

FULL ASSURANCE

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CHAPTER EIGHT

ASSURANCE OF HEART

THERE IS A VERY PRECIOUS LINE of truth unfolded in John's first epistle that has to do with the experimental side of Christianity. In 3:18-19, we are both exhorted and encouraged in the following words:

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."

Now this assurance of heart is the result of the Spirit's work in the believer, following the full assurance of faith.

The moment I take GOD at His Word and trust the Lord JESUS as my Saviour, I have eternal life, and I know it on the authority of the Holy Scriptures, which over and over link the present possession of this life with faith in the One whom GOD gave to be the propitiation for our sins.

And as I go on in the Christian life I have abundant corroborative evidence through the Holy Spirit's continuous work in my inmost being that this is indeed far more than a doctrine which I have accepted.

I find from day to day positive proofs that I am in very truth a new man, **"created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."**

Thus my assurance deepens. While at the beginning I rested everything for eternity upon the naked Word of GOD, I find, as I continue in faith, overwhelming confirmation of the truth of that Word in the manifestations of eternal life actually imparted to me a sinner, through grace.

Let us look carefully at some of these corroborative proofs which assure our hearts before Him.

First, the believer becomes conscious of an inborn love for the will of GOD.

"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" (I John 2:3-5).

It is not natural for the unbeliever to delight in the will of GOD. The unsaved man loves his own way and resents being asked to yield his will to another.

An English Barrister Counsels a Young Man

Mr. Montague Goodman, a well-known English barrister, who is also a widely recognized minister of CHRIST, recently related the following incident which will illustrate this point:

"Sitting in my study with me one evening was a young man whom I had known from his early boyhood. He was about to set out for the Far East and had come to say good-bye. We talked in a candid, friendly manner, and I sought to commend CHRIST to him. I shall not readily forget his reply. It was given without any trace of hostility or bitterness. He said, 'I want to do as I like. I don't see why I should surrender my liberty to JESUS CHRIST, or anybody else.' "

"In so saying he was but expressing the mind of the whole race of which he was a member. For the universal truth concerning mankind is just this: '**We have turned everyone to his own way.**' This is a man's condemnation before GOD; he is not prepared to subject himself to the will of GOD. He is set on having his own way, and resents any interference with it.

He says in effect to GOD, '*Not Thy will, but mine be done.*'

He wills his own will, and this is universally true whether that will may be vulgar or refined, sensual or intellectual, honest or dishonest, cruel or kind. He claims the right to be the master of his fate, the captain of his soul."

But now consider what takes place at conversion. I trust in CHRIST as my Saviour and I own Him as my Lord. His all-embracing love wins my heart. I yield my will to His. Henceforth, however conscious I may be of daily failure, I find the supreme desire of my heart is to do as He would have me. I love His commandments.

How truly Bonar's beautiful old hymn sets this forth:

"I was a wand'ring sheep,
I did not love the fold,
I did not love my Shepherd's voice,
I would not be controlled;
I was a wayward child,
I did not love my home,
I did not love my Father's voice,
I loved afar to roam.

The Shepherd sought His sheep,
The Father sought His child;
He followed me o'er vale and hill,
O'er deserts waste and wild:
He found me nigh to death,
Famished, and faint, and lone;
He bound me with the bands of love
He saved the wand'ring one.

JESUS my Shepherd is;
'Twas He that loved my soul,
'Twas He that washed me in His blood,
'Twas He that made me whole:
'Twas He that sought the lost,
That found the wand'ring sheep;
'Twas He that brought me to the fold,
'Tis He that still doth keep.

I was a wand'ring sheep,
I would not be controlled,
But now I love my Shepherd's voice,
I love, I love the fold:
I was a wayward child,
I once preferred to roam;
But now I love my Father's voice,
I love, I love His home!

A Changed Attitude Gives Assurance

This change of attitude gives me heart assurance that I am now a child of GOD by a second birth. Nothing else can properly explain the subduing of my once proud will, and my earnest desire to obey the commandments of GOD as set forth in His Word.

I hope none will be so foolish as to suppose that John's use of the word "**commandments**" has reference simply to the ten words given at Sinai. It goes far beyond that. The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. But over and above this we have the commandment of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, embracing all that He taught while He was here on earth as to the behavior of His disciples; and also that which He has since revealed by His Spirit, as set forth in the New Testament Scriptures.

The regenerated man longs to do those things that please his Lord; and as he walks in obedience, that divine love which was shown in all its perfection at the Cross wells up in his own heart, as CHRIST becomes increasingly precious the better He is known.

In the second instance, let us consider what is written in I John 3:9:

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

This has puzzled many a careless reader, and even some who are more careful. Satan himself has used it to distress GOD's dear children, when GOD meant it to comfort sensitive, conscientious souls.

The devil says to such an one, "You know you are not sinless. You frequently fail in thought and word and deed, therefore you commit sin, and so you cannot be a child of God." The troubled mind is inclined to accept this as clear and logical, even when the heart that has trusted CHRIST rebels against it, and feels instinctively that there is something wrong and fallacious in such reasoning.

It will help us to see that the tense of the verb here is what has been called the "present continuous."

It is not a question of occasional, or even of frequent failure, bitterly lamented and grieved over. It rather implies a course of behavior that is characteristic. With this in mind it will be well to go back to verse 6 and read the entire section as given with a critical eye:

"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; [does not practice sin] whosoever sinneth [practiceth sin] hath not seen Him, neither known Him. Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth [practiceth] righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth [practiceth] sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth [practiceth sin] from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy [or annul] the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit [practice] sin, for His seed remaineth [or abideth] in him and he cannot sin, [be practicing sin] because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not [practice] righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

How Two Different Families Act

See how the two families, the unregenerated and the regenerated, are here depicted.

Unsaved men practice sin. Whatever fine things there may be in their characters, as judged by the world's standards, they delight in having their own way. This is the essence of sin.

"Sin is the transgression of the law." We are told that **"until the law sin was in the world,"** and although sin was not imputed as transgression because no written standard had yet been given, nevertheless sin manifested itself as self-will, or lawlessness, and was seen everywhere among fallen mankind. Lawlessness is the refusal of a person to submit his will to Another, even to GOD Himself, who has the right to claim his full obedience.

In this the children of the devil show plainly the family to which they belong. But with the believer it is otherwise. Turning to CHRIST he is born from above, as we have seen, and thus possesses a new nature.

This new nature abominates sin, and henceforth dominates his desires and his thinking. Sin becomes detestable. He loathes himself for the follies and iniquities of his past, and he yearns after holiness. Energized by the Holy Spirit, his life trend is changed. He practices righteousness. Though oftentimes conscious of failure, the whole trend of his life is altered. The will of GOD is his joy and delight.

And as he learns more and more the preciousness of abiding in CHRIST he grows in grace and in knowledge, and realizes that divine power is given him to walk in the path of obedience. His new nature finds joy in surrendering to JESUS as Lord, and so sin ceases to be characteristic of his life and character.

This leads us on to the third corroborative evidence of the new birth.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (I John 3:14).

There is a difference between the love spoken of here and a merely human affection. Two different words are used to distinguish these two aspects of love in the Greek New Testament. The word here chosen by the Spirit is used throughout to designate a love that is divinely imparted. It far surpasses mere natural affection. It is implanted in us when we are born again.

What a marvelous thing is this love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given unto us! It links us to all saints everywhere. Instinctively the newly converted soul feels that he belongs to a new family and he claims all such as are saved as his brethren and sisters in CHRIST. Before the great change came, he shrank from the company of Christians and preferred to associate with worldlings. Now he seeks out fellow believers, like those of old, concerning whom we read, **"and being let go, they went to their own company."**

Line of Demarcation Becomes Evident

Nor is this a passing notion, for as the years go on the line of demarcation only becomes stronger. The world becomes less and less attractive, and the family of the redeemed becomes more and more precious.

Love of the brethren is an abiding proof of the new life, and so the heart is assured before GOD. This love is a very practical thing. The true child of GOD cannot be content with loving **"in word or in tongue."** He will manifest love in active benevolence and in gracious behavior. This truth is stressed everywhere throughout the first epistle of John.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (4:7).

It is a remarkable fact, however, that after emphasizing these internal evidences of the new birth so clearly in the early part of his letter, the apostle comes back in the closing portions to the great outstanding truth that the surest proof of all is simple faith in the testimony of GOD.

It is because the more conscientious a soul is, the more he will distrust himself and his experiences, and hence it will not do to build upon these experiences apart from the great foundation truths of the Gospel.

So in I John 4:13-16 we are told:

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 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."

Reading this, one might ask, "But how do I know that He has given the Spirit to me?"

The answer is that it is the Spirit who bears witness to the eternal verities of the Gospel. He indwells all who have trusted CHRIST as their personal Saviour. If you have done this and confess that JESUS is the Son of GOD, you may know that GOD by the Spirit dwells in you, and you in GOD. His love has been revealed in the Gospel. Nature manifests His power and wisdom. It is the Cross that tells of His love and grace.

Dr. Horatius Bonar, author of one of whose well-known hymns we have quoted before, has brought this out most strikingly in another poem, not so widely known.

"We read Thee in the flowers, the trees,
The freshness of the fragrant breeze,
The songs of birds upon the wing,
The joy of summer and of spring.

We read Thee best in Him who came
To bear for us the Cross of shame
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live, our death to die."

When our Saviour had made purification for sins He was taken up into Heaven and seated on GOD's right hand. The Holy Spirit then came down to earth to give power to the testimony of the work so blessedly accomplished, when the Roman spear pierced the side of the dead CHRIST and "**forthwith came there out blood and water.**"

That blood and water bore mute witness to His holy life given up for sinners. To this the Spirit adds His divine record. And so, as we are informed in I John 5:8, "**There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.**"

Thus GOD has given abundant testimony to the perfection of the redemptive work of His Son. And now He calls on man to receive that testimony in faith and thus be eternally saved. We credit the testimony of men in whom we have confidence, even though they speak of matters beyond our knowledge or our ability to verify.

Surely, then, we should accept unquestioningly the witness that GOD has given concerning His Son! To do otherwise, to refuse to trust His record, is to make Him a liar. To believe the record is to receive this divinely given message into the very heart and soul. Therefore John tells us, "**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.**"

And so John brings us back to that which we dwelt on in an earlier chapter of this book:

"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" (I John 5:13).

It becomes evident, then, that the term "**these things**" embraces all that the venerable apostle has been setting before us in this epistle of light and love.

Go over it again. Take it up point by point.

Follow the Spirit's presentation of "the message" from verse to verse and theme to theme. Receive it as it is in truth the very Word of the living GOD, and know beyond any cavil or doubt that you are born from above and have everlasting life as a present possession. And so your heart shall be assured before Him.

"Blessed assurance, JESUS is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of GOD,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood."

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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