

HOW GROW YOUR ASSURANCE

2 Pt 1:5-10

Tonight, as we consider our time together, I want to continue our discussion on assurance. Last week I wrote on the topic of why we sometimes waver in our assurance, and today I want to speak on "How to Grow our Assurance." Really, this subject is one that is not often addressed, but it is vital to our spiritual wellbeing. Many believers have been almost paralyzed in their spiritual walk, their gospel outreach, and/or their faithfulness to the Lord's service simply because they have no confidence in the supernatural work of God's in salvation. The battle is often in their mind, but it brings about vexation in their soul. That sense of spiritual agitation is captured in 2 Peter 1:8-9 as Peter describes two types of people: one who is growing in his knowledge of Christ and one who is not. For the one who is growing, he is spiritually stable while the other is spiritually discouraged. Peter calls the one who is discouraged "blind" (near sighted). Such a person, he says, lives in a perpetual state of discouragement because he perpetually wavers over the forgiveness that Christ has given him. In short, such people have no assurance of their salvation. Helping believers grown in the grace and knowledge of Christ is the heartbeat of Peter's message, and it is my goal to help us grow in our assurance of salvation as well. As we turn our eyes upon Jesus and see His sacrificial love for us, our souls are healed and our minds begin to rest.

In his lecture series on Assurance, Joel Beeke gives four major disciplines the Puritans regularly taught that believers need in order to grow their assurance. It is these four disciplines that we will look at in this article.

First, the Puritans taught that we grow in our assurance as we spend time in God's Word. Again, it was Peter who taught his scattered congregation to "*lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ²As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby* (1Pt 2:1-2). His illustration is quite simple, but quite clear. Just like all newborns must have milk in order to survive, so must God's children survive on the unchangeable Word of God.

Scripture is replete with warning and admonitions regarding the need for us to know our Bible. Let me give three:

- >In Psalm 119:11, the writer exclaims, "*Thy Word have I had in my heart that I might not sin against [God].*"
- >James tells us to "*be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" (Jms 1:22-25).
- >Similarly, Christ says that there are two types of people who listen to His "Sermon on the Mount." One implements what he hears into his life, and will be like a house built upon a solid foundation that can withstand the tempestuous ordeals of life. The other ignores what he hears and will be like a house with no foundation. It will look good for a while, but when the storms of life descend, it will be destroyed. (Mt 7:24-27)

I could go on, but the point is made that if the believer is to gain and maintain assurance in Christ, the foundational source of that assurance can only be the Word of God. Spurgeon once said, "Backsliders begin with dusty Bibles, and they end with filthy garments." It was D.L. Moody that said, "The Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible."

A second discipline the Puritans taught that believers need in order to grow their assurance is *Meditation*. Meditation can be defined as "serious thought about a subject that produces application." In his book, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation*, David Saxton says that Bible meditation is "a key aspect for godly renewing of the mind. It is...used as a primary means to comfort and encourage Christian perseverance" (pg29). The Puritans saw multiple benefits that meditation brings to the soul. They said that it prevents vain and sinful thoughts; it serves as a tool that provides inner resources by which we can draw; it serves as a weapon against temptation; it provides relief in afflictions; and it glorifies God.

In Psalm 1, the man who is blessed by God meditates upon His Word. In Psalm 8, David "*considers* [ponders, meditates upon] *the heavens*" and wonders, "*What is man that thou art mindful of him.*" In Psalm 139, the psalmist meditates

upon God's omniscience, His omnipresence, His creative wisdom, and His loving care and then concludes "*Search me O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (v23-24).

Meditation is thought for application. It applies what has been read and prayed over. It shares with others what you are learning, and it pursues holy living.

A third discipline the Puritans taught that believers need in order to grow their assurance was the regular participation in the Ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Obviously, we are only baptized once as we identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, yet some are fearful of this step of obedient faith. Baptism is a public testimony of a right relationship with God. It does not save us, but it serves as an outward sign of an inward change, and numerous Scripture passages indicate that we are to be baptized after our salvation (Mt 28:19; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:12, 36; Acts 10:47; Acts 16:33; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12).

When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we are to regularly participate in it. It is a time to consider the significance of Lord's broken body and shed blood. It is time to consider what it took to save us from our sin. The Lord's supper is a time for us to consider our own actions and words in search of any besetting sin. It is a time for us to repent and forsake such sin in order to maintain a clean conscience and a right relationship with God. Yet for those who love their sin more than they love God, they often find that their souls are vexed, and many have no assurance of their salvation.

The ordinances do not save us. They merely make public profession and confession of a right relationship with God, and regular participation in them commends our souls to great assurance of saving faith.

Finally, the Puritans taught that believers grow in their assurance with regular Prayer. Joel Beeke tells the story of his father sitting him down to ask, "What is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever." His dad said, "Believers have somewhere to go." Think on that for a moment. Believers are pilgrims who look forward to a home in heaven. But beyond the future horizon, believers have a place to go right now...at this moment. Hebrews 4:15-16 tell us that our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus, has made it possible for us to boldly approach God the Father to find mercy, grace, and help in our time of need. Peter tells us that we can cast all of our care upon Him because He cares for us (1Pt 5:7). Prayer is an integral part of our Bible, providing example after example of how we can cry out to our loving heavenly Father who personally makes Himself available to us.

In the end, there is nothing like great assurance of salvation within the soul. Anxious souls produce mentally exhausted minds as well as spiritually paralyzed believers. Yet as we dig deep into the comforts of Scripture, and as we give ourselves to meditation, prayer, and the ordinances, we will find great strength to do spiritual battle. We will find great ability to grow to be like the Lord. We will find great contentment in what Christ has accomplished for us in giving us peace with God. May we be a people who regularly enjoy the blessing of these four disciplines as we grow in our confident assurance of Christ's salvation.