

“Where Does Assurance Rest for The Believer?”

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1-5)

Christians, perhaps more often, new believers, struggle with assurance. Maybe that's you, or someone you know. It's not unusual to see born again children in Christ wondering whether they are genuinely in the family at all. And there's a reason for that.

In short, Christian assurance takes time. Assurance is the work of the Spirit in His ministry to the believer. It is His gift, but it is also part of His development for each believer.

That's not to say that *conversion* takes time. Absolutely not. The Spirit's supernatural work of regeneration is instantaneous. Have you read the conversion of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), or the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-40)? When God miraculously changes us from lost sinners into redeemed, born from above, believers, that takes no time at all. No one grows or develops a new heart, a new position as redeemed before the Lord. No one becomes a Child of God by the works that one can do with all the facilities of the body. It is not a reward at the end of a dedicated and sincere life. That work of change from lost to saved is God's work alone and it is instantaneous. (Ezekiel 36:26!).

Once you're converted, *assurance* of your salvation often grows stronger over time. You can tell that something has changed in the present. Now, you love reading your Bible, and you have an opposition, a hate for your sin. But we often measure our present experience with our memory of what we did when we were converted. We're often unsure of our motives, our understanding of sin, of Christ, of the cross. Did we believe enough? Did I understand thoroughly? I still struggle with some of the same sins, was my decision a superficial clean up? Or did Christ do a marvelous miracle that has supernaturally produced what little change I

have experienced? And as one wonders of the salvation time, assurance wavers-up and down.

Part of the problem is the place one is looking to find the assurance the Spirit of God produces. Looking back to see if every aspect of faith and belief, understanding and will, were involved leads to insecurity. Assurance becomes based on my memory of the past. Does anyone have a perfect memory of thoughts and feelings of the past? I don't believe so. Assurance is the present work of the Spirit. He does not work to produce peace in yesterday's experiences. They are past and gone, never to be lived again. He is alive and present and works to produce His work today. He does not produce peace or hope for tomorrow, either. His gifts won't arrive until you need them, until you live in tomorrow. He ministers to you and me in the ever-present, not in the past or in the future. All God's gifts are to be opened and used today.

Therefore, one can always accurately know if one is believing at this moment. Do I love Him, now? Do I trust Him now? Am I on the side of righteousness and opposed to sin in my life? The faith I need to be saved began in the past but it can't be measured until it operates in the present.

When one's present experience is examined, assurance is affirmed and established. Further, down the road of your Christian life, you will be able to look back with utter confidence and peace, no longer pierced by nagging questions. You will develop a mature sense of your assurance. Looking inward and using a memory tainted by the fall are poor and unacceptable resources. The Spirit of God won't use them to establish assurance.

In pastoral ministry, I've watched new Christian's struggle with assurance. When we talk to struggling believers, we often tell them to rest their hopes on past decisions. "If you prayed this prayer," "if you raised your hand," "if you really meant it," we tell them, "Then you're a Christian and nobody can tell you otherwise." But, do you have the right to declare someone is saved who is doubting that they are? Perhaps this doubt they have is the work of the Spirit to cause them to see that they have no New Birth. In an attempt to bring comfort to these dear saints, counselors unwittingly anchor assurance to the shifting sands of a past choice. When that Christian looks in the past for comfort about their salvation, they look back to a decision that they can't be sure was real. So many then, re-dedicate, re-baptize, and re-commit their lives to Christ, because they think assurance is the result of good works, the prayer they prayed, the hand they raised, the sincerity you had. Isn't that what we told them?

What kind of counsel should we give new believers when they wonder about their spiritual state? Paul gives answers in Romans 5:1-5; **Assurance Rests in the Work of Christ for Us.**

God made war on Christ to make peace with you.

All Biblical assurance must be built upon **the Work of Christ on your behalf.** The truth and joy of the Gospel is that our justification is alone in Christ. God's wrath for your sin was directed to His own Son. God ceased war with us and now peace reigns between God and me. Whenever someone becomes a believer, it is because they have *by faith* rested in this truth, that Christ died for every one of our sins, which when we believe, brings us to God (1 Pet 3:18). Their assurance, however, is not in their faith, but in the object of their faith, in the death of Christ on their behalf.

The degree to which one clings solely to the cross, then, is the degree to which one will experience the assurance in it. That restful grip is a work of the Spirit and it grows more firm the more one knows Christ. It takes time to deepen our love for, our understanding of, and trust in the finished work of Christ on Calvary. The more weight the cross bears, the stronger our assurance. And sometimes acknowledging our sins are heavy takes time.

So, when I counsel folks who wonder how to tell whether they are saved, I ask them two questions: 1) Are you resting in the work of Christ for you today? 2) the more they affirm that it is true each day, the more they will cling to the cross, grow in love with Christ, and rejoice to see him confirming His work for and in them.