

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Christians Lack Assurance

Scripture: 1 John 3:19

Code: 62-30

This is one of the most wonderful studies that believers can have, a study on the assurance of salvation. Let's open our Bibles to 1 John and, in fact, as we study the epistle of 1 John we basically are engaged in a whole epistle geared to direct us toward this wonderful truth of assurance. In fact, you will remember, if you go back to chapter 1 of 1 John and verse 3, it says that our fellowship, at the end of the verse, is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write, verse 4, so that our joy may be made complete. John is writing so that those of us who have fellowship with the Lord may enjoy that fellowship to the max.

In the fifth chapter of this epistle and the thirteenth verse, John again says why he's writing. "These things 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." Knowing that you have eternal life, possessing assurance is necessary to complete joy. You cannot fully enjoy your salvation without the confidence that it is really yours.

Before us, as we move through this epistle, in chapter 3 verse 19, is another verse that is addressed at the same issue. Chapter 3 verse 19, "We shall know by this that we are of the truth and shall assure our heart before Him." John says, "I want you to know, I want you to be sure, I want you to have joy." The issue then throughout this epistle is the assurance of salvation. It's not the only issue, John is also helping us to delineate who the true Christians are and who the false are. The fallout for being able to do that discerning is to be able to discern your own spiritual condition. We shall know from the word *ginosk* which means to find out, we shall find out that we are of the truth, the written truth, Scripture, the incarnate truth, Jesus Christ, to which we belong. And consequently shall assure our hearts before Him. It's the Greek word *peitho* which means to persuade, or to pacify, or to win over with confidence. John is saying we are able to know that we belong to the truth and to enjoy strong assurance, persuaded confidently that we belong to God.

Now also you'll notice a little phrase in verse 19, "by this." And John is there identifying the means by which we know that we are of the truth and our hearts are assured. But we're not going to look at "by this" for a little while because I want to delve a little more deeply into this problem of assurance. Assurance is a spiritual reality that we should enjoy. Ephesians 3:12 says, "In whom," that is speaking about Christ, "we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him." Those are very strong terms. In Christ we have boldness, in Christ we have confident access. In other words, we are assured that we have a right to enter into the presence of God. The writer of Hebrews puts the same thought this way, "And let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." That is to say, "Go

to God with whatever's on your heart, fully assured, boldly confident that you are His child and that He awaits your arrival, the meeting of your needs." Hebrews 6:19 says, "This hope, or this confidence, we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast." We should be anchored strongly in the hope that is ours in Christ so that we have both assuredness and a steadfast confidence in our relationship to the living God and His fulfillment of future promises. Colossians 2:2 puts it this way. "We should attain to all riches of the full assurance."

All of this indicates to us that the Lord wants us to live enjoying our assurance. Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing that He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it or perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Be confident of your future. Be confident of your access to God. Be confident you can come boldly to the throne of mercy for help in time of need. Enjoy all the riches of a full assurance. Be as confident as the Apostle Paul who at the end of his life said in 2 Timothy 4:18, "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly Kingdom, to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen." Now there is a doxology of confidence, the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, He will preserve me for His heavenly Kingdom. Why? Because I am assured that I belong to Him. We are to live in the joy of that assurance, we are to live in that hope of that assurance, we are to live in the maximum confidence and boldness that that assurance gives to us.

I'm saying all that just to remind you that God doesn't expect you to go through your life worrying and wondering about whether you really belong to Him. There are theologians that say that, there are teachers and preachers that say that. They are the same ones who think you can lose your salvation and they're therefore afraid that you living in confidence might step over the line of sin, going too far in your confidence and therefore forfeit your salvation. And so it's better for you since you could lose it not to think it was too secure, that keeps you more on your toes and makes it more likely that you'll hang on to it.

Well, of course, we know from our study last week and from all the years of studying the Bible that salvation is forever. You cannot lose it and so you might as well enjoy having it. That's exactly what God desires.

Last Sunday night...or two Sunday nights ago we looked at the essential foundation, the eternality of salvation. We talked about the doctrine of salvation as to its eternality, that once God saves you, it is forever. After all, eternal life is eternal life. It is permanent. We talked about the reality of that permanent salvation. If you ever had it, you always have it. We saw clearly in the Bible that it cannot be lost because it is eternal life, by definition. Because God has chosen from before the foundation of the world to whom He will give it and all to whom He has chosen to give it He will give it. Everyone whom He has chosen He calls, everyone whom He calls He justifies, everyone whom He justifies He glorifies. So from the elective purpose of God in predestination before the foundation of the world, to the consummate glory of the saints, everything works according to the perfect plan of God in giving salvation so that the purpose of God in the beginning is the end of the redemptive work. What God

intended to do is exactly what He will do. He intended to give salvation to sinners whom He chose before the foundation of the world and that is exactly what He is doing.

The work of Christ also was complete. It was so complete that there is no way you can forfeit salvation. That would undermine the efficacy and the completeness of the work of Christ. If His work was not sufficient to hold you, then it would be a deficient work. Furthermore, you have the intercessory work of Jesus at the right hand of the Father, making sure that no successful accusation is ever brought before the throne of God against you.

You also have the work of the Holy Spirit who is your guarantee of eternal life. He is the down payment, the *arrabon*, the engagement ring, the firstfruits by which you were sealed and held until the day when you see the Lord.

We are then to enjoy this eternal salvation that is ours and not live in fear. One of the worst things taught today is dominant kind of teaching in the Charismatic Movement that says essentially that Satan can come along and steal your salvation, so you have to stay alert and pray the demons and devil away so he doesn't come and steal your salvation. How would you like to live under that kind of fear? That's not at all what God wants us to do, He wants us to enjoy the security that we have by being sure we are His.

Now why do people...and I want to talk about this, this is a little bit like the Puritans used to teach, but I want to meander through something of the logic of this, for a moment, because I think it will help us. There are people who lack assurance. As I said last time, most people who lack assurance are Christians. It's very rare to meet a non-Christian struggling with a lack of assurance. When I find somebody struggling with the assurance of their salvation, it's inevitably a believer. And there are reasons why people struggle with assurance. I'm going to give you some of them tonight.

Number one, some lack assurance because of being under strong preaching of God's holy standard. Some lack assurance because of being under strong preaching of God's holy standard. To put it another way, if you're in a church where the preaching is weak, where the Law of God is not held up, where holiness is not exalted, where the standard for the gospel is not proclaimed, it's unlikely that you're going to have a battle with the lack of assurance. If you're in an environment where there's a minimalist kind of gospel and all you're told to do is pray a prayer, as we were talking about this morning, invite Jesus into your life and nothing is ever questioned as to the depth and legitimacy of that faith, it's not likely that you're going to struggle with assurance the way that someone might in an environment where the Law of God is upheld, where the holiness of God is upheld, where the essence of true faith is proclaimed, where a call for genuine repentance is at the heart of all gospel invitations, it is under that strong kind of preaching that people struggle with assurance. Wherever demanding preaching and demanding teaching forces people to acknowledge a high and holy standard for the believer, it can lead to a lack of assurance in disobedient and sinning Christians.

And I think it's fair to say the pulpit is rightly the creator of anxious hearts. That's part of the duty of the preacher is to make the heart anxious. Why? So that, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, you examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith, would be a breach of ministerial responsibility, it would be a forfeiture of the duty we have before God to let people live comfortably and an illusion about their true spiritual condition. But as I said, much of the preaching today is neither strong or convicting, doesn't set a holy standard at all. About the only time the subject even comes up, the subject of assurance, is to argue with those who are unwilling to give psychological assurance to someone just because they made a profession of faith in Christ. And I've had that personal experience. In dealing with other pastors or dealing with other ministries, the subject of assurance doesn't come up unless I would bring it up and say, "Why are you giving people who make a profession of faith in Christ some little psychological formula to make them feel secure, when you don't know their faith is genuine until you've seen the fruit of it?"

If you or people today in the evangelical world struggle with assurance, perhaps than any other earlier time, because the preaching lacks a strong call to holiness, it lacks a strong and clear definition of faith and repentance. And as you will remember from all the years that we have been talking about lordship salvation and battling for the clarity of the gospel, there is...this is a minority voice, calling to a high and holy standard. Preachers today want to make it as easy as possible by their approach to accept what they think is the gospel, and then immediately make people feel secure. It's a very dangerous thing to understand the doctrine of eternal security, to understand the eternity of salvation, but not to understand the truth about repentance and saving faith. Because now what you're doing is psychologically assuring people that their salvation is forever when they don't even have it because they never came through the path of true repentance and true confession of Jesus as Lord to the degree of self-denial and self-sacrifice and self-submission. But where there is convicting preaching, doubt can be created.

And while the pulpit is to be a purveyor of a message that creates anxious hearts, the pulpit is also to be the creator of comfort and that's why I'm here, to bring some balance. The preaching of the Word, I believe, is the supreme means of grace in the life of the church in its worship. But where there is that strong preaching, there will be a battle with assurance. And I'll tell you something, it's not bad to have that, it's good because how else are we drawn to the important issue of self-examination?

There's a second reason why people might lack assurance. Some might lack assurance because they can't accept forgiveness. They can't accept forgiveness. They really are tyrannized by their emotions, feeling they're too bad to be saved. There's just too much garbage in their mind, there's just too much sin that they can't get rid of.

I always remember a story my father used to tell and...about a man who came to his pastor and he was concerned about all of the sin in his life. And so he said, "I don't know how bad a sinner I really

am."

And so the pastor said, "Well, every time you consciously commit a sin, go hammer a nail in the barn door."

And I don't know how long it was before the man came back and said, "There's no more room for nails."

And he said, "Now if you want to understand the forgiveness of God, it's like pulling all the nails out." And the man was able...the pastor was able to lead the man to Christ. And he said, "Now, every time you do something in your life, I want you to go in the barn and pull one nail out."

Well many months went by. Little by little the nails came out. And one day he said to the pastor, "The nails are out."

And the pastor said, "Isn't that wonderful?"

He said, "No, the holes are still there."

And there are some people who don't get over the holes, you know? All the scars of the past. This is because...there's a reason for it, this is because conscience speaks against forgiveness, it really does. I mean, it is the essence of conscience to berate you. It is the essence of conscience to accuse you. It is the essence of conscience to hold you up before the bar of God as wanting. That's what God designed your conscience to do. Your conscience never should let you off the hook. Your conscience is not designed to mollify or pacify you and it does not go away when you become a Christian. In fact, it functions after you've been saved better than it did before because it was purged and purified, the Bible says. And it's clean now and it's clear and it has a function, and that function is to waken your heart to sin, and it will never let you off the hook. Conscience knows nothing of forgiveness. The more you're exposed to the preaching of the Word of God, the more you're exposed to the Law of God, the more you know about sin, the more active your conscience is and the more your conscience berates you in a relentless fashion and yields nothing to the issue of forgiveness, the more possible it is for you to feel the loss of assurance.

By the way, your conscience knows nothing about mercy. And that's good. God will give you mercy, your conscience won't. It is relentless in plaguing you about your iniquity. And you can be thankful for it, right? Unless you plummet into destructive sin in an unfeeling way.

The Law of God knows nothing of forgiveness. The Law of God knows nothing of forgiveness. What do I mean by that? What I mean by that is the Law is a standard which holds you to it, and sentences you to death for every violation. There is no law...there is no mercy, I should say, in the Law of God.

There is no grace in the Law of God. There is no forgiveness in the Law of God. The Law of God simply says, "Do this or die...Do this or die."

When you hear the Law of God proclaimed, whether it's Old Testament or New Testament, whether it's the Mosaic Law of God, or whether it's the moral principles that are related to us in the Psalms, or whether it's the ethics and the righteous characteristics that are unfolded throughout the Old Testament, or whether it's the standard of Jesus Christ, the commands of Jesus, or whether it's the inspired teaching of the apostles that lay upon us spiritual responsibility, the Law of God is the Law of God and inherent in that Law there is no forgiveness. The Law kills. The Law slays. The Law knows nothing about excuses.

Not only does conscience relentlessly hammer without forgiveness, not only does the Law of God relentlessly accuse without ever excusing, but divine justice is also relentless and divine justice knows nothing of forgiveness either. When a person then is exposed to conscience, the Law of God, the standard of His divine justice, they can be an overwhelming tyranny that can impact the emotion so that one feels too evil to be saved.

But what, after all, is the heart of the gospel that when your conscience has damned you and the Law of God has damned you and the justice of God has damned you, the work of Christ graciously redeems you, right? And if you hang on to the condemnation of conscience and the condemnation of Law and the condemnation of divine justice and do not yield to the great grace of God, the mercy of God in the provision of Jesus Christ, then you have willingly crowned the devil king rather than Christ because you now say, "Law rules, conscience rules, justice rules, guilt rules, condemnation rules rather than grace rules, mercy rules." Faith brings forgiveness.

One Puritan writer put it this way. "He that lacks assurance converses too much with Satan. As he that has that assurance of God's love converses with Christ, the Spirit bearing witness to him that he is a child of God. So he that lacks assurance converses with Satan and Satan, though falsely, bears witness to his spirit that he is not a child of God. And is it not a misery to be in these converses with Satan and to be under his hellish droppings? The devil is always following and tempting me to suspect the love of Christ, to be suspicious of grace, to distrust mercy. And the more suspicious I am of the love and grace and mercy of God, the more I embrace Satan's love." The Puritan writer says, "The truth is, beloved, this lack of assurance of God's love or personal 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 into a full conclusion saying, 'Now that I know 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 and says, '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 and believing of my life, and all the ordinances I have enjoyed, I shall never have that interest in Christ. So the longer I live the more I aggravate my condemnation.'"

Stop that process. Let the Law do its work. It is a schoolmaster to drive us to Christ. Let conscience do its work, it is to prevent us from sin by inducing pain over iniquity. Let the justice of God do its work and that is to make us thankful for forgiveness and grace. Both strong preaching of the holiness of God and the requirements that He lays before us and the refusal to accept forgiveness, cause people to have a lack of assurance.

They are related to a third reason why people don't have assurance, and this could go on for a long time, this point. I think it's an important one to make and I'll be brief. You'll understand when I say it. Some lack assurance because they do not comprehend the gospel and the plan of salvation. Bad theology contributes to a lack of assurance. I just mentioned an example of that a moment ago. If you believe you can lose your salvation, then, of course, you can't enjoy assurance. But there is more than that. Somehow the whole reality of grace and the whole reality of mercy and forgiveness in Christ is not comprehended. To go beyond that and say people do not understand the wonder and the glory of the great doctrine of justification. Well I would venture to say that most people sitting in most churches who think they're Christians don't even understand the doctrine of justification and that is the doctrine which inherently is the gospel which must be believed. They have had emotional experiences. They have come to Christ in a measure of faith. They have prayed a prayer. They have some feelings of well-being. But no matter how vivid and how passionate and how powerful feelings are at the moment, the crisis moment when one prays a prayer or quote/unquote accepts Christ, emotion, powerful as it may be, vivid as it may be, emotion is no safe storehouse for your assurance. It's a really bad place to store your assurance. Your assurance cannot be based upon an emotional experience, it has to be built on a true understanding of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

I would venture to say that most people hold on to some kind of experience as the evidence of their salvation, rather than a true and a deep understanding of the great doctrine of justification. Do you understand what really happened when God saved you? Do you understand that you were a sinner and God knew it? You were condemned by Him as a just and righteous and holy Judge? Do you understand that that penalty had to be paid? Do you understand that God substituted His Son to pay the penalty that His wrath required, and that He paid it in full and God was so satisfied with the Son for the payment, that He raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand and gave Him the name Lord, which is above every name? Do you understand that the work of Jesus Christ was complete? That sin was fully paid for? That when He died He died bearing the punishment for all your sins? And when you put your trust in Him, God credits all His righteousness to your account? Do you understand that the Old Testament says that because your sins are paid for in Christ, God Himself will never remember them again? You won't forget, but He does. That He will remove them as far as the east is from the west? That He will bury them in the depths of the sea? That written across your account, the account that you owe to God, the debt of sin, is the statement, "Paid in Full" written in the blood of Christ? Do you understand that? Though you were...your sins were scarlet, they are white as snow, though they were red like crimson, they are as wool. You've been washed. You've

been cleaned. You've been purged. You've been purified because He who was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, as Isaiah puts it, the chastisement that had to come to us to make peace with God was laid on Him and by His stripes, that is His suffering, we are spiritually healed.

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save, and it's not reluctant. I think sometimes people think, "Well, Jesus sort of reluctantly set...allowed me into the Kingdom." Some time, and we'll get there in a year or so, but some time read Luke 15 and you'll read about a prodigal son who was, you know, bad to the bone, we would say in the vernacular, did everything to dishonor his father, to live a dissolute life, wasted his entire substance, wound up slopping pigs. And he came home to his father and he said, "Look, I'm not worthy of anything, just to be your servant. Just let me sneak in and serve somewhere."

And his father said, "No, that's not how it's going to be." And he put a robe on him and put the ring on his finger and had a huge celebration because his son had come home. And the picture there is of God receiving the worst sinner, all of heaven has a party because it gives God the opportunity to put on His display of grace before men and holy angels. There is no reluctance in the saving work of God. You may not be able to forget the years of wandering and the years of sinning, but God has. Your emotions may make you feel guilty, but God declares that you are not. God is in the business, Romans 4 says, of justifying the ungodly. What a great statement. Legalists think He justifies the godly. The Bible says He justifies the ungodly. You can't see Calvary's cross, we have an emblem of it behind us, we have the Lord's table all the time, communion, representing the body and blood of the Lord. Why? To bring the cross before you. To bring the cross before you. Not to make a fetish out of the cross, not to make a mindless repetitious ceremony out of the cross, but so that we can be reminded of what the cross was. It was the display of the wrath of God on the perfect substitute so that we remember that all our sins are covered, paid for. The moment a repentant sinner puts his trust in Christ, he is viewed by God as sheltered behind the blood-sprinkled cross, just as Israel of old was sheltered behind the blood sprinkled on the door in the lintel.

Assurance then, folks, not an emotional experience, it's a rational reality. Why do I feel sure of my salvation? Because I understand the work of God in Christ. It's not a matter of holding on to my assurance emotionally. I hold on to it doctrinally, it's facts revealed in Scripture, historical realities in the Bible. It's not a feeling. That is why there is such strength in that great eighth chapter of Romans. Listen to how Paul says this, Romans 8:38. "For I am convinced," strong language, "I am assured, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present or things to come, nor powers, or height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And how was he persuaded? Was he persuaded by some feeling? Was he persuaded by the recollection of some emotional experience of the past? No. He was persuaded by the facts of the gospel that the love of Christ for His own was an eternal

love, that sin was no longer an issue because it was completely paid for. We who know that relish assurance based upon sound doctrine. I am secure. I do believe in Christ. Therefore I enjoy my assurance for Christ has guaranteed it to me, having become the perfect substitute who paid the price for all my sins. This is just the heart and soul of our assurance.

Someone wrote, "If anyone is ever to be kept out of heaven for my sins, it will have to be Jesus." What a thought. If anyone is ever kept out of heaven for my sins, it will have to be Jesus, "Because He took them all upon Himself and made Himself responsible for them." And by the way, He's already in heaven. He wasn't kept out. As long as the Father accepted Him back in heaven, who was responsible to pay the penalty for my sins, I have no fear that I would be turned away. He was delivered up for our transgressions and was raised for our justification.

And so, assurance often comes to people who don't understand the gospel. And by the way, this takes us back to the resurrection. The Lord is risen, with Him we also rose. In His death we vanquished all our foes. The Lord is risen, all our sins paid for through His empty tomb. God declares satisfaction in that sacrifice.

I wonder sometimes what people are thinking. I hear this, "Theology is divisive. People don't want to come to church and hear a bunch of theology. People want things they can relate to. They want stories, they want contemporary style, they want you to communicate in the vernacular. They certainly don't want long, drawn-out expositions of the Bible and big doses of theology."

Let me tell you something, folks, everything in your life that produces anything to the glory of God and your own personal true and pure joy is related to some theological fact. I was talking to the students at the seminary this week, I occasionally do lectures on preaching, and sometimes just question and answer, and I sometimes am criticized for a lack of practicality. This is a criticism that has shown up in doctrinal dissertations. There was one long 400-page doctrinal dissertation where the student who wrote his dissertation said, "I was biblical, I just wasn't practical." And that was the conclusion on the last page, I didn't read the whole thing, I just went to the last page to find out what the conclusion was.

I want to tell you something about being practical, and this is not self-justifying. I want to tell you what I told the seminary students this week. When I go to a text of Scripture, there's a process. I was talking to them about how to preach and how to prepare and that the first thing I do when I go to a text is find out what it says. Okay? What does it say? How am I to understand the words? Not in English, only, but to go back into the Greek, working in the New Testament, and to determine exactly what the lexicography, that's the study of the words, the syntax, that's the relationship of the words. I need to know all of that. I want to know exactly what it says in the original. I want to be accurate. Once I know what it says and I write that all out on eight-and-a-half by fourteen sheets through every passage, breaking every verse down into phrases, and then under those phrases putting in

everything I discover about what it says.

Second step is what does it mean? I get what it says, but what does it mean? Third step, after I've written all that down, I go back and ask the question, how do I make it apply? And that process is not...can I think of three ways that you can somehow implement this? That to me, that...that's not how to make it practical. If I was teaching a lesson on humility, I suppose I could say, "Now here's what I want you to do to make this practical. Go home and be humble. Go to work and be humble. Go for a day and don't talk about yourself. Go for a week and don't be the hero of any of your stories."

And you want to know something? You'd forget before you got to the parking lot. You know what being practical means? It isn't jumping at how you behave, it's dealing with how you think. The practicality comes then when I understand what the passage says, when I understand exactly what it means, and I show you how that fits into the scheme of the divine mind and I show you how that works in the framework of all biblical theology because you're going to live out the way you think. And if I jump at how you live and bypass how you think, the practicality of it is lost. The practical work in the Scripture is developing the theology of it. That is, crystallizing the divine principle and then weaving it into the fabric of your thinking so that you think with the mind of Christ. Then I know it will show up in your living cause as a man thinks, so he is.

The most practical thing a person can ever do is to give people solid, sound doctrine and show every truth in every passage in a framework, in a scheme that has continuity through all of the Word of God and reflects the mind of God. That's what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to bring you people to the place where you think the way God thinks. I know how God thinks because it's revealed in the Scripture and I've studied it long enough to know. You can ask me about any issue and I will tell you how God thinks about that. And I have committed my life to getting as close to thinking about everything the way God thinks as I can. And that's what shows up in my life because it's on the inside. It's not what goes into the man that defiles him, it's what comes out of him. It's also not the behavior of the mind that has to be corrected, it's the inside of the man that has to be corrected and that's an issue of thinking. So that's why we camp on the issue of doctrine. Doctrine is critical to assurance. Some people are floating around, wandering around trying to get assurance of their salvation and waiting for somebody to emotionally pump them up. What they really need to understand is the reality of what salvation is, what Christ has done and the completeness of it and the finality of it, right?

And here's kind of a common one, number four, some lack assurance because they don't know the exact time of salvation. That's kind of silly, isn't it? I might not be saved because I don't know when it happened. Nobody knows when it happened. You might remember when you prayed a prayer or felt a response or said something, but you can't see the regenerating work of God. You can't see Him creating a new nature in you and a new disposition. This is an invisible miracle.

I remember a man who heard me preach here one...he was coming to our church and he told me this later, and he was struggling with assurance. And apparently I preached a message on that Sunday morning that was strong about making sure you're a real Christian. He told me, he said, "I went out of here and I was so shaken, I wasn't sure I was a Christian. And so...because I couldn't remember the time. I couldn't remember the place and the location." So he said, "I drove down Roscoe Boulevard and I stopped my car along the side and I went in the back of the car and I took out a piece of wood and I hammered it into the ground by the sidewalk on Roscoe Boulevard." And I said, "Okay, I'm doing it right here and right now in case I've never done it before and I wanted to have in my mind that I had hammered a stake into the ground."

Well I had to collect my composure for a moment because what is remembering the time you hammered a stake into the ground have to do with the mysterious, sovereign work of God? If it's any comfort to you, I don't know the exact time of my salvation. But I don't judge my salvation by the past, I judge its reality by the present. And that man said to me, "I always doubted until I pounded that stake in the ground."

Is that crazy? What does that have to do with anything? Those today who teach that, the remembrance of a past event, the remembrance of a childhood prayer, the remembrance of a baptism is a legitimate basis for the believer's security and assurance are wrong. The exact time is never the issue. There are some people who don't remember their birth, I don't. My mother told me about it but I don't remember it. That doesn't mean I'm not alive.

There's a fifth reason that some people lack assurance. Some lack assurance because they still feel the flesh strongly and wonder if they have been transformed. They feel the pull of sin. They sometimes feel the pull of doubt. They feel the hankering after the past life and the world and the old relationships. They feel the pull of recycled sinful experiences, dragged back through their consciousness. And they wonder if the presence of all of that doesn't indicate that they are not a transformed person, they are not a new person in Christ where old things are gone and new have come.

But what they're really experiencing is the battle of Romans 7, right? And in Romans 7 Paul says there is a principle in me that's in my flesh and it's there all the time and it's powerful and it's relentless, but it makes me do what I don't want to do and not do what I want to do. And there's another principle in me and it's the love for the Law of God and the Law of God is holy, just and good and I love that Law and I want to do that Law, but I find this war going on in me. And he even says, "O wretched man that I am, who is going to deliver me from the body of this death." In ancient days when somebody murdered a victim, one form of punishment was to strap the corpse of the victim to the killer and as the corpse decayed, the decay ate its way into the living murderer and took his life in a horrific way. Paul said, "That's how I feel sometimes, like I'm this new man strapped to a corpse that's eating at me." But that's what it means to be a Christian in an unglorified state. That's why Romans 8

says, "We wait for the redemption of the body." That's why Paul said, "I can't wait till I receive that glorified body," Philippians 3:20 and 21, "like unto the body of the glory of Jesus."

Do I have so much of sin in my life? Is there so much of the presence of the flesh in my life that I'm not really new? I'm not really changed? How do you know?

Oh, I think it's easy to know. Paul knew because he loved the Law of God and he hated the sin that he saw in him. Before you came to Christ you loved the sin and hated the Law of God. It's about an affection, isn't it? That's why Jonathan Edwards wrote so much about religious affections because they really are the mark of salvation. You once lived in sin and you relished it and you loved it. Now you desire deliverance from it. You once were self-confident and trusted in your own goodness, and now you judge yourself as a sinner before God. You once wanted nothing to do with God and you wanted to run away from His authority, or rebel against it. Now you want everything to do with Him, you desire Him, you desire to know Him and to yield to Him and to please Him. And that's the indication that you're new. You used to deny that you're a sinner, now you confess that you're a sinner. You used to have no interest in cleansing your heart, now you long to have it cleansed. You used to run from any attitude of penitence and now there is penitence in your heart upon any and every sin. And so it's that affection that runs toward the Law of God, toward God Himself, toward Christ.

Bonner, the Scottish preacher whose little church I visited one day with Eric Alexander over in Scotland, a very little church but a very powerful man, he wrote a beautiful old hymn, it goes like this: "I was a wandering sheep, I did not love the fold. I did not love my Savior's voice, I would not be controlled. I was a wayward child, I didn't love my home. I didn't love my Father's voice, I loved afar to roam. The shepherd sought his sheep, the Father sought his child. He followed me o'er vale and hill or desert's waste and wild. He found me nigh to death, famished and faint and alone. He bound me with the bands of love, He saved this wandering one. Jesus, my Shepherd is, twas He that loved my soul. Twas He that washed me in His blood, twas He that made me whole. Twas He that sought the lost that found the wandering sheep. Twas He that brought me to the fold, it's He that still doth still doth keep. I was a wandering sheep, I would not be controlled. But now I love my Shepherd's voice, I love, I love the fold. I was a wayward child, I once preferred to roam. But now I love my Father's voice, I love, I love His home."

That captures it, doesn't it? It's that change of affection that demonstrates that I am His and He is mine. The conflict is there but the affections show us, so is a transformed inner man.

So some lack assurance due to strong preaching, strong conviction. Some lack assurance because of an inability to accept forgiveness. Some lack assurance because they fail to understand the rich truth of the gospel, the work of Christ. Some lack assurance because of an inability to remember the time of salvation. Some lack assurance because of the remaining power of their unredeemed flesh.

Number six, some lack assurance because they don't see the hand of God in their trials. They don't see the hand of God in their trials. And I'll stop with this one.

Kind of goes like this, "Well, if I belong to God and He was my Savior and my Lord, He certainly wouldn't be letting this happen. How could God love me and not hear my prayer when I prayed for my child who died, or I prayed for my spouse who died, or how can I be God's child and accept the promise that He's going to meet all my needs when I lost my job, and I don't know where the next meal is going to come from?"

There are severe tests in life and there are really deadly troubles in life. And there are people who in the midst of that don't see the hand of God in those trials. And because they don't see the hand of God in those trials, they then lose their assurance, fearing that this is evidence that God is not caring for them. But, you know, they miss the very source of their strongest assurance. You want to know what the source of your strongest assurance is? Tested faith, tested faith. That's exactly what our Lord said to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 when he was being battered by the thorn in the flesh, a demon from Satan who was tearing up the Corinthian church and he said, "I asked the Lord three times it might depart from me, and He said My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." You know, nobody is too weak to be useful to God, but many people are too strong. And so, God is in the business of breaking. God is in the business of stripping us down. He's in the business of pruning. He's in the business of taking away everything we have so we see Him clearly. He works that way with Job, right? He works that way with Peter. He works that way with Paul. And He works that way with us. And He's saying power is perfected in weakness.

So Paul says, "Okay, I'll boast in my weakness. I'm content with weakness, insults, distresses, persecution, difficulty for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak then I'm strong." When I come to the end of myself, when I come to the last gasp of my own resources, I have nowhere to turn and I'm in utter dependence and God comes through as He always does for His own beloved children, then and there is my faith taken to a new level. Satan went to Jesus and said, "I want Peter, I want to shake him to the foundation, I want to sift him like wheat. I want to rattle him like he's never been rattled." And Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, I'm going to let him do it, I'm going to let him do it because when it's over and you turn around, out of this experience you will be able to strengthen others. When you've been there through that profound depth and you've seen in the crucible of suffering the power and the goodness of God, you come out with tested faith. When your faith is tested, it comes out refined, comes out strong.

And that's part of the confession that Paul makes in Romans 8 when he says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" He's talking about assurance. I have assurance that nothing is ever going to separate me from the love of Christ, that's assurance, that's confidence. And he says this, "Tribulation won't, distress won't, persecution won't, famine won't, nakedness won't, peril won't, sword won't." How do you know? "Because I've had all those." That's a little summary of his life. He went through

terrible tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, been there, seen the hand of God. Faith is tested and tested faith becomes the foundation for assurance.

Well, we've answered two questions then. Number one, is salvation forever? And the answer is? Yes. Number two, can a Christian enjoy assurance? And the answer is? Yes! Yes. And we enjoy that assurance as we understand the theology of the gospel, as we experience our affections toward righteousness and toward Christ and as we see the glorious hand of God in the trials of our life.

Well, more to be said on that, but we'll keep it for next time when we actually will look at the text around verse 19.

Father, it's been a wonderful day and we have been so immensely encouraged by all that the Word of God has brought to us. This is so practical to know Your mind on all these issues and to enjoy true and saving discipleship, to be real followers, to experience the wonder and the joy of assurance. Thank You that You've saved us and You've given us assurance. So we live boldly and confidently in much assurance looking to the glorious hope of the return of Christ when all our doubts will forever disappear. We thank You for this wonderful grace of assurance, may we thoroughly and fully enjoy it and thereby offer You praise. We pray again in Your Son's name. Amen.

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