

Assurance of our Salvation (4)

Proposed Study Outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. Biblical illustrations of assurance of one's salvation
- III. Assurance of salvation is the gold of the Reformation teaching
- IV. Foundation of the assurance of our salvation
- V. Reasons for the lack of assurance of our salvation**
 - A. Reasons why God may withhold assurance temporarily
 - B. Reasons in believers that may lead to a lack of assurance**
 - C. Reasons in Satan's activity in the life of believers**
- VI. Manner how to be assured of our salvation

V. Reasons for the lack of assurance of our salvation

Intro: We may possess true saving faith without the full joy of salvation.

1. **Q72. What is justifying faith?**

Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner, by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assents to the truth of the promise of the Gospel but receives and rests upon Christ and His righteousness therein held forth for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

Q81 Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved?

Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it; and after the enjoyment therefore, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions; Yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

2. God for reasons of *sovereignty, wisdom, or justice* may temporarily suspend His sweet assuring smile upon His saints.

This lack of assurance can be agonizing, and more painful than broken bones. (Anthony Burgess)

3. However, the believer often causes the lack of assurance

That our own hearts should be the causes and producers of such distress and darkness when the Holy Ghost thus deals with us, is no wonder, because as we are creatures, there is much weakness and infirmity in us. (Thomas Goodwin)

B. Reasons in believers that may lead to a lack of assurance

1. Deep awareness of indwelling sin leading to a despair of God's mercy
2. False conception of about God's way of bringing assurance of salvation
3. Misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus
 - a. Justification is a *divine act* God makes known in His promises
4. The grieving of the Holy Spirit by various sins, such as
 - a. Neglect of an ordinance or omission of religious duties
 - some seek Christ in some of His ways but not all

Are there not many doubting souls that wait upon God, in hearing the Word of life, and yet neglect and make light of waiting upon Christ in breaking the bread of life? Are there not many that are very careful to perform family duties while they neglect seeking God privately? Others are all for listening and others only praying. When I consider these things, I cease wondering that so many lack assurance, and do rather wonder that any obtain assurance, considering how few there be that are conscientious in waiting upon God in every way and every

service wherein He is pleased to manifest His grace and favor to poor souls. (Thomas Brooks in Heaven on Earth)

b. Cherishing of any secret sins

God has made an everlasting separation betwixt sin and peace, betwixt sin and joy, sin and assurance. God will be out with that man that is in with his sin. He that is resolved to dally with any sin, he must resolve to live in many fears. (Thomas Brooks in Heaven on Earth)

5. Laziness and carelessness hinders assurance

a. God calls to make our calling and assurance sure

Hebrews 6:11-12 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience [enduring] inherit the promises. (see also 2 Peter 1:5-11)

Ah, doubting Christians, remember this, that the promise of assurance and comfort is made over, not to lazy but laborious Christians; not to idle but to active Christians, not to negligent but to diligent Christians. John 14:21-23; 2 Peter 1:10, 11

A lazy Christian will always lack four things: comfort, contentment, confidence and assurance. Assurance and joy are choice gifts that Christ gives only to diligent Christians. The lazy Christian has his mouth full of complaints when the active Christian has his heart full of comforts. (Thomas Brooks in Heaven on Earth)

6. A mental weakness of being of a negative or doubting disposition

a. Puritans called this 'melancholy' (mental depression)

b. Persons with that condition "could offer no good reason for being down and they concluded it must be from 'natural, psychological or bodily (as distinct from truly spiritual) causes.'" (Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*)

Thomas Brooks: *Melancholy is a dark and dusky humor which*

disturbs both body and soul, and the cure of it belongs to the physician rather than the divine. These look through a colored glass and see even the shinings of the Sun of Righteousness and the gracious whisperings of the blessed Spirit as delusions and slights of Satan to cozen the soul.

Richard Baxter on counseling the mentally depressed: *You may almost as easily keep the leaves of trees in quietness and order in a blustering wind as the thoughts of one in troubling passions.*

7. Lack of clarity about the circumstances or timing of one's salvation
8. Self-imposed doubts by despising the day of small things in rejecting the undeniable evidence of God's grace, even small and limited
9. Mistaken view about God's work of grace
 - a. Q114: But can those who are converted to God perfectly keeps these commandments?
No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience, yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God. (HCat)

Hypocrites mistake nature for grace – common gifts and graces for distinguishing grace and salvation (like Saul, Jehu, and Judas). But many dear saints mistake grace for nature and consider the 'pearls they wear' as mere pebbles of no value. (Thomas Brooks in Heaven on Earth)
 - b. Heart renewing grace means that *divine life is pulsing within us.*

True religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation in the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; it is Christ formed within you.

*Now if a person is conscientious and uniform in his obedience, and earnestly groaning under the sense of his dullness, and if he is desirous to perform his duties with more spirit and vigor, these are the first motions of de divine life which, though faint and weak, will surely be cherished by the influences of heaven and grow to greater maturity. But he who is utterly destitute of this inward principle, and does not aspire unto it, but is content with these [religious] performances whereunto he is prompted by education or custom, by the fear of hell, or carnal notions of heaven, can no more be accounted a religious person than a puppet can be called a man.” (Henry Scougal in *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*)*

10. Incorrect understanding of self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28 & 2 Cor. 13:5)

- a. The **secondary foundation** of the assurance of our salvation is the internal evidence of God’s gracious work within the person’s heart and life

*Is it not true, my friend that whilst some of the people of God bring themselves into a state of doubt by reason of the sins they commit, there are very many whose doubts are solely occasioned by the deficiencies and shortcomings of which they are conscious? Sincere and upright weigh themselves in the balance and are found wanting! (David Pitcairn in *Christ our Rest*)*

- b. The cause of this distress or lack of assurance is often a mistaken understanding of the call of self-examination

*Indeed, there is strong impression on my mind that, of all the duties incumbent on the Christian, scarcely any one is either so entirely neglected, or so grievously perverted, or so much misunderstood, as is that of self-examination. (David Pitcairn in *Christ our Rest*)*

- (1) **The neglecters** are those who want to maintain a compromise between Christ and the world

- (2) **The *grievous perverters*** are those seldom troubled because they fail to examine the heart
 - (3) The **'*misunderstanders*'** are often true and upright believers
- c. If self-examination is focused wrong, it will distress and discourage
- (1) the focus is not exclusively the *fruits of salvation*
 - (2) the focus is to be on the *object of faith in our salvation*
Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, ***how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates*** (2 Cor. 13:5)
 - (3) 'self-examination' will bring a sense of shame and sorrow over our shortcomings but is *to strengthen our resolve to look more to Christ*

With regards to attaining assurance of our salvation, we need to watch not to fix your attention exclusively on your faults and failings and so shut out the Savior out of sight (Pitcairn in Christ our Rest)
 - (4) caution: if the examining the 'fruit of grace' cause us to rest and be satisfied with ourselves, we enter dangerous grounds

C. **Reasons in Satan's activity in the life of believers**

- 1. The devil looms large as our 'chief adversary'
 - a. 1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*

b. though his power is clipped, and his influence restrained, he still has access to the saints by Jesus' permission

(1) Satan and his agents watch us constantly

- *It is Satan's practice to go over the hedge where it is lowest (Richard Sibbes in Soul's Conflict)*
- *When he sees a man or woman strongly and comfortably walk with God, he cannot endure that a creature of lower rank by creation than himself should enjoy such happiness. (Sibbes)*
- *When he cannot do greater, he will do the less: if he cannot damn thy soul, he will labour all he can to disquiet thy conscience. The devil aims principally to make us walk sinfully, and if not, then uncomfortably.*

Because he cannot make the children of God to dash their souls in pieces upon the rocks of presumption, therefore he labours to make them to drown their souls in the gulf of desperation. Because he cannot hinder a child of God from going into His master's joy in another world, he labours to hinder their Master's joy from coming into them in this world. The devil would rather play at a small game, than at no game at all. Seeing he cannot keep them from going into heaven itself, he will keep heaven from entering into them. Because he cannot keep you from having grace, he will keep you as long as he can from having the sense of grace. (Christopher Love)

2. Satan's main method to keep believers from assurance: *false reasoning*

a. **Satan (!)** *often argues and charges the conscience of one distressed like, 'Those in whom any sin reigns, or in whose hearts hypocrisy or self-love is the predominant principle, are not in a state of grace. But such a one are you, etc.'*

In this reasoning the major and the first proposition is true. But the minor, the assumption 'such a one are you' is most false. The

deceit lies chiefly in the assumption and minor proposition; that is, in misapplication to a man's self. (Goodwin)

- b. William Spurstowe's response in *The Wiles of Satan*:
It is true a child of God cannot be a hypocrite; but he may have hypocrisy in him.
- note the difference between *sin troubling* and *sin reigning*

Q & A

Next session will be on *How we obtain assurance of our salvation?*
In preparation, it will be helpful if you read and ponder the following:

- Canons of Dort: Head I, 12;
 Head V, art 9, 10, 11, 13 & rej. 5 & 6
- Heidelberg Catechism: Q/A 1, 79, 86, 129
- Westminster Confession
 Of faith: Art. 18, 1-4