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Lesson 2 — Assurance of Salvation

INTRODUCTION

Consider for a moment two different soldiers, both wearing the same body armor. One is the son of the inventor, worked for the company that made it, and was involved in testing it. He even saw someone take a bullet while wearing it and walk away unharmed. The other man knows nothing about the body armor, other than rumors he's heard that some body armor has failed before and people have died even though wearing it. Consider: Will those two soldiers fight differently? What's the difference between the two?

Both men are equally protected, equally safe. But in their attitude, demeanor, and feelings, they will be a world apart. One operates in the battle from a place of confidence and strength; the other engages in fear and insecurity. Those contrasts stem from one fundamental difference—what each one thinks or believes about his body armor.

While not a perfect parallel, in that it fails to consider all the various dynamics at play, that illustration nonetheless shares many similarities with our topic at hand—assurance of salvation. Two soldiers protected by the same armor can feel and think very differently about their security in it. Likewise, two believers equally trusting and forgiven can differ drastically when it comes to their sense of confidence in their salvation. It is a joy, then, to consider from God's Word this morning that **every true believer may indeed have assurance of his/her salvation.**

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT A LACK OF ASSURANCE

The lack of assurances is a problem.

1. Avoidable problem

You and I can know the blessed peace that comes from being assured of one's salvation.

- 1 John 5:9-13 — "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."
- John 14:1-3 — "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."
- John 10:14 — "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."
 - Paul had assurance of salvation (2 Tim 1:12; 4:6-8).
 - Peter had assurance of salvation (2 Peter 1:14).
 - John had assurance of salvation (1 John 4:13).

2. Common problem

The average Christian will wrestle with this issue at least once, for one reason or another. While theirs was of a different nature, the doubting of Elijah and John the Baptist are encouraging to us, in that it reminds us how susceptible any believer is.

3. Serious problem

A lack of assurance should not be taken lightly, for it may indeed be indicative of an absence of salvation. We are always wise to "examine

ourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5), and we are certainly unwise to offer assurance to someone else based on one’s knowledge of their character. Best to leave the provision of assurance to those channels through which God intends to give it (see “Cure” below).

4. **Secondary problem** (i.e., it may actually NOT be a problem)

Eternal security and assurance of salvation are not the same, and assurance of salvation is not even essential to actually being saved. In other words, you can doubt your salvation, but indeed be truly saved.

Furthermore, the lack of assurance doesn’t necessarily indicate spiritual immaturity any more than a strong sense of assurance is a mark of mature faith (e.g., I’ve counseled with some who are absolutely certain of their salvation and indeed have evidence of it, but are ensnared in a particular sin).

Finally, the desire for assurance is itself a motivation for spiritual growth, for assurance of God’s unconditional love “produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the way of the Lord which he prepared in advance” (Dort 5.13). In other words, confidence that we are wrapped up in God’s loving purpose for us in Christ should actually provoke us to reciprocate that with a life of grateful holiness. Thus, the lack of assurance is a secondary problem in that it should actually provoke us to pursue assurance and grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ.

CAUSES FOR A LACK OF ASSURANCE

There are many reasons why we might not have assurance of salvation.

1. **Youth**

Many believers, especially those who grow up in Christian homes, profess faith in Christ between the ages of four and seven. However, when we get older, we often don’t remember much or anything about the event. Doubt can easily set in then, and it is often compounded by the personal examination of one’s worldview and faith that people often experience as they approach upper high school and college. Furthermore, even well-meaning preachers can complicate this problem by suggesting, “Unless you can remember

the exact time and place of your salvation, you are not saved.” Such counsel is hard to relate to the biblically revealed testimonies of Jesus’ 12 disciples (e.g., What was the time/place of their salvation?).

For these individuals, “getting assurance of salvation” at a specific point in time may indeed be spiritually helpful. Cf. Pastor Phelps’ encouragement to have a date/time/place recorded in your Bible in order to point back to a moment of conversion and regeneration.

2. **Personality**

The following personality traits may contribute to a tendency to be fearful and insecure: introspective, tender, doubting, weak in conscience, or feelings-oriented. Timothy may be a representative of this personality (2 Timothy 1:6-8), which often mistakes the ongoing conviction of sin in sanctification as an indication of the need for justification.

These individuals may need to be encouraged with the reality that spiritual struggle/sensitivity is itself a sign of life. Those who are spiritually dead never respond correctly to spiritual stimuli (cf. Ephesians 2:1-3; Genesis 3:6-12); those who have been made alive, however, now have the capacity to struggle and fight for righteousness sake, even as conviction now provokes them in that direction, rather than away from the presence of the Lord.

In addition to those who are more sensitive in their personality, those who tend to be logic- or reason-driven may also wrestle with a lack of assurance.

3. **Sin**

David expresses this reason in Psalm 51:10-12, and since sin does indeed strain our relationship with God, this reason is not surprising and is actually spiritually helpful. But when such sin is not dealt with, or when conviction of sin meets with a sensitive personality, assurance can be forfeited. While he doesn’t seem to lose assurance, Paul certainly demonstrates the emotional impact that our struggle with sin can bring to bear upon our confidence (Romans 7:14-24).

4. Comparison

We may compare our experience with someone else and then question the legitimacy of our own, in light of something missing from ours that we see in someone else's (e.g., an emotion, a particular response, etc.). These individuals should be encouraged by reminding them that God makes each person unique, and that includes their emotions and responses. Such comparisons are not helpful to enjoying one's salvation.

Furthermore, when a strong professing Christian reveals that he was never truly saved until "yesterday," it can be particularly alarming to some who reason, "If he was not saved, then I must not be saved!" These individuals need to be helped to understand that such reasoning is basing their salvation on works. They are comparing their inward evaluation of themselves (which they deem to be so bad) with the outward reputation of the other person (which they deem to be so good), and thus they are forfeiting assurance on the basis of their works compared to the other person's. However, other people do not determine or ratify our salvation; God alone through Christ does that!

5. Suffering

John the Baptist's struggle with doubt (Luke 7:18-23) illustrates that uncertainty often follows on the heels of personal suffering. Difficult circumstances often stir us to elevate feelings above fact and thereby question God's relationship to us. In those times, we need to remind ourselves of the promises of Romans 8:31-39 and Hebrews 13:5-6.

6. Bad doctrine

Many theological aberrations may contribute to a loss of assurance, but at least three are obvious:

- **Legalism (Romans 5:20-21)** — a failure to grasp the "unconditional" nature of our salvation and the free nature of grace ("unmerited favor").
- **Limits on God (Romans 5:20)** — a guilt-driven disbelief that God is able to or would want to continue to be gracious (e.g., "My sin is so bad, even God wouldn't/can't keep me. I've sinned so much, God has lost patience and doesn't love me anymore.")

- **Relativism (John 18:38)** — a post-modern culture that doubts we can have assurance about anything

7. Spiritual warfare

1 Peter 5:8 warns, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Now, due to the precious doctrine of God's preservation (eternal security) that we considered in our last lesson, Satan can never "devour" true believers (cf. Matthew 24:24), but the warning is nonetheless real. Just ask Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

CURE FOR A LACK OF ASSURANCE

How can we experience it?

1. Examine your profession of salvation (1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 3:19).

We are always wise to consider our lack of assurance and pause to re-evaluate ourselves.

- 1 Corinthians 13:5 — "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"
- 2 Peter 1:10-11 — "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- 1 John 3:19 — "By *this* we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him..."

2. Enjoy your possession of salvation.

There are three ways in which we may enjoy our salvation and experience assurance. Or, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (18.3), we don't need "extraordinary revelation" in order to have assurance, but rather only need the "right use of ordinary means." Those means are three-fold:

a. The promises of Scripture (Lesson 1 verses) — RELIANCE

The preservation of God!

For me, the following passages have been particularly meaningful — John 6:37-40, 44; 10:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:13; Romans 3:20-26; Ephesians 1:3-14; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5

Recommendation — *A Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent

b. The practices of a transformed life (Matthew 24:13; 2 Corinthians 1:12; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:1-6, 12-14; 6:9-12; 10:39; 1 John 2:24-25, 28) — RIGHTEOUSNESS

The perseverance of the believer —

- Conviction/confession of sin (1 John 1:5-2:2; 3:4-10; 5:18)
- Love for God/others (1 John 1:9-11; 3:14; 4:7-12, 16-21; Hebrews 9:28)
- Fellowship with God (Matthew 7:23; 1 John 1:1-4)
- Understanding of God's Word (John 8:47; 1 John 2:26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:5-9)
- Obedience to God's Word (John 8:31; 10:27; 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:1-11; 1 John 2:3-6, 29; 3:4-10)
- Fruitfulness in Christian living (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-8; James 2:14-26)
- Present belief in Christ (John 6:47; 1 John 5:1-12, 13, 20)

c. The persuasion of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:19-24; 4:13; 5:6) — RELATIONSHIP

God's Spirit within us witnesses to our spiritual standing and assures us that we are in the family of God.

CONCLUSION

"If you want to know if you are truly in Christ, forgiven of your sins, and sealed for eternal life, you should [1] rest in the good news of justification by faith alone, [2] listen for the Spirit speaking to your spirit that you are a child of God, and [3] discern (with the help of others) that God is slowly but surely changing you from one degree of glory to the next. Different people at different times under different circumstances will need to hear about all three grounds of assurance. It matters whether you are introspective, doubting, weak in conscience, presumptuous, prone to trust your feelings, or prone to rely on nothing but reason. God motivates us and comforts us in different ways. All three grounds for assurance are Scriptural and given for the cure of souls and the care of God's people" (Kevin DeYoung, <http://wp.me/p5FX8d-1AO>).

Not long ago, Billy Graham was invited to a luncheon in his honor. While initially hesitant to accept due to his struggles with Parkinson's disease, he finally accepted at the hosts' insistence.

After wonderful things were said about him, Dr. Graham stepped to the rostrum, looked at the crowd, and said: "I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by Time magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train, when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his trouser pockets. It wasn't there. He looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still couldn't find it.

"The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.'

"Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

"The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are; no problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

Einstein looked at him and said, "Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

Having said that Billy Graham continued, "See the suit I'm wearing? It's a brand new suit. My children, and my grandchildren are telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: "I not only know who I am. I also know where I'm going."

(source unknown)