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THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE

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THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE

1. Introduction

By way of introduction and in order to acquaint the reader with the particular angle or viewpoint from which we now approach our present theme, let it be pointed out that changing conditions in Christendom call for an ever-varying emphasis on different aspects of divine Truth. Did space allow, and were the writer fully equipped for such a task, it would be both interesting and instructive to give in detail *the history* of the preaching of Assurance throughout this dispensation. Instead, we can barely outline it. At different periods the true servants of God have had to face widely different situations, and meet errors of varied character. This has called for a campaign of offense and defense adapted to the exigencies of many situations. The weapons suited to one conflict were quite useless for another; fresh ones needing to be constantly drawn from the armoury of Scripture.

At the close of that lengthy period known as “the dark ages,” (though throughout it God never left Himself without a clear witness), when the Lord caused a good of light to break forth upon Christendom, the Reformers were faced by the hoary errors of Romanism, among which was her insistence that none could be positively assured of his Salvation till the hour of death was reached. This caused Luther and his contemporaries to deliver a positive message, seeking to stimulate confidence toward God and the laying hold of His sure promises. Yet it has to be acknowledged that there were times when their zeal carried them too far, leading to a position which could not be successfully defended from the Scriptures. Many of the Reformers insisted that assurance was an essential element in saving faith itself, and that unless a person *knew* he was “accepted in the Beloved,” he was yet in his sins. Thus, in the revolt from Romanism, the Protestant pendulum swung too far to the opposite side.

In the great mercy of God the *balance* of Truth was restored in the days of the Puritans. The principal doctrine which Luther and his fellows had emphasized so forcibly was justification by faith alone. But at the close of the 16th Century and in the early part of the 17th, such men as Perkins, Gattaker, Rollock, etc., made prominent the collateral doctrine of sanctification by the Spirit. For the next 50 years the Church on earth was blest with many men “mighty in the Scriptures,” deeply taught of God, enabled by Him to maintain a well-rounded ministry. Such men as Goodwin, Owen, Charnock, Flavel, Sibbes, etc., though living in troublous times and suffering fierce persecution, taught the Word more helpfully (in our judgment) and were more used of God than any since the days of the Apostles to the present hour.

The ministry of the Puritans was an exceedingly searching one. While magnifying the free grace of God in no uncertain terms; while teaching plainly that the satisfaction of Christ alone gave *title* to Heaven; while emphatically repudiating all creature-merits—they nevertheless insisted that a supernatural and transforming work of the Spirit in the heart and life of the believer was indispensable to fit him for Heaven. Professors were rigidly tested, and the results and fruits of faith were demanded before its presence was admitted. Self-examination was frequently insisted upon, and full details given as to how one might ascertain that he was a “new creature in Christ Jesus.” Christians were constantly urged to “make their calling and election sure” by ascertaining that they had clear evidence of the same. While conditions were far from being perfect, yet there is good reason to conclude that more deluded souls were undeceived and more hypocrites exposed than at any other period since the 1st Century A. D.

The 18th Century witnessed a sad declension and departure from the faith. Worldly prosperity brought in spiritual deterioration. As the Puritan leaders died off, none were raised up to fill their places. Arminianism spread rapidly, followed by Deism (Unitarianism) and other fatal errors. Worldliness engulfed the churches, and lawlessness and wickedness were rampant without. The Gospel-trumpet was almost silent, and the remnant of God’s people dwindled down to an insignificant and helpless handful. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Again, the light of God shone forth powerfully in the darkness: Whitefield, Romaine, Gill, Hervey, and others being raised up by God to revive His saints and convert many sinners to Christ. The main emphasis of their preaching and teaching was upon the sovereign grace of God as exhibited in the Everlasting Covenant, the certain efficacy of Christ’s atonement unto all for whom it was made, and the work of the Spirit in regeneration.

Under the God-given revivals of the latter part of the 18th Century the *great doctrine* of the Christian faith occupied the most prominent place. In order that the balance of truth might be preserved during the next two or three generations, it became necessary for the servants of God to emphasize the *experimental* side of things. Intellectual orthodoxy qualifies none for Heaven: there must be a moral and spiritual transformation, a miracle of grace wrought within the soul which

begins at regeneration and is carried on by sanctification. During that period doctrinal exposition receded more and more into the background, and the practical application of the Word to the heart and life was the characteristic feature in orthodox circles. This called for serious self-examination, and that, in many cases, resulted in doubting and despondency. Where a due balance is not preserved by preachers and teachers between the objective and subjective sides of the truth—where the latter preponderates, either a species of mysticism or lack of assurance ensues.

The second half of the 18th Century found many circles of professing Christians on the borders of the Slough of Despond. In many companies the full assurance of salvation was looked upon as a species of fanaticism, or as carnal presumption. Unduly occupied with themselves, ill-instructed upon the “two natures” in the Christian, thousands of poor souls regarded doubts and fears, sighs and groans, as the highest evidence of a regenerate state—but those being mixed with worldly and fleshly lusts, the subjects were afraid to affirm they were children of God. To meet this situation many ill-trained evangelists and teachers sought to direct attention to Christ and His “finished work,” and to get their hearers’ confidence placed upon the bare Word of God. While one evil was corrected, another was committed: while the letter of Scripture was honoured, the work of the Spirit was (unwittingly) dishonoured. Supposing they had a remedy which was sure to work in all cases alike, a superficial work resulted, the aftermath of which we are now reaping. Thousands of souls who give no evidence of being born again are quite confident that Christ has saved them.

From the brief outline presented above, it will be seen that the pendulum has swung from one side to the other. Man is a creature of extremes, and nothing but the grace of God can enable any of us to steer a middle path. A careful study of the course of religious history also reveals the fact that the servants of God have been obliged, from time to time, to vary their note of emphasis. This is the one meaning of that expression, “And be established in the present truth” (2Pe 1:2), namely, that particular aspect or line of truth which is most needful at any given time. Instead of gaining ground, the Puritans lost it had they merely echoed what the Reformers had taught. It was not that Owen contradicted Luther, rather did he *supplement* him. Where particular stress has been laid on the counsels of sovereign grace and the imputed righteousness of Christ, this needs to be followed by attention being drawn to the work of the Spirit *within* the saints. In like manner, where much ministry has been given on the Christian’s state, there is a need for a clear exposition of his standing before God.

It is truly deplorable that so few have recognized the need for *applying* the principle that has just been mentioned. So many, having a zeal which is not tempered by knowledge, suppose that because some honoured servant of God in the past was granted much success through his dwelling so largely upon one particular line of truth, that *they* will have equal success provided they imitate him. But circumstances alter cases. The different states through which the professing Church passes call for different ministry. There is such a thing as “a word spoken *in due season*” (Pro 15:23): O that it may please God to open the eyes of many to see what is most “seasonable” for the degenerate times in which our lot is cast, and grant them spiritual discernment to recognize that even many portions of divine Truth may prove highly injurious to souls if given them *out of season*.

We recognize this fact easily enough in connection with material things—why are we so slow to do so when it concerns spiritual things? Meats and nuts are nutritious, but who would think of feeding them to an infant? So, too, sickness of body calls for a change of diet. The same is true of the soul. To make this clearer, let us select one or two extreme cases. The truth of eternal punishment should be faithfully preached by every servant of God, but would a broken-hearted woman who had just lost her husband or child be a suitable audience? The glory and bliss of the heavenly state is a precious theme, but would it be fitting to present it unto a professing Christian who was intoxicated? The eternal security of the saints is clearly revealed in Holy Writ, but does that justify me pressing it on the attention of a *backslidden* child of God?

Our introduction is proving to be a lengthy one, yet we deem it necessary to pave the way for what follows. The servant of God is facing today a dreadfully serious and solemn situation. Much that is dearest of all to his heart he has largely to be silent upon. If he is to faithfully deal with souls, he must address himself to the condition they are in. Unless he is much upon his guard, unless he constantly seeks wisdom and guidance from above he is likely to make bad matters worse. On every side are people full of assurance, certain that they are journeying to Heaven; yet their daily lives show plainly that they are deceived, and that their assurance is only a fleshly one. Thousands are, to use their own words, “resting on John 3:16,” or 5:24, and have not the slightest doubt they will spend eternity with Christ. Nevertheless, it is the bounden duty of every real servant of God to tell the great majority of them that they are woefully deluded by Satan. O that it may please God to give us the ear and serious attention of some of them.

Some time ago we read of an incident which, as nearly as we recall, was as follows. Nearly 100 years hence, conditions in England were similar to what they have recently been in this country. Banks were failing, and people were panic-stricken. One man who had lost confidence in the banks, drew out all his money in five-pound notes, and then got a friend to change them into gold. Conditions grew worse, other banks failed, and some of this man’s friends told him they had lost their all. With much confidence he informed them that he had drawn out *his* money, had changed it into gold, and that this was secretly hidden where no one would find it, so that he was perfectly safe. A little later, when needing to buy some things, he went to his secret hoard and took out five golden sovereigns. He went from one shop to another, but none would accept them—they were bad. Thoroughly alarmed, he went to his hidden money, only to find that it was all counterfeit coin!

Now dear reader, you, too, may be quite sure that *your* faith in Christ is *true* “gold,” and yet, after all, be mistaken. The human heart is dreadfully deceitful (Jer 17:9). God’s Word plainly warns us that “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is *not washed* from their filthiness” (Pro 30:12). Do you ask (O that you may, in deep earnestness and sincerity), How can I be *sure* that my faith is a genuine and saving one? The answer is, *Test* it. Make certain that it is the, “faith of God’s elect” (Ti 1:1). Ascertain whether or not your faith is accompanied with those *fruits* which are inseparable from a God-given and Spirit-wrought faith.

Probably many are ready to say, There is no need for me to be put to any such trouble; I *know* that *my* faith is a saving one, for I am resting on the finished work of Christ. But dear friend, it is foolish to talk like that. God Himself bids His people *to make* their “calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). Is that a needless exhortation? O pit not your vain confidence against divine wisdom. It is Satan who is striving so hard to keep many from this very task, lest they discover that their house is built on sand. There is hope for one who discovers his illusion, but there is none for those who go on believing the Devil’s lie, and rest content with the very real but *false* peace which he gives to so many of his poor victims.

God Himself has supplied as *with tests*, and we are mad if we do not avail ourselves of them, and honestly measure ourselves by them. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, *that ye may know* that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe (more intelligently) on the name of the Son of God” (1Jo 5:13). The Holy Spirit Himself moved one of His servants to write a whole Epistle to instruct as *how* we might know whether or not we have eternal life. Does that look as though the question may be determined and settled as easily as so many present-day preachers and writers represent it? If nothing more than a firm persuasion of the truth of John 3:16 or 5:24 be needed to assure me of my salvation, then why did God give a whole Epistle to instruct us on this subject?

Let the really concerned soul read slowly and thoughtfully through this first Epistle of John, and let him duly observe that not once in its five chapters are we told, “We know that we have passed from death unto life *because* we are resting on the finished work of Christ.” The total absence of such a statement ought, surely, to convince us that something must be radically wrong with so much of the popular teaching of the day on this subject. But not only is there no such declaration made in this Epistle, the very first passage which contains the familiar “we know” is quite the reverse of what is now being so widely advocated as the *ground* of Christian assurance. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1Jo 2:3). Is not that plain enough? A *godly life* is the first proof that I am a child of God.

But let us observe the solemn declaration that immediately follows. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). Do these words anger you? We trust not: they are God’s, not ours. Do you refuse to read any more of this article? That would be a bad sign—an *honest* heart does not fear the light. A sincere soul is willing to be searched by the Truth. If you are unable to endure now the feeble probing of one of His servants, how will it fare in a soon-coming day when the Lord Himself shall search you through and through? O dear friend, give your poor soul a fair chance, be willing to ascertain whether your faith is real wheat, or only chaff. If it proves to be the latter, there is still time for you to humble yourself before God and cry unto Him to give you saving faith. But in that Day it will be too late!

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). How plain and pointed is that language! How awful its clear intimation! Do you not see, dear reader, this verse plainly implies that there *are those* who claim to *know* Christ, and yet are liars? The father of lies has deceived them, and he is doing everything in his power to keep them from being undeceived. *That* is why the unregenerate reader finds this article so unpalatable, and wishes to turn from it. O resist this inclination, we beseech you. God has given us this very verse by which we may measure ourselves, and discover whether or not our “assurance of salvation” will stand the test of His Holy Word. Then act not like the silly ostrich, which buries his head in the sand, rather than face his danger.

Let us quote one more verse from this *first* “we know” passage in John’s Epistle: “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1Jo 2:5). This stands in sharp contrast from the preceding verse. The Apostle was here moved to set before us some clear Scriptural *evidences* of spiritual faith and love, within constitute the vital difference between sheep and goats. In verse 4 it is the empty professor who says, “I know Christ as my personal Saviour.” He has a theoretical, but not a vital knowledge of Him. He boasts that he is resting on Christ’s finished work, and is confident that he is saved: but keeps not His commandments. He is still a *self-pleaser*. Like Solomon’s sluggard, he is “wiser in his own conceits than seven men that *can* render a reason” (Pro 26:16). He talks boldly, but walks carelessly.

In verse 5 it is the genuine Christian who is in view. *He* does not say, “I know Him,” instead, he *proves* it. The Apostle is not here presenting Christ as the immediate Object of faith, but is describing him who has savingly fled to the Lord for refuge, and this, by the effects produced. In him Christ’s Word is everything: his food, his constant meditation, his chart. He “keeps” it in memory, in heart, in action. Christ’s “commandments” occupy his thoughts and prayers as much as do His promises. That Word working in him subdues his carnal desires, feeds his graces, and draws them into real exercise and action. That Word has *such* a place in his heart and mind that he cannot but give proof of the same in his talk and walk. In

this way the “love of God is perfected”: the Family likeness is plainly stamped upon him. All can see *to which* “father” he belongs—contrast John 8:44.

“Whoso keepeth his word... hereby [in this way] know we that we are in him.” Keep His Word perfectly? No. But actually, characteristically, in deep desire and honest effort to do so? Yes. Regeneration is that miracle of divine grace wrought in the soul which enlists the affections Godwards—which brings the human will into subjection to the divine—and which produces a real and radical change in the life. That change is from worldliness to godliness, from disobedience to obedience. At the new birth the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and that love is manifested in a dominating longing and sincere purpose *to please in all things* the One who has plucked me as a brand from the burning. There is a greater difference between the genuine Christian and the deceived professing Christian than there is between a living man and a corpse. None need remain in doubt if they will *honestly measure themselves* by the Holy Word of God.

There is only space left for us to consider one other Scripture in this opening article, namely, the parable of the sower. Why did the Lord Jesus give us that parable? Why, but to stir me up to serious inquiry and diligent examination so as to discover *which* kind of a “hearer” I am. In that parable, Christ likened those who hear the Word unto various sorts of ground upon which seeds fall. He divided them into four different classes. Three out of the four brought no fruit to perfection. That is exceedingly solemn and searching. In one case the Devil catches away the good seed out of the heart (Luk 8:12). In another case, they “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luk 8:13). In another case, they are “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luk 8:14). Are you, my reader, described in one of these? Do not ignore this question. We beg you: face it honestly, and make sure *which* of the various soils represent *your* heart.

But there are some “good ground” hearers. And *how are they to be identified?* What did the infallible Son of God say of them? How did He describe them? Did He say, “that on the good ground are they who rest on the Word of God and doubt not His promises: are thoroughly persuaded they are saved, and yet go on living the same kind of life as previously”? No. He did not. Instead, He declared, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luk 8:15). Ah, dear readers, the test is *fruit*: not knowledge, not boasting, not orthodoxy, not joy, but FRUIT: and *such* “fruit” as mere nature cannot produce. It is the fruit of the Vine, namely, *likeness to Christ*, being conformed to His Image. May the Holy Spirit search each one of us.

2. Its Nature

“Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation? Answer: Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him (1Jo 2:3) may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the Truth of God’s promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made (1Jo 3:14, 18-19, 21, 24, etc.), and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God (Rom 8:16), be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace and shall persevere therein unto salvation (1Jo 5:13; 2Ti 1:12).”

“Assurance is the believer’s full conviction that, through the work of Christ alone, received by faith, he is in possession of a salvation in which he will be eternally kept. And this assurance rests only upon the Scripture promises to him who believe.”

The careful reader will perceive a considerable difference of doctrine in the two quotations given above. The former is the product of the Puritans, the latter is a fair sample of what the boasted enlightenment of the 20th Century has brought forth. The one is extracted from the Westminster Catechism of Faith (the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterians), the other is taken from the “Scofield Bible.” In the first, the balance of Truth is helpfully preserved: in the second, the work and witness of the Holy Spirit is altogether ignored. This example is only one out of scores we could cite which sadly illustrates how far we have gone backwards. The answer given by the Puritans is calculated to lead to heart searching; the definition (if such it may be called) of the popular dispensationalist is likely to bolster up the deluded. This brings us to consider, more definitely, in regard to assurance, *its nature*.

Let us begin by asking the question, Assurance *of what?* That the holy Scriptures are the inspired and infallible Word of God? No, that is not our subject. Assured that salvation is by grace alone? No, for neither is that our immediate theme. Rather, the assurance that I am no longer in a state of nature, but in a state of grace: and this, not as a mere conjectural persuasion, but as resting on sure evidence. It is a well authenticated realization that not only has my mind been enlightened concerning the great truths of God’s Word, but that a supernatural work has been wrought in my soul which has made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. A Scriptural assurance of Salvation in that knowledge which the Holy Spirit imparts to the heart through the Scriptures—that *my* faith is not a natural one, but “the faith of God’s elect” (Ti 1:1)—that my love for Christ is sincere and not fictitious and that my daily walk is that of a regenerated man.

The assurance of the saints is, as the Westminster divines said, “by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made.” Let us seek to amplify that statement. At the commencement of Matthew 5 we find the Lord Jesus pronouncing *blessed* a certain class of people. They are not named as “believers” or “saints,”

but instead are described by their *characters*. And it is only by comparing ourselves and others with the description that the Lord Jesus there gave that we are enabled to *identify* such. First, He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” To be “poor in spirit” is to have a feeling sense that in me, that is, in my flesh, “there dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18). It is the realization that I am utterly destitute of anything and everything which could commend me favourably to God. It is to recognize that I am a spiritual bankrupt. It is the consciousness, even now (not years ago, when I was first awakened), that I am without strength and wisdom that I am a helpless creature, completely dependent upon the grace and mercy of God. To be “poor in spirit” is the opposite of Laodiceanism, which consists of self-complacency and self-sufficiency, imagining I am “rich, and in need of nothing.”

“Blessed are they that mourn.” It is one thing to believe the theory that I am spiritually a poverty-stricken pauper. It is quite another to have an acute sense of it in my soul. Where the latter exists, there are deep exercises of heart which evoke the bitter cry, “my leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!” (Isa 24:16). There is deep anguish that there is so little growth in grace, so little fruit to God’s glory, such a wretched return made for his abounding goodness unto me. This is accompanied by an ever-deepening discovery of the depths of corruption which is still within me. The soul finds that when it would do good, evil is present with him (Rom 7:21). It is grieved by the motions of unbelief, the swelling of pride, the surging of rebellion against God. Instead of peace, there is war within: instead of realizing his holy aspirations, the blessed one is daily defeated—until the stricken heart cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).

“Blessed are the meek.” Meekness is *yieldedness*. It is the opposite of self-will. Meekness is pliability and meltedness of heart, which makes me submissive and responsive to God’s will. Now observe, dear reader, these first three marks of the “Blessed” consist not in outward actions, but of inward graces; not in showy deeds, but in the state of our *soul*. Note, too, that they are far from being characteristics which will render their possessor pleasing and popular to the world. He who feels himself to be a spiritual pauper will not be welcomed by the wealthy Laodiceans. He who daily mourns for his leanness, his barrenness, his sinfulness, will not be courted by the self-righteous. He who is truly meek will not be sought after by the self-assertive. No, he will be scorned by the Pharisees and looked upon with contempt by those who boast they are “out of Romans 7 and living in Romans 8.” These lovely graces, which are of great price in the sight of God, are despised by the bloated professors of the day.

We must not now review the additional marks of the “Blessed” named by the Redeemer at the beginning of His precious Sermon on the Mount, but at one other we will just glance. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake... Blessed are ye when men shall revile you... for my sake” (Mat 5:10-11). Observe that this antagonism is not evoked by wrong-doing or by a well-grounded offense. They who are morose, selfish, haughty, evil-speakers, cruel—have no right to shelter behind this beatitude when people retaliate against them. No, it is when Christlikeness of character and conduct is assailed; where practical godliness condemns the worldly ways of empty professors, that fires their enmity—where humble but vital piety cannot be tolerated by those who are destitute of the same. Blessed, said Christ, are the spiritual whom the carnal *hate*—the gentle sheep whom the dogs snap at.

Now, dear reader, seek grace to honestly measure yourself by these criteria. Do such heavenly graces adorn your soul? Are these marks of those whom the Son of God pronounces “Blessed” stamped upon your character? Are you truly “poor in spirit”? We say “truly,” for it is easy to adopt expressions and call ourselves names—if you are offended when someone else applies them to you, it shows you do not mean what you say. Do you “mourn” over your lack of conformity to Christ, the feebleness of your faith; the coldness of your love? Are you “meek”? Has your will been broken and your heart made submissive to God? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?—do you use the means of grace, your searchings of the Scriptures, your prayers? Are you “merciful,” or censorious and harsh? Are you “pure in heart”?—grieved when an impure imagination assails? If not, you have no right to regard yourself as “Blessed”; instead, you are under the curse of a holy and sin-hating God.

It is *not*, Are these spiritual graces *fully developed* within you—they never are in this life. But are they truly present at all? It is *not*, Are you completely emptied of self, but is it your sincere desire and earnest prayer to be so? It is not do you “mourn” as deeply as you ought to over indwelling sin and its activities, but have you felt at all “the plague” of your own heart? (1Ki 8:38). It is not is your meekness all that can be desired, but is there unmistakable proof that the root of it has actually been communicated to your soul? There is a growth: “first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” But that which has no existence can have no growth. Has the “seed” (1Pe 1:23) of grace been planted in your heart? *That is the point* which each of us is called upon to determine—not to assume, or take for granted, but to make “sure” (2Pe 1:10). And this is done when we faithfully examine our hearts to discover whether or not there is in them those spiritual graces to which the promises of God are addressed.

While Gospel assurance is the opposite of carnal presumption and of unbelieving doubt, yet it is far from being opposed to thorough self-examination. But, alas, so many have been taught, and by men highly reputed for their orthodoxy, that if it is not actually wrong, it is highly injurious to a Christian to look within. There is a *balance* of truth to be observed here, as everywhere. That one might become too introspective is readily granted, but that a Christian is never to search his own heart, test his faith, scrutinize his motives, and make sure that he has the “root of the matter” within him (Job 19:28), is

contradicted by many plain Scriptures. Regeneration is a work which God performs *within* us (Phi 1:6), and as eternal destiny hinges on the same, it behooves every serious soul to take the utmost pains and ascertain whether or not this miracle of grace has been wrought within him. When Paul stood in doubt of the state of the Galatians, he said, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed *in* you" (4:19). So, too, to the Colossians he wrote, "Christ *in* you the hope of glory" (1:27).

"For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in (or "by") God" (Joh 3:20-21). Here is one of the vital differences between the unregenerate and the regenerate, the unbelieving and the believing. Unbelief is far more than an error of judgment, or speculative mistake into which an *honest* mind may fall; it proceeds from heart-enmity against God. The natural man, while left to himself, hates the searching light of God (v. 19), fearful lest it should disquiet the conscience, expose the fallacy of his presumptuous confidence, and shatter his false peace. But it is the very reverse with him who has been given "an honest and good heart." He who acts sincerely and conscientiously, desiring to know and do the whole will of God without reserve, welcomes the light.

The genuine Christian believes what Scripture says concerning the natural heart, namely, that it is "deceitful above all things" (Jer 17:9), and the surest proof that he *does* believe this solemn fact is that he is deeply concerned lest "a deceitful heart has turned *him aside*" (Isa 44:20), and caused him to believe that all is well with his soul, when in reality he is yet "in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity." He believes what God's Word says about Satan, the great deluder, and trembles lest, after all, the Devil has beguiled him with a false peace. Such a possibility, such a likelihood occasions him much exercise of soul. Like David of old (and every other genuine saint), he "communes with his own heart" (Psa 4:4), and "his spirit makes *diligent search*" (Psa 77:6). He turns to the light of Holy Writ, anxious to have his character and conduct scrutinized by the same, desiring to have his deeds made manifest as to whether they proceed from self-love or real love to God.

It is not that we are here seeking to foster any confidence in self, rather do we desire to promote real confidence toward God. It is one thing to make sure that I love God, and it is quite another for me to find satisfaction in that love. The self-examination which the Scriptures enjoin (in 1Co 11:28, for example), is not for the purpose of finding something within to make me more acceptable to God, nor as a ground of my justification before Him; but is with the object of discovering whether Christ is being formed within me. There are two extremes to be guarded against: such an undue occupation with the work of the spirit *within*, that the heart is taken right off from the work of Christ *for* His people; and, such a one-sided emphasis upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, that the righteousness *imparted* by the Spirit is ignored or disparaged. It is impossible that the Third Person of the Trinity should take up His abode within a soul, without effecting a radical change within him: and it is *this* which I need to make sure of. It is the Spirit's work within the heart which is the only infallible proof of salvation.

It is perfectly true that as I look within and seek to faithfully examine my heart in the light of Scripture, that the work of the Spirit is *not* all I shall discover there. No, indeed. Much corruption still remains. The genuine Christian finds clear evidence of *two* natures, *two* contrary principles at work within him. This is brought out plainly, not only in Romans 7 and Galatians 5:17, but strikingly, too, in the Song of Solomon: "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of *two* armies" (6:13). Hence it is that in her present state, the Bride says, "I am black, but comely. O ye daughters of Jerusalem; as the tents of Kedar, and the curtains of Solomon" (1:5). And again, "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (5:2)—strange language to the natural man, but quite intelligible to the spiritual. And therefore is it also that the renewed soul so often finds suited to his case the prayer of Mark 9:24. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

It is because the real Christian finds within himself so much that is conflicting that it is difficult for him to be sure of his actual state. And therefore does he cry, "Examine me, O LORD; and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psa 26:2). They who are filled with a carnal assurance, a fleshly confidence, a vain presumption, feel no need for asking the Lord to "prove" *them*. So completely has Satan deceived them, that they imagine it would be an act of unbelief so to do. Poor souls, they "call evil good, and good evil"; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa 5:20). One of the surest marks of regeneration is that the soul frequently cries, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa 139:23-24).

Perhaps some of our readers are still ready to say, "I do not see that there needs to be so much difficulty in ascertaining whether one is in a lost or saved condition: I am resting upon John 5:24, and that is sufficient for me." But allow us to point out, dear friend, that John 5:24 is *not a promise* which Christ gave to an individual disciple, but instead, a doctrinal declaration which He made in the hearing of a mixed multitude. If the objector replies, "I believe that verse does contain a promise, and I am going to hold fast to it," then may we lovingly ask, Are you sure that it belongs to *you*? That John 5:24 contains a precious promise, we gladly acknowledge, but to whom is it made? Let us examine it: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

That promise is given to a definitely defined character, namely, "He that *heareth my word*." Now, dear reader, can it be truthfully said that you are one that "heareth" His Word? Are you sure? Do not be misled by the mere sound of words. The

reference here is not to the hearing of the outward ear, but to the response of the heart. In the days that He sojourned on earth, there were many of whom the Lord Jesus had to say that “hearing (with the outward ear), they hear not” with the heart (Mat 13:13). So it is still. To “hear” spiritually, to “hear” savingly, is to *heed* (Mat 18:15), is to *obey* (Mat 17:5; Joh 10:27; Heb 3:7). Ah, Are *you* obedient? Have you searched the Scriptures diligently in order to discover His commandments? And that, not to satisfy an idle curiosity, but desiring to put them into practice? Do you love His commandments? Are you actually *doing* them? Not once or twice, but regularly, as the main tenor of your life—for note it is not “hear,” but “hearing.”

Does someone object?: “All of this is getting away from the *simplicity* of Christ: you are taking us from the Word and seeking to get us occupied with ourselves.” Well, does not Scripture say, “Take heed unto thyself?” (1Ti 4:16)? But it may be answered, “There cannot be any *certainty* while we are occupied with our wretched selves. I prefer to abide by the written Word.” To this we have no objection at all: what we are here pressing is the vital necessity of making sure that the portions of the Word you cite or are resting upon, fairly and squarely *belong to you*. The reader may refer me to “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31) and ask, Is not that plain enough? But have you ever noted, dear friend, to whom the Apostles addressed those words, and all the attendant circumstances?

It was neither to a promiscuous crowd, nor to a careless and unconcerned soul, that the Apostles said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Rather was it to an awakened, deeply exercised, penitent soul—who had taken his place in the dust, and in deepest anguish cried, “What must I do to be saved?” However, what is the use *you* are making of Act 16:31? You answer, “This: those words are divinely simple, I believe in Christ, and therefore I am saved; *God* says so, and the Devil cannot shake me.” Possibly he is not at all anxious to; he may be well content for you to retain a carnal confidence. But observe, dear friend, the Apostles did not tell the stricken jailer to “believe on Jesus” nor “believe in Christ”; but to “believe on *the Lord* Jesus Christ.”

What does it mean to *savingly* “believe”? Let us give a brief reply. John 1:12 makes it clear that to “believe” is to “receive,” to receive “Christ Jesus the *Lord*” (Col 2:6). Christ is the Saviour of none until He is welcomed as LORD. The immediate context shows plainly the particular character in which Christ is there viewed: “He came unto *his own*” (Joh 1:11); He was their rightful Owner, because their Lord. But “his own received him not”; no, they declared, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). Ah, dear friend, this is searching. Have *you* received “*The Lord* Jesus Christ”? We do not ask, “Are you resting on His finished work,” but have you bowed to His scepter and owned His authority in a *practical* way? Have you *disowned your own* sinful lordship? If not, you certainly *have not* “believed on *the Lord* Jesus Christ,” and therefore the promise of Acts 16: 31 does not belong to you.

“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). *This* is just as much a part of God’s Word as is Acts 16:31. Why do we not hear it quoted as frequently!? And how can anyone *know* that he is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ? Only by discovering within him the *fruits* of His regenerating and sanctifying grace. *Not* that either these “fruits” or the “good works” of the Christian are in any way or to any degree meritorious. No, no—but as the *evidence* of his divine sonship.

3. Its Basis

The task set before us is by no means easily executed. On the one hand, we wish to be kept from taking the “children’s” bread and casting it to the “dogs”; on the other, it is our earnest prayer that we may be delivered from casting a stumbling block before any of God’s “little ones.” That which occasions our difficulty is the desire to expose an empty profession and to be used of God in writing that which, under His free Spirit, may be used in removing the scales from the eyes of those who, though unregenerate, are resting with carnal confidence on some of the divine promises given to those who are in Christ—for while a sinner is out of Christ, none of the promises belong to him: see 2 Corinthians 1:20. Notwithstanding, it behooves us to seek wisdom from above so that we may write in such a way that any of Christ’s who are yet unestablished in the faith may not draw the conclusion they are still dead in trespasses and sins.

Having before us the twofold object named above, let us ask the question, Is a simple faith in Christ sufficient to save a soul for time and eternity? At the risk of some readers turning away from this article and refusing to read further, we unhesitatingly answer, No, it is not. The Lord Jesus Himself declared, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luk 13:3). Repentance is just as essential to salvation as is believing. Again, we read that, “wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead” (Jam 2:20). A “simple faith” which remains alone, a faith which does not purify the heart (Act 15:9), work by love (Gal 5:6), and overcome the world (1 John 5:4), will save nobody.

Much confusion has been caused in many quarters through failure to define clearly *what it is* from which the sinner needs saving. Only too often the thought of many minds is restricted to Hell. But that is a very inadequate conception, and often proves most misleading. The only thing which can ever take any creature to Hell is unrepented and unforgiven *sin*. Now on the very first page of the New Testament the Holy Spirit has particularly recorded that the incarnate Son of God was named “Jesus” because “He shall *save* his people *from their sins*” (Mat 1:21). Why is it that that which God has placed at the

forefront, is relegated to the rear by most modern evangelists? To ask a person if he has been saved from Hell, is much more ambiguous than to inquire if he has been saved from his sins.

Let us attempt to enlarge on this a little, for thousands of professing Christians in these days have but the vaguest idea of what it means to be saved *from sin*. First, it signifies to be saved from the *love* of sin. The heart of the natural man is wedded to everything which is opposed to God. He may not acknowledge it, he may not be conscious of it, yet such is the fact nevertheless. Having been shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5), man cannot but be enamoured with that which is now part and parcel of his very being. When the Lord Jesus explained why condemnation rests upon the unsaved, He declared, “men *loved darkness* rather than the light” (Joh 3:19). Nothing but a supernatural change of heart can deliver any from this dreadful state. Only an omnipotent Redeemer can bring us to “abhor” (Job 42:6) ourselves and loathe iniquity. This He does when He saves a soul, for “the fear of the Lord is to *hate evil*” (Pro 8:13).

Second, to be saved from our sins is to be delivered from the *allowance* of them. It is the unvarying tendency of the natural heart to excuse evildoing, to extenuate and gloss it over. At the beginning, Adam declined to acknowledge his guilt, and sought to throw the blame upon his wife. It was the same with Eve: instead of honestly acknowledging her wickedness, she attempted to place the onus on the serpent. But how different is the regenerated person’s attitude toward sin! “For that which I do, I *allow not*” (Rom 7:15): Paul committed sin, but he did not approve, still less did he seek to vindicate it. Nay more—the real Christian repents of his wrongdoing, confesses it to God, mourns over it, and prays earnestly to be kept from a repetition of the same. Pride, coldness, slothfulness, he hates, yet day by day he finds them re-asserting their power over him; yet nightly he returns to the Fountain which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1), that he may be cleansed. The true Christian desires to render perfect obedience to God, and cannot rest satisfied with anything short of it; and instead of palliating his failures, he mourns over them.

Third, to be saved from our sins is to be delivered from the *reigning power* or mastery of them. Sin still indwells the Christian, tempts, annoys, wounds, and daily trips him up: “in many things we all offend” (Jam 3:2). Nevertheless, sin is not the complete master of the Christian, for he resists and fights against it. While far from being completely successful in his fight, yet, on the other hand, there is a vast difference between him and the helpless slaves of Satan. His repentings, his prayers, his aspirations after holiness, his pressing forward unto the mark set before him, all witness to the fact that sin does not have “dominion” over (Rom 6:14) him. Undoubtedly there are great differences of attainment among God’s children: in His high sovereignty, God grants more grace unto one than to another. Some of His children are far more plagued by constitutional sins, than others. Some who are very largely delivered from outward transgressions, are yet made to groan over inward ones. Some who are largely kept from sins of commission, have yet to bewail sins of omission. Yet sin is no longer complete master over any who belong to the Household of Faith.

The last sentence may perhaps discourage some who have a sensitive conscience. He who is really honest with himself and has had his eyes opened in some degree to see the awful sinfulness of self, and who is becoming more and more acquainted with that sink of iniquity, that mass of corruption which still indwells him, often feels that sin more completely rules him now than ever it did before. When he longs to trust God with all his heart, unbelief seems to paralyze him. When he wishes to be completely surrendered to God’s blessed will, murmurings and rebellion argue within him. When he would spend an hour in meditation on the things of God, evil imaginations harass him. When he desires to be more humble, pride seeks to fill him. When he would pray, his mind wanders. The more he fights against these sins, the farther off victory seems to be. To him it appears that sin is very much the master of him, and Satan tells him that his profession is vain. What shall we say to such a dear soul who is deeply exercised over this problem? Two things:

First, the very fact that you *are* conscious of these sins and are so much concerned over your failure to overcome them, is a *healthy* sign. It is the blind who cannot see; it is the dead who feel not—true alike naturally and spiritually. Only they who have been quickened into newness of life are capable of real sorrow for sin. Moreover, such experiences as we have mentioned above, evidence a *spiritual growth*: a growth in the knowledge of self. As the wise man tells us, “he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Ecc 1:18). In God’s light we see light (Psa 36:9). The more the Holy Spirit reveals to me the high claims of God’s holiness, the more I discover how far short I come of meeting them. Let the midday sun shine into a darkened room, and dust and dirt which before was invisible is now plainly seen. So with the Christian: the more the light of God enters his heart, the more he discovers the spiritual filth which dwells there. Beloved brother, or sister, it is not that you are becoming more sinful, but that God is now giving you a clearer and fuller sight of your sinfulness. Praise Him for it, for the eyes of the vast majority of your fellows (religionists included) are blind, and cannot see what so distresses you!

Second, side by side with sin in your heart, is *grace*. There is a new and holy nature within the Christian as well as the old and unholy one. Grace is active within you, as well as sin. The new nature is influencing your conduct as well as the old. Why is it that you so desire *to be* conformed to the image of Christ, to trust Him fully, love Him fervently, and serve Him diligently? These longings proceed not from the flesh, No, my distressed brother or sister, sin is *not* your *complete* master; if it were, all aspirations, prayers, and strivings after holiness would be banished from your heart. There are “as it were the company of *two* armies” (Song 6:13) fighting to gain control of the Christian. As it was with our mother Rebekah—“the children struggled together within her” (Gen 25:22)—so it is with us. But the very “struggle” shows that the issue is not yet decided: had sin *conquered*, the soul would no longer be able to *resist*. The conqueror disarms his enemy so that he can no

longer fight back. The very fact that you *are* still “fighting,” proves that sin has not vanquished you! It may *seem* to you that it soon will: but the issue is not in doubt—Christ will yet save you from the very *presence* of sin.

Having sought in the above paragraphs to heed the injunction found in Hebrews 12:13, 14 to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,” and to make “straight paths” for the feet of God’s little ones, “lest that which is lame be turned out of the way,” let us again direct our attention unto those who “have not a doubt” of *their* acceptance in Christ, and perhaps feel in no personal need for what has been said above. The Lord declared that a tree is known by its fruits, so there cannot be anything wrong in examining the tree of our hearts, to ascertain *what* kind of “fruit” it is now bringing forth, and discover whether it be such as may proceed from mere nature, or that which can only issue from indwelling grace. It may at once be objected, But nothing spiritual can issue from ourselves. From our *natural selves*, Yes. But how can an evil tree ever be any different? Christ said, “Make the tree good, and his fruit is good” (Mat 12:32). This is typed out by engrafting a new slip on an old stock.

All pretensions unto the present enjoyment of the assurance of faith by those whose daily lives are unbecoming the Gospel, are groundless. They who are confident of entering that Eternal Happiness which consists very much in a perfect freedom from all sin, but who now *allow* themselves in the practice of sin (persuading themselves that Christ has fully atoned for the same), are deceived. None truly desire to be free from sin in the future, who do not sincerely long to forsake it in the present. He who does not pant after holiness here, is dreadfully mistaken if he imagines he desires holiness hereafter. Glory is but grace consummated; the heavenly life is but the full development of the regenerated life on earth. Neither death nor the second coming of Christ will effect any radical change in the Christian: it will only *perfect* what he already has and is. Any, then, who pretend unto the assurance of salvation, boast of their pardon and present possession of eternal life, but who have not an experience of deep sorrow for sin, real indignation against it, and hatred of themselves because of transgressions, know nothing at all of what *holy assurance* is.

In considering the *basis* of the Christian’s assurance we must distinguish sharply between the ground of his *acceptance before God*, and his own knowledge *that he is* accepted by Him. Nothing but the righteousness of Christ, wrought out by Him in His virtuous life and vicarious death, can give any sinner a perfect legal standing before the thrice holy God. And nothing but the communication of a new nature, a supernatural work of grace within, can furnish proof that the righteousness of Christ *has been* placed to my account. Whom God legally saves, He experimentally saves; whom He justifies, them He also sanctifies. Where the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to an individual, a principle of holiness is *imparted* to him; the former can only be ascertained by the latter. It is impossible to obtain a Scriptural knowledge that the merits of Christ’s finished work are reckoned to my account, except by proving that the efficacy of the Holy Spirit’s work is evident in my soul.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). Why that order of “calling” before “election”? Here it is the converse of what we find in Romans 8:29-30, “whom he did (1) predestinate, them he also (2) called”; but here in Peter the Christian is bidden to make sure (1) his “calling” and (2) his “election.” Why this variation of order? The answer is simple: in Romans 8:29-30 it is the execution of God’s eternal counsels; but in 2 Peter 1 it is the Christian’s obtaining an experimental knowledge of the same. I have to work back from effect to cause, to examine the fruit so as to discover the nature of the tree. I have no immediate access to the Lamb’s Book of Life, but if I obtain clear proof that I have been effectually called by God out of the darkness of sin’s enmity into the light of reconciliation, then I *know* that *my* name is written there.

And *how* am I to make my “calling and election *sure*”? The context of this passage tells me very plainly. In verses 5-7 we read, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness love.” There we have a summary of those graces which make up the Christian character. The word “add” signifies “supply in connection with,” just as in a choir a number of parts and voices unite together in making harmony; or, as in a rainbow the various colors, side by side, blend into one beautiful whole. In the previous verses the Apostle had spoken of the grace of God manifested toward His elect: by regeneration they had “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Now he adds, Rest not satisfied with a negative salvation, but press forward unto perfection: be in thorough earnest to “add to your faith” these virtues. Faith is not to be alone, but the other spiritual graces must supplement and adorn it.

In verses 8-9 the Spirit moved the Apostle to set before us the consequences of a compliance or a non-compliance with the duties specified in verses 5-7. The “these things” in verse 8 are the seven graces of the previous verses. If “all diligence” be devoted to the acquiring and cultivating of those lovely virtues, then a certain consequence is sure to follow: as cause stands to effect, so is fruitfulness dependent on Christian diligence. Just as the neglect of our daily food will lead to leanness and feebleness, just as lack of exercise means flabby muscles, so a disregard of the divine injunction of verse 5 issues in soul-barrenness, lack of vision, and loss of holy assurance. This brings us now to verse 10.

The “Wherefore the rather, brethren,” of verse 10 points a contrast from the sad tragedy presented in verse 9. There we see the pitiful results of being in a backslidden state of soul. There is no remaining stationary in the Christian life: he who does not progress, retrogrades. He who does not diligently heed the divine precepts, soon loses the good of the divine promises. He who does not add or conjoin with his “faith” the graces mentioned in verses 5-7, will soon fall under the power of unbelief. He who does not cultivate the garden of his soul, will quickly find it grown over with weeds. He who neglects God’s

exhortations will lose the joy of His salvation, and will lapse into such a state of doubting that he will seriously question his divine sonship. To prevent this the Apostle says, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

The obvious meaning, then, of this exhortation in 2 Peter 1:10 is, Bestir yourselves, take pains to secure satisfactory evidence that you are among the effectually called and elect of God. Let there be no doubt or uncertainty about it: you profess to be a child of God, then justify your profession by cultivating the character and displaying the conduct of one. Sure proof is this that something more than a mere resting upon John 5:24 or Acts 16:31 is demanded of us! It is only in proportion as the Christian manifests the fruit of a genuine conversion that he is entitled to regard himself and be regarded by others as one of the called and elect of God. It is just in proportion as we add to our faith the other Christian graces that we have solid ground on which to rest in the assurance we belong to the family of Christ. It is not those who are governed by self-will, but “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

“In times so critical to the interests of vital religion, and amidst such awful departures from the faith as we are daily called upon to behold, it becomes a very anxious inquiry in the breasts of the humble—Is there no method under divine grace by which the believer may arrive to a well-grounded assurance, concerning the great truths of the Gospel? Is it not possible for him to be so firmly settled in those great truths, as that he shall not only be ready ‘to give answer to everyone that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him,’ but to find the comfort of it in his own mind, that his faith ‘doth not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God’? To this inquiry I answer, Yes, blessed be God, there is. An infallible method is discovered, at once to secure from the possibility of apostasy, and to afford comfort and satisfaction to the believer’s own mind, concerning the great truths of God; namely, *from the Spirit’s work in the heart*; by the sweet influences of which he may find ‘joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit’” (Robert Hawker, 1803).

Christian assurance, then, is a Scripturally-grounded knowledge that I am in the Narrow Way which leads unto life. Thus, it is based upon the Word of God, yet consists of the Holy Spirit enabling me to discern in myself a character to which the divine promises are addressed. We have the same Word to measure ourselves by now as God will judge us by in the Day to Come. Therefore it behooves every serious soul to prayerfully and carefully set down the Scriptural marks of God’s children on the one side, and the characteristics of his own soul and life on the other, and determine if there be any real resemblance between them. We will close this section by quoting from the saintly Samuel Rutherford (1637):

“You may put a difference betwixt you and reprobates if you have these marks: If ye prize Christ and His truth so as you will sell all and buy Him, and suffer for it. If the love of Christ keep you back from sinning more than the law or fear of Hell does. If you be humble and deny your own will, wit, credit, ease, honour, the world, and the vanity and glory of it. Your profession must not be barren and void of good works. You must in all things aim at *God’s* honour; you must eat, sleep, buy, sell, sit, stand, speak, pray, read, and hear the Word with a heart purpose that God may be honoured. Acquaint yourself with daily praying, commit all your ways and actions to God by prayer, supplication and thanksgiving and count not much for being mocked, for Christ Jesus was mocked before you.”

4. Its Attainment

In writing to a company of the saints an Apostle was inspired to declare, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work *in* you will perform (or “finish”) it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6). *That* is what distinguishes the regenerate children of God from empty professors, from those who while having a “name to live” are really spiritually dead (Rev 3:1). This is what differentiates true Christians from deluded ones. And in what does this “good work” which is “begun” *within* the saved consist? It is variously described in different Scriptures. It is the heart being purified by faith (Act 15:9). It is the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is the Law of God being written in their hearts (Heb 8:10). Thus, the *nature* of Christian assurance is a well-founded knowledge that I am a child of God. The *basis* of this assurance is an unmistakable agreement between *my* character, experience, and life, and the description which Holy Writ furnishes of the characters, experiences and lives of God’s children. Therefore, the *attainment* of assurance is by an impartial scrutiny of myself and an honest comparing of myself with the Scriptural marks of God’s children.

A reliable and satisfactory assurance can only be attained or reached by means of a thorough self-examination. “O therefore, Christians, rest not till you can call this rest your own. Sit not down without assurance. Get alone, and bring thy heart to the bar of trial: force it to answer the interrogatories put to it to set the qualifications of the saints on one side, and the qualifications of thyself on the other side, and then judge what resemblance there is between them. Thou hast the same Word before thee, by which to judge thyself now, as thou shalt be judged by at the great day. Thou mayest there read the very articles upon which thou shalt be tried; try thyself by these articles now. Thou mayest there know beforehand on what terms men shall then be acquitted or condemned. Try now whether thou art possessed of that which will acquit thee, or whether thou be in the condition of those that will be condemned; and accordingly acquit or condemn thyself. Yet be sure

thou judge by a true touchstone, and mistake not the Scripture description of a saint, that thou neither acquit nor condemn thyself by mistake" (*The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, Richard Baxter, 1680).

The need for such self-examination is indeed great, for multitudes are deceived; quite sure that they are Christians, yet without the marks of one. "They say they are saved, and they stick to it they are, and think it wicked to doubt it; but yet they have no reason to warrant their confidence. There is a great difference between presumption and full assurance. Full assurance is reasonable: it is based on solid ground. Presumption takes for granted, and with brazen face pronounces that to be its own to which it has no right whatever. Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If thy heart be renewed, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be a thorough change of mind in thee; if thou be born again, then hast thou reason to rejoice: but if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit, then thy saying 'I am saved' is but thine own assertion, and it may delude, but it will not deliver thee" (C. H. Spurgeon on 1Ch 4:10).

O what efforts Satan puts forth to keep people from this vitally important and all-necessary work of self-examination. He knows full well that if many of his deceived victims set about the task in earnest, they would soon discover that no miracle of divine grace has been wrought in them, and that this would cause them to seek the Lord with all their hearts. He knows, too, that real Christians would gain much advantage against the power of indwelling sin would they but thoroughly search their own hearts. Many are diverted from this wholesome work by the evil example set by so many who now bear the name of Christ. Not a few argue, If he or she (that claims to have been a Christian so much longer and appears to know the Bible so much better), who is so worldly, so governed by "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," is sure *he* is bound for Heaven, why should I be concerned?

But *the state of men's hearts* is what holds so many back from the discharge of this duty. Some are so ignorant that they know not what self-examination is, nor what a servant of God means when he seeks to persuade them to "*prove* your own selves" (2Co 13:5). Others are so much in love with sin and have such a dislike for the holy ways of God, they dare not venture on the trial of their state, lest they should be forced from the course they so much relish, to one which they hate. Others are so taken up with their worldly affairs, and are so busy providing for themselves and their families they say, "I pray thee have me excused" (Luk 14:18). Others are so slothful that they cannot be induced on any consideration to be at those pains which are necessary in order to know their own hearts.

Pride holds many back. They think highly of themselves. They are so sure of *their* salvation, so thoroughly convinced that all is right between their souls and God, they deem any search after *proof*, and testing of themselves by Scripture to see if they *have* the marks of those who are "new creatures in Christ Jesus," as quite unnecessary and superfluous. They have been brought up in a religious atmosphere where none of those professing the name of Christ expressed any doubts about their state. They have been taught that such doubtings are of the Devil, a calling into question the veracity of God's Word. They have heard so many affirm, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth," they felt it their duty to echo the same, forgetting that he who first uttered those words (Job 19:25) was one of whom God said, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8).

Tens of thousands have been taught that it is wrong for the Christian to look within himself, and they have blindly followed the advice of such physicians "of no value." How can it be wrong for me to examine my heart to see whether or not God *has* written His laws upon it (Heb 8:10)? How can it be wrong for me to look and see whether or not God *has* begun a "good work" *in* me (Phi 1:6)? How can it be wrong for me to test myself by the Parable of the Sower to see *which* of its four soils represents *my* heart? How can it be wrong to measure myself by the Parable of the Virgins, and ascertain whether or not the "oil" of regenerating and sanctifying grace is within the "vessel" of my soul (Mat 25:4)? Since God Himself declares, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom 8:9), how can it be wrong for me to make sure that *I am* indwelt by Him?

Rightly did an eminent Puritan say, "The Scripture abounds in commands and cautions for our utmost diligence in our search and inquiry as to whether we are made partakers of Christ or not, or whether His Spirit dwells in us or not—which argue both the difficulty of attaining an assured confidence herein, as also the danger of our being mistaken, and yet the certainty of a good issue upon the diligent and regular use of means to that purpose" (John Owen, 1670, on Heb 3:14). Alas, this is what has been so strenuously opposed by many during the last two or three generations. An easy-going religion, well calculated to be acceptable unto the slothful, has been zealously propagated, representing the salvation of the soul and assurance of the same as a very simple matter.

It is very evident to one who has been taught of God that the vast majority of present-day evangelists, tract-writers and "personal workers," do not believe one-half of what Holy Writ declares concerning the spiritual impotency of the natural man, or the absolute necessity of a miracle of grace being wrought within him before he *can* savingly turn to Christ. Instead, they erroneously imagine that fallen man is a "*free* moral agent," possessing equal power to accept Christ as to reject Him. They suppose all that is needed is information and coercion: to preach the Gospel and persuade men to believe it. But have they never heard of the Holy Spirit? O yes, and *say* they believe that only He can effectually convict of sin and regenerate. But do their actions agree with this? They certainly do not, for not only is there practically no definite waiting upon God

and an earnest seeking from Him the power of His Spirit, but they sally forth and speak and write to the unsaved as if the Holy Spirit had no existence.

Now just as it is plainly *implied* by such “novices” that lost sinners can receive Christ anytime they make up their minds to do so, just as they are constantly told that nothing more is needed than to believe that Christ died for them and rest on John 3:16 and salvation is theirs, so the idea has been inculcated that the professing Christian may enjoy the full assurance of faith anytime he wishes and that nothing more is required for this than to “rest on John 5:24” etc. One verse of Holy Scripture is sufficient to give the lie to this popular delusion: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). If the written promises of God were sufficient of themselves to produce assurance, then what need is there for the Third Person of the Godhead to “bear witness” with the spirit of the Christian that he *is* a child of God?

As this verse is virtually given no place at all in modern ministry, let us ponder its terms: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The clear implication of these words is that the actual existence of the saint’s sonship is, at times at least, a matter of painful uncertainty, and that the supernatural agency of the Spirit is required to authenticate the fact, and thus allay all fear. To be fully assured of the amazing fact that God is my spiritual Father, demands something more than the testimony of our own feelings or the opinion of men; and, let us reverently add, something more than resting upon a divine promise. Millions have “rested on” the words, “this *is* my body,” and no argument could persuade them that the bread upon the Lord’s table was not actually changed into Christ’s *literal flesh*.

Who so competent to authenticate the work of the Spirit in the heart as the Spirit Himself? What, then, is the merit of His testimony? Not by visions and voices, nor by any direct inspiration of new revelation of truth. Not by bringing some verse of Scripture (of which I was not thinking) vividly before the mind, that my heart is made to leap for joy. If the Christian had no surer grounds that *that* to stand upon, he might with despair. Satan can bring a verse of Scripture before the mind (Mat 4:6), and produce in his victims strong emotions of joy, and impart a false peace to his soul. Therefore the witness of the Spirit to be decisive and conclusive, must be something which the Devil cannot duplicate. And what is that? This: Satan cannot beget divine grace and impart real holiness to the heart.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit.” To “bear witness with” is a legal term, and signifies to produce valid and convincing evidence. “Our spirit” here has reference to the renewed conscience. Concerning natural men it is said, “which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their *conscience* also *bearing witness*” (Rom 2:15). But the conscience of the natural man is partial, dim-sighted, stupid. Grace makes it tender, pliant, and more able to do its office. The desire of the regenerate man, and unto which he exercises himself, is “to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men” (Act 24:16). Where such a conscience is (by grace) maintained, we can say with the Apostle, “This is our rejoicing (what? resting on Joh 3:16? No, but) *the testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity... we have had our conversation in the world” (2Co 1:12).

Was the beloved Paul off the right track when he found something *in himself* which afforded ground for “rejoicing”? According to many present-day teachers (?) he was. It is a great pity that these men do not give less attention to human writings, and more to the Holy Scriptures, for then they would read “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man shall be satisfied from himself” (Pro 14:14). If that text be despised because it is in the Old Testament, then we also read in the New Testament, “but let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have *rejoicing in himself* alone, and not in another” (Gal 6:4). Once more, “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth: And *hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and *shall assure our hearts before him*” (1Jo 3:18-19). What is the method which God here sets before His children for assuring their hearts before Him? Not in telling them to appropriate one of His promises, but to *walk in the Truth*, and then their own spirit will bear witness to their divine sonship.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” In addition to the testimony of a renewed conscience which is enjoyed by the Christian when he (by grace) is walking in the Truth, the Spirit adds His confirmation. How? First, He has laid down clear marks in the Scriptures by which we may settle the question: “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14)—why tell us this, if “resting on John 5:24” be all that is necessary? Second, by working such graces in the saints as are peculiar to God’s children: in Galatians 5:22 these graces are expressly designated “the fruit of the Spirit.” Third, by His spiritual consolation: “Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Act 9:31 and cf. Rom 15:13). Fourth, by producing in the Christian the affections which dutiful children bear to a wise and loving Parent (Rom 8:15).

To sum up: the blessed Spirit witnesses along with our spirit that we are the children of God by enabling us to discern (in the light of Scripture) the *effects* and *fruits* of His supernatural operation within us. The breathings of the renewed heart after holiness, the pantings after a fuller conformity to the image of Christ, the strivings against sin, are all inspired by Him. Thus, by begetting in us the divine nature, by teaching us to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit 2:12), the Spirit conducts us to the sure conclusion that we are the children of God. Thereby He shows us there is a real correspondency between our experience and revealed truth. “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us *of his Spirit*” (1Jo 4:13).

Let us now briefly consider the *character* of those persons to whom the privilege of Christian assurance rightfully belongs. Here again there are two extremes to be guarded against. On the one hand is that class who have been deceived by the slogan “believe you are saved, and you *are* saved,” which is best met by pointing out that genuine assurance is never any greater than is our *evidence* of the same. On the other hand are those who are fearful that such evidence is unattainable while the body of sin indwells them. To such we would ask, Is it impossible to ascertain whether or not the health of your body is sound? Are there not certain symptoms and signs which are a clear index? If I were doubtful, and feared that some fatal disease was beginning to grip me, I would seek a physician. Were he to merely look at me and then lightly say, Your health is good, I would leave him and seek another more competent. I would request a thorough overhauling: the taking of my blood-pressure, the sounding of my heart, the testing of my other vital organs. So it should be with the soul.

In seeking to determine from God’s Word who are entitled to Christian assurance, let us ask and answer a number of questions. Who are they with whom the great God dwells?—“with him also that is of (not an haughty and boastful, but) a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15); “to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth at my word*” (Isa 66:2)—do you? or do you joke over or argue about its sacred contents? Whom does God really forgive? They who “repent” and are “converted” (Act 3:19), that is, they who turn their backs upon the world and sinful practices, and yield to Him; those in whose hearts God puts His “*laws*” and writes them in their minds, in consequence of which they love, meditate upon, and keep His commandments: note how Hebrews 10:16 precedes 10:17!

Who is the man whom Christ likened unto one who built his house upon the rock? Not merely him who “believes,” but “whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them” (Mat 7:24). Who are truly born again? “Everyone that doeth righteousness” (1Jo 2:29); they who “love the brethren” with such a love as is described in 1 John 3:17-18. To whom does God experimentally reveal the eternal purpose of His grace? “The secret of the Lord is with them that *fear him*, and he will show *them* his covenant” (Psa 25:14). “To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God” (Psa 50:23). What are the identifying marks of a saving faith? One which “purifies the heart” (Act 15:9), “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), “overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4): only thus may I know that *my* faith is a living and spiritual one.

The birth of the Spirit can only be known from its effects (John 3:8). Thus, it is by comparing what God in His Word, has promised to do *in* His elect with what His Spirit has, or has not, wrought in my heart, that I can ascertain whether assurance of salvation be my legitimate portion. *This* is “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1Co 2:13). Wondrous things has God prepared “for them that love him” (1Co 2:9); how important then for me to make sure that I love Him. Many suppose that because they have (or had) a dread of eternal punishment, that therefore they love God. Not so: true love of God is neither begotten by fears of Hell nor hopes of Heaven: if I do not love God for what He is in Himself, then I do not love Him at all. And if I love Him, my desire, my purpose, my aim, will be to *please* Him in all things. Much might be added to this section of our subject, but we trust that sufficient has been said to enable exercised and honest souls to learn how to identify those whom Scripture teaches are entitled to the assurance of salvation.

5. Its Hindrances, Maintenance, and Fruit

“*Question:* Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved? *Answer:* Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith (2Pe 1:10), true believers may wait long before they obtain it (1Jo 5:13); and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions (Psa 77:7-9; 31:22, etc.); yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God, as keeps them from sinking into utter despair (Psa 73:13-15, 23; 1Jo 3:9; Isa 54:7-11)” — (Westminster Catechism).

Just as the absence or the loss of bodily health is not always attributable to the same cause or occasion, neither is the absence or diminution of assurance always to be accounted for in the same way; and just as any doctor who used only one medicine for the healing of all diseases would exhibit his crass incompetence, so any “Christian worker” who prescribes the same treatment to all soul-diseases at once declares himself a physician “of no value” (Job 13:4). There are *degrees* of health, both of body and soul; and this is to be ascribed, in the first place, to the high sovereignty of God, who distributes His gifts, both natural and spiritual, as He pleases. Yet, while we cannot impart health to ourselves, we should use legitimate means which, under God’s blessing, are conducive thereto. So, too, we may, through our sinful folly, undermine and destroy our health. The same holds good in the spiritual realm.

In many cases lack of Christian assurance, or a very low degree thereof, is due to a *poor state of health*. Bodily infirmities react on the mind. Low physical vitality is usually accompanied by lowness of spirits. A sluggish liver produces depression and despondency. Many a person whose soul is now “cast down” would be greatly benefited by more open air exercise, a change of diet, and a few doses of castor oil. Yet we are far from saying that this course would result in the recovery or increase of *assurance*, for spiritual effects cannot be produced by material agents. Nevertheless, the removal of a physical hindrance is often an aid. Who can read the Word to profit while suffering from a nerve-racking headache! What we wish to make clear is that, in some instances at least, what is regarded as a lack of assurance is nothing more than physical inability

to enjoy the things of God. Nor do we mean by this that none are blest with the joy of the Lord while their bodily health is at a low ebb. Not so: there are striking cases which show the contrary. But it still remains that many are missing much spiritual good through their disregarding the elementary laws of physical well-being.

The assurance of some of God's dear children has been hindered by a *defective ministry*. They have sat under teaching which was too one-sided, failing to preserve a due balance between the objective and the subjective aspects of the Truth. They have been encouraged to be far more occupied with self than with Christ. Knowing that many are deceived, fearful lest they also should be, their main efforts are directed to self-examination. Disgusted, too, by the loud boastings of empty professors, perceiving the worthlessness of the carnal confidence voiced by the frothy religionists all around them, they hesitate to avow the assurance of salvation lest they be guilty of presumption or be puffed up by the Devil. Yea, they have come to regard doubtings, fears and uncertainty, as the best evidence of spiritual humility.

Now while we are by no means prepared to sanction the idea last named, yet we have no hesitation whatever in saying that we much prefer it to the presumptuous claims now being made by so many. Far rather would we cast in our lot with a company of lowly, pensive, self-distrustful people, who exclaim, "Tis a point I long to know, oft it causes anxious thought: do I love the Lord or no, am I His, or am I not?" (John Newton, 1725-1807)—than fraternize with those who never have a doubt of their acceptance in Christ, but who are self-complacent and haughty, and whose daily walk compares most unfavorably with the former. Better far to be weighed down by a sense of my vileness and go mourning all my days over lack of conformity to Christ, than remain ignorant of my real state and go about light-hearted and light-headed, wearing a smile all the time.

But surely there is a happy medium between spending most of my days in Doubting Castle and the Slough of Despond so that I am virtually a stranger to "the joy of the Lord," and experiencing a false peace from Satan which is never disturbed by the voice of conscience. Holy assurance and lowly-heartedness are not incompatible. The same Apostle who cried, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24), also declared, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him" (2Ti 1:12). "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2Co 6:10) summed up his dual experiences. We, too, are "sorrowful" daily if God has opened our eyes to see something of the mass of corruption which still indwells us; "sorrowful," too, when we perceive how far, far short we come of the example which Christ has left us. Yet we also "rejoice" because God has not left us in ignorance of our dreadful state, that He has planted within us deep yearnings after holiness, and because we know these yearnings will be fully realized when we are freed from this body of death.

The assurance of other saints is greatly dampened by *the assaults of Satan*. There are three principal things which our great enemy seeks to accomplish: incite us to sin, hinder the exercise of our graces, and destroy our peace and joy. If he fails largely in the first two, he is often very successful in the third. Posing as an angel of light, he comes to the soul preaching the holiness of God and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, his object being to overwhelm the conscience and drive us to despair. He presses upon the Christian the awfulness and prevalence of his unbelief, the coldness of his heart toward God, and the many respects in which his deportment and actions are un-Christlike. He reminds him of numerous sins, both of omission and commission, and the more tender be his conscience, the more poignant are Satan's thrusts. He challenges him to compare *his* character with that given of the saints in Scripture, and then tells him his profession is worthless, that he is a hypocrite, and that it is mockery to take the holy name of Christ upon his polluted lips.

So many succumb to Satan's efforts to disturb their peace and destroy their assurance through not knowing how to meet his attacks, and through forgetting that Scripture is very far from representing the earthly lives of God's children as flawless and perfect. As a general rule it is the best thing to *acknowledge the truth* of Satan's charges when he declares that I am still a great sinner in myself. When he asks me if such and such a lusting of the flesh be consistent with a heart in which a miracle of divine grace has been wrought? I should answer, Yes, for the "flesh" in me has neither been eradicated nor refined. When he asks, How can such doubtings consist with a heart to which God has communicated saving faith? remind him how Scripture tells us of one who came to Christ saying, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24).

But the most common hindrance to assurance is *the indulgence of some known sin*. When a Christian deliberately follows some course which God's Word forbids, when he lives in some unwarranted practice, and God has often touched him for it, and his conscience has been sorely pricked, and yet he perseveres in the same—then no wonder if he be destitute of assurance and the comfort of the Spirit. The cherishing of sin necessarily obscures *the evidences* of divine sonship, for it so abates the degree of our graces as to make them indiscernible. Allowed sin dims the eye of the soul so that it cannot see its own state, and stupefies the heart so that it cannot feel its own condition. But more—it provokes God, so that He withdraws from us the benevolent light of His countenance: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa 59:2).

The sad history of David presents a solemn case in point. His fearful fall brought with it painful consequences: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long: for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psa 32:3-4). But, blessed be God, his earthly life did not end while he was in this lamentable state: "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa 32:5). Further light on the deep exercises of soul

through which David passed, is given us in Psalm 51. There we hear him crying, “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy Salvation” (vv. 9-12). This leads us to consider *its maintenance*.

Here again there are two extremes to be guarded against: the fatalistic lethargy of, I cannot help myself, and the Arminian effrontery which affirms that the remedy lies in my own hands. Spiritual assurance is a divine gift, nevertheless the Christian has a responsibility for preserving the same. It is true that I cannot speak peace to my own conscience, or apply the balm of Gilead to my wounded heart, yet I can do many things to grieve and repel the great Physician. We cannot bring ourselves near to God, but we can and do wander from Him. Of ourselves we cannot live to God’s glory, but we can to our own. Of ourselves we cannot walk after the Spirit, but we can after the flesh. We cannot make ourselves fruitful unto every good word and work, but we may by disobedience and self-indulgence bring leanness into our souls and coldness into our affections. We cannot impart health to our bodies, but we can use *means* which, by God’s blessing, further the same.

1. Holy assurance cannot be maintained unless the Christian keeps his heart with “all diligence” (Pro 4:23). “Watch ye and pray *lest* ye enter into temptation” (Mar 14:38). “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). There must be “A watchful fighting, and contending against the whole work of sin, in its deceits and power, with all the contribution of advantage and efficacy that it hath from Satan and the world. This the Apostle peculiarly applies it unto, in the cautions and exhortations given us, to take heed of it, that we be not hardened by it; seeing its whole design is to impair or destroy our interest and persistency in Christ, and so to draw us off from the living God” (John Owen).

More especially does the Christian need to pray and strive against *presumptuous* sins. Right hands must be cut off, right eyes plucked out (Mat 5:29): a gangrened member must be amputated, or death will soon ensue. Cry mightily unto God for enabling grace to mortify besetting sins. Remember that a deliberate running into the place of danger, a willful exposing of myself to sin’s attacks, is a tempting of the Lord. “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Pro 4:14-15). O what circumspect walking is called for in a world which abounds with pitfalls on every side!

2. Holy assurance cannot be maintained unless the Christian be diligent in *cherishing his graces*. A Christian is one who has been made a partaker of those spiritual graces which “accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9), and for the establishing of his comfort and joy it is necessary that he *know* himself to be in possession of them. The best evidence that we *are* in a state of grace, is to *grow in grace*. For this there needs to be a “daily constant cherishing and labouring to improve and strengthen every grace by which we abide in Christ. Neglected grace will wither, and be ready to die (Rev 3:2); yea, as to some degrees of it, and as to its work in evidencing the love of God unto us, or our union with Christ, it will utterly decay. Some of the churches in the Revelation had lost their first love as well as left their first works. Hence is that command that we should grow in grace, and we do so when grace grows and thrives in us. And this is done two ways:

“First, when any individual grace is improved. When that faith which was weak, becomes strong; and that love which was faint and cold, becomes fervent and is inflamed; which is not to be done but in and by the sedulous exercise of these graces themselves, and a constant application of our souls by them to the Lord Christ. Secondly, by adding one grace unto another: ‘and beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, etc.’ (2Pe 1:5); this is the proper work of spiritual diligence. This is the nature of Gospel-graces, because of their concatenation¹ in Christ, and as they are wrought in us by one and the self-same Spirit, the exercise of one leads us to the stirring up and bringing in the exercise of another into the soul” (John Owen).

3. *By keeping short accounts with God*. “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” (Heb 10:22). Note the intimate connection there is between these things. There cannot be a sincere and hearty approach unto God as worshipers while the guilt of sin be resting upon our consciences. Nothing more effectually curtails our freedom in drawing nigh to the thrice Holy One than the painful realization that my conduct has been displeasing to Him. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1Jo 3:21).

But strive as he may, walk as cautiously and carefully as he will, in “many things” the Christian “offends” (Jam 3:2) daily, both by sins of omission and commission. Yet, blessed be God, provision has been made by our loving Father even for this sad failure of ours. “If we *confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). As soon as we are conscious of having done wrong, we should unbosom ourselves to God: holding nothing back, but freely acknowledge each offense. Nor should we fear to do this frequently, daily—constantly. If the Lord bids us to forgive our sinning brethren “until seventy times seven” (Mat 18:21), is He less merciful? “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them (in heart and purpose) shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13).

¹ **concatenation** - A series of links united; a successive series or order of things connected or depending on each other; as a concatenation of causes.

4. By *cultivating daily communion with God*. “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; and these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1Jo 1:3-4). Observe the connection between these two statements: fullness of joy (which, in this Epistle, largely has reference to walking in the unclouded assurance of our divine sonship) is the fruit of fellowship with the Father and His Son. But what is signified by the term “fellowship”? Many seem to have but vague and visionary ideas of its meaning. Oneness of heart and mind, common interests and delights, unity of will and purpose, reciprocal love, is what is denoted. It is a fellowship “in the light” (1Jo 1:5, 7). This was perfectly realized and exemplified by the Lord Jesus. He walked in uninterrupted communion with the Father: delighting in His will (Psa 40:8), keeping His commandments (Joh 14:31), always doing those things which were pleasing in His sight (Joh 8:29). And this very Epistle declares “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6). What a standard is here set before us! After it we should prayerfully and constantly strive.

Fellowship is *participation* in the light and love of God. It is a refusing of the things He hates and a choosing of the things in which He delights. It is the losing of my will in His. It is a going out of self, and an embracing of God in Christ. It is the acceptance of His estimate of things, thinking His thoughts after Him, viewing the world and all in it, life both present and future, from His viewpoint. It is therefore a being molded into conformity with His holy nature. It is living to His glory. And thus it is a fellowship of *joy*, and “the joy of the Lord is our strength” (Neh 8:10): strength to overcome temptations, to perform the duties of life, to endure its sorrows and disappointments. The closer we walk with the Lord, the brighter will be the evidences of our divine sonship.

Holy assurance delivers from those doubts and fears, which rob many a Christian of his legitimate joy in the Lord. This is clear from the contrast presented in Romans 8:15, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father.” Suspense is bad enough in any of our concerns, but most of all in connection with our eternal interests. But true assurance sets us free from the painful bondage of uncertainty, and even robs death of its terrors. It enables the soul to say, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in *my* God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Isa 61:10). Let us now very briefly discuss some of the *fruits* of assurance.

Holy assurance produces patience in tribulation: “And you took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, *knowing in yourselves* that ye have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). Where the heart is anchored in God, basking in the sunshine of His countenance, the Christian will not be afraid of evil tidings, remains calm under bereavements, is unmoved by persecutions. “When I live in a settled and steadfast assurance about the state of my soul, methinks that I am as bold as a lion. I can laugh at all tribulation: no afflictions daunt me. But when I am eclipsed in my comfort, I am of so fearful a spirit that I can run into a very mouse-hole” (Latimer Ridley, 1551).

Holy assurance results in a joy in God which causes its possessor to despise those evil pleasures after which the worldling so much dotes. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will *rejoice* in the Lord, I will *joy* in the God of my salvation” (Hab 3:17-18). “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure... *for* so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly (both now and in the future) into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:10-11).

6. Dialogue 1: Carnal Confidence

The last chapter really completed our present treatment of this theme. It has occurred to us, however, that perhaps some would be helped were we to further explain and amplify one or two of the leading points. Really, this ought not to be necessary; yet Scripture tells us that it is “line upon line” (Isa 28:10). Moreover, in view of the error which now so widely abounds, and the confusion which beclouds so many minds, it is hardly to be expected that one can unlearn in a few hours what he has been mistakenly receiving as God’s Truth for so many years. Doubtless not a few of our readers wish they had the opportunity for a personal conversation on the subject, so that they could state their difficulties and ask questions on anything that is not yet clear to them. We have therefore decided to write further chapters in the form of dialogues, introducing widely different characters, who express a desire to discuss the subject. The first is:

Mr. Carnal Confidence. “Good morning, Mr. Editor, I wish to have a talk with you about those articles on ‘Assurance’ which you published in last year’s ‘Studies.’”

The Writer: “Be seated, please. First of all, may we courteously but frankly inform you that our time is already fully occupied in seeking to minister unto God’s dear children, yet we are never too busy to do all in our power to help a needy soul.”

Carnal Confidence: “O I am not seeking help, my purpose in calling is to point out some things in your articles where I am quite sure you erred.”

The Writer: “It is written, dear friend, ‘If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know’ (1Co 8:2), therefore I trust that God will ever give me grace to willingly consider and weigh the views of others,

and receive through them anything *He* may have for me. Yet, on the other hand, I am not prepared to *debate* with any man upon divine things.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Well, I am quite sure that I am right, and you are wrong, and I feel it my duty to tell you so.”

The Writer: “Very good, I am ready to listen unto what you have to say, only reminding you again that I cannot enter into a debate with you, for the things of God are too holy to *argue* about; though a friendly discussion, in the right spirit, may prove mutually helpful. Before beginning, shall we seek the help of the Holy Spirit, that He may graciously subdue the flesh in each of us, guide our conversation so that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts may be ‘acceptable’ in God’s sight (Psa 19:14), remembering that for every idle word each of us will yet have to give an account.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I consider that in your articles you have made a very difficult and complicated matter out of what is really very simple. According to your ideas a person has to go to a lot of trouble in order to discover whether or not he is saved, whereas if a man believes God’s Word he may be sure in a moment.”

The Writer: “But are all those who believe God’s Word really *saved*? Did not the Jews of Christ’s day believe implicitly in the divine authorship of the Old Testament? Do not Russellites [Jehovah’s Witnesses] and others today insist loudly upon their faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible? does not the Devil himself believe the same?”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “That is not what I meant: my meaning is that, if I rest upon some verse of Holy Writ as God’s promise to me, then I know He cannot disappoint me.”

The Writer: “That is just the same in principle: does not the Romanist rest with full confidence upon that declaration of Christ’s ‘this is my body’? Saving faith is not faith in the authenticity of any verse of Scripture, but rather faith in the Person of Him who gave us the Scriptures, faith in the Christ who is made known in the Scriptures.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Yes, I know that, and I *do* believe in God and in His Son, and I *know* that I am saved because He says so.”

The Writer: “Where in Scripture does God say that *you* are saved?”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “In John 5:24, in Acts 16:31, and many other places.”

The Writer: “Let us turn to these passages please. In John 5:24 the Lord Jesus describes one who has ‘passed from death unto life.’ He tells us two things about that individual, which serve to *identify* him. First, ‘he that heareth my word.’ That is definite enough. But of course it means far more than simply listening to His Word with the outward ear.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Ah, right there you want to mystify what is simple, and perplex souls with what is quite clear.”

The Writer: “Pardon me, you are mistaken. I only wish to *rightly understand* the words God has used, and to do this it is necessary to carefully compare Scripture with Scripture and discover how each word is *used* by the Spirit.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I object. That may be all right for you, but common people do not have the leisure for deep study: God knew this, and has written His Word in plain language that ordinary folks can understand: ‘Hear’ means ‘hear,’ and that is all there is to it.”

The Writer: “I believe you are quite sincere in what you have said, and you have expressed the view which a great many hold today; but, if you will allow me to say so, it is a very defective one. God places no premium upon laziness. God has so ordered things that nothing is obtained without diligence and industry. Much work and care has to be devoted to a garden if anything is obtained from it. The same holds good everywhere else: what time and trouble is required in order to keep our bodies in working order! Can, then, the eternal concerns of our *souls* be more lightly dismissed, or more easily secured? Has not God bidden us ‘*Buy* the truth’ (Prov. 23:23)? Has He not plainly told us ‘If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and *searchest* for her as for hid treasures; then thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God’ (Pro 2:3-5)?”

The Writer: “Mark *how* the Israelites were fed of old in the wilderness: Exodus 16. God did not provide them with baked loaves of bread ready to eat. No, instead He gave them manna from Heaven, which was ‘a *small* round thing’ (v. 14). Work and patience were called for in order to ‘gather’ (v. 17) it. Note too ‘when the sun waxed hot, it melted’ (v. 21), so that they had to get up early to secure it! Moreover, the manna would not keep: ‘let no man leave of it till the morning’: it ‘bred worms and stank’ (vv. 19, 20) if they tried to preserve it for another day. Then, after it had been gathered, the manna had to be ‘ground in mills or beaten in a mortar,’ and baked in pans and made into cakes (Num 11:8). All of this typified the fact that if a soul is to eat the Bread of Life, he must devote himself in earnest, and, as Christ says, ‘*Labor*... for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life’ (Joh 6:27).”

The Writer: “Thus it is in connection with the obtaining of a right understanding of any verse of Scripture: pains have to be taken with it, patience has to be exercised, and prayerful study engaged in. Returning to John 5:24: the one who has passed from death unto life, says Christ, is he that *heareth* my word.’ Let us turn then to other passages where this term is found: ‘they are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refuse to *hear* my words’ (Jer 11:10); ‘because ye have *not heard* my words, behold I will send and take all the families of the north’ etc. (Jer 25:8-9); and see 35:17; Zechariah 1:4; Matthew 7:24; John 10:27. In all of these verses, and in many others which might be given, to ‘hear’ means to *heed* what

God says, to *act upon* it, to *obey* Him. So he who “hears” the voice of Christ *heeds* His command to turn away from all that is opposed to God and become in subjection to Him.

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Well, let us turn to Acts 16:31, that is simple enough. There is no room allowed there for any quibbling. God says ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved’: God says that *to me*. I have believed on Christ, and so I must be saved.”

Writer: “Not so fast, dear friend. How can you prove God says that *to you*? Those words were spoken under unusual circumstances, and to a particular individual. That individual had been brought to the end of himself; he was deeply convicted of his sins; he was in terrible anguish of soul; he had taken his place in the dust, for we are told that he ‘came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas’ (Act 16:29). Now is it fair to take the words of the Apostles to *such* a man and apply them indiscriminately to anybody? Are we justified in ignoring the whole setting of that verse, wrenching it from its context, and giving it to those who have not any of the characteristics which marked the Philippian jailer?”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I refuse to allow you to browbeat me, and move me from the simplicity of the Gospel. John 3:16 say, ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Now I *have* believed on the Son, and therefore am fully assured that I possess eternal life.”

Writer: “Are you aware of the fact that in this same Gospel of John we are told, ‘Many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them’ (Joh 2:23-24)? There were many who ‘believed’ in Christ who were not saved by Him: see John 8:30 and note verse 59! John 12:42, 43! There is a believing in Christ which saves, and there is a believing in Him which does not save; and therefore it behooves every sincere and earnest soul to diligently examine *his* ‘faith’ by Scripture and ascertain *which* kind it is. There is too much at stake to take anything for granted. Where eternal destiny is involved surely no trouble can be too great for us to make sure.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I *am* sure, and no man can make me doubt.”

Writer: “Is your faith purifying your heart (Act 15:9)? Is it evidenced by those works which God requires (Jam 2:17)? Is it causing you to overcome the world (1Jo 5:4)?”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “O I don’t claim to be perfect, but I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

Writer: “We did not ask if you were perfect; but have you been made a new creature in Christ, have old things passed away, and all things become new (2Co 5:17)? Are you treading the path of obedience, for God’s Word says, ‘He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar; and the truth is not in him’ (1Jo 2:4).”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I am not occupied with myself, but with Christ; I am not concerned about my walk, but with what He did for poor sinners.”

Writer: “To be ‘occupied with Christ’ is rather a vague expression. Are you occupied with His authority, have you surrendered to His Lordship, have you taken His yoke upon you, are you following the example which He has left His people? Christ cannot be *divided*: He is not only Priest to be trusted, but is also Prophet to be heeded, and King to be subject unto. Before He can be truly ‘received,’ the heart must be emptied of all those idols which stand in competition with Him. It is not the adulation of our lips, but the affection of our souls, which He requires; it is not an intellectual assent, but the heart’s surrender to Him which saves.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “You are departing from the simplicity of the Gospel; you are making additions unto its one and only stipulation. There is nothing that God requires from the sinner except that he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Writer: “You are mistaken. The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Repent ye*, and believe the Gospel’ (Mar 1:15).” Mr. Carnal Confidence: “That was *before* the Cross, but in *this* dispensation repentance is not demanded.”

Writer: “Then according to your ideas God has changed the plan of salvation. But you err. *After* the Cross, Christ charged His disciples, ‘That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations’ (Luk 24:47). If we turn to the book of Acts we find that the Apostles preached repentance in this dispensation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter bade the convicted Jews to ‘repent’ (Act 2:38). Reviewing his ministry at Ephesus Paul declared that he had testified both to Jews and also to the Greeks ‘repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Act 20:21); while in Acts 17:30 we are told that God ‘now commandeth *all* men everywhere to *repent*.’”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Then do you insist that if a person has not repented, he is still unsaved?”

Writer: “Christ Himself says so: ‘Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish’ (Luk 13:5). So, too, if a man has not been converted, he is yet unsaved: ‘Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out’ (Act 3:19). There must be a right-about-face: there must be a turning from Satan unto God, from the world unto Christ, from sin unto holiness. Where *that* has not taken place, all the believing in the world will save no one. Christ saves none who is still in love with sin; but He is ready to save those who are sick of sin, who long to be cleansed from its loathsome foulness, who yearn to be delivered from its tyrannizing power. Christ came here to save His people *from* their sins.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “You talk to me as though I were the helpless slave of strong drink or some other appetite, but I want you to know I was never the victim of any such thing.”

Writer: “There are other lusts in fallen man besides those which break forth in gross outward sins: such as pride, covetousness, selfishness, self-righteousness. And unless they be mortified, they will take a man to Hell as surely as will profanity, immorality, or murder. Nor is it enough to mortify these inordinate affections: the fruit of the Spirit, the graces of godliness, must also be brought forth in the heart and life; for it is written, ‘follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’ (Heb 12:14). And therefore it is a pressing duty for each of us to heed the divine exhortation ‘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?’ (2Co 13:5).”

“Notice very carefully, dear friend, that the one point pressed upon the Corinthians was ‘that Jesus Christ is *in* you,’ and not their trusting that He died for them. Just as the Christian can only discover that his name was written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world by discerning that God has written His laws in his heart (Heb 10:16), so I can ascertain that Christ *died for me* only by making sure that He now *lives in me*. And it is obvious that if the Holy One indwells me that His presence must have wrought a radical change both in character and in conduct. *This*, above everything else, is what we sought to make clear and emphasized in our articles on ‘Assurance,’ namely the imperative necessity of our making sure that the Lord Jesus occupies the throne of our hearts, has the supreme place in our affections, and regulates the details of our lives. Unless *this* be the case with us, then our profession is vain, and all our talk of trusting in Christ’s finished work is but idle words.”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I consider all you have said to be but the language of a Pharisee. You are occupied with your own fancied goodness and delighting in your own worthless righteousness.”

Writer: “Pardon me, but I rather rejoice in what Christ’s Spirit has wrought in me, and pray that He will carry forward that work of grace to the glory of His name. But we must bring our discussion to a close. I would respectfully urge you to attend unto that exhortation addressed to all professing Christians, ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (2Pe 1:10).”

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I shall do nothing of the sort: I *hate* the very word ‘election.’ I know that I am saved, though I do not measure up to the impossible standard you want to erect.”

Writer: “Fare thee well; may it please the Lord to open your blind eyes, reveal to you His holiness, and bring you to His feet in godly fear and trembling.”

7. Dialogue 2: Humble Heart, Part One

Mr. Humble Heart: “Good morning, Sir. May I beg the favor of an hour of your valuable time?”

Editor: “Come in, and welcome. What can I do for you?”

Humble Heart: “I am sore troubled in spirit: I long so much to be able to call God ‘*my* Father,’ but I fear I might be guilty of lying were I to do so. There are many times when I have a little hope that He has begun a good work within me, but alas, for the most part, I find such a mass of corruption working within, that I feel sure that I have never been made a new creature in Christ. My heart is so cold and hard toward God, that it seems impossible the Holy Spirit could have shed abroad God’s love in me; unbelief and doubt so often master me, that it would be presumptuous to think I possess the faith of God’s elect. Yet I *want* to love Him, trust Him, serve Him; but it seems I cannot.”

Editor: “I am very glad you called. It is rare indeed to meet with an honest soul these days.”

Humble Heart: “Excuse me, Sir, but I do not want you to form a wrong impression of me: an *honest* heart is the very blessing I crave, but I am painfully conscious, from much clear evidence, that I possess it not. *My* heart is deceitful above all things, and I am full of hypocrisy. I have often begged God to make me holy, and right after, my actions proved that I did not mean what I said. I have often thanked God for His mercies, and then have soon fretted and murmured when His providence crossed my will. I had quite a battle before I came here to see you tonight, as to whether I was really seeking help, or as to whether my secret desire was to win your esteem: and I am not sure now which was my real motive.”

Humble Heart: “To come to the point, Sir, if I am not intruding. I have read and re-read your articles on ‘Assurance’ which appeared in last year’s magazines. Some things in those articles seemed to give me a little comfort, but other things almost drove me to despair. Sometimes your description of a born-again soul agreed with my own experience, but at other times I seemed as far from measuring up to it as the poles are asunder. So I do not know where I am. I have sought to heed 2 Corinthians 13:5 and ‘examine’ myself, and when I did so, I could see nothing but a mass of contradictions; or, it would be more accurate to say, for each one thing I found which seemed to show that I was regenerate, I found 10 things to prove that I could not be so. And now, Sir, I’m mourning night and day, for I feel of all men the most miserable.”

Editor: “Hypocrites are not exercised about their motives, nor troubled over the deceitfulness of their hearts! At any rate, I am thankful to see you are so deeply concerned about your soul’s eternal interests.”

Humble Heart: "Alas, Sir, I am not half as much concerned about them as I ought to be. That is another thing which occasions me much anguish. When the Lord Jesus tells us that the human soul is worth more than the whole world put together (Mar 8:36), I feel that I must be thoroughly blinded by Satan and completely under the dominion of sin, seeing that I am so careless. It is true that at times I am alarmed about my state and fearful that I shall soon be in Hell; at times too, I seem to seek God more earnestly and read His Word more diligently; but alas, my goodness is 'as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away' (Hos 6:4). The cares of this life so soon crowd out thoughts of the life to come. O, Sir, I want reality, not pretense; I want to make sure, yet cannot."

Editor: "That is not so simple a task as many would have us believe."

Humble Heart: "It certainly is not. I have consulted several Bible teachers, only to find them 'physicians of no value' (Job 13:4). I have also conferred with some who boasted that they never have a doubt, and they quoted to me Acts 16:31, and on telling them I did believe, they cried 'Peace, peace,' but there was no peace in my heart."

Editor: "Ah, dear friend, it is not without reason that God has bidden us, '*give diligence* to make your calling and election sure' (2Pe 1:10). And even after we have given diligence, we still need the Holy Spirit to 'bear witness with our spirit, that we *are* the children of God' (Rom 8:16). Moreover, spiritual assurance may easily be lost, or at least be clouded, as is evident from the case of him who wrote the 23rd Psalm, for at a later date he had to cry unto God, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.'

Editor: "Before proceeding further, had we not better ask the help of the Lord: His Holy Word says, 'In *all* thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' (Pro 3:6). And now, dear Brother, for such I am assured you really are, What is it that most causes you to doubt that you have passed from death unto life?"

Humble Heart: "My inward experiences, the wickedness of my heart, the many defeats I encounter daily."

Editor: "Perhaps you are looking for perfection in the flesh."

Humble Heart: "No, hardly that, for I know the 'flesh' or old nature is still left in the Christian. But I have met with some who claim to be living 'the victorious life,' who say they never have a doubt, never a rising of anger, discontent, or any wicked feelings or desires; that Christ so controls them that unclouded peace and joy are theirs all the time."

Editor: "Bear with me if I speak plainly, but such people are either hypnotized by the Devil, or they are fearful liars. God's Word says, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1Jo 1:8). And again, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Ecc 7:20). And again, 'In many things we offend all' (Jam 3:2). The beloved Apostle Paul when well advanced in the Christian life, declared, 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members' (Rom 7:21-23)."

Humble Heart: "That relieves my mind somewhat, yet it scarcely reaches the root of my difficulty. What troubles me so much is this: when God regenerates a man, he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus: the change wrought in him is so great that it is termed a 'passing from death unto life.' It is obvious that if God the Holy Spirit dwells in a person, that there must be a radical difference produced, both inwardly and outwardly, from what he was before. Now it is *this* which I *fail* to find in myself. Instead of being any better than I was a year ago, I feel I am worse. Instead of humility filling my heart, so often pride rules it; instead of lying passive like clay in the Potter's hand to be molded by Him, I am like a wild ass' colt; instead of rejoicing in the Lord always, I am frequently filled with bitterness and repinings."

Editor: "Such experiences as you describe *are* very sad and humbling, and need to be mourned over and confessed to God. They must *never* be excused nor glossed over. Nevertheless, they are not incompatible with the Christian state. Rather are they so many proofs that he who is experimentally acquainted with the 'plague of his own heart' (1Ki 8:38) is one in experience with the most eminent of God's saints. Abraham acknowledged he was 'dust and ashes' (Gen 18:27). Job said, 'I abhor myself' (42:6). David prayed, 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed' (Psa 6:2). Isaiah exclaimed, 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips' (6:5). In the anguish of his heart, Jeremiah asked, 'Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?' (20:18). Daniel once owned, 'There remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption' (10:8). Paul cried, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Rom 7:24).

"One of the principal things which distinguishes a regenerate person from an unregenerate one may be likened unto two rooms which have been swept but not dusted. In one, the blinds are raised and the sunlight streams in, exposing the dust still lying on the furniture. In the other, the blinds are lowered, and one walking through the room would be unable to discern its real condition. Thus it is in the case of one who has been renewed by the Spirit: his eyes have been opened to *see* the awful filth which lurks in every corner of his heart. But in the case of the unregenerate, though they have occasional twinges of conscience when they act wrongly, they are very largely ignorant of the awful fact that they are a complete mass of corruption unto the pure eyes of the thrice holy God. It is true that an unregenerate person may be instructed in the truth of the total depravity of fallen man, and he may 'believe' the same, yet his belief does not humble his heart, fill him with anguish, make him loathe himself, and feel that Hell is the only place which is fit for him to dwell in. But it is far oth-

erwise with one who sees light in *God's* light (Psa 36:9); he will not so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven, but smites upon his leprous breast, crying, 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'"

Humble Heart: "Would you kindly turn to the positive side, and give me a brief description of what characterizes a genuine Christian?"

Editor: "Among other gifts, every real Christian has such a knowledge of God in Christ, as works by love, that he is stirred up to earnestly inquire after *the will of God*, and studies His Word to learn His will, having a sincere desire and making an honest endeavor to live in the faith and practice of it."

Humble Heart: "I cannot boast of my knowledge of God in Christ, yet by divine grace this I may say: that I desire no other Heaven on earth than to know and to do God's will, and be assured that I have *His* approval."

Editor: "That is indeed a good sign that your soul has been actually renewed, and doubtless He who has begun a work of grace in your heart, will make the great change manifest in your life and actions. No matter what he thinks or says, no unregenerate man *really* desires to live a life which is pleasing to *God*."

Humble Heart: "God forbid that I should flatter myself, yet I hope I have often found delight when reading God's Word or hearing it preached, and I do sincerely meditate upon it, and long that I may 'grow in grace.' Yet, at times, I am tempted with vain and vile thoughts, and I strive to banish them, my heart rising up against them; yet sometimes I yield to them. I loathe lying and cursing, and cannot endure the company of those who hate practical godliness; yet my withdrawal from them seems nothing but pharisaic hypocrisy, for I am such a miserable failure myself. I pray to God for deliverance from temptation and for grace to resist the Devil, but I fear that I do not have His ear, for more often than not I am defeated by sin and Satan."

Editor: "When you thus fail in your duty, or fall into sin, what do you think of yourself and your ways? How are you affected therewith?"

Humble Heart: "When I am in this deplorable condition, my soul is grieved, my joy of heart and peace of conscience gone. But when I am a little recovered out of this sinful lethargy, my heart is melted with sorrow over my folly, and I address myself to God with great fear and shame, begging Him to forgive me, pleading 1 John 1:9, and humbly imploring Him to 'renew a right spirit within me.'"

Editor: "And *why* is it that you are so troubled when sin conquers you?"

Humble Heart: "Because I truly wish to please the Lord, and it is my greatest grief when I realize that I have dishonoured and displeased Him. His mercy has kept me, thus far, from breaking out into open and public sins, yet there is very much *within* which I know He hates."

Editor: "Well my dear brother and companion in the path of tribulation, God has ordained that the Lamb shall be eaten with '*bitter*' herbs' (Exo 12:8). So it was with the Apostle: 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2Co 6:10) summed up his dual experience: 'sorrowful' over his sinful failures, both of omission and commission; yet 'rejoicing' over the provisions which divine grace has made for us while we are in this dreary desert—the Mercy Seat ever open to us, where we may draw near, unburden our heavy hearts, and pour out our tale of woe; the Fountain which has been 'opened for sin and for uncleanness' (Zec 13:1), where we may repair for cleansing. I am indeed thankful to learn that your conscience confirms what your tongue has uttered. You have expressed enough to clearly evidence that the Holy Spirit has begun a good work in your soul. But I trust you also have faith in the Lord Jesus, the Mediator, by whom alone any sinner can draw near unto God."

Humble Heart: "By divine grace I do desire to acknowledge and embrace the Lord Jesus upon the terms on which He is proclaimed in the Gospel: to believe all His doctrine as my Teacher, to trust in and depend upon the atoning sacrifice which He offered as the great High Priest, and to submit to His rule and government as King. But, alas, in connection with the last, 'to *will* is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good, I find not' (Rom 7:18)."

Editor: "No real Christian ever attains his ideal in this life; he never reaches that perfect standard which God has set before us in His Word, and which was so blessedly exemplified in the life of Christ. Even the Apostle Paul, near the close of his life, had to say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 3:12). But may I ask if you are sensible of how you arrived at the good desires you mentioned? Do you suppose that such a disposition is *natural* to you, or that it has resulted from your own improvement of your faculties?"

Humble Heart: "No, Sir, I dare not ascribe to nature that which is the effect and fruit of divine grace. If I have any measure of sanctification (which is what I long to be assured of), then it can only be by the gift and operation of God. I am too well acquainted with my wretched self: I know too well that by nature I am alive to vanity and sin, but dead to God and all real goodness; that folly possesses my soul, darkness shrouds my understanding; that I am utterly unable to will or to do what is pleasing in God's sight, and that my natural heart is set contrary to the way of salvation proposed in the Gospel, rising up against its flesh—condemning precepts and commandments. I see, I know, I feel that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth *no* good thing."

Editor: "Then do you realize what must be the outcome if God were to leave you unto yourself?"

Humble Heart: “Yes, indeed. Without the assistance of His Holy Spirit, I should certainly make shipwreck of the faith. My daily prayer is ‘Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe’ (Psa 119:117). My earnest desire is that I may watch and pray against every temptation. There is nothing I dread more than apostatising, relaxing in my duty, returning to wallow in the mire.”

Editor: “These are all *plain evidences of the saving grace of God at work within you*, which I beseech Him to continue, so that you may be preserved with a tender conscience, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and obtain a full assurance of His love for you.”

Humble Heart: “I thank you kindly, Sir, for your patience and help. What you have said makes me feel lighter in heart, but I wish to go home and prayerfully ponder the same, for I dare not take no *man’s* word for it. I want God Himself ‘to say unto my soul, I am *thy* salvation’ (Psa 35:3). Will you not pray that it may please Him so to do?”

Editor: “You shall certainly have a place in my feeble petitions. The Lord be very gracious unto you.”

8. Dialogue 3: Humble Heart, Part Two

In the communicating of His Word, God was pleased to speak “at sundry times and in divers manners” (Heb 1:1). In the Scriptures of Truth we have clear doctrinal instruction and plain precepts for the regulation of conduct, but we also find “dark parables” and mysterious symbols. Side by side is history and allegory, hymns of praise and practical proverbs, precious promises and intricate prophecies. Variety stamps all the works and ways of God. This illustrates a principle which should guide those whom the Lord has called to teach His Word: there should be variety both in the matter of their messages and the methods employed in delivering them. Many are unable to apprehend abstract statements, comparatively few have minds trained to follow a course of logical reasoning. The teacher then, ought to adapt himself to the capacity of his hearers. Blessedly do we find this exemplified in the ministry of the perfect Teacher. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was largely by question and answer. Having this in mind, we feel it may be wise to complete this book on “Assurance” in dialogue form.

Editor: “Good evening, friend Humble Heart.”

Brother Humble Heart: “Good evening, Mr. Editor. This is a pleasant surprise, for I was not expecting to be favoured with a visit from one of God’s servants: I do not feel worthy of their notice.”

Editor: “According to my promise, I have been seeking to remember you before the Throne of Grace, and while in prayer this morning there was impressed on my mind those words, ‘Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees’ (Heb 12:12). I have been impressed of late by that lovely prophetic picture of Christ found in Isaiah 40:11, ‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.’ The Savior devotes special care and tenderness upon the weak of the flock, and in this He has left an example which the under-shepherds need to follow.”

Brother Humble Heart: “It is indeed kind of you, Sir, to bestow any trouble upon such a poor, worthless creature as I am: I should have thought your time had been more profitably employed in ministering to those who *can* take in the Truth quickly, and who grow in it by leaps and bounds; as for me, I am so dull and stupid, so full of doubtings and fears, that your labours on me are wasted.”

Editor: “Ah, my friend, all is not gold that glitters. The great majority of those who ‘take in the Truth quickly’ only do so intellectually—it has no power over the heart; and those who ‘grow by leaps and bounds,’ grow too swiftly for it to be real, or worth anything spiritually. Truth has to be ‘bought’ (Pro 23:23): ‘bought’ by frequent meditation thereon, by taking it home unto ourselves, by deep exercises of conscience, by wrestling with God in prayer, that He would apply it in power to the soul.”

Brother Humble Heart.: “Yes, I realize that, and it makes me feel so bad because God’s Word has not been written on *my* heart. I have gone over in my mind, again and again, all that you said at our last interview, and I am sure that I am unregenerate.”

Editor: “What leads you to such a conclusion?”

Brother Humble Heart: “This, if I had been regenerated the Holy Spirit would be dwelling within me, and in that case He would be producing His blessed fruit in my heart and life. It is written, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance’ (self-control)—Galatians 5:22-23; and as I have endeavored to examine and search myself, I discover in me the very opposite of these heavenly graces.”

Editor: “God’s workings in grace and His ways in the material creation have much in common, and if we observe closely the latter, we may learn much about the former. Now in the natural realm the production of fruit is often a slow process. Glance out now at the trees, and how do they look? They are leafless, and seem to be dead. Yet they are not; the vital sap is still in their roots, even though no signs of it be apparent to us. But in a little while, under the genial warmth of the sun, those trees will be covered with blossoms. Then, after a few days, those pretty blossoms will all have disappeared—blown off

by the winds. Nevertheless, if those trees be examined closely it will be found that where those blossoms were, are now little green buds. Many weeks have to pass before the owner of those trees is gladdened by seeing the buds develop into fruit.

“A further lesson may be learned from our gardens. The orchard teaches us the need for patience: the garden instructs us to expect and overcome disappointments. Here is a bed, which has been carefully prepared, and sown with seed. Later, the seed springs up and the plants appear from which the flowers are to grow. But side by side there spring up many weeds too. The uninstructed gardener was not expecting this, and is apt to be discouraged. Before he sowed the flower seed, he thought he had carefully rooted up every nettle, thistle, and obnoxious plant; but now the bed has in it more weeds than flowers. So it is my Brother with the heart of the Christian. Though the incorruptible seed of God’s Word is planted there (1Pe 1:23), yet the heart—neglected all through the years of unregeneracy—is overgrown with weeds (the lusts of the flesh), and to the anointed eye the heart looks more like the Devil’s weed plot than ‘the King’s garden’ (2Ki 25:4).”

Brother Humble Heart: “What you have just referred to in the natural realm is quite obvious, but I am not so clear about the spiritual application. Does not your last illustration belittle the work and power of the Holy Spirit? You have often quoted in your articles that Christ saves His people ‘*from* their sins’ (Mat 1:21), how, then, can any person rightfully regard himself as saved, while he is conscious that many sins have dominion over him?”

Editor: “I am glad you raised this point, for many dear souls are often troubled over it. Concerning the work and power of the Holy Spirit: light is thrown on this by various expressions which God has used in His Word. For example, in 2 Corinthians 1:22 (cf. Eph 1:13-14) we read that God has ‘given *the earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts.’ Now an ‘earnest’ means a part, and not the whole—an installment, as it were; the fullness of the Spirit’s power and blessing is communicated to no Christian in this life. So again in Romans 8:23, ‘ourselves also, which have *the first fruits* of the Spirit’—a pledge, a sample only, of future greater abundance.

“Let me call your attention to the words which immediately follow those just quoted from Romans 8:23, namely, ‘even we ourselves groan within ourselves’ which is the more striking because this same thing is seen again in 2 Corinthians 5:4-5. So those who *are* indwelt by the Spirit of God are a ‘groaning’ people! It is true that the unregenerate ‘groan’ at times: when suffering great bodily pain, or over some heavy loss; but the ‘groaning’ of the Christian is occasioned by something very different: he groans over the remains of depravity still left within him, over the flesh so often successfully resisting the Spirit, over seeing around him so much that is dishonouring to Christ. This is clear from Romans 7:24 and its context, Philippians 3:18, etc.”

Brother Humble Heart: “But only a few days ago I mentioned some of these very Scriptures to one whom I regard as an eminent saint, and he told me that he had ‘got out of Romans 7 into Romans 8’ long ago.”

Editor: “But as we have seen, the Christian in Romans 8 ‘groans’ (v. 23)!”

Brother Humble Heart: “The one I had reference to laughed at me for my doubts and fears, told me I was dishonouring God by listening to the Devil.”

Editor: “It is much to be feared that he is a complete stranger to those exercises of heart which are experienced by every regenerate soul, and knows nothing of that heart-anguish and soul-travail which ever precedes *spiritual* assurance. The Lord Jesus did not laugh at fearing souls, but said, ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’ It is clear that your acquaintance does not understand your case.”

Brother Humble Heart: “But do you mean to say that all of God’s children are as wretched in soul as I am?”

Editor: “No, I would not say that. The Holy Spirit does not give the same degree of light on the exceeding sinfulness of sin to all alike, nor does He reveal so fully unto all, their own inward depravity. Moreover, just as God has appointed different seasons to the year, so no true Christian is always the same in his soul: there are cheerful days of spring and gloomy days of autumn, both in the natural and in the spiritual. ‘But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day’ (Pro 4:18), nevertheless ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God’ (Act 14:22). Both are true, though we are not always conscious of them both.”

Brother Humble Heart: “I do not believe that any real Christian is ever plagued as I am: plagued so often with a spirit of rebellion, with unbelief, with pride, with such vile thoughts and desires that I would blush to mention them.”

Editor: “Ah, my Brother, few unregenerate souls would be honest enough to acknowledge as much! The very fact that these inward workings of sin plague you is clear proof that you *are* regenerate, that there is within you a nature or principle of holiness which loathes all that is unholy. It is this which causes the Christian to ‘groan,’ nevertheless this brings him into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. While here the Lord Jesus was ‘the Man of Sorrows,’ and that which occasioned all His grief was sin—not His own, for He had none; but the sins of others. This then is one reason why God leaves the sinful nature in His people even after regeneration: that mourning over it they may be conformed to their suffering Head.”

Brother Humble Heart: “But how does this tally with Christ’s saving His people from their sins?”

Editor: “Matthew 1:21 in nowise clashes with what I have been saying. Christ saves His people from the *guilt* and *punishment* of their sins, because that was transferred to and vicariously suffered by Him. He saves us, too, from the pollution of sin: His Spirit moves us to see, grieve over, confess our sins, and plead the precious blood; and as this is done in faith, the

conscience is cleansed. He also saves us from the reigning power of sin, so that the Christian is no longer the absolute and abject slave of sin and Satan. Moreover, the ultimate fulfillment of this blessed promise (like that of many others) is yet future: the time is coming when the Lord Jesus shall rid His people of the very presence of sin, so that they shall be done with it forever.”

Brother Humble Heart: “While on that point I wish you would explain to me those words ‘sin shall not have dominion over you’ (Rom 6:14).”

Editor: “Observe first what that verse does not say: it is not ‘sin shall not haunt and harass you’ or ‘sin shall not trip you and occasion many a fall’; had it said *that*, every Christian might well despair. To ‘have dominion over’ signifies the legal right to command another, such as a parent has over his child, or as one nation has over another which has been completely conquered in war. Such *legal* ‘dominion’ sin has *not* over any Christian: Christ alone is his rightful Lord. But sin oftentimes usurps authority over us—yet even experimentally it has *not* complete ‘dominion’: it can lead no Christian to apostatize—that is, utterly and finally renounce Christ. It can never so dominate the believer that he is thoroughly in love with sin and repents not when he sins.”

Brother Humble Heart: “Thank you; but may I ask another question: Why is it that some of God’s children are not plagued by sin as I am?”

Editor: “How can you be sure that they are not? ‘The heart knoweth his own bitterness’ (Pro 14:10).”

Brother Humble Heart: “But I can tell from their peaceful countenances, their conversation, their joy in the Lord, that it cannot so be the case with them.”

Editor: “Some are blest with a more cheerful natural disposition than others. Some keep shorter accounts with God, making it a point of conscience to confess every known sin to Him. Some are more diligent in using the means of grace: they who neglect the reading of God’s Word, meditation thereon, and approach the Throne of Grace only occasionally and formally, cannot expect to have healthy souls.”

Brother Humble Heart: “I admit I cannot meet your arguments. What you say is doubtless true of God’s people, but my case is far worse than you realize: I have such a sink of iniquity within, and so often find myself listless toward all that is spiritual, that I greatly fear there can be no assurance for me.”

Editor: “It is the Devil who tells you that.”

Brother Humble Heart: “How can one distinguish between the harassing doubts which the Devil injects, and the convictions of sin and piercing of the conscience which the Holy Spirit produces?”

Editor: “*By the effects produced*. Satan will tell you that it is no use to resist indwelling sin any longer, that it is useless to pray any more. He seeks to produce despair, and tells many harassed souls they might as well commit suicide and put an end to their misery. But when the Holy Spirit convicts a Christian, He also works in his heart a godly sorrow, and moves him to acknowledge his transgressions to God: He leads to the Throne of Grace and gives again a sight of the cleansing blood of Christ; and this not once or twice, but to the end of our earthly lives. ‘For a just man falleth seven times, *and riseth up again*’ (Pro 24:16). If then this agrees with your own experience, you must be a Christian.”

Brother Humble Heart: “I cannot but be struck with the fact that *your* counsel and instruction are the very opposite of what was given to me by the last person I spoke to about my sorrows. He is a man very wise in the Scriptures, having scores of passages at his finger’s end. He told me that the only way to get rid of my doubting was to believe the Word, and that every time I felt miserable to lay hold of one of the promises.”

Editor: “I think I know the company to which that man belongs. All they believe in is a *natural* faith, which lies in the power of the creature; a faith which is merely the product of our own will-power. But *that* is not the ‘faith of God’s elect.’ Spiritual faith is the gift of God, and only the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit can call it forth into action in any of us. Shun such people, my Brother. Avoid all who give no real place to the Holy Spirit, but would make you believe that the remedy lies in your own ‘free will.’ Seek more the company and communion of God Himself, and beg Him for Christ’s sake to increase your faith and stay your mind upon Himself.”

9. Dialogue 4: Fears

Brother Humble Heart: “Good evening, Mr. Editor, I trust I am not intruding.”

Editor: “No indeed, you are very welcome Brother Humble Heart, and I am thankful to see from your countenance that your heart is lighter (Pro 15:13).”

Brother Humble Heart: “I am glad to say it is so at present, for the Lord has been very gracious to me, and I cannot but think that it is in answer to your prayers, for the Scriptures declare, ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much’ (Jam 5:16).”

Editor: "If the Lord has deigned to hear my feeble intercessions on your behalf, all praise alone to Him. But tell me something of His goodness towards you."

Brother Humble Heart: "May it please the Lord to direct my thoughts, anoint my lips, and help me to do so. My story is rather a long one, but I will be as concise as the case allows. "A poor woman, known among the Lord's people as Sister Fearing, was left a widow some months ago, and having buried all her children, I knew she had no one to spade her garden; so this spring I called on her, and asked if she would allow me to do it."

Editor: "I am glad to hear that: if godliness be not intensely practical, then it is only a name without the reality. It is written 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (Jam 1:17). And did this poor Sister avail herself of your kind offer?"

Brother Humble Heart: "Yes, with tears running down her face, she told me she was quite unable to express her gratitude. Later she said it was not so much my offer to help which moved her so deeply, but that it gave her a little hope she was not completely abandoned by God."

"I asked her why she ever entertained the thought that God had cast her off? She told me that most of the time she felt herself to be such a vile and polluted creature that a holy God could not look with any complacency upon her. She said she was so constantly tormented by doubts and fears that God must have given her over to an evil heart of unbelief. She added that, in spite of all her reading of the Word and crying unto the Lord for strength, her case seemed to grow worse and worse, so that it appeared Heaven *must* be closed against her."

Editor: "And what reply did you make to her sorrowful complaint?"

Brother Humble Heart: "Why, there flowed into my mind a verse which I had not thought of for a long time: I felt it was from the Lord, and looking to Him for wisdom and tenderness, I addressed the dear soul as follows:

"Sister Fearing, I think you are too hasty in your conclusion. I have been just where you now are. I read in God's Word, 'the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power' (1Co 4:20), and I reasoned that if God had set up His kingdom in my heart, then the power of sin would be broken; and alas, I found sin in me stronger than ever. I read 'he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him' (1Jo 4:16), but I could not believe He dwelt in me while I was in such bondage to slavish fear. I read 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father' (Rom 8:15), but I could not cry 'Abba, Father'; so I was afraid God had nothing to do with me. I read, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin' (1Jo 3:9), and though I was preserved from bringing public reproach upon the name of Christ, yet I found myself continually overcome by sin within. My guilty conscience daily condemned me, and unto peace I was a stranger."

Sister Fearing: "You have accurately described my sad lot; but go on please."

Brother Humble Heart: "Suffer me, then, to ask you a few honest questions. Have you been chastised, rebuked, made tender and sore for sin? And after feeling God's reproofs, was your spirit revived and refreshed under the Word, so that you hoped for better days?"

Sister Fearing: "Yes, I have been conscious of God's rod upon me, and have owned with David, 'Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me' (Psa 119:75). And there have been times, all too brief, when it seemed I was softened and revived, and had a little hope; but the sun was soon again hidden behind dark clouds."

Brother Humble Heart: "Well, *that* proves God *does* dwell within you, for He declares, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to *revive* the spirit of the humble, and to *revive* the heart of the contrite ones!' (Isa 57:15)."

Sister Fearing: "Yes, I am familiar with that verse, but it makes against *me*, for had God truly 'revived' me, the *effects* of it would remain; instead, I am dry and parched, lifeless and barren."

Brother Humble Heart: "Again you are too hasty in 'writing bitter things against' yourself (Job 13:26). Such 'revivings' of faith, hope, and love in the soul *are* evidences of the Spirit's indwelling. But let me now give you the verse which flowed into my mind at the beginning of our conversation: it exactly fits your case, 'And now *for a little space* grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us *a little reviving* in our bondage' (Ezr 9:8). Ah, dear Sister, do you not see that this 'little reviving,' even though it be for 'a little space' is a manifestation of God's dwelling in a broken and contrite heart?"

Editor: "That was indeed a word in season, and evidently given you by the Spirit. There are many hindered from enjoying assurance through unnecessary fears: because sin is in them as an active and restless principle they imagine they have no contrary principle of holiness; and because in part they are carnal, judge that they are not spiritual. Because grace is but feebly active, they conclude they are void of it; and because for a long season they enjoy not strong consolation, suppose they have no title to it. They fail to distinguish between the motions of the flesh and the motions of the Spirit: as surely as sin manifests the flesh to be in us, so does grieving over it, striving against it, repenting for it, and the confessing of it to God show the Spirit or new nature indwells us. The Christian's sighs and groans are among his best evidences that he is regenerate."

Brother Humble Heart: “May I ask, exactly what you meant when you said, Many are hindered from enjoying assurance through *unnecessary fears*? My reason for asking is because in Philippians 2:12 God bids His people work out their salvation *with fear and trembling*.”

Editor: “Your question is well taken. We must distinguish sharply between the fears of *godly jealousy* and the fears of *unbelief*: the one is a distrusting of self, the other is a doubting of God; the former is opposed to pride and carnal confidence, the latter is the enemy of true peace. The eleven Apostles manifested the fear of godly jealousy when the Saviour announced that one would betray Him, and each of them enquired, ‘Lord, is it I?’ David gave way to the fear of unbelief when he said, ‘I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul’ (1Sa 27:1). But I have interrupted your narrative; tell me how Sister Fearing responded to your giving her Ezra 9:8.”

Brother Humble Heart: “Really, it seemed to make little impression. She sighed deeply, and for a while said nothing. Then she continued, ‘I fear it would be presumption for me to say that I have ever been *revived*, for a dead soul cannot be—he must first be quickened; probably the raising of my spirits under the reading or hearing of the Word is nothing more than the joy of the stony-ground hearer’ (Mat 13:20-21). To which I replied, ‘But one who has never been quickened has *no* pantings after God, never seeks Him at all, but seeks to banish Him entirely from his thoughts. True, he may go to church, and keep up a form of godliness before others, but there is no diligent seeking after Him in private, no yearnings for communion with Him.’

“Perhaps, dear Sister, it may be a day of ‘small things’ (Zec 4:10) with you. Often there is life, where there is not strength. A child may breathe and cry, yet cannot talk or walk. If God be the object of your affection, if sin be the cause of your grief, if conformity to Christ be the longing of your heart, then a good work *has* begun in you (Phi 1:6). If it is indwelling sin which makes you so wretched from day to day, if it be deliverance from its polluting affects you yearn and pray for, if it be the lustings of the flesh you are struggling against, then it must be because a principle of holiness has been implanted in your heart. Such godly exercises are not in us by nature; they are the products of indwelling grace. Despair not, for it is written of Christ, ‘a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench’ (Mat 12:20).”

Sister Fearing: “Yes, it is one thing to understand these things intellectually, but it is quite another for God to apply them in power to the heart: *that* is what I long for, and that is what I lack. My wound is far too deadly for any man to heal. O that I could be sure as to whether my disrelish of sin arises from mere natural convictions of conscience that every ungodly person feels more or less, whether they are suggestions from Satan for the purpose of deceiving me, or whether they actually are the strivings of the new nature against the old. Nothing short of the personal, mighty, and saving power of the Holy Spirit realized in my heart, will or can give me genuine relief.”

Brother Humbling Heart: “I am thankful to hear you say this. Human comforts may satisfy an empty professor, but such a plaster will not heal one of the elect when stricken by God. It is His purpose to cut off *every* arm of flesh from them, to strip them and bring them, in their helplessness, as empty-handed beggars before the throne of His grace. As to whether or not the life of God be actually planted in the soul, *therein* lies the grand mystery: *that* is the pivot on which eternal destiny must turn. And no verdict from man can satisfy on that point. Only the Lord Himself can give such a testimony or witness as will satisfy one of His children. But when He *does* shine into the soul, when He applies His Word in power, when *He* says ‘thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace,’ then no word from a preacher is needed. The Lord keep you at His feet till He grants this.

“Until very recently I too was much exercised over the great danger of Satan instilling a false peace, and making me believe that all was well, when it was not so; as I was also much perplexed to know how to distinguish between the convictions of *natural* conscience and the exercises of a *renewed* conscience. But the Lord has shown me that as a tree is known by its fruits, so the nature of a cause may be determined by the *character of the effects* it produces. They who are deluded by the false peace which Satan bestows are filled with conceit, presumption, and carnal confidence: they do not beg God to search them; being so sure of Heaven they consider it quite unnecessary. The convictions of natural conscience harden, stop the mouth of prayer, and lead to despair. The convictions of a renewed conscience produce penitent confession, lead to Christ, and issue in honesty and uprightness before God.

“In conclusion, let me earnestly counsel you, dear Sister, to have nothing to do with those who profess their experience to be all peace and joy; and who, if you ask them whether they are tormented by the plague of their own heart, or whether they have *felt* the blood of Christ applied to their own conscience, laugh, and say they have nothing to do with feelings, but live above them. Such deluded creatures can be of no more help to a groaning saint than one suffering anguish from bodily ills would receive any relief from the so-called Christian Scientists, who tell him his pains are mental delusions, and to think only of health and happiness: one and another are equally physicians of no value. Instead, pour out your woes into the ears of the Great Physician, and in His own perfect time He will pour oil and wine into your wounds, and put a new song into your mouth.”

Brother Humble Heart: “Since then I have said nothing more to her on the subject, believing it best to leave her alone with God.”

Editor: "I am glad to hear that: none but blind Arminians will attempt to do the Holy Spirit's work for Him. Much damage is often done to souls by trying to force things: when God begins a work, we may safely leave it in *His* hands to continue and complete the same. And how happy I am, dear Brother, to perceive the dew of the Spirit upon your own soul. It appears that 'the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear,' and 'the time of the singing of birds is come' (Song 2:11-12) with you."

Brother Humble Heart: "Thanks be unto God for taking pity upon such a wretch: it is much better with me now. The strange thing is, though I had little or no real assurance myself when I commenced speaking to Sister Fearing, but as she mentioned the different things which so sorely troubled her, God seemed to put into my mouth the very words most needed, and as I spake them to her, He sealed them into my own heart."

Editor: "Yes, it is as we read in Proverbs 11:25, 'The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself': in communicating the Word of God to His children, our own hearts are refreshed and our own faith is established. To him that useth what he hath shall more be given. "I have long perceived the truth of what the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 1:4, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' It is God's way to take His people, *and especially His servants*, through trying and painful experiences, in order that they may *use* to His glory the consolation wherewith He has comforted them. It is those who know most of the plague of their own heart, who are best fitted to speak a word in season to weary souls. It is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and it is he who has passed through the furnace who can best deal with those now in the fire. Let us pray that it may please God to be equally gracious unto Sister Fearing."

