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

Resting in the Assurance of Our Salvation
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Well on to the study of the Word of God tonight and we continue in our doctrinal series, obviously, studies in doctrine could take up your entire life, but we're looking at them in a somewhat abbreviated fashion and tonight I want to talk about the doctrine of assurance...the doctrine of assurance.

One of the tragic elements of Roman Catholicism which embedded itself in Christianity in the Dark Ages was the denial that anyone can have the assurance of salvation. It is part of Roman Catholic dogma that no one can know if they are going to end up in heaven. Since salvation is a joint effort, since salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man, salvation ultimately then falls to man. God is not likely to fail, but we are. And since the outcome of our salvation is in our hands, it is seriously in doubt since we cannot know if we will endure to the end. And we cannot know if we have satisfied the requirements of God and are actually saved and additionally very unlikely to avoid Purgatory where even if we've made a noble effort, we will have to spend thousands and thousands of years paying for sins before we are ever given heaven. This is part of Roman Catholic theology, you cannot know that you're saved.

Consequently when the Reformation came, this great truth asserted itself and freed people from this horrific life of fear and doubt. One of the most gifted of Puritan authors, Thomas Brooks, wrote a classic book on assurance called Heaven on Earthand the title of the book really sort of sums up what assurance is. Thomas Brooks said, "Assurance is the experience of divine bliss this side of heaven." "Assurance," he wrote, "yields to the soul two heavens, one here and one there; one now and one later." And so at the heart of the Reformation gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone was the reality that one could know for certain that one was saved. Consistent with God's sovereign election, consistent with God's promise of eternal life, consistent with God's gift of perseverance or eternal security is also God's gift of assurance. Faith itself is the assurance of things hoped for. Assurance is a gift from God. It is part of the promise of God in the gospel. It is not some addition. It is a privilege which we are granted in Christ. It is a birthright that God gives to all His beloved children, to know for sure that you're headed for heaven.

The redeemed of the Lord as the Old Testament puts it, can say so because they know so. It is again an interesting thing to me that assurance seems rarely to be an issue today. Assurance is very little discussed by professing Christians. Popular simplistic books that treat lightly the gospel say nothing about assurance. Preaching today tends not to call one's salvation into question, but to do the very

opposite. Evangelism today normally seeks to make sure that no one ever doubts his or her salvation. Evangelism today wants to illegitimately, but nonetheless to reinforce to people that the most meager approach to Christ and the most simplistic prayer is sufficient to remove any unnecessary question about the reality of salvation. And so the evangelism of today normally seeks to remove all doubts, throwing them all into the category of illegitimacy and even labeling them as unnecessary temptations from the devil himself. Don't let the devil make you doubt. Preachers are afraid to weaken anyone's confidence. Preachers are afraid to ask questions about the legitimacy of one's faith. They are afraid to cultivate thoughts about the fact that assurance could be false. They're really afraid to deal with the terms that Jesus laid down in Matthew 7, "Many will say unto Me, 'Lord, Lord, and I did this and I did that,' and I will then say to them, 'Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you.'" People don't want to deal with those kinds of realities.

And so, today the idea of assurance is not a major issue. We don't hear a lot of discussion about it. You don't hear people addressing the issue of assurance. And it seems to me that fewer Christians, so called professing Christians, than ever before show any concern about the legitimacy of their salvation. The attitude today seems to be, "Look, I prayed the prayer, I said the words, I'm in." They are products of superficial preaching that leads to superficial faith, that leads to superficial self-examination.

But it was a very different thing in the post-Reformation world...very different thing in the world of the Puritans. All through those years from the Reformation through the Puritan movement in England and even into America and through the time of the Great Awakening, the seventeenth century, and the eighteenth century, that followed. Preaching was strong. Preaching was even frightening. Preaching shook people to the core and it called into question their salvation. And the Puritans themselves were rather merciless at this. I think sort of collectively if you read the Puritan preaching, they probably overdid it. They were so concerned that no one have the wrong idea about his salvation, they were so concerned that no one possess a false and therefore damning assurance, that they pounded strongly on the reality of a false conversion, a false faith. John Owen wrote about it and identified it as the most treacherous of things to believe. And it is, to believe you're saved when you're not. And so the Puritans preached hard on true salvation. And people struggled. It almost became for some people a kind of badge of spirituality to doubt your salvation because it indicated that you were falling under the great power of preaching. Maybe we don't want to go as far as the Puritans and bash people to the point where even those who should enjoy assurance can't, but we certainly don't want to end up on the other side in that superficiality today where to call anyone's act of faith into question is somehow tantamount violating the gospel. There is a biblical balance, as always. We can have assurance. I am convinced that God has given it to us as a birthright, not an option but a birthright. It's a part of our salvation. And I want to talk to you about it a little bit tonight. Obviously it's a huge subject, this will be an introduction. But I'll break it down as simply as I can.

In looking at the doctrine of assurance, we look in to two categories, one is objective and the other is subjective. One has to do with something outside of us, the other has to do with something inside of us. That's what I mean by objective, subjective. Objective considers that which is outside of us, subjective considers that which is inside of us. And I am convinced that Scripture calls upon both, that which is objective and that which is subjective, as the ground of our assurance. That is to say we look first to history and then to experience. Both are essential in assurance.

The objective ground is clearly indicated to us in statements like this, 1 John 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." There is objectivity. You believe in the truth of Christ, therefore you are born of God. And in saying "believing that Jesus is the Christ," you are gathering up everything that is true about Christ, the true Christ, His work, His promises. According to 1 Corinthians 1:30, everything is yes and amen in Him. So the objective ground then is what you believe about Christ. To have assurance, you have to believe the right thing.

But secondly, there is subjective ground and that is internal. The subjective ground is the convicting, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us. Romans 8:16, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." It is because we believe something outside of us, the historical fact concerning Christ, and it is because of the work of the Spirit inside of us, those two together produce in us assurance. And so in 2 Corinthians 13:5 we read what is essentially a call, a command, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." Examine yourselves. And you ask the question, "What am I looking for?," right? What am I looking for? Am I looking for a past event? When I'm called to examine myself, what am I...am I looking for a past event, a prayer prayed once somewhere sometime? What am I looking for? Am I looking for affirmation from my parents who tell me I prayed that prayer when I was small? Am I looking for affirmation from a friend who thinks I'm religious and quote/unquote spiritual? What am I looking for?

Well let's start with the objective truth...let's start with the objective truth. What is it that I have to believe objectively? What revealed historical truth must I believe to be saved? This is so foundational I can't...I can't overemphasize it and yet it is obscure to so many people that you would never expect to have a lack of perspicuity or clarity on this point. I remember sitting in the office of D. James Kennedy down in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in a meeting with some of the greatest minds in theology and some of the greatest leaders in the evangelical world and I was sitting in that room for seven hours and we were talking about the essence of the gospel. It was an unbelievable experience, you would loved to have been a fly on that wall, it was everything from compassionate to violent, and everything in between as the battle was raging for the clarity of the gospel. And at the end of all if it, I said to the leading theologian who had been sitting at my right hand, a man revered and respected by all who know anything about Christian theology, I said to him, "You tell me what it is that is the bottom line that must be believed and if you don't believe that, you can't be saved. Where is that? There has to be some non-negotiable, non-optional elements of saving faith, what must a person believe to be saved?" And this gentleman who has written many books, who is astute in

theology looked in my eye and said, "That is a good question." To which my heart said, "I know it's a good question, it is THE question of all questions when dealing with the gospel." But he was unwilling to give me a definitive answer.

If we don't know what we have to believe to be saved, and if we don't believe it, then how are we every going to know who is saved? And how could you ever have assurance of salvation unless you believe what God requires that you believe? The health of the church, listen to this, the health of the church and the impact of the church is always based on the church's ability to keep objective truth clear. It was like that pastor that I quoted or mentioned to you this morning, from a Bible church who was shocked that somebody might think Mother Teresa wouldn't go to heaven just because her soteriology was messed up. It's shocking. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. And the health of the church is always based on her ability to keep objective truth, biblical revelation clear. Never to blur the line between truth and error. As soon as you blur the line between truth and error, you blur the line between Christian and non-Christian. As soon as you water down the gospel, you wipe out that line between Christian and non-Christian. And as soon as you blur the line between truth and error and therefore blur the line between Christian and non-Christian, you throw the door open and welcome Satan and the devil goes to church. Ian Murray writes this, "When churches have recovered from apostasy as at the time of the Reformation in the Eighteenth Century Evangelical Revival, when churches have recovered from apostasy, it is always by a return to discriminating preaching and practice." He further says, "Given the great decline in the English-speaking churches of the Twentieth Century, the chief need again is the reassertion of the meaning of being a Christian."

When our theology gets watered down, the line is rubbed out. And here we are, because we so desperately want to be popular and so desperately want everybody to accept us, we fear being alienated, we fear being marginalized. As John Piper said to me the other day in a phone conversation, "The church is full of wimps." That was his quote, but I agreed. Cause we're afraid to stand up for the truth, afraid of losing reputation and acceptance, wanting so desperately to find something that people will accept, we have blurred the line. And if we're going to deal honestly with assurance, we have to go back and reconstruct the truth. You're not a Christian just because you believe in Jesus, just because you prayed a prayer to Jesus, just because you have good feelings about Jesus. There are things that must be believed. And I was telling the men earlier, we had a conversation, it was kind of a conference call this week with some of us, John Piper and a group of people including Al Moler and R.C. Sproul and Mark Deavor and Philip Rikin, and some of the leading men in evangelical world, and they were all basically saying the same thing. You know, the horror of our time is the church's indifference toward theology. And when it's indifferent toward theology, it blurs the line between a Christian and a non-Christian, and as I said, the devil goes to church. The church that is interested...disinterested in doctrine is left shallow, worldly, weak, self-deceived, superficial. And the really interesting thing is, truth becomes its enemy. And that's the truth, truth becomes its enemy. It's what John Wesley, I believe it was, who said, "In our day to be a true

Christian is to be a scandal to the church." It think truth may be the greatest enemy of the current evangelical drift. But if we're going to have a revival and if we're going to have a reformation, and if we're going to get back, it has to start with the truth again.

Now, we start then in this matter of assurance with knowing that we believe the truth because salvation is predicated on that. Now let me work into that a little bit. Let's take number one point, the objectivity, what it is that we believe. What it is that we believe. Salvation comes not by some mystical experience...I remember, just thought of it, being interviewed on a Christian radio station by an afternoon talk show personality, happened to be a woman who had been on the air in a major city for years giving Christian counsel to people. And it became apparent as she was interviewing me about a book that I had written that she was relatively clueless about almost everything, asking me very strange questions for someone who was on the air three hours every day giving people Christian counsel. And I finally said to her off the air when a commercial was running, "How did you become a Christian?" To which she replied very glibly, "Well I'll tell you, it was really cool. One day I got Jesus' phone number and we've been connected ever since." I mean, I was stunned. I said, "Well what do you mean by that?" She said, "What do you mean what do I mean by that?" She didn't know if there was any more content in it than that. And then she said to me, "Well, if someone asked you how you became a Christian, what would you say?" And so I told her what was necessary...what does it mean you've got Jesus' phone number and you've been connected? This is not somebody on the fringe here, this is somebody giving people answers. This is the expert.

One thing has genuinely occurred in salvation, and I guess maybe the best place to look at it is in Romans 6. Turn to Romans 6, there's a lot of Scriptures, but Romans 6, and I want you to just look at verse 17, it's a great chapter with a lot of wonderful things in it, but verse 17 for now. "Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin...that's what you were...you became obedient from the heart...that was salvation, transformation, conversion, regeneration...you became obedient from the heart...listen...to that form of doctrine to which you were committed." You know what happens to somebody who's saved? They become committed to new understanding. You were committed, *paradidomi*, to deliver, to hand over. You were literally delivered from error to truth. You became a believer when you understood that form, that theology and you were delivered over to it. Literally, you ceased being held captive by error and you were delivered over to a new captivity. It's the same thing in 2 Corinthians 10:5, you brought every thought captive to Christ. So if you're asking the question about your salvation, it all starts at the point of what you believe. First Timothy 2:4 parallels salvation with truth. Paul writes, "To be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." And the end is even, it's a parallel. "To be saved is to come to the knowledge of the truth." To be saved in the New Testament is to believe the message. Christianity means you know the truth and you believe the truth. Being saved means coming to believe with all your heart what is true about the Lord Jesus Christ. Prior to that, you believed lies and deception. And now you've come to the truth.

So what is the truth? What is it you have to believe? Well if you listen to the modern climate today, it would be pretty minimalist, wouldn't it? Broad mindedness, believe in Jesus. That's not what Scripture teaches. Let me help you with that a little bit. Everybody who is a true Christian if you're looking for assurance, you have to go to this starting point. Everybody who calls himself, or herself, a Christian must agree that there's a body of doctrine that is non-negotiable. There's a body of doctrine that is required. There are articles of faith that make up this constituted body of truth that Jude says is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. There are things that must be believed, they are indispensable to salvation. In fact, they are so indispensable to salvation that if somebody doesn't believe them, even though they profess to be a Christian, you are commanded to have nothing to do with them. Second Corinthians 6:14 to 17, you are told that there is no fellowship between light and darkness, there is no concord between Christ and Satan, there is no harmony between a believer and an unbeliever, there is no agreement between the temple of God and idols. Don't be bound together with people who don't believe what you must believe to be saved. The body of truth, the scheme of doctrine to which you have been delivered, the constitutional body of truth is the essence of the faith which saves. They are indispensable truths and if someone denies them, you're not to have any fellowship with them. Listen to what Paul said, Galatians 1:8 and 9, "Even though we, an Apostle, or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be cursed." There is zero tolerance policy for adulterating elements of the gospel, zero tolerance.

If any man, says Paul, is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. Curse is pronounced on those who pervert the gospel. We are commanded to have nothing to do with those people who believe anything other than, more than, or less than the gospel. Listen to 2 John 9 through 11. "Anyone who goes too far and doesn't abide in the teaching of Christ doesn't have God." You mess up teaching about Christ, His person and His work, you're not saved, you don't have God. And then he says, "If anyone like that comes to you and doesn't bring this true teaching, do not receive him into your house, do not give him a greeting, for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." You're not even to greet people like that who come with an aberrant message. They are not of God. They are destructive. They are dangerous. We have nothing to do with them. They are cursed and the last thing we want to do is pat them on the back and make them seem like they belong to our group and therefore participate in their evil deeds. We are commanded then to keep spiritually separate from those who corrupt the essential truths of the gospel, essential truths which have to do with Christ. And if you welcome people like that in, you literally bear the guilt of the false teacher himself. This is very stern language. Any corruption of the gospel is condemned. Any kind of false Christianity is in the category of the most heinous sins. We cannot justify any kind of connection, spiritual union with anyone whose teaching at all corrupts the New Testament gospel.

And that leads us then to the question...what is that truth which saves and delivers? What is that truth which must be believed? What is that truth that is non-negotiable? What is that truth that cannot be denied?

Well it has to do with that which relates to the gospel. Let me just work you through it a little bit. If a doctrine is truly fundamental, it must have its origin in Scripture. Now you say, "Obviously." Well not obviously, it can't have its origin in church tradition, Papal Bull, somebody's vision, somebody's prophecy, somebody's intuition, somebody's idea, can't come out of Mary Baker Patterson Glover Frye, she had husband after husband, or Joseph Smith, or Annie Besant or Judge Rutherford or Madam Blavatsky or any other of those who started the cults. If a doctrine is truly fundamental, it must have its origin in Scripture, not tradition. It is, Paul says, the Scripture which is able to make you wise unto salvation, right?, 2 Timothy 3:15. So whatever doctrine is essential for salvation is a biblical doctrine. The Psalmist said, "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Scripture is sufficient to give us what we need to be saved. And so, we come, first of all then, to the Scripture to find the truth. And as I said, this is in stark contrast to the time of the Reformation when the Catholic Church was its own authority, threatening eternal damnation on anybody who called into question anything the Pope said or anything the church councils decided. For example, in the Canon One of the Seventh Session of the Council of Trent, anathemas were pronounced on anybody who said there are more or less than seven Sacraments established by the Council. The Council said there were seven, so if you say there's six or eight, you're cursed. That means that if any Catholic in the world ever questions even today the Sacraments of Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, mentioned, by the way, nowhere in Scripture, that person is cursed, subject to excommunication and in the Church's eyes, worthy of nothing but eternal damnation because they've called into question the Church's authority. One writer in that day said, "The Church is impudent enough to declare as fundamental its own hay and stubble." They must come from Scripture, these doctrines, and Scripture alone because the Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation.

Secondly, they are set forth in Scripture clearly. This is that perspicuity issue. There's no secret knowledge. There's no hidden knowledge. There's nobody who just popped up and discovered the truth. There's no...and I hate this idea...key that unlocks the teaching of the Bible. You hear people talk like that all the time. This is the key to unlocking the Bible, like the Bible somehow is locked up on its own and it takes person to come along and figure out the key. The Bible was never aimed at intellectuals. That's comforting, isn't it? No, never. In fact, Matthew 11:25 Jesus said, "God hid these things from the wise and the intelligent, revealed in babes." And 1 Corinthians 1 says, "By the wisdom of the world, the world knew not God. Or, "God through the foolishness of preaching brought salvation." The Bible is not riddled with riddles. It is not cryptic or encoded or mysterious or secret. The testimony of the Lord is sure and makes wise the simplest. Every necessary article of doctrine essential for salvation is in the Scripture and is clear....clear.

Third thing to consider is you must believe what is biblical, what is clearly revealed in Scripture and what is fundamental to eternal life...what is fundamental to eternal life. Not everything in the Bible is fundamental to eternal life. What you might believe, for example, about sacrificial ceremonies in the Old Testament and what you might believe about modes of baptism or patterns of church polity, what you might choose to believe about the interpretation of a parable here or there, those things are not necessarily linked to eternal life. But those matters which are essential to eternal life, fundamental to eternal life must be believed. And there are a number of them that are very obvious to us. One of them, to start with is, salvation is by faith. Without faith it's impossible to please Him, he who comes to God must believe. Faith is essential to a right relationship to God. And as you follow the idea of faith throughout the New Testament, you find it's faith alone, not works, as we saw in our study this morning. We find that eternal life comes to those who believe. And what is it that they believe? They believe in the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus is the true God. They believe in His deity. They believe therefore that He is a part of the Godhead. They believe that He is equal to the Father. He Himself said, "All who honor Him, honor His father." You cannot honor Him and not His Father, they're one and the same. Truths then that relate to Jesus divine Sonship, truths that relate to His deity are essential. If you deny the deity of Christ, you can't be saved. That's the struggle I have constantly with the Mormons with whom I interact. They have the wrong Christ. And even though they feel sentimental toward Jesus and they say they love Jesus and they put their faith in Jesus, it's not the Jesus who is the true Son of God. And there are a lot of people who are praying prayers to Jesus and being told that if they just trust in Jesus He'll save them without ever knowing who He is or having any idea.

Even beyond that, to believe in His death as well as His sinless life. And to believe in His resurrection. The Apostle Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God...what?...raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved." How can you leave that out? It's believing and only believing. He who believes, Romans 4, is justified by the One who justifies the ungodly. And I think, and I say this because against the backdrop of what's going on today, it probably needs to be said, you can't tamper with the doctrine of justification either because when I say I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I believe in Him as the One who saved me, as the One who redeemed me, as the One who paid the price for my sins, I am by that saying that I cannot establish my own righteousness and if I am to be righteous before God, it has to be a righteousness that God gives to me because of what Christ has done. You can't escape the great doctrine of imputed righteousness, the great doctrine of justification. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. When we believe, the Law is no longer our hopeless path to righteousness, Christ is. The Jews going about to establish their own righteousness did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God and thus were apostate and doomed.

I think you must also believe in the doctrine of sin. Really, you know, because the Bible says this, if you say you have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, you lie and do not the truth, 1 John 1. If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourself and the truth is not in us. If we say we haven't sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us. Deny your sin and you can't be saved. You must affirm your sinfulness. You must affirm your hopelessness to be saved by any merit of your own. You must affirm that Christ died in your place, redeemed you and only through Him can you be given righteousness from God. You must affirm that God was satisfied with His sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. So it goes.

Many deceivers are gone out into the world. And they always tamper with Christ and the gospel. These are fundamental. So the first thing that gives ground or foundation to our assurance is that we believe the truth concerning Christ. In fact, the fundamental doctrines of salvation are all summed up in the person and the work of Christ. All...the Trinity is there, His deity is there, His sinless life is there, His virgin birth is there, of course. If He wasn't born of a virgin, He would be just another human being. All of the elements of life of Christ, He is the foundation, that's why Paul says, "No other foundation can be laid than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ." Jesus Himself embodies and establishes every doctrine that is essential to salvation. You reject any of the doctrines concerning Christ, His nature or His work, you reject any of those that have to do with who He is and what He did, and you can't be saved. And if you are ignorant of those things, then you're not putting your trust in the person and work of Christ but in some illusion or misinformation about Him. It is Christ in whom we are justified. And that is why the Apostle Paul says, "I preach Christ, I preach Christ, I preach Christ, I preach Christ, I'm determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and particularly Him crucified...the cross, the cross, the cross, the cross and all that goes with it. His virgin birth, He is the sinless God. His deity, He is the Son of the Father. His humanity, fully human. His sinless life, His substitutionary death, His glorious resurrection, His ascension, His Second coming, everything concerning Christ." That is the objectivity of our faith.

So what you want to ask yourself if you're wondering whether you're a Christian is what do I believe objectively? And if you're saying to yourself, "Well I don't know if I buy all that." That's a good indication you're not a Christian. I would sum it up by saying this, a sure test of a true Christian is their response to Scripture, would you agree with that? A sure test of a true Christian is how they respond to Scripture. Unregenerate people do not have any response to Scripture. If they don't like what it says, they throw it away. They ignore it. And that's understandable because by nature they're at enmity against God and against His Son and against His truth and the natural man receives not the things of God, they're foolishness to Him. In fact, Jesus said to the Jews one day, "Because I tell you the truth, you don't believe Me." Then He went on to say, "He who is of God hears God's words." You don't hear God's words because you're not of God. So in general, all who hear the voice of Christ, John 10, are members of His flock. That's why Paul said to the Thessalonians, "For this reason we thank God unceasingly that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us,

you welcomed it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the Word of God." The saved person has a heart that embraces the Word of God, embraces the truth. And what do we have today? This ridiculous idea that dogmatism is unchristian, that doctrine is unchristian. There is no Christianity without doctrine. When I hear people say that, I'm reminded of 1 John 4, "They are of the world, therefore they speak as of the world and the world hears them."

If you can find somebody whose message the world likes, it's because they're speaking of the world and from the world. He who knows God, writes John, hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us and that's how we know the difference between the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. The objective evidence that one is a Christian is one's response to Scripture. The true believer hears the words of God, embraces the truth, takes it in affirms it and particularly that saving truth concerning Jesus Christ. When the Spirit of Truth saves the sinner truly, He brings to that sinner an understanding of, a belief in and an embracing and total commitment not only to the true gospel, but to all the Word of God. And we understand the heart of David who says, "O how I love Your Law."

So that's where you start. We start with that objectivity. Assurance then first is a reckoning of what you believe and embrace from the Word of God. That's the objective. I have maybe five minutes, that's okay. I'm not going anywhere for a while. Let me talk about the subjective, okay? Let me just talk about the subjective. This is the work of the Spirit in the heart. This is again Romans 8:16, "The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God."

Listen, folks, you have not just been justified, it's not just a forensic declaration on the part of God. You have not just been granted righteousness from God's perspective in some legal way. There is another element to your salvation apart from justification and that is regeneration. You're different. You've been changed. And this is where the subjective aspect of it comes in. You have had your sin taken away. You have, according to Ezekiel chapter 36, been given a heart of flesh, the old heart is gone, the stony heart is gone and God has put His Spirit in you. You are, says Paul, the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have been circumcised not in a physical way. We are the true circumcision, says Paul in Philippians 3, who worship in the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. All of a sudden instead of pandering to the flesh, we can't do enough to honor Christ. That's the subjective reality.

So you start with this matter of assurance by asking...what is it that I believe? Do I believe that which is necessary to save? And then you ask...and what do I desire? What is going on in my life? I am...am I seeing a transformation in my life because that's essential? That's essential. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without sanctification, no one will see the Lord. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord." We've been changed.

Let's go back to Romans 6 again, that's the key passage. We looked at verse 17, let me just look at the subsequent words. "You have been transformed by having your heart moved to a form of teaching the truth of the Word of God which you are committed." Verse 18 then adds this, "And having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." That's not hope, that's fact...that's fact. Back to verse 16, "You are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness. But thanks be to God, though you were slaves of sin, you're not anymore." Verse 18, "You became slaves of righteousness." All of a sudden there's a new heart and a new desire and a new servitude. And that's why we always say sanctification is inseparable from justification. We remember when we went through 1 John the...really the whole epistle of 1 John describes for us this transformation. It says in verse 5 of chapter 3, "He appeared to take away sins and no one who abides in Him sins." You don't go on in the same unbroken pattern of sin. "The one who is righteous practices righteousness. The one who practices sin is of the devil. No one born of God practices sin. His seed is in him, he can't sin because he's born of God." It's not saying you never sin, it's saying that the pattern is different, it's not this unbroken pattern of sin, it's a new pattern of righteousness interrupted by our fallen flesh.

So I guess to just sum it up, and I wish we had time, we could take a lot more time, maybe I'll do that, developing the second point. But the issue here is you start with what you believe objectively and you move to what you love subjectively. People have said to me through the years, "Well, you're calling for perfection." No I'm not, I'm calling for direction and that's the issue. We're not talking about sinless perfection, we're talking about direction in the direction of righteousness our desires go, our heart goes, our love goes. And that...that takes us back to what we were saying earlier about Psalm 119, "O how I love Your Law, it's my delight, it's my delight." I read through Psalm 119 a couple of times recently and how frequently the Psalmist says he delights in it, he delights in it, he delights in it. And Paul in Romans 7 says, "He delights in the Law, even though he doesn't fulfill it perfectly because of his fallen flesh."

Assurance is your birthright. You should have it. You should love it. You should enjoy it. You should have two heavens, the heaven to come and the heaven now. And one of the reasons, you know, we would say, "Well heaven is so wonderful. Heaven is so wonderful. It's so glorious. It's so beyond imagination. Why don't we all just long to go there? Why aren't we all miserable here? Why aren't we just saying get me out, get me out, I want to get out of here, I want the heaven of heavens?" And I'll tell you why. The answer is because there's a heaven here. There's a heaven here for those who have assurance. It doesn't get any better than this in my experience. And you can tell me about something I've never experienced, but I will tell you this, I want to go to heaven and experience what I've never experienced but I'm very content to be experiencing the heaven I'm experiencing now. This is a heaven of assurance. This is a heaven of confidence. This is heaven of a solid hope. It's a heaven that I live in because I know what I believe to be the truth. And I know my heart loves and longs to live in that truth. And therein is the evidence that God has done His work in me. He

transferred me from lies to the truth and from sin to righteousness.

Lord, as we think about these things, sometimes imagining there are complexities in these matters, we find it's pretty simple really, as it should be because we need it simple. We're so childish. It is a matter of what we believe and what we love, believing in the truth of Christ and loving righteousness. Therein lies our assurance. And may we rest in the objective and the subjective as our confidence knowing that there will be days when doubt will come because we're human and susceptible to temptation and we may doubt something we know to be true. And we sin and our conscience assaults us and calls into question our salvation. But give us strength to survive those moments and to rest in what we know to be true and what we know we love. Christ is true, His gospel is true and we love Your Law, O God, and long to live in righteousness. Therein is our heaven on earth. Give us the fullness of it, give everyone here the fullness of it until we come to the heaven of heavens and we'll thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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