

Know Your Spiritual Enemy's Tactics #3

Daniel 10:13; 1 John 5:13

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The evil tactics that Satan generally uses against believers fall under these three categories: (1) temptations to sin by disobeying Christ and His Word; (2) temptations to neglect or ignore communion with Christ through His Word and prayer; and (3) temptations to doubt and question a believer's salvation. We have in previous sermons considered Satan's temptations under the first two categories. Let's look more closely at that third category of the devil's temptations that are brought against those who truly trust alone in Jesus Christ alone for their eternal salvation.

Not all believers struggle to the same degree with this temptation to doubt whether their faith is a genuine saving faith (some may never have had a struggle in this area, but many of us have so struggled at some point in our Christian life). There is perhaps not a greater tool of the enemy to discourage us and to rob us of that blessed peace, hope, and joy that have been purchased for us by the Lord Jesus than to turn us from looking to Christ and His righteousness and rather to turn us to look merely at our failures, weaknesses, and sins. That is a recipe for discouragement, hopelessness, and despair.

However, there is a confident hope in Christ that as a Christian you may have a certain assurance that you are held safely in the loving, gracious, and almighty hands of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The enemy comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy that gracious assurance, but Jesus comes to give life/assurance that through faith in Christ you are alive in Christ.

Our main points are these: (1) The Blessedness of Assurance in Christ; (2) Application. Next Lord's Day we will consider The Temptations of Satan against Assurance and Biblical Responses to These Temptations.

I. The Blessedness of Assurance in Christ.

A. What is this assurance? Let's make a distinction at this point.

1. Let's note first that there is an assurance of faith that we exercise (by God's grace) in our coming by faith alone to Jesus Christ alone as Savior and Lord. We understand that we are sinners, deserve God's condemnation, and turn from looking to ourselves or in ourselves to find merit before God, and look in faith alone to Christ alone for His righteousness, forgiveness, and eternal life. In coming to Christ, we are assured that He has promised to save us if we received Him as Savior and Lord (John 6:47; Acts 10:43; Acts 16:31). Why would we have trusted in Jesus and His promise to cleanse us and save us if we believed He was lying to us or was playing games with us or was untrustworthy of our faith in Him and His promise? That type of assurance/confidence in Christ is necessary/essential to saving faith. It is an objective assurance of faith—an assurance in an object, Christ. It's resting in who He is and in His promise. Once it is exercised in Christ that saving faith and assurance can never be lost—tested yes (like that of Peter), but never lost (1 Peter 1:5).

2. Let's note second that there is also an assurance of faith that we may sense/feel in our souls after our conversion and justification that comforts us and gives us an inward peace that Christ is ours and we are His—His life is our life—we are loved, forgiven, and are being conformed to His image. This is a blessed awareness of belonging to our God and our God belonging to us. This assurance of faith that is sensed can come and go in the life of a Christian. It's a subjective assurance—an assurance in us as the subject. It is not necessary/essential to saving faith. Some of the great heroes of the faith in Scripture struggled with this as well (Psalm 51:11-12). Listen to *Larger Catechism*, Question 81.

Question: Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved?

Answer: Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may

wait long before they obtain it; and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions; yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.

B. Several Questions about Assurance.

1. **What difference does having such an assurance of grace make in the Christian life?**

a. As already noted, this sense/feeling of assurance is not of the essence of saving faith, but it is a great comfort to our faith.

b. Here's an illustration that might help us understand the great blessing this assurance is to us as Christians. What if you had amnesia from a head injury and did not know with assurance that you were married? Objectively, you might be shown a marriage certificate and photos of your wedding, but subjectively, you just were not assured within because you could not remember being married? Although your lack of assurance will not mean that you are not married; nevertheless, such doubts/concerns will greatly hinder your growth in your marriage and your enjoyment of your spouse. Perhaps guilt will continuously plague and riddle your conscience if you are not inwardly assured that this is your spouse or not. If assurance in marriage to your spouse is so important, how much more significant is assurance of your spiritual union to Jesus Christ (which is the reality to which your earthly marriage points)? This is a very important matter.

2. **Does assurance bring stability or instability, growth or decay, love or doubt, trust or distrust, communion or distance?** This inward assurance is a blessed grace of God for which we as Christians should pray and seek by God's grace (1 John 5:13). We should want to know that we know that we are the children of the living God.

3. **Is it presumptuous for a believer who trusts alone in Christ alone to have such a certain assurance of faith and salvation in Christ?**

a. Various unfaithful churches teach it is presumptuous and even dangerous for the Christian to have a certain assurance of faith and salvation. For they claim that it will lead a Christian to be careless, lazy, and unfaithful, thinking and acting as though it doesn't matter how one lives—"I am saved." They claim that fear of losing one's salvation is a necessary motivation to loving God and walking uprightly.

b. Is that true in a parent-child relationship? Will such a fear in a child cause a child to love the parent more or to distrust the parent more, to joyfully obey or just obey outwardly to avoid being cast out of the family, to submit from the heart or to submit only outwardly?

c. To the contrary, assurance of God's love, mercy, forgiveness, eternal life, and faithfulness to His everlasting covenant made with us through Christ (and sealed with Christ's own blood) is the fertile soil in which a Christian sends down deep roots and sends up a strong tree bearing much fruit (Hebrews 4:15-16; Hebrews 10:21-22).

d. That is not to say that those Christians that struggle with assurance of salvation cannot be growing Christians—it is only to say that such a struggle will be a hindrance, a discouragement, and a setback in the Christian life (sending us back to question the very foundation of our house rather than spending that time in building a beautiful house upon the foundation). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (18:1) states,

Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God: which hope shall never make them ashamed.

4. **What is it that hinders that blessed assurance of salvation (not salvation itself, but the assurance, peace, and comfort of salvation)?** The enemy will use the following in order to accuse us and drive us away from Christ, which usually brings a distance from the Lord, not nearness.

a. Not trusting God's promises—walking by sight and feelings, rather than by faith.

The enemy will attack our faith in Christ.

b. Unrepented sin which grieves the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 59:1-2). Satan encourages us to flirt with sin, seeing how close we can come to the very act.

(1) The devil suggests we should compromise what we know to be God's will. In so doing we offend our conscience and the Lord, and we run and hide (like Adam and Eve) from Him rather than to Him (Acts 24:16).

(2) If there are two children in a family—one is stubbornly rebellious and the other is lovingly obedient. Even though the parents love both children the same and assure them of that love, which child is more likely to have that sense of assurance? The obedient child because the parent's love in word and deed is interpreted through a conscience that does not condemn that child, while the conscience of the rebellious child is accusing that child of sin against the parents' love, and is interpreting every act of loving discipline as hatred and cruelty.

c. Sins that we commit against one another and unwillingness to pursue reconciliation will leave us open to the attacks of the enemy against our conscience and assurance (Ephesians 4:30-32).

d. Since communion with Christ in His Word and prayer (as individuals, families, and as a church) is a great means to enjoying our precious Jesus, the temptation of the enemy to neglect and ignore that communion is the devil's way to bring about a distance with Christ. When we are strangers to Christ, assurance often vanishes (John 15:5).

5. **What is it that promotes a blessed assurance of faith in our Christian life?** These are summarized in our *Confession of Faith* (18:2).

a. The promises of God's Word (God's faithfulness to keep His promise—Romans 4:20; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 1:1-2). We will not have a steadfast and certain assurance of salvation where we waver in believing God will keep His Word. The enemy will tempt us to doubt whether our faith in Christ is true faith (we're just phonies, pretending to be Christians). Next week we will consider how Satan comes to cast doubt on whether our faith is genuine.

b. The evidence of God's grace and fruit in our lives (God's grace evidences itself not in perfection, but in loving holiness—1 John 2:3; loving the truth—2 Thessalonians 2:10; and loving God and our neighbor—1 John 4:12). Remember, it's also keeping His commandments to flee to His mercy, to seek His forgiveness, to repent, and to renew our love and obedience to Him when we have sinned (Micah 7:8).

c. The inward testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:15-16).

II. Application

A. Thus, it is not the fear of losing our salvation that motivates us to be obedient to his God, but rather a heart of love and gratitude for the abundance of grace and mercy received from the Lord. The works of love performed in obedience to God's commandments can add nothing to our righteousness which is absolutely perfect for it is Christ's righteousness alone and not our own of which God will approve.

B. If we must add to our righteousness or remove sin by our own suffering or obedience, we will always be plagued with doubt and uncertainty, for we will always wonder when we have done enough (and that is precisely the point—we can never do enough). But when we turn from ourselves, from our sin, and even from our works of obedience, and by faith rest securely in Christ and His righteousness, God says, "He is enough. I love you and accept you in my beloved Son now and for all eternity." That's the unailing and eternal promise that brings God's blessed assurance.

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