

Are You a Christian?

Tim Conway | *illbehonest.com*

Tim: ...Christian assurance. And I want to because it seems like I've just been getting a number of questions asked about it lately. I've been receiving emails. And I guess that's what I want to talk about tonight. Assurance. What do we mean when we say that? Christian context - what do we mean by that? Assurance.

(from the room) Assurance of salvation?

Tim: Right. What do we mean? That we can be sure of it. That we can be sure that we're saved. Anybody say it a different way? Know with confidence that we're saved. Anybody say it another way? It's confirmed. There's confidence. There's surety. Evidence - we might say that. Evidence. Assurance has to do with the confidence; a certainty. Ok.

I can tell you this. I've told you folks this before, but I remember when I was first converted. I went to a church: Calvary Bible Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. And in fact, when I was back up there, Ruby and I and the children, we went back and we visited in Kalamazoo, MI. We went to church back there at Calvary in August. When I was first converted and I was in that church, typically at the end of the sermon, they had a sound booth positioned right in the middle of this auditorium. It seated about 1,200 people, had a balcony, a lot of people. They would have a guy in the sound room. And right at the end, you know, he would work this thing up and he would get people where he'd try to get the emotions moving, and the guy would have the sound dial (probably more linear). He would start moving that thing up. So you would have this very enchanting music begin to come in. And he would say, "Just believe. Just believe." And I can remember at those times I would have my eyes wide open. I know I've told this story before. I'd have my eyes wide open and I'd be looking around at all those people.

And of course, I was a product. I was saved in 1990. John MacArthur came out with his book: "The Gospel According to Jesus." I think it was released publicly in '88. So that book was kind of at its prime. He was writing the Gospel according to Jesus as he saw it coming out of the Gospels. God used that book to save me. That book was largely about the necessity of repentance in being converted. It was about the whole Lordship controversy. And of course, there were a lot of people writing against him that were denying the necessity of repentance. Denying that you had to bow the knee to Jesus Christ. They were saying that was adding something to salvation. So here I am, saved right in the heart of that controversy through the materials of John MacArthur. So you know where my bias was. And you can imagine what I was convinced was the truth. And I was convinced of that not just MacArthur said it but because when I went to the Bible, I saw it there.

And so now when this guy is up here saying, "just believe, just believe, just believe," and I'm going to the Sunday school class - the singles Sunday school class in that church, and I got this

girl over here coming to me and talking to me telling me she's sleeping with her boyfriend. And that guy over there, I'm talking to him, and he says he's got a drinking problem. I'm thinking, well, what? You got saved and now once in a while you go back? The guy's getting drunk every day. I got another guy over here, he invites me to his bachelor party. And I'm thinking, wow, this is great. Now it's not going to be like the ones I knew when I was lost. We're going to go over there, probably exhort the guy from the Scriptures. We pull in his yard. There's a keg. And I'm thinking, something is wrong here.

I joined the softball team. There's a guy on the team. His mouth is so filthy and so foul. And I said something to the coach. Isn't that guy supposed to be a Christian? "Well, he's a Christian. He just fell in with a bad crowd." And I got looking at all that and I thought something is wrong here.

They asked me to write an article for the paper. I wrote it about the nature of biblical repentance. They shot it down and would not publish it. Well, now here's this guy in this pulpit every week saying, "Just believe, just believe, just believe." And I wanted to stand up and shout, (and I almost did)... If the Spirit of God had moved upon me a little bit more, I probably would have. But I wanted to shout, "No! It's repent and believe!"

Well, that's basically where my beginnings were. And so, I have been adamant about Lordship. I mean, here I was in the tensions when I was under conviction. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? What's Christ saying there? He's saying unless a man forsakes the whole world, he will lose his own soul. That's what that means. That's the tension I was in. I mean, I've told some of you before, I had "The Gospel According to Jesus" and I had the forty ouncer, and I'm telling you, I was trying to run. I was being drawn, but at the same time I was trying to run. "God, leave me alone!" If you'll just let me enjoy my sin like I used to, I'll get rid of this book. I'll go back. Just let me... But there's this tension, this pulling. And I knew it. It was like in one ear I could hear the devil saying to me, "You can't give up your life. You can't give up that lifestyle. You can't give up those friends. You can't give those things up. All your idols. That's who you are. That's what you're known for. That's your reputation. You don't want to live without that reputation." And I would think, yeah, you're right. And then I would hear that Word: What will it profit you if you gain all that reputation and all those idols and all those things and lose your own soul? And so this battle back and forth... I was birthed into the Kingdom through that. I knew Christ would forgive me if I came to Him. I knew there was rest there. But I knew what He was going to require of me. And when I finally let go, and said, "Lord, help me." He saved me in a moment.

Here's what it seems like happened. You had everybody talking about the carnal Christian heresy. What's the carnal Christian heresy? Well, basically, it goes right along with this whole deal. What is it? Well, it's basically saying this: That there were guys that were actually even responding to MacArthur - you know some of the names. They're out there. Most of them came from Dallas Theological Seminary. They wrote books against MacArthur. Back and forth. They were saying things like this: You could actually at one point in time believe, and because you

made that one-time decision, you could actually fall into all sorts of notorious sins. You could even actually fall eventually into atheism. And I remember MacArthur saying these guys are advocating you can become an unbelieving believer. And he's like what is that?

Exactly. What is that? What in the world is that? And so what happens is trying to put away these errors; trying to put away this idea that you can be a Christian and live any way you want, which is basically a denial of regeneration. That's basically what it is. Because God says if He saves you, He's going to give you a new heart. God says if He saves you, He's going to put His Spirit within you. God says if He saves you, He's going to write that law on your heart. That's what it says. The Scripture says if by the Spirit you don't put to death the deeds of the body, you're going to die. This is a life and death thing. Jesus Christ comes along and He says it's not anybody and everybody that says to Me, "Lord, Lord," that's going to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. He says it's the ones that do the will of My Father in Heaven. Basically, if there is not such a radical transformation in your life that old things pass away, all things become new, and you're a new creation in Christ, keeping the will of the Father, if that's not true about you, you haven't been born again.

I mean, that is where repentance flows from. Repentance flows from a renewed man or woman. It flows from one who is born again; radically transformed by God - by the power of God. And we have undoubtedly in our church and folks like you that gather here for the Bible study, you have embraced these things. I think most of you have. You like these things. But I'll tell you, what I think is happening - now listen to me, Satan is cunning. Oh, he is cunning. There is a text - now listen to this. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 11:3. I'm going to read the ESV. And then I'm going to read the New King James. 2 Corinthians 11:3. By the way, the NAS, the old King James are virtually the same; pretty close to the New King James. So you'll get the flavor there.

Listen to the ESV first. "I am afraid that as the serpent (there's the devil) as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Now the New King James: "I fear lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The reason I wanted to use that one; the NAS, the New King James, the old King James, they all use that word: simplicity.

Listen. There is a simplicity in Christ. What is the craftiness that Paul's worried about? The cunning of the devil? It is to move us away from Christ. And I'll tell you this, if all of a sudden, the movement in the church is to reintroduce and reemphasize repentance, guess what his craftiness will be? Guess where the danger is? He would gladly have us to believe you can be a Christian and live like hell. But ok, if they're not going to buy that, if they're going to move back to Lordship and there's going to be a resurgence of repentance, then let's do this: let's get them so focused on repentance; let's get them so focused on themselves bending the knee to Christ and what that looks like that they're no longer setting their eyes simply on Christ. You see, there is a simplicity in the Gospel. And there is a simplicity in what it is coming to Christ in the beginning. And there is a simplicity of where our strength as a Christian comes from in the

Christian life; in Christ. And Satan will seek to divert us away in his craftiness all the time. Oh, let us go back to repentance. But if he's going to have us go back there then he would have us look away from Christ in the midst of our repentance.

Now, you say, wait a second, I thought you were going to speak on assurance. Oh yeah. Think with me here. You know what? Satan - basically his strategies: keep the lost lost. If somebody is saved, keep them powerless. And you know what? You keep the lost lost when you keep them blind to Christ, and you keep the saved powerless when you keep their eyes off of Christ. How does that relate to assurance? Folks, let me ask you this: Have any of you ever asked a Catholic if they know they're going to heaven? I have. And you know what? Now you may prove me wrong on this, and somebody watching is going to say, "Wait a second! I'm a Catholic and I wouldn't answer that way."

And you know what? That may be. You may find exceptions. But I can tell you this, I've talked to many Catholics and I've asked them this question. And I have never found one answer to the contrary. Do you know you're going to heaven? Do you know what they say? Have you ever asked one? What do they say? I hope so. I've gotten that answer from almost everyone. If not exactly that answer, something that's basically comparable to that answer. I hope so. You know where that comes from? That comes from the top. What do I mean by that? Have you ever heard of the Council of Trent? Basically, many of the Catholic dogmas were asserted or reasserted in that council.

Let me tell you this, Council of Trent; 16th Canon, 6th Session, says this: Now listen to this very carefully: "If anyone saith that he will for certain of an absolute and infallible certainty have the great gift of perseverance unto the end, unless he have learned this by special revelation, let him be anathema." In other words, if you say that you have confidence and assurance of salvation in the end of this life, they say we pronounce our curse of damnation on you. That's what they say. Now, isn't it interesting, they give that exception, "unless he have learned this by special revelation."

Why do you think they added that? I'll tell you why they added it, because it helps them explain somebody like Paul. Because if they can't explain some of the things Paul says about himself they're in real trouble. Like what does Paul say? "I am not ashamed..." 2 Timothy 1:12 "...for I know Whom I have believed and I am convinced (or persuaded) that He is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me." Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me." There is no doubt in that man... that man has assurance. Does he not?

Ok, what is assurance? You want to define assurance? It's that right there. I know Whom I've believed. I am persuaded He is able to keep that which I've committed to Him against that day. I know it. I believe it. I'm persuaded. I know that the Christ Himself loved me and I know He gave Himself for me. Listen folks, that's assurance. That's assurance. The Catholics basically say

you're cursed if you say that you can know that you're going to have eternal life in the end of this with the assurance that Paul has, unless you've had special revelation. And they would basically say yes, Paul has it, and yes, maybe certain select saints - super Christians have been given special revelation.

Listen to this text. 1 John 5:13 The Apostle John says after he gets done writing the first epistle. "I write these things to you who believe..." Not just to those who have special revelation. To every single person who believes. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." Oh, my brothers and sisters, God wants us to know we have eternal life. He's not playing some game with us where He dangles a carrot before our eyes and says, I never want you to be sure that you have it. Brethren, the very Spirit He gave us is a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit speaks to us in ways that resonate within us that we're children of God. What does John say? "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God." Does he say, oh, He wants us to doubt? He wants us to fret? He wants us to worry? He wants us filled with anxiety? He wants us filled with uncertainty? Brethren, He doesn't want that. Why?

Listen. When you lack assurance, what are you doing? (Unintelligible) But if you lack assurance... Look, if we said we lacked faith, I would say you're right on. Lacking faith - faith and assurance are not exactly the same. Because you can have saving faith and lack assurance. You all agree with that right? I mean a person can truly be converted and wrestle with whether or not he's truly saved. So they're not exactly the same. Faith is believing what God has said. It's believing His character. It's believing His promises. Assurance is that confidence that I truly belong to God. I'm truly saved. I'm truly going to receive eternal life at the end of this. And those are two different things. So if I'm lacking assurance, what am I doing?

Now look, a lost person can lack assurance. And a saved person can lack assurance. So think with me here, what is it that whether you're saved or lost if you lack assurance, what are you doing? Totally separate from whether you have saving faith or not. What are you doing when you lack assurance? What is that? (unintelligible) But what is it you're thinking about yourself? (unintelligible) Well, not so much that necessarily.

(from the room): Am I going to heaven?

Tim: Exactly. You're in a quandary. I'm not positive I'm going to heaven. Right? Isn't that what lacking assurance is? I'm not positive that I'm saved. I'm not positive that I've actually had saving faith. I'm not positive if I'm going to go to heaven. I'm not positive if I'm going to go to hell. I'm not positive if I'm one of God's children or not. I'm not positive. I don't have confidence. That's what it is to lack assurance. And to have assurance is to say, yes, I know that I'm one of His. Paul had that assurance. I know Whom I've believed. I'm confident. I know He died for me. I know He loved me. Now listen, assurance, like I said is not faith. A person can have great assurance. These folks in Matthew 7 seem quite certain. "Lord, Lord..." We were there. Many mighty works. Remember all those? Remember the demons we cast out? Remember us

prophesying? And they were pretty confident. Look, you can have assurance and not be saved. There are a lot of people, Christ says, many in that day are going to say to Me... You see the second soil type in the parable of the soils. They receive the Word gladly. There's a time there, they're thinking they're in. They're pretty confident people. They receive these things. There's a confidence there. Trials come and they fall away. But we're speaking about assurance. And of course, I'm wanting us to give consideration to the Christian and assurance. (Incomplete thought)

What are some big indicators that a person - even if they have tremendous confidence, that they're a Christian? What are some big indicators that they're not? They don't desire the Word of God. Fruits. They don't pray. Again, all these things. Fruits. These have to do maybe with the fruits of repentance. Maybe with the fruits of regeneration. And see, we're coming back now, to where I really wanted to go. Folks, let me tell you something. My fear that there's a danger - there's always a danger with everything, and it's missing the simplicity of Christ. The danger is forgetting Christ.

Listen. Think with me here. That as we stress and we stress, and I'm hearing some of you do this, I'm hearing this happen. I'm hearing it in the church. I hear it in this Bible study. I hear you folks when you tell me what you're telling people, when you're out on the streets, and listen, I'm not saying that what you're saying is wrong about repentance and about looking for the fruits; obviously, they're there. Obviously, the great evidences of regeneration need to be true in our lives. But let me tell you this. Why is it that the Catholic doesn't have confidence? Why? I mean, yes, they said it in the Council of Trent, but practically, why do they lack confidence? (unintelligible) They're trusting their works. And what's wrong when you trust your works? (unintelligible) You never know if you've done enough. That's the problem. The problem with works is you never know when you've done enough. If you've ever been part of a religion that is based on works, you never know when you've done enough. And so if you're always looking at your works, you're always looking at yourself. And the problem with looking at yourself is your self is bad. You are bad. By nature, you are bad. By nature, you are full of imperfection. By nature, you fall short of the glory of God. (Incomplete thought)

And you know what? Even whatever religion it is and no matter whatever code they stick up, nobody ever keeps the code of any religion. They always have a standard that even when they bring it down; even when they back off God's Word, nobody ever keeps any of the standards of any of their religions. And so whenever they look at themselves, they are always shaken. They don't know. They don't have confidence because they're always looking at themselves. You know why they don't have confidence? Because they can't say, Jesus Christ perfectly kept the law in my spot. And my acceptance with the living God is not based on my performance. He did it! And you see, as soon as faith turns away from self and our works, you know what happens?

Folks, there's a lot of attention; a lot of emphasis being given with regards to repentance. (incomplete thought) Listen, we've got a lot of people saying; well, let me just tell you what some

people are saying. Let me tell you some emails that I've received. Here's an email. I'm going to read two emails to you that I've just received in the last week or so.

First guy says - and these are shortened versions of actually what I got. First guy says, "I have to confess that I am not so sure I've been genuinely converted. I'm so confused, and I honestly do not have assurance of salvation. Every day is miserable for me. I have no peace, joy, or love. Let me tell you why I'm so confused about my salvation. In the past, I've been more devoted to reading the Word and I truly loved it. I had a prayer life. I felt clean and free. And I knew I was born again. But I've compromised in many ways. If you knew who I used to be, you would say without any doubt that I had a radical change that had occurred in my life. I know I've changed, but now I'm unsure I'm truly saved. I want to be free. I want to have peace with God. I want to rejoice in what God has done for me through Jesus Christ. I want to shout for joy. I want to be a bold witness for Christ. I can't. Oh, I've wrestled with God in prayer. I've begged Him to help me. To set me free. To give me assurance. But I still can't say with joy I'm saved. I want to so badly. If I do say that, I feel like a hypocrite and a liar. I think I've grieved the Holy Spirit. And His manifest presence is no longer in my life."

Here's the second email: "I've been a Christian for over two years but so often I still struggle with assurance which may mean that I'm not truly saved. I have no doubt about the truth of Scripture, about who God is, who Christ is, and that to be saved one must repent and put full trust in Him. (Referring to a particular time in his past, he says...) My entire life was changed. My mom tells me that she remembers the transformation that took place. I remember talking about how God gave me a new heart. Now over the past year, I've been blessed to be under good teaching, and I know all the right answers to the questions that someone would ask concerning how you can know you are saved. (But he says) I can't get assurance from those answers. I look back at my conversion and I can't remember a single moment where I placed my trust in Christ. I know that I must trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of my sins and that I cannot trust even a shred in myself. I know that to be true. I see my sinfulness. I understand my weakness and inability, but I fear that because I didn't understand that then, that I never really put my trust in Christ and just don't know what to do. I don't know if I should seek God for assurance or seek Him to save me. Sometimes, I share the Gospel and I completely forget about my assurance problem. Other times, I'm sitting alone. Tears well up in my eyes because I'm simply not sure if I truly belong to Him. I cannot go living like this. It's so taxing. I don't know if I truly am His. I know all the tests from 1 John. When I hear an exposition of 1 John, and I ask myself, ok, does my life stand the assurance test? I simply cannot place any trust in my own reasoning to answer that question. I fear so immensely for my salvation."

Folks, we've got people running around, and I'll tell you, some of them probably aren't true Christians, but we've got true Christians running around. And you know, they're there and they're just wondering. Does He love me? Does He love me not? Am I in? Am I out? Am I saved? Am I not? Back and forth they go. Brethren, I'll just tell you this. If you don't have assurance, guess what else you don't have? Both these guys hit on it. The first guy said, "every day is miserable for me. I have no peace, joy, or love." The second guy hits on it. (incomplete

thought) He says, "I cannot go on living like this. It is so taxing." Both of these guys hit on no joy. No peace. So taxing. I can't go on living like this. What happens when you lack assurance? You have no what? Joy.

Let me read an Old Testament passage to you from Nehemiah 8:10. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." No assurance. No joy. No joy. No strength. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Brethren, let me tell you something. Confidence makes you brave. You think a person can run headlong into heavy Muslim population where they very well may lose their life and preach the Gospel boldly? If they're there and they're wondering, am I in? Am I out? Does He love me? Does He love me not? Am I the real thing or am I fake? Am I going to go to heaven? Or am I going to go to hell? Am I still in my sin? Am I not? Is my name graven upon His palm? Or is it not? You cannot be brave. You cannot charge off into the world and battle for Christ if you have no assurance. No assurance. No joy. No joy. No strength. No strength. Folks, you've got no boldness. You've got no confidence. You've got to have confidence if you're going to be bold as a lion for Christ. You will not be.

See, folks, you cannot scare a person with assurance with death. You can't. Why? Because they're confident that at the end of this life, there is joy everlasting. There is an eternal weight of glory. You don't scare Christians with that assurance of that joy and that eternal weight of glory with death. But if you're wondering... "I don't know." I may come in here claiming to be a Christian, but if they put me to death, I may go straight to hell. I may not be any better off than them. You don't have boldness to go out on the East side. Well, what if this happens to me? Folks, you don't know if you're a child of God or not, you're trying to protect everything. (incomplete thought)

Folks, what do we say to people like this? And I'll tell you what, we need to be really careful. You know what I'm hearing a lot of times? Well, that person fell into... Look, one of these guys, he's been falling into masturbation. He had such assurance in the beginning. And I'm telling you, we can take all these tests from 1 John, and look, we don't dismiss them. They're valid. Regeneration looks like something. But I'll tell you this folks, if we start keying in on repentance and on the fruits and on all these things that ought to be true of the Christian life, and you're not constantly taking people to the cross; taking people to Christ, you know what? You're going to be tearing down people's assurance. Because there isn't a one of you in this room, truly and genuinely converted, that isn't going to fall into sin and sometimes majorly in your Christian life. And if we're setting up this standard that is unreal; that is not right; that is not biblical... Listen, if you're in Christ, definitely, by the Spirit, you're going to be putting to death the deeds of the body. You will be practicing righteousness. But we have to be confident, folks, of texts like "therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We've got texts in the Scripture. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God Who justifies." We have to be turning our eyes again and again and again back to that cross.

Now look, if people struggle with assurance, and some do, and some do more than others, what we want to do is we want to take them to the cross. We want to take them to passages like this:

Romans 8:34 "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One Who died. More than that, Who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us." Brethren, we are not Catholics! Our performance is not what gets us into Heaven. Our acceptance before God Almighty is based on the perfect work of Christ. Brethren, He came to save sinners. And you are at best in this room a saved sinner. And you are not perfect. And practicing righteousness does not mean perfection. And it doesn't mean that you're not going to fall. And it doesn't mean that even some of the best Christians we read about in the Scriptures didn't have terrible falls. And the way to heal such wounds is to take the balm of Gilead to the hurting Christian. It isn't simply to beat them over the head with a standard of righteousness that is unbiblical and not real. Yes, we come to them and we say, brethren, we want to exhort you. We want to encourage you that you not sin. But if you do sin, you have an Advocate with the Father. Does that sound familiar to us? That comes at us from John. In all of John's tests, in all of 1 John, in all the marks of true Christianity, he says, brethren, I'm telling you this; I'm writing this to you that you might have assurance; that you might know. And I'm writing all this to you that you sin not. And yes, the standard is high. And yes, it's radical when you've been truly born again. And it's going to do something to your life. And your life is going to be affected by the cross of Jesus Christ. And if you truly have a faith in Him, it's going to turn your life upside down.

And he says, brethren, I write to you that you not sin. But he knows... He says if you sin, we have an Advocate. And you see when the devil rushes in and says, "look at you." "You've got all this teaching on repentance. Hey, don't you hear what they're saying? If repentance isn't true in your life; if radical bowing to the Lordship of Christ isn't real; if there isn't some pattern of righteousness in your life, who do you think you are saying you're a Christian?" But you see, if you can say, "devil, you're right... what you say is right. But I can tell you this, I'm not perfect. But I know this, I'm not what I once was. I'm not perfect, and I fall, and I struggle and I fight and I wish I could be perfect, but I know I have desires I didn't have before. And I know I love Christ in a way I didn't before. And my life has been transformed. You're right. I've sinned. I've fallen. But I'll tell you this. I didn't come to Christ in the first place dependent on my works. And I don't stay there now dependent on my works. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Devil, all you're telling me right now all the more assures me that I need to trust Christ and not look at my own life. What you're saying to me only drives me back under His wing."

Brethren, that's got to be so. And I'll tell you this, that's where our assurance comes from. We've got to be running back again and again and again. And I would say this to any of you, you get where you're struggling at a point in life where you're struggling with assurance. I would ask you this: Did you ever have assurance? Because listen, why would I say that? Why would I ask that? The Spirit of God is a Spirit of adoption. By that Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father." [Romans] 8:16 - He bears witness with our spirit. Now listen. Do not grieve the Spirit by which you've been sealed. The Spirit seals us. The Spirit seals. When you sealed a document - if a president puts his seal on something, it's a sign of ownership. The Spirit of God is given. That is a seal. Where the Spirit of God is there are definite evidences.

What's one of the things the Spirit of God does? Bears witness with our spirit. Pours the love of God into our heart. Now listen to me. If that Spirit is resident, that person is going to have assurance at least at some time. Now, it's possible to grieve the Spirit by which you've been sealed. And if you grieve Him, or as 1 Thessalonians 5, quench, then yes, the witness of the Spirit may go silent. If you're a person who has never known the witness of the Spirit, you have never had assurance of your salvation, I don't believe you're saved. By the testimony of the Scriptures. I don't believe that. But if at seasons, you have indeed had it, well, then look, people can have false assurance. There's no question about it. And that definitely needs to be examined.

But I can tell you this, it's definitely as a true Christian possible to have that resident Spirit of adoption by which we cry, "Abba, Father," and at seasons because we've quenched Him or grieved Him, have Him go silent. And so what I would ask: have you had seasons where you've known assurance? And if you tell me yes, then I would ask you, have you done anything in your life to grieve the Spirit? And typically, we know. We've allowed something. The Spirit has prodded us to repent of something that we've resisted. You've allowed some sin or worldliness or idol into your life that you're not repenting of. Brethren, the Spirit bears witness.

Look, I can't tell you about what you've experienced. But I can tell you, I've experienced it. I've experienced it in a way I never experienced it when I was lost. I mean, I never experienced it when I was lost. Look. The witness of the Holy Spirit is different than assurance that's gotten from other things. Like there are people who are certain they're going to go to heaven. Why? Because (have you guys ever come across this?) God healed me. I'm certain everything's ok. We were just talking about this at the campus today at Palo Alto, that many people have an assurance that everything's ok. Why? Because they got sick and God healed them. Because they were in a car accident where they should have been killed and they walked away. You guys have heard things like that?

Listen. The kindness of God is meant to do what? Assure us we're Christians? Is that what the Bible says? Lead you to repentance. Right. The kindness of God is meant to lead you to Christ. Not confirm that you're in Christ. In fact, the fact is that many who are in Christ, don't avert the accident or the sickness or the trial or the tears or the death... in fact, through many tribulations... Why do other people have assurance that's no good? Not based on good foundations. Where does other false assurance come from? Emotions. People feel like they're saved. But why would people feel like they're saved when they're not truly saved? And I'll tell you this, if they're not truly saved, it's not the witness of the Holy Spirit. What is it? Where would emotions come from? Let's go through a list of things. Maybe false teaching, right? People assure you that you're saved when there's really no evidence. How many men are out there telling men they're saved? How many preachers stand in pulpits and say if you say this little prayer, you're saved? Basically if you did this, you're saved. We've got men all over the place telling people that. How about something else? How about people who just get emotionally stirred up? They weep tears. They were greatly affected. And because of bad teaching, again,

they don't understand what true saving faith looks like. They don't understand the nature of biblical repentance, and so they're led to believe (incomplete thought)

Can you think that maybe the devil would try to convince people that they're saved when they're not saved? How? Let me give you an example. We were just talking about this at Mark's. I remember as a Catholic having a dream on Christmas Eve about Mary. And I felt so much assurance and warmth from that dream. I went and visited my Roman Catholic great uncle. A week before I went there to preach the Gospel to him, an angel appeared in his dining room in the middle of the night; lit up the whole house. He said it was the most beautiful creature he ever laid his eyes on. I said, "Uncle Tom, Satan comes as an angel of light." You know when I told that story at church one night, Carlos turned and looked at me and he said, "My parents had the same thing happen." They saw an angel in the doorway of their bedroom in the middle of the night. Listen to me, folks. The devil will seek to give men false assurance. Many different ways. Through false religion. Through various manifestations.

But true assurance - listen to me. The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit. When God Almighty wants to speak to the soul of a man, do you think He's impotent in doing it? He pours the love of God into the heart. How? Well, the Scripture tells us. God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us, for (fuller explanation)... for while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Do you know what the expressions of love are that are poured into the heart of God's people? They're expressions of the love of God as shown through us. In a time of weakness, His Son died for us. (Incomplete thought) Listen. The Spirit bears testimony not as you gaze at yourself.

Brethren, you can gaze at yourself. If we get a church that's gazing on ourselves where the talk is, am I a Christian or am I not a Christian? Well, have you masturbated? Well, is this true? Well, is there that sin in your life? Look, there's a place for practicing righteousness. There's a place for these tests. We need to examine ourselves. Folks, there's no proper examination except looking at the cross. True repentance is, see, so often, (incomplete thought) is missed because what repentance is viewed at is more like, imagine a human scale. Imagine I've got a big human yardstick. And we say, well, am I up here? Am I full of pride? Am I lifted up? Am I high and haughty? Versus, am I low? Am I broken? Am I repentant? And you see, the whole time, we're looking at ourselves. Versus being done with the yardstick and looking at Christ. You see, folks, repentance, so often what happens is just in religion - every human type of religion - what they do is they put the yard stick up and they say you've got to go from here to here. Or from here to here. However you want to look at it. Either from pride to humility or from this low, debauched state to this high moral standard. Whichever way you want to invert it.

But what is it? The whole time you're looking at the yard stick. Where what the Bible says is repentance - true, biblical repentance is throwing that thing away altogether and looking at Christ. And see, when you pull the yard stick back, and now as a Christian - see, the Bible doesn't say, examine yourself and now pull the yard stick back. And look at it again. Well, where am I at on here? That's not the examining of yourself.

If you ever take your eyes off of Christ, I'll tell you this, the Spirit of God came into the world to exalt Christ. Where does the Spirit of God bear witness with our spirit that we're children of God? As we gaze at Christ. Looking to Christ in faith. The love of God is poured abroad in our heart. It's shed abroad when we're looking to Christ. It's shed abroad when we see ourselves as weak, as ungodly, and Christ dying for us. That's where the assurance comes in. It's not looking at our works. (incomplete thought)

You say, well, how do I measure up then? How do I look? How do I do that? If this indeed is true; if there's got to be this radical change, well how can I not see that? Or how can I see that? How can I measure myself against that if I'm not pulling the yard stick back? But you go look at those things. Go look at the biblical yard sticks. And I'll tell you what happens. Yes, there has to be a look at what God has done in my life. There's going to be that evidence of what God has done in my life, but what is basically at the root of the evidence? What is the heart of repentance? It's a turning. It's a turning away from what? It's a turning away from the yard stick. Because what happens, if you look at the yardstick by itself, even as a Christian, what are you doing? You're saying well, am I doing this? Have I lived righteously enough? Have I lived perfectly enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I loved enough? It says if I don't do that - have I done this enough? And you start looking there and you start looking there, and I'll tell you what, the poor Christian is just getting beat up by the law again. They're getting beat up by the standard. They're getting beat up by this thing. And then, suddenly they're floundering around. Am I in? Am I out? Because I have sinned.

Brethren, this is why whenever these standards of Christianity are held out, you look biblically, they are just impacted, they are surrounded, they are encompassed with lookings to Christ. Looking to Christ. The cross of Christ. Do you see what the problem can be folks? Is when we begin to pull these things out of Scripture. And you begin to pull them away. You begin to set up this standard before people. Practice righteousness. Practice righteousness. You fall into this thing of masturbation; you fall into this thing over here, it's practice righteousness; practice righteousness. And we can get to where we're hammering people and hammering people.... We hammer them with holiness. Folks, we're under the New Covenant.

What is the New Covenant? The New Covenant is God saying, "I will forgive their sins." Blessed is the man - blessed is the man, folks, whose transgressions are not held against him. David went in with another man's wife and he killed that man. And he could come before God and say, "Blessed is the man..." Folks, we've got to be there all the time. We've got to be there. I tell you, brethren, don't sin. But if you sin, we have an Advocate. Do you see? We've got to take these letters in their entirety. Yes, you've got Romans 8. Yes, yes, yes. By the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the flesh. But remember how he started that same chapter. There is no condemnation. Remember how he's hitting at this when he gets to v. 33-34, Nobody can bring an accusation against God's elect. There is no condemnation. No one can condemn. It's freeing.

Brethren, I've been hearing a lot about repentance. And I hear some of you guys, and you're hammering it, hammering it, you're hammering it... but folks, we've got to take people to the cross. What we're going to do, if we don't keep taking the brethren to the cross, we're not going to outfit people for the mission field. What we're going to do is we're going to have them wondering: Am I in? Am I out? Does He love me? We've got to take them to the cross. Say your acceptance is here. We know you've fallen into sin. We've fallen there ourselves. We're not advocating a life that is habitual sin. There's got to be victory. There's got to be righteousness, but it is a righteousness that flows out of a life that is constantly resting in the cross.

When I came to Christ in the beginning, yes, there was radical transformation in the beginning, but I fell into some horrible sins in the beginning. My wife fell into some horrible sins in the beginning. And I'll tell you what, in the midst of that, I didn't fall into despair for this reason: Because when Satan would rush in and say, "look at you. You wretch. You think God wants anything to do with you? How could you claim you're saved?" And I could say, "Devil, you can slander me day and night. But I came to Christ in the beginning because I was a wretch. And I know, all I am right now is a saved sinner. And all you're proving to me all the more is I need to run back to Him again. And I'm going to head back there." Folks, we've got to be heading back to the cross. Because that's where our assurance is going to come.

And it's only when we're confident: Yes. I am not accepted by God because of my own works, even as a Christian. I am not accepted because of my own works. And my own failings as a Christian don't sever the way I'm received by the Lord. And I run back there again for healing, for the blood, back again, where I know there is full forgiveness and no condemnation. Back to that cross. Over and over and over. And I set my eyes there. And that Spirit will breathe in such loving expressions of the Father to me as His son - expressions of love, bearing witness, and in those expressions there will be assurance. There will be confidence. Where there is confidence, there will be strength. There will be boldness. We will be bold as lions. We will have a church of lion-hearts. Brave-hearts where there's confidence. Oh, it comes in Christ alone.

That is my word for us tonight. Brethren, go to the cross. Brethren, when you see others struggling, take them to the cross. Don't beat them up, but take them to the healing wounds. Take them. Back again and again. And amen. Any last comments or questions or anything tonight? What will help us look to Christ? Fair question, right? I would say this. (incomplete thought) Look, if my eyes need to be there, then my eyes need to not be on other things. (incomplete thought) We don't have spider eyes. We don't have fly eyes. We don't have compound eyes. I mean, basically, God has designed us - we can basically look in one direction at a time, and maybe that's true spiritually to a great degree as well. We need to set our minds on things above.

Folks, it's very difficult to fix your gaze upon Jesus Christ, when your gaze is on a thousand other things. And so, I realize, there are things we need to give our attention to in life. Gazing on Christ means I'm thinking on Christ. (incomplete thought) Have you ever read Psalm 1? What does that godly man, that righteous man, that upright man of Psalm 1 - what is his relationship

to the Word of God? There's something he does with the Word of God. He meditates on it. Folks, you've got to meditate. You've got to chew. The little, flippant reading of Scripture isn't going to get it. You need to be in the Word long enough, well enough, where you're able to meditate and chew and think. The Spirit of God begins to work and drive those thoughts deep. Go deep with God. I mean, you're not going to go deep with God in the Word; you're not going to go deep with Christ in visions of the cross; you're not going to go deep into those realms of Christianity, where the Spirit of God really breathes, where you just do flippant reading in the Scriptures. You've got to get in there. A lot of you guys listen to sermons. You know what? Sometimes we can get where we can really like a certain kind of sermon. We really like the kind of sermons where we get all beat up. I know in the beginning, I like that. I like sermons that really beat me up, but I tell you what, a lot of times, we need to listen to good sermons that just take us to the cross. And you find a good preacher. Go read some good Spurgeon sermons. When you guys find a good sermon on the cross, begin to recommend it to one another.

I'll tell you this, avoid legalism. Avoid it among yourselves. Avoid it in your own thinking. Don't go to a church that is legalistic. Why? Because legalistic churches set up standards. They set up rules. They press it. Press it. Press it. That's no good. That is not good to assurance. Don't go where they're legalistic. Don't go where there's preaching that hammers law and responsibility and holiness where Christ isn't constantly mixed in. Where Christ isn't central in the singing; central in the preaching.