

Assurance of Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Our theme tonight is assurance of faith as you've been told and it's important for at least three reasons. It's important first of all because at the Reformation there was great stress laid upon this fact of assurance and the Reformers have been deemed it to be equivalent to faith itself.

In fact they went so hard as to argue that only by assurance could we know God's salvation. We were justified more or less by assurance of our own salvation.

It's important secondly because in our own background as Reformed Evangelicals this has often been a very serious problem.

A problem because not only have we often lacked assurance we've even tended to cultivate a lack of assurance.

This was very markedly so in the north of Scotland but one finds the same phenomenon for example among Dutch Calvinists.

[1 : 1 9] And it is I suppose very easy to assume that lack of assurance reflects some kind of real humility.

And that conversely assurance is a mark of spiritual pride. So on the one hand the Reformers in my view made too much of assurance we have made too little of it.

It's important thirdly because in my judgment it bears very very directly on the quality of our own Christian lives.

It seems to me that without assurance it becomes very difficult to serve the Lord.

It becomes difficult to cultivate sanctification or to mortify sin. Without assurance there is no joy in our discipleship.

[2 : 2 7] And joy as I keep on saying is the lubricant of obedience. And I tend to suspect that many of our most pressing problems in the church today in fact stem from the lack of assurance.

Remember that phrase in Wordsworth. Poetry is, as he says, the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. I use those Wordsworths time and time again. Because they encapsulate a fundamental principle of our Christian faith.

The quality of our witness, of our worship, of our whole service to God depends on the depth of our own feeling.

The power of our own emotions and affections. And primary among those is this fact of assurance. Our joy is the consequence of our persuasion that God loves us.

[3 : 5 3] I want tonight to summarize this doctrine very much along the lines of our own confessions discussion in the 18th chapter of the Christian faith.

We'll find a very useful summary of the doctrine of assurance. And I simply follow its contours tonight. The confession reminds us, first of all, that those who are hypocrites may nevertheless enjoy some kind of assurance.

These are people who are, of course, not converted, who are carnal men, and yet they have a very powerful assurance that they are God's children and they are secure for time and eternity.

The Bible itself bears abundant witness to this fact that unconverted folk can have some kind of assurance. The Old Testament Jews, for example, said the temple of the Lord are we.

They said we are the Lord's temple. They said we have Abraham for our father. We don't need to be baptized. We don't need to be born again.

[5 : 18] The Pharisee was thankful to God because he wasn't like other men. He wasn't a sinner. And so because of their birth connections, because of their various liturgies and rites and so on, they thought that they were true children of God.

And that raises the whole specter of a perceptuous and ill-based assurance.

Now, is it possible to answer in maybe one proposition? The question, how can we distinguish this spurious assurance from true spiritual, biblical assurance?

Well, if I'm limited to one proposition, I would say this, that this spurious assurance is always accompanied by spiritual pride.

In other words, it is always based upon something egotistical, upon something personal. It is, in its essence, legalistic.

[6 : 37] It is based upon my own morality, my own religiosity, my own sincerity, my own kind and quality of conversion, my own faith, my own conviction of sin, my own repentance, my own love for the brethren.

Maybe most often, my own zeal for religion. But always, you see, it's based upon something inherent, upon something personal to myself.

I say spiritual pride because if there is one thing that this kind of man is a complete stranger to, it is what the Lord calls poverty of spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. That is the very first of the Beatitudes. A reminder to us that the blessed man is without spiritual pride, is without spiritual self-confidence.

There is nothing of which he boasts. He comes to Christ and says, nothing in my hand I breathe, just as I am, poor, wretched, blind.

[8 : 10] That's the way that man feels. And it seems to me to be the very, very essence of hypocritical assurance that it is completely devoid of this feeling of being poor in spirit.

It is always based in some form or other on something that we ourselves have done, something inherent, something we felt, something we ourselves have experienced.

It always leaves us some ground to boast. For us, where there is true assurance, there is no place for boasting.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. It is shut out. The true believer will never boast of anything that is inherent in himself.

What said David Dixon who said, I cannot bring my best work to the touchstone of God's law.

[9 : 25] This man is ashamed not of his evil deeds, he is ashamed of his righteousnesses. And that's something that the hypocrite can never begin to understand.

That the believer stands boastless before God and says quite simply, Lord, be merciful to me, this sinner. Where his whole identity has contracted to the point where he is nothing but the sinner.

Saying to God, you know who it is, Lord, it's the sinner. You know the sinner. Well, that's the first point. But there is this possibility of a spurious hypocritical assurance.

But then, secondly, there is the possibility of a real spiritual assurance. The confession of faith insists that the true believer who sincerely loves the Lord Jesus Christ and endeavours to walk in all good conscience before him can have a real assurance of the fact that he is in good standing before God.

Now, I do want us to grasp that. I want us to grasp it in its confessional status. because sometimes it has been the mark of orthodoxy to lack assurance.

[11 : 00] It's been the hallmark of orthodoxy to play down assurance. And what I'm saying is this, that if we deny the possibility of assurance, if we lay it down, if we diminish its importance, then our position is by conditional standards heretical.

It is a heresy to say that the child of God cannot have assurance. It is heresy to say that assurance is not important.

because our confessional faith insists that this is a normal part and even an obligatory part of the life of the true child of God.

Though I know that there have been areas of the church where it certainly has been suggested that if you have assurance then your whole conversion must be dubious and must leave grounds for suspicion.

I know that there was courage given to the view that if you didn't doubt your conversion then others should doubt it for you.

[12 : 23] Now that is light years away from the teaching of Lutheran Calvin but it is also very very far removed from our own confessions position.

I can recall as a young Christian finding it very very difficult that I didn't have those doubts. I can recall the pressure to have those doubts to have the humility that everybody else seemed to have because it was almost mandatory in those ways that one should have some doubts and one should lack assurances.

And if ever anybody said that for example when I was converted that is if I was converted you always had to add that because it simply wasn't caution to be sure of having had this kind of experience.

Now thankfully I think that ethos is behind us although I'm sure it will return in some form to the church at some other stage.

But for the moment I simply say that it is entirely non-confessional and it is indeed a violation of confessional teaching.

[13 : 47] because the confession says both that we may have assurance and that we should have assurance. Now of course the confession isn't our rule of faith and the question is what said the scriptures?

Now the scriptures lay down very plainly that it is perfectly normal for a Christian to be assured of his own salvation.

In actual fact it is very very difficult to find in either the Old Testament or the New Testament any instance of a child of God doubting whether he is a child of God.

I think that maybe if one looked very hard one could find in the Old Testament instances of such doubts but they are very very hard to find.

And it does indeed fascinate me that in the Old Testament that is in the pre-Pentecost age when the spirit was less intimately active in most of God's people than he is today but nevertheless in for example the book of Psalms one finds very great confidence very great boldness on the part of believers in relation to God.

[15 : 15] For example in Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd is my shepherd that is in the language of doubt it's the language of assurance.

The 40th Psalm in the same way I am poor and needy but the Lord thinks of me. The 40th Psalm again I waited for the Lord my God and he put my feet on a rock and he put a new song in my mouth.

I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. You find Job also saying I know that my Redeemer lives and that really is the standard form of address in the Old Testament between a believer and his God.

Martin Luther said that religion consists in personal pronouns in the ability to say my God O Lord thou art my God and King thee will I magnify and praise and also Old Testament saints they had that they had this ability say my God and my King and of course in the New Testament one finds the same thing we know that we have passed from death unto life we know that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord the apostle Paul in the gloom of his Roman dungeon was able to say I have finished my course I have kept the faith henceforth there awaits me a crown of life which the

Lord will give me in that day and he faces death with full assurance the time of my departure has arrived it's time to slip the moon and he faces that with total confidence because he knows his own relationship with God and so it seems to me that not only is this confessional teaching but it is Old Testament teaching and it is New Testament teaching that as Christians we should be absolutely certain that God loves us well I say it is confessional teaching it is Old Testament teaching it is New Testament teaching but let me put it to you in a different and in some ways I hope I'm running away still and it is this imagine for a moment how those little parents would feel if our sons or daughters came or went to somebody else and said

[18:14] I don't know if my father loves me I don't know if my mother loves me it would surely be a most unnatural relationship that someone should not know our parents affection I can't even be sure if it's my father or she's my mother at all now it seems to me improbably extreme that God should want his children not to know who their father is not to know whether their father loves them surely if God is our father God wants us to know God wants us to be sure that he loves us and that's why our catechisms lay down the principle that the benefits which in this life accompany and flow from justification adoption and sanctification include at the very head of the list assurance of

God's love and peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost now you know it is a remarkable tribute to the stubbornness of the human heart and our tendency to disjoin theology from experience that generations of Scottish Christians reeled on the short of catechism yet thought it spiritual pride to have peace of conscience to have assurance of God's love and to have joy in the Holy Spirit it was there you see at the very heart of their own catechetical religion it was there as part of the core teaching of the document which above all others was the symbol of their orthodoxy and yet generations from the 18th century onwards not only lacked their assurance of

God's love but even cultivated the lack or thought was there in their own catechetical so it is confessional in its Old Testament in its New Testament it is surely implied very directly in the whole nature of our relationship with God that God wants his children to know who their father is and to know that he really really loves them so we seen that hypocrites may have assurance we seen that God's people ought to have assurance and thirdly we see that this assurance rests according to reformed theology on two specific grounds there are two reasons why we should know how we come to know that God loves us two roads to assurance the first is this that we find in ourselves the inward evidence of those graces to which

God's promises are addressed we find in ourselves the inward evidences of those graces to which the promises of God are addressed now those promises of God of course are infallible those promises of God aren't addressed to named individuals they're addressed to classes of people the question is do I belong to the class of people to whom those promises are made the class of people defined for example in the Beatitudes the class of people defined as Abraham's children that is believers the question is do I have those inward marks do

I find myself those characteristics enumerated in the Beatitudes now it seems to me that we sometimes make this enormity difficult and that we sometimes for example look for marks of faith when it might be much easier to look for faith itself because faith is something that we do with the conscious part of our mind and I think that other things being equal in the case of normal people we are conscious of our own faith in exercise it certainly seems to me that in my own case I am much more conscious of my faith than I am of some other graces but may reflect a particular experience when one has known unfaith or non faith and against that background of a past or an episode in which there was no faith maybe one can see one's faith more clearly but

[23 : 55] I doubt whether any other mark for example love for God love for the brethren is in fact any more detectable than is the act of faith itself I am very very conscious myself of my belief at an intellectual level and I think that it is no pride to say I'm conscious also of the fact but I find Christ attractive as I find nothing else and no one else attractive in the whole range of possible experiences you see the question is whether we find in Christ beauty so as to desire do we want to faith faith is not simply as as as we saw faith is also the perception of the glory of Christ that draws us out to need him to want him to desire him so there is beauty that we desire so we find in ourselves as we examine ourselves the inward evidence of the graces to which

God's promises are made we find in ourselves belief in Christ we find in ourselves that we want Christ we find that we need the Lord Jesus Christ or this way when we pray what arguments do we use well the arguments we use are very good indicators of the things that we lie upon other things that we trust we will not use arguments before God that we don't think are valid if we go to God and say Lord accept me because I'm a very good man then our trust is in our own goodness but if we go to God and say Lord accept me because of Jesus blood and righteousness then our trust is in Jesus blood and righteousness I'm asking really in the privacy of our own homes and our own quietness between ourselves and God what arguments do we use would you ever go to

God and tell him what a good a good mother a good woman you are would you go before God and tell him what great progress you've made what lovely fruit you made what lovely graces and all you like well of course some people do I thank thee that I am not as other men and that's clear proof of course that her faith is not in Christ but her faith is in ourselves so I'm asking what is your argument before God is it something you've done you are you feel or is it something that Jesus Christ has done so we have the evidence of our own faith the evidence of our own desire for Christ the evidence of the arguments we ourselves use in prayer the argument of our own preferred society we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren we love

Christian people now that is not always such an easy mark to apply but that's what the apostle John relies upon so very very heavily that we modified a moment do we love our enemies do we love those who hate and persecute ourselves it may be the church of God itself that some people cause us difficulty and trouble do we love them that's a very great test of our whole relationship with God love or love or come back again to this do we know poverty of spirit you see blessed are the poor in spirit do we know that this very very profound persuasion we have the very core of our being one of the great axioms of life that our lives are indefensible and that we ourselves are spiritually impotent that we have nothing to offer to God and because of that we are meek and we are merciful to others and we positively hunger and thirst after righteousness because we are so poor our need is so great as I said before there is no verse in the whole range of scripture that says miss so and so is saved but there are verses in

God's word that say believers are saved and those who see beauty in Christ are saved and those who pray in the name of Christ are saved and those who love the brethren are saved and those who are poor in spirit they are saved and the question is do I find in myself the inward mark those graces do I have those affections that identify other people of God well that's the first ground of assurance that we find ourselves the evidence of those inward graces the second road to assurance is through the witness of the Holy Spirit bearing witness to and with our own hearts the witness of the Spirit of God now this has of course caused endless discussion and still does cause discussion among theologians what is the witness of the Spirit of God the there is a sense in which the objective possession of the Spirit is itself the evidence in other we are sealed with the Spirit God the Father puts this mark of attestation upon His own children he gives us his own spirit and that is an attestation it is of course also true that the Spirit's work within us is an evidence.

[30 : 22] But that comes under the first heading, the evidence of the inward graces. That's the Spirit's work. The Spirit's assurance, and my view on this really gets modified constantly, and I hope becomes more precise.

But at the moment, what I'm going to say is this. That it is that work of the Holy Spirit, always in the context of the inward evidence of the graces, by which He puts filial feelings in my heart.

That is, He makes me cry, Abba, Father. He gives me the feelings of a Son, the confidence of a child before God.

Now, in many ways, that assurance, that ability to say Abba, Father, to God, is remarkable. Without going into the actual technicalities of it, one can search the whole of the Old Testament, and the whole of rabbinical literature, and never find a single instance of a believer addressing God as Abba, calling God Father.

When Jesus Christ, called God Father, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, addressed Him specifically as Abba, He was, among other things, inaugurating a theological revolution, because it had never been done before, in the context, and within the confines of revealed religion.

[32 : 20] God was seen very much more in terms of holiness, and the response, instinctive response to God, was one of fear, but Jesus called Him Abba.

And when we talk of our fellowship with Christ, that is a very important, a very significant element in our fellowship, that we share with Him the spirit, that says to God, Abba, Father.

Now I doubt, if I come back again, to the natural relationship, between parents and children, whether any of us, has gone through, any kind of logical process, in order, to come to the assurance, that so and so, is her father, and so and so, is her mother.

And I think that, whereas this witness, is always given in the context, of the inward evidence of graces, though that inward evidence, is itself not enough, and probably, is not the normal road, to assurance, to assurance, any more, than the theistic evidences, that is the arguments, for God's existence, are the normal road, by which we come to believe, that God is.

the great George, George Gillespie, maybe Scotland's, outstanding theologian, said once, all thy marks, will leave thee, in the dark.

[34 : 02] And all of us, unknown Christians, who have, borne, very, very clear marks, of a work of grace, grace, and yet, they haven't had, this assurance, of salvation.

That's a very, very complex, spiritual, and pastoral problem. And what I'm saying, is that, really, it is never enough, to have the inward evidence, of the graces.

We must also have this, work of the Spirit of God, in the depths of our hearts, always in the context, of the inward evidence, of those graces.

And giving us this, Abba, Father. This ability, to go to God, in all his holiness, and all his heaviness, and all his grandeur, and still saying, Abba, our Father, which art in heaven.

And the Lord taught us, so to pray. He taught his children, to pray, in the language of assurance. And so, assurance comes, through the inward evidence, of the graces.

[35 : 10] It comes through, the Spirit's witness. Those two points, are made, in confessional theology. But I want to add, a third point to it.

That sounds, dreadfully arrogant, but I hope that, you'll bear with me, if I explain what I mean. Maybe I can put it to you, this way.

If we, reflect for a moment, not on the parent-child, but on the husband and wife relationship, how, within the context of marriage, does, either party know, that the other party, loves him, or loves her.

Now you see, if we are of, legal and, juridical, cast of mind, we can turn, every day, to the marriage certificate. And we can say, there is the proof, that my wife loves me.

It's on this piece of paper, with mind, and she vowed, that she would love, and obey. I doubt, if in practice, that is how, it normally operates.

[36 : 25] The assurance is given, in the context of, a living, and a daily relationship. And yet, it seems to me, that, a good deal, of the literature, on assurance, and a good deal, of the discussion, on assurance, belongs, very much, to the first, kind of experience.

Going back, to check, the marriage certificate, to see if it's genuine. Is it in correct form? Is it correctly signed? Whereas, surely, assurance, between parents, and children, between husband, and wife, between believer, and the Savior, is a matter, of a living, ongoing, daily relationship.

Within marriage, within the family, the multiplicity, of loving acts, the multiplicity, of tolerances, of forgivenesses, it is in that, that, the assurance, is fostered, and strengthened.

And, no real marriage, needs to go back, to the title deeds, to find out, whether or not, it's valid, and real. And in the same way, it is our daily experience, of the goodness of God, that really fosters, our assurance.

We cry to God, He answers. We bring our needs, to God, He supplies them. Things we don't dream, of God gives us.

[38 : 05] Things we've done, God overlooks them. And sometimes, of course, it is so demoralizing, it's so humbling, because God is so kind. And sometimes, in our parishioners, we wish, that God would be so kind, and we could then, maybe stand up, and argue with them, get some of our ego back.

But no, the constant flow, of multiple, of infinite, acts of mercy. That's what fuels the assurance.

It's there, in the living relationship. I'm not saying, that it's anything, particularly mystical, or particularly dramatic, any more than family life is, or married, marital life is.

But it's there, you see. God listening to us, God hearing us, God answering us, God supplying your needs, not in some niggardly way, but according to his own riches, and glory, by Christ Jesus.

And I'm saying, look, let's not always be going back, to the marriage certificate, to the birth certificate, see, if we're really God's children, see, if he really loves us.

[39 : 19] But let's look, at the way God treats us. I come back again, to my earlier point, the child who says, I don't know if my father loves me. What kind of father does he have?

And I often wonder, what impression we convey, to men, of our father. What impression we convey, to the angels in heaven, of our father, when we convey the impression, the doubts, I don't know if my father loves me, I don't know if God loves me.

I've come to the point, where I'm almost saying, that for a Christian, that language is blasphemous. I don't know if God loves me. You mean, that God doesn't show you much kindness.

You mean, he doesn't show you much love. Are you saying, that it's not very good to you? That is a normal, logical deduction, to be drawn, that God, and we often speak, that God's not kind to us.

And that surely is a travesty, of the truth. Because God's mercies are new, every morning. And he supplies all our need, according to his riches and glory, in Christ Jesus.

[40 : 34] He is as good to us, as Jesus Christ deserves. And there we know, that God does love us. So the assurance comes, through the evidence, of those inward graces.

Through the witness, of God's spirit, and through the daily experience, of God's unnumbered acts, of mercy and of kindness. We've seen that three things.

We've seen that hypocrites, can enjoy some kind of assurance. We've seen that God's people, can and should enjoy, assurance. We have seen the grounds, of that assurance, enjoyed by God's children.

And we see, fourthly, that assurance, is not of the essence of faith. Now I quote there again, the language simply, of our old confession, that assurance, is not of the essence of faith.

In other words, a believer, can lack assurance. Now I'm very conscious, of the danger, of such teaching. And I'm conscious also, that there have been Christians, and are Christians, who would react at once, and say, if we don't know, whether we're converted, then we're not converted at all.

[41 : 55] Because they say, that spirit baptism, of our example, is a conscious, and unforgettable experience. And once you've had it, it's, it's impressed indelibly, on your memory, and on your consciousness.

Well I want to put that to you, see for the moment, in terms of a pastoral problem. If that is true, then, nobody who doubts, is conversion as a Christian.

And I must, face up to, a large number of, men and women, who lead in many ways, lives of exemplary godliness, who yet, do not at this moment, have assurance, of their own salvation.

I, recall, for example, Rabbi Duncan, tormented, day after day, by what he called, the same old question, is John Duncan, born again?

And C.H. Burgeon too, who many a day, found himself, in a deep, spiritual depression. Am I saying, that these people, because they had no assurance, were therefore, not Christians?

[43 : 13] Am I to say, that those people, who come to, almost every, pastor in Scotland, doubting, some, part of his own experience, doubting his own conversion, that, that person, by definition, is not a Christian.

Well, whatever it is, that is not, confessional theology. The confession, is, crystal clear, that, assurance, is not, of the essence, of faith.

Now that doesn't mean, that assurance isn't important. It is enormously important. In fact, it is so important, that the absence, of assurance, is always, evidence, of what I might, call technically, morbid, spiritual pathology.

The lack of assurance, is always, a sign, that there is, something wrong. The norm, for a Christian, the normal, state of health, is, that we have assurance.

But assurance, is not, of the essence, of faith, in the sense, that if you don't, have it, you aren't a Christian. Now the confession, puts that in terms, of two or three details.

[44 : 36] For example, it says to us, that some people, may wait long, for assurance. They may be converted, and yet, they may come, to experience assurance, only some time, maybe a long time, after, their actual conversion.

Now, again, I'm not saying, that that is the norm. I'm not even, commending it. I'm not encouraging it. I am simply saying, that the possibility, exists, that a man, may be in a converted, state, and, himself, not note.

In fact, be in a converted, state, and be tormented, for months, with doubts, as to his own salvation. Maybe a Christian, and yet, may never have, known assurance.

Now, the confession says here, he may wait long, for it. He eventually, gets it. But, his assurance, and his conversion, do not coincide.

Now, as the mother of experience, that is important, for this reason, that I am sure, that many people, who claim, to offer, a subsequent, spirit baptism, are in fact, people, in whose lives, that has been, a disjunction, a hiatus, a delay, between the moment, of the conversion, and the moment, of the assurance.

[46 : 17] and such people, may feel, that, at that point, of assurance, they've had some, second, overwhelming experience.

Now, it is very important, for me, not to deny, the experience. I am simply, denying the label. it is not, spirit baptism.

But, there are, so many, documented instances, of, people, who are, converted, and, then maybe, go for days, or weeks, or months, maybe even years, before they, enter into, assurance.

If you take, even for example, the apostle Paul, on that Damascus road, he is, throuled, blindness, and fallen, into darkness. Only three days, afterwards, does Adonai, come, and speak peace, to his soul.

Now, it is quite possible, that, in Paul's experience, there was, a hiatus, a gap, between, this conversion, and the moment, of his assurance.

[47 : 28] And, those involved, in pastoral work, may sometimes, be required, to come to the conclusion, that, they should, face, some person, with the possibility, you are a Christian.

Somebody, who hasn't got, assurance, doesn't feel, bound, to, live like a Christian, doesn't have, the joy of a Christian. And, we have to bring, to that point, not, when they become, Christians, but, where they know, they are Christians.

Now, I'm not saying, that, that's a common experience, but I'm saying, it's a possible experience. If, for example, you are brought up, in a tradition, where there is, very, very great, emphasis, on, dramatic, Damascus road, experiences.

And, you, yourself, have never had one. It is quite possible, that, you are a Christian, but, you don't think, you are, because, you've never had, a Damascus road.

John the Baptist, never had, any Damascus road, experience. And, had he, brought up, in a tradition, where, every testimony, he ever heard, spoke, of a life, of debauchery, followed by, an episode of conviction, and then, by a moment, of great spiritual deliverance, he would never, have understood, these men.

[49 : 04] And, if he had been told, that that was the only way, to become a Christian, he said, well, I'm not one of them, because, I've never had, that kind of experience.

Now, there are as many conversions, as, there are human beings. each one, different, each one, in its own way, individualistic.

And, there are, I think, many people, not least, in our own circles, who, wait long, for assurance. They are converted, but, they lack, assurance.

And, then again, the confession, tells us this, that, we can have, our assurance, diminished, or, intermittent, or shifted.

In other words, we can lose it. We can lose our assurance. We've had it, we know what it's like, to have peace with God.

[50 : 07] But, we lose, our assurance. Now, that again, is clear, unexplicit, confessional teaching. Now, it's clear, Mr. Mackay himself, itemized, most of the factors, that contribute, to this loss, of assurance.

But, I'm just, in many ways, repeating, what he said. One reason is this, it is the possibility, of a direct, satanic attack.

I believe, that the devil, can, in a moment, without any, rational argument, take our faith, from us.

Our faith, that God exists, our faith, that God loves us. In a moment, he can do it. Remember, that he attacked, Jesus, God's only begotten, in this, direct way.

If, you are the, Southern God. And I'm certain, that, the lack of assurance, I've seen, in some cases, is a result, of a direct, satanic attack.

[51 : 23] The devil has come, and taken away, the joy, and the peace, and the confidence, and the assurance, has gone. And, the person, couldn't say, why it happened, there was no argument, there was no sin, but, it simply went away.

Secondly, we can lose it, because, of, our own temperament, because, of certain kinds, of, mental illness. There are some people, with, a, predisposition, to depression.

Their temperaments, are melancholy. And, these people, will, sometimes, show, as, one symptom, of their depressiveness, a lack, of assurance, of salvation.

In other words, the depression, will feed, on the most, solemn aspects, of biblical teaching. That is, the nature of depression, to, to single out, the most somber facts, in somebody's environment, the repressing facts.

You see, two people, come up with the same bottle, and one man, can say, it's half full, the other says, it's half empty. Same human being, same situation. But, temperament, in terms, decides, the perception.

[52 : 47] There are, people, whose temperament is such, but, their thoughts, are always, on hell. Their thoughts, are always, on the, unforgivable sin.

Now, it isn't, that, the Bible's teaching, on hell, creates, their depression. Or, the somber, emphasis, of Calvinism, create, their depression.

It is, that their depression, gravitates, towards, the Bible's teaching, on hell. Gravitates, towards, the more somber, aspects of Calvinism. And, their temperament, ignores, heaven, and grace, and comfort, and divine, pity, divine love, the offer of the gospel.

It's simply, their own, melancholy. Our experience, shows that, there is no way, that by, argument, by, quoting, the Bible, one can, shake, these people, out, of their depression.

I know, that, it's very tempting, sometimes, to shake them, to accuse them, to say, snap out of it, but they can't, snap out of it. And sometimes, one has to, come back to, the Lord's own, great words of wisdom, this kind, go not out, but by, prayer and fasting.

[54 : 13] Sometimes, you don't argue, you don't, you don't argue, with somebody, in a clinical depression. You don't, take conversation, into the territory, that has caused, this problem.

You, have to, leave it, to the Lord himself, and to other factors, to deal with his temperament.

And I'm sure, that must happen, at, a subconscious level. And certainly, the lack of assurance itself, is often, simply a symptom, of, a clinical depression.

Sometimes, again, it is due to, bad teaching. Now, I'm not here, to, criticize, or indict, a specific, force of preaching.

But, what I'm saying, is this, you see, what Luther taught, the church, and the church, has often forgotten, that, the article, by which you, distinguish, as standing, from a fallen church, is justification, by faith alone.

[55 : 18] That's a very, familiar, form of words, but that is not, all that common, a doctrine. You see, in some shape, or other, legalism, will come in, to preaching.

It will come in, you see, by, if not through, preaching morality, then by preaching sincerity. If not by that, then by, drawing the attention, towards, faith itself, as in that, were the ground.

Or towards, conversion itself, us in that, were the ground. And, you see, people come to this point, they see, their lives are indefensible.

And they conclude, they're not Christians. I am ungodly, therefore, I'm not a Christian. I'm being defeated, therefore, I'm not a Christian. Now, you see, if the teaching were sound, it would indicate, that, the fact of ungodliness, is not proof, that I'm not a Christian.

They won't mistake me, it is a very sad fact, to be ungodly. It may be proof, that, I'm a very poor Christian. But, I will really, take God's people, into this glorious area, where really, our acceptance, before God, is a matter, of sheer grace, and where the believer, is able, to make the most, appalling, accusations, against himself, and yet, know, that he is accepted, by God.

[56 : 55] You see, Paul did it. Oh, wretched man, that I am. Nothing, shall separate, me, from the love of God, in Christ Jesus.

It's a difficult art. both, to, nourish the sense, of wretchedness, that is itself, so necessary, to a Christian.

And at the same time, to nourish the assurance, of God's love, that is also, so necessary, to a Christian. But, we've got to get people, onto this ground, you see.

This man, we see, was sinners. The fact, of our ungodliness, not being, proof, that we are, in Christians. That, our acceptance, does not depend, on the quality, of our own, spiritual lives.

And sometimes, it may be due, of course, to, unbalanced, teaching. Not simply, to wrong teaching, but to, unbalanced teaching.

[58 : 05] By that, I mean, particularly, preaching, that, centers, on the marks, of grace. You can get a situation, where every, Lord's day, one heading, in a sermon, is, or was, the marks, of the state.

Now you see, it is terribly important, that people, should, examine themselves. Well, it is, a complete betrayal, of the biblical, proportion, and balance, to have people, constantly, looking at themselves, taking their own, spiritual pulses.

You produce, a generation, of spiritual, hypochondriacs. And we did that, very effectively, at one time, in this land. You see, if we get people, to an area, where, their, minds, are imprisoned, by the principle, of radical doubt.

You never, never, never get them out. If I can, bring Descartes, the great French philosopher, in here. Remember, when Descartes, began to doubt. He, at least, pretended, that he doubted.

Well, he himself existed. How could I, how could he prove, that he himself existed? Well, once you start, with that premise, you never get out of it.

[59 : 28] If you doubt, your own existence, you can't move, you're immobilized. And sometimes, we got so, immersed, within the marks of grace, we became, so, perverted, we became, paralytic.

Because, you begin to look, for more and more, vivid evidence, of, your own salvation. And there's no way, out of that. I come back, you know, to, the great words, of Hamlet, as he, was tempted, to introspection, and he said, quite simply, that way, madness lies.

If I'm going to, keep on looking in, that's what's going to happen. that way, madness, lies. You never, did anything, if you become, obsessively, preoccupied, with, the marks of grace, do I have this mark, do I have that mark?

It's a question, of, apophony, and balance. Now, where this came from, I'm not sure. You know, it didn't come from the reformers. You find it very, prevalent in the works of, for example, Richard Sibbes, and Puritans, of that vintage.

And it came, I suppose, through them, into the highlands, into the work of such men, as Archibald Cook, and Finley Cook, and so on. But, what I'm saying simply here is, a problem of balance.

[60 : 52] Yes, God's people need, to be criticized. Need to engage, in self-examination, to the spiritual inventory, now and again. But, they cannot be fed, Sunday after Sunday, on, that kind of diet.

So, we lose our assurance, through this, through Satan, we lose it, through temperament, through bad teaching, through unbalanced teaching. Through all of these things.

And of course, we lose it, through, through our own sin. We do something. And, this act, completely disrupts, our relationship with God.

It might very well happen, on the human level. In a family, a son, or daughter, husband, or wife, does something, and it disrupts, the whole relationship.

And, God has children, who sometimes, do things, that make it imperative, that God should, chastise them. That God, should not smile at them.

[62 : 00] That God, should not talk to them. That God, should not give them presents, not give them blessings. That God, should withdraw, his spirit, and the whole ability, to say, Abba, Father.

Now, I'm not saying, for a moment, that, the lack of assurance, is always the result of sin. But, I'm saying, that, sin, will very often, produce, this, lack of assurance.

Now, I must bring this to a close. I want to do so, but, as, saying in a word or two, that, this assurance, is, something of enormous, practical importance.

I go back again, you see, to this confession. Because, that is our orthodoxy, that's our creed, our standard, our summary, biblical teaching. People, used to tell me, that it was the doubter, who was spiritually active.

That it was the man, who doubted his salvation, the woman, who doubted her salvation. It was that person, who was really exercised. Well, you know, in a way, these people are, and were exercised.

[63 : 16] Like, Bunyan's pilgrim, who are very active. But you see, they weren't active, for God, or the kingdom of God. How were they active, in Bunyan's great picture?

They had, he had gone back, to look for the role. You know, he had to go back. He had to turn his back, on where he was going.

He had to give up, all his other activities, to go back, and find the role he had lost. And that's what happens, for the real assurance. We've got to go back, to find the role.

In many ways, we're taken out of the action. Now, I say it was some hesitation. But it seems to me, that that was one, very obvious effect, of a prevailing, lack of assurance, in our circles, two or three generations ago.

But it was such a problem, finding this role, this parchment, with our, attestation, as Christians.

[64 : 27] And it was such a problem, that it took many of God's people, out of effective action. They were so paralyzed, by doubt, they couldn't witness, they couldn't evangelize.

Exorcised they were, you see. But where we find, the New Testament parallel, to a man who is exorcised, day in, day out, about whether he's saved or not.

And whose whole, spiritual and psychic energy, not to say, physical energy, is directed towards, looking for his parchment. Now the confession says, so far is this assurance, from tending to looseness, that in fact, it is the stimulus, to diligence, and obedience, to duty.

Real assurance, gets us working. Not working, looking for our parchment, but having our assurance, working for God.

The love of Christ, constrains us. I love the Lord, because my voice, and prayers, heeded here. You go through, all those great men, who did so much for God.

[65 : 47] You look, for example, at Martin Luther, at John Calvin, at John Knox, you never find these men, prostrate, with doubt, as to whether God loves them, paralyzed, looking for their parchments.

They know God loves them, that's their, that's their source, that's their dynamo. That's what keeps them going. You look at, Manic Robert Murray, McChay, Manic Andrew Bonner, who said, when he was in his 80s, I've been following the Lord, he said, for over 70 years, and I have never one day doubted, that he loved me.

They work, you see, you don't find Thomas Chalmers doubting. Now look, I have great sympathy with doubt. I don't want us to feel that, there's some meritorious here, or something humbling here, you see.

There is nothing that humbles a man, woman, like knowing that, that they're so precious to God. Me, precious to God. That's what makes you feel small. That makes you feel, a debtor, to mercy alone.

When I surveyed the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my riches gained, I count but loss, and poor contempt, and all my pride, were the whole world of nature mine, that were an offering far too small.

[67 : 09] Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. This assurance, not producing looseness, or slackness, but a deep, motivating sense, of gratitude, to God.

May God grant it so for us. Thank you. We are indebted to Professor McLeod once again, and if there are any questions, now is the time for these questions.

and if we ask a question, it will identify a lack of a shutdown.

There was one thing that I made in so old in time. I expected Professor Clunton to mention, if I remember correctly, the Confession, it mentions that God might chastise his people by hunting them for their former sins.

That, I understand, would take away their assurance for a time in order that they would see their own dependence upon God.

[68 : 53] Was there any reason why he didn't touch on that? Does he agree with that part of the Confession himself? Well, if I didn't, I couldn't admit it in this audience anyway.

Yes, I do, although I'm not sure if that occurred in the Confession. Maybe it's in justification or even in providence. That point you make comes up. But I do refer to chastisement just incidentally. It seems to me that if we do commit sin, that God does chastise.

And that may very often minimize our assurance. Because it would mean, for example, God not smiling on us, God not blessing us, God sending something into our lives which is very difficult to bear.

And it could be that sometimes there are days in our lives when we couldn't say that God is kind to me today.

I don't think there are many such days, but there could be days when we walk in darkness and there is no light. What I would question is whether God ever withdraws his countenance in simple sovereignty.

[70 : 12] I think that God does withdraw his countenance responsibly. For we ourselves backslide and sin that God does withdraw his countenance.

But John Owen, I think, tells us, you know, that it is never God's will that we should doubt our sonship. Even although God does chasten us, in actual fact, in a curious way, and this itself is thoroughly biblical, that chastening is itself a proof of God's love for us and a sign of sonship.

And Hebrews 12 argues that if we lack chasten, then we are legitimate children, not sons at all. And it can, in fact, be quite a worrying thing for a Christian if he knows his backslidden and God is doing nothing about it.

That can, I think, raise questions in our minds too. Yes, John. First of all, may I thank you Professor Michael for your very positive presentation of the place of assurance in the life of a Christian.

I was going to ask you some questions regarding the things which you thought caused people to have lack of assurance, because this seems to be the greatest prevalent problem amongst Christians today, but you've got to less dealt with that fairly exhaustively.

[71 : 36] One verse, though, that was read aloud in a hearing was Romans 8, verse 28, where it says that we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that love God, to them that love God, according to His purpose.

And I just wonder how you could place individual Christians' lack of assurance within that framework. For instance, you have talked about some great and eminent Christian believers who have had great types of personal doubt and listening about their own faith and about their own standing before God.

And before I ever heard the free church preaching, if you like to call it that, I never have had a problem with assurance. To me, when I said that, believe in your heart, God, praise Christ from the dead, if you confess from the room, then they are saved.

And I just took that as being plain and literal. So a truth that's so straightforward, I didn't think to question it. And it was only when I came into the company of some free church people, I began to think, well, I'd be behind us to make a salvation.

I wonder if I am going to sing. I just wonder if you could put all that into the context of Rome 8, verse 28, which was written on the Indian table.

[73 : 08] Well, if I go back, John, to the men I referred to, for example, Spurgeon and Rabbi Duncan. Spurgeon had a very serious depressive tendency in his latter years.

And I think that accounts for his lack of assurance that his temperament had become pretty morbid for various reasons. And he had difficulty handling his own temperament.

He had both physical and mental problems. The disaster of the musical scarred him, of course, and he didn't recover from that.

And with Rabbi Duncan, you know, a more interesting problem, that he was such an avid student that he could go for days reading books and in his own words not remember God at all.

And then he would realize what he had done and go into a deep depression over what he'd been doing, you see. So with him it was a function, I think, of his own lack of discipline.

[74 : 08] And the guilt that that tended to generate. I'm not sure where I would fit Romans 8, verse 28 into it.

It seems to me that when Paul speaks of God working all things for good, that he does indicate that this is a personal testimony we know.

And also suggests, I think, that it's something that he has come to know. It's a matter of experience for himself. And I would think that young Christians who are suddenly faced with trauma could find it very difficult to accept God's will.

And a young believer who, you know, has no assurance in the joy of salvation and so on, and then thinks he's got sin leaked. And then one day sin leaks him, you know.

And that's a terrific discovery to make sometimes, that the beast is still alive. And that can cause lack of assurance. And also, I think, sometimes if a believer has to face great personal trauma, it can become fuel to the devil's arguments.

[75 : 22] Do you think God loves you? And certainly I've seen the Lord's people in some situations very bitter under God's providence. I've also seen God's people very triumphant against God's providence, you know, when things have been difficult for them to handle.

But I think that sometimes we have to allow that God's people, you know, do bend and storm. And they sometimes fall into indefensible attitudes towards God himself.

It's just, I suppose, John, that none of us is ever totally logical, ever able to apply your faith completely in our own situations.

And that sometimes, from a human angle, providence can be very upsetting when we're least prepared for it. And to go back again to Rabbi Duncan, you know, he referred once to an old Scots proverb, he tempers his wind to the shorn lamb.

And he said it's not through in either nature or grace, because very often the worst winds come at the lambing time, but that's when it's coldest. And it can happen also in the spiritual life that the young believer cannot have faced very serious difficulties, very early Christian life.

[76 : 40] So, I don't know what the Free Church did for you, John, to make you a deeper Christian or a more perplexed Christian. It certainly gave you lots of questions and maybe one or two answers.

But I feel it's important to learn to handle people sympathetically. And the early pressure on my generation in the Free Church was to doubt your own salvation, because that was the mark of humility.

I think we've left that behind us, but we seem to have at least put you through one or two minutes in the process, and maybe I should apologize for that. But you survived very well, obviously.

I think we've got a lot of questions. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Another question? Yes. I'm wondering whether assurance has a fruit, or whether there is a fruit to the actual, the being of assurance.

It seems that, whether you've done it deliberately, but almost that assurance is an end in itself, something we have put on our mantelpiece and say, there we are, I've got assurance. Is there something that follows from the things in our lives, that sort of identifiable and can be known positively, to look back and say, well, I've got that, therefore that's indicative that I have assurance?

[77 : 55] Well, I would hope that assurance is a very, very natural thing for a Christian, that arises out of his own experience and the relationship with God.

I don't think it's an end in itself, because the only end in itself is God and God's glory. And I would hope that it is, in fact, transformed into a dynamic that impels us to glorify our Father in Heaven.

And I don't think we're glad to go on to say, Hallowed be thy name, unless we first of all say, Our Father. We've got to start with the Abba, to go on to say, Hallowed be thy name.

So, my difficulty is that I've had to, in some ways, abstract this from the whole context of experience and theology and look at it in isolation.

And that is always in some ways unhelpful, because it's sort of anatomical and analytical.

[79 : 02] But assurance really is, I hope, just one aspect of our own love for God and our own joy in God. And I do hope that it is productive of zeal and commitment in Christian service.

And I would hope that if we move into an age when there's a high level of assurance, we'd have a high level of productivity at a spiritual level, just because we have the constraint upon us.

Perhaps the right and Taliesin MacDonald would conclude our meeting with prayer, but yes, there is time for one question, perhaps Alström himself wants to ask it. Is that...? Yes. Yes, that's fine. It'll have to be the last one, but I was going to have a last one.

You should pray before it happens. You should perhaps pray before it happens. You should be a guest. Thank you, David. You mentioned the inward evidences of faith.

We gave a list of them. And then you said that we can also be assured by the witness of the Holy Spirit. And I was thinking, you know, that it is feasible and ever is due down to our graces in their love for the brethren. But how is it of what is wrong in their lives when a Christian perhaps for many years was the witness of the Holy Spirit crying Abba Father, that faithful witness of the Spirit.

[80 : 38] What is it in a believer's life that even the presence of the Holy Spirit crying Abba Father stops the assurance that he is a child of God?

Because I think we would all say that whereby we would sadden our Father that we can't acknowledge that he is our Father.

Would God the Father for many years deny our Son that he has God as his Father? Well, my instinct on that one I was to raise is that we must accept the lack of assurance is a very very uncommon situation.

It's very common maybe in a particular circle. But as John has said, it never occurred to him. It almost has to be taught to be caught. And it really is I think a sign of morbidity.

There is something wrong when a Christian doubts his own salvation. It's a very unusual situation to be in. It's either because he is all mixed up or because God is responding to some anomaly in his life in a peculiarly difficult and reactive way.

[82 : 02] But I find it very perplexing when I look at the records of some of the godly men in Scotland a hundred years ago, a hundred years ago, a hundred years ago, who were really preeminent in piety and yet lacked assurance.

I find that very very difficult to understand. I suspect that to some extent they were not grasping justification by faith alone, that there was maybe some legalism in them that left them limping.

There may also have been some censoriousness in them that grieved God's spirit. I think that some of the best of them, like John Grant, the separatist, suffered from that malady.

Very very close to God, but very censorious of other Christians. I'm sure that grieved the spirit. But I would feel it most helpful if my total response to you were to suggest that really it is very very unusual on a sign of something seriously wrong when a believer doubts his own salvation.

It seems to me that you can hardly find it in the Bible at all. I can find in God, in the Word of God, serious backsliding. I can find acute depression there.

[83 : 30] I can find acute anxiety. I can find covetousness. But it's very difficult to find lack of assurance in the New Testament or the Old Testament for that matter. So it is a sign, I think, virtually always that there is something wrong somewhere.

And like sin itself, it's such an anomaly. I'm sorry that I can't be more specific and precise on it.

Well I'm sure it may be very good for us to end almost on a note of warning. That's something that the Lord blesses as well.

So let us stand now for Tria. We give thanks for God this evening for thy presence with us, and for another occasion to be taught by thee.

And to be instructed in the great things of our faith. We ask, O God, that we might know, assuredly this evening, that it is thy will for us, that we are able to live with that consciousness that we have passed from death unto life.

[85 : 09] We ask, O God, that thou would increase that assurance in each one of us. That we might be able, O God, knowing what thou hast done for us.

And knowing what thou art able to achieve in us. We are able to live lives that are victorious.

And lives that display to the world. Lord, we are to live many burnings that power is now and are remembering whether we are still from the Lord.

These are our hearts and airplanes that we believe through outer pillars of our Zion. doubt we may be able as we have this evening to go to the cross and to see there the love that God and Christ had for sinners and able to see there that he so loved us that he laid down his life for us. We ask of God that knowing that since he spared not his only son but delivered us up for us all, help us our God to know that he will freely give us that assurance and that joy that his death has procured for us. We ask of God that thou would bless each of us this evening. We thank dear God for bringing us together and learning more about thy salvation. We prayer God for any this evening who are cast down for any of the reasons we heard. We prayer God that the Holy Spirit may so work within them that they know that they are beloved of thee. We ask of God that we might be able to live in a way that sin does not mark that assurance for all of us about usefulness. We ask dear God now to be with us to bless each home represented here. We ask dear God that thou would take us home safely and get those travelling safely as well. We ask dear God that thou would hear us this evening and thou may the love of God the Father and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this evening, now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen.