



Assurance Part One



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1. Introduction.

By way of introduction and in order to acquaint the reader with the particular angle of 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. 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 defence 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 flood 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 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 sixteenth century and in the early part of the seventeenth such men as Perkins, Gattaker, Rollock, etc., made prominent the collateral doctrine of sanctification by the Spirit. For the next fifty 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, Sibbs, 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 first century A.D.

The eighteenth 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 eighteenth century the great *doctrines* 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 doubtings 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 a lack of assurance ensues.

The second half of last 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 lustings, 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 nought 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 one

meaning of that expression, “and be established in the present truth” (2 Pet. 1:12), namely that particular aspect or line of truth which is most needful at any given time. Instead of gaining ground, the Puritans had 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, calls for different ministry. There is such a thing as “a word spoken *in due season*” (Prov. 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 an infant upon them? So too sickness of the 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 in pressing it on the attention of a *backslidden* child of God?

Our introduction has been a lengthy one, yet we deemed 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 one hundred years since, 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 ones. 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 danger of this is not to be fancied, but real. 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” (Prov. 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” (Titus 1:1). Ascertain whether or no

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*” (2 Pet. 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 the 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 us *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” (1 John 5:13). The Holy Spirit Himself moved one of His servants to write a whole Epistle to instruct us *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” (1 John 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” (1 John 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 prove 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” (1 John 2:4). How plain and pointed is this 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” (1 John 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, which 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 conceit than seven men

that *can* give a reason” (Prov. 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 act. 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 Godward, 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 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 the seed falls. 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 (Luke 8:12). In another case, they “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). In another case, they are “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luke 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 represents *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” (Luke 8:15). Ah, dear readers, the test is *fruit*: not knowledge, not boastings, 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.

“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 (1 John 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 (1 John 3:14, 18, 19, 21, 24; Heb. 6:11-12, 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 (1 John 5:13; 2 Tim. 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 believes.”

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 twentieth century has brought forth. The one is

extracted from the Westminster Confession of Faith (the doctrinal statement of the Presbyterians), the other is taken from the “Scofield Bible.” In the one, 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 backward. The answer given by the Puritans is calculated to lead to heart searchings; 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, the *nature* of assurance.

2. 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 is 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*” (Titus 1:1), that my love for Christ is sincere and not fictitious, 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’s notice. 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, and 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 swellings 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 states of 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” (Matt. 5:10, 11). Observe that this antagonism is not evoked by wrongdoing, or by a well-grounded offence. 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 where Christ-likeness 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 searching of the Scriptures, your prayers, evince it? 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 over indwelling sin and its activities, but have you *felt* at all “the plague” of your own heart (1 Kings 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” (1 Pet. 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” (2 Pet. 1:10) of. 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 doubts, 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 for 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 (Phil. 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 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 reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in (or “by”) God” (John 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 (verse 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 deceived heart hath 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 1 Cor. 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 in 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 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 and 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, as 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 (Matt. 13:13). So it is still. To “hear” spiritually, to “hear” savingly, is to *heed* (Matt. 18:15), is to *obey* (Matt. 17:5; John 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 “heareth.”

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” (1 Tim. 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” (Acts 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 Acts 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 jailor to “believe on Jesus” nor “believe in Christ;” but to “believe on *the Lord* Jesus Christ.”

What does it mean to *savingly* “believe?” We have sought to answer this question at length in our recent articles on “Saving Faith.” But let us now 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*” (John 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” (Luke 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 sceptre 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 wise or to any degree meritorious. No, no; but as *the evidence* of his Divine sonship.

3. Its Basis.

The task which these articles sets 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” (Luke 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” (James 2:20). A “simple faith” which remains alone, a faith which does not purify the heart (Acts 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 it that, the incarnate Son of God was named “Jesus” because “He shall *save* His people *from their sins*” (Matt. 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” (John 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*” (Prov. 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" (Zech. 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" (James 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” (Eccl. 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” (Matt. 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” (2 Peter 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 colours, 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 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 every one 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 leadeth 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" (Phil. 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 (Acts 15:9). It is the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is the laws 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 that there 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 thy self 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 1 Chron. 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*” (2 Cor. 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” (Luke 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 (Phil. 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 (Matt. 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, whether we are made partakers of Christ or not, or whether His Spirit dwell 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 on Heb. 3:14, 1670). 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 any time 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 any time 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 than *that* to stand upon, he might well despair. Satan can bring a verse of Scripture before the mind (Matt. 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 offence toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). Where such a conscience is (by grace) maintained, we can say with the Apostle, “This is our rejoicing (what? resting on John 3:16? No, but) *the testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity . . . we have had our conversation in the world” (2 Cor. 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” (Prov. 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*” (1 John 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” (Acts 9:31 and compare with 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” (Titus 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*” (1 John 4:13).

5. Its Subjects.

Under this head we propose to 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” (Acts 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” (Matt. 7:24). Who are truly born again? “Everyone that doeth righteousness” (1 John 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” (Acts 15:9), “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), “overcometh the world” (1 John 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” (1 Cor. 2:13). Wondrous things has God prepared “for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 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.

6. Its Hindrances.

“*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 (2 Peter 1:10), true believers may wait long before they obtain it (1 John 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; 1 John 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,?" 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 unfavourably 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" (2 Tim. 1:12). "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 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 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 unChristlike. 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” (Mark 9:24).

But the commonest 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 drouth 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” (verses 9-12). This leads us to consider,

7. 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" (Prov. 4:23). "Watch ye and pray *lest* ye enter into temptation" (Mark 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 (Matt. 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 wilful 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" (Prov. 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 left 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.’ (2 Peter 1:5); this is the proper work of spiritual diligence. This is the nature of Gospel-graces, because of their concatenation [linking] 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” (1 John 3:21).

But strive as he may, walk as cautiously and carefully as he will, in “many things” the Christian “offends” (James 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” (1 John 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 offence. Nor should we fear to do this frequently, daily, yea constantly. If the Lord bids us to forgive our sinning brethren “until seventy times seven” (Matt. 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” (Prov. 28:13).

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” (1 John 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” (1 John 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 (John 14:31), always doing those things which were pleasing in His sight (John 8:29). And this very Epistle declares “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). What a standard is here set before us! yet 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 moulded 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.

8. Its Fruits.

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).

Holy assurance produces patience in tribulation: “And 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” (2 Peter 1:10-11).

The first of two booklets.

