

The Essential Foundation of Christian Assurance

Scripture: 1 John 3:19

Code: 62-29

Well I mentioned this morning that tonight we were going to look at the issue of assurance...assurance of one's salvation...assurance that one is truly headed for heaven. Let's turn to 1 John chapter 3 and in fact to the very text that we are currently studying. First John chapter 3, and we are in the section from verse 19 to the end of the chapter.

But as I was contemplating just that nineteenth verse, I found myself pinned to it and unable to move beyond it. The nineteenth verse of the third chapter of 1 John says, "We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him." And here John introduces the matter of having assurance, confidence before God that we are of the truth. This introduces us to the whole matter of assurance which opens up a very large field of consideration. In fact, it would be appropriate, probably, to give a dozen or so messages on the subject. I'm not going to do that because I think the epistle itself works in, around and through that theme. But I want to address tonight the bigger scope of this matter of assurance by looking at this verse and then expanding from it.

One of the privileges of being a shepherd of the flock of the Lord is to be able to provide comfort and confidence and peace to those sheep who are in fear and doubt. The most dreadful kind of doubt that can occur in the life of a believer is doubt about one's salvation. Many, if not most Christians, have experiences or episodes of doubt, sometimes severe doubt, sometimes momentary and sometimes prolonged. Doubt and the fear that one is not a Christian is common among the people of the church. And it needs to be addressed from a pastoral perspective. And I come to you, I trust, in doing this tonight and probably on another Sunday night, and maybe another one after that, I come as your comforter. Obviously as your teacher because I will be able only to comfort you by giving you the truth that comforts.

But John understands that as well and that's why in verse 19 he says, "We shall know that we are of the truth." That's why over in chapter 5 verse 13 he says, "These things I am...I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." It has been and it will continue to be John's emphasis to write about the marks of a true believer and thus not only enable us to evaluate someone else, but more importantly to start with, to enable us to evaluate our own condition.

We have been looking at 1 John in the context of false teachers who had come in, and John is arming us to be able to discern who among us is not real, who among us is a false claimant to salvation and Kingdom citizenship. But we want to turn it around and look at our own hearts and to provide strength and conviction, persuasion and assurance that we, in fact, are Christians.

This verse is so direct that it...as I said...stopped me in its tracks and the very statement, "We shall know that we are of the truth and assure our hearts" opened a door for me as most Bible verses do and I walked through that door and found myself in a huge room filled with all kinds of truth. Let me just look at that verse, to begin with, and then we'll go through the door that is the verse and explore what's in the room behind it.

John starts out by saying, "We shall know..." From the Greek word *ginosko*, very, very common word, verb, which means to come to know, to learn, to find out, to realize. And he says it in a future tense, "We will come to know, to learn, to find out, to realize." In other words, it's not necessarily intuitive, it's something we have to learn, it's something we have to find and discover. And we will know by this that we are of the truth. There is a promise that we can know based upon a certain reality based on "by this," that we are of the truth. When we grasp the "by this," that's when we know. That's when we know. We want to know that we are of the truth," that's a beautiful phrase, that we are of the truth, the truth written, the Scripture; the truth incarnate, Jesus Christ. We're the people of the Book and the people of the Lord. Literally that "out of the truth we exist." It is the truth that has given us life, that has defined our existence. The truth of God in-Scripturated, the truth of God incarnated.

There is a way then that we can know, that we can learn, that we can realize, that we can find out, come to know, that we are out of the truth. It is the divine truth that is the source of our existence. And, verse 19, "Shall assure our heart before Him." Assure is from the Greek word *peitho* which means to persuade, that's usually the way it is translated, to persuade. In other words, we'll be persuaded. We can know that we're of the truth, we can be persuaded of that fact as we stand before Him.

Actually Thayer's Lexicon uses the word *peitho* in an interesting way. It tracks back the word to meaning to tranquilize. Or to put it another way, to calm, to pacify, to soothe the alarmed conscience, to quiet the troubled heart, to calm fear and doubt even though we're in the presence of God, and that's the importance of that final phrase "before Him."

Literally he is saying here, let's pull it all together, there is a way that we can and shall know that we are linked by life to the truth written and incarnate so that our fears and doubts are completely pacified and our heart is assured, even though we stand before God. That is to say, even in the intimidating presence of the absolutely holy One.

You see, it is in a very real sense the presence of God that raises the doubts. It is the character of God that raises the fears. It certainly raised some fears in Isaiah when he knew he was in the presence of God. Certainly raised some fears for Ezekiel when he knew he was in the presence of God. And you can go through the Old Testament and find many others. It certainly raised the fear in Peter when he was aware that he was in the presence of the Creator God. It raised the fear of John, Peter and James on the Mount of Transfiguration in John in the vision of Revelation 1. It is a normal thing to be traumatized by the appearance of God. And you see that throughout the Old Testament, and as well, even, in the New. People were traumatized when God was in their midst and manifestly so. And it is our understanding of the great holiness and righteousness of God. We know that, we believe that, we understand that and are also understanding that we are sinful, that we fail, that we are weak and this is not...this is not something that's only now and then but we see it in our lives at all times. Even though the pattern of unbroken sin has changed, and we are now pursuing what is holy and righteous, sin is still there in our flesh. And that makes the holiness of God intimidating. And it is that understanding of God's glory and holiness and greatness and righteousness that produces our fear and our doubt because we fear we've come short. But here John says there is a condition when that is met by which we will know that we are connected by life to the truth and tranquilize and pacify and calm our fears and doubts, even though we stand before God. And that's a good thing, isn't it? That's an incredibly wonderful promise.

Doubts and fears are related to God's glory and honor and righteousness and holiness and our dread of His judgment and our fear of His punishment. We are weak and we know it. We are imperfect and we know it. We openly acknowledge it. And God is perfect and holy and omniscient and nothing escapes Him. And that is intimidating. Yet in that very presence of God we can have assurance of our eternal glory, being calm and confident that we are of the truth, people of the truth.

How do we come to that? Verse 19 says, "By this...by this..." What does that mean? Well I'll tell you later. But John has been giving it to us in the prior passage as well as earlier in the letter. You probably have a pretty good idea that it has to do with obedience toward God and love toward Him and toward others, the two moral tests that verify salvation.

But before we look at that, before we take a look at the "by this" that we're going to find, by the way, in verses 18 to 24, it's right in the passage. Before we look into that, I want to sort of broaden our perspective a little bit. One issue has to be established or all of our discussion is severely weakened. In fact, our whole discussion might be rendered moot without this one consideration, and here it is. Is salvation revokable? Because what's the point of spending our time trying to develop an understanding of assurance if we really have no right to any assurance, because our salvation is revokable?

Another way to say it is this, is eternal life really eternal? Or another way, though once heaven was your destiny, can it become hell? Or to say it another way, even though you have been saved, can

you be lost or lose your salvation?

Now for some people, possessing assurance is sheer presumption. You have no right to it because you're not entitled to it because it doesn't exist, because you might lose what you have. And if you for one moment thought you couldn't lose it, that level of presumption might indicate that you had already lost it because that would be such a sinful concept. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, and others, but in particular the Roman Catholic Church does not hold that anybody can have assurance of salvation. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church does not believe that assurance is a desirable conviction, it is an undesirable confidence because the Church believes that if you could ever know you were fully and finally headed for heaven, it would make you careless about your sin and then when you became careless about your sin, you would lose your salvation. So better to keep you mystified. Better to make sure you never have any assurance because if you never have any assurance, you're going to work hard to try to make it in the fear that you might not.

In the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, here's what it says: "No one can know with a certainty of faith which cannot be subject to error that he has obtained the grace of God. No one can ever know that he's obtained saving grace."

The whole world of Roman Catholic people live without that knowledge and without a right to that knowledge. Furthermore, Canons and Decrees of Trent say: "No one, moreover, as long as he is in this mortal life ought to far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate, for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto Himself."

So as far as Roman Catholics know, the Pope could be on his way to hell. As far as the Pope knows, he could be on his way to hell just as well because there is no such presumption of assurance allowed.

Another paragraph from the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that a man who is born again and justified is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate, let him be anathema." You pronounce a curse on a person who is assured of his salvation. Such a person should be damned who would exercise such presumption. Another reason to feel sorry for Roman Catholics, another reason to feel sorry for Roman Catholic priests and nuns, and bishops and cardinals, all the way up the line. Tragic souls.

You say, "Well isn't that...that's, you know, sixteenth century stuff? They certainly don't believe that way today."

Let me update you. Here's a recent Roman Catholic Dictionary of Theology, this is what it says, the heading, "Certainty of Salvation." "A concept of Protestant theology, more of that cursed Reformed

theology. Certainty of salvation...it says...is a concept of Protestant theology which signifies a belief in justification so firm that this belief is inconsistent with any doubt of a man's ultimate salvation." That, to them, is a heresy to have assurance. "Such a certainty of salvation which Catholic theology describes as absolute was repudiated by the Council of Trent for whereas the Christian is absolutely forbidden to doubt what God has done in Jesus Christ, or to doubt his universal salvific will, this does not exclude all possible doubt of one's own eternal salvation," end quote.

You can't doubt the work of Jesus Christ. You can't doubt the saving will of God. But you better doubt your own salvation otherwise you're cursed and damned for sinful presumption. This is one of the most horrific doctrines in the Roman system, leaving people in this total darkness.

In his book on Conflict With Rome, Berkhower(?) shows that Rome's denial of the assurance of salvation is consistent with Rome's conception of the doctrine or nature of salvation. It is precisely, he writes, because the Roman Catholic Church conceives of salvation as a joint effort by man and God and as a blessing which can only be maintained through the doing of good works that it must say to the believer, "You can never be absolutely sure of your salvation." Why? Because it doesn't depend on God alone, it depends on you. And, frankly, you're not dependable. You're not absolutely dependable because the salvation system of the Roman Church is a cooperative system between man and God, their denial of the doctrine of assurance, or certainty of salvation, eternal security goes along with it.

But it's not just the Catholics who deny that we can be certain, it's those who are designated as Arminian, not Armenian, that's a nationality, Arminian is a theology named after Arminius, Jacob Arminius, who was a Dutch theologian. And he taught that you could lose your salvation. And the Arminian view, the Wesleyan view, as it's often called, is the idea that you can lose your salvation so you never really...since you don't have a secure salvation, you can't have real assurance because you don't know that you might do something to forfeit the salvation that you have. And so it's not healthy for you to feel too assured of your salvation or you're going to fall into the same pattern that the Catholics were worried about and you're going to stumble off and lose your salvation.

And I'll tell you something, folks. I don't know where the line between Roman Catholic works/theology and that is drawn. If I have to keep myself saved by my works and therefore I'm not entitled to any assurance because that would make me lazy and I'd fall into sin and lose it, then I don't know what the big difference between that and the Roman Catholic view is. I think in the minds of many people in that movement there is a huge difference and they believe they're saved by grace, only...but somehow lost by works.

But all of that is sort of outside the Scripture, outside the Scripture. Scripture is absolutely clear on the necessity of assurance, on the blessing of assurance, for the purpose of enjoying your salvation...for

the purpose of praising God. Hebrews 6:11, listen to this. "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the end, to the max." The writer of Hebrews says we desire that each of you show the same spiritual diligence so as to come to the realization of the full assurance of your hope to the very max. We should have this full assurance. It was the writer's desire, it was the Holy Spirit's desire. Second Peter 1:10 Peter writes, "Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you." We're literally commanded to assurance, it's not a sin, it's not a presumption. We need to pursue the path of assurance. Why should someone be going to heaven and not enjoy the trip? Why should someone be going to heaven all settled by the councils of God and the grace of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit and not enjoy the confidence of that? What does God gain? You tell me. By fearful, doubting, despairing, depressed, distrusting, fearful Christians, what does He get out of them? Misery, grief, a lousy testimony, poor service, weak praise, you name it.

I don't know about you but my praise to God is directly connected to the eternality of His gift to me, isn't yours? I mean, what kind of a...what kind of praise can I offer a God who may not get me there? I'd like to praise You, but I could sure praise You a lot more if I knew You were going to get me there. I'd like to serve You and I would certainly serve You with more passion if I knew that You were actually going to get me there. I'd like to love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength but I certainly could, you know, make a better run at that if I knew Your love for me is permanent. It's kind of tough if You ask me to deny myself, take up my cross and follow You and know somewhere down the road after I've done it for a while, you know, I might just fall off and I'm out and headed for hell. I...it's a little hard to make the kind of commitment You're asking for if I'm not real certain where this is going.

It's like the old deal, I don't know if I want to put all my eggs in this basket if there's a small hole in it, or a big one. Assurance is crucial to Christian living. I never met a productive Christian, I never met a Christian abandoned to praise and worship, sold out to Jesus Christ in doubt of his salvation. Cause if you doubt your salvation, you've got a big problem. You not only have got a problem with yourself, you've got a problem with God, you've got a problem with the Bible, you've got a problem with truth, and all your spiritual energy is sapped out, sucked up by your doubt, fear and despair. What's the point of that? God gains nothing.

So we have to ask the question, first of all then, is eternal life really eternal? And that's a stupid question. Of course, if it's eternal life, it's...what?...it's eternal. But that is the question. And there's no fine print in the contract called the New Covenant. There's no escape clause for God. There's no clause, you know, 42B, "If you do this, this contract is null and void." No fine print. Salvation is forever. And that is where you have to start. And I've done that so many times through the years, but I just want to touch base with that great truth.

Turn in your Bible to the fifth chapter of John, just a few...just a few verses that strengthen our foundation on this doctrine. By the way, if you want more of this, I did a tape and CD series called, "The Grip of God," which is a very careful detailed study of Romans 8:28 to 39 of the grip of God which is a comprehensive treatment of that passage, probably the most important passage on eternal security. But just a few verses, and I will also read a couple from that section.

John 5:24, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." What kind of life? "Eternal life." It's unequivocal in that one verse. If that's all we had, that would be enough. You believe, you have eternal life, you do not come into judgment, you are out of the realm of death into the realm of eternal life.

In the sixth chapter of John, again verse 27, Jesus says, "Do not work for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you. This is eternal life, the Son of Man will give to you."

Go down to verse 35. This eternal life is further defined. Jesus said to them, verse 35, "I am the bread of life, he that comes to Me shall not hunger. He who believes in Me never shall thirst." There isn't going to be a time anymore of hunger. There's never going to be a time of thirst in this provision of the bread of life, the water of life that belongs to people who possess eternal life. And then the passage flows from there, verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me. The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Go down to verse 39, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose none, but raise it up on the last day." Every one the Father gives Me I receive, every one I receive I keep, every one I keep I raise. Nobody falls through the cracks. Verse 40, "For this is the will of My Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life and I Myself will raise him on the last day."

Do you see the point? From believing to being raise, nobody's lost...nobody. That's what that's all about. And that's because it is the Father who draws, it is the Father who gives, it is the Son who receives, it is the Son who keeps, it is the Son who raises.

Back in the fourth chapter of John, I just thought of this. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up to eternal life." You drink this water and you receive eternal life. It's contrasted with water that's temporary. You need more, you need more, you thirst again. That is a very clear distinction between some kind of salvation that comes and goes and comes and goes and comes and goes and the true salvation which comes once and is a perpetual source of water because it is eternal life.

Now the Scripture continues this emphasis all throughout the New Testament. We know that whatever the Father purposes to do, He will bring to pass and nothing will alter His purpose. In fact, if you look at 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 through 5, you find another marvelous articulation of this truth. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." All right, so there we are at the new birth. "Born again to a living hope." With our salvation came a real living hope, not a sometime living and a sometime dead hope. The moment you were born again, hope lived. You understand that? And it remains a living hope. And it never dies. And that hope is provided through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, because He lives, we will live. We have in our living hope an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. There's just no way around it.

When you were born again, hope came alive. Your inheritance was established, fixed in heaven, reserved for you in an unalterable promise and never ever be any different than that. Jude 24, a wonderful benediction, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy." This is the only God, our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the one who keeps us from stumbling. He is the one who brings us all the way to glory so that we can stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy.

Now these are just some Scriptures that prove to us that our salvation is indeed eternal, that it is forever. First Thessalonians, the end of 1 Thessalonians, toward the end, again is a benediction again very much like Jude 24. Verse 23 of 1 Thess 5, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, may your spirit, soul, body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Boy, that sounds like a wish. That sounds like a wish, doesn't it? "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely. May your spirit and soul and body, your whole being, be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus. May you make it all the way to the end." That sounds like a wish in verse 23, well it's answered in verse 24. Faithful is He who calls you and He will also bring it to pass. No way around it. It's an inescapable reality, that your salvation once granted is forever.

Turn, with that in view, to the passage I mentioned earlier with regard to that tape series, Romans 8 and just a brief look because we could get lost in this wonderful garden of truth. But we'll look at it just with a bird's-eye view rather than a worm's-eye view, which usually is what I do. In chapter 8 verse 1 we read, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You don't have to worry about ever being condemned if you're once in Christ, there will never be any condemnation.

Now why is that so? Go all the way over to verse 28, "Because God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, those who are called according to His purpose for whom He foreknew before the foundation of the world, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Whom He predestined these He called,

whom He called these He justified, whom He justified these He also glorified." It goes from election to calling to justification to glorification. Salvation is the complete picture, all the way from eternity past to eternity future, your salvation unfolds. And if this is so, verse 31, if this is so, and it is, if God says it's this way and He's purposed it and He's making it all work together for good, and He is glorifying every one that He predestined and called and justified, if that is true, if God is for us and God is the one in charge, then who can substantially alter that? Right? No one. It's like John 10 where you're in My Father's hand, who is going to take you out? "If God, verse 32, didn't spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, if God gave His Son to save us when we were sinners, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" The point of the verse is if He would give up His Son to save us when we were sinners, won't He make sure that we have all we need to be kept by His Son?

Who is going to successfully...verse 33...bring a charge against God's elect since God is the one who justifies? Since God is the ultimate judge, what court of appeal is there? There is no appellate court in the universe. If Satan or demons or anybody else doesn't like what decision God has made about eternal salvation, where's the court of appeals? There isn't any.

Not only that, who is going to condemn us? Who is successfully going to bring a charge and condemn us when Jesus Christ has already died for our sins and been raised? The penalty already having been paid? And is now at the right-hand of God interceding on our behalf with God. You just can't get there, can you? You can't find a crack in the doctrine, there isn't any. God is working everything to the purpose of bringing His predestined children to glory. And if God is for us, who is against us? And if God is the judge who determined the verdict, there is no appellate court. And if God would give His Son for us when we were sinners, will not He allow His Son to keep us when we are His children now that we are no longer enemies? And if God does not condemn us because all that condemnation was paid for in the death of Christ, then on what basis would we ever be sent to hell? What basis would our salvation be taken away? What basis?

You say, "Well, our sin." No, your sin was paid for. "Well," you say, "somebody might, you know, get God's ear, like Satan got God's ear about Job." Well, that's not easy, that's impossible because there is One seated at the right hand of God interceding for us. He is our attorney for the defense and He never lost a client to the accuser of the brethren.

You say, "Well maybe He'll just stop loving us." No, verse 35, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" "There isn't anything that can happen in the world, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, nothing." Verse 38, "Not death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth," and he's just grabbing everything he can think of...nothing created and the only thing uncreated is God, "Nothing outside of God shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." You see, you can't... once you're in you can't get out.

And, you see, if you're going to talk about assurance, you have to start with that doctrine, right? Cause if that doctrine weren't true, our discussion is pointless. And if that doctrine isn't true, then the Catholic theology may have a point and Arminian theology may be right, you can get too presumptive about your salvation, get careless about your sin and lose your salvation, as they say. But they're wrong and the reason they're wrong is because they don't understand the eternality of the gift of salvation and they don't understand that it never was of works, you didn't get it that way and you don't keep it that way.

I am convinced that the question of eternal salvation is not legitimately debatable. It's not really arguable. Salvation is an eternal gift. Now, on the basis of the fact that if you have it you have it forever, we can talk about how to have the confidence that you have it. Having a secure salvation is a fact, feeling secure is something else. You know, there are a lot of Christians who have eternal salvation but they don't enjoy it because they don't think they have it. Many of them, as we pointed out, think they can lose it just around the corner, so they live in dread and fear. There are many in the Charismatic Movement who think Satan can come and steal it by leading them into some kind of sin, or demons can come and get in them and take over their life and rob them of their salvation. What a horrific way to live under the sovereignty of Satan and turn God into some victim. There's a lot of people who don't enjoy the assurance because they don't understand the eternality of the gift.

So, let's start with that. Salvation is forever...forever. And you need to enjoy that. Isaiah 32:17 says, "The work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever."

As a Christian I enjoy a lot of things. And if you sort of pin me down and say, "What do you enjoy about your Christian life?" I...I enjoy everything about my Christian life. I love the Bible. I love to study the Bible. I love to discover truth. I don't mind preaching. I really don't. I mean, it's not my favorite thing, but I do it, it puts food on the table. I love praise, worship. I love fellowship with Christian people. But I'll tell you when it comes down to deep in my soul when you're not around and the organ's not playing and the songs aren't sung, I rest my life on the assurance of my eternal salvation. If I didn't have that, everything else would be somewhat whimsical. So we're not talking about a peripheral issue here. I think it's crazy for Christian people to go through their whole life in some kind of mortal fear about their condition. But they do.

I don't normally read my own books because by the time you get them written, you've read them so many times that, you know, you don't want to read them again. But I wrote a book some years ago called *Saved Without a Doubt*. And I went back just to kind of read through it on Saturday to kind of get in touch with what I had said in that book because I hadn't looked at it for probably ten years. And I found this letter in the book and I thought I would share it with you.

"I've been attending Grace Church for several years. (This is someone ten years ago.) As a result of 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, 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, and that was the real blow, 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. 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 backdoor 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."

Boy, that is a sad way to live. Manure, a mongrel dog? Is this how Christ wants one of His own to feel? I was struck by the way..how eloquently he expressed himself and have since found that is somewhat common among Christians, although not nearly so well articulated. The Bible doesn't indicate that there's any reason to live like that. And it may have been a temporary disaster at that point because of the lost love which seemed to have been the devastating blow to him emotionally.

But you know what the Bible calls for? The New Testament writers always speak about assurance, not in meager ways but in superlatives. For example, Colossians 2:2 uses the phrase "full assurance." First Thessalonians 1:5, "much assurance." And Hebrews 6:11 and Hebrews 10:22, again the phrase, "full assurance." God does not want to withhold that. "You have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus," right? Ephesians 5:3. God wants to pour out His blessings and among the very best of those blessings is assurance.

Now just a little footnote here. There are many people who have assurance who don't deserve it. In fact, it's been my experience that the people who battle with assurance, the people who struggle with it, who get depressed, who have fears and doubts and worries are almost always Christians because non-Christians, they don't have the battle. They claim, "Well, I'm going to heaven, God would never turn me out of His heaven, I'm a good person." Or, "Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that, we did the other thing in Your name. Here we are." You know, people...people who battle with this, like the one

who wrote this letter, inevitably are Christians and the battle comes because they're standing before God and they see His glory and His holiness and His righteousness and they're looking at themselves and they're feeling weak and unworthy and it's in the throes of that that they see in their life that fall short of the standard that intimidates them that makes them say with Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone, I'm a man of unclean lips."

So it's...I don't know that I've met very many people...I can't remember any who were having this struggle and were actually non-Christians. This is a struggle in the heart of a believer very often. And God does not want it to be that way.

Now some of you are saying, "Well, you know, I don't have any problem with assurance. They told me when I prayed the prayer that I was saved." Well that's that sort of what I call syllogistic assurance. You know what a syllogism is? Major premise, minor premise, conclusion...if you've had logic, you remember that. Major premise, "If any has received Him, then He gave the *exousia*, the authority of the power to become the children of God." You receive Him, you become a child of God. That's the major premise. You received Him, you became a child of God, that's the minor premise. If you receive Him, you become a child of God, major premise. You received Him, you became a child of God, minor premise. Conclusion, you're saved. And that goes on all the time.

When I was trained in evangelism as a young person, doing evangelism on college campuses, I was told whenever you bring the gospel to somebody, get them to pray the prayer, don't leave. It's like selling a vacuum, don't leave the house before they sign the contract, you know, because if you come back again, you've got to do the whole drill again, so sign before you get them...before you get out the door. So, you know, get them to sign the deal before you go and make sure after they've signed the deal you affirm to them that they are really saved so they don't have any doubts.

And so you play this little syllogistic game...major premise, if you believe you are saved. Minor premise, you believed, conclusion, you're saved. It's an appeal to logic based on profession, unproven and untested. Assurance of salvation is not something I can give to somebody by a logical drill. Why? Because I don't know whether the profession was real, right? I don't know the state of the heart. People say things they don't mean. Is that not pretty common? You probably did it today in some conversation. We say things just to be kind. We say things because we're hopeful. Down deep they may not represent the real thoughts of our hearts. Assurance cannot be based on some logical inference unproven. Assurance is the blessed reward of faith tested and verified. That's why you have the phrase in verse 19, "By this... by this..." and it goes back to the issue of love and obedience.

Well, John is concerned to give us the tests, but before we take the tests, I want to do one other thing. And this will be two weeks from tonight because I'm done for tonight. But I want you to know what I'm going to do. I want you to know why true Christians lack assurance. Obviously it can be related to sin issues, we'll talk about that. But there are some other reasons and I want to tell you

what they are and I want to tell you this. A church like ours is a place that typically generates more doubt than the average church, for obvious reasons...because when you teach the Word of God, you hold the standard so high. There are Christian people in churches all across this country who have never even asked the question, "Am I really saved?" Because they don't think deeply about anything. And they're not confronted with the glory of God and the holiness of God. And they're not confronted with the Law of God and submission and obedience. And they're not confronted with self-denial, taking up a cross, abandoning all. All they're told is pray a prayer and you're in...I prayed the prayer, I'm in.

So there are lots of people who don't even understand this issue of assurance because they simplistically believe the little syllogism somebody gave them. And, of course, the danger of that is that they had a false profession to start with and now they're living under a deception. And a church like ours can, in a sense, stir up doubt and fear by its relentless commitment to the Word of God. So we're going to talk about, a couple of weeks from tonight, why it is that true Christians struggle with assurance. And after we've covered all of this, we'll give you the solutions to it which will be very familiar to you.

Well, Lord, thank you again for the breadth and height and length and depth of Your wondrous revelation to us. No matter how many years we go through it, no matter how much depth we dive into to discern its glories and its wonders, no matter how we penetrate it and search it, we never come close to covering it all or exhausting the glories of Your Word. We have been so blessed again tonight, to be reminded that ours is an eternal salvation and that You want us to enjoy our salvation, to live with confidence and assurance, fully persuaded with all our doubts and fears, calmed completely so that we can love You and serve You and honor You, and praise You and worship You with much assurance, in full assurance for the sake of our own joy, for the sake of the ringing reality of our testimony to others and for the sake of our usefulness to You. Free us up from draining doubt and fear to fully enjoy the grace of salvation You've given us. And we ask this in Your Son's name. Amen.

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