

# Assurance

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*Three Sermons on Assurance from the “Prince of Preachers:*

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## The True Position of Assurance

*“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” — Ephesians 1:13.*

Many sincerely-seeking souls are in great trouble because they have not yet attained to an assurance of their interest in Christ Jesus: they dare not take any comfort from their faith because they suppose that it has not attained to a sufficient strength. They have believed in the Lord Jesus, and they have his promise that they shall be saved, but they are not content with this—they want to get assurance, and then they suppose they shall have a better evidence of their salvation than the bare word of the Savior. Such persons are under a great mistake; but as that mistake is a very painful one, and exercises the most injurious influence upon them, we will spend this morning in trying, as God shall help us, to clear up their difficulty, and to let them see that if they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, even though they should not have attained to the precious grace of full assurance of faith, yet nevertheless they are saved, and being justified by faith, may rightfully enjoy peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Their mistake seems to me to be this—they look for ripe fruit upon a tree in spring, and because that season yields nothing but blossoms, they conclude the tree to be barren. They go to the head of a river—they find it a little rippling brook, and because it will not float a “Great Eastern,” they conclude that it will never reach the sea, and that in fact it is not a true part of the river at all. They look upon themselves as being little children, and such they are; but because they cannot speak plainly on account of having been so newly born, they therefore conclude that they are not the children of God at all. They see strong men in Christ Jesus performing great exploits; and because they as yet are but young and feeble, they conclude that they are not in the family of grace. They compare themselves with giants in the Church of God and then because they rightly perceive the difference between themselves and these mighty ones, they imagine that they are not saved, that they cannot be numbered among the faithful, and have no part nor lot in this matter. They put the last things first. They make comforts essentials. They consider that which is the fruit of grace to be the root of grace, and herein they pierce themselves through with many sorrows. Perhaps they will not fall into this error again if they get a right understanding of the text before us.

The apostle Paul here explains the process by which sealing—the sealing of assurance—is obtained. There are three steps by which the hallowed elevation is reached. The first is *hearing*—they heard first the preaching of the Word; the second is *believing*; and then, thirdly, “after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise.

I. To begin then, faith cometh by Hearing.

The preaching of the gospel is God’s soul-saving ordinance. It hath pleased God by the “foolishness of preaching” to save them that believe. In every age God raiseth up men who faithfully proclaim his Word, and, as one departs, another arrives. Elijah ascends to glory, but his mantle falls upon Elisha. Paul dies not until Timothy is in the field. This true apostolic succession is continued evermore, for when we know not where to find ministers, we may rest assured that in nooks and corners the Lord is preparing men for his work.

The true preacher has a claim upon men’s attention. If God has sent him, men should receive him. If he comes as an ambassador from the King of kings, let his commission be proved, and he has a right to receive the careful and prayerful attention of all who come in his way. Nay, more, God’s true ambassador not only claims a hearing, but he wins it, for there is an attractiveness in his theme which holds men by the ears: “I, if I be lifted up,” said Christ, “will draw all men unto me;” and among the other drawings there is this peculiar fact, that men are drawn to hear where Christ is preached. He who preaches Christ hath golden chains coming from his mouth wherewith he bindeth men’s ears, if not their hearts; they are not all bound to salvation, but bound somehow they shall be: the savor shall go forth even though it should be a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life. The preacher claims a hearing and he wins it.

*What is that message which we are to hear in order to the attaining of faith, and, through faith, of full assurance?* Our text is very expressive, for it tells us, “Ye heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” It is of little use to hear that which is not *the Word of truth*, nay, it is worse than useless, for by error we shall soon be misled. And if the preaching be not concerning *the Word of truth*, even though it should be a word of truth, yet it can be of no value to the getting of faith: it must be *the Word—the Word* peculiarly above all others having truth and substance in it. There is no doubt that the expression here is a Hebraism for “the true Word,” “ye heard the true Word.” O brethren, how joyous it is to us to know God’s Word to be true. We have proved it in our own souls, and thus can bear our witness to you concerning it. If we speak not according to the true Word of God, reject us, for that which will bless you, must have a “Thus saith the Lord” to support it, and must be based and bottomed upon the revelation of the Most High, otherwise it cannot be of saving service, seeing it is not the Word which is infallibly true.

No doubt that the expression signifies the highest truth, truth as much *the truth* among other truths, as the Bible is *the book* above all other books. What I must hear to my salvation is not an important doctrine which may or may not be believed, but the Word without which men must perish in their sins. We may also remind you that the “*Word of truth*” is a phrase peculiar to the contradistinction to the law. Compare the revelation of Christ with that of Moses: Moses revealed much gospel truth, but it was in shadow, not by a plain *word* of teaching; and hence we now declare that the law was given by Moses, but grace and *truth* came by Jesus Christ. Christ is the substance of all those shadows which Moses had to bring before the people’s minds; and hence there is an emphasis about the gospel as being not metaphorical truth, but solid truth — the essential truth. As the mountain towers high above the surrounding plain, so the great truth that “God was made flesh, and dwelt among us” — the faithful saying that “Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and to save sinners,” towers above all other truth, and demands our first and our best thoughts; and as the sun outshines all other lights, even so the manifestation of truth in the gospel of Christ excels all other revelations. It is *the Word of truth*.

But the text also adds, “the gospel” — “the gospel of your salvation.” You are to listen to *the gospel*—to that which is good news—to a something totally *new* to the world’s natural religion—a something which came fresh from God: God’s great novelty—something *good*—good in the

deepest sense—ininitely good—good for your soul’s best interests—good in answering the craving appetite of your poor hungry spirit.

It must be good news—it must be evangelical doctrine to which you must listen if you would get faith. Faith does not come by *seeing*. Men do not get faith by looking at a priest manipulating bread and wine, or sprinkling drops of baptismal water. The symbols of the Church of Rome do not beget faith. They may beget attention; they may please the fancy and delight the taste, but they do not beget the faith of God’s elect. It is the gospel—the gospel preached and heard which does this through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not get faith through ordinances: no matter if God himself prescribed them; they are not the channel through which faith comes. The apostle expressly declares that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” It is not through eye-gate, but through ear-gate, that salvation comes to us. God may, and doubtless does, infuse grace into us by channels other than the sense of hearing; but, at any rate, the usual way in which grace comes streaming into the soul is by hearing—and that is the hearing of the gospel; not the hearing of tradition; not the hearing of supposition; not the hearing of poetic imaginations; but the hearing of that old evangel, which was first proclaimed by Jesus on the Mount, and afterwards by his apostles, and to this day is still proclaimed with trumpet-tongue by those who know its quickening power. You must *hear the gospel*—and observe, it is called *the gospel of your salvation*. You will never get faith, dear friends, unless you look upon the gospel as the great means of salvation, and come earnestly enquiring and desiring that it may be made to you the gospel of *your* salvation; not of another man’s, but of *your* salvation. I cannot say to every unconverted man, “This gospel *will* save you,” but I can say this, that, if you receive this gospel, it certainly will, and that the moment it is accepted by the heart it is the gospel of *your* salvation. Reject it—it will be a savor of death unto death to you; but if the Holy Spirit shall come with it, and command your will and win your assent and consent thereunto, then it is indeed the gospel of *your* salvation. Are you a sinner? “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Inasmuch as this is worthy of all acceptation, it is worthy of *your* acceptation, and is in a sense *even now* the gospel of your salvation. We know that Christ came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” Are you lost? Then in a sense it is the gospel of your salvation, seeing that you are lost. If you can grasp that cheering word with the hand of faith, you will say, “Yes, lost as I am, I believe Christ came to save the lost, and I trust him alone to save me;” then it is the gospel of *your* salvation, in a very high and special sense, seeing that now you have been saved thereby. The great end, it seems to me, of the preaching of the gospel is just this—the preacher should always be aiming so to preach it that he may find out those souls to whom this is the gospel of their salvation; so labouring to bring it home, both by persuading by the terrors of the law and by the love of Jesus, that men shall-through the Spirit of God accompanying the Word-be led, through hearing, to lay hold upon Christ and so to be saved. Thus I have set forth what you have to hear. May I beg you carefully to judge every preacher, not by his gifts, not by his elocutionary powers, not by his status in society, not by the respectability of his congregation, not by the prettiness of his Church, the grandeur of the ceremonial, or the peculiar beauty of his vestments, but by this—does he preach the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation? If he does, your sitting under his ministry may prove to you the means of begetting faith in you; but if he does not, you cannot expect God’s blessing, for you are not using God’s ordinance, but the ordinance of man.

The hearing of the gospel involves the hearer in responsibility. It is a great privilege to bear the gospel. Ye may smile and think there is nothing very great in it. The damned in hell know. Oh! what would they give if they could hear the gospel now? —if they could come back and entertain but the shadow of a hope that they might yet escape from the wrath to come? The saved in heaven estimate this privilege at a high rate, for, having obtained salvation and eternal life through the preaching of this gospel, they can never cease to bless their God for calling them by his Word of truth. O that *ye* knew it! On your dying beds the listening to a gospel sermon will seem another thing than it seemeth now. Now you may come out of curiosity, and go away and forget it; but when grim death and you shall stand face to face, you will find it quite another thing

to have had God's Word spoken to you, and you will hear such a word as this, "Ye stumbled at the word because ye were disobedient, and therefore woe has come upon you to the uttermost."

I must also add that if hearing be really so gracious an ordinance, it becomes Christian men and women to pray the Lord to send forth laborers into his vineyard, to entreat him to bless all efforts used to train our young ministers for future conflict. I beg you not to forget to aid our Pastor's College, both with your gifts and your prayers. It should bring afresh to the thoughts of all of you the duty of praying for those who are engaged in preaching the Word, for their preaching is nothing, except as the Spirit goeth with it; and though, when the Spirit goeth with it the shout of the King is heard in our camps, let him withdraw, and there is nothing but disappointment and dismay in the hosts of God. Pray for us, brethren. We trust we have a good conscience and endeavor to free ourselves of the blood of souls. We want our hearers to pray for us and hold up our hands as Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses on the mount. Be diligent in hearing the Word. If ye be saved, still listen to it for your soul's health; if ye be not saved, neglect no opportunities of listening. Lie at this pool of Bethesda. Who can tell but you may yet step in when the angel doth move the waters, or Jesus himself may come and walk through those five porches, and bid you take up your bed and walk? Waste no Sabbath in going where you cannot hear the gospel; but when you do hear the gospel, hear it with all your ears; give your whole soul to it: as the thirsty earth drinketh in the descending showers, so drink in the Word of God; as new-born babes receive the unadulterated milk of the Word, so receive you that which is able to save your souls; and through hearing may faith come, and through faith may you gain the assurance which you so earnestly desire.

## II. After hearing came Belief.

We know that believing does not always follow hearing immediately. There is a case told of Mr. Flavel having preached a sermon which was blessed to a man, I think eighty-five years afterwards, so that the seed may lay long buried in dust; yet, had not that man heard that sermon, speaking after the manner of men, he had not received the quickening Word. You may have heard the gospel long in vain, and it should be to you a source of very serious enquiry if you have done so—it should set you trembling lest the Word should never be the savor of life unto you, but at the same time do not renounce the hearing because hitherto you have had no blessing, for faith cometh by hearing. Continue still to listen; continue still to search the Word; and, if your soul desireth faith, God denies not faith to any in whom he has really implanted a desire after it. Faith will yet, we trust, come while you are hearing.

This belief, you observe, is called *trusting*. Kindly look at the verse: "In whom ye also *trusted*." The translators have borrowed that word "trusted," very properly, from the twelfth verse. Do not, because you see it in italics, think that it is not properly there. It is not in the original, but being in the twelfth verse it is very rightly understood here. Believing then is trusting. If you want it summed up in the shortest word, it is just this—trusting Christ.

A message comes to me upon good authority—I believe it; believing it, I necessarily trust it. My receiving of the message is so far good, but the essential act, the act essential to salvation is the trusting—the trusting Christ. The process of faith may be thus illustrated. You know a friend of yours to be perfectly reliable—you are in debt. He tells you that if you will trust him to pay the debt, he will give you on the spot a receipt for it. Now, you look at him, you consider his ability to pay it; you consider the probability that he means what he is saying. Having once made up your mind that he is truthful, you could not then say, "I cannot believe you." If you once know that person to be truthful, I utterly deny that you can hold any argument about your power to believe him. So, if Jesus Christ declares that he came into the world to save sinners," and, if he tells me, as he does tell me, that "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life"—if I am already enabled by God's Spirit to believe in the perfect truthfulness of Christ, I should be lying unto my own soul if I said I had not power to believe in him. Understand, power to believe in Christ is the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit has given that power to all men who know the perfect truthfulness of Christ. It must be so, if you just look at it for a

moment—it must be so. If I know the perfect truthfulness of a man, I lie if I say to him, “I cannot believe you.” Why, it follows, as a matter of course, that I must believe if I am convinced that he is worthy of credit. Just so, when I am assured of Christ that his testimony is worthy of my belief; I have no right then to plead that I cannot believe him. Mark, I am only speaking to those who have got as far as that, and there are hundreds of you who have; when you tell me you cannot believe, I reply, “My dear friend, you can believe. In the Holy Spirit’s giving you enough enlightenment to know that Christ is faithful and true, that enlightenment is your power to believe.” And this is according to the rules of common sense as well as according to the rules of experience. Do not stand, therefore, and say, “I cannot believe what Christ says.” Do you believe him to be true? “Yes,” say you, “I dare not say otherwise.” Then you can believe what he says. But do you believe that Christ is true? I fear you do not. I believe that John discovered the secret of your unbelief when he said, “He that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he hath not believed on his Son.” That is the bottom of it. You really do think God to be a liar! Do you shrink from that charge? Ah! but I must bring it against you again, for if you know God to be true, I insist upon it, and your own reason tells you it is so, that you cannot help believing in a person you know to be true. I fear me, that you are making God a liar; and if you deny that charge, then I arrest you at the other point at once, and demand of you that you do now exercise faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is trusting Christ that saves the soul.

Now a few remarks about believing. *Faith in Christ is the work of God’s Holy Spirit.* In proof of this we have many Scriptures. No man ever did yet believe in Christ until the Holy Spirit had quickened him and illuminated his understanding, so that he perceived the truthfulness of Christ’s character and was then led to trust him. But in the next place, although faith is the work of the Spirit *it is the act of man.* The Holy Spirit does not believe for me: there is nothing for him to believe. Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit does not repent: he has nothing to repent of. He works in me to will and to do, but I will and I do: he does not will nor do what I ought to will and do. If I have a person here who is ignorant and I teach him, when he acquires knowledge, that knowledge is my gift to him and my work in him: at the same time *he* acquires that knowledge himself, and it would never have been his if he had not yielded up his faculties to be taught. Man *believes*; and whenever persons say to you, “Well, if it be the work of the Holy Spirit, how can it be the duty of man?” remind them that while it is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is not the act of the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit does not believe, it is the man who believes. The Spirit moves upon us, and by his mysterious agency takes away the natural unbelief of the soul and then we believe; but man is not passive in the act of believing. A dead man does not believe, the man is quickened, and then his quickened spirit lays hold of revealed truth.

Observe this, further, that *faith is due to Christ.* The faithful and true witness demands of me that I should believe what he says. Sinner, this is the unkindest cut thou canst give to Christ—to doubt him. I tell thee that all his sufferings on the tree did not insult him so much as when thou sayest, “I cannot trust thee.” What, not trust the eternal arm on which the earth doth hang! Not trust the bleeding hands which have opened the gates of heaven for the very chief of sinners! Not trust the streaming side out of which there gushes blood and water to cleanse the guilt and the power of sin! Not trust God’s own Son, the Mighty God, the Redeemer of Men! It is due to him that thou shouldst with thy whole heart lean upon him and give him all thy confidence.

*This faith is essential to salvation.* Assurance is not essential, but no man can be saved unless he trusteth in the Lord Jesus Christ. You may get to heaven with a thousand doubts and fears; you may get to heaven without some of those graces of the Spirit which are the ornaments of the believer’s neck, but you cannot get there without the lifegiving grace of faith. You must have that, and so long as you continue to say, “I will not trust Christ; I want dreams, visions, experiences, revelations; I want terrors of conviction; I want this, I want the other;” so long you shut yourself out of peace. Till you set your seal to God’s Word, God will never set his seal to your faith.

Remark, again, *this faith is not required in any particular degree*. In order to salvation, it is not declared in Scripture that you are to believe to a certain strength, but if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed—if that be a mountain-moving faith, surely it shall be a soul-saving faith. Faith is not to be estimated by its quantity but by its quality. If thou hast no more faith than a smoking flax hath of fire, yet he will not quench thee: if thou hast no more power of faith than a bruised reed hath of strength, yet he will not break thee: if thou be not a man, but an infant in grace—nay, if you be scarcely a healthy infant, if there be but faith in thee, though thou be cast out as unswaddled and unwashed, yet he passeth by and looketh upon thee. Canst thou but trust him? that is the thing. If thou dost but trust him as a drowning man clutches a rope; if thou lookest to Jesus, as it were, out of the corner of thine eye, though there are so many tears in thine eye that thou canst not see him so completely as thou dost desire—though thou canst not see him at all to thy comfort, yet thou seest him to salvation. If you have received him, desire great faith, but remember that little faith will carry thee to heaven through Jesus Christ.

Observe, further, that *this faith is very variable, but it is not perishable*. Faith may go to an ebb, as the tide does, but it will come to a flood again. When faith is at its flood, the man is not therefore the more saved; and when faith is at its ebb, the man is not therefore the less saved; for, after all, salvation does not lie in faith, but in Christ; and faith is but the connecting link between the soul and Christ. Faith may take Christ up in its arms, like Simeon, and it is true faith; but, on the other hand, faith may only venture to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, and that faith makes men whole. Some of us can look the Savior in the face, and even kiss him with the kisses of our mouth, and others may only venture to come behind him in the throng, all timid and afraid—but faith, if it be faith, let it change as it may, still saves. Faith—if it be faith—let it sink as it may, never can drown: it may live in the flames, but it shall never be burned. He who once gets this incorruptible seed, shall find it live and abide in him for ever.

This faith is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, according to the laws of mind. When God works upon matter, he works according to the laws of matter. I do not find, apart from miracles, that God violates gravitation—that he breaks any of the great laws with which he has stamped matter; and when the Spirit of God comes to work on man, he does not break the laws with which he regulates mind. Now, it seems to be one of the laws of mind, that a man should believe a thing not by trying to believe it, but by force of evidence. If you now sit down, for instance, and try to believe in the explosion of the powder magazines yesterday, if you have any doubt about it, you may try, as long as you like, to believe it—you cannot do it by trying. You must go through another process. You cannot pump faith up from your own mind. How do I get to believe in the explosion of the powder mills? There are certain newspapers—I have confidence in those newspapers, and as I read the account, I believe it. Or I meet with certain persons who either heard the explosion, or saw some of the effects produced thereby, and now I believe without any effort at all—I cannot help believing. Belief comes necessarily from my having confidence in those who tell me so. Now, the Spirit of God when about to produce faith, frequently leads men to think about Christ. Christ is set forth before them crucified. They perceive that “Here is a great wonder—God clothed in human flesh to suffer for human sin!” The mind thinks, “There is something here which meets my conscious needs. I can see how God can be just, for he punishes his Son—and how he can be gracious, for he forgives sin. I find it stated that if I trust myself in this Son of God, who suffered as man, and now pleads his infinite merits before the throne—if I trust in him I shall be saved.” I cannot trust in him by simply saying I will try to do it, but I look at the Bible—is that true? I look at the thing itself—does it look like truth? I ask friends who have tried and proved it, and they tell me that they have tasted that he is gracious. Upon this evidence, and specially upon perceiving the power of this truth in my own soul, I believe the Word of God. The Spirit of God, working thus, leads me from the evidence given, to believe the testimony borne, and I believe it. Dear friends, if you want to get faith, it must come through the Spirit of God; but it usually comes in this way: —Sit down, if the Word be not blessed to you in hearing it, and ruminat upon it at home; think much of Christ and his great work. Now what you have been

doing is this—you have been thinking of your sins only: but what would you think of a judge who sat upon a bench, and who would listen to all the complaints against a criminal, but as soon as the advocate arose to plead his cause, would say, “No, I do not intend to think of that”? You have been doing that. Your poor soul stands on trial, and you have been listening to the accusations of Satan and your own sins, but the moment Christ gets up to show you his great atonement, the moment the promise is quoted, you say, “It is presumption for me to hope.” My dear friends, it is never presumption to listen to truth. If it be true that in due time Christ died for the ungodly; if it be true that he who cometh to him he will in no wise cast out; if it be true that he has said, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;” if it be true that he has said, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins,” why not listen to that as well as the other? Surely you must look at the fair side as well as the foul; and while your ear is hearing of the work of Christ and the promise of God, you will be able to cry—

*“I do believe, I must believe,  
That Jesus died for me.”*

I could not have thought it, Oh! it melts me; I have been trying to get a soft heart and could not get it, but I have it now all through this. Here have I been hurrying to and fro, looking after faith and assurance instead of looking to the cross for it, but now I see it all, and I am saved, for I trust in Jesus Christ alone.

I have said as much as may be needful this morning upon faith. I have tried to be brief upon each point, and packed as many things as I could into the time. Now we are to have a few words about assurance.

**III.** The text says, “Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” I cannot take the fourteenth verse, except to hint at it: we will try and preach on that this evening.

Sealing, which is another name for assurance, for the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit—that we are born of God, *is evidently distinct from faith*—will you please to observe that—for the text says, “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Believing, then is not this sealing; and assurance, although it be akin to believing, is not believing. There is a distinction between the two things. I want you to notice the distinction. In faith the mind is active. The text uses verbs which imply action: “ye trusted,” “ye believed;” but when it comes to sealing it uses quite another verb: “ye were sealed.” I am active in believing—I am passive when the Holy Spirit seals me. The witness of the Spirit is a something which I receive, but faith is a something which I exercise as well as receive. In faith my mind *does* something, in being sealed my faith *receives* something. If I may say so, faith writes out the document, there she labors, but the Holy Spirit stamps the seal himself, and there is no hand wanted there except his own. He stamps his own impression to make the document valid. Notice the difference between the activeness and the passiveness. Then, again, man is commanded to believe in Scripture, in many places, but he never was commanded to be sealed. Faith is a duty as well as a privilege, but assurance a privilege only. I never find any man exhorted to get the sealing of the Spirit. I believe that every Christian should pray for it and seek it, but I know of no command. It is a boon, a priceless boon, and, unlike faith, it does not constitute a subject or command. Again, we read in Scripture that men are saved by faith, and live by faith, but neither salvation nor living are ever imputed to sealing or to assurance. We are not saved by assurance: we do not even live by assurance. The vital principle is couched in faith. That is the shell which holds the kernel of the inner spiritual life. I may be saved though I never had assurance; but even if I fancied I had assurance, I could not be saved if I had not faith. To faith we say salvation is promised, but to assurance such a promise is not given.

It is clear from the context that assurance follows faith: “after that ye believed.” The apostle does not say how soon. I believe that many souls get full assurance with faith. I have known converts who have been as certified of their interest in Christ as though they had been seventy years experimentally walking with him. But, mark you, this is not the case always, perhaps not

often. Brookes gives the case of a Mr. Frogmorton, who was one of the most valuable ministers of his day, but was thirty-seven years without any assurance of his interest with Christ; he did trust Christ, but his ministry was always a gloomy one, for he could not read his title clear to mansions in the skies. He went to the house of a dear friend, Mr. Dodd, to die, and just before he died, the light of heaven streamed in—he not only expressed his full assurance of faith, but triumphed so gloriously, that he was the wonder of all round about him. He also tells us of one Mr. Glover, who had been for years without assurance of his interest in Christ; but when he came to the fire to be burnt, just as he saw the stake, he cried, “He is come! he is come!” and instead of being heavy of heart as he had been in prison, he went to the stake with a light step. Three martyrs were once chained to the stake, two of them rejoicing; but one was observed to slip from under the chains for a moment and prostrate himself upon the fagots and wrestle with God, and then coming back to the stake, he said, “The Lord has manifested himself to me at the last, and now I shall burn bravely.” So, indeed, he did, bearing his witness for his Lord and Master. So it seems there are some of God’s saints who do not get assured till even the last moment, and I will not say that there are not some of them who even, like some children, are put to bed in the dark. Christ went up to heaven in a cloud, Gideon saw the angel ascending in the smoke of the incense, and many a good man ascends with clouds of darkness round about him, but still he is gone to heaven. I hope these cases are very few; still we bring them forward to show you that assurance is not to be looked for *before* faith. You might as well look for the pinnacle before the foundation; for the cream before the milk; for the apples before you plant the tree; for the harvest before you sow the seed. Assurance *follows* faith.

Observe in the next place—and it is worthy of your notice—that *assurance is to be found where faith* was found. Do observe those two words, “in whom”—“*in whom* ye also trusted”—“in whom ye were sealed.” So that as I get my faith out of Christ, so I must get my assurance out of Christ. The virtual means of my faith is Christ himself, and the virtual means of my assurance must be the same. As I think of what he did for me, I believe in him; as I continue to meditate upon that self-same thing, I have assurance of interest in him. You must feed upon the flesh and blood of Christ if you would grow into strong men in Christ Jesus. A touch of Christ will heal you from all disease, but you must hold him fast if you would enjoy spiritual health perpetually. To believe in Christ will save you from hell; to be assured of your interest in Christ will give you a heaven upon earth. Do not be content with faith: be thankful for it, rejoice in it, but do ask to have more; and when you want to have more, go to Christ for it, for the same fountain which first quenched your thirst, must be that which shall quench it till you are taken up to drink of the river of life which flows through the midst of paradise, which is no other than the presence of Christ as a refreshment to his people.

*This assurance, like faith, is the work of the Spirit of God.* “Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” He does this in various ways. Sometimes we get the seal of the Spirit through experience. We know that God is true because we have proved him. Sometimes this comes through the hearing of the Word—as we listen our faith is confirmed. But there is doubtless besides this, a special and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, whereby men are assured that they are born of God. You will observe in one place the apostle says, “The Spirit also beareth witness with our spirit, that we are born of God;” so that there are two witnesses—first, our spirit bears witness, that is, by evidences: I look at my faith, and see myself depending upon Christ, and then I know, because I love the brethren, and for other reasons, that I am born of God. Then there comes over and above the witness of evidence, faith and feeling—the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit. Have you not felt it? I cannot describe this to you, but you who have felt it know it. Did you not the other day feel a heavenly calm as you meditated upon your state and condition in Christ? You wondered where it came from. It was not the result of protracted devotion, but it stole over you, you knew not how it was, you were bathed in it as in sunlight, and you rejoiced exceedingly. You rejoiced in Christ—that was your basis of confidence, but that confidence came through the Spirit bearing witness with your spirit. And this has occurred

sometimes in the midst of sharp conflicts just when dark despair seemed ready to overwhelm you. You may have enjoyed this comfort under peculiar trials, and losses of friends, and you may expect to have it when you come to die. Then, if ever in your life you should be able to say, “I will fear no evil, for thou art with me (in a special sense) thou art with me.” The Holy Spirit, then, must give it to us, and we must wait upon him to set his seal.

And so to conclude, this is desirable to the highest degree, for it is the earnest of the inheritance. It is a part of heaven on earth to get an assurance wrought by the Spirit. It is not a pledge merely, for a pledge is given back when you get the thing itself, but it is an earnest; it is one cluster from the vines of Eshcol—one shekel of the eternal wage-money of the free-grace reward—what if I say it is a stray note from the harps of angels!—it is a drop of the spray from the fountains of life; it is one ingot of gold from the pavement of heaven; it is one ray of heavenly light from the eternal Sun of Righteousness. O Christian, if you have ever known assurance, you will pant till you have it again. You can never, after seeing the sunlight, put up with the candle-light of your doubts and fears in the dungeon of despondency. But if assurance be gone, do still hang on Jesus.

*“When your eye of faith is dim,  
Still hold on Jesus, sink or swim;  
Still at his footstool bow the knee,  
And Israel’s God thy peace shall be.”*

If thou canst not feel his love in thy heart, still trust him. Oh! it was grand of Job—“Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” Truly, the vitality of faith is such, that if he should spurn me from his presence—if he never gave me another look of love this side heaven—if he gave me up to the lowest depths, and bade all his waves and billows go over me, yet is he such a faithful God, and so true, that I dare not even then give him the lie. Blind unbelief would do so, but victorious faith says, “Never! He cannot lie. Let God be true and every man a liar.” When faith is in her very worst, she is glorious, and sparkles like a jewel in the dark mine, and God will come and take her up out of all the depths, and set her in his own crown as a precious jewel. “Thy faith hath saved thee,” says Jesus. No, Lord, it is not faith that has done it, it is thyself. He takes the crown royal of salvation’s glory, lifts it right off from his own head, and puts it on the head of the poor feeble woman’s faith. “Thy faith hath saved thee—go in peace.” And so will God do with your tempest-tossed and exercised faith—put the crown upon it, and that faith of yours shall sing in heaven. Do not tell me that we shall have no faith in heaven—nonsense! “Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” We shall find faith to be our sweet companion there. Shall I not believe God when I get to heaven? Shall I give up trusting my God when I get there? No, I shall trust him for my resurrection body; I shall trust him for the millennial splendor; I shall trust him for the gathering of the elect; trust him for an eternity of bliss; trust him for my safe standing where he has brought me; and so, happy faith, imperishable faith, shall live and reign when sense and sight are gone past recall. The Lord give you to hear the Word, to believe in it, and afterwards to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

## Full Assurance

*“Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” — Psalm 35:3.*

THE Psalmist, when he wrote these words, was surrounded by many and furious enemies. He pleads with God to take hold on shield and buckler, and to come forth for his defense. Yet he feels that there is only one thing which God hath need to do in order to remove his fears, and make him strong in the day of conflict, “‘Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,’ and I will defy

them all. In the name of God I will set up my banner; and though weak in myself, yet shall I be able to overcome them readily, and tread them as straw is trodden from the dunghill, when the joy of the Lord shall be my strength, because thou hast said unto me, 'I am thy salvation.' " Brethren, there is nothing that can make you strong to labor for God, bold to fight against your enemies, and mighty to resist your temptations, like a full assurance that God is your God, and your sure salvation. Your doubts and fears weaken you. While they nourish your despair, and diminish your joy, they do at the same time cut the sinews of your valor, and blunt the edge of your sword. A fully-assured Christian is a very giant in our Israel; for happiness and beauty he standeth like Saul, head and shoulders taller than the rest; while for strength and courage he can match with David, and is like the angel of the Lord.

It is upon the subject of full assurance that I shall address you this morning, without further preface I shall first bid you *hear objectors*, who oppose themselves to full assurance; secondly, I shall beg you to *hear the test*; and then I shall request you to *hear the preacher*.

#### I. First of all, let us HEAR OBJECTORS.

There are some who say, it is better that a man should stand in jeopardy of his soul every hour — better for him to be exercised with doubts and fears, than that he should grow confident, and have the joy of knowing assuredly that he is a saved man, is in the favor of God, and shall never be condemned. We will hear these objectors for a moment, and answer them speedily.

One of them advances, and he says, "First, I object to your preaching this morning, the doctrine of full assurance, *because I believe it to be impossible: I cannot conceive that any man can know in this life, whether he shall be saved in the life to come. Perhaps I may grant you that, in the dying hour, some men may get a little confidence; but, with the perception of a few of the eminently holy, and the profoundly spiritual, it cannot be possible that Christians should attain to a full confidence, and an infallible assurance of being saved.*" To this, sir, I reply thus. You say it is impossible: I say it is not only possible, but has been certainly enjoyed by the people of God. Doth the Spirit of God teach men to pray impossibilities? Yet David prays for it here: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." The thing is possible, then, or else David would not have asked for it, it *can* be granted by God, it *can* be received by the Christian, else this prayer had never been put in inspired record. Besides, do you think that the Holy Ghost would exhort us to do an impossibility? And yet, does he not speak by the mouth of Paul and say, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*?" Does he not bid us be assured that we are called by grace, and that we are chosen of God? I say, that which *may* be a matter of prayer, and which is a subject of precept, cannot be an impossible thing. Besides, it has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of even ordinary every-day Christians. We could read you their biographies, and find expressions like this: "I have no more doubt of my interest in Christ than I have of my existence." "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." And there be many in this house to-day, who if this were the time for them to give their personal testimony, could say, "I *know* that I have been born again; I *am sure* that my sins are all forgiven. I am neither afraid to die, nor do I fear to live; for, living, Christ is with me, and dying, I shall be with Christ; being justified, I have peace with God through Jesus Christ my Lord." Brethren, it is not impossible; it is attainable by the man who hath faith, if he know how to use the proper means.

But shall I tell you who the gentlemen are who generally raise objections to the glorious privilege of assurance? There are, first of all, the adherents of the Pope of Rome. Of course, the Papist does not like full assurance. And why? The Pope and his priest would have a lean larder if full assurance were well preached. Only conceive my brethren, if the Roman Catholic could get the full assurance of salvation, surely the Cardinals would hardly find money enough to buy their red hats. For where were purgatory then? Purgatory is an impossibility, if full assurance be possible. If a man knows himself to be saved, then he is not to be troubled with a silly fear about waiting in the intermediate state, to be purified with fire, before he can enter into heaven. Purgatory is only acceptable to those poor trembling souls who know of no sure salvation here,

and are glad of this deceptive hope of a salvation to be wrought in the world to come. Purgatory being thus builded upon a lying imposition — on the fears of ignorant consciences, becomes what brave old Hugh Latimer used to call it, “Purgatory Pick-purse,” to the poor sinner, and Purgatory Fill-purse to the vagabond priest. Once let full assurance be given to all Christian men — first make the Romanist a Christian, and then let him be fully assured of his interest in Christ, and away goes purgatory, and there will never be a soul found to tremble at it any more.

The other persons who object to this doctrine, are generally people who have no religion, and who want, therefore, to make themselves a little easy by the notion that nobody has any more than they have. Your easy church-goers and chapel-goers; your ladies and gentlemen who think that religion consists in buying a Prayer Book, who imagine that to have a book of Psalms and Hymns, constitutes godliness; your fine folks to whom religion is as much a matter of fashion as some new color, or some new form of dress; — these people, having no vitality in their godliness, never having a religion which could either make them cry or sing, never having godliness enough either to make them miserable, or make them blessed — these think there is nothing more in godliness than they get themselves. They say, “*I never knew my sins were forgiven,*” and judging all others by themselves, they think that no one else can know it. And I am sorry to say, grieved at heart to say it, not seldom I have known professed ministers of the gospel, who have even rebuked those who have reached to the high attainment of assurance. I was waited upon, not very long since, by a lady of considerable standing, who had long been seeking rest, and nothing would satisfy her, unless she knew her sins were forgiven. She had called upon a clergyman, of some standing too, and he had assured her that the thing was utterly impossible; and she was ready to go mad with the idea that she must all her life go mourning on somewhere between hope and fear, in the balances between despair and hope. When I told her that it was not only the privilege of the Christian, but his duty, to *know* himself to be saved, and that no man ought to rest till he was infallibly assured by the Holy Ghost that he was in a gracious state and delivered from fear of hell, the joy that flushed her face was something worth beholding, and she went on her way to seek, and I trust to find the grace which is in Christ Jesus. I would have each of you put aside those carnal quibbles which are raised by Romanists and Romanizers, against the idea that we can know that we are saved, for not only can we know it, but we ought never to be satisfied till we do know it. And this, mark you, is not *my* statement; it is the manifest testimony of the Book of God, and was plainly held by all the fathers of the Church, Augustine, Chrysostom, and the like; it is the testimony of all the Reformers — of all the giant divines of the Puritanic times, it is the testimony of all truly evangelical Christians, that every Christian has a right to have a full assurance of his salvation, and should never be content until he attains thereunto.

But another objector rises and faintly says, “*But I am afraid, sir; I am afraid of your preaching full assurance, because so many persons have boasted of it, and they have been vile pretenders, and have perished after all.*” Friend, it is to be admitted that there have been many who have mistaken presumption for assurance. They have thought that the arrogant impertinence of a proud unhumbléd spirit was the same thing as the simple child-like confidence of a renewed, regenerated heart. But mark, assurance is not possible to you, till you are born again; you have no business to dream of it, till you have a new heart and a right spirit. It would indeed be a fearful piece of blasphemy for you to think that God is your Father when your Father he is not, or to dream that your sins are forgiven when your hands are scarlet with them, and your soul is black with your crimes. But because some make the counterfeit, am I to throw away the genuine? Because, forsooth, there be some tin shillings, will you all cast away the silver? Because some pass upon you the base forged bank-note, will you therefore burn those which really come from the bank? I trow not. And, my dear brethren, if thousands presumed, that would not be an argument why one true Christian should not be fully assured of his interest in Christ.

“*Yes, but,*” says another, “*I am afraid, if men get fully assured, they will grow careless.*” This is the old objection that was brought against faith in Luther’s time. “If men believe that they will be justified by faith,” said the Romanist, “they will never do any good works;” whereas the fact

is, men never do any good works till they are justified by faith. Those who cry down good works as the ground of hope, are the very men who work with all their might in the service of Christ, and as assurance is but faith come to perfection, the assured man will always be the most industrious man. Why, when I know that I am saved,

*“Then for the love I bear his name,  
What was my gain I count my loss;  
I pour contempt on all my shame,  
And nail my glory to his cross.”*

A well-grounded assurance is the most active worker in the field, the most valiant warrior in the battle, and the most patient sufferer in the furnace. There are none so active as the assured. Let a tree be planted in this soil, and watered with this river, and its boughs will bend with fruit. Confidence of success stimulates exertion, joy in faith removes sorrows, and realizing assurance overcomes all difficulties. Like the sword of Goliath we may say of assurance, “There is none like it; give it me.” Who cares for deaths, or devils, when he can read his title clear? What matters the tempest without when there is calm within? Assurance puts the heart in heaven, and moves the feet to heaven. Its children are all fair, like the holy children in Babylon, and no race can compare for a moment with these “hinds let loose,” these “lion-like men,” these children of the sun. There never were men so self-sacrificing, so daring, so zealous, so enthusiastic in the cause of Christ, as the men who know that their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and therefore out of gratitude serve their God. Why, I put it to the sinner here, who never thought of this matter before. “Poor man! if your sins could be all forgiven this morning, and you could know it — if God should say to your soul, “I am thy salvation,” and if you could go out of this house knowing that you were a child of God, do you think it would make you unholy? Do you think it would make you negligent? No, I think I see the tear in your eye, as you reply, “I would do anything for *him*; I would *live* for him; I would *die* for him, to show how I love him who loved me.” Ah! poor soul, if thou believest in Christ *now*, that will be true. If thou wilt cast thyself on Jesus now, thou shalt be forgiven; there shall be no sin left in God’s book against thee; thou shalt be absolved, acquitted, delivered, cleansed and washed; and then thou shalt prove in thy experience that assurance does not make men sin, but that assurance of pardon is the very best means of making men holy, and keeping them in the fear of God.

I have one class of objectors to answer, and I have done. There is a certain breed of Calvinists, whom I do not envy, who are always jeering and sneering as much as ever they can at the full assurance of faith. I have seen their long faces. I have heard their whining periods, and read their dismal sentences in which they say something to this effect — “Groan in the Lord always, and again I say, groan! He that nuourneth and weepeth, he that doubteth and feareth, he that distrusteth and dishonoureth his God, shall be saved.” That seems to be the sum and substance of their very un-gospel-like gospel. But why is it that they do this? I speak now honestly and fearlessly. It is because there is a pride within them — a conceit which is fed on rottenness, and sucks marrow and fatness out of putrid carcasses. And what, say you, is the object of their pride? Why, the pride of being able to boast of a deep experience — the pride of being a blacker, grosser and more detestable backslider than other people. “Whose glory is in their shame,” may well apply to them. A more dangerous, because a more deceitful pride than this is not to be found. It has all the elements of self-righteousness in it. I would sooner a man boast in his good works than boast in his good feelings, because you *can* deal with the man who boasts in his good works, you have plain texts of Scripture, and you convict him of being a legalist; but this other man boasts that he is no legalist, he can speak very sharply against legality, he knows the truth, and yet the truth is not in him, in its spirit, because still he is looking to his feelings, and not looking to the finished work of Christ. Of all the Diabolians that ever stole into the city of Mansoul, Mr. Live-by-feeling was one of the worst of villains, though he had the fairest face. Brethren, you had better live by works than live by feelings, both are damning forms of trust, but the one is more deceptive and more delusive than the other by far. You are justified by faith, not by feelings, you

are saved by what Christ felt for you, not by what you feel, and the root and basis of salvation is the cross, and “other foundation shall no man lay than that which is laid,” even though he place his experience there, he builds “wood, hay, and stubble,” and not the corner stone, which is Christ Jesus the Lord.

I have thus tried to meet my objectors: I shall now turn to the second part of the discourse briefly.

II. Let us HEAR THE TEXT. “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

The first thing the text seems to say is, *David had his doubts, then*; for why would he pray, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,” if he were not sometimes exercised with doubts and fears? Cheer up, Christian brother! If David doubted, thou must not say, “I am no Christian, because I have doubts.” The best of believers *sometimes* are troubled with fears and anxieties. Abraham had the greatest faith, but he had *some* unbelief. I envy the brother who can say that his faith never wavered. He can say more than David did, for David had cause to cry, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

But, next, the text says that *David was not content while he had doubts and fears* but he repaired at once to the mercy-seat to pray for assurance, for he valued it as much fine gold. “O Lord!” David seems to say, “I have lost my confidence; my foot slippeth; my feet are almost gone; my doubts and fears prevail, but I cannot bear it. I am wretched, I am unhappy. ‘Say—say unto my soul, I *am* thy salvation.’ ”

And then the text tells you yet a third thing—that David *knew where to obtain full assurance*. He goes at once to God in prayer. He knows that knee-work is that by which faith is increased, and there, in his closet, he crieth out to the Most High, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” O my brethren, we must be much alone with God, if we would have a clear sense of his love! Let your cries cease, and your eyes will grow dim. Much in prayer, much in heaven; slow in prayer, slow in progress.

Now pull the text into pieces, and let us look at the words. And notice, that David would not be satisfied unless his assurance had a *divine source*. “Say unto my soul.” Great God! if the priest should say it, it is nothing, if my minister should say it, if the deacons, the Church officers, and all the members of the Church should say it, it is nothing. Lord, do *thou* say it! Nothing short of a divine testimony in the soul will ever content the true Christian. The Spirit of God must himself after a supernatural sort, speak to our conscience and to our heart, or else peaceful and quiet our spirit can never be. Gracious God! let me not take my hopes at hap-hazard; let not my confidence be ill-founded and built upon the sand. Speak thyself, with thy word of truth and wisdom, and say to me, even to me, “I am thy salvation!”

Note, next, David cannot be content unless his assurance has a *vivid personality* about it. “Say unto my soul, I am *thy* salvation.” If thou shouldst say this to all the saints, it were nothing, unless thou shouldst say it to me. Lord, I have sinned I deserve it not; I am sinful; I scarcely dare to ask it; but oh! say it to *my* soul, even to *my* soul, “I am *thy* salvation.” Let me have a pointed, personal, infallible, indisputable sense that I am thine, and that thou art mine.

See, next, David must have it come deep into *his inner being*. “Say unto my *soul*. Speak it not merely to my ears; say it to my soul. Great God! let me not fancy that I heard it in the air; let me not dream that I listened to it in my sleep, but speak it right into the ears of my spirit, and let the inner man hear the echoes of thy peace-speaking voice, — ‘Say unto my *soul*, I am thy salvation.’ ” Brethren, it is no skimming the surface which will do for us; we must have quiet in the deeps. That blessing “of the depth which lieth under” we need and must have. It will not content us to have a fair skin, scarce concealing with its deceitful gauze the foul and deadly leprosy. Our soul must be sound and healthy to the very core. Lord, say to my *soul*, in my bowels’ inner depths, “I am thy salvation.” Put it beyond doubt; put it beyond all chance, dispute, or hazard, “I *am* thy salvation.”

Note again, David wants *present* assurance. He does not say, “Say unto my soul, I *will* be thy salvation,” but, “I *am*.” And yet that “*am*,” as you will see if you look at the text, is not in the

original, it is in italics; it has been supplied by our translators. That word “am” is man’s word, not God’s; therefore I will say but little of it. It may be, “I *will* be thy salvation,” or “I *have been* thy salvation,” or “I *am*,” and very rightly there is no word there at all. You can learn as much from God’s silence as you can from his speech, and I think this silence means just this. There is no word put there at all, because full assurance enables the Christian to say of God, “He *was* my salvation before the worlds began, he *is* my salvation now, he *will* be when the world shall pass away.” So that you may put up the prayer in any tense you prefer. “Say unto my soul, I — thy salvation,” The two terms shall be alike. “God — thy salvation” — “I,” the great personal self-existent Deity, “thy salvation.” The two shall stand and fall together; they shall both of them be sure, both eternal in the ancient ages, both everlasting in the ages to come. “Say unto my soul, I, thy salvation.”

I think we have thus heard what the text has to say to us. You will remark, when you look it all the way through, that the only question which we need put is this: How *can* God say to us, “I am thy salvation?” You do not expect to hear it as you walk along the streets, you do not imagine that you will see it written on the skies? No, God speaketh to his people thus: by his Word, by his ministers, and by his Holy Spirit silently and mysteriously imprinting upon the heart the fact, that that heart is washed in the Redeemer’s blood. Dr. Caesar Malan, of Geneva, has put in a very plain light the way in which God in his Word says to us, “I am thy salvation.” You are to suppose the minister is talking to a friend; this friend is anxious and doubting, and wants to know how the Bible can say to any man, that that man is saved. The conversation runs thus: —

*Pastor.* “He who believes in Jesus Christ, has eternal life,” John 3:36: do you know this declaration of the word of God? Very well, but you appear to think it obscure or equivocal. *John.* Never, I am sure it is true. Yet all those who *say* — I believe in Jesus Christ, are not the elected of God, bought of the Lord, or saved by grace. All these are not chosen, for there are many hypocrites who dare say that they believe in the Son of God. *Pastor.* You observe, that the word does not say, that those who *say* they believe, or *pretend* to believe, in Jesus Christ, or who imagine falsely that they believe, have eternal life; but this infallible word says, that those who believe in effect and really, have this life; so, then, the multitude in Christian nations who profess to believe in Jesus Christ, is not proof that they believe in effect; but if this multitude believe in effect on the Savior, certainly they will have eternal life. *John.* Thus, then, sir, whoever is able to assure himself that he believes on the Savior, then he will be certain that he has actually the life eternal, and that he is also elected. — (*The minister took a little bit of paper and wrote upon it these words.*) ‘Whoever receives from my hand this paper, and this declaration, I hold him for my friend: (*he put his name to these words, and presenting it to John, he said to him.*) Receive this from my hand, and believe my testimony, for I am a creditable person: — (*John took the paper and read what the minister had written.*) *Pastor.* How am I to regard you, John, after this testimony that I have given you? *John.* I have the minister for a friend. *Pastor.* Is it from you to me that this friendship flows, or is it from me to you? *John.* It is from you to me. *Pastor.* Do you hesitate to say that I am your friend, and that you have become mine? *John.* If I said I did not believe you, I should make you a liar. *Pastor.* Do you, then, look with affection towards me, or is it I with affection towards you? for you are assured that I am your friend, and that I regard you as mine. *John.* You, dear sir, love me, and care for me. *Pastor.* And how are you assured that this good-will is addressed to you! *John.* Because you have been pleased to say it, and I do not doubt your veracity. *Pastor.* I am sure that I have not written your name, as my friend; why then do you know that I have mentioned you in particular? *John.* You have written with your own hand, that whoever receiveth this paper, you shall have him for a friend; and because I have received this paper, and because I know that you are of good authority, I have no doubt at all upon the subject. *Pastor.* That is, then, because you have been certain on the one hand of having received this paper from my hand, and on the other hand, that I am of good authority, that you are certain of possessing, at the present, my affection. *John.* I do not think that I am able to speak with doubt upon this point, without insulting your veracity.”

The substance of which is just this, that when you can take the Word, and find that you *are* the character there spoken of, it is as good as if out of heaven an angel should fly down to you, sitting in your pew now, and should say in your ear, in the presence of this congregation, "God is thy salvation." Now, brethren, I know this day I have no other trust but in the cross of Christ; therefore I am saved; and you can say the same, each one of you, if you are resting in Christ alone, There is not an "if" or a "but" about it; you are saved. Oh! do enjoy that thought, and go home and live upon it; it shall be marrow and fatness to your spirit.

But, then, God often speaks by his minister, as well as by his Word. But that is very much in the same way. While the minister is preaching concerning those who are saved, you listen, and you say, "Ah, he speaks to me!" He describes your character, and though you are standing far away in the gallery, you say, "Ah, that is my character!" He speaks of the weary and heavy laden sinner and he bids him come, and you say, "Ah, I am weary and heavy laden, and I will come, "and when you have come, Christ has given you rest. You need have no doubt about it; if you can fairly take hold on the promise which is offered to certain characters and states, why, then you can go your way saying, "God hath said to me by his servant, 'I *am* thy salvation.' "

Besides this, God has a way of speaking, without the Word and without the ministers, to our hearts. His Spirit can drop like the rain, and distil like the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb. We know not how it is, but sometimes there is a deep sweet calm. Our conscience says, "I have been washed in the blood of Christ," and the Spirit of God saith, "Ay, 'tis true, 'tis true." In such times we are so happy — so happy that we want to tell our joys — so blessed, that if we could but borrow angels' wings and fly away, we would scarce know the change when we passed through the pearly gates, for we have had heaven below, and there has been but little difference between that and heaven above. Oh, I wish my whole congregation without exception, consisted of men and women who had heard the Spirit say, "I am *thy* salvation." What happy hymns! What happy prayers! You might go home to some poor single room, you might go to a scantily furnished house, and to a table that has barely bread upon it, but happy men! happy men! Better would be your dinner of herbs, than a stalled ox without confidence in Christ; better your rich poverty, than the poverty of the rich who have no faith in Jesus; better all the griefs you have to endure, when sanctified by assurance, than all the joys the worldling has, when unblessed by faith, and unhallowed by love to God. *I can say now, —*

*"Grant me the visits of thy face,*

*And I desire no more."*

I shall now pass to my third and last point — a little while only, but earnestly, I trust.

**III.** Will you patiently HEAR THE PREACHER, in what he has to say?

I know that in this large assembly, I am addressing very many who never knew that they were saved. I must put you all into one class, though, indeed, you are not in the same state; for there are some who never *knew* that they were saved, who *are* saved. They do believe in Jesus; but their faith is so little, that they never know that they are forgiven. I have to put *you* in the class, because you do belong to it for the time being. But there are many of you who never knew that you were saved, because you never cared to know. It has been a matter of concern with you to find out your pedigree; but you never asked, "Is God my Father?" You have made quite sure of the title deeds of your estate; but you never took the trouble to ask whether heaven was yours or not. And possibly, some of you have imbibed a notion that it is a very easy thing to be saved — that there is no need to trouble your heads about it much — that so long as you do your duty, attend your church or frequent your chapel, it is well and good, and there is no use making this fuss about being born again, and having a new heart, and a right spirit. I may never have your ear again, but mark this at the day of judgment, I will be quit of your blood if you perish in your delusion. This is *the* delusion of England. We have not half so much to dread Popery as we have that nominal Christianity, fostered by a national Church — that nominal Christianity which has no root nor soul within it. Oh! there are millions of Englishmen who think they are Christians, because they were sprinkled in infancy with holy drops, and because they have come to the

Lord's Table, whereas, little do they know that every time they have come there, they did eat and drink damnation to themselves, because they did not discern the Lord's body. This is the curse and plague of England, that we have so much profession and so little possession — such multitudes of you who are content to sit under a sleepy ministry where ministers will not tell you the truth for fear of hurting your feelings, where they will preach the truth generally, as if a man should waive a sword, but do not come home personally, as if a man should drive it through your very heart. What we want is more home dealing, more plain speaking, more thrusting of the hand inside your soul, to make you tremble, and ask yourselves the question whether you be right before God or no.

I speak then, to the whole of you who never knew that you were saved; and first I say to you *how foolish you are!* O sirs! you are to die soon, and you are to go to heaven or to hell, — to splendours and glories, or to glooms and horrors, and yet you do not know which is to be your portion. O fools! miserable fools! If some of you should say, "I do not know whether I have a cancer or no," I should say, seek the physician, and enquire if there be a fear; but to say, "I do not know whether I am in the bonds of iniquity and the gall of bitterness or no," is awful indeed. Why, you make your estates as tight as law can tie them; all the skill of legal language is employed to make the deed secure, and yet you are content to have heaven as a thing of *if*, and *but*, and *perhaps*. Oh! fools indeed! How can ye be so mad? Sure to die, and yet not sure whether you are saved! Sure to appear before the bar of God, and yet not know whether you shall be acquitted or condemned? Oh! if there be wisdom left within you, if your brain be not turned to perfect madness I conjure you by the living God to make sure work of it, and never be content till you *know* that you are saved.

But again: I must not only call you foolish, but miserable. Miserable, I say. Do you look at me and say, "We are comfortable, we are easy, we are content?" "Ay, sirs, so madmen talk. If I saw a man lying down upon the brink of the crater of a volcano, and I knew that very soon the lava would come streaming up, and then rolling down, I could not call him happy, though he were toying with Nature's fairest flowers, or sucking her most delicious sweets. And you — you are in such a state as this! Upon a puff of wind, a bubble, hangs your eternal state. If life depended on a hair, it were indeed precarious; but here is your soul depending on your life, which depends on something frailer than a dream. O sirs! you may drop dead in this house. Such things are not extraordinary. Men have come into the house of God bodies, and they have gone out corpses. And while I think that any one of you may die, and you are uncertain whether you shall be lost or saved I could sooner call you kings than call you happy, and the rightest title I can give to you is, O miserable men! miserable men! uncertain as to your future state.

Once more, and let this last thought ring in your ears. Ah! you may go away, perhaps to your gay parties, to your rounds of merriment, to your midnight balls, to your varnished harlotries, mayhap, but let this ring in your ears, "Oh! the danger — the danger of not knowing whether you shall be saved or lost!" You will die! I suppose you will not dispute with me about that. You do not claim to be immortal; you expect to die. You die; and what, sirs; — what, madam; — what if your fears should be true? Your companions are gay no longer; they are the damned spirits of hell; your occupations are frivolous no more; they are solemn and serious now — as solemn as death, and as serious as eternity. Where now the music which once regaled your dainty ears? Your only symphonies are sighs, dirges, and howlings. Where now the soft couch on which you took your rest and pleasure? You have made your bed in hell; and what a change for some of you — from the scarlet of Dives to the flames of hell — from the feasts so sumptuous to the fiends so terrible! Where are ye now, ye church-goers, ye chapel-goers? You have no profession of religion here, no hymn-books here; no minister of mercy; no voice of holy song; no ring of Sabbath bells; no tearful eye; no tender heart; no lip which trembles while it speaks to you, and only speaks of terror because it loves you, and would save you if it could. O my hearers, if you are not sure of being saved, what if you are sure of being damned! And you are either — mark this — not to your own apprehension perhaps, but in fact; you are sure of one or the other. Which is it? Which

must it be? I know, when I preach these terrible things, men will not listen to me. But God is my witness, I would not speak about them if I *dare* be silent about them. But if you perish, sirs, it shall not be for want of pleading with, or praying for, or weeping over. Sinner! I beseech thee turn! By him that died, and lives, and hath sent me to plead with thee, I beseech thee, seek, if thou hast never sought, and if thou hast sought, seek again, and if thou hast found, find yet more fully, till thou canst say, “He *is* mine, and I am his.” Put your downy pillow under your head to-night, ye sluggards: but sleep not, for ye may never wake in this world. Sit to your luxurious meal to-morrow: let the dainties be sweet, leave them untasted, for you may one day be denied a drop of water. O sirs! be not happy till you have made your happiness sure. Oh! have no peace, till your peace is everlasting, substantial peace. Talk not of being blessed, till God has blessed you. Think not that you be blessed, while “God is angry with the wicked every day,” and hath said, “Cursed is he that is under the law.”

But do you wish to be saved? Does the Spirit of God whisper to you “Escape! escape!” There is forgiveness still; there is forgiveness *now*; there is forgiveness for *thee*. Trust Christ sinner, and you shall be saved — saved this moment. Believe in him now with all your guilt and sin about you. May the Holy Ghost now lead you to trust my Lord and Master; and you may go home assured that *he* hath for ever put away your sin, and you are accepted and blessed in him. May God bless you, each one of you, now and ever. Amen.

*“Surrounded by a host of foes,  
Storm’d by a host of foes within,  
Nor swift to flee, nor strong t’ oppose,  
Single against hell, earth, and sin;  
Single, yet undismay’d, I am;  
I dare believe in Jesu’s name.*

*What though a thousand hosts engage.  
A thousand worlds my soul to shake  
I have a shield shall quell their rage,  
And drive the alien armies back;  
Portray’d it bears a bleeding Lamb;  
I dare believe in Jesu’s name.”*

## Helps to Full Assurance

*“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 on the name of the Son of God.” — 1 John 5:13.*

How very simple this all is! John had an eagle’s wing with which to soar aloft, and an eagle’s eye with which to penetrate into great mysteries; and yet of all the writers of the Old or New Testament he is one of the simplest. He never endeavors to show you the greatness of his mind or the grandeur of his rhetoric; on the contrary, he speaks as a child to those who are children in the school of love. I would that all of us who try to teach others would remember this, and sink ourselves in our lesson.

It is equally notable how practical John is. When he writes he always has a worthy intent in every line; “These are written,” saith he, and he explains the design with which he penned the record. These epistles are not written to dazzle you, nor to lead you into speculation, nor to gratify your curiosity; but these are written “that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” The practical

object may seem to the high-soaring votaries of modern thought to be commonplace; but John had a deep veneration for matters which moderns despise. The commonplaces of theology are the greenest of the pastures wherein the sheep of God feed and lie down. It is infinitely more to our benefit to know that we have eternal life than to be able to predict the future of empires or to forecast the destiny of kings. It is of more practical importance for us to know that we have eternal life than to be able to explain all mysteries, or to speak with tongues. John acts according to his loving heart when he writes to lead his brethren into the assured knowledge of their personal possession of eternal life.

When he tells us his design, it is that he may help to accomplish his purpose; for by informing men of understanding what he is writing for, he stirs them up to see his purpose and to fall in with it. "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 on the name of the Son of God." Dear friends, if this be the design of the inspired apostle, let us not be slow to co-operate with him; but let us pray this morning for the full assurance of faith, that we may know of a surety that eternal life is pulsing in our hearts. May you who have not believed in Jesus feel a fervent desire within your spirits to take that preliminary step, and become believers in the Son of God.

Come, then, to the text, and with us consider, first, *to whom it was written*, — "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;" secondly, *to what end it is written*, — "That ye may know that ye have eternal life." This will lead us, thirdly, to consider *how that which was written in this epistle conduces to this blessed confidence*: and then, lastly, I shall have to call your attention to *an added matter which is never forgotten* by John, even when he writes with the design of promoting the highest form of Christian attainment, — "That ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." They did already believe on the sacred name; yet it remained a part of his design to confirm them in that faith, and conduct them to higher degrees of it.

May the Holy Spirit make our meditation profitable.

**I.** First, then, briefly, **TO WHOM WAS THIS WRITTEN?** It is important to observe the direction of a letter, for I may be reading a communication meant for somebody else, and if it should contain good tidings, I may be deceiving myself by appropriating the news.

This epistle, and this particular text in it, were written *for all those who believe on the name of the Son of God*. In part of the epistle he says, "I write unto you, little children"; then he says, "I write unto you, young men"; further on he says, "I have written unto you, fathers"; but now he writes to babes, to young men, and to fathers under the one comprehensive description of those who have believed on the name of the Son of God. Our discourse is, therefore, for all of you who are believers in Christ. Little child, you who have just begun the spiritual life, we would have you attain to the confidence that you have eternal life. Young man, sternly battling with sin, we would have you strengthened for your conflict by knowing that you have eternal life. And you fathers, let us hope you have not come so far without this knowledge; but whether you have or not, these things are written that you in your mature years may rise to the full conviction that the life of God is strong within you. No person, young or old, is excluded from this text, unless he is an unbeliever.

*To unbelievers this text is not written*: it is for all who trust in Jesus; but it is for none beside. If you enquire why it is not addressed to unbelievers, I answer, simply because it would be preposterous to wish men to be assured of that which is not true. John never wished that a man who had not believed in Jesus Christ should even think that he had eternal life, for it would be a fatal error. "He that believeth not shall not see life," how, then, could he have an assurance of possessing it? Faith is a necessary preliminary to assurance; you must have the blade of faith before you can have the ripe corn of assurance. Dear friends, do not dream of being sure that you are saved apart from making sure that you have trusted yourselves with the crucified Savior. The atonement presented by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives assurance of salvation to all who trust in it, but to none besides. It would be taking things out of their due order, it would be doing you

real and perhaps fatal mischief if we should lead you to presume that you have eternal life before you have unreservedly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." I speak, therefore, to all of you who have come to Christ, however imperfect and undeveloped your spiritual life may as yet be; but I invite none beside to the banquet of joyous confidence. As with a drawn sword of fire, John's words guard the way like the cherub at the gate of Paradise: his words, "these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God," keep back every man who has not believed in Jesus from dreaming that he has eternal life. What hast thou to do with the rest, and the peace, and the blessedness of full assurance, unless thou hast received the appointed Savior into thy heart's trust?

We may gather from this address being made to all the people of God and to none beside, that *there are some believers in the world, and true believers too, who do not know that they have eternal life*. A very large number of true believers do not know this cheering fact. For instance, certain Christians believe that even if they are now saved they may yet be lost: that even if they have the life of God in them, that life may die out. Beloved, I pray for you that you may know that you have *eternal* life, and not a temporary life. The life which the Holy Spirit imparts to the believer is not a thing of days, and weeks, and months, and years: its dwelling-place is in the region of eternity. It is practically a divine life which God puts into us, whereby we are made "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We were begotten again unto a lively or living hope in the day of our regeneration. The new birth from above by the Spirit of God is a birth to an endless life. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Our Lord at the well of Samaria gives us another figure: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Many imagine that this spring can fail. How much comfort God's dear children lose by not apprehending the absolute immortality of the new life. I will not venture to say; but this much I will declare — that to me it is the very crown and glory of the gospel, that if I receive Jesus into my soul, and the Holy Spirit imparts to me the new life, I have received an everlasting blessing. Has not Jesus said "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Again, a large number of Christ's people who may be perfectly sound in the doctrinal view of the nature of this life do not know that they possess it at this present moment if they are believers. I find even the commentators, when they try to write upon this text, and most of the preachers who have left us printed sermons upon it, read the text as if it said, "that ye may know that ye *shall have* eternal life." They speak about the full assurance that we shall one day enter into glory. I beg their pardon, the text does not say anything of the kind: it is, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life," even here, at this present hour. The spiritual life which is in the believer at this moment is the same life which shall be in him in heaven. The grace-life is the glory-life in the bud: the same life, only less developed. We shall not in the article of death receive another life than that which we have while we are sojourning here below. Death sets a seal on that which is, but it produces nothing. There is to be a very palpable change wrought upon the body; but as to the spirit, the life of God which is in it now is the life which will dwell in it throughout eternity. Our believing life is eternal life. We want children of God who believe in Jesus to feel that the holy flame which kindles their lamp to-day is the same fire which will shine forth before the throne of God for ever: they have begun already to exercise those holy emotions of delight and joy which will be their heaven: they already possess in measure those perceptions and faculties which will be theirs in glory. Let us recollect this, and know that, as believers, we have eternal life.

Yet again, there are some Christians who believe all this, and are perfectly right in theory, but yet they each one cry, "I want to know that I have eternal life. I want a fuller assurance of

salvation than I have already obtained.” That is also our desire for you; for if you know you have believed in Jesus you certainly are quickened with eternal life, and ought to know it.

But it is only to you that have believed that the text speaks. If you have not believed in the glorious name of the Well-beloved, then come at once and put your trust in him. This is the gospel to every unbeliever: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” For “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” An unbeliever may have an assurance that he will be lost, but he cannot have an assurance that he is saved, or ever will be. First, believe on the name of the Son of God, who is manifested to take away sin. Trust in his glorious Person, in his finished work, in his accepted sacrifice, in his prevailing intercession, and in his glorious advent which is yet to be. Look unto him, and be ye saved. Rest alone upon the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and then to you will the word of this consolation be sent, but not till then.

**II.** So, secondly, I have now to mention TO WHAT END JOHN HAS WRITTEN.

When he says, “that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” I think his first meaning is *that you may know that everybody who believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life*. This is not a fact about you and a few others only, but it is a general truth — every man that believes on the name of the Son of God has eternal life. We may not doubt this, it is not a matter of inference and deduction, but a matter of revelation from God. You are not to form an opinion upon it, but to believe it, for the Lord hath said it. Listen to these words. 1 John 5:1: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Thus saith the Spirit of God, and so it must be. We do not need any further evidence: if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. The Spirit of God bears witness to this, and as the Spirit is truth, his witness is certainly true: accept you his witness and ask for no other. It is written (1 John 5:12), “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” This is the unvarying testimony of the whole of Scripture, and specially of the writings of the apostle John. How many times over he insists upon it that the believer has eternal life! I beseech you, never question the statement. Settle it in your mind; for if you have any doubt about it you have undermined the gospel, and rejected the witness of the Lord, and denied the Holy Ghost. You will not behave thus wickedly; therefore glorify God by believing his testimony.

I think that John in this passage meant, and we will consider him as meaning, something more — namely, *he would have us know that we personally have eternal life by having us know that we do personally believe in Jesus*. It is one thing to know that every believer has eternal life; but it is quite another thing to know that I am a believer so as to have eternal life myself. I have read of one who fell into the water, and as he was sinking he saw a rainbow in the sky above him. “Ah,” thought he, “God has made a covenant not to destroy the earth with a flood, and yet it is no comfort to me, for I fear I shall be drowned.” The largest provisions of grace avail us nothing unless we have a personal interest in them. It is true that every believer has eternal life, but what if I am not a believer?

It is a very singular thing that people should not know whether they believe in Jesus or not: for it is an ascertainable piece of knowledge. I know whether I think. I know whether I resolve, I know whether I doubt; I ought, therefore, to know whether I believe. But you see human nature received a terrible twist at the Fall, and it has fallen into a very foggy region, so that the eyes of the understanding are all squint, and the air around is very dank. Perhaps you ask me to speak for myself, and I assure you that I do so; but at the same time I do not hesitate to say the same of you. You, my clever friend, who are so wonderfully clear-headed, I should not wonder but what you are the foggiest and blindest of the whole company. The worst darkness is that which so blinds a man that he thinks he can see better than other people. We are all by nature in such a mixed up state that we need not wonder at any strange statement or feeling. When you hear brethren assert that a person who is not assured that he believes must necessarily be an unbeliever, you may say to yourself, “That friend does not know everything.” There is no estimating the possible inconsistency and contradiction of the human mind. I have been in a state of mind in which I have

questioned the possibility of there being a grain of grace in me, and yet I have clung to Jesus with a death grip. At such times my mind has worked morbidly, and its way has been turned upside down. Bunyan speaks of being “much tumbled up and down in his thoughts;” and that nearly hits my mental condition. It is very possible for a man to be a very strong believer and yet to question whether he has a spark of faith. I have heard ministers ridicule this state of inward questioning; and, indeed, it is ridiculous to all but those who are in it. If you once become a sufferer under this wretched complaint, the absurdity of your disease will not lessen its painfulness. Our mental distresses need not be logical; they can be full of anguish, and yet be most unreasonable. You probably know some people who are excessively nervous: they are afraid the skies will fall or the earth will crack: this is very stupid, but the agony caused thereby is very real. There is little of the Christian spirit in the man who can increase mental torment by turning it into jest. This is not to pour oil into the wound, but to rub salt into it. No doubt, the doubts which many have of their personal safety are very unreasonable; but a servant of God is not therefore to scorn the subject of them, for the Lord Jesus Christ had compassion on the ignorant. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor must we. I am personally taught to be tender of poor doubters, for I have often been one myself. I would sometimes give all that I have to be able to feel myself to be even the least in the Lord’s family. Just now I enjoy a full assurance, but I am not always on the mount; and therefore I have bowels for others because I am myself compassed with infirmity. We may not judge harshly, as if things were as we would theoretically arrange them, but we must deal with things as they are, and it cannot be questioned that some of the best believers are at times sorely put to it to know whether they are believers at all. The prayer of John is that such people, yea, and all believers, may know of a surety beyond all doubt that they have eternal life.

So far is human nature out of joint that it is necessary for me to say what it seems superfluous to say — that full assurance of our possessing eternal life is possible. The Church of Rome teaches that no man can be assured that he has eternal life, except some few to whom supernatural revelations may be given. That sort of doctrine lingers in the air of Protestantism; many people think the same, though they do not say so. Impossible to know that you are quickened! It ought to be impossible to have any doubt about it. Rationally, a living man should know that he is alive. No man should give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids while he has a doubt about his eternal state.

It is possible, and if it is possible it is very desirable; for when a man knows that he has eternal life, what a comfort it is to him! What gratitude it produces in his spirit! How it helps him to live above the world! With what holy ardor does he pursue the service of God, knowing that he has an eternal reward! He has not to waste time in calculating evidences, and perpetually examining himself; for he has examined himself, and he has cast himself upon Christ, and he knows that he has eternal life. With what rapidity does he make progress, for he leaves the first principles and goes on towards perfection! No longer questioning, he shows holy daring, and goes from strength to strength in rapturous fellowship and ecstatic enjoyment: he advances from glory to glory, his faith making substantial to him, even while he is here below, the joys which are laid up for the redeemed. I say again, if full assurance be possible, it is eminently desirable.

And I go a little further: it is our duty to obtain full assurance. We should not have been commanded to give diligence to make our calling and election sure if it were not right for us to be sure. I am sure it is right for a child of God to know that God is his Father, and never to have a question in his heart as to his sonship. I know it is right for a soul that is married unto Christ to know the sweet love of the bridegroom, and never to tolerate a cloud of suspicion to come between the soul and the full enjoyment of Christ’s love. Wherefore, I would urge you onward to know that you have eternal life. My brethren, John, being dead, yet speaketh out of this Book: he calls upon you to know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and that we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. He bids us as believers firmly repose our souls upon the promise of our faithful God.

I sorrowfully remind certain of you that, as you have not believed, you have neither part nor lot in this matter, and the beloved disciple speaks not to you.

**III.** Thirdly, I come to where I would lay the stress of the discourse this morning, — **WHAT HAS JOHN SAID IN THIS EPISTLE WHICH CONDUCE TO OUR FULL ASSURANCE?**

How does he help us to know that we are believers, and consequently to know that we have eternal life? I cannot attempt a full *résumé* of this most blessed epistle, but I shall select a few items from very many. An exposition of this epistle, written to show how it enables men to know that they have eternal life, would be a very valuable thing; and I feel confident that without the slightest forcing of a single sentence it could be shown that the whole letter bears upon assurance. The wish of the apostle that all believers might know that they have eternal life is the silken thread upon which his pearls are strung. Now believers ought to know that they have eternal life, and they ought never to doubt it, for God's own word assures them that it is so. Remember that word of the Lord Jesus in John 6:47 — "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Will you doubt the Lord's "Verily, verily"? Christ's word unsupported by any external evidence is quite enough to satisfy every gracious mind. "Let God be true, but every man a liar," — yea, let every circumstance be a liar. Everything that we have looked upon as evidence should be regarded as a lie if it denies the declaration of the Lord. Out of this simple faith in God comes assurance naturally, by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart. Take pure and unadulterated milk, and let it stand, and you will soon get cream. Faith is the milk, and full assurance is the cream upon it; and when faith has stood long enough, you may see the rich cream of holy confidence upon the top of it. The witness of God is true, and therefore to be believed, yea, to be believed with full assurance. According to all right principles, assurance should increase by the lapse of time during which faith occupies itself upon the same promise. I have trusted my soul on Christ, therefore I have eternal life. How do I know? I know, because the Spirit of God has so declared it in the Word of God. Thus has he spoken — "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." I believe in the Son, and, therefore, I have eternal life. Do friends assure me that they see the life in me? I am very much obliged to them, but I do not need their evidence. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." When the Holy Spirit has made a statement, it is something like impertinence either to ask or to offer any further evidence upon the point. Therefore, that matter is not my subject. I take it, we must not offer you any other argument to prove the eternal life of believers beyond this, — God has said it.

The matter which may be argued about is this — "Do I believe in Jesus? Am I a believer in such a sense that I have eternal life?" Let us look at the epistle for help in this enquiry.

You will find, first, that John mentions as an evidence *truthful dealing with God, in faith and confession of sin*. Naturally men walk in darkness or falsehood towards God; but when we have believed in Jesus we come to walk in the light of truth. Read in the first chapter of the epistle from verse 6 to 9. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The believer does not attempt to deal with God as if he had no sin; for that were to make Christ useless, seeing there would be no need of his blood to cleanse. He does not say that he now lives without sin; for that were to make his cleansing a thing of the past, whereas the Spirit teacheth that it is a present matter, concerning our present walk with God. To claim to live without sin is to walk in the dark; for the claim is a false one. The man who walks in the light comes before God as a sinner, whom the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin. So, then, you may take this as an evidence that you are a saved man, if you deal truthfully with God: if you confess your guilt before God, if your only hope of being cleansed from it lies in the blood of Jesus Christ, then you have come to act towards God on the line of truth, and he accepts you. You that are not a believer in Christ may try to forget that you have any sin, or by forms and ceremonies to offer some kind of palliation of

your sin: but when you are brought into the honest light you will make a clean breast of it, and cease to act a borrowed part. Your cry will be, "Search me, O God, and try me," and your appeal will be to the boundless mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Be sure that you are a child of God when sin is confessed, and faith is looking to Jesus for the removal of it. "Father, I have sinned," is the cry of a true-born child. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is the prayer of the man who goes down to his house justified. We can repeat with rapture the words of Paul to the Romans, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

Next, John gives us *obedience* as a test of the child of God. Look to the second chapter, and begin to read at the third verse: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Come, then, beloved brethren, do you obey the will of the Lord from your heart? Is holiness the aim and object of your life? Do you strive to do as Jesus bids you? Do you set your clock by the heavenly sun? Do you try to order your ways and your steps according to the law of the Lord? Do you delight yourself also in the law of God after the inner man? Do you press forward after perfect holiness? Then his servant you are whom you obey. Rest assured beyond all question that you are one of Christ's sheep, for he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." If grace has made you obedient it has given you eternal life.

Follow me as I call attention, next, to the evidence of *love* in the heart. In the second chapter read at the ninth verse: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." Then go on to the fourteenth verse of the third chapter. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." This will greatly help you to decide your case. Do you hate anybody? Are you seeking revenge? Are you unforgiving? Then you are not dwelling in the light: you are of Cain and not of Christ. Do you feel that you love your enemies, and that, in fact, you are no man's enemy, because love is the principle of your life? "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." We must feel a general benevolence towards all men, and a still more intense love and complacency towards all who are in Christ. This love must be practical, and lead us to help and succor our brethren. Have you this love? Do you feel a delight in the company of the brethren because they belong to Christ, however poor or illiterate they may be? You would not feel love reigning in your spirit if true faith had not come to dwell there. A loving spirit evidenced by a loving life is a true sign that you belong to God, whose name is love. Be of good courage and enter into full assurance, O ye whose bosoms glow with the sacred flame of fervent love to God and men.

Next to that comes *separation from the world*. Read in the second chapter at the fifteenth verse: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This is backed up by the first verse of the third chapter: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Have you met with opposition from the ungodly? Have you discovered that Ishmael still mocks Isaac? Do you find when you go out to work that your shopmates who used to drink with you are inclined to avoid you? Are you pointed at as a hypocrite because you are a Christian? Then there is a difference between you and others, and the world can see it. The serpent's seed will hiss at the seed of the woman: God has put an enmity between the two. Do not therefore be surprised at it. Did not our Lord say, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,

therefore the world hateth you”? Thus slander, abuse, and other forms of persecution may turn to your comfort by showing that you are of that sect which is everywhere spoken against.

Next to that, in the second chapter, we have the evidence of *continuance in the faith*. “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” The longer a Christian man is enabled to persevere in holiness, the more confident may he become that his religion is the work of the Spirit of God in his soul. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” Perseverance in holiness is a sure mark of election. It is the righteous who hold on their way; but mere pretenders are as wandering stars and fading flowers. That which comes and goes is not of God: the Holy Spirit abides permanently in true believers.

The next evidence you will find in the third chapter, the third verse, namely, *purification*. “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” Do you every day endeavor to keep clear of sin; and, when you have sinned, do you at night go with bitter repentance to God, and beg to be delivered from it? Are you fighting against your besetting sins? Do you contend against the customs of the world? Have you come to be a warrior against evil? Let that be an evidence that there is in you a new spirit which was not there by nature, and let that prove to you that you are quickened into newness of life. Conflict and victory are evidences of grace. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Again, in the twenty-first verse of the third chapter, we meet with another blessed evidence, and that is a *clear conscience*, - “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” They say of us that we seek ourselves, or that we are hypocrites; but if we can lay our hand upon our heart and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou nowest that I love thee,” we have the best ground for full assurance. A conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God is one of the seals of the Holy Ghost upon that epistle which he has written in our hearts. This divine witness is a privilege which none possess but the regenerate. Prove yourself clear in the court of conscience that ye may know that ye have eternal life.

Furthermore, we find an evidence in *answers to prayer*: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” Does God hear your prayers? then you are pleasing in his sight. Are you in the habit of speaking with him, and does he reply to you? then you are agreed with God. Does he grant you the desire of your heart? Is it not because you delight in him? He heareth not those who wilfully live in sin; but if any man doeth his will him he heareth. You may look upon every answered prayer as another token of the love of God toward you in Christ Jesus your Lord.

*Adherence to the truth* is another help to full assurance. Read the whole fourth chapter: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” In the sixth verse he says, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.” I read in a certain learned divine the other day a declaration that the evangelical doctrine which we preach is not Christianity, but Paulinism. By that utterance this divine condemned himself. John saith, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” He who hears not the apostles hears not their Master. He who dares say that Paul has not given us the gospel is not of Christ: for Jesus saith, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” The testimony of the Holy Ghost by apostolic lips is as sure as the testimony by the Son of God himself; and it is flat rebellion against the Holy Ghost to graduate his utterances, whether they be through prophets, apostles, or the

Christ himself. He who makes this to be true and that to be false, or this true and that truer still, has disparaged the Spirit of God, who speaketh as he pleases, but is always infallible. He that questions what the Spirit saith hath not the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him. If you have taken Scripture to be your guide, and hold fast by the truth of God, you are one of Christ's sheep, of whom he saith, "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." Against the detestable spirit of this age, and against everything else that would corrupt the gospel of Christ, it is the mark of the true seed to stand opposed. If you bear witness to the truth, the truth bears witness to you. Blessed are those who are not removed from the hope of their calling.

One of the best evidences of true faith, and one of the best helps to full assurance, is a *holy familiarity with God*. Read in the fourth chapter the sixteenth verse: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us." Oh, beloved brother, if you have come to speak with God as a man speaketh with a man, if you dwell in him, if every day you say more to God than you do to men, and if you find more joy in fellowship with God than you do in all the world beside, then you are one of his. God never made a man to know him and love him, and then cast him away. Eternal life is surely in you if you have entered into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. When you have no longer that slavish fear which makes you stand back, but that childlike confidence which draws you nearer and yet nearer unto God, then are you his child. The spirit of adoption is one point of sure witness from the Spirit of God. He who can call God his exceeding joy is among the living in Zion.

**IV.** I would now finish, only I dare not leave out the last point — THE APPENDIX TO JOHN'S DESIGN. The apostle puts it, "That ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." I think he means this — you are never to get into such a state that you say, "I have eternal life, and therefore I need not trust simply in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Years ago I was born again, and so I can now live without the daily exercise of faith." "No," says the apostle, "I am writing this to believers, and I tell them that while they may have full assurance, it cannot be a substitute for habitual faith in the Lord Jesus." Personally, I wish to say, — it is some thirty-four years since I first believed in the Christ Jesus, and then I came to him as having nothing in myself, and I took him to be my all. At this moment I possess a comfortable and clear assurance that I have eternal life; but my ground of confidence today is exactly what it was when first I came to Christ. I have no confidence in my confidence, I place no reliance upon my own assurance. My assurance lies in the fact that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that "Whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life": I do believe in him, and therefore I know I have eternal life. Brethren, do not stir beyond that. Keep to your first faith. However far you go in other directions, stand fast in your undivided faith in Jesus. If you think it wise to examine these signs and evidences which I have given you, do so; but if you think to get food out of them you will find a bare cupboard. If you think you can live without Christ, on what you have known in the past, you are greatly mistaken. It is like trying to live on stale manna. None of you would have done that in the wilderness; you would soon have turned up your noses at it. When it was more than a day old it "bred worms and stank." Everything you look to apart from Christ will rot in due time, so that you will loathe it. Beloved, every vessel, whether it be a great flagon or a little cup, must hang upon the one nail which is fastened in a sure place. If you get from Jesus, you wander into a land of darkness and of the shadow of death.

Whether I be a child of God or not is a question I will not discuss today. I am a sinner, and Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and they that trust in him are saved. Therefore I trust him! Therefore I am saved! The Word of God declares it. Blessed be his name for ever and ever. Amen.

*Portion of scripture read before sermon — 1 John 5. Hymns from “our own hymn book” — 191, 549, 193.*