

Assurance of Salvation

The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification – Direction 10

Direction 10: That we may be prepared by the comforts of the gospel to perform sincerely the duties of the law, we must get some assurance of our salvation in that very faith by which Christ Himself is received into our hearts. Therefore, we must endeavor to believe on Christ confidently, persuading and assuring ourselves, in the act of believing, that God freely gives to us an interest in Christ and His salvation, according to His gracious promise.

Thesis: Believe on Christ for assurance of salvation.

Introduction: You cannot receive the comforts of the gospel without assurance of your salvation. Since it is necessary to receive the comforts of the gospel in order to practice holiness, it is necessary for you to receive the assurance in order to practice holiness.

I. Objections to Assurance.

- A. Some say that assurance cannot come until the fruit of faith is borne following profound self-examination. Those who believe this confuse natural human doubt with lack of assurance.
- B. Others say that it destroys one's self-examination and brings forth the fruit of pride and arrogance.
- C. These same people claim that assurance of salvation causes carelessness of devotion and encourages licentiousness.
- D. "...this makes them commend doubtfulness of our salvation, as necessary to maintain in us humility, religious fears, watchfulness, much searching and trying our spiritual state and ways, diligence in good works and all devotion."

II. The Nature of Assurance.

- A. This does not breed presumption because the emphasis is on God's gift of Christ to us, and encourages us to come to him rather than look to ourselves.
 1. This assurance is part of the "reflex action of faith."
 2. We strive to live holy to live up to it.
- B. We will not enjoy this assurance until we first see our own sinfulness and misery and cast ourselves on Christ's righteousness and strength.
 1. This carries with it a hunger and thirst for sanctifying as well as justifying grace.
 2. "The faith by which we receive Christ must have in it, not only a persuasion of happiness, but these and the like good qualifications that will make it a most holy faith."
 3. A faith with these qualifications will not give birth to pride but humility and self-loathing. It will cause us to glory in Christ and have no confidence in the flesh.
 4. "It will not destroy religious fear and breed carnal security; but rather it will make us fear going aside from Christ our only refuge and security and walking after the flesh."
- C. Assurance is not inconsistent with doubt. In other words, one can have assurance and still have doubts.
 1. In the best saints there is still flesh and spirit (Gal 5:17) and the law of our members is at war with the law of our minds (Rom. 7:23).

2. The most believing among us can ask “Lord, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24) and the apostle Paul praises the Thessalonians for having great assurance which implies that there is a lesser degree of assurance to be had.
3. Peter’s walking on the water is a good example of this: he had faith, that is why he walked on the water, but he had doubt, too, or he wouldn’t have sunk.
4. *A believer may be sometimes so overwhelmed with doubtings that he may not be able to perceive an assurance in himself. He is so far from knowing his place in heaven already that he will say that he does not know any assurance that he has of being there, and needs diligent self-examination to find it out.*
5. *Yet, if at that time he can blame his soul for doubting, ‘Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him’ (Ps. 42:11); if he can condemn his doubtings as sinful, and say with himself, ‘This is my infirmity’ (Ps. 77:10), these doubtings are of the flesh, and of the devil;*
6. *if he still endeavour to call God ‘Father’, and complain to Him that he doubts whether He is his Father, and pray that God will give him the assurance of His fatherly love, which he is not sensible of, and dispel those fears and doubtings; I say, that such a one has some true assurance, though he must strive to grow to a higher degree, for, if he were not persuaded of the truth of the love of God towards him, he could not rationally condemn his fears and doubts concerning it as sinful; neither could he rationally pray to God as his Father, or that God would assure him of that love that he does not think to be true.*

D. We cannot be assured in our faith until we believe that we belong to Christ.

1. “...we are bound by the command of God thus to assure ourselves, and the Scripture sufficiently warrants us that we should not deceive ourselves [by] believing a lie but, according to our faith, so shall it be to us (Matt. 9:29).”
2. “...we must work it out in ourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and in this way we bring our own thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”
3. “He only can make good that promise: ‘What ever things you desire, when you pray; believe that you receive them, and you shall have them’ (Mark 11:24). [...] this faith is due to God only and greatly redounds to His glory.”
4. “The faith of miracles gives us some light in this matter. Christ assured them on whom they were wrought, and who had power given them of working them, that the miracles should be wrought, if they believed without doubting of the event (Mark 11:22, 23).”

III. The Necessity of Assurance.

- A. This assurance of salvation is implied in the description before given of that faith by which we receive Christ and His salvation into our hearts.
- B. Several places of Scripture declare positively and expressly that we are to be assured of our salvation in that faith by which we are justified and saved.
 1. Hebrews 10:8, 22; 11:1; 3:6, 14
 2. Romans 4:18, 19, 23, 24
 3. James 1:6-7
 4. Mark 11:24

5. “More places of Scripture might be alleged to the same purpose, but these are sufficient to evince that we are bound to assure ourselves of our salvation in faith itself, or else we are never likely to enjoy it; and that it is not humility, but rather proud disobedience, to live in a state of mere suspense and doubtfulness concerning our salvation; and that this assurance must be in the direct act of faith by which we are justified and saved.”
- C. God gives us sufficient ground in Scripture to come to Christ with confident faith at the very first, trusting assuredly that Christ and His salvation shall be given to us, without any failing and delay, however vile and sinful our condition has been before.
1. Acts 2:39; 3:26
 2. Rom. 10:11, 12
 3. John 3:14 -16
 4. John 7:37, 39
 5. Acts 16:31
 6. Jer. 3:4
 7. Hos. 2:23
 8. Isa. 30:15
 9. 1 John 5:10, 11
 10. The example of Israel in the wilderness is appropriate here (Heb. 4:1, 11).
- D. The professors of true godliness that we read of through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament commonly professed their assurance and persuasion of their interest in God and His salvation, and were directed by the Word of God so to do, and true saints had still some true assurance of it.
1. Old Testament examples:
 - a. Moses (Exod. 15:2)
 - b. Ps. 106:12
 - c. Psalms 23, 27, 44 and 46.
 - d. We have a great cloud of witnesses gathered out of the whole history of the Old Testament (Heb. 11) who did, and suffered and obtained great things by faith, whose examples are produced on purpose that we follow them in believing to the saving of our souls (Heb. 10:39).
 - e. I confess we read several times of the fears and doubtings of the saints under the Old Testament; but we read also how they themselves condemned them as contrary to faith, as in the Psalms (Ps. 42:11, 31:22; 78:7, 10).
 - f. The most mournful psalm in Scripture begins with an expression of some assurance (Ps. 88:1).
 2. New testament examples:
 3. Paul could prove to primitive Christians, by appeals to their own experience, that they were the ‘children and heirs of God, because they had not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, by which they cry, Abba, Father.

4. The Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirits [or, bears our spirits witness] (Rom. 8:1), 'that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs' (Rom. 8:15 -17; Gal. 4:6).
5. And the apostle tells the Ephesians that after they believed 'the were sealed with the Holy Spirit, which was the earnest of their inheritance' (Eph. 1:13 , 14), that is, they were sealed from the same time that they believed, for the original words are in the same tense.
6. If this witness, seal and earnest of the Spirit had not been ordinary to believers, it would not have been sufficient to prove that they were the children of God, and such manner of arguing might have driven some to despair that wanted this witness, seal and earnest.
 - ...the Spirit works this in us by giving us saving faith itself, by the direct act of which all true believers are enabled to trust assuredly on Christ for the enjoyment of the adoption of children; and all His salvation, according to the free promise of God, and to call God Father, without reflecting on any good qualifications in themselves, for the Spirit is received by the direct act of faith (Gal. 3:2); and so He is the Spirit of adoption and comfort to all that receive Him.
7. There are several other evidences to show that believers generally were persuaded of their salvation in the apostles' time.
 - a. They loved and waited for the coming of Christ to judge the world (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:8).
 - b. They loved all the saints for the hope that was laid up for them in heaven (Col. 1:3-5).
 - c. The Corinthians, that were very carnal and but babes in Christ, were persuaded that they should judge the world and angels, and that their bodies were members of Christ and the temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:2, 3, 15, 19).
 - d. The very first coming of the gospel to the Thessalonians was 'in the Holy Ghost', and 'much assurance', so 'that they received it in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost,' when as yet they had no considerable time to get assurance by reflecting on their good qualifications (1 Thess. 1:5, 6).
 - e. Likewise, the believing Hebrews, when they were illuminated at their first conversion, 'took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance,' and this was their confidence, which they were not to cast off, because the just lives by faith.
 - f. And therefore it appears that this confidence belongs necessarily to justifying saving faith (Heb. 10:34 , 35, 38).
- E. The chief office of faith is to receive Christ and his salvation, which cannot be done unless we are persuaded we have enjoyment of him.
- F. Faith also serves to purify our hearts and enable us to walk in the practice of holiness by Christ's grace with Christ living in us. The Spirit cannot perform this without our being assured of our salvation.
- G. The contrary doctrine, which excludes assurance out of the nature of saving faith, brings forth many evil fruits.

1. It leads to false practices to assure oneself of salvation
2. It breeds arrogance.
3. It refuses to see the depth of our sin in an attempt to convince ourselves we are Christians.
4. Some true believers will not pray, calling God “Father,” or take the Lord’s Supper or perform other good works because they are uncertain of their standing before the Lord and so do not enjoy their salvation s God intended.

Conclusion:

Though true believers have some assurance of salvation in saving faith itself, yet it is much weakened in many by this contrary doctrine and assaulted with many doubtings.

Thus many believers walk heavily in the bitterness of their souls, conflicting with fears and doubtings all their days. And this is the cause that they have so little courage and fervency of spirit in the ways of God, and that they so much mind earthly things, and are so afraid of sufferings and death; and if they get some assurance by the reflex act of faith, they often soon lose it again by sins and temptations.

The way to avoid these evils is to get your assurance, and to maintain it, and renew it upon all occasions by the direct act of faith, by trusting assuredly on the name of the Lord, and staying yourself on your God, when you walk in darkness, and see no light in any of your own qualifications (Isa. 50:10). I doubt not but the experience of choice Christians will bear witness to this truth.