

Aspects of assurance

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] To return to 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and read again verse 5, 2 Corinthians 13 and verse 5. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how there is Jesus Christ within you, except ye be reprobate.

But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobate. Now we were looking recently at the question of Christian assurance of salvation.

And last time we spent a fair bit of thought on just what we would call in our Presbyterian tradition marks of grace.

What is it that distinguishes, in one direction or another, what is it that distinguishes the Christian, the true Christian, from other people?

I think that we need to complete that study with another thought.

[1 : 07] It's a very simple exercise this evening. But it's centered on the question, why is it that some Christians, and I mean real Christians, lack assurance?

Because that many real Christians do, there can be no doubt. And the first thing, you'll have to clear out of the way, is that illness, sickness, physical or mental illness, can very seriously affect assurance.

Somebody asked him, Dr. Archibald Alexander, the famous president of Christian Theological Seminary, somebody asked him one day, if he always had assurance, and he got the strangely side, sounded strange at first, he said nearly always, except when there's an East Wind.

Now I'm not clear whether he meant that he had a bad chest, the biography, or the snippet of biography he doesn't tell, and that therefore when there was an East Wind he really got ill, although he was pretending to use the thing East Wind meant authoritatively, and saying that when he was in trouble, then he very often didn't have assurance.

He said nearly always, except when there's an East Wind. And I think you can see what he meant. Often real, earnest Christian believers will doubt their salvation.

[2 : 45] When, at a time previously, they didn't have any doubt. They were like Cooper, enjoying the blessedness of the Lord when first they sought the Lord.

And other Christians didn't have any doubt about the reality of their Christianity. But when they have become ill, they have begun to doubt, they become weak in body, they become concerned, question, if they ever were real Christians.

Not, you know, there's such an interaction between mind and body. I can remember an old man who went on a dieting plan without consulting a doctor, and he got into a real state of crime.

and the whole thing that just, they put his assurance to the wind. And it took quite a long while before he got it back. So we've got to put that at a very close point there that illness, mental or physical illness, can affect, and has often affected, the sense of assurance that real, true, earnest Christians have had.

Now we want to say that if we have ever truly come to Jesus to be our Savior and ever truly enjoyed through the Gospel, around the centrality of the Gospel, it's got to be that, around the Atonement, around the blood of Jesus, enjoy the sense of God's favor and blessing, then however we feel now, God will never leave us nor forsake us.

[4 : 26] Remember the beautiful words right there, 5.10, on this precise point. Who is among you that sheareth the Lord? That's it. We fear the Lord, that we love the Lord.

Who is he that, among you that sheareth the Lord, that obeith the voice of the, his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the Lord. The darkness will pass.

Let him trust in the Lord and stay upon his God. Then we must move on. To this thought, that a Christian, a true Christian, and a Christian who's enjoyed a lot of assurance, will find out creeping in and will lose assurance where he or she omits to perform some due, or due is that they should be attending to, or on the other hand, where they commit sins of some kind.

Your iniquities, said the Prophet, have separated, talking to Israel, between you and your God, and your sins, have fed his face from you, that he will not fear you.

This is always a consideration that we have to look at. Remember, a Christian, in Pilgrim's Progress, found himself in Doubton Castle, where the person in charge was giant despair.

[5 : 42] And how did he get into Doubton Castle? There was no problem about how he got into Doubton Castle. He had left the King's Highway, he saw all the attractions of Bypath Meadow, and he climbed over the style into Bypath Meadow, but he shouldn't have been at all, and giant despair got him, and put him into Doubton Castle.

The famous Reverend John Angel Jeans, to whom students of theology are very indebted for his many books, he said, when he was near the end of his life, he said that he knew many Christians who lived in Doubton Castle.

And he said that from the careless style of their lives, he would have been very surprised to find them living anywhere else than a Doubton Castle. What he meant by carelessness was spiritual carelessness.

You know, not living close to the Lord or keeping close to the Lord, he said, he would have been very surprised if there were anywhere else but in Doubton Castle. And John Newton, the famous Tim Wright has said, he said, I wouldn't give a straw for that kind of assurance that sin will not doubt.

What he meant was that if it's real Christianity, then sin will bring doubt. Of course, if we've got the kind of assurance the hypocrite has, like the Pharisee in the temple, the woman's more sure that he wants of his salvation, then nothing will dent it.

[7 : 08] I mean, we can throw rocks at it, and it'll not, it'll not, there'll be no doubt at all that if it's real Christianity, then it's easily upset. The violence is easily upset, and the centre of peace with God is easily upset.

That's what John Newton mentioned, he said, I wouldn't give a, I wouldn't give a straw for that assurance that sin will not be done. So let's think, first of all, of how neglecting duties, you know, things that we ought to be doing, if we're real Christians and we love the Lord, if we know the Lord, if we've come to Christ and sought our salvation in him, and been received by Christ, how neglect of some duty or other will rob us of assurance.

Well, what are we Bible reading and praying? There's no mystery here if we lose assurance through neglecting in some way of Bible study or prayer. I mean, spiritual weakness is bound to come, and when it comes, all the other problems will come with it if we do not pick spiritual food from the word of God as issued and seek God's blessing in prayer.

Maybe one of our problems, I think every Christian knows something about it, however we get over it. One of the big problems is being afraid of confessing twice before men, before people.

before our peers, before our pals, before our neighbours, before people who were our friends long ago and we become Christians and they haven't.

[8 : 42] It's a very testing situation. Now, if we don't confess the Lord before men, whatever the men are, in our own family, sometimes it's most difficult to maintain your Christian witness within your own family.

Sometimes that's the hardest testing ground. if we don't confess Christ before men, whatever we're afraid of, then it's bound to affect our sense of peace with God because we're disputing God and he will hide his face from us, as the prophet said in the passage I read, and you will not hear it.

Now, of course, we mustn't form absurd ideas of what confessing God before men and Christ before men is.

It's not a matter of running around and telling people loudly all the time and everywhere that we are Christians that we're born again and badgering people and saying to them, are you a Christian?

Are you born again? There's a place for urgency sometimes where the Lord gives us opportunities. But if we go about like that, I'm sure it's not the kind of confession that Christ wants. Nevertheless, everyone who loves the Lord, who knows Christ as Savior, is bound to confess him.

[9 : 52] If we don't confess him some way or another then there's something wrong with our faith. And we've got faith if we don't confess him at all. We're bound to confess Christ if we know him as Savior.

For example, if we know the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to be at this table. He's not playing with words when he says, this do in remembrance of me to those who are at his disciples.

And if we neglect that ordinance which is to strengthen the believers and we ought to be at the Lord's table then there'll be no wonder it will have doubt because the Lord will not be pleased with our declining to confess him publicly as he wants us to when we know him as our freedom.

And of course, how important it is and how easy we slip up to take the Lord's side on spiritual and moral issues. Now it's easy to take the Lord's side on spiritual and moral issues when they're on a national scale but taking the Lord's side in the locality on moral and spiritual issues that's a real thing.

But again, who's on the Lord's side? However we do it, we don't again go about shouting and bawling that we're on the Lord's side that we must take the Lord's side on moral and spiritual issues in the community in the nation too, but in any case what I'm saying is and it's for me to examine myself first before I get out in the poop but then address others but it's for every one of us to examine ourselves we know the Lord let us be sure that there's no blessing will come on our being ashamed of Christ.

[11 : 35] What is wanted is I cry gentle but nevertheless decided alignment with Christ and his cause and there is a requirement that we speak further that opportunity often.

Now I know that there are situations you know maybe we all know there are situations where we've spoken and spoken a lot and perhaps you know things are only getting less responsive there's the people talking about a family situation where it was where you visualise the wife hasn't spoken a lot to her husband it could just as easily be a husband speaking to her wife or a father to a son or a mother to a daughter or vice versa and nothing has happened and well he said look there is a case for winning them without the wife not for everything going on at them if it's going to get their backs up and only make them more rebellious then he said there's a case for winning them by a quiet and Christian line of conduct keeping his commandments so if we omit to keep his commandments whatever they are we could go on and on then he will not manifest himself to us

I think we took this verse up when we were looking at assurance the last time he that has my commandments that keepeth them he that loveth me and he that loveth me shall be loved of my father and I will love him that's not all he says and I will manifest myself to him and if we don't keep his commandments if we're not in the way of keeping his commandments if we're failing more or less seriously in one direction or another day we will all manifest it in self-defense and that's the same thing as being we will not let us even again still thinking about what we may or may have been aware of you do are we doing anything to bring our fellow sinner to Christ the command is please you who believe in my name you shall be my witnesses the man that was delivered of the demons he was given a commission go home to thy friends I'm sure it meant to his own household but I'm sure it meant the neighbours as well the people who had been bringing the pigs and the big community of people go home to thy friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for the sisters are to be the salt and light of the world were not to hide our blight under a bush and then the

Revelation of John says in the very last chapter that one good meaning of that is if you know the gospel if you listen to the gospel yourself then you have the responsibility to address the welcome of the gospel to Adam think of the text thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself think what efforts we made when we first came to Christ to find eternal salvation for us what worry and what anxiety and indeed a terror there was that we wouldn't get to save you now we were loving ourselves when we sought Christ can we deny can we possibly deny to our unbelieving friends what we were seeking so earnestly for ourselves love your neighbour as yourself if you were concerned about your own salvation Jesus would say make certain that you're equally concerned about your neighbour's salvation alright we've got to be wise in seeking out our family members of our family are not congregated or members of the community we've got to be wise yes and patient

I know and labbing of course there's no use time unless we're labbing we might as well give it up nobody listen to us if we're not labbing alright wise patient labbing yes indeed but it must be done Christ makes promises and precious promises to faithful witnesses go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature and lo I am with you I'll be with you because I've been given authority and power in heaven and on earth so that you'll be helped to be faithful to me and so that you should be successful witnesses we must neglect praying for our family and friends and our neighbours that they may find Christ we were talking this morning about praying for our generation that the Holy Spirit would touch them so that they'd want to come and hear the gospel it can't be less than it's not enough for us to pray we have to seek to bring the gospel to people find ways of bringing people to the house of God that's something that I find very difficult

[16 : 25] I've had to resort to all sorts of dodges in my ministry to get people to come to church sometimes we took a long long while it couldn't happen overnight and I suggest every Christian we may have to resort to all the dodges in a good sense all sorts of stratagems all sorts of tactics in order to get people to receive a tract even that we issued try and ask people to come to the house of God to ask people to join in on bible study to come to prayer meetings certainly I read a woman not so long ago who used to bring about a dozen people each Sunday to church now she didn't get ages up by sitting at home and saying well I'd like to so and so on but will so and so to come to church she must have gone and said look Chris how do you like to come along to church tonight she used to bring a dozen well maybe she was living in a timely spectrum letting

I don't know I just don't know the sections but at least one woman can do it other people can do it and whatever the difficulty we can't get a dozen we might get one or two or three there's a cross in it it's never going to be easy it's never going to be that difficult to try and get people interested in the gospel as part of our cross but we've got to kick out the cross and there is of course a faith and as the Lord may give us opportunity we should pray for that and speaking to our neighbour alone about Christ and praying with our neighbour the opportunity arises what about letters many people have it's a way of doing it that way many people have written letters to unconverted acquaintances and the letters have been blessed so groups and tracts the famous Reverend Webb Petro he was one of the very early Keswick speakers do you know how he was converted not in a church but at the derby on the race coast and some person at the race coast came up and gave

Petro a truck that's what converted him and became a wonderful witness for Christ wonderful preacher of the gospel but in any case whatever the sacrifice it will only be a little sacrifice compared to what Christ did for us some little sacrifice will be made to visit somebody maybe that's the best thing in our modern circumstances is a visit to a home and just get talking and not produce the Bible keep it in your pocket or leave it at home and try and talk to somebody that's a very good way or get somebody get involved in some way in bringing the gospel to your fellow sinner now if we don't in the measure that you and I don't endeavour to bring the gospel to those who are perishing without it we're displeasing the Lord if we're displeasing the Lord then he'll not be healing us we'll lose some measure of assurance we're apt to think of sin as sins of commission but there are sins of omission and maybe we're looking there and trying to and rightly so to keep our lives clean of sins of commission as far as we can but what about all the things that we're omitting to do then what about some sin that

I or you may be committing I suppose when it's the way people's minds go in society when we talk about sin people tend to think of the grosser sins you know the more fleshly sins and of course if we are involved in thought word or action in fleshly sins there's no doubt at all that they'll bring doubt into the Christian's life even the Christian who's had the most assurance just think of David the great psalm is good marvellous assurance and we lost it almost completely in connection with his great sin but it needn't be that you know it's a temptation to say oh well yes my mind is not clean but thank the Lord by the grace of God my life is reasonably clean and that's it it needn't be that what about people that we've injured in some way look at the stress laid by the Bible on getting right with people that there's a disagreement with disagreement with do we leave the disagreements to fester or maybe it's not that maybe somebody's done an injury to us and we're over the years harbouring a grudge against that person there's a bitterness there's a hardness there's a nugget and it's not cleansed their heart it's there it's all right maybe deep down but it's there well we may be certain that if that's the case if we have an endeavour to put that right and take it to the

Lord to get it put right and maybe if it's something that's you know like Zacchaeus saying well I'm going to put it all right to redress for the damage I've done to people then get it right with the people concerned by the grace of God and there's all sorts of other things maybe maybe the world is too much with us well of course sometimes the world we can't get away from in the sense we've got to do our work there and there's no excuse for not doing our work but maybe the love of the world is too much with us and is eating into our assurance maybe we're mixing unnecessarily with unbelieving company we can't possibly escape if we're going to be in this world unless we're going to have honesty we can't escape mixing with unbelieving company in the course of our business and our social life I mean even in our families every family's got some unbeliever how can you possibly it would be sinful to turn our backs and be discourteous and loving to people in our family or neighbourhood just because they were unbelievers but maybe we can mix unnecessarily with unbelieving company and then we're sure to be affected by the unbelieving outlook well we could go on and enumerate many sins that we can commit that will dent undermine our assurance examine yourselves whether you be in the faith are there certain things that you're not doing that you should be doing are you doing certain things that you ought not to be doing then if so certainly it will affect the assurance of the believer sometimes I think one reason for lack of assurance in

[23 : 22] Christians is perhaps that they haven't got clear enough views about Christ and the gospel scheme maybe like the Galatians and there's no suggestion on Paul's part that those Galatians weren't real Christians but they wanted to add a little just to get absolutely assured about salvation they wanted to bring in circumcision just to improve matters as they trusted in Christ and he said who's bewitched you who's put a spell on you that you should do a thing like that you came to Christ and he trusted solidly on him then why is it now that you're adding these little bits statues as if to improve on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ I think there's one way in which almost any Christian can unwittingly rely on these or her own works I'm thinking of a situation where we have sinned against the Lord in some way or other and we've got a guilty conscience and we don't want to come back directly and immediately to him no we must let a little time pass so that we'll feel better and of course when you dig into that what it means is that we want to come to the Lord with our conscience kind of cleansed by what we've done we want to feel better before we'll come to him that's trusting in our own works whereas what the Bible says if any man sin then don't let him we we have an advocate with the Father

Jesus Christ the righteous who is the propitiation for our sins come at once if we confess our sins not if we wait a little while and tidy things up and feel better if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins the blood of Jesus Christ God cleanses for all sin now if you take the opposite case you can get people who treat Christ's salvation too cheaply in this sense that they're not concerned so much about bringing forth fruits they say oh the Christ has died and I'm converted and I believe in Jesus there's no need to get too fussy about the way one about the details of one's life but no the Bible says that yes alright we're justified by faith alone but the faith that justifies is never alone we can't presume in God's grace if we do presume in it and live in any way carelessly then our assurance will get rotten it will just crumble what about this influence for ill upon assurance where the

Christian doesn't think enough about Christ about Christ himself I mean Christ personally or hold fellowship sufficiently with them see it's one thing to have clear and how important it is to have clear ideas and sound ideas about the atonement and about that were not justified by works but by faith in Christ alone but it's another thing to be coming constantly to Christ personally you can get a real believer an earnest true believer and you wouldn't be able to spot a single fault in his doctrine of the atonement his doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ but he doesn't live daily in fellowship with Christ he doesn't come to Christ all the time well that's bound to affect assurance as we go about our daily work we should be praying to him and thanking him for our salvation and asking for his guidance that's not something that happens at once it's something we must practice remember the man who was practicing the presence of

God we've got to work at it to hold fellowship with Christ not just at stated times of prayer when we have our quiet time as it's called in the morning or the evening or whenever but all the time be practicing the presence of Christ in the measure that we don't seek the early fellowship with Christ or fellowship by the minute in that respect in that direction there's going to be an element an ingredient of something that will undermine our assurance but then again what about where a person a Christian looks overmatched into his or her own heart and life and what will they see there but sin and not enough to Christ and his finished work Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that in the believer the flesh strives against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh there's Paul saying oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death well he had the answer he looked away to

Christ he said well there's only one cure I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord there's no end to this battle you know you can be on the very borders of heaven and still the flesh will be striving against the spirit so that if you look into your own heart or your own life you're not going to see that fear to comfort you the thing is to be looking away to Jesus and rejoice that although there's still sin striving against the spirit and as the spirit is stronger than the flesh walk you know the famous the familiar communion chapter walk in the spirit the spirit of Jesus and you shall not fulfill the law of the flesh we should be asking help daily for Christ from Christ to overcome I don't know who it was that said that for every look at oneself we should take ten looks at Christ and then the Christian can lose assurance when he or she is living on feelings and moods instead of on the promises and on the personal work of Christ now it's a great thing don't let's do something stupid and undervalue happy Christian feelings they're very important and thank God when we get them it's great to have happy Christian feelings but they're not a good basis for Christian assurance confidence there are

[29 : 45] Christians who think that they can't really be Christians unless they're always warm and alive in their prayers and if they find that one time they're a little bit cold in prayer they begin to say oh I can't be a Christian at all they don't feel that they're real Christians unless they're luxuriating in waves of Christian emotion well that's simply not that's not true Christianity Simon Rutherford he always had a delightful way of putting it old Scottish language he said the Lord cannot always be thindling apples with me the Lord cannot always be thindling apples with me we walk by faith not by sight or feelings we've got to take up the cross and follow Christ it doesn't mean that the cross is not going to be felt by us it doesn't mean that we're going to feel happy all the time how can you be feeling happy when you're feeling the load of your cross if you're concerned let's illustrate if there are people in your family who are not converted and you feel that you haven't been doing what you ought to do

I get that feeling often then how can we be happy when we feel this duty and we haven't faced up to it and there's a struggle we don't always march boldly and say right I'm away to do it there's this struggle we can't be happy we can't look the Lord in the face as long as that's not resolved so taking up the cross doesn't mean that there have to be constant waves of Christian emotions thank God for them but they're not always there remember the lesson of the priest's feet in the Old Testament the priest were to enter the Jordan when the Jordan was at its highest and its the worst there's a torrent they went away till the torrent subsided and yet that's what so often Christians want to do they want to wait the Lord to come in and the torrent will subside and they'll feel good and they'll have nice emotions and then they'll work for the Lord well alas it's not often like that not only is it not always like that but it's not often like that very often it's a matter of just taking up the cross just walking into the water simply because the

Lord tells us to do it and then the blessing will come afterwards for obedient walking and this old Hodge Dr. Hodge Professor Hodge used to say when students said to him that they didn't think they'd really mean Christians well he said whenever I feel that I go back to the Lord again that's tremendous Christian sanity the famous Irish preacher Mr. Patton used to say that he had two texts that were like a knocker for him when he felt he wasn't a Christian one was Christ died for the ungodly well he would say that suits me I'm ungodly and the other was him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out and he used to go and say to the Lord I'm afraid I've never come but here I am coming and I'm ungodly but you sent your son to see the ungodly the last thing I want to say is this just briefly the most common cause of people not having Christian assurance is that they're not Christians at all that's the commonest reason for lack of

Christian assurance the people have heard the gospel but they haven't responded to the gospel you know it would be very difficult for me to feel sure that I had a hundred thousand pounds in the bank of Scotland for the simple reason that I don't how can you have assurance about something that you don't possess the gospel is there if you haven't come to Christ then it's there come unto me all ye that labour and if you can and cast your sins on Jesus you'll get plenty of assurance but there's no other way of getting it the Israelites who were bitten by the poisonous snakes they could have no healing and no feeling of being healed until they looked to the brazen serpent that had been appointed by God and Moses put it up on the pole and then when they did look they were healed and when they were healed they felt better so we will not feel better and we will not have Christian assurance until we really come to Christ there's no peace for anybody out of Christ in time or eternity and the logic therefore is look to him except not being found in him and he says him that cometh unto me

I will in no wise cast out you come to Christ if you've never come before come to Christ with your sins and then you'll get all the assurance that you need in the Lord's good time and way examine yourselves whether you be in the faith prove your own selves know you're not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you except you be reprobates but then trust that you shall know that we are not reprobates may the Lord bless to us is why let's pray Lord grant that we may make certain of Jesus Christ as our saviour we know the gospel we've heard it often Lord let it not be that any one of us shall fall short of eternal salvation Lord if we're looking for assurance grant that we may look for it only on the basis of actually having come to Jesus and of having found rest in him and Lord we pray for thy people who may be lacking assurance that maybe that they're unwell in some way then that's affected and we pray for strength physical and mental strength to be given to them so that their assurance may be restored if it's the case Lord that we're committing sin or we're admitting to do something that we ought to do and our assurance is affected grant that we may not have any rest until we put matters right grant oh

[35 : 27] Lord that we may trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and have in him cruel assurance of salvation we ask it in his name Amen