

Sunday, March 1, 2020

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22)

I’d like to speak this week on the doctrine of “full assurance of faith.” We could define this in a lot of ways, but a simple definition would be that I know that I have faith, and I know that my faith is real. It is when I can say with confidence that “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” (Song of Solomon 6:3). And when I can say with confidence that “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27). Note that Job doesn’t say, “I know that there is a Redeemer, but I can’t really be sure that He’s mine.” And he doesn’t say, “I don’t really know for sure if I’m one of God’s elect, so I’m going to just have to wait until I die to see for sure if Jesus really is my Redeemer.” He says, “I **know** that **my** redeemer liveth.”

David has similar language in Psalm 23:1 - “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Spurgeon: *“It is well to know, as certainly as David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble note of confidence about this sentence. There is no ‘if’ nor ‘but,’ nor even ‘I hope so’; but he says, ‘the Lord is my shepherd.’ We must cultivate this spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, ‘My.’ He does not say, ‘The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leadeth forth the multitude as His flock,’ but ‘The Lord is my shepherd’; if He be a shepherd to no one else, He is a shepherd to me; He cares for me, watches over me, and preserves me. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer’s position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah.”*

Job and David had assurance of faith, and we can too (not in a presumptuous or arrogant way, as if we’re entitled to it, but in thankful humility). I say we can for the following reasons:

1. Biblical saints throughout the OT and NT give evidence of assurance of faith – this isn’t a thing that was unique to just a few people. This isn’t to say that any of them constantly had full assurance of faith – they all doubted from time to time. Think Abraham, David, Jeremiah, Peter. And truthfully, as long as we are in the flesh, there will be a constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit (see Romans 7 and Galatians 5), which is why the scripture tells us that “the inward man is renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16). But we can take some comfort in the fact that these saints, who were weak in the flesh just like we are, were also able to have the joy of assurance of faith.

2. We have clear scripture that tells us how to have assurance. For example, 1 John is written “that ye may **know** that ye have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13). We wouldn’t have instruction on how to be assured unless God wanted to assure us.
3. We have commandments to be assured. For example, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10). He wouldn’t have commanded it if He didn’t want us to do it.
4. We have promises, like “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we **are** the children of God.” (Romans 8:16). God is faithful who made these promises.

The very existence of scripture telling us how to obtain assurance and commanding us to do so implies that being assured of our calling and election is not a given; if it was, we wouldn’t need instruction on the matter and we wouldn’t have to give diligence to make it so. We know by experience that this is a lifelong endeavor; it isn’t a once-and-done activity. Our assurance waxes and wanes. It’s not a permanent state of being; we need new tokens regularly. Sometimes we are sure of our calling and election; sometimes we doubt. Sometimes we are full of the joy of assurance; sometimes we have periods of heaviness and darkness. I say, it’s a lifelong endeavor, but it’s a wonderful endeavor and it yields sweet fruits; there are very few things that are more important than knowing that Jesus Christ really is your Redeemer.

The word translated into the phrase “full assurance” here in Hebrews 10 means “most certain confidence, entire confidence.” We see it elsewhere in the New Testament in the phrases “full assurance of understanding” and “full assurance of hope unto the end” and the gospel came unto us “in much assurance.” (Colossians 2:2, Hebrews 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 1:5). This isn’t talking about a precarious, speculative thing – this is an absolute confidence, grounded on the rock-solid promises of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Before moving on, I would like to clear up confusion surrounding the word “hope.” Often times, we’ll get asked a question like, “are you saved?” or “are you going to heaven?” And a common answer is, “I have a hope.” That is a great answer. It is a Biblical answer. The helmet of our armor is called “the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Paul says in Romans 8:24-25 that “we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” And here is where the confusion lies: the way that we commonly use the word “hope” nowadays is to mean “a wish” or “a desire that things will turn out for the best.” This is absolutely not what the word means in the scripture when we’re talking about the hope of salvation. The scriptural meaning is “expectation of good, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation, anticipation with pleasure.” Our hope is not an uncertain desire; it is a joyful expectation. In one of the Bible dictionaries I have, it says, “*Hope as expectation of good is closely linked with trust, and expectation is also yearning, in which the element of patient*

waiting or fleeing for refuge is emphasized.” That is, it consists in a yearful expectation of the future, trust in God, and the patience of waiting. It goes on to say, “Christian hope rests on the divine act of salvation accomplished in Christ, and, since this is eschatological, hope itself is an eschatological blessing, i.e., now is the time when we may have confidence...for hope is not concerned with the realization of a human dream of the future but with the confidence which, directed away from the world to God, waits patiently for God’s gift, and when it is received does not rest in possession but in the assurance that God will maintain what He has given.”

Within the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can group people into a few categories. At any given time, there are people who are saved who have full assurance of faith, and there are people who are saved who don’t have full assurance of faith. And, knowing that the tares grow up along side the wheat, there are very likely people who fall into that most sorrowful group of those who are not saved, but have “full assurance” that they are. As a reminder, this last group of people is who Jesus addresses at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. I went over this in a [sermon I did on October 6, 2019](#). As a reminder for your edification and use in examining yourself, I mentioned the following examples of indicators of self-deception and a house built on sand:

1. Mistaking a past event or a feeling for salvation
2. Mistaking church membership and activities for salvation
3. Mistaking morality for salvation
4. Justifying and minimizing sin
5. Giving only intellectual assent
6. Refusal to examine yourself
7. Interest in the results of faith and the means of salvation, but not in the Savior
8. Selfishness
9. Disinterest in and/or hostility toward the Word
10. Hatred or hostility toward the people of God

But today’s sermon is primarily for my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are lacking in assurance. I hope that the words you hear today will help to restore your joy in the Lord and aid you in fulfilling the command to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” In his book “Heaven on Earth,” Thomas Brooks wrote: “*A man may be a true believer, and yet would give all the world, were it in his power, to know that he is a believer. To have grace, and to be sure that we have grace is heaven on this side of heaven.*” Some people among us may toil for months or years to come to an assurance that their faith is real. It’s a painful experience for them. They seem to never quite get to the point where they can fully accept that Christ really died for them. There are a lot of reasons for this, but here are a few thoughts about why this might be:

- **Sin** – this is, without a doubt, the greatest hindrance to having a full assurance of faith. Past sins, present sins, backsliding into sins that we thought were long gone. We may ask questions like, “How can I possibly be saved when I am such a corrupt human being?” “Why is my love for God so weak; do I even really love Him at all?” It’s at times like this that you should remember that salvation is by grace alone. Remember that the one that you believe on is “Him that justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). God doesn’t justify the godly – He justifies the ungodly. If you were responsible for saving yourself, then you would have a very good reason to live in doubt and despair and uncertainty – but you believe in that Christ who was your substitute. He took care of it all. God’s Word for it! If that doesn’t reignite your love for God, I don’t know what will. It’s essential to examine yourself, but don’t forget to look at Christ. When you spend all your time looking at your own sinful self and forget Christ, you can really become your own worst enemy in this matter of assurance.
- **Lack of Prayer and Reading the Word** – Sometimes we grow cold in our prayers and our reading of the Word, if we’re even praying or reading at all. This will invariably result in you having that same coldness when you hear the Word preached, or when you take the Lord’s Supper. You will not have any assurance of faith if you are derelict in your communion with God. There is no substitute to spending time in the Word, and meditating on it, and praying.
- **Forgetting the nature of God** – God doesn’t elect us from before the foundation of the world, adopt us as His own children, and then leave us devoid of evidence that He’s our heavenly Father. On the contrary, He is faithful to “give good things to them that ask Him.” (Matthew 7:11). He loves to receive His penitent children and shower them with gifts and blessings: “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him...[and said] Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:20,22-24). You may have forgotten that Jesus Christ desires to relieve burdened sinners, promising that “ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:29). You may have forgotten that our God “delighteth in mercy.” (Micah 7:18).
- **Naturally pessimistic disposition** – We may know a few people like this. Some people are apparently hardwired like Eeyore on “Winnie the Pooh.” I’m happy to see that the Lord Jesus chose a man like Thomas as one of His apostles to remind us that grace can overcome such a personality. He’s the one who gave us such jewels as, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16) and “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). In what may be an understatement, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown say, “lovely spirit, though tinged with some sadness, showing the tendency

of this disciple to take the *dark* view of things.” But remember, our beloved Thomas had one of the greatest confessions of faith in all the scripture when he said, “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28).

- **Fear of being presumptuous** – When we look at the doctrine of election, and we see those decrees as part of the secret counsel of God, we might fear to say “I am one of God’s elect” on the grounds that it is presumptuous. It is definitely good to have a healthy dose of humility here, but if your faith truly rests on Jesus Christ and His work, then you are one of God’s elect. This is why the apostles could rightly identify themselves with the elect of God and identify their fellow Christians as such (see Titus 1:1, Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 1:2). The doctrine of election is a joyous and comforting doctrine; not one that should be used as an obstacle to having joy in Christ.
- **Despising the day of small things** – The Lord tells us not to do this in Zechariah 4:10. Specifically, I’m talking about having a low view of the manner in which the Lord saved you personally, as if the Holy Ghost didn’t do it right. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8). Not everyone has a “road to Damascus” experience like Paul did. Don’t belittle the Lord God by saying, “well, I didn’t have a bright light from heaven and have Jesus talk to me audibly and directly, so I must not be saved.” The same thing goes for not acknowledging what God has done for you since you have been saved. He’s given you spiritual blessings beyond measure, and you have despised them and said they’re not sufficient, or they’re not as grandiose as you, in your great wisdom, think they ought to be. The fact is, they’re all-sufficient and they’re more amazing and grandiose than you’ll ever realize in this life.
- **Satan** – Satan and his devils are constantly at work sowing doubt and fear, and hurling accusations. He’s smarter than you, stronger than you, and more diligent than you. But Christ has defeated him, and Christ has provided us everything we need to resist him. See last week’s sermon on [Devils/Demons](#) for more details.
- **Fatherly Act of God** – For His own sovereign reasons, God may withhold assurance from us. I don’t know what His reasons are, but I know He’s our Father, and I know that Fathers do what is best for their children. Perhaps it’s so we can have a better understanding of how sinful sin is, or perhaps it’s to humble us, or perhaps it’s so that full assurance of faith is all the sweeter when we do have it. In these times, we can only pray that He would shine His face on us (and trust that He will do that speedily), and we must maintain straight paths of obedience.

Now, one may come to me and ask, “how can I have this assurance?” I plan to go over three things to answer that question: 1. The promises of the gospel. 2. The evidences of grace. 3. The testimony of the Spirit. The foundation of assurance is the infallible truths and promises of the gospel. So that’s where you must start.

“But [as] God [is] true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, [even] by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him [are] yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” (2 Corinthians 1:18-20)

The promises of God in Him are yea and Amen. This means that when God makes a promise, it's the absolute truth. He doesn't equivocate. He's not duplicitous. He doesn't speak out of both sides of His mouth. When He says “yea” He means “yea.” He doesn't say “yea” but really means “nay.” He doesn't change, and therefore His promises don't change. In other words, the promises of God are completely reliable. They cannot fail because He is Faithful and True.

When God utters a promise, we can trust it. We can't trust anyone else like we can trust God. If I make a promise to you, I may fully intend to keep the promise, but there could be circumstances outside of my control that would hinder me from being able to keep it. There are no circumstances outside of God's control. When you question God's promises, you question the very nature of God. It's a great insult to not trust the eternal King of the universe, who cannot lie.

So, what are His promises? You know there are thousands, and the more you mediate on the scripture, the more you see. Let's look at Acts 16:31 as an example – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” This is a promise – you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ AS REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE!), and you will be saved. It's God's promise. It's guaranteed.

As I was preparing this sermon, and bringing to my remembrance some of the promises that have been most precious to me, I was reminded of Thomas Watson's words on Colossians 3:16 (“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”): *“Read the Bible with reverence. Think, in every line you read — that God is speaking to you... Read with seriousness. It is a matter of life and death... Read the Word with affection. Get your hearts quickened with the Word. Labor that the Word may not only be a lamp to direct — but a fire to warm. Read the Scripture, not only as a history — but as a love letter sent to you from God, which may affect your hearts. Pray that the same Spirit who wrote the Word may assist you in reading it; that God's Spirit would show you the wonderful things of His law, so that the Word will become effectual.”*

This Word contains great promises written from a Father to His children. For example:

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

**“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”
(Hebrews 2:10)**

“He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Hebrews 13:5)

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

This last verse is one of my favorites in the Bible. The message here is that God finishes what He starts. If He begins a good work in you, He will bring it to completion! I can be confident in that, because God promised it. I know if there is but a weak ember of true, saving faith in my heart, it was wrought by God, and He is going to finish that work that He began. He’s not going to only take me part of the way, and then forsake me. I’m His son, and He’s going to bring me unto glory. And I will be saved to the uttermost. He promised it!

Now, those promises are only for believers (i.e., God’s elect). Some proud sinner doesn’t get to take those promises for himself – they aren’t for him. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 John 2:4). What I need to know is that those promises are for me, personally. And the way to know that is to examine yourself, looking at the inward evidences of grace. If you have grace, there will be evidence. There will be tokens. I said before that God is not going to elect you, and then leave you devoid of any evidence of your election.

So, what are the evidences of grace? If you have grace, you will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it will be impossible for you to NOT have fruit. Examine yourself. Take a look at your heart. Take a look at the course of your life. See how it lines up with scripture. You’ll find attributes of God’s elect throughout the entire Bible, and you’ll also have those attributes. Remember – these are not causes of salvation; these are the results of salvation. Some good places to look at are:

- Matthew 5:3-12 – these are the beatitudes (blessed are: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake and when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake). They are characteristics of the blessed of God (i.e., God’s elect). I did a couple sermons on this in 2018 – [“The Beatitudes: Part One”](#) (9/2/18) and [“The Beatitudes: Part Two”](#) (9/9/18).

- John 10 – this is about the Good Shepherd and His sheep. There are several marks of the sheep of God in this chapter: they know (and love) Him, they know His voice, they hear Him calling them by name, they follow (and trust) Him.
- Galatians 5:22-23 – these are the fruits of the Spirit. Anyone who has the Spirit of God will have these fruits, to one degree or another. We’ve had a lot of sermons over the years on these attributes of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.
- 2 Peter 1:5-7 – these attributes are what we have commonly referred to as a “daisy chain” or “stepping stones” or “building blocks.” This is where you add to your faith virtue → knowledge → temperance → patience → godliness → brotherly kindness → charity. You may recall that Sam did a couple sermons on this passage back in 2015 using the image of building a house: “[Make Your Calling and Election Sure: Part One](#)” (10/18/15) and “[Make Your Calling and Election Sure: Part Two](#)” (10/25/15).
- 1 John – the entire epistle is about showing you evidence that you’re saved. I did a sermon about this little book of 1 John called “[Prove Your Own Selves](#)” (6/26/16) where I pointed out several of these pieces of evidence: walking in the light, confessing our sins, keeping God’s commandments, doing righteousness, purifying yourself, walking as Christ walked, loving our co-elect, not loving the world, overcoming the world, and confessing Christ.

Across these brief passages, you’ll find 30 or 40 marks of grace. That is, if you humbly and prayerfully examine your heart and your walk in life, you’ll see these things if you have grace. Let me be very clear here – you will not have any of these attributes in full measure. In fact, there will be times in your life where you struggle to see any evidence that you have them at all (at dark times like that, rather than drowning yourself in even more despair, it’s time to run and take refuge in the promises of the gospel). You will live much of your life in the same state as the father of the demon-possessed boy in Mark 9 – “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” (v. 24). Because of the flesh, there will never be “sinless perfection” in this life. You will always fall short of the standard, and you will never attain any of these marks of grace to the degree that you desire. The question is not, “do I have all of these marks of grace in full measure at all times?” but rather “do I have them at all, do I grieve that I don’t have them more, and do I hunger and thirst after them?”

Look at the general tenor of your life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, according to the standards laid out in the Word – do you ever have these marks of grace, and have they been increasing as you grow in faith? “The path of the just *is* as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Proverbs 4:18). You may not see all of them all the time, but look at the big picture. Is your path shining more and more? Has Christ been increasing, while you’ve been decreasing? (John 3:30).

Let's take a couple examples from the passages above. Example 1: The Lord tells me that "longsuffering" is one of the fruits of the Spirit. I struggle with being "longsuffering." Sometimes I feel like I don't have it at all. But I pray for the Lord to increase that grace in me, and I know that He has over the years. I know I have a lot of fickle, sinful, worldly reasons to want to be longsuffering, but I also know that the prevailing, abiding reason is because I love the Lord. I know I'm not even close to where I ought to be, but I know I want more of it, and I know if that attribute is there to any degree, it's from the Spirit of God. I have evidence, therefore, that the Spirit of God dwells in me. Example 2: God tells me that those people are blessed who are poor in spirit. As I write this, I can say with no doubt in my mind that as God has graciously given me to understand more about the gospel and the nature of sin, by that same grace, I have some level of poverty of spirit. Again, it is attended with sin, and it is far from what I would desire it to be, but it's evidence to me that God has sovereignly blessed me.

The main danger you'll run into with examining yourself is slipping over into free-willism (i.e., that this is something that you can do on your own without the Spirit of God). This is an activity that must be done by the guidance of the Holy Ghost, according to the written Word. This isn't an activity that is generated out of the goodness of your own heart – it is generated by God. And this isn't an activity where you get to make up the rules and define the words and concepts to your own advantage – stick to the scripture. If you understand that the very fact that you want to give diligence to make your calling and election sure is, itself, a gift of the Holy Spirit, that will be evidence that your calling and election is sure.

The final means of assurance is the testimony of the Spirit:

**“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”
(Romans 8:16)**

This implies that there is some doubt or uncertainty in our hearts – otherwise, there would be no reason for the Spirit to bear witness to us. This is an internal work on the believer's heart, where the Spirit impresses upon you that you are a child of God indeed. It is God testifying directly to your spirit, witnessing to you that the promises of God are for you, personally. It is a reminder directly from God that “I am your heavenly Father, and you are my child.” This may happen while reading the Word, or praying, or listening to a sermon, or taking the Lord's Supper, or talking to one of your brethren, or while under afflictions for His sake. An amazing way that He does this which I've experienced (and I'm sure many of you have as well) is by plucking out the most perfect passage from the Bible to help you in whatever circumstances you're in at a particular time, and delivering that to you from multiple, independent sources.

If you're saved, the Spirit has witnessed to you that you are a child of God at some point. This is not something that He does constantly, and in fact may be rather rare. You may not have even recognized that this is what was happening (don't despise the day of small things). We can't turn our noses up to God when He witnesses to our hearts, but you also want to be careful here. Making too much of this can quickly turn into emotionalism, or mysticism/spiritualism, and can end up with you talking about how the Spirit led you to do this or that thing, when the Spirit did no such thing. Remember that Satan is a great counterfeiter. Everything must be tested against the scripture. If the fruit that it bears is that you love God more, are more humble, mortify sin, have a greater desire to live a life of purity, etc., that is consistent with the scripture. If the fruit is you being flippant about your salvation, pride, or pursuit/justification of sin, that is the work of Satan masquerading as an angel of light. I think of Aimee Semple McPherson, who was the forerunner of all these modern American megachurches and their theatrics, praise bands, faith healings and such. She got started back around 1915 when the Spirit of God allegedly came to her and told her that despite what the scripture said, it was really OK for her to become a preacher, and in order to make that happen, it would be OK for her to leave her husband.

So, I've briefly touched on the promises of God, the evidences of grace, and the testimony of the Spirit. Suppose that you see all of that, and yet you still have no assurance of faith. You see the promises, but you can't claim them as your own – you find no comfort or rest in them. You know what the evidences of grace are, but you can't find those things in yourself, or they're so negligible that they may as well not be there at all. You don't think that the Spirit has ever witnessed anything to you, let alone that you're a child of God. Reading the Bible has become a rote activity. Your prayers (if they exist) are cold and meaningless. The Lord's Supper has turned into nothing more than an addendum onto a sermon that has left you comfortless. If you're content with that state of affairs, that's not a good sign – you're either not saved at all, or you're in a state of severe backsliding. If you're desperate to remedy the situation, though, that's a good sign. It helps to go back to the basics. For example:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

You can ask yourself if you have any love of the Lord Jesus in your heart, and a desire to know Him (Philippians 3:8-11). You can recall the faithfulness of God to you over the years – how many times you've left Him, and He's faithfully called you back, according to promise. You can regain your assurance in the same way you started: repent and believe.

I love you. Amen.