

“The Matter of Assurance – Part 1”  
Galatians 4:4-6  
(Preached at Trinity, March 24, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been expounding on the glorious blessings of the New Covenant. Christ has fulfilled the promise of God. Paul describes this work here in **Chapter 4**. Jesus came according to the perfect timing of God – the fullness of time.  
**Galatians 4:4-5 NAU** - "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."
2. He redeemed us that we might receive the fullness of our inheritance—that we might be adopted as sons.
3. He has given us the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance. It is through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we have come to know our rich heritage in Christ—that we are the sons of God.  
**Galatians 4:6 NAU** - "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"  
Once again, the best commentary on Galatians is the Book of Romans.  
**Romans 8:14-16 NAU** - "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,"
5. It is amazing so little attention is given to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is fundamental to the Christian life.  
**Romans 8:9 NAS** - "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."
  - A. The Holy Spirit brought us to spiritual life, created faith in our heart, and enabled us to turn from our sin in repentance.
  - B. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the Word of God alive to us – He is our teacher.
  - C. It is the Holy Spirit who enlivens our affections for Christ and kindles the fires of true worship in our hearts.
  - D. It is the Holy Spirit who equips us for our work in our Lord’s Kingdom.
  - E. One of Paul’s great underlying themes in the Book of Galatians is the work of the Holy Spirit. (Recount Chapters 3-6)
6. In **Verse 6** Paul is telling us another important work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that confirms within us the reality of our adoption. This is the essence of our assurance—the wonderful confidence that we are the children of God.
7. Many Christians struggle with assurance; perhaps some of you. This whole topic of assurance has been an issue of hot debate and dispute since the Reformation.
  - A. The Roman Catholics teach that you can’t really know you are saved. Although faith hopes for heaven it cannot have a certainty of arriving. In fact, according to the RC Church, to claim of such a certainty is presumptuous.

- B. The early Reformers, especially Luther, taught a distinction between “historical faith,” which is simply believing the facts of Christianity (*Notitia*) and “true faith,” (*fiducia*) which is a full trust or resting upon the truths of the Gospel—essentially assurance.  
Luther declared, “Faith is a living deliberated confidence in the grace of God, so certain that for it one could die a thousand deaths and that such confidence makes us joyous, intrepid, and cheerful towards God and all creation.”
- C. The Puritans taught that assurance is not an absolute aspect of saving faith. They called for self-examination to make your calling and election sure.  
Although assurance was not necessarily connected to saving faith it was something to be sought out.
8. We hold to the beliefs of the Puritans. Assurance is not necessarily attached to genuine saving faith but something all Christians should seek. This is consistent with our confession.  
1689 Confession – 18:3 “This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of means, attain thereunto.”
9. Paul tells us in this passage that one way the Christian knows he’s a child of God is by the witness of the Holy Spirit.
- I. This morning I simply want to address this question: If every Christian has the Holy Spirit why doesn’t every Christian have the fullness of assurance?
- II. Then in my next sermon on this text we’ll look at how the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirit.  
We’ll also see that this witness has both a subjective aspect as well as an objective aspect—an inner confidence as well as an assurance based upon propositional truth.

### **If every Christian has the Holy Spirit why doesn’t every Christian have full assurance?**

- I. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.
- A. We are indwelt at conversion
1. The existence of the Holy Spirit marks the Christian’s testimony as genuine  
**Romans 8:9 NAU** - "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."
2. Paul is saying here that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to the Christian experience.
- a. Without the Holy Spirit all religion is counterfeit. It is all a delusion.
- b. The Holy Spirit is God’s mark upon us. He is God’s sign and seal.  
It is the Holy Spirit that makes our Christian profession a reality.

- B. But the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not equal in all  
The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operation
1. There are degrees of giftedness  
**1 Corinthians 12:4 NAS** - "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit."  
**1 Corinthians 12:7 NAS** - "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
  2. Some are granted the ability to teach – there are pastors and teachers
  3. Some are endowed with great measures of the Holy Spirit's presence
    - a. The deacon is supposed to be a man full of the Holy Spirit  
**Acts 6:3 NAS** - "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."
    - b. Stephen was such a man  
**Acts 7:55-56 NAS** - "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; <sup>56</sup> and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
    - c. It would be expected that such a man would be mighty in faith and assurance of his salvation
- C. On the other hand we are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit  
**Ephesians 5:18 NAS** - "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,"
1. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
    - a. It means to be fully under His control—to live under His influence
    - b. Paul compares it to being drunk with wine. An intoxicated person is dominated by the drink. It rules him, controls him.
    - c. Likewise with the Holy Spirit
  2. The person full of the Holy Spirit is the person dominated by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit  
He sets our minds above this world. He gives us a passion for Christ. He gives us great confidence in our work. And he gives us great confidence that we are God's people.
- D. How does this happen? How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit?
1. By seeking those things that please Him – loving the things He loves  
Paul often set up the flesh/Spirit contrast  
**Romans 8:5 NAU** - "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."
  2. The man who is filled with the Spirit develops spiritual appetites
    - a. He gives himself earnestly to the Word of God – this is where the Holy Spirit gives us our instruction.

- b. He gives himself earnestly to prayer – this is where the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf  
**Romans 8:26-27 NAU** - "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; <sup>27</sup> and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God.*"
- 3. We must set our hearts on living a Spirit filled life  
**Galatians 5:25** - "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

## II. We can hinder the Holy Spirit through our sinful behavior

- A. We are commanded over and over to live in submission to Him
  - 1. This is a major teaching in Galatians  
**Galatians 5:16-17NAS** - "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."  
**Galatians 5:25** - "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."  
**Galatians 6:8 NAS** - " For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life."
  - 2. Paul states the great contrast in **Romans 8**  
**Romans 8:5-6 NAS** - "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,"
- B. Paul spoke of “quenching” the Holy Spirit  
**1 Thessalonians 5:19 NAS** - "Do not quench the Spirit"
  - 1. The word for quench (σβέννυμι) means “to extinguish” as in putting out the flames of a fire.
  - 2. Living according to fleshly desires is like pouring water upon a fire – it quenches the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life  
 Paul says in Gal. 5:22  
**Galatians 5:22-25 NAU** - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

## III. How does this apply to our assurance? Why are there so many Christians who lack confidence in their adoption?

- A. When we walk according to our fleshly desires should it surprise us when we see little evidence of the Holy Spirit working?
  - 1. When we love the things He hates should it surprise us that we have quenched His gracious influence?
  - 2. The Holy Spirit is the HOLY Spirit. One of the great evidences of His presence is holiness. But sanctification carries human responsibility. Paul says—

**Ephesians 4:22-24 NAU** - "lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, <sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup> and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

**Ephesians 4:30 NAU** - "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

3. Walking in the flesh is a demonstration of hostility towards God and is inconsistent with Biblical Christianity

**Romans 8:6-9 NAU** - "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. "

- B. We find great comfort when we walk in the Spirit in a life of holiness

**Romans 8:14-15 NAU** - "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

1. We will find the comfort and assurance of our adoption

**2 Corinthians 6:17-18 NAS** - "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty."

2. The Holy Spirit enables us to comprehend the love of Christ which allows us to taste of the fullness of God.

**Ephesians 3:16-19** – "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

#### Conclusion:

1. When we lack assurance the first place to look is at our own life. When we continue to persist in sin we shouldn't be surprised that we find little assurance for our soul.
2. But there are times when a Christian becomes hyper-introspective and condemns himself at every flaw and imperfection. At this point we can sometimes begin to bring ourselves back under the Law – trying to earn God's approval and fearing that we've never done enough. This is the very thing Paul warns about in Galatians. While we must never find comfort in sin, we can find infinite comfort in the cross.

**1 John 1:9 NAU** - " If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

3. God looks upon our heart. He knows our weak attempts at obedience. He has pity on our frailty. There is an infinite difference between a weak Christian who struggles hard with sin and a rebel who refuses to let go of sin. God takes great pity upon His struggling children. This behavior doesn't quench the Spirit. He is ready to lift you up and help you along your journey. He assures your heart of the love of the Father for His child.
4. This is far different from the stubborn and stiffnecked ones who surely quench the Spirit. They have little aid from the Holy Spirit.  
 We've been looking at the great contrast between the New Covenant and the Old. Under the New Covenant God looks upon our heart – our desires. The standard of the Law hasn't changed. God now accepts us as righteous in Christ and is pleased by our affection for Christ.  
**Samuel Bolton** (*True Bounds of Christian Freedom*) – “The law looks for exact obedience in every jot and tittle. From this rigid obedience has God freed the believer. Instead of universal actual obedience, God is pleased to accept universal habitual obedience. In the Gospel God accepts affections for actions, endeavours for performance, desire for ability. A Christian is made up of desires, of mournings, thirstings and bewailings. God has mercy for can-nots, but none for will-nots. God can distinguish between weakness and wickedness. While you are under the law, this weakness is your wickedness, a sinful weakness, and therefore God hates it. Under the Gospel He looks not upon the weakness of saints as their wickedness, and therefore pities them.”
5. God knows the difference between weakness and willful rebellion.  
 The Holy Spirit helps you in your weakness and assures your heart of your rightful place as His child.