

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XXXIV

ASSURANCE

The theme of this chapter should be distinguished clearly from that of the preceding chapter. Security relates to the absolute, eternal safety of those who are in Christ, while assurance relates to a personal confidence in a present salvation.

According to the Scriptures, that assurance of salvation which is justifiable rests upon two lines of evidence:

(a) normal manifestations of the indwelling Christ, and

(b) the veracity of the Word of God.

I. NORMAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE INDWELLING CHRIST

Among the various divine accomplishments which together constitute the salvation of a soul, the impartation of a new life from God is, in the Bible, given the supreme emphasis. Upwards of eighty-five New Testament passages attest this feature of saving grace. Consideration of these

Scriptures disclose the fact that this imparted life is the gift of God to all those who believe on Christ (John 10:28; Rom. 6:23); it is from Christ (John 14:6); it is Christ indwelling the believer (Col. 1:27; 1 John 5:11, 12), and therefore is as eternal as He is eternal.

On the basis of the fact that Christ indwells him, the believer is appointed to judge himself as to whether he is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5); for it is reasonable to expect that the heart wherein Christ dwells will, under normal conditions, be aware of that wonderful Presence. However, the Christian is not left to his own misguided feelings and imagination as to the precise manner in which the indwelling Christ will be manifested, it being clearly defined in the Scriptures. For the Christian who is subject to the Word of God, this particular revelation serves a two-fold purpose: it protects against the assumption that fleshly emotionalism is of God -- a belief far too prevalent at the present time -- and sets a standard of spiritual reality toward which all who are saved should ceaselessly strive.

It is obvious that an unsaved person, be he ever so faithful in outward conformity to religious practise, will never manifest the life which is Christ. In like manner, the carnal Christian is abnormal to the extent that he can in no way with accuracy prove his salvation by his experience; for all normal Christian experience (but never the imparted divine life) is limited, if not dissipated, by that which is carnal (1 Cor. 3:1-4). It should be recognized that a carnal Christian is as perfectly saved as the spiritual Christian; for no experience, or merit, or service can form any part of the grounds of salvation. Though but "a babe" he is, nevertheless, in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). His obligation toward God is not one of the exercise of saving faith, but rather one of adjustment to the mind and will of God. It is of fundamental importance to understand that a normal Christian experience is vouchsafed only to those who are Spirit-filled.

The manifestations of the indwelling Christ which are mentioned in the Scriptures are:

1. The Knowledge of God as Father.

In Matthew 11:27 it is declared that no one knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. It is one thing to know about God, which, experience is possible to the unregenerate; but quite another thing to know God, which can be realized only as the Son reveals Him, "And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God" (John 17:3). Fellowship with the Father and with the Son is known only by those who "walk in the light" (1 John 1:6). A normal Christian experience includes, therefore, a personal appreciation of the Fatherhood of God.

2. A New Reality in Prayer.

Prayer assumes a very large place in the experience of the spiritual Christian. It becomes increasingly his most vital resource. By the indwelling Spirit the believer offers praise and thanksgiving (Eph. 5:18, 19), and by the Spirit he is enabled to pray according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26, 27; Jude 1:20). It is reasonable to believe, also, that since Christ's ministry both on earth and in Heaven was and is so much one of prayer, the one in whom He dwells will if normal be moved to prayer.

3. A New Ability to Understand the Scriptures.

According to the promise of Christ, the child of God will understand through the Spirit the things of Christ, the things of the Father, and things to come (John 16:12-15). On the Emmaus road Christ opened the Scriptures to His hearers (Luke 24:32) and their hearts to the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). Such an experience, though so wonderful, is not designed alone for favored Christians; it is the normal experience of all who are right with God (1 John 2:27), since it is a natural manifestation of the indwelling Christ.

4. A New Sense of the Sinfulness of Sin.

As water removes that which is foreign and unclean (Ezk. 36:25; John 3:5; Titus 3:5, 6; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 John 5:6-8), so the Word of God displaces all human conceptions and implants those ideals which are of God (Psa. 119:11), and by the action of the Word of God as applied by the Spirit the divine estimate of sin displaces the human estimate. It is impossible that the sinless Christ who, on becoming a sin offering, sweat drops of blood, should not, when free to manifest His presence, create a new sense of the sinfulness of sin in the one in whom He dwells.

5. A New Love for the Unsaved.

The fact that Christ has died for all men (2 Cor. 5:12) is the grounds upon which the Apostle Paul could say "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). Apart from all earthly distinctions, men were seen by his spiritual eyes only as souls for whom Christ had died. Likewise, for the lost he ceased not to pray (Rom. 10:1), to strive (Rom. 15:20) and for them he was willing to be "accursed from Christ" (Rom. 9:1-3). As a result of the divine presence in the heart the divine compassion should be experienced by every Spirit-filled believer (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22).

6. A New Love for the Saved.

In 1 John 3:14, love for the brethren is made an absolute test of personal salvation. This is reasonable, since by the regenerating work of the Spirit the believer is brought into a new kinship in the household and family of God, wherein alone the true Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man exist. The fact that the same divine Presence indwells two individuals relates them vitally and anticipates a corresponding bond of devotion. The Christian's love one for the other is therefore made the insignia of true discipleship (John 13:34, 35), and this affection is the normal experience of all who are born of God.

7. A Manifestation of the Character of Christ.

The believer's subjective experiences which are due to the unhindered divine Presence in the heart are indicated in nine words: "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22, 23), and each word represents a flood tide of reality on the plane of the limitless character of God.

This is the life which Christ lived (John 13:34; 15:11; 14:27); it is the life which is Christ-like (Phil. 2:5-7), and it is the life which is Christ (Phil. 1:21). Since these graces are wrought by the Spirit who indwells every believer, this experience is provided for all.

8. A Consciousness of Salvation through Faith in Christ.

Saving faith in Christ is also a definite experience. The Apostle related of himself, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). A personal reliance upon a Saviour is so definite an act of the will and attitude of the mind that one could hardly be deceived regarding it. But it is the purpose of God that the normal Christian shall be assured in his own heart that he is accepted of God. To the spiritual Christian the Spirit beareth witness that he is a son of God (Rom. 8:16). Similarly, having trusted in Christ, the believer will have no more the consciousness of condemnation because of sin (Heb. 10:2; Rom. 8:1; John 3:18; 5:24). This does not imply that the Christian will not be conscious of the sin which he commits; it rather has to do with a consciousness of an eternal acceptance with God through Christ (Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:13), which is the portion of all who believe.

In concluding the enumeration of the essential elements of a true Christian experience, it should again be stated that mere fleshly emotionalism is excluded, and that the experience of the believer will be normal only as he is "walking in the light" (1 John 1:6).

II. THE VERACITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Above and beyond all that the believer may experience -- which experience is too often indefinite and overshadowed because of carnality -- there is given the abiding evidence of the dependable Word of God. In addressing believers the Apostle John states, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). By this passage assurance is given to every believer, carnal or spiritual alike, that they may know that they have eternal life. This assurance is made to rest, not on a changeable experience, but upon the things which are written in the unchangeable Word of God (Matt. 24:35; Psa. 119:89, 160; Matt. 5:18; 1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

The written promises of God are as a title deed (John 6:37; 5:24; 3:16, 36; Rom. 1:16; 3:22, 26; 10:13; Acts 16:31) which challenge confidence. These promises of salvation form the unconditional covenant of God under grace and call for no human merit, nor are they proven to be true through any human experience. These mighty realities are to be reckoned as accomplished on no other ground than the veracity of God. God hath spoken. It becomes man to believe, and all lack of assurance concerning personal salvation will be found to be due to one or the other of two forms of unbelief:

1. Doubting One's Own Committal.

Multitudes are in no way certain that they ever have had a personal transaction with Christ regarding their own salvation. And while it is non-essential that one should know the day and the hour of his decision, it is imperative that he should know that he is now trusting Christ without reference to the time it began. The Apostle states that he is persuaded that God is able to keep (Lit., guard his deposit) that which he had committed unto Him (2 Tim. 1:12). Obviously the cure for any uncertainty as to one's acceptance of Christ is to receive Christ now, reckoning that no self-merit or religious works are of value -- Christ alone can save.

2. Doubting the Faithfulness of God.

Others who lack assurance of their own salvation do so because they, though having come to Christ, are not sure that He has kept His word and received them. This state of mind is usually caused by looking for a change in their feelings rather than looking to the faithfulness of Christ. Feelings and experiences have their place; but, as before stated, the final evidence of personal salvation, which is unchanged by these, is the truthfulness of God. What He has said, He will do, and it is not pious or commendable to distrust one's salvation after having definitely cast one's self upon Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. State the difference between the doctrine of Security and that of Assurance.
2. State the lines of Biblical assurance.
3. What one aspect of salvation is made the test of the believer's experience?
4. Wherein may this experience fail or be misleading?
5. Prove that a carnal Christian is saved and safe in Christ.
6. State the meaning of Matthew 11:27.
7. How might the indwelling Christ inspire the believer to pray?
8. State the normal effect of the indwelling Christ on the believer's knowledge of the Scriptures, upon his sense of sin, and his love for the unsaved.
9. a. On what basis is 1 John 3:14 a reasonable test of a real Christian experience?
b. Why is it reasonable to expect Christ-likeness in the believer?
10. What passages indicate that a spiritual Christian will be conscious of his acceptance with God?
11. Is a normal Christian experience essential to salvation?
12. On what certainty does assurance rest apart from experience?
13. What should one do who doubts his own trust in Christ?
14. What should one do who doubts Christ's promise to receive even after having trusted Him?