

The Whole Christ

By Sinclair Ferguson

Lesson 9: The Marrow of Assurance

It is one thing to know that Christ died to save sinners. It is another thing to know and feel that Christ died for me. Can a Christian have _____? Is the lack of assurance clear evidence that one is outside of Christ? Is it possible to be a Christian and not fully feel like it? Is it possible to not be a Christian but to feel like you are one?

“For one thing, it is possible to have false assurance (Matthew 7:21-23) ...It is also possible for a true believer to be harassed with doubts; to be, in words much loved in the days when the Marrow was being penned, ‘A child of light walking in the darkness’ (Isaiah 50:10).”

During the Middle Ages the doctrine of assurance fell on hard times. Even though Christ and the Apostles taught this doctrine, later in the church, some thought that teaching such a doctrine could lead to all sorts of problems _____. Some went so far as to say that when the later Reformers began to again teach the doctrine of assurance that this teaching was the “principle heresy of Protestants”.

“By the dawn of the early Middle Ages...assurance was increasingly regarded as rare, and even, supposing it were possible, undesirable and a potential source of antinomianism.”

Despite what the Medieval church taught; it is possible for Christians to have assurance. However, is assurance necessary for one to be saved? To ask it another way, “Is assurance of the _____ of faith”?

If you doubt that you are in Christ, is that sufficient evidence to prove that you are indeed outside of Christ?

If faith is “A particular persuasion of my heart that Christ Jesus is _____, and that I shall have life and salvation by His means; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, He did it for me”, is it possible to struggle with doubt about this and still have saving faith?

First, let us acknowledge that the above definition of faith is just that, a definition of faith, as it is in its _____. However, do we in this life, experience and possess perfect faith? We could say the same thing of love. Perfect love is described for us in 1 Corinthians 13. Do we love like that? If not, is that a clear evidence that we do not possess the love of God?

We must remember that life in the present, for the believer, is lived in the tension of the already/not yet. We are _____ (holy ones), yet at the same time we struggle with much unholiness. Saving faith, in this life, will never be perfect.

“We say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief.”

Quoting Calvin, we read:

“We ought not to seek any more intimate proof of this than that unbelief is, in all men (who are believers) always mixed with faith...faith is tossed about by various doubts, so that the minds of the godly are rarely at peace—at least they do not always enjoy a peaceful state...experience obviously teaches that until we put off the flesh we attain less than we should like...Our heart especially inclines by its own natural instinct toward unbelief.”

Our own conscience will battle against us. The enemy will battle against us. We will feel the doubt and struggle of faith. However, we must cling to the _____ of God. Christians can also experience comfort by taking time to see the evidence of grace in one’s life. Again quoting Calvin we read,

“We do not forbid him (the Christian) from undergirding and strengthening this faith by signs of the divine benevolence toward him...the grace of good works shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us.”

“We cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety...Believer are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief...He who, struggling with his own weaknesses, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety is already in large part victorious.”

Chapter 2-The Law of Faith (the Covenant of Grace)

Nomista says, “But sir, you see that Christ requires a thirsting, before a man come unto Him, the which, I cannot conceive, cannot be without true repentance.” So, the issue here for Nomista is that he thinks a person must repent, thirst after Christ, _____ he can truly believe and come to Christ.

Evan. Why, then, I tell you truly, you would have him to do that which is impossible. For, first of all godly humiliation, in true penitents, proceeds from the love of God their good Father, and so from the hatred of that sin which was displeased Him; and this cannot be without faith.

Secondly, sorrow and grief for displeasing God by sin, necessarily argue the love of God; and it is impossible we should ever love God, till by faith we know ourselves loved of God.

Third, no man can turn to God, expect he be first turned of God: and after he is turned, he repents...The truth is, a repentant sinner first believes that God will do that which He promiseth, namely, pardon his sin, and take away his iniquity; then he rests in the hope of it; and from that, and for it, he leaves sin, and will forsake his old course because it is displeasing to God; and will do that which is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

Faith always comes before repentance but true saving faith always _____ repentance with it (this is the point that James makes).

Evan. When a man believes the love of God to him in Christ, then he loves God because He loved him first; and that love constrains him to humble himself at the Lord’s footstool, and to acknowledge himself to be less than the least of all His mercies...and then will he also cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the God, having respect unto all God’s commandments.