

## The Ground of True Assurance, the Truth of the Promises of Salvation - 2 Cor. 1:18-22

**Introduction:** Since the entrance of sin into the hearts of men, we have become inherently untrustworthy. When you go to your car, to your home, or to your bank, you find vivid physical reminders of this in the form of: *locks*. Why do we need them? Because other people *exist*. We all know, because we know the evil of our own hearts, that people are generally untrustworthy.

**Illustration:** Why do we need written contracts when it comes to big deals, like, for example, selling a house? Can't we just take each other at our word? Answer: No.

**Application:** Because of sin, human beings have to take every conceivable precaution to protect themselves from the *untrustworthiness* of others. And yet, such should not be the case among Christian people - our yes should be yes, and our no should be no? Why?

**Application 2:** Because this is the character of our God - and we are to imitate His holiness.

**Biblical illustrations - we must exercise extreme caution about obligating ourselves to anything (why? Because God will hold us to our word):**

**Proverbs 6:1-2** My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, [2] You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth.

**Proverbs 11:15** He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, But one who hates being surety is secure.

**Proverbs 17:18** A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, And becomes surety for his friend.

**Point:** We are warned again and again to be very careful regarding what we promise to do. Hear the Words of the Law of God from:

**Numbers 30:1-2** Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: [2] If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

**Scripture warns people to exercise extreme caution regarding the promises they make.** God will hold us to them - He will hold us to our word. Why are there so many warnings? Because people often make promises they cannot keep, or they make promises they do not intend to keep.

**Introduction conclusion:** Scripture teaches that our assurance of grace and salvation is first and foremost rooted in the divine truth of the promises of salvation. With men, we often get "yes and no," we often experience betrayal, forgetfulness, or outright deception. But the Word of God teaches us this about the nature of God's promise:

**Hebrews 6:13-20** For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, [14] saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." [15] And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. [16] For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. [17] **Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,** [18] that by two immutable things [i.e. **God's promise and His oath**], in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. [19] This hope **we have** as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, [20] where **the forerunner has entered for us**, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Intro to outline:** What we see in this text of Scripture is:

### 1) God is Faithful - v18

**[18] But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.**

**Point:** As was pointed out in v15-17, Paul had intended to visit the Corinthian church but was

providentially hindered. The enemies of the apostles, who, sadly seemed to be everywhere, took this as an opportunity to discredit Paul's *gospel message he had preached*. "Hey, the guy said he's coming to visit you and obviously his word means nothing. Therefore, what he preached to you about Jesus likewise means nothing.... Paul is a 'yes' and 'no' kind of guy. He talks out of both sides of his deceptive mouth.

**Point 2:** Paul is very quick to explain why he had not visited them, but then responds to any idea that this providential delay in his visit should take away from the absolute *truth* of what he had preached to them concerning Jesus Christ and the gospel.

**Point 3:** It should strike us that Paul is laboring here writing by the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit of God to assure the Corinthians that *the promises* of the gospel are absolute and certain - that in Jesus Christ, all of God's promises of saving, forgiving, and justifying sinners are "yes" and "amen."

**Application:** Isn't it amazing that an alleged failure on the part of a minister of the gospel - i.e. Paul not being able to visit Corinth - an alleged breaking of his word, a sin on his part (so-called) would be used to undermine the credibility of God's promises? Has anything changed? How many people walk away from God altogether because of the failure of a leader or preacher?

**Question:** Does the certainty of God's promises in any way depend upon the personal integrity of the preacher of those promises?

**Luther himself said:** You could have the gospel preached by an atheist or a the devil himself, as long as he gets it right, God will use it.

**Point 4:** Here in 2 Corinthians 1:18 Paul is directing all attention to the faithfulness of God Himself.

**[18] But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.**

**Consider** God's faithfulness. *This is the first and strongest ground of our assurance of grace and of salvation - in fact, our Confession describes this certainty as: "not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation..."*

**Illustration:** Just before his death, Joshua, after all the land had been partitioned out to the tribes of Israel in the book of Joshua, right at the end, he said to the people of Israel:

**Joshua 23:14** "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed."

**Application:** There is only One Being who is inherently always trustworthy - who always tells the truth - and whose promises are absolutely certain with no possibility of failure - and that is the covenant God who has revealed Himself generally in creation and providence, and *savingly* in the pages of Holy Scripture. **If we truly believe** the promises He makes to us - to save us from our sins, to make a full and complete satisfaction to His justice for them at the cross, and to pronounce us righteous by imputing the righteousness of Christ to our account *they the promise is sure*.

**Big Point:** B.B. Warfield wrote the following about what saving faith is and how faith (or belief) in Jesus saves us: "*It is never on account of its formal nature as a psychic act that faith is conceived in Scripture to be saving. It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or nature of faith, but in the object of faith.*"

**Luther on faith:** Even a weak faith embraces a strong Savior. Two men who possess 100 gold coins, one in a steel safe and the other in a wet paper sack *both still possess 100 gold coins*.

**How much faith in Jesus does it take to be justified before God?** *Any.* Remember, as Warfield said - "it is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith." In other words, faith is simply the means by which we lay hold of Christ. Faith IS receiving, resting, and relying upon Christ *alone* for our salvation.

**Romans 4:16** Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of

Abraham, who is the father of us all...

**To truly believe the gospel means you *relinquish all reliance upon yourself and anything you have done to be saved.*** To believe the gospel means that you *believe* that Jesus Christ *alone* has accomplished your salvation - and that He has done so perfectly. Recall the words of the apostle Paul:

**To believe is to be “persuaded”:**

**2 Tim. 1:12** ... I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

**Application:** When Paul says: “As God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no,” what he is saying is that the *content* of the message they preached and the promises they made - that all who repent and believe that gospel - is not fickle or changeable.

## 2) God’s Promises are all “Yes” in Jesus - v19-20

**[19] For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me, Silvanus, and Timothy--was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.**

**Point:** We very often underestimate how serious a sin it is to break promises, oaths, and our word. **Matthew 5:34-37** But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; [35] nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

**Why is this so important?** We are called upon to be holy even as God is holy and as 1 Corinthians 2:18 says, “God is faithful” - i.e. His promises are always trustworthy and are to be taken at face-value. We are to imitate His character. The promises we make, *we will be held to.* Listen to what “James the Just” said:

**James 5:12** But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

**Application:** In this particular section of James 5, he has just, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addressed and denounced greed, stealing wages, murdering the just, grumbling, etc... and then he says in James 5:12: **But above all, my brethren, DO NOT SWEAR.**

**Remember the way in which the 3rd commandment is put in the Word of God?**

**Exodus 20:7** "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

**Application:** If we take a solemn oath and make a promise invoking the name of God, it is a very serious matter. Men are fickle, good at rationalizing deception, and often downright wicked in what they say and promise. In fact, we even have to have lawyers who are experts at “contract-law.”

**Key Question of point 2:** But why do we take oaths, make promises, have sacred vows swearing by someone greater than ourselves? **Because we are “yes” and “no” creatures.** We are sinful and often untrustworthy. BUT:

**v19 - ... the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me, Silvanus, and Timothy--was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.**

**Point:** The Son of God, Jesus Christ - He was the center and substance of the message Paul had preached - this was what Paul preached to the Corinthians. In his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 2:1

**1 Cor. 2:1** And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.

**And in this message, this central message was preached: *Forgiveness of sins and a perfect righteousness imputed to us is found not by works of law, not by things we do, but by simple belief in this Son of God, Jesus Christ.***

⇒ When we remember God's dealings with Israel throughout their entire history, He always made good on all His promises. When we remember the conception of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary, *that* is God making good on His promise. In fact, when Mary sang her song after learning that she would be the one who would carry God's Promised One, the one who would "save His people from their sins," her final words in that song were:

**Luke 1:54-55** He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, [55] As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."

**Why was there a child in her womb who did not have a human father?** Because God is a "Yes, Yes" God.

⇒ When we remember Jesus *setting His face to go to Jerusalem* - Why did He do that? Why did Jesus stand silent before false accusations? Why did Jesus quietly allow Roman soldiers to scourge His body, take his garments and divide them, and then nail Him to the cross? Why did Jesus *lay down His life* on that cross so that in that climactic moment, the following was forever enscripturated into the Word of God?:

**John 19:30** So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

**The answer is in the next verse - v20:**

**[20] For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.**

**The Commentator John Gill said regarding the promises of God mentioned in this verse:**

"There are some which concern the temporal good of the saints; as that they shall not want any good thing; and though they shall be attended with afflictions, these shall work for their good, and they shall be supported under them. Others concern their spiritual good; some of which relate to God himself, that he will be their God, which includes his everlasting love, his gracious presence, and divine protection. Others relate to Christ as their surety and Saviour, by whom they are, and shall be justified and pardoned, in whom they are adopted, and by whom they shall be saved with an everlasting salvation: and others relate to the Spirit of God, as a spirit of illumination, faith, comfort, strength, and assistance, and to supplies of grace by him from Christ: and others concern everlasting life and happiness, and are all of them very ancient, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; are exceeding great and precious, suited to the various cases of God's people; are free and unconditional, immutable and irrevocable, and will all of them have their certain accomplishment."

**Do you believe those promises?** When Paul wrote these words in:

**Romans 4:6-8** just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: [7] "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; [8] Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."

⇒ Do you exclaim with Joy: "I am the blessed man of Romans 4:6-8 - Christ's righteousness is imputed to me and my sins are NOT imputed to me. I am happy, I am blessed, I have eternal life!

**2 of the stanzas of R. Kelso Carter's great hymn: *Standing on the promises:***

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I now can see  
Perfect, present cleansing in the blood for me;  
Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free,  
Standing on the promises of God.

The Scriptures gives us other ways in which we can be assured of our salvation, but the firmest ground upon which our hope of heaven must always rest are, as our Confession of faith says: “founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation...”

### 3) Established, Anointed, Sealed, Given, and Guaranteed - v21-22

**[21] Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, [22] who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**

**Point:** In this text, the term: “establishes” is a present ongoing action on God’s part - He is ever at work in us to establish us more and more upon the foundation of His promises.

**Point 2:** The rest of the verbs which describe God’s work here are simple past tense: he *has* annointed us, sealed us, and given us the Spirit - who is our guarantee.

**Illustration:** The indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God is who causes us to cry out “abba, Father” when we are burdened. The indwelling Holy Spirit is who brings about His fruits of “*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control.*”

**Application:** The indwelling Spirit is who sets the true believer apart from an unbeliever.

**Point 3:** What is communicated to us in the word “**established**” is the idea of firm security. We are now firmly planted upon the rock. We were once a ship adrift at sea, but how the biggest, strongest chain and anchor which no storm, wind or disaster could ever break or move *has been firmly attached to us.*

**Illustration:** One of those great biblical themes that illustrates so well our new position when we believe the gospel is that of adoption. There has been a definitive change in ownership of us - we were once orphans, enslaved to our sin-nature and to the will of Satan and the course of this world. But Christ has broken those chains and taken us for his own. So remarkable is this divine transaction of adoption that Scripture actually says:

**Romans 8:16-17** “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

**Application:** Truly, this is what it means to be established.

**Point 4:** When the text says we are “**anointed**” it is speaking of the Spirit of God taking up residence within us. We are anointed with the Spirit - anointed giving us the image of anointing with oil - a common way in Scripture of referring to being filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Point 5:** The Spirit of God indwelling us is the means by which we are said to be “sealed” - i.e. marked out for redemption. His indwelling presence is the *gaurantee* of our redemption and salvation.

**Ephes. 1:13-14** In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

**Final point:** The question we will take up in the next sermon is: *How can we know we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit?* What does the Westminster Confession of faith mean when it says we can have an infallible assurance of faith founded on the divine truth of the promises of salvation **and** “the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God;”

**Question:** What are these inward evidences? That will be answered in the next sermon.

**In conclusion, I’d like to read a simple promise from God - All of us must reflect on it carefully:**

**Romans 10:9-10** “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”