

Assumption and Assurance

Hebrews 6:11-13 ESV And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- I. If you read older Christian books from the 16-19th centuries, you notice writers often discuss the idea of of “assurance”. Their words concern how believers can get assurance, and why unbelievers and the unsanctified don’t. They put assurance forth as a principal thing to be desired, pursued, and treasured, once it is attained.
 - A. When I began to see this consistently in old books, I asked: What is assurance?
 1. Assurance of salvation is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit allowing a disciple of Jesus to know with confidence that they are justified, and have benefited from the gospel they believe. It’s the internal affirmation of what the scriptures teach about Christ’s saving work in the individual believer.
 2. **2 Timothy 1:12 ESV** But I am *not ashamed*, for *I know* whom I have believed, and *I am convinced* that *he is able* to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. This is a textbook statement of full assurance!
 - B. But if assurance is that important, whatever happened to it? Why don’t pastors and authors talk about it anymore after 400 years of near-constant mention?
 1. From the time of the apostles until the nineteenth century (with an exception being the oppressive, abusive Catholic dark ages), the way of salvation was meticulously presented in sermons, and thoroughly explained in tracts, sermons and books, along with instruction in the prime universities.
 - a) When people showed up at church, or even in seminaries, there was no assumption they were “saved”; neither on the part of the church or the individual. Churches kept the need of salvation before the people, in hopes the Spirit would convict them of their need to be saved by Christ.
 - b) They expected people to carefully consider the gospel, never assuming they could make a “choice” to believe it, but trusting the Holy Spirit to make truth real to them, and help them to understand their need, and the grace available to them. They were encouraged to seek **assurance** from God, and to wait and search the Bible prayerfully until they did!
 2. In the mid-1800’s, a wildly popular revivalist named Charles Finney came on the scene. He determined that this apostolic process was painfully slow, and began to develop methods to “mass produce” followers of Christ. The goal of the church had always been to make individual disciples, but Finney wanted widespread societal, moral reform of culture, not individual people.
 - a) So he introduced things like the “altar call”, the “sinner’s prayer”, and using soft music to put people in an emotional frame of mind. These things may seem common (and even normal) to you, but they were never used in the first 1,850 years of Christ’s church.
 - b) Finney enticed people to Christ through their emotions instead of their minds (as had been done since the beginning), and people responded. Thousands of people walked aisles and made decisions during his lifetime. As Henry Ford would later develop assembly lines to make machines, Finney mechanized the process of making Christians.

- C. Finney dramatically changed what most people think of as coming to Christ. His methods are used in many if not most churches. But what has been the cost?
1. People once waited on God to be convinced they needed to be born again based on what they heard from the scriptures. They would never have thought that they could just make up their mind to be accepted by God.
 - a) Finney put them in the driver's seat: "Make a decision...walk an aisle... pray a certain prayer and you're in!" The process was streamlined to signing a "good-faith contract" to avoid hell and obtain the favor of God.
 - b) Understanding the Bible, confessing and repenting from sin are no longer necessary. Don't trouble yourself with the heavy demands of Christ, though he commanded us to "count the cost" before making him Lord.
 2. Pastors used to leave the assurance of a person's salvation to God alone, never pronouncing anyone saved just because they repeated a prayer.
 - a) But people seem to like the Finney method better, because making a decision is a lighter burden than laying down sins you'd rather embrace, and dealing with unbelief towards God's sovereign choice in salvation, abandoning our lust for control, and letting him call us into his kingdom.
 - b) So "Finneyism" proves our problem is unbelief. God **can** use altar calls, decision prayers, and emotional music (he did in my salvation!), but do we believe that God has enough power to call sinners to himself through the simplicity of the preached Word. Can anyone point to anyone using any of Finney's methods in the book of Acts? No, you cannot.
- D. **Acts 2:37 ESV** Now **when they heard** this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" There was no invitation! The Word alone convinced the first hearers of the need for Jesus!
1. This is not only the case in Acts 2 - throughout Acts, Peter, Phillip, Paul, Barnabas, and Silas preached the Word of Christ with no added "production value" beyond what was provided by the Holy Spirit, and people responded!
 2. The Holy Spirit brought the conviction of sin, convincing of gospel truth, confirming signs and wonders, and, ultimately, assurance of salvation. All he required his servants to do was proclaim the truth, accurately and boldly.
- II. But we've traded God's assurance of faith and salvation, brought about by the power of the preached word for "gospel assumption". What was once completely supernatural is now purely transactional. We now trust a process, not a Person; a procedure, not a promise or a Promiser. We trust the instructions of a preacher more than the Word preached. We assume that of which we have not been assured by God. Jesus himself warned us about this...
- A. **Matthew 7:21 ESV** "Not everyone **who says** to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one **who does the will of my Father** who is in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' **23** And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
1. Assumption is seen when a mega-church preaches the basics of salvation and tells everyone who thinks it sounds good to come down to be baptized and get a free t-shirt (this actually happens!). But there is no discussion of

- Lordship, conviction of sin, repentance, forsaking worldliness, loving the brotherhood, or submitting to the church; it's simply a decision to be made.
2. Assurance comes as a result of believing what has been preached, but also everything else the Bible says; which must be thoroughly heard, considered, and found to be true. Assurance is a gift, granted only by the Holy Spirit.
 - a) **Romans 8:16 ESV** *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*
 - b) Assurance is not about a positive religious attitude. It is not what you hope or wish to be true, or wishing on a star. It can't originate within you. It's something the Holy Spirit alone can give you based on the Bible.
- B. That is not to say that we always have full assurance. Sin will still trip us up from time to time. But one with an assumed salvation will walk on, blindly trusting the contract he thinks he has with God, even while his conscience burns within. The genuine Christian will cry out to God for renewed assurance only he can give.
1. Assurance is worth fighting for! The Bible encourages us to seek it diligently.
 - a) **2 Peter 1:10 ESV** *Therefore, brothers, be **all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election**, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.* Confirm it! Don't assume it based on your own standards.
 - b) **2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV** *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*
 2. Confirm your calling and election! Examine yourselves! Test yourselves. It bothers me that some of you think you are saved based on unbiblical standard and a meaningless method. Take the test! Don't fight off every doubt. Let them rise and submit them to the Lord. Ask him to convict or assure you. Search the scriptures to see what they have to say to you.
- C. In our text the writer of Hebrews had just warned people not to trifle with God's saving grace, followed by an assertion of his confidence in God's work in them.
1. He then encourages them, "**show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end**" He is saying to seek assurance, and don't be half-hearted about it. Make it your principal thing until the very end!
 - a) This doesn't mean to always be fearful of not being saved. Just the opposite, we should trade our false confidence in morality or religion, for the full, grace-filled, inner peace that only Christ can give.
 - b) **John 14:27 ESV** *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* Until you seek assurance from Christ alone, you will always struggle with doubts about being good enough or loved enough.
 2. Know that seeking assurance almost never happens overnight. It takes time, and that's ok! God will be working amazing things in you as you seek.
 - a) Our text points this out. The Hebrews should seek full assurance so that they may "**not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises**". God works his holiness into us as we seek the gift of assured peace from the Holy Spirit, based on Holy Scripture.

- b) Don't give up until you have confidence from God that you belong to him. He will not ignore you if you ask him to reveal his heart to you. **Luke 11:11 ESV** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12** or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**"
- D. Lastly let me point out what I'm **not** saying. Raising a hand, praying a prayer, walking an aisle certainly doesn't make you saved, but if you did any of those things (and most of you probably did!), it also doesn't mean you're unsaved. God saves us according to his will and working and can use even broken things.
1. But if you think you've got a legal loophole because you've done any of those things, and yet you ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit, never repenting and forsaking sin, walking in hatred and unforgiveness, you have no reason to assure yourself of your salvation, and may even be condemned.
 2. Throw your religious experience aside and ask God to convict you of sin and convince you of truth. Don't tell him you receive him, instead, plead with him to receive you, and to assure you that you are his child. He will hear your cry.
- III. Are you assured by the Holy Spirit of your true faith and unshakeable salvation as he reveals the truth of his word to your innermost being; or have you just assumed that you and God are good because of some hoop a preacher told you to jump through? **John 14:23 ESV** Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, **and we will come to him and make our home with him.** That is assurance! The ever present love of the Father, Son and Spirit.
- IV. Communion
- V. **Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 ESV** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.