer to Luther's exposition of the Biblical truth of Justification by faith alone, went a step farther than Gregory the Great. They were not content to say that assurance was dangerous and not desirable, they declared that it was a mortal sin to claim assurance of salvation. They went still farther and, with full Papal authority and sanction, hurled anathemas and consigned to eternal damnation all who dared preach or believe such a doctrine. Let any who doubt this read the section on justification in the Decrees of the Council of Trent, and see how specifically and clearly the Jesuits spelled out how

deeply Rome hates the doctrine of Assurance. Here are the actual words used by the Council of Trent:

Whosoever shall affirm, that when the grace of Justification is received, the offence of the penitent sinner is so forgiven, and the sentence of eternal punishment reversed, that there remains no temporal punishment to be endured, before his entrance into the kingdom of Heaven, either in this world or in the future world, in purgatory, let him be accursed. Council of Trent, January 1547. The above "curse," or anathema, which means "let him go to hell" is still the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic church. Assurance of salvation is still a cardinal sin, the sin of presumption, and anyone holding that doctrine is condemned to hell. Many think Rome has changed and has become evangelical. They are being duped very badly. The Anathema of Trent still stands in force. It is still a cardinal sin for which there is no forgiveness unless it is given up before you die. In other words, a Roman Catholic who dies with assurance of salvation is sure to be doomed in hell according to the official teaching of Roman Catholicism.

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" **(2 Cor. 13:5).**

Test

dokimazo: I put to the test, prove, examine

Original Word: δοκιμάζω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: dokimazo

Phonetic Spelling: (dok-im-ad'-zo)

Short Definition: I put to the test, prove, examine

Definition: I put to the test, prove, examine; I distinguish by testing, approve after testing; I am fit.

HELPS Word-studies

Cognate: 1381 *dokimázō* (from 1384 /*dókimos*, "approved") – properly, to try (test) to *show something is acceptable* (real, approved); *put to the test* to reveal what is good (*genuine*). See 1384 (*dokimos*).

1381 /*dokimázō* ("to approve by testing") is done to *demonstrate* what is good, i.e. *passes the necessary test*. 1381 (*dokimázō*) does *not* focus on *disproving* something (i.e. to show it is *bad*).

Examine oneself Present Active IMPERATIVE

peirazó: to make proof of, to attempt, test, tempt

Original Word: ΠΕΙΡÁΖΩ

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: peirazó

Phonetic Spelling: (pi-rad'-zo)

Short Definition: I try, tempt, test

Definition: I try, tempt, test.

HELPS Word-studies

3985 *peirázō* (from 3984 /*peíra*, "test, trial") – "originally to *test*, to *try* which was its usual meaning in the ancient Greek and in the *LXX*" (*WP*, 1, 30).

"The word means *either test or tempt*" (*WP*, 1, 348). *Context alone* determines which sense is intended, or if both apply *simultaneously*.

2. to try, make trial of, test: ΤΙΥΑ, for the purpose of ascertaining his quality, or what he thinks, or how he will behave himself;

2 Peter 1:10

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,

Heb 4:1

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Heb 12:14

⁴ Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ¹⁵ looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God

III. The Priority of Observation

There are two important tests in Scripture for a person to determine whether or not he or she is a true believer.

There is first of all an objective test, which asks, "Do I believe?" Ask yourself if you affirm the Scripture's record of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that He is God manifest in the flesh? Do you believe that God saves sinners solely through the merits of Jesus Christ's obedient life and substitutionary death on the cross?

Second is the subjective or experiential test of assurance in which you ask yourself, "Is my faith real?" The apostle John's purpose in writing the epistle of 1 John was to give true believers

assurance of their salvation (1 John 5:13). In that small epistle John gives several marks to distinguish a true believer.

True believers walk in the light (1 John 1:6-7). The light here means both intellectual and moral truth. Ask, "Do I affirm the truths of Scripture, and desire to obey them?"

True believers confess their sin (1:8-2:1) Confess here doesn't mean to recite every wrong that we have ever done. Rather, it means to agree with God about our sin. That means that true believers hate their sin; they don't love it. They acknowledge they are sinful, and yet they know they are forgiven.

True believers keep His commandments (2:3-4; 5:2-3). The term here refers to a watchful, observant obedience. Here the believer desires to obey truths he deems precious. It involves a proactive approach to obedience-the Christian studies Scripture in order to understand and obey it.

True believers love the brethren (2:9-11; 3:10, 14-15; 5:2). Ask yourself the question, "Do I love God's people and desire to be around them?"

True believers affirm sound doctrine (2:20-23; 4:2,6). John here teaches that no true believer will fall into any serious, Christ-denying error or heresy.

True believers follow after holiness (2:29; 3:3-4, 6-9). These verses certainly aren't talking about sinless perfection, or even the frequency or duration of sin. The term sin in these verses describes one who lives an immoral, ungodly, unrighteous life as a matter of continual practice, and carries the attitude of hardened hate for God's righteousness.

True believers have the Holy Spirit (4:13; 5:10-11). This is an over-arching test summing up all the others. Is there evidence that the fruit of the Spirit is present in your life (Galatians 5:22-23)?

In summary, one's assurance of salvation does not need to be based on a past decision or an experience. It should rest first of all on one's faith in the objective truth of God's Word, Jesus Christ, and the gospel. Secondly, it should rest on the reality of a changed life marked by obedience, a love for Christ and His righteousness, and a hatred for sin. Take heart if these things are true in your life, and trust God to continue to work out His salvation in your life.