

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

ASSURANCE

of Grace and Salvation

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Assurance

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I must acknowledge a genuine debt of gratitude to the work of Dr. Charles Hodge. The writings of this theologian from a previous generation have helped considerably in preparing this work. On a number of occasions—as will be seen when reading these studies—I have cited or alluded to Dr. Hodge's remarks in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. These references have been acknowledged in the footnotes to the study text.

Assurance

Contents

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED	i
ASSURANCE	i
Contents	vi
Part 1	1
Synopsis: Assurance of Grace and Salvation	1
Note 1	1
Redemption—the Ground of Assurance	1
Scripture References	1
Note 2	2
Lack of Assurance	2
Scripture References	2
Note 3	3
The Holy Spirit Guarantees Final Redemption	3
Scripture References	3
Note 4	4
The Inheritance of the Saints	4
Scripture References	4
Related Bible Truths	4
Part 2	7
Doctrine of Assurance of Grace and Salvation	7
Blessings of Providence and of Grace	7
(1) Temporal Blessings, or Blessings of Providence	7
(2) Eternal Blessings, or Blessings of Grace	7
The Believer’s Assurance of Salvation	8
Assurance is Founded on God’s Solemn Oath	8
Assurance is Founded on Eternal Redemption	8
Assurance is Not Based on Feelings	9
Assurance is Based on Facts	10
Part 3	11
Bases of Assurance (1)	11
First Basis of Assurance	11
The Testimony of The Bible	11
I Know That My Redeemer Lives	11
They Shall Never Perish	12
Kept by the Power of God	13

Part 4.....	15
Bases of Assurance (2) _____	15
Second Basis of Assurance _____	15
The Substitutionary Work of Christ _____	15
Third Basis of Assurance _____	16
The Believer’s Adoption _____	16
Fourth Basis of Assurance _____	17
The Indwelling Holy Spirit _____	17
Part 5.....	19
Lack of Assurance (1) _____	19
Possible Reasons _____	19
Lack of Assurance (Medical Grounds) _____	19
Side Effects of Prescribed Drugs _____	19
Depression May be Related to Treatment _____	19
Lack of Assurance (Spiritual Grounds) _____	20
Lack of Knowledge of The Bible _____	20
Lack of Sound Teaching _____	20
Lack of Self Discipline _____	20
Lack of Faith _____	21
Part 6.....	23
Lack of Assurance (2) _____	23
Possible Reasons _____	23
Wilful Sin in a Believer’s Life _____	23
Judgment Does Not Involve Loss of Salvation _____	23
Judgment Can Result in Loss of Life _____	24
All God’s Elect Will be Gathered Home _____	24

Part 1

Synopsis: Assurance of Grace and Salvation

The believer's assurance of continuing grace and salvation rests on the promises and faithfulness of God. God has promised to all his people a full and free redemption in Christ Jesus, accompanied by the gift of eternal life. In addition, God promises that all whom he calls to inherit the heavenly kingdom will be kept secure by his almighty power until the day of final redemption. God, who is faithful to all his promises, and whose gifts and calling are irrevocable, has covenanted to bring every regenerated and justified believer into the place his Son has prepared for them in heaven. God cannot change, nor can he prove unfaithful to his word. Therefore, this promise of final redemption cannot fail of accomplishment. This is the believer's assurance in this life, and his certain hope for the life to come.

Note 1

Redemption—the Ground of Assurance

The assurance of salvation and of life eternal should be the experience of every child of God. However, for various reasons, and under differing circumstances, we may lack this assurance. At times, we may even doubt the reality of our salvation. Nevertheless, if we possess the indwelling Holy Spirit, then we are the children of God. As such, our temporary lack of assurance in no way diminishes from the fact that God will keep us secure in Christ until he has completed our salvation in glory. Our *conviction* of our assurance may vary with our personal experiences. Even so, the *ground* of our assurance—namely, the redemption secured by Christ on our behalf—makes the reality of our final redemption absolutely certain. (2 Cor. 4:7–5:9; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 John 5:11-13)

Scripture References

2 Corinthians 4:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us* with you. (See vv.13-15)

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

⁽¹⁶⁾ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. ⁽¹⁷⁾ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; ⁽¹⁸⁾ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:1-3

⁽¹⁾ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ⁽²⁾ For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: ⁽³⁾ If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (See v.4)

2 Corinthians 5:5-8

⁽⁵⁾ Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

⁽⁶⁾ Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁽⁷⁾ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁽⁸⁾ We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (See vv.9-10; cf. vv. 6,8 with Phil. 1:23)

2 Timothy 4:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. (See vv.14-17)

1 John 5:11-13

⁽¹¹⁾ And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ⁽¹²⁾ He that hath the Son hath life: *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

⁽¹³⁾ These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (See vv.9-10)

Note 2

Lack of Assurance

If we lack assurance, we should endeavour, firstly, to determine whether the cause of this lack is not primarily in ourselves. For example, we may lack assurance of God's grace and salvation because of some known and unconfessed sin in our life. Again, we may lack assurance because we have been resisting the will of God for our life. Alternatively, we may lack assurance because we have not wholly committed ourselves to the Lord, but are still living for self and for the sinful pleasures of the world. Any, or all of these things may deprive us of the confident assurance that we ought to possess in Christ Jesus. (Ps. 107:17-22; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Thess. 4:3-8)

Scripture References

Psalms 107:17-20

⁽¹⁷⁾ Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses.

⁽²⁰⁾ He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. (See vv.21-22)

Romans 12:1-2

⁽¹⁾ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ⁽²⁾ And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (See vv.3-8)

1 Thessalonians 1:3-8

⁽³⁾ Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; ⁽⁴⁾ Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. ⁽⁵⁾ For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. ⁽⁶⁾ And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: ⁽⁷⁾ So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁽⁸⁾ For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. (See vv.1-2)

Note 3

The Holy Spirit Guarantees Final Redemption

Only those who are the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus can be assured of salvation and eternal life. However, assurance of grace and salvation applies equally to every one of God's children. In Christ Jesus, God has elected and called us into his kingdom, and has adopted us as his own children and heirs. To guarantee our rights and privileges as children of the Father, and heirs of glory, God has given to each of us the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit acts as the earnest or pledge of our final redemption. All of us who possess the Spirit of God, and who are being sanctified by the Spirit, are the children of God and true heirs of glory. Of this, we can be certainly assured. (Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14)

Scripture References

Romans 8:14-17

⁽¹⁴⁾ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
⁽¹⁵⁾ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.
⁽¹⁶⁾ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; ⁽²²⁾ Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (See vv.15-20)

Ephesians 1:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (See vv.11-12)

Note 4

The Inheritance of the Saints

Since, as believers, we are heirs, then there must be an inheritance. This inheritance is the gift of eternal life and the promise of sharing with the Son of God in his Father's glorious heavenly kingdom. This heavenly kingdom is a place where there will be no more sorrow, sin, suffering, pain or death; for all these things will have passed away. Instead, we, as the redeemed children of God, will benefit from the fullness of the Father's everlasting love toward us in Christ Jesus. We will dwell forever with our Lord in his glory, and we will share with him in that everlasting peace, joy that characterises God's holy dwelling place. There, we will praise, worship and serve the triune God for all eternity. Until that time, our inheritance is being reserved for us in glory, and, in the meantime, the Lord is keeping us eternally secure in our salvation. (Ps. 94:14; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Rev. 21:1-7)

Scripture References

Psalms 94:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. (See vv.12-13; cf. v.5; see also 1 Sam. 12:22)

1 Peter 1:3-5

⁽³⁾ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁽⁴⁾ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁽⁵⁾ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (See vv.2-9)

Revelation 21:1-4

⁽¹⁾ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. ⁽²⁾ And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ⁽³⁾ And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. ⁽⁴⁾ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (See vv.5-7; see esp. v.7)

Related Bible Truths

The doctrine of assurance (of grace and salvation) relates closely to the predestination of the elect, to the perseverance of the saints, and to the work of the Holy Spirit. All whom the Holy Spirit effectually calls into God's kingdom, and whom the Holy Spirit indwells, have the witness within themselves that they are the children of God. Since they are God's children, then they should have the assurance that

their heavenly Father will never cease to love them. Similarly, they can remain confidently assured that the Lord will not fail to accomplish his purposes for them in bringing them safely to glory.¹

¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Perseverance; Heaven*, by Gordon Lyons.

Part 2

Doctrine of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

Blessings of Providence and of Grace

We may divide God's blessings into two main categories. These are:

1. *Temporal blessings*, or blessings of *providence*, which apply principally to this age.
2. *Eternal blessings*, or blessings of *grace*, which apply both to this age and to the age to come.

There is some degree of overlapping between blessings of providence and blessings of grace. Allowing for this, however, we may summarise these two forms of God's blessings as follows:

(1) *Temporal Blessings, or Blessings of Providence*

Temporal blessings are those blessings that, *in his providence*, God bestows upon mankind; and, in a special way, upon his own people—the church. Temporal blessings include the gifts of health and strength; natural or acquired abilities; the necessities of life; favourable climates and seasons; peace, security, and freedom; and many other gifts of God's providence. These temporal blessings are dependent upon our obedience and faithfulness to the Word and will of God.

If we were to prove persistently disobedient or unfaithful to God, then the Lord may suspend or withdraw his temporal blessings in our lives until we repented. If, however, we were to continue unrepentant, then God may send upon us some form or punitive discipline or temporal judgment.²

(2) *Eternal Blessings, or Blessings of Grace*

Eternal blessings are those blessings that, *in his grace*, God has covenanted to give to his people, and which cannot be suspended, revoked or withdrawn. Eternal blessings relate principally to the gifts of salvation and eternal life: a blessing that God graciously bestows upon all his elect people.

Unlike temporal blessings, eternal blessings are not dependent upon the faith, obedience or faithfulness of God's people. Rather, they are dependent upon the unchanging faithfulness of God, and upon the work of God's Son that he accomplished perfectly and once-for-all on behalf of all God's people.

We have distinguished between these two categories of blessings to make it clear that—although, at times, God may withdraw his *temporal* blessings—he never withdraws his *eternal* blessings.

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Adoption; Providence*, by Gordon Lyons.

The Believer's Assurance of Salvation

The saints of God can be certainly assured of their salvation. Salvation is a gift and blessing of God's free and unmerited grace, therefore, it is an eternal blessing. It cannot be withdrawn. The certainty of the believer's salvation, therefore, does not depend on the strength or degree of that person's faith, but on the promises of the ever-faithful and covenant-keeping God.

Assurance is Founded on God's Solemn Oath

We have said that the believer's assurance of salvation rests on the work of God's Son, and on the faithfulness and promises of God. In fact, God has bound himself with a solemn oath. This oath guarantees that everyone who believes on his Son will certainly be kept secure in Christ Jesus unto the day of final redemption in glory.

This solemn promise—made on oath—is absolutely certain of accomplishment: for it is impossible for God ever to lie, or to prove unfaithful to his word. Thus, the Scripture says:

Hebrews 6:16-20

⁽¹⁶⁾ For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: ⁽¹⁸⁾ That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: ⁽¹⁹⁾ Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; ⁽²⁰⁾ Whither the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (See vv.13-15)

Since God could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself. He bound himself with a solemn and irrevocable oath—taken in his own name, and on the strength of his own unchangeable and holy character—that he would perform every stipulation of the covenant promises. The covenant promises include the promise of eternal redemption for all those whom God has given to his Son from before the creation of the world. These are those whom the Holy Spirit draws to repentance and faith in Christ through effectual calling.

Assurance is Founded on Eternal Redemption

Concerning the eternal efficacy of Christ's work of redemption, and of his continuing ministry of intercession on the believer's behalf, the Scripture gives us this assurance:

Hebrews 7:24-25

⁽²⁴⁾ But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. ⁽²⁵⁾ Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (See vv.18-23)

Continuing grace and salvation, therefore, is assured to us. This is because Christ's atoning work is a perfect work and a completed work (although the Lord continues ever to make intercession for us). Again, continuing grace and salvation is assured to us because God is ever faithful to all his promises—including his promises concerning our eternal redemption.

The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:29.) The Lord may, however, suspend or withdraw his temporal blessings, if we disobey his Word or disregard his will for our lives. Eternal bless-

ings, however, do not depend upon our obedience. Rather they depend upon the complete obedience of God's Son on our behalf.

Of the eternal nature of our salvation, the Word of God says:

Hebrews 9:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ⁽¹²⁾ Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. (See vv.13-28)

Hebrews 10:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

⁽¹¹⁾ And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: ⁽¹²⁾ But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;

Hebrews 10:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (See vv.1-23)

It is in virtue of Christ's atoning sacrifice that we have no need to fear the loss of grace or of salvation. God's grace will forever keep us, and Christ's mediating work will forever guarantee that we will be brought to that eternal home in glory. This is the place in his Father's house that the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare for all those who belong to him. (John 14:1-3)

Assurance is Not Based on Feelings

Very often, the Lord's people lack assurance in the promises of God. This is not necessarily because they doubt the veracity of God's word, or his ability to fulfil that word. Rather, it is because they tend to depend on their feelings, or are unduly influenced by the fluctuating states of their minds. However, we must never depend either on our feelings or on our thoughts for assurance of continued grace or of ultimate salvation. Feelings change constantly. At times, our state of mind alters from one opinion to another or from one mood to another. At times, our mind may be adversely affected by circumstances in our lives over which we may have little or no direct control.

Assurance, therefore, must not be based on our changing emotions or on our fluctuating states of mind, but on the unchanging and totally trustworthy Word of God. Again, we must not base our assurance of grace and salvation on our sometimes wavering faith, but on the unwavering faithfulness of God. Similarly, we must not base it on our spiritual progress—or the lack of it—but on the redemption secured for us vicariously by the Son of God.

If we are seeking assurance of salvation and true peace in our hearts, we must never rely on the way we feel. Similarly, we must never rely on what we think—unless these feelings and thoughts are a direct result of some known and unconfessed sin in our lives. Assurance must always be founded on solid facts—not feelings. These facts must be supported by unshakeable evidence. Only in this way will we be able to stand firm against the storms of life, and during the severest trials of our faith.

Assurance is Based on Facts

Assurance of grace and salvation, therefore, must not be based on the believer's fluctuating feelings, or on his varying states of mind, but on solid facts supported by unassailable evidence. This evidence is provided by the Word of the Almighty God himself.

Part 3

Bases of Assurance (1)

First Basis of Assurance

The Testimony of The Bible

- (1) The first fact on which the believer's assurance of grace and salvation is founded is *the Word of God*.

The Bible is plerarily inspired. In its sixty-six books—from Genesis to Revelation—it is God-breathed. This total inspiration extends not only to the Bible as a whole, but also to each of its individual parts. Every word spoken and recorded (in the original manuscripts or autographs) is the very word of God. In all matters, therefore, of which the Bible speaks, it is authoritative and infallible. In all matters pertaining to faith and godliness, it is fully sufficient and wholly to be believed and obeyed.

Concerning the divine origin and nature of God's Word, and writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul says:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

- ⁽¹³⁾ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (See vv.14-16)

If we are to trust the word of a totally honest and reliable person, how much more should we trust the word of the living and Almighty God? For God cannot lie. Nor can he prove unfaithful to the truth he has spoken. Every word that God has uttered, and which his servants have recorded for us on the pages of Holy Scripture, must assuredly prove true and totally trustworthy. It is trustworthy regarding every promise it makes—for it is God's Word, and God's Word is infallible. It cannot fail of fulfilment.³

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Concerning the matter of redemption, the Bible is replete with references making it abundantly plain that the people of God have every reason to be confidently assured of their salvation. These assurances come from a God who is ever faithful to his covenant, and who keeps faith with his people—even when, on many occasions, his people are unfaithful to him.

Job was a man whom the Bible describes as *blameless* and *upright*. Concerning Job, it is written:

Job 1:8

- ⁽⁸⁾ And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (See vv.6-22; see also Job 2:3)

³ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, by Gordon Lyons.

Job was utterly faithful to God, but God permitted his servant's confidence and faithfulness to undergo the most severe test. If ever anyone had apparent cause to doubt the wisdom and love of God, or to question the reality of his salvation, it was Job. Although not without fault in some of his utterances, yet—in the very depths of his trials—Job makes this outstanding confession of confident faith and trust in God:

Job 19:25-27

⁽²⁵⁾ For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

⁽²⁶⁾ And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

⁽²⁷⁾ Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; *though* my reins be consumed within me. (See v.23)

In spite of his great pain, sorrow, and heart-breaking losses, Job knew in his heart that the living God was his Redeemer—or his Defender. He believed earnestly that God would yet deliver him from the battle that raged around his soul, and which thus far had deprived him of his children, his property and his health. In addition, Job held steadfastly to the belief that—one day—he would see God. Of these things, he was most certainly assured. The prevailing circumstances in his life, and the resultant feelings or emotions experienced by Job, might well have convinced him that God had forsaken him. Nevertheless, although at times God may chastise his people, he never forsakes his inheritance. The inheritance of God is the people of God; i.e. the individual members of the true and invisible Church.

The Lord had not forsaken Job. God would yet bless him more abundantly than he had ever been blessed before. (Job 42:12) But first Job had to endure—and be strengthened by—the trial of his faith. (Jas. 1:2-4,12; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-19) Although called upon to endure the most severe trials of his faith, Job had the wisdom not to depend on how he felt. Rather, he depended on what God had promised. In spite of all that had happened to him, Job was assured of God's continuing grace in his life because he knew that he could trust God to fulfil every word that he had spoken. Thus, Job declares:

Job 13:15a

^(15a) Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him... (See vv.13-19)

Such was Job's faith in the living, Sovereign God.

Sometimes, like Job, the Christian can be brought to the point of deepest depression, near despair, or to a feeling of total abandonment. Yet, he must not yield to how he feels, nor must he be tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God because of his present feelings or circumstances. The believer's *feelings* and circumstances will not alter his state of grace, or his eternal salvation, one way or the other. That state of grace and that eternal salvation depend on the merits of Christ's redeeming work—not on the believer's emotional state, nor on the state of his mind or will, nor on his present circumstances.

Since Christ is the *Redeemer* of sinful men and women, we know in our hearts that we shall one day see him, and shall be like him. (1 John 3:2.) We have this assurance—not because someone on earth has told us, or because of how we feel—but because it is the word of the living and eternal God in heaven. This God is our own Father, and our heavenly Father cannot lie. Of this, we can most certainly be assured.

They Shall Never Perish

Sometimes, the Bible refers to the people of God as the sheep of God's pasture. Over these sheep, God has placed one faithful Shepherd: The Lord is our Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows all his

own sheep by name. He leads them out to green pastures. He protects them from evil, and he brings every one—without exception—into the fold of God on high.

Concerning the flock of God, the Bible says:

John 10:27-30

⁽²⁷⁾ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ⁽²⁸⁾ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ⁽²⁹⁾ My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

⁽³⁰⁾ I and my Father are one. (See vv.22-33; cf. v.29 with John 6:37-40)

The Son of God laid down his life for the sheep that the Father had given him. He has given to each one of these sheep the gift of eternal life. They know and follow the Good Shepherd, because they belong to him. The Good Shepherd assures his sheep that they will never perish. This, however, is not because the sheep are endeavouring to keep close to the Shepherd—vitaly important as this is—but because the Shepherd holds their lives in his hands. No one can snatch them from the Good Shepherd's grasp. The Lord Jesus Christ is equal in eternity, power and glory with Almighty God. The omnipotence of the Father is the omnipotence of the Son. Therefore, no power in heaven or on earth is able to separate us from the eternal love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord—and our Shepherd.

Kept by the Power of God

Yet, cannot temptation, sin, Satan or other powers of evil, give us cause for concern regarding our assurance of grace and salvation?

The Bible says:

2 Timothy 4:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.
(See vv.14-17)

We are assured of continuing grace and salvation because the Lord will deliver us—or will rescue us—from every evil attack. By his grace, mercy and providence, the Lord will preserve us until we reach God's heavenly kingdom, and our future inheritance in glory. We are secure in our salvation, because we are being kept by the power of God. Of this, we can most certainly be assured.

We have said that the Lord is preserving us unto an inheritance in glory. Such an inheritance, however, would be of no value if we could not one day benefit from it. Thus, to confirm us in the assurance of our salvation, God's Word reminds us of the purpose and end of our new birth:

1 Peter 1:3-5

⁽³⁾ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁽⁴⁾ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁽⁵⁾ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (See vv.1-8)

1 Peter 1:9

⁽⁹⁾ Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls. (See vv.10-12)

Faith is the gift of God—as is every other aspect of our salvation. The completion of our faith is the completion of our salvation in glorification. Until that time, we are being kept secure—or shielded—in Christ Jesus, by the power of God Almighty. We know, therefore, that we have eternal life. As the Scripture says:

1 John 5:13

⁽¹³⁾ These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (See vv.9-12)

It is for these and other reasons that a believer's salvation is eternally secure. This is the testimony of the Word of God: and God remains true and faithful to every word that he has spoken, and to every promise that he has made. Of this, the believer can most certainly be assured.

Part 4

Bases of Assurance (2)

Second Basis of Assurance

The Substitutionary Work of Christ

- (2) The second fact on which the believer's assurance of grace and salvation is founded, is *the substitutionary (or vicarious) work of Christ*.

At one time, we were God's enemies. In our unregenerate state, our evil behaviour (KJV, *wicked works*) totally alienated us from God. This evil behaviour represented the sinful attitudes and actions of our fallen nature. Now, however, we who once were God's enemies, have been reconciled to God through the atoning sacrifice of his Son. Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:23-25a

- ⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ⁽²⁴⁾ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
^(25a) Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood... (See vv.21-26)

Appeasement of the just wrath of God against sin is effected only by the shedding of blood; i.e. by the sacrifice of atonement made by a totally spotless and innocent victim. The atonement effected for sinners by the Son of God is the single most important reason why the believer can be assured of continuing grace in this life, and of final and complete salvation in the life to come.

Christ obeyed, suffered, and died vicariously; i.e. he obeyed, suffered and died as a substitute for sinners. However, since Christ fulfilled God's righteous demands on our behalf, and since he paid in full the penalty due to us, then it follows that we are no longer under condemnation. Never again will God judge or condemn us for our sins. For when Christ secured our redemption by his atoning blood, he secured the remission of all our sins—past, present, and future. Through their faith in him, God justifies everyone who believes.

The atoning work of Christ is not only *certainly* effective, it is also *eternally* effective. It continues to be effective from the beginning of our lives to the very end, at which time the atoning work of Christ culminates in our glorification and final deliverance from all sin. The believer, therefore, can be certainly assured of his faith because of the substitutionary atonement effected for him by the Son of God. God himself set forth—and accepted—that perfect Sacrifice. As a result of its power and efficacy for all time, he has reconciled to himself all his redeemed people. Even while we were his enemies, God reconciled us to himself through the death and resurrection of his Son. How much more then—now that he has reconciled us—shall he deliver us from his coming wrath? (Cf. 1 Thess. 1:10)

As the apostle Paul declares:

Romans 5:9-10

- ⁽⁹⁾ Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ⁽¹⁰⁾ For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (See vv.6-11)

Assurance of salvation, therefore, does not depend on the believer. Rather, it depends on what Christ has accomplished on the believer's behalf. The redeeming work of Christ is the guarantee of our acceptance by God. It is also the guarantee of our perseverance in the faith, and in holiness of life, and of our being brought faultless and blameless into the Father's presence.⁴

Third Basis of Assurance

The Believer's Adoption

- (3) The third fact, on which the believer's assurance of grace and salvation is founded, is *his adoption as God's child*.

Those who have received the grace of adoption are the children of God. No others are ever afforded the privileges of sonship in the family of God. Again, no others are ever entitled to be called the children of God, heirs of the Father, and joint heirs with the eternal Son of God.

Regarding our adoption as children of our heavenly Father, the Scripture says:

Romans 8:15

- ⁽¹⁵⁾ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

We must remember that—from before the beginning of creation—God gave to his eternally begotten Son a people of his own. These are the people whom God predestined unto salvation and eternal life. These are the people whom he would redeem from the effects of the Fall by the atonement that Christ was to accomplish at Calvary. All those whom God has given to his Son in the covenant of redemption are certainly brought to repentance and faith in the Son of God. Again, all whom God's Holy Spirit thus draws to the Son for salvation, are born of God. In other words, they are God's own children. (John 1:12-13)

Every truly regenerated and justified believer is a child of God. This is proved by the fact that each child of God possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit. Possession of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by holiness of life, is proof of sonship in the family of God. For none ever receive the Spirit of holiness who have not been called to personal and saving faith in Christ. Thus, the Scripture assures us:

Romans 8:16-17

- ⁽¹⁶⁾ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. (See vv. 18-25)

Since we are the children of God, then we can be absolutely certain that we will receive the promised inheritance. Unlike human covenants that a person may amend, revoke, or annul, the covenant that God has made with his Son is irrevocable. The terms of the covenant have been fully met in Christ. The promises of the covenant, therefore, are being bestowed upon all who belong to Christ. He is the Mediator and Executor of the New Covenant or New Testament, which he has ratified and sealed with his blood. We can, therefore, be confidently assured that—as God's adopted children—we will receive every spiritual and eternal blessing in Christ: for God can never prove unfaithful to his Word. Similarly, God never disowns or disinherits anyone whose salvation Christ has bought with the ransom price of his own blood.⁵

⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Justification*, by Gordon Lyons

⁵ See further on, *Bible Truths Explained: Adoption*, by Gordon Lyons.

Fourth Basis of Assurance

The Indwelling Holy Spirit

- (4) The fourth fact, on which the believer's assurance of grace and salvation is founded, is *the indwelling Holy Spirit*.

We have said that each adopted child of God receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have also said that God gives the indwelling Holy Spirit only to those whom he calls to belong to Christ. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of sonship. Possession of the Holy Spirit—together with a life that produces the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit—is proof that we belong to God. Thus, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 1:13-14

- ⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (See vv.11-13a)

Galatians 5:22-23

- ⁽²²⁾ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ⁽²³⁾ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Everyone whom the Holy Spirit enables to exercise repentance toward God, and faith in the Son of God, is born into God's family. Everyone who is born of God is marked by the Holy Spirit as belonging to God. The Spirit is the seal guaranteeing that God will keep us secure in our salvation until the Lord completes our salvation in glory. The fact that a person possesses the Holy Spirit, and that he is consistently producing in his life the fruit of the Spirit, is incontrovertible evidence that that person is God's own son or daughter. If thus identified by the Spirit as belonging to God, then it is certain that God will preserve that believer secure in his salvation, and will bring him safely to glory. The Spirit of holiness is the pledge of the believer's final redemption. Of this, he can be most certainly assured.

Nevertheless, although God's Word assures us of grace and salvation, that Word also exhorts us to conduct ourselves in a manner fitting for the saints of God. We must remember that we are those whom the Holy Spirit indwells and sanctifies. It is essential that those who belong to Christ, and whom the Holy Spirit has sealed unto God, forsake the desires of their old sinful nature and pursue holiness of life. There should be nothing in the believer's life or conduct that offends, grieves, or dishonours the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 4:30

- ⁽³⁰⁾ And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (See vv.29-32)

Anything in our character or conduct that is inconsistent with our consecration to God, and with holiness of life, grieves the Spirit of God by whom we are sealed for eternity. We can grieve the Holy Spirit by what we think, say, or do—or by what we fail to think, say, or do. Lest, however, anyone should presume upon the grace of God, and 'continue in sin that grace may abound', the Scripture gives this solemn warning:

1 Thessalonians 4:8

- ⁽⁸⁾ He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit. (See vv.1-7)

To despise or reject any part of the Word or will of God, is to despise or reject God himself. Those who despise and reject God's Word are treating God's Spirit with contempt. God, however, will surely discipline those who show contempt for the Spirit of truth and holiness. (Heb. 12:25-29)

The Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer to *seal* him unto God, is the same Holy Spirit who indwells the believer to *sanctify* him unto God. If sanctified and consecrated to God, however, then everything in our lives should be honouring to God. Possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit, therefore, is another reason why the believer has every reason to be assured of continuing grace and final salvation. For the Holy Spirit is the identifying seal—signifying that that person belongs to, and has been set apart as holy to, the Lord. If thus consecrated to God, then it is certain that God will complete what he has begun in the believer's life. Of this, the believer can be certainly assured.

Part 5

Lack of Assurance (1)

Possible Reasons

It is very important to be aware of, and to learn to recognise, possible reasons that may underlie a believer's lack of assurance in spiritual matters. People often assume that—in one way or another—a believer's lack of assurance somehow relates to his spiritual condition. We do not deny that this might be the case. For example, a believer's lack of assurance may stem from some unconfessed and forsaken sin in his life. On the other hand, this may be an entirely unjust and erroneous assumption. It is just as possible that a believer's spiritual condition is being adversely affected by other circumstances—circumstances over which the believer may have little or no direct control.

Lack of Assurance (Medical Grounds)

Side Effects of Prescribed Drugs

One such set of circumstances is the side effects or after-effects sometimes associated with certain forms of medical treatment. For example, drug therapy or other therapies that may be necessary over a prolonged period can produce devastating effects upon some patients. Substantial documentary evidence exists to prove that the side effects of certain forms of drug treatments can alter a patient's mood, cause confusion, and/or impair the patient's ability to concentrate or to think rationally. These powerful side-effects may have a very real and perhaps substantial bearing upon a person's life—including his spiritual life.

It would be grossly unfair, unjust, and unkind, therefore, to imply that such a person's spiritual condition was something he could improve upon. For the same reason, it would be inappropriate and unjust to suggest that he ought not to feel deeply depressed. Again, we ought not to infer that a person in this situation should not, at times, lack assurance of salvation, or assurance of any other of God's mercies or promises.

Depression May be Related to Treatment

People who are undergoing certain long-term therapies are sometimes in no condition to do those things that other believers find little or no difficulty in doing for themselves. A person who is undergoing this kind of medical treatment may read God's Word regularly—or as regularly as his present condition permits. That person may be faithful in his private prayer life. Yet, in his depressed (or subdued or sedated) state of mind, he may not always benefit from the means of grace to the same extent as someone in more favoured circumstances.

This condition is no fault of the person. It is a situation that requires the exercise of great discretion, patience, love and understanding. If we fail to show such consideration, we may drive the person to even greater depths of depression or despair by our sometimes thoughtless, careless, or ill-considered advice, suggestions or remarks. It is of paramount importance to determine, therefore, whether a person who is lacking assurance is—or has been—receiving medical treatment. If so, we must consider whether that treatment may be adversely affecting that believer's spiritual condition, thus producing his present lack of assurance in the things of God.

There are, of course, many instances where the above situation does not apply. Again, there are situations where a person's sinful manner of life eventually results in his requiring medical treatment. We

cannot emphasise too strongly, however, that not all such conditions are the direct result of a person's sinful lifestyle.

Lack of Assurance (Spiritual Grounds)

With the provisos made above, perhaps one of the most common grounds for a believer's lack of assurance stems from that person's spiritual condition. This condition may be caused by several different factors. These factors may include a lack of knowledge of what the Bible teaches, or a lack of clear teaching in his or her local church. Additionally or alternatively, they may include a lack of self-discipline in studying the Word of God diligently, regularly, and prayerfully, or the wilful practice of sin. One or more of these, or other similar factors, will adversely affect a believer's spiritual condition.

We will consider each of these possibilities below.

Lack of Knowledge of The Bible

A believer may lack assurance in the things of God simply because he lacks a knowledge of the first principles of the faith. Under normal circumstances, every believer should have a continual hunger for the Word of God. He should be searching God's Word prayerfully and diligently to learn those things that are intended for the edification of his soul, and for the upbuilding and strengthening of his faith. New converts to Christ may take some time to become familiar with all the fundamental truths of the Bible. Once the new believer apprehends the basic truths of the gospel, however, then assurance of grace and salvation should follow as a matter of course. The Holy Spirit himself brings home these important truths to each believer's life and experience.

There can be no excuse, however, for the deliberate neglect of God's Word. If a person belongs to Christ, then he must be willing to learn the ways and will of Christ. However, the Holy Spirit will reveal these ways to him only through the careful, regular, and prayerful reading of the Bible. If, however, a believer proves unwilling to apply himself to the careful reading of God's Word on a regular basis, then he will not experience the blessings God has promised. One of these blessings is the assurance of grace and salvation.

Lack of Sound Teaching

Another possible reason for a believer's lack of assurance is lack of sound teaching in that believer's local church fellowship. Failure to provide sound biblical teaching in the first principles of the faith, is failure to feed the flock of God. If the flock of God is not being fed spiritually by a regular, careful and thorough exposition of God's Word, then that flock will be deprived of spiritual growth and vitality. If, in a particular local church, the lack of sound teaching prevails over a long period, then God's people will suffer accordingly. This will affect every aspect of their spiritual lives, including their confidence in the Word and promises of God. One of these promises is the assurance of grace and salvation.

Where a believer is not being fed spiritually on the Word of God, it is his responsibility to endeavour to remedy this situation. Where possible, appropriate measures should be taken within the believer's existing fellowship to establish and maintain a sound biblical ministry. However, if it proves utterly impossible to remedy the situation within the local church, then the believer must consider before the Lord whether he ought to seek fellowship elsewhere. God will hold each person accountable for ensuring that he attends to the proper welfare of his soul. If, of necessity, this means removing to another place of worship, then—in order to honour God—this is what that person must do.

Lack of Self Discipline

A believer may lack assurance in the things of God and in the promises of salvation and eternal life because he does not discipline himself in spending time with God. This includes spending time in prayer, and in the study and meditation of his Word. It is of the greatest importance that we learn how to apply

ourselves diligently to the reading and application of the Word of God. In private and family devotions, that Word should never be neglected—nor should it be rushed.

If we study a subject with only cursory attention, then we will learn little of value about that subject. So it is with the Word of God. That Word is the source of nourishment for our spiritual life and growth. Unless we feed upon that Word daily—consider its truths carefully, and meditate upon it—we will neither learn the things of the Spirit, nor grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We must make time, therefore, to study and learn God’s Word and to apply that Word to our personal and family lives. For, as the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 32:47a

^(47a) For it *is* not a vain thing for you; because it *is* your life... (See vv.44-47b)

Or, as the NIV renders this verse:

Deuteronomy 32:47a

^(47a) “They are not just idle words for you—they are your life ...” (NIV)

We cannot expect to be assured of our salvation if we have not taken the time to make ourselves familiar with the promises of God.

Lack of Faith

Lack of assurance may stem from lack of assurance in the Word or promises of God. Those who are young in the faith need careful and thorough instruction in the fundamentals of the faith. As their knowledge of God’s Word increases, so also will their assurance of grace and salvation.

Lack of faith, however, may arise directly from disbelief or unbelief; i.e. the refusal or unwillingness to trust God’s Word or to believe his promises. There can be no excuse for this kind of lack of faith. It we refuse to believe the truth—when God’s Word clearly makes that truth known to us—then we are wilfully resisting the testimony of God’s Holy Spirit. We are also calling into question the veracity or integrity of God’s Word. This is a serious sin, and those guilty of such unbelief must repent of their sin, seek God’s forgiveness, and determine to take God at his word. This means accepting and believing what his Word expressly teaches—in all things.

Until a person is prepared to believe the Bible as the authoritative, inerrant, and infallible Word of God, then he cannot expect to experience the blessings promised in that Word. These blessings include the assurance of grace—from moment to moment throughout each day—and the assurance of eternal life and final salvation.

Part 6

Lack of Assurance (2)

Possible Reasons

Wilful Sin in a Believer's Life

Another reason why a believer might lack assurance may relate directly to unforsaken sin, or to a sinful life-style. We cannot expect God's Word to assure us of spiritual blessings, if we are harbouring deliberate sin in our lives. Unconfessed and unforsaken sin cuts us off from fellowship with God. If we sin wilfully, we are desecrating the temple of the Lord (i.e. our body). Our body—and our mind—is the sacred dwelling place of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Any abuse or misuse of body or mind grieves and dishonours the Spirit of God, and defiles his sacred temple.

If we persist in clinging to our sin, then ultimately we will reap what we sow. We will lose our close walk with God; we will forfeit God's temporal blessings upon our lives; we will forfeit some of God's spiritual blessings. This may include the loss of assurance of grace and salvation—but not the loss of salvation itself. Salvation is an eternal blessing. Once the Lord bestows it, we cannot forfeit it.

If, however, we will not give up our cherished sin, then—sooner or later—God will discipline us. Those who respond to God's loving discipline are forgiven and restored to fellowship and to all the blessings of the covenant of grace. If, however, we should refuse to respond, God may discipline us more severely, or he may subject us to his temporal judgments. God disciplines his children to produce holiness of life, and to preserve their souls unto the day of final redemption.

Judgment Does Not Involve Loss of Salvation

That severe discipline or temporal judgments do not result in loss of salvation is illustrated by God's dealings with his people Israel (here taken to include both Israel and Judah). God covenanted to take his people for himself. The LORD promised the people of Israel that they would benefit from all his covenant blessings, so long as they remained faithful to him.

We know, of course, that Israel was persistently unfaithful to God, and constantly broke the terms of God's covenant. We know also that God repeatedly warned his people of the consequences of their spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness. We know that he disciplined them, that he sent temporal judgments upon them, and that he afflicted them with the sword, famine and plague. We know, too, that—ultimately—the LORD sent them into captivity for their repeated sin and rebellion.

Yet, in all these dealings with his unfaithful people, God never at any time forsook them utterly. God punished them—as a father would punish the children he loved. Yet they were still God's people; and throughout the history of Israel, God preserved for himself a faithful remnant. Even today, God has not totally rejected Israel. God has set Israel aside, but he has not utterly forsaken her. There is still a remnant, chosen by grace.

As God has not utterly forsaken his covenant people of old, so God will never forsake his new covenant people—those whom he has redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Judgment Can Result in Loss of Life

God delivered the nation of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. After forty years of unfaithfulness in the desert, however, that entire adult generation (excepting Joshua and Caleb) perished. They perished because of their persistent unbelief and sin. They forfeited their lives before entering the promised land. Those who truly belonged to the LORD, however, had not forfeited their eternal salvation.

In the New Testament, the Lord disciplined in like manner certain of his professing people. Because of their persistently sinful attitudes and behaviour regarding the Lord's Table, they forfeited their health—and, in some instances, even their lives. This was God's judgment upon them for despising the Lord's Table.

If we are to assume that these were backslidden believers, then they would not forfeit their eternal salvation. On the contrary, God had judged them very severely so that they would be preserved from further persistent and wilful sin, and so that they would not be condemned along with the world. Of this event, the Word of God declares:

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

⁽²⁷⁾ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ⁽²⁸⁾ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ⁽²⁹⁾ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ⁽³⁰⁾ For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. ⁽³¹⁾ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ⁽³²⁾ But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (See vv.17-26,33-34)

All God's Elect Will be Gathered Home

God has determined to bring all of his redeemed people to eternal glory, and he will not fail to accomplish his purposes for them. Unfaithfulness and other sins may result in discipline, judgment, and loss of temporal blessings. However, it cannot frustrate the eternal purposes of God. God will fulfil every one of his purposes for his people, and he will gather every one of them home. Not so much as one will be accounted missing from the glorious presence of the Lord. Christ their Redeemer has paid their ransom price in full—and that debt cannot twice be charged.

This, of course, provides the believer with absolutely no reason or excuse for indulging in sin. Rather, those who have experienced the grace of God in redemption can no longer yield themselves to the desires of the sinful nature. For they have been crucified with Christ, and their old sinful nature—the 'flesh'—has been nailed to the tree. They have also been raised with Christ to newness of life. Thus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer must endeavour to put to death the desires and the deeds of his old sinful nature. Those whom God has redeemed from the slavery of sin, now serve a new Master. This Master is Christ. Our new Lord and Master demands the total submission of ourselves and all our faculties to him—in loving, trusting, and obedient service.

Those whose lives the Spirit of holiness and the Word of God now controls, belong to Christ. Since they belong to Christ, they can never perish. Of this, they can most certainly be assured. Thus, Jesus himself gives this solemn assurance to each one of his people:

John 10:27-30

⁽²⁷⁾ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ⁽²⁸⁾ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ⁽²⁹⁾ My Father, which gave *them* me, is

greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

⁽³⁰⁾ I and *my* Father are one. (See vv.24-38; see also 1 Pet. 1:3-5)