

WHY WE STRUGGLE WITH ASSURANCE

Various Scripture

Tonight, as we consider our time together, I want to sort of “piggy back” upon last week’s article on the topic of *Adoption*. If you will remember, adoption is *the legal process whereby a family brings a child (born to a different family) into their home and makes that child their own*. From a human standpoint, we understand adoption because many of us know someone who has gone through the process. In the same way, the Bible makes clear that God adopts us as His own children when we accept Christ as our Savior. Not only are we made citizens of God’s Kingdom, we are made heirs *with Christ*. No longer are we slaves to sin; we are now children of God with all the advantages and privileges afforded by the Father. We are promised eternal life, holy righteousness, a holy city, and full access to Him. Because of Christ Jesus’s work on the cross, we are adopted by God the Father and given privileges that we never deserved.

Adoption is a tremendous teaching of the Bible. It is a doctrine that provides eternal encouragement because once God has adopted us, we will never be abandoned by Him. The problem believers sometimes have, however, is the struggle with their assurance that God really has adopted them. That is what I want to look at in this article. Really, I envision this to be a two or three part series, and my goal is to help us gain the utmost confidence that God has certainly adopted us and given us the great assurance that we are His children.

Let’s begin our series with this question: *Why Do We sometimes struggle with our Assurance?* That is my topic for this article. Next week we will look at the subject of *“How we can grow in our assurance.”* I start with the question of “Why” because it tends to be a foundation upon which we can build our confidence. Frankly, believers struggle with assurance for different reasons. Some go through seasons of dryness. Some go through seasons spiritual confusion as they grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Others endure battles mental doubt while their soul remains steadfast. So today, let’s consider some reasons the Bible gives as to why our assurance of salvation may waffle.

The first consideration is *Unbelief*. In Matthew 7 we read the conclusion of the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. In verse 21, Christ says, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”*²² *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*²³ *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

Did you catch that? These people are religious. They are actively religious. They are miraculously religious. Yet in all of their religiosity, they are lost. Christ says of them, “I never knew you.” It wasn’t that He did not know their name, their date of birth, or even the numbers of hair on their head because being God, He is omniscient. His lack of knowledge reflects a lack of relationship. He did not know them and they did not know Him in a relational way. They were religious but lost.

It is the Holy Spirit that convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgement (Jn 16:7-8). In John 6:44, we are told that the Father draws (literally drags) all who come to Christ. Further, Romans 10:13 tells us that *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* Yet salvation is not based upon what *we do*, but upon what *Christ has done*. He alone purchased our redemption, and to Him alone, we come for saving grace. This is a topic that could stand alone as a separate article, but the point is this: *Sometimes religious people struggle with the assurance of their salvation because they are not saved*. There is a root of unbelief that still exists in their heart, and for such people, they must put their faith in Christ alone in order to be saved.

Second, we should note that we sometimes struggle with our assurance on account of our own *Sin*. Think of David’s sin with Bathsheba and the circumstances that followed. We have two psalms (32, 51) that give us insight to David’s life during that time. In Psalm 32:3, he says, *“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.”* Ever had that feeling as you withered under the weight of known sin? It is miserable, and the point is clear that if we try to live under the sustained condemnation of a guilty conscience, spiritual leanness will be ours. And though it is not always the case, in such times of living in sin, it is very possible to have your assurance waffle and wane.

Third, sometimes people struggle with their assurance because of *Immaturity*. In 2 Peter 1, Peter tells his readers to give diligence to make their calling and election sure (v10). That is accomplished by adding to our saving faith seven characteristics of the sanctification process (v5-7). Peter goes on to say in v8, "*If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ⁹ But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*" In short, for the one who is not growing in his faith but remains spiritually immature, he will struggle with his salvation. He will regularly question if God heard him when he confessed and believed. He will question whether he said the right words. He will lack assurance and regularly question his salvation.

Fourth, we should note that sometimes people struggle with their salvation assurance on account of *Divine Allowance*. I will point to two accounts in Scripture to illustrate my point. First, Job was a righteous man who suffered great trial and vexation of soul on account of God's permissive will. Before Satan could ever lay a finger upon Job, he had to ask his Creator God for permission, and upon its granting, Job suffered. Part of that suffering caused Job to waver in his assurance as he questioned God. Second, I would point to Hebrews 12. After the great chapter illustrating those who lived by faith, we are admonished to "*look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*" (v2). The writer uses Christ's agony at the hands of sinners to admonish us to persevere in our own trials and afflictions. He then points to the Lord's chastening of His children to perfect them and make them more righteous (v5-11). Hebrews 12 neatly ties into the story of Job as we see that at the end of his trial, even Job was made more righteous; more holy; more like God. We don't always know why; we don't always understand; but we can always trust our gracious God who works all things out to our good that makes us more like Christ. Sometimes we struggle with our assurance as we go through affliction that is a direct result of the Divine Allowance of God.

Finally, I would note that our assurance is sometimes vulnerable on account of our *Circumstances*. This is closely tied to Divine Allowance, but it is different. We know that God allowed Job to suffer. We know that God sometimes chastens us. But sometimes we suffer simply because we live in a sin-cursed, God-hating world. I will point to John the Baptist as my number one example. John was hardy. He did not seem to care what men thought of him as he wore strange clothes, ate strange food, and openly called the religious rulers "vipers" (Mt 3:1-7). He even condemned the adulterous relationship of Herod and Herodias (his brother's wife) even though it landed him in jail. Think on that: John was preaching righteous living and he ended up in the dank, dark, rat-infested dungeon of Herod's palace. Because of what we know about John, one would think that if anyone could be sustained in that hole, it would be John. However, both Matthew 11 and Mark 6 record the actions of John who sent his disciples to ask the Lord Jesus if He truly was the long sought for Messiah. Just months ago, it was John who proclaimed with great confidence, "*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*" (Jn 1:29). Yet in the prison, he is so rattled, so confused, that he now doubts what he once tenaciously believed. His assurance almost seems as broken as he is. The lesson is plain: sometimes, through no fault of our own, our circumstances can cause us to doubt to the point where we question our salvation. The amount of rest we have received (or been deprived of) is another detriment to our mental assurance. The constant medical issues we daily endure can also rob us of our confidence that God's control, His goodness, and even His ability to save. We live in a sin-cursed world, and as such, we must be careful not to let our circumstances affect our love for and confidence in the Lord's working out His glory for our good in our daily lives. We are pilgrims looking for a better home with no sin and no suffering. But until that day comes, we persevere, and we strive to see Him as we bear up under the weights of daily living.

There are many more reasons we could list as to why people struggle with their assurance of their salvation. However, as we continue to grow in grace, may the Lord help us to be a people who serve Him with confidence. Yet, in seasons of dryness, in seasons of confusion, in seasons of duress, may we search our hearts for and confess any sin. May we serve Him with complete confidence, knowing that He is making us more like His beautiful son, our Lord Jesus Christ.