

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

Assurance and Its Fruit

1 John 5:13-15

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I am very encouraged, very motivated and very animated even as I stand before you this morning because of the passage that we are going to look at today out of 1 John, chapter 5, I invite you to turn there. One of the things that always saddens me a bit and invokes my pastoral compassion is when I am dealing with people who have doubts about their salvation. The concern about whether someone is truly a Christian or not and seeing the debilitating effect that that has on their spiritual life, on their confidence, some seemingly continually going back to “Is my salvation real? Do I really belong to Christ or not?” And to have the difficulty of trying to put that to rest so that they could get on with their spiritual growth in their lives.

Well, you can't really start to grow spiritually until you know where you stand. If you are continually worried about whether you are or are not a Christian, you are or are not on your way to heaven or to hell, it is very difficult to get anywhere other than to continue to spin your wheels in the mud as you try to sort out your spiritual life.

This passage today gives us great clarity, great conviction and great sense of direction that I am happy to give to you, it is 1 John 5:13-15, and if you are there, read along with me. The apostle John said:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

This is a classic text on the doctrine of assurance. John is drawing near to the end of his letter and as he completes what he has said, he wants to give true assurance to these true believers in Christ. And notice the atmosphere of confidence that permeates this passage. Verse 13: “I have written so that you would know that you have eternal life.” Verse 14: “This is our confidence before God, if we ask, He hears us.” Verse 15: “If we know that He hears us, we know we have the request that we have asked from Him”—knowledge, confidence, certainty, that's the atmosphere of this passage. It tells us something about the character of God that he wants us to know. God doesn't want to keep us in darkness. He wants us to walk in the light, He wants us to have a sense of assurance, of confidence, a settled certainty that we truly belong to Jesus Christ, a settled certainty that our sins are forgiven, a settled certainty that yields to a clarity of

confidence in a walk with God--it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of that assurance.

Remember at the end of the Sermon on the Mount at the end of Matthew 7, Jesus said that there will be many people who will be shocked on the day of judgment that they are being turned away from heaven. Their problem was one of overconfidence. They had a false assurance of salvation. John here is addressing those who are weak in their assurance, not those who are overconfident. There are some such as Roman Catholics who deny that assurance of salvation is possible or even desirable and view it as a matter of presumption, a matter of pride to say that you are sure of your salvation as if that were a bad thing.

Well, let's just stay plainly and clearly that based on the word of God, we do not agree with them who say that. We do not agree with those who say someone could be saved and then lose it, if that was even possible. Assurance of ultimate salvation would be an impossibility—we deny all of that. God intends His children to know that they belong to the family of God.

One writer said this in this context: “It is common today to decry any claim to assurance of salvation, to dismiss it as presumptuous and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death. But if God’s revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, but also that we should know. Presumption lies in doubting His word not trusting in it.”

When a true believer, based on the testimony of scripture stands up and says I am certain that I have eternal life, he is not showing presumption or pride, he is simply showing trust in what God has revealed in His word. We set forth the reality, the desirability, the goal of assurance of salvation as being one of the marks of a true Christian and we do that without apology. Not because of pride in our accomplishments, but because of confidence and trust in the word of God as He has revealed it here in 1 John chapter 5.

So the question comes down to this, are you a Christian and how would you ever know if that were the case. This passage is going to lay that out for us. There is two main points to the message today, the first main point is going to be the grounds of our assurance and then secondly, we will talk about the goal of our assurance and we are going to see those things in verses 13-15.

1. The Grounds of Our Assurance

Now, let me just define assurance to get us all a common basis from which we start the message here today. We could define assurance in this manner, that assurance of salvation is a believer’s confidence that he possesses salvation now through faith in Christ and that he is most certainly bound for heaven. Assurance means, “I know, I am confident, I have the clarity of mind and clarity of conscience that I possess salvation now, it is my present possession. And because I possess salvation now through faith in Christ, I am most certainly bound for heaven. I have no fear of death, I have no fear of God’s judgment coming upon me as though I might ultimately be lost and cast in to hell. I have no fear of that whatsoever because I have confidence that I have eternal life which God has given to me through faith in Jesus Christ. Assurance is a matter of

confidence, a matter of certainty that goes beyond probability to a matter that this is an established and settled fact that is real in my life.”

And brothers and sisters in Christ, if you have that kind of settled confidence, you are rich beyond all measure because all of eternity is settled for you. All of eternity can only bring ultimate blessing of God upon your life no matter the circumstances now. Assurance gives you the confidence and the joy that you are rich indeed. Look at verse 13 with me again as we dive in to the text now, he says:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

What are these things that yield over in to this knowledge that we have eternal life? John is referring to all that he had said in the letter up to this point, going from chapter 1 all the way through chapter 5:12. John is bringing it all to a climax, he is bringing it to a summary statement to say this is the overarching purpose in everything that I have said and so that you believers, you who have been troubled in this first century context, you who have been troubled by false teachers who undermined your confidence, I have written so that you would know that you have eternal life. And he is gathering on up in a collective impact to strengthen their assurance and by extension our assurance here today. He is looking back in the totality of what he has written, summarizing it in saying if you want to know if you have gotten my point, my point is that you would know that you have eternal life—That’s what “these things” are referring to, it is a collective reference to all that has gone before, so that’s the content of what he is saying.

The question is, who has he said this to? Who has he written to? He makes it plain here, look at verse 13 again, he says:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God...

To believe in the name of the Son of God means that you have committed your life to Christ, that your reliance of the forgiveness of your sins is in Christ alone. You have staked your eternity and your reconciliation with God entirely and exclusively based on the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. You trust Him, you have irrevocably committed your life to Him in a way that is irreversible and that you have no plan “B”. You have totally committed your life to Christ, you believe what the Scriptures say about Him, you believe what the scripture say about His work on the cross, you have trusted Him, you have received Him and you rest in Him, your soul is at peace in Christ. People who are like that, people whose hearts are anchored in Christ, those are the target of John’s letter here.

In contrast with what he said at the end of his gospel, here in 1 John he is writing to those who already believe so that they would know that they believe and that they would have confidence. At the end of his gospel, the gospel of John, his purpose was different. He said in chapter 20:30-31:

Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

There is an evangelistic purpose to the gospel of John. When you come to 1 John, there is a sanctifying purpose, there is a purpose of strengthening those who have already believed so that they might be settled in their Christian confession.

So, coming to this summary statement here in verse 13, the question that is on John's mind and therefore the question that is on the mind of God as we come to this passage, the question that is in our minds today because this is the passage that God has brought us to is, how can you know if you have eternal life and that you belong to Jesus Christ. How can you enjoy the certainty that your salvation is real? And notice that we are talking about certainty, we are not talking about probability that leaves it open to doubt. John has written this to bring us to a certain knowledge that we have a certain salvation that will certainly prove its fruit throughout all of eternity. It is a glorious passage, it is a glorious concept that removes all doubt from our eternal future and assures us in the depth of our being that it will be well for us in the end. You couldn't pay a price big enough to have that guaranteed to you. There are not the riches on earth to purchase this as the man who tried to purchase the power of the Spirit from the apostles in the book of Acts. No, this is an assurance that is given to us through the testimony of scripture.

We are going to divide these grounds for assurance in to two separate but important groups. So the main point is the grounds of assurance. We are going to talk about two different aspects of those grounds, the objective grounds of assurance and the subjective grounds of assurance. That's about as technical as it is going to get, but we are going to divide these things up because scripture divides them up in this way.

So let's look at the objective grounds of assurance that John has laid out for us in his gospel. In some ways, this will be a review of our extended teaching on 1 John over the past few years. But here are the objective grounds of assurance, what does that mean. Follow along with me because this is helpful. This is all designed for the up building of your soul.

The objective grounds of assurance ask this question. The objective grounds of assurance ask whether you believe the transcendent doctrines of Christianity. Do you believe the transcendent truths that mark true Christianity, true biblical Christianity? I am going to summarize these objective grounds with three very simple questions and point you to a couple of brief passages so that all of this is fresh in your mind.

First question on the objective grounds of assurance is simply this, do you believe the Bible? Do you believe and trust the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, do you believe them? Do you believe that they are the trustworthy word of God? That is one of the tests that John lays forth as being the mark of the true Christian. The apostles of whom John was the last living representative when he wrote this letter, the apostle saw the resurrected Christ and they wrote about Him in scripture. They wrote about Him to explain the significance of His person and His work in order that we might have eternal life, in order that our sins might be forgiven

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through faith in Christ. And the only place where true salvation is revealed is revealed in the 66 books of the Bible, and so it starts there. Do you believe this source of authority that the apostles have bequeathed to us and that God has preserved over the intervening 2000 years? Do you believe the Bible? Do you believe the testimony of the apostles? Look at the very start of the book, chapter 1:1-3. John is recounting his apostolic witness and setting forth his apostolic testimony which flows from what he witnessed. And in these three verses he says:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life, and the Life was manifested. And we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also so that you, too, may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The apostle John is writing as an apostle. He says these are the things that we have heard and seen and touched with our hands. We are talking about Christ, these are the things of eternal life and I am proclaiming them to you so that you may share in the fellowship of true salvation with us as the apostolic circle of witnesses, I want to bring you in to that fellowship. The purpose of my writing is so that you would share in this eternal life with me. The only source of eternal life is that which flows from, that is borne out of the apostolic witness as recorded for us in the New Testament, John says I am writing so that you would know that.

And later on in the book, he comes back to his apostolic authority in chapter 4:6, look at it with me. Writing as an apostle, speaking about the apostolic witness, he says in chapter 4:6:

We are from God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Notice the emphasis on knowledge, notice the emphasis on the certainty of knowing God and knowing discernment, knowing the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. He says the dividing line between truth and error is whether you heed the apostolic witness or not. Do you listen to it? Do you believe it? Do you submit to its authority? Is it the framing reference to your world view and your understanding of God and Jesus Christ?

The mark of a true believer is that his unqualified answer to that is “Yes, I believe the Bible, I believe what the apostles said, I believe that scriptures are the word of God and their word is my law.” That’s the objective grounds of assurance, if you believe that, you have one of the pillars of true assurance of your salvation is real. Do you believe the Bible? That’s the question that is being asked of you. John says this is the mark of a true believer. And if you say “Yes, I believe the Bible, I not only believe it, but I heed it, I obey it, I submit to it, I trust the Bible. It is not that I just believe it as a historical document. I believe it to be the living word of God that sets authority over all of mankind and I gladly submit to it and trust it.” That’s the mark of a redeemed heart, that’s an objective ground of assurance. John says if you know God, you listen to us. That’s the first objective ground.

We have covered all of these things and we are going to talk about the first half of this message. We have covered all of them, so I am just doing it in summary form just like John does. He said “I have written these things...” It is a summary statement, so we are just doing a summary to make it clear and particular and we trust in the work of the Spirit of God.

We have asked the question, do you believe the Bible? Secondly, do you confess your sin? The Bible says that “All men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That all men are guilty because they have broken God’s law, they are unable to save themselves and left to their own devices, they are irretrievably destined to suffer eternal judgment in hell as the just punishment for their rebellion against their creator.

The question is, do you believe that to be true about yourself? Do you believe that you are a sinner in need of redemption? Look at chapter 1:8-10, John says:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Anyone who mitigates a confession of his sinfulness is not entitled to assurance of salvation. If you try to qualify it, if you try to blame other people for your sin, if you go to the extreme that John does here and say “I have no sin, I’ve never sinned,” I had someone tell me that one time, I said “Dude, please, I know you, we’ve grown up together.” At the heart of being a Christian is the recognition that you have sinned, that you are responsible for your sin that you cannot blame anyone else for it. There is a grieving sense of spiritual bankruptcy that marks you that says “I have nothing of any merit whatsoever to give to God that would cause Him to reward me with eternal life.” The mark of the true Christian is someone who says “I am bankrupt before God. I have no merit of my own whatsoever. Are you kidding? The only thing that I have on my own account, on my own merit is the sin and guilt that merits eternal judgment on my head for ever. And if God gives that to me, it would be good and righteous and just of Him to do so.” That’s what we mean by the question, do you confess your sin? We are not asking whether you have committed mistakes. We are saying, are you a guilty sinner under the law and judgment of God? True Christians confess that without qualification. True Christians say “Yes, of course, I don’t hide it, I’m guilty before God and I’ll confess that to anyone who asks.” It is a free, unhindered, unqualified confession of guilt if you say that about yourself. Not only if you say it verbally in the presence of men, but perhaps even more crucially, in your heart of hearts, is that your self-assessment? Is that what you say to be true about yourself? Is it more than simply mimicking the words so that you fit in to a church environment like this? Or is it the desperate plea of your heart that you are a sinner before God and your appeal is to Christ and Christ alone—that’s the question.

The true Christian is one who confesses his sin, the true Christian is one who says without qualification “I’m guilty, and I deserve judgment and I have nothing in myself, there is nothing about me to mitigate the righteous fury of God’s wrath against my soul.”—That’s what a true Christian says, that’s what a true Christian confesses. He believes the Bible and he confesses his sin.

Thirdly, do you believe the gospel? One of the most rewarding things for me in preaching through the book of 1 John is just seeing this little passage of things that are summarized in chapter 4 beginning in verse 9, turn there with me if you will. Do you believe the gospel? Do you believe what the Bible says about Jesus Christ in the way that forgiveness of sin is obtained? Do you believe what the Bible says about how the wrath of God is satisfied and turned away? These four verses here, chapter 4, verses 9-10 and verses 14-15 are such great summary of these wonderful truths. Because the gospel says this in chapter 4:9:

By this the love of God is manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son in to the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation, the satisfaction of God's wrath, propitiation, that which turns away the wrath of God from the one who believes in Christ. Verse 13, here comes this principle of knowledge and certainty again:

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that Father has sent His Son to be the savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

So here is the question, do you believe that? Do you believe the gospel? When the says that God out of His love for sinners sent His only begotten Son, the God man, Jesus Christ in to the world so that sinners might have eternal life, the question is, do you believe that? Do you affirm from the bottom of your heart that yes, without doubt, that is the purpose of God and the gospel, yes, that is who Jesus Christ is. He is the Son of God, He was sacrificed on the cross in order to turn away the wrath of God against sinners. Yes, He is exclusively the only one to be the savior of the world. Yes, He is the eternal Son of God who sacrificed His life to appease the Father's wrath, not only against the sin of men, but against my sin.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the question is, do you believe that? Do you trust that word in the scriptures? Do you trust those promises of the Bible that he who believes in Christ has the forgiveness of sin? As the cornerstone of your eternal hope you say "Yes, that is what I am banking all of my eternity on. I have received Christ and I rest in Him, I know His work is a finished work and I rest in that">

If that is what you believe, then you have objective grounds to believe that you are a true Christian. No matter what else might be true about you, this is what true Christians believe, this is what they commit themselves to, this is what they trust in. And we can say with certainty, without exception that anyone who does not believe this, what I have just been describing, anyone who bocks against this, who contends against this, who would undermine this, that person is not a Christian no matter what else they may say.

And so when you see prominent teachers who try to undermine the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, who mock the idea that God punished Christ for our sins as though it were a cosmic child abuse and mock and undermine the very heart of the gospel, that person is proclaiming

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through his teaching that he is not a Christian. He is proclaiming through his teaching that he does not believe the gospel, he is proclaiming through his teaching that he is someone that true believers should run from.

And those of us that don't have a platform like that, we don't need it anyway. As simple believers in Christ, we are content to go to this word of God, illustrated in 1 John 4:9-15 and say "You know what, this is where the rest of my soul is, this is where my comfort is, this is where my hope is. I believe what the Bible says that Jesus came to give us life, that Jesus on the cross was the propitiation for our sins, that Jesus is the savior of the world, that He is the savior of me, Don Green, here in 2011 and I entrust all of my soul to those truths. Those truths are true, they are accurate, they are the word of God, if it were not for those truths, I would have no eternal hope." That's what a true Christian says about the gospel "I believe that, I trust in that, and I rest my soul right there and I will never move off of it."

Do you believe the gospel? That's the question. If you say "I believe that. I read the word of God, I see what it says about Christ and I believe it without qualification," you have objective grounds outside of yourself to affirm the reality of your salvation. You see, assurance begins with objective truth, it begins with these eternal truths that God has revealed.

I said this last time, but I want to say it again. Understand that these truths are objective in the sense that they are true whether you believe them or not. They were true before you were born, they will be true after you are dead, they have nothing to do with what you think about them. It is simply a question of whether you have committed yourself to them and receive them and believe them, they are independent of you, they are objective, they do not depend on your opinion at all. Whether you believe the Bible or not, it is the word of God. Whether you confess your sin or not, you are a sinner. Whether you believe the gospel or not, it is true, it is the only message of salvation. And Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God was sacrificed for sinners on the cross, He is at the very core of that. Not only sacrificed, not only died, but resurrected and ascended in to heaven. True Christians hear those truths and affirm them and there is an echo of resonation in their heart that says "Yes, that is what I believe, that is true, I affirm that without reservation." Someone who says that has objective grounds for assurance.

Now, having established that, there is another side of the grounds of assurance. We talked about the objective grounds, there is another side which must also be true for your assurance to be genuine and that is the subjective grounds of assurance.

I am trying to be careful to define my terms here so that you don't get lost in terminology. We talked about the objective grounds of assurance. Now we are going to address the subjective grounds of assurance. And when I say the subjective grounds of assurance (listen to me carefully so that this can be clear to you) I am referring to those things that are particular to your own individual experience, your own individual life, the subjective grounds, you are the subject of these grounds of assurance. And there are three questions that I want to ask you here as well. We will have to go through these fairly quickly.

First question on the subjective grounds of assurance is, do you obey God's word? Look at

chapter 2:3-4, familiar passage, we don't need to spend much time here. But again as you see, as you go back over these things through the perspective of 1 John 5:13, you see that John has been building the case for assurance all along. He says in verse 3:

By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The one who says I have come to know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.

Do you obey God's word? Is your heart inclined toward obedience toward the Scriptures? This does not mean that you obey perfectly. We have already said that the Christian life is marked by confession of sin, so he is obviously not talking about perfection. But it means that the goal of your heart and the pattern of your life, the overarching pattern, the distinguishing characteristic of your life is that you are marked by obedience to God's word, not in perfection, but in direction of life. John says, the Bible says that if that aspect of your experience is not true, all of your testimony to the contrary about what you say you believe is irrelevant. You can contradict the objective grounds of assurance by leading a sinful disobedient rebellious life. The rebel has no claim on assurance no matter what he says he believes. Look at verse 4 with me again, I just want you to see this clearly. John sets this forth with great simplicity and clarity:

The one who says I come to know Him...

I have objective grounds for assurance, I believe all these things, I have come to know Him...

...but does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.

The verb tense is indicating that it is not the orientation of his life, it is not the overarching pattern of his life, the one who is like that is a liar and not entitled to assurance.

So we ask the question, are you oriented toward obedience of God's word? Stated differently, do you hate sin or do you mitigate it, justify it and excuse it in your life? When you find sin in your life, is it an enemy to be attacked? Is it a cancer to be excised from your life or is it something that you are comfortable with and that you make excuses for and you say it is not so bad and you are not going to change it anyway. A stubborn attitude toward sin in your life is a ground to diminish the assurance of your salvation.

The one who says "I hate sin. If I could snap my fingers and be rid of sin for ever and be rid of all of the illicit desires of my heart and the bad things that characterize my lips and actions, if I could snap my fingers and be rid of them, I would do it in a heartbeat, but sin clings to me, but I desire to obey God like the apostle Paul in Romans 7." That's the heart of someone who says "I obey God's word, I want to obey Him, I do obey Him. When sin enters my life, it is not a welcome friend, it is a hostile enemy."

So, do you obey God's word? Are you oriented toward obedience? It will do all of us good to deal with ourselves strictly on that issue, to deal strictly with ourselves in the matter of sin in our lives, to fight sin, to mortify sin, to put it to death in our lives so that the aspect of subjective

ground of our assurance could flourish. If you can tolerate sin and just accommodate it and say welcome, you really have no grounds for true assurance. It doesn't matter what the sin is, whether it is big or small, a conscious companion of sin is not someone who is entitled to think that he is a conscious companion of Jesus—those two things don't go together. And so this is very searching, very penetrating to our hearts in the way that we view our spiritual lives.

If you have been tolerating sin this week, this month as a pattern of life, you have got to come to grips with what God's word says about it because the issue of assurance is too important. Jesus said:

Depart from me, I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness.

It searches us, doesn't it? It searched me to prepare this. But when you cut the disease out, there is refreshment that goes with that. As you deal with sin, as you repent of sin, as you do away with the remnants of sin in your life, this is the mark of the genuineness of my salvation. People who don't care about salvation, don't worry about this. This is important to me, I'm dealing with sin as a mark of the reality of my salvation, and that fuels your joy and confidence as you go forward.

Now secondly on these subjective grounds of assurance, do you love Christians? Are you drawn to the fellowship of other fellow believers? Do you love Christians? I'm not going to spend any time here except to read this verse, chapter 3:14:

We know that we have passed out of death in to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

He is abiding in death, he is abiding in the ongoing consequences of sin, he has not truly been redeemed. If your conversion is real, you will find a heart affection and a heart sympathy and a heart attraction to other true Christians because you share a common life. You are going to be drawn by the commonality of the shared common life that you have. You are going to love the expression of your God being manifested in the life of someone else, you are going to be attracted to that, you are going to love them for that, you are going to want to serve them, minister to them, encourage them. Do you love Christians? The person who is happy to live in isolation from other believers is someone who is not entitled to assurance of salvation. The person who welcomes the fellowship of other believers has an experiential basis to affirm what his heart says that he believes and to say "I believe the gospel, I believe these subjective grounds of truth and my heart, my life, my affections are confirming evidence that that confession is real." So you love other Christians.

Now thirdly, does the Holy Spirit affirm your confession? What does that mean? Let's look at scripture and think about it for a moment here. Chapter 4:13, John says:

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit.

Verse 10 of chapter 5 says:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

What John is saying here is that there is a supernatural spiritual affirmation that comes from the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit who affirms to our hearts that we belong to Christ. The apostle Paul said the same thing in Romans 8:16:

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

There is a spiritual component brought by the person of the Holy Spirit that marks those who claim to be a Christian when our salvation is real.

I can illustrate that for you from my own life before and after I was a Christian. I remember distinctly before I was a believer, claiming to be a Christian and I remember specific conversations that I had with friends at that time and we were talking about whether we were Christians or not. And I said “Yes, I am a Christian.” And this person said “What does that mean to you? How do you know that you are a Christian?” And I sputtered out the words (And I use the word “sputter” intentionally) well, that means that I’ve accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. That’s what I was saying verbally, that’s what I was affirming, that’s what I thought was true of my life. I wasn’t deliberately lying to my friends at that time when I would say such things. But the truth of the matter is that inwardly, there was a shouting going on saying “No, you are lying, that’s not true, you’re not a Christian, why are you saying that.” The Holy Spirit was not affirming to my heart what I was saying to be true about myself. There was an inward recognition that my claim to be a Christian was false, it wasn’t true at all.

Now that I have become a Christian, now when I stand before you and I tell you I have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, there is a complete, settled peace, a complete sense of affirmation that the Spirit gives to my heart that says yes, that is true. The deception that you were practicing 30 years ago is no longer true now. Now when you say these things, “I’m a Christian, I believe in Christ, I believe He is the Son of God, I believe He is my only savior, I believe that I am on my way to heaven,” there is an echo, a resonance in my heart that says yes, that is true. And that’s true for you too if you are a true Christian, that is part of the gift that God gives to true Christians, the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirits that we are truly His children—that is the transcendent affirmation of our salvation. And the Spirit is using the totality of all of these grounds of assurance to bring that kind of certainty to our hearts. We believe the gospel, we believe the scriptures, we see evidence in our obedience and in our love and the Spirit uses all of that to say your testimony is genuine. The Spirit uses that and says yes, Don, what you are saying is true, I affirm that, you belong to Christ, you belong to me. And that affirmation of the Spirit, that testimony of the Spirit is the most precious gift we have from God. Spirit bearing witness with our hearts that we belong to God. God Himself saying yes, I am in agreement with you on that point.

Now, we need to turn the corner here. Those are the objective and subjective grounds for assurance, and what it means is you say “Okay, I am a Christian now I am a Christian for sure, for certain, without a doubt.” And the implication of that is that your salvation will never be lost, it will be your possession forever. Paul said at the end of Romans 8, I am convinced. Do you see the certainty again? Contrast that with these postmodern preachers who want to inject doubt and questions and uncertainty in the lives of those who hear. That is a complete contradiction of the entire way of the Bible’s true salvation. They should be condemned, we condemned them for the doubt that they inject in the lives of those who hear them as if certainty were not possible. The biblical writers spoke with certainty and they intended to convey that certainty to the true Christians everywhere throughout all of times until Christ returns. Paul said:

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Separate us, collectively, this is our common birthright, this belongs to all of us, that salvation will never be ended, we will never be separated from Christ, God will preserve us to the end, the work that He has begun, He will finish. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, my salvation is never going to be lost and I know I have it right now, right here, lightning can strike me right this second and it will just transport me in to heaven. The worst thing that can happen to me is the best thing that can happen to me—this is great, that’s what assurance of salvation does for you.

Now, we need to ask this question. It is an aspect of the doctrine of assurance that I don’t think gets enough emphasis. So you have assurance of your salvation, there’s no more effort, right? Now we can just relax, it’s real and everything is cool and it’s okay.

That’s not where John leads us. Yes, our salvation is real, yes it is secure for ever. But in this parenthesis of time between this moment, this conscious assurance I have and until I am in heaven, there is something that is to be done. This assurance has a goal, this assurance has a purpose to it. It is not simply to lead you in to inactivity and spiritual slothfulness. Assurance has a goal which is our second point:

2. The Goal of Our Assurance

We talked about the grounds of assurance, now we are going to look at the goal of assurance. What is the point of having assurance of salvation? Well, assurance is the foundation for your spiritual growth, it is what you build on, you come to it by examining the objective and subjective grounds of assurance. You have laid the foundation now to build your spiritual life on, for you to glorify God in the time that He gives you and to grow and to become an even better Christian that you are at this time now.

The goal of assurance is to be found in a conscious seeking of God’s will for your life. Look at verses 14-15. I am going to ask you to give me a couple of extra minutes here to get through this material—this is really important.

The English translation that I am using does not include the important word that is in the Greek text “and”. Greek text in verse 14 says “And this is the confidence which we have before Him...” What you have to see, what you have to understand is verse 14 is connected to verse 13, they are linked together like links in a chain. These two things go together, they are not independent and separate. “Assurance” in verse 13 is meant to lead to this “Confidence” and these consequences in verses 14 and 15:

And this is the confidence which we have before Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him.

Couple of preliminary observations about these verses. The verbs in these two verses indicate that ongoing prayer will be a characteristic of the life of the true Christian, it is an ongoing pattern that he is talking about. This assurance yields in to a conscious dependence on God that is expressed in prayer and it gives us a promise, it promises that God hears our prayers that are according to His will.

Now, what does this mean when he says:

If we ask anything according to His will, he hears us.

First of all, understand that when it says “He hears us” it means that He hears us favorably. He welcomes and receives our prayers, of course He does. Even though it may not seem like that to you from time to time, of course He receives our prayers favorably. We are His children, He saved us for this purpose. When we go to Him in prayer, that is accomplishing the purpose of salvation, of course He receives us favorably, of course He hears us. But the question for you and me is, what are we going to use that privilege for? We have this access to God, we have this assurance that we are truly saved, what are we going to make as the goal, the object, the priority of our prayers? John says “If we ask anything according to His will...”

Now, elsewhere in scripture, this priority has been made very clear. And I say this in love, I say this to help you, but I think the truth of the matter is that far too many of us in this room had not grasped this and made it the core of the way that we pray. God does not give us this promise of hearing our prayers for the sake of us being able to manipulate earthly circumstances to our benefit, to manipulate earthly circumstances to our liking. Our priority in prayer is laid out for us in scripture, it was laid out for us by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And our prayer should be marked by seeking the priorities that God has called us to in prayer. You say, what are you talking about? Well, let’s start with Matthew 6:33:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus taught us to pray that way by precept and by example, didn’t He. The very core of Jesus’ teaching His disciples on prayer, one of the key elements He said was He taught us to pray:

Father, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And then He went and He manifested that in His own life in Gethsemane. As He was facing the cross, He said:

Father, remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

“Your will be done” Mark 14:36. To pray according to the will of God beloved is to seek His will above all else, to seek first His kingdom—that’s what we are told to do, seek first His kingdom. And then as a corollary to that, you seek His righteousness to be manifested in your life—Father, your will be done in my life, I seek your righteousness to be expressed through my life. You see, the prayer that is according to the will of God is the prayer that is according to His priorities that He has revealed in scripture. And God’s priority in prayer is His will, His glory—Father, hallowed be your name. God’s priority in your life beloved is not necessarily the easing of your earthly circumstances, but rather that your sanctification would be advanced, that you would grow in holiness as a result of whatever circumstance that He has placed you in, whether prosperity or poverty, whether ease or disease.

The priority is not the circumstances, the priority is the work of God in your heart and the advance of His glory. And when you pray “Father, your will be done” Father, advance the development of righteousness in my life, you are praying according to the will of God. And when you pray that way, you can be certain that God’s answer is yes. You can be certain that you are praying according to what He wants. You can be certain, think about it from God’s perspective, one of His children comes to Him and say Father, I am more concerned about your glory than anything else and I am more concerned that holiness would be grown in my life when things the way that I designed it to go and what I want. It is more important for me to be holy than for me to be happy. If that is your orientation in prayer, you can know for certain that God is going to receive you favorably.

Now, again bear with me because I have to finish this and this is just too important for our spiritual lives to shortchange it. I often get questions, people asking, what does this mean when I try to pray for God to change my circumstances? I don’t like my circumstances, life is hard, I don’t like this relationship, I don’t like my job, I want this to change. Look, I’m not going to tell you not to pray that way, not to pray for change of circumstances, I’m not going to intervene that way between you and God. But you must understand this, there is a place for that kind of praying, but you must understand that it is a subordinate place, it is not the focus of Christian prayer to pray about your earthly circumstances so that they would be what you want them to be, you must understand this. Because look, think about it this way, you do not have to be a Christian to want some god to order your circumstances to your liking. Pagans do that all the time, there is nothing uniquely Christian about praying that God would make life go the way you want it to go—you have to understand that. It is not the mark of the Christian that God, help life go right for me.

And so before you seek a change in your circumstances, you should see to it that your heart reflects as a mirror that you prefer God’s honor and your righteousness to your circumstances. So the prayer goes something like this: God, I don’t prefer these circumstances, but it is more

important that you be glorified than for me to be happy, it is more important for me to grow in holiness than for this situation to work out as I wish.

And beloved, listen to me, when you pray that way, when you glory in your heart that way, oh, listen to me, when you pray that way and you cultivate those kinds of affections in your heart, changing your circumstances fades in importance. It is no longer that important because you realize that there are more transcendent priorities that you want to seek. Don't you want your life to glorify God in the end? Don't you want to grow in holiness in the end? Well, if difficult circumstances are the means by which that happens, why would you ask God to change it? That is the mark of true spiritual growth.

Now in light of that, if you still want to pray for God to change things, go for it, but the test of the reality of your Christian confession is going to be the willingness to say this when it is all said and done "Father, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." You can pray all you want for the change in your circumstances, go for it, but the mark of a Christian is the one who says at the end "Father, not my will, but yours be done. And if your will means these circumstances stay the same, that I stay in the same situation, I am fine with that as long as it is your will."

And so your goal should not be to seek a particular result, but that God's will is done whatever the circumstances and that you grow in holiness as He works out His providence in your life. Think about the apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:8, he is talking about his thorn in the flesh, he said:

Concerning this, I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He said to me "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

So without the change in circumstance, Paul said:

Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with stresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

This is for the glory of Christ and if I am weak, this causes me to grow in holiness, I have what I want even though the circumstances have not changed.

And so you see that the goal of assurance is to bring you to a point where you are seeking the glory of the God who saved you and gave you that assurance. You are seeking His glory more than anything else as the supreme priority of your life. And you realize that to grow in holiness is the greatest blessing of them all and that is where you focus your prayers according to the will of God. When you pray that way beloved, you have settled for all to see that you are not seeking your own will, but you are seeking the pleasure of the Father who saved you. Of course His answer is going to be yes when you pray that way.

John Stott said it this way, please listen to me beloved as I finish here: "Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will on God or bending His will to ours. Rather, it is the prescribed way of subordinating our will to His. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace

it and align ourselves with it.” This is prayer that is according to the will of God. The scripture has been so clear on this, I don’t know how we have missed it for so long throughout the annals of the modern church. Prayer is about God’s will not yours, it is about your righteousness not your happiness, your holiness not your happiness.

So, if you lack assurance, search out these things, these grounds of assurance and ask the Spirit of God to lead you to saving faith in Christ. And if you have true assurance, make it your goal to seek the righteousness of God, the kingdom of God and His righteousness and the promise of God is when you orient your priorities by what I said, all these other things will be added to you. He is faithful to us through it all.

Let’s pray. *Father the glory of salvation is vast beyond our comprehension and to own it and to know that we own it is the greatest of all gifts. Thank you for giving that gift to so many in this room. Thank you for giving it to me. Father, I pray that as we grow in assurance, we would pursue the goal of assurance which is the preeminent priority of your will and your righteousness being expressed through our lives and in the world around us. That is what we set our heart affections on Father. And if you change circumstances along the way, so be it, that’s a bonus, but it is not our focus, it is not what we want most from you oh God. What we want most is your honor and glory to be on display and that our lives reflect the holiness of which you are worthy. Father, we pray for that, knowing that you hear us and knowing that you receive that prayer favorably and that you had given already what we have asked because we have asked according to your will and we have asked in Jesus’ name. Amen.*