

# THE FAITH BUILDER

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

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## From The Editor

This is a continuation of the series on the need for downcast believers to continue being encouraged in the Lord. One of my mentors once said that from the moment he was converted to Christ he had never once lost his assurance of salvation. When I heard that I believed that if a person lost their assurance then it was because they had done something wrong and put them at odds with God. That was in 1970. Since then, I have gone through times when attacked with a "condemnation bomb" I have been tempted to have doubts about my assurance.

It was in one of those times that I went to God in prayer and discussed what I would say when I come up before Him at the judgment. I will say when He asks me why I should be allowed to come into His heaven, "All I have is that Jesus died for me on the cross of Calvary." He replied, "That's all you need – and by the way, that's all you ever needed." That was a major encouragement at one of the lowest and darkest periods of my life. It remains the basis of my assurance.

It is interesting that in the times when I thought I was pretty good and progressing well in the Christian life; that the way God saw it was that even in those times all I needed was that Jesus died for me on the cross. That can be quite humbling for a believer who thinks he has progressed in the faith and may be tempted to think that he is becoming better than the "common herd" of believers.

In those times when I thought I was pretty good and was developing an effective ministry for the Lord, I tended to look down on some struggling believers and think, "What's wrong with them? Thank goodness I'm better!" There is nothing like a good set of challenging life experiences to pull the rug out under the feet of that type of pride. Knowing that all we need, and the only qualification of making it with God is that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross

and that our salvation is a free gift of God and nothing from what we could ever do for him, pushes us into the reality of where we are in the Christian faith. Then, the good things we do for God and others is because we are thankful for the free gift of salvation, and because we choose to do these things because we want to honour and glorify Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

This series is not my original work. It is an updating of the work of William Bridge, the Puritan divine; and I fully acknowledge his work and his great contribution to the life and faith, not only of the believers of his time, but of all believers everywhere who have read his work.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> You can Google his name and there are sites where you can download his complete works. Once you get used to his Elizabethan way of expression, you will find his work really faith building.

## A LIFTING UP IN THE LACK OF ASSURANCE.

By William Bridge

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you anxious within me, &c."  
— Psalm 42:11.

Sometimes the discouragements of God's people are drawn from the lack of their evidence for heaven.

And for this they reason or argue: "I am a poor specimen of a Christian, who lacks assurance of the love of God and of my own salvation; therefore I am discouraged by this. Indeed, if I had any evidence of my standing in Christ, I should never be discouraged whatever my condition: but, alas! I lack the assurance of God's love, and of eternal life. If I die today, I don't know whether I would go to heaven or hell, and what would become of my soul to all eternity. Oh I lack assurance of my salvation, and therefore I am discouraged. Haven't I just cause and reason for my discouragements now?"

No, no reason yet. It is indeed a great evil and a painful affliction, to lack the assurance of God's love and of one's own salvation; yet, notwithstanding, the lack of this assurance is not sufficient grounds or basis for your discouragement. I agree that it is a great evil and a painful affliction for a man to lack assurance; because sin and affliction are twisted together in the lack of assurance.

As of all blessings those are the greatest, where grace and comfort are joined together. So where sin and affliction are twisted together, they are the worst afflictions of all. And it is like this in the lack of assurance: because, as in assurance there is something of grace, and something of comfort or reward; so in the lack of assurance there is somewhat of sin or unbelief, and somewhat of affliction too. Sin and affliction, affliction and sin, are both twisted together in the lack of assurance.

The truth is, believers who lack the assurance of God's love, and of their standing in Christ, is neither fit to receive mercy from God, nor to make return of love and praise to God as they should. Not fit to receive mercy as they should, for though they would want Christ to come in, yet by unbelief they shut the door against him, and they make an evil interpretation of mercies offered to them.

If a mercy or blessing is extended to them, they say, "This comes in judgment to me. It is a blessing indeed in itself, but I am afraid it is a judgment to me". By this the believer makes a mistaken interpretation of blessings, and so is unfit to receive. And he isn't fit to make returns of love to God again because assurance responds with praise to God. Therefore the text says here, "O my soul, wait on God, hope in God, for I shall yet praise him," why? "For he is my God." Praise grows on the basis of assurance. And upon this account, I say, he is neither fit to receive mercy, nor to make return of praise as he should.

Yes, furthermore, the one who lacks assurance of God's love, is mixed up too much with Satan's influence. As he who has the assurance of God's love is open to Christ's influence, "the Spirit bearing witness to him that he is the child of God;" so the person who lacks assurance, comes under the influence of Satan, and Satan, though falsely, is still bearing witness to his spirit that he isn't the child of God. And isn't it a misery to be under this influence by Satan, to be under his hellish droppings? David felt one pang of unbelief, and he cried out, and said, "It is too painful for me." Oh, what a pain is it then, to lie bed-ridden with an unbelieving heart.

You know a pure and a loving wife counts it an affliction to her, to be "stalked" with the approaches of an unworthy person whose motives are to make her suspect her husband's love for her, because he is jealous of her husband's love and wants her for himself. She says, because of that, he stalks me with these approaches, making me to be suspect of my husband's love for me, with the intention of attaining his own filthy desires.

So a true believer says, "The devil is always following and tempting me to doubt the love of Christ, and he therefore does it, that he may attain his intentions upon me; for the devil knows well enough, that the more I doubt Christ's love for me, I will be influenced to embrace Satan's love".

The truth is, beloved, this lack of assurance of God's love, or standing in Christ, is an inlet to many sins and miseries; because when a believer first doubts of his own salvation, and then after he has continued doubting, he rises up to a full conclusion, saying, "Now I know that Christ doesn't love me, I had my doubts before, but now I know he doesn't love me". And after he is risen to this conclusion, then he shortly rises higher, and he goes further, in this way: "If Christ doesn't love me now, he will never love me, and if I have no standing in Christ now, after all the preaching I have heard, and the elements of worship enjoyed, if I don't have a standing in Christ now, I shall never have it; and so the longer I live, the more I make my condemnation worse; therefore I am as good as being in hell right now as at the last when God's judgment is completed, so therefore I will even make away with myself now".

Oh, what a black chain is here, and the first link is the lack of assurance. If you should see a child, a pretty child, lie in the open streets, and no one owns her, wouldn't it make your heart yearn within you? You would come to the little one and say, "Child, where is your father?" "I don't know", says the child. "Where is your mother, child?" "I don't know". "Who is your father? What is your father's name, child?" "I don't know". Wouldn't make your heart ache to see such a little one in the streets?

But for a poor believer to lie in the street as it were, and not know his father, whether God is his Father, or the devil is his father; for a believer to say, "I don't know my father. Whether God in Christ is my Father or not"; this is indeed pitiful.

The word father is a sweet word, for it sweetens all our Christian activities. Take the word Father out of prayer, and how sour is it? Surely, therefore, it is a sad and painful affliction, to lack the assurance of God's love in Christ. But now, although it is a great evil, and a painful affliction for a believer to lack this assurance, yet I say, the saints and people of God have no reason to be cast down or discouraged, although they lack this assurance.

How may that appear?

### Seen In A Church

Confession today will be held between 11am to 3pm, **no earlier or later**. There is only one priest on duty. Confess **only** the actual sin and not the reasons why it happened. This is confession, not counselling!

It is like this: if the lack of assurance is not the damning unbelief, then a believer has no reason to be totally discouraged, although there is a lack of assurance. Now, though there may be much unbelief bound up in the lack of assurance, yet I say, the bare lack of assurance isn't the type of unbelief that shall damn one's soul to all eternity. It is certainly not the type of unbelief which Christ threatens with damnation.

For if you look into John 3:18, you shall find our Saviour speaking this way: "He who believes on him isn't condemned; but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

But now, unless any poor believer who would prefer to believe and cannot, should be afflicted and troubled at these words, therefore I am telling you that our Saviour Christ says, in the following words which show the damnableness of unbelief, (verse 19), "This is the condemnation (he speaks in relation to the words before), and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for everyone who doeth evil hates the light; neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved or discovered". This light is Christ.

Now therefore, do you hate the light, which is Christ? Do you therefore avoid it for fear that your deeds should be exposed? Or rather on the contrary, Is it because you know that there are evil deeds in your life and much evil in your heart? And don't you therefore desire to come to Christ, who is the true light, so that your deeds may be exposed, and your sanctification improved?

Then, although you cannot believe as you want to, and though you lack assurance, and though you have much unbelief in you, the Lord Jesus Christ

having spoken it, you will never be condemned to all eternity for this lack, but the Lord Christ will pardon this to you: and therefore certainly upon this basis, God's people have no reason for their discouragement.

If there is such an overruling hand of grace, and mercy over the lack of the saint's assurance, as that it will work to their and to others good; then they have no reason to be quite discouraged, although they lack assurance.

As for their own good: through this they gain experience; and through it they come to see the emptiness and nothingness of all their own righteousness. David says, and you know the scripture in Psalm 116, "I said in my haste, all men are liars." The words in the Hebrew may be read, "I said in my shaking"; "I said in my shaking, all men are liars."

David was shaken by the men around him, and then he concluded that men were liars. So, when a man is shaken in his own righteousness, then he sees the emptiness and the lying disposition of it; and, I ask, "When is a man's own righteousness more shaken, than when he lacks assurance of God's love?"

When a believer's own righteousness is shaken, the believer comes to get more and stronger assurance of God's love. This is the most certain outcome that is certain after uncertainty. The shaken tree grows the strongest. It is observed of Thomas, that of all the apostles, he cried out, and said, "My Lord and my God." Two My's, not one My: My Lord, or My God: but two My's, "My Lord, and My God." Two My's, why? Because he had two No's before, "Unless I may put my finger into his side, I will not believe." That's how you read it in the English version; but in the original there were two No's, I will not, not believe; a double Not. Because there were two No's of unbelief, so there are two My's of faith.

To the extent that a good believer is sunk in unbelief, the believer will rise in faith to the same extent. To the extent that a believer is shaken by unbelief, and in the lack of assurance, that believer will rise to assurance to the same extent and be confirmed and steeled in it.

Concerning other points: a believer is never more suited to comfort, to relieve, to satisfy others in their fears, than when he has been in fears, and

doubting him or herself. St. Bernard commented: "I would rather believe poor doubting Thomas, than confident Peter: I would rather believe poor doubting Thomas than Peter who never doubted. Thomas having once doubted, knew how to deal with a poor doubting soul". In this, I say, God orders the lack of assurance of his servants to their own, and others good: and therefore there is no reason that they should be cast down and totally discouraged, although they do lack assurance for the present.

If a true believer may have comfort and live comfortably, although he lacks assurance, then he has no reason to be totally discouraged, although he lacks it. Now, though it may seem like a paradox to you, yet you shall find a truth in it. I say a believer who has no assurance for the present, may have comfort; yes, he may live comfortably, if things are rightly ordered.

For the believer who has no assurance may have hope, and hope brings comfort. The believer who has no assurance, may yet rely upon Jesus Christ; and anchor his soul upon Christ; and in all reliance there is some comfort.

The believer who has no assurance may be justified, and being justified by faith, we have peace with God.

The believer who has no assurance, may submit to God's commandments; and the Psalmist says, "The entrance into your commandments, gives light:" and so there is comfort. "In keeping your commandments, there is great reward:" and so there is comfort. "It is a comfortable thing, (says Solomon) to behold the light"; and in all light there is some comfort. Now God is light, and the free grace and love of God is light, which a believer who has no assurance may keep in their sights.

You sometimes take a great deal of contentment in the reading of a story: I don't mean a scripture story, but in other books, a believer sometimes takes a great deal of contentment in reading of a story, although it doesn't concern him; for, he says, "Although this story doesn't concern me, yet I take complacency, and contentment in reading of it, because I read here of the valour of such a man; and of the faithfulness of such a man to his friend; and of the excellent conduct and virtues of men".



Now, my beloved, is there no excellence in God himself to give contentment to the believer? Is there no faithfulness in God? Is there no love and mercy in God himself? Isn't the Lord the God of all consolation, and God of mercy, regardless of my condition? Is there not an ocean of excellent love and grace in God himself? How many sweet stories of love and grace, are you able to read in this little book of the Bible?

A believer who has no assurance now may have some promise thrown into his soul, to uphold him with. When Elijah was by the brook, and could not enjoy the ordinary food of the land, a raven brought him food: and whenever was any godly believer in such a condition, except he had one raven or other to bring him comfort? Sometimes a testing is a raven; God causes it; sometimes an abandonment is a raven; sometimes affliction; sometimes a particular word and promise is thrown into his soul; and isn't there any comfort there?

I say, though a believer lacks assurance for the present, he may live in comfort. Surely therefore a godly believer has no reason for his discouragement, though for the present he lacks assurance?

"But I don't only lack this settled assurance of God's love, and so the ordinary food of the land; but I have no raven to bring me any comfort: I mean, I have no promise, no particular word to bring in comfort to my soul, and to uphold me in my dark condition: though I lack a settled assurance, yet if I had a particular word and promise, to uphold my soul, until I had this assurance, I would not be discouraged: but I lack this settled assurance, and I have no particular word or promise to uphold my soul with, until it comes; and therefore I am discouraged by it. Haven't I reason now?"

I answer, "No. For, Christian, what particular word or promise do you want to have? Haven't you got the whole gospel before you, a bag of golden promises?" A father has two children; and he comes to one, and gives to that child a piece of gold. "There child", he says, "Supply your lack with that"; but to the other child, he says, "Here child, I know that you are in want, and there are bags of silver and gold in my study; take the key of my study, and go in, and take what you want". Isn't this latter in as good a condition as the former or rather better?

It is this way with the saints; the Lord is pleased to give now and then, a particular word to some of his children; but to others, he says rather, "Here take the key of faith, for faith is the key, and has a power to unlock all the promises, I give you faith, and by this faith, I give you a power to go to all my promises". Isn't this latter in as good a condition as the other? In this way it is with all the servants of God, "Having therefore these promises," says the apostle, &c. ( 2 Cor. 7:1).

If the promise of grace belongs to you, then you cannot say, "I have no word, no promise to uphold me with" Now that the promise of grace does belong to you, is made clear in this way:

1. Your very resting on the promise makes it belong to you and it becomes yours, by your resting on it; if you have rested on the promise.

2. If the command does belong to you, then why not the promise? Doesn't the word of commandment belong to you, namely, "You will not kill; you will not steal; you will not commit adultery?" Does this word of command belong to you? Yes, surely; because the commandment says, you, and you, and you will not, &c.; and that word you does include Me (God Himself). The word of promise has its you and you and You (God) also. Psalm 37, "Trust in the Lord and do good, so will you dwell in the land, and verily you will be fed," verse 3: "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desire of your heart," verse 5. And if you put yourself within the compass of the commandment's you, God will put you within the compass of the promise's You (that is, where it applies to God also).

3. If you may, and it is your duty to rest on the promise, then it belongs to you. Now, you may rest on the promise of grace and holiness for sanctification, and it is your duty so to do, unless it is no sin not to rest on the promise. But unbelief and not resting on the promise is sin; only you must know that there is a great difference between the promise of consolation and the promise of sanctification. To apply the promise of comfort without endeavour after holiness is presumption; but to apply the promise of sanctification that I may be more holy is no presumption but my duty; and if it is your duty to apply and rest on this promise, then it belongs to you.

“Oh, but yet, when I go to the word or the Scripture, I find that God's promise still depends upon some condition and I cannot perform that condition, I don't find that condition in myself; and therefore, I am afraid that I may not be able to depend on these promises and that I have no right to them.

But what if a good and gracious believer may apply a conditional promise, although he has not performed the condition? Look into Nehemiah, chapter 1 and there you will find, that the Jews being in captivity, Nehemiah goes to God in prayer, and presses the promise which God made to the Jews by his servant Moses (verse 8): "Remember, I beseech you, your word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if you turn to me, and keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast to the uttermost parts of the earth, yet will I gather them from thence, and I will bring them to the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power."

The Jews in Babylon were scattered according to the word, but alas, they did not return to the Lord, and leave their sins according to the conditions of the promise; yet, notwithstanding, Nehemiah goes to the Lord, and presses this promise, and the Lord hears him, and he has acceptance, as you find in the following chapter.

What if the condition of one promise is the thing promised in another promise; will you then be afraid that the promise doesn't belong to you because you haven't performed the condition of the promise?

Now so it is that the condition of one is the thing promised in another promise. For example: in one promise, repentance is the condition of the promise, 2 Chron. 6:37, 38; Joel 2:15 -19. But in another promise, repentance is the thing promised, (Ezek. 36:26) "I will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh."

In one promise, faith and coming to Christ is the condition; "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). But in another promise it is the thing promised, (John 6:47) "All who the

Father gives me shall come to me." In one promise, obedience is the condition of it, (Isa. 1:19) "If you consent and obey, you shall eat the good of the land." In another promise, it is the thing promised, (Ezek. 36. 2 7) "I will put my Spirit into you, and cause you to walk in my ways."

In one promise, perseverance is the condition, (Matt, 24) "He who continues to the end shall be saved" (verse 5); But in another promise, it is the thing promised. (Psa. 1:3) "His leaf shall not wither;" (Ezek. 36) "I will put my fear into your hearts, and you shall not depart from me."

In one scripture of the Old Testament, the coming of the Deliverer is promised to the Jews, upon condition that they turn from ungodliness; (Isa. 59:24) "The Redeemer shall come out of Zion and to them who turn from ungodliness in Jacob." But in another scripture in the New Testament, turning Jacob from ungodliness is the thing promised; (Rom. 2:26) "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and turn ungodliness from Jacob". Now if the condition in one promise is the thing promised in another promise, will you be afraid that the promise doesn't belong to you because you have not performed the condition?

And, again, what if the condition of the promise is performed for you better than you could perform it? In the beginning the Lord made a covenant with man, a covenant of works, "Do this and live;" and Adam, the first man, stood as a common person for us all to perform the condition of doing: and if Adam had performed the condition we all would have performed the condition.

Now the Lord makes a new covenant of grace with man, and the Lord Jesus Christ is a second Adam, and he stands as a common person, and if he performs the condition, then all his descendants performs the condition. Now the Lord Jesus Christ has performed the condition for all his descendants. Although the first Adam did not perform the condition for his descendants, yet the second Adam has performed the condition of the promise and of the covenant for his descendants to the full.

Now if all these three things are true, namely, (1) that a believer may go to the promise, the conditional promise with acceptance, although he has not performed the condition; (2) that the condition of one promise is the thing

promised in another promise; (3) that the Lord Jesus Christ has performed the condition of the promise for you, better than you can perform it. Have you, then, any reason to be discouraged and to keep away from the promise, because you have not performed the condition?

But so it is, that a child of God may go to a conditional promise with acceptance, although he has not performed the condition; and the condition of one promise is the thing promised in another; and the Lord Jesus, our second Adam, has performed the condition of all the promises for all his descendants. Surely therefore, you have no reason to be discouraged in this respect.

“But this isn’t my case, for I don’t only lack assurance of God’s love, and have no particular promise; but, instead of the promise, I have a threatening set upon my soul. Oh, the bitter words of the threatening have soaked into my heart. In times past I had a promise. I could say, I had a promise, and I rejoiced in it: but now I have lost my promise, and instead of the promise a threatening has come. Oh, I feel the pain and the anger of the threatening, and haven’t I just cause and reason to be discouraged now?”

No: for if you are drawn to Christ, is it material whether it is done with a cord of flax or a cord of silk? God has two arms by which he draws us to himself; the arm of his love, and the arm of his anger and justice. The arm of his love is extended in the promise, the arm of his anger and justice is extended in the threatening; and with both these he lifts up the fallen sinner.

What if God lifts you up with his left arm, as long as you are lifted up? Sometimes he lifts up with the arm of his threatening, that he may carry us in the arm of his promise. Because as the law was a schoolmaster to bring to Christ, so the threatening is a schoolmaster to bring us to the promise. Has the threatening therefore arrived? Then is the promise on the way; for the threatening is given forth in order for that purpose.

And if this which you complain of may be the condition of the saints, then you have no reason to be discouraged. Now for the loss of the promise, you know how it was with Joshua. The Lord gave Joshua a gracious promise; “I will

never leave you, nor forsake you: be strong, be not dismayed, be not afraid, be of good courage, for I will not leave you, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:6).

But the children of Israel were defeated by the men of Ai, and see how Joshua lost the sight of the promise. In Joshua 7:6: "Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face, before the ark of the Lord, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads, and said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore have you at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content to dwell on the other side Jordan."

Oh, what unbelief is here! What discouragement is here! How he had lost the promise! "O Lord", he says, "What shall I say when Israel turn their backs before their enemies?" And oh, what shall we say, when Joshua turned his back upon the promise! But so it was with Joshua here, he had lost the sight of the promise which once he had.



And as for the threatening, you know how it was with David; having sinned greatly in the matter of Uriah, the Lord threatens him, "that the sword should never depart from his house;" and the threatening did take hold upon him, and David was under the stroke of the threatening. But wasn't Joshua godly; and wasn't David godly? So, then, a godly believer may possibly lose the sight of the promise and have a threatening set on his soul too.

But if a promise given out by the Lord shall never be reversed and a threatening may be repealed; then you have no cause to fear in this respect. Now a threatening is therefore given that it may not be fulfilled. Jonah knew this so well that he professes to the Lord that therefore he fled to Tarshish, because, he says, "O Lord, I knew that you are a merciful God." As if he should say, "I knew, O Lord, you are so merciful a God, that though you have threatened Nineveh, yet you will reverse your threatening". But a promise once given to a believer shall never be reversed or repealed.

It may rise up to an oath as sometimes it does, for when God gives a promise to a believer, and opposition arises, then if God gives out the same promise again, it amounts to an oath; "As I live (says the Lord) I will never reverse this promise that I have made to you." But a promise once given shall never be reversed or repealed (Gal. 3).

You have the case that is now before you. Paul says, at verse 15, "I speak after the manner of men". Though it is just a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one cancels or adds to it.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his descendants. And therefore says the apostle, the promise shall not be cancelled, although the law came after the promise. But if the promise that the Lord gave to Abraham, wasn't cancelled by the law, that came four hundred and thirty years after; (verse 17) "wherefore then serves the law?" He tells you, verse 19; "It was added because of transgression."

So now, you say, "If that the promise that God has given heretofore, is not cancelled, and made void by the threatening that follows after, why then was the law or the threatening given to my soul?" It was added because of transgression. God had some transgression of yours to expose to you that you did not think of and therefore the threatening and the law came afterward.

"But the promise is quite out of sight and I have lost it. Didn't the Jews also lose the sight of the promise which was given to Abraham? When the Lord gave the Law and they stood trembling and quaking before Mount Sinai didn't they then lose the sight of the promise that was given to Abraham?"

So, I say that although you have lost the sight of the promise that you once had and a threatening is come in the place of it, the promise that was once given you may be four hundred and thirty days ago or many years ago shall never be cancelled or reversed. And the reason is this: because God doesn't repent in the matter of the gospel. You read in Scripture, that God is said sometimes to repent, "It repented the Lord that he made man". Sometimes it is said that the Lord doesn't repent, "I am not a man that I should repent". How are these two reconciled; God does repent, and God doesn't repent?

According to our present purpose: God repents as to the matter of the threatening, but God never repents as to the matter of the promise. God repents as to the matter of the threatening, and therefore says the Lord to Jeremiah, "I am weary of my repenting." I have threatened, and threatened, and I am weary of threatening. Here God repented as to the matter of the threatening; but God never repents as to the matter of the promise.

And therefore the apostle says, (Rom. 11:29) "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." And the promise is a great gift. So then, as to the matter of the promise, God never repents. Where, poor believer, do you have a promise given to you, may be five years ago, may be ten years ago, may be twenty years ago, and have you lost the sight of the promise; and instead of the promise is there a threatening come upon your soul, that makes your heart quake and tremble?

I am here to tell you from the Lord, the promise that was once given to you, though now you have lost the sight of it, shall never be repealed or recalled. Oh, what matter of encouragement is here! Is there a matter of discouragement here? No, rather, there is a matter of great encouragement here.

"Oh, but yet this isn't my case: I don't only lack assurance of God's love, but I have assurance of God's displeasure. I don't only lack assurance of my salvation, but I have assurance of my damnation. I don't only lack the testimony of the Spirit, bearing witness with my spirit that I am the child of God; but I have another testimony within my soul, bearing witness to me that I am a reprobate. And haven't I cause to be discouraged?"



No, not yet; because it may be that you look upon the back-side of God's dispensation. If we look upon the face of God's dispensation we see his love and good pleasure. But if we look on the back-side of it, we conclude nothing but anger and displeasure. It may be it is so with you in this case.

But, if you find no such testimony of reprobation as you speak of in all the Scripture; then you have no reason to fear or to be discouraged in this respect. Now search the Scripture, and you will not find in all the word, any ground for such a testimony of reprobation. We read indeed, of Francis Spira, notorious for his despair; when his friends came to comfort him, having spoken encouraging words to him, that he said, "Why do you come to comfort me? Comfort belongs not to me, for I am a reprobate".

"Oh", said one of his friends, "Don't say so, because none are able to say so". "Yes", he said, "As the elect of God have a Spirit within them, bearing witness that they are the children of God; so reprobates have another spirit, bearing witness with their spirits that they are not the children of God, but the children of Satan: and I have such a spirit of reprobation".

But, my beloved, if there is such a spirit or a testimony of reprobation as this is, either it must be from the Spirit of God, or from the spirit of Satan. If from the spirit of Satan, then he is a liar, not to be believed. If it is from the Spirit of God, how does it suit with the Word? Because the Spirit of God is called the Comforter, can such a spirit of reprobation come from the Comforter?

And if you have such a testimony as this is, either you must have it from the Word or from the Spirit of God alone outside of the Word. If it is from the threatening in the Word; because it isn't from the promise, nor from the command, it may be repealed, be reversed, as you have heard.

And if you have it from the Spirit of the Lord, how can it be that the Spirit should be called a Comforter? Surely therefore, if you have such a spirit of reprobation in your heart, it is from Satan, and he is a liar.

But, my beloved, I will in this appeal to you, don't you think that there are many believers now in heaven, who while they lived said, "I am sure to go to hell"? There is the story of the woman who took a glass in her hand, and

throwing it on the ground, said, "As sure as this glass breaks I shall be damned"; and the glass did not break. Well then, your condition isn't alone. Others of God's people may be and have been led in this way of testing; and therefore there is no reason why you should be cast down or discouraged.

"But yet this doesn't reach my case or condition, for I don't only lack the assurance of God's love, and of my own salvation; but I have lacked assurance this two, four, six, eight, ten years: and I have continued so long doubting in unbelief, and my heart is so hardened with it that I am afraid I shall never be healed or saved. Oh, I have sat under such and such precious gospel preaching and teaching, and if ever I should have had assurance of God's love, I should have had it before now. I have sat under many a comforting sermon, and under the gospel preached for many years, and yet have no assurance of my salvation. Surely if the Lord would ever have bestowed assurance upon me, I should have had it by now. But I am still unbelieving, and I still lack assurance, and my heart is hardened under unbelief and therefore I am thus discouraged. Haven't I cause and reason now?"

No, not yet, for our evidence for heaven is in God's keeping, as well as our comforts and our graces; and our evidence for heaven as well as our heaven and salvation; and he will extend it when we have the most need, in a due time, though not in our time.

And if you look into Isaiah 46, you will see what a gracious promise the Lord makes to hard hearted sinners; an invitation and promise together: verses 12 and 13, "Hearken to me, you stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation, it shall not tarry."

"Oh, but I have no righteousness to lay my assurance upon". "Well, yet" says the Lord, "Never speak of your righteousness. I will bring near my righteousness." "Oh, but my heart is dead and hard and stout". "Then hearken to me, you stout-hearted", says God. "Oh, but I am far off from righteousness". "Be it so; yet hearken to me, you stout hearted, who are far from righteousness, I will bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation it shall not tarry."

But that you may have more full satisfaction in this, I shall desire you to consider three or four propositions.

1. Though it is possible for a man to attain to full assurance of God's love, yet he may have saving faith and yet no assurance. Faith and assurance differ; and therefore says the apostle, "Draw near with full assurance of faith." Assurance of faith comforts, but the reliance of faith saves.

It is possible that a man or woman may have such an assurance, as that they never doubted of God's love; but ordinarily, a believer who has never doubted of salvation has never had assurance of salvation. The first step to salvation is to see that there is no salvation; we must go to heaven through the valley of death; and the believer who isn't troubled sometimes with Satan, is possessed by him.

I say again, ordinarily a believer who has never doubted salvation has never had assurance of salvation. A believer who yet has no assurance of salvation, may have true saving faith. This is the first point.

2. As a believer may have true saving faith, and yet no assurance, so a believer may have strong faith and assurance, yet many doubts, fears, and mistrust may be left in his soul. I have observed that of all the churches, the church of the Thessalonians are most commended for their faith and their graces, "So that they were examples to all who believed" (1 Thess. 1:7). Yet in chap. 3, verse 10, the apostle says that there was something lacking in their faith: "Night and day praying exceedingly, that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." Something was lacking in their faith, yet they were examples of faith to all the churches.

3. As a believer may have strong faith with assurance, and yet some doubts and fears may be left in the soul still; so a believer may have strong faith and assurance, yet for a long time may be deprived of the feeling of it. And therefore whereas the spouse in the Song of Solomon in one place says, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine;" in another place she says, "I sought him whom my soul loves, and I did not find him. I opened to my Beloved, and he was gone, and my heart failed; I called and he did not answer."

4. As a believer may have strong faith, and yet may be deprived of the feeling of it for a great time; so it is possible a believer may be a godly and gracious, yet may continue and go on doubting for a long time, yes possibly, he may die doubting also.

The godly and the wicked are contrary. Now for the wicked, you shall find that a wicked man may think his condition is good, yet it may be very bad; he may have hope and persuasion that he shall go to heaven, and he may die in these persuasions, yet he may go to hell (Rev. 3).

You read thus of the churches of Laodicea, at verse 16, "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth: I would you were cold or hot," verse 15. These were very wicked. Did these people have any thoughts of mercy, or did they think their spiritual condition was good? Read verse 17, "Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked."

So that I say, a wicked man may think his condition good, and yet it may be very bad. Yes, daily experience tells us as in the parable of the foolish virgins that he may die in these persuasions.

So on the contrary, a believer may think his or her condition bad, and go fearing and trembling a long while, yes, even die under these fears, yet his condition may be very good.

Consider it rightly, I know very well, usually, God does come in with some comfort or other to a child of God before he dies; but I would be unwilling to say, and you will be unwilling to think, that certainly that man who doubts of his salvation, or who dies doubting of his salvation goes to hell. No, possibly a man may doubt and fear, and doubt for a long time, even die doubting without a settled assurance of God's love, yet he may go to heaven and be saved for ever.

What then, though you have endured a long time and have long lacked assurance, yet God has not led you so far as he has led some; and your

condition is no other than that which may befall the dear servants and children of God.

But, though for the present, you lack assurance of God's love and of your own salvation; yet if you may conclude by scripture arguments that you shall have it before you die, then you don't have any reason to be discouraged. Now, though this or that particular Christian in an unusual case dies under a cloud and with much fear and doubting about his everlasting condition; yet there are arguments in scripture whereby believers may usually know and conclude, that they shall have peace and assurance before they die.

For example, the believer who is content to endure and go without a mercy, if God will have it so, shall not lack it forever: "For the patient abiding of the meek, shall not be forgotten forever" (Psalm 9). As the way to have affliction continued is to be discontented under it, so the way to have it removed is to be contented with it.

There is a faith of expectance, a faith of reliance, and the faith of assurance. The faith of expectance will rise up into a faith of reliance and the faith of reliance to the faith of assurance. There is seldom a 'maybe' faith, but it also has a 'shall-be' and this is at the foundation. God at some point may make it rise to the surface.

If the Lord has wrought wonders for your soul when you were in the wilderness and in a desert; then certainly he will bring you into the land of rest. He dealt this way by David, and by Israel, so he will deal by you.

If your heart is upright in the matter of your assurance, God will certainly give assurance to you; because you know what the Psalmist says, "The Lord will give grace and glory and no good thing will he withhold from them who walk uprightly" (Psalm 44:21). If therefore, I say that your heart has been upright in the matter of your assurance, the Lord will give you assurance, though for the present you lack it.

Now I ask, when is a man's heart upright in the matter of his assurance except when he desires assurance of God's love and of his own salvation rather than he may praise and serve God the more, than for his own comfort?

For this look in Psalm 9 and see how David reasons to this purpose, verse 13, 14. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, consider my trouble which I suffer of them who hate me, you who lift me up from the gates of death: that I may show forth all your praises in the gates of the daughters of Zion: I will rejoice in your salvation."

Here are three observable things: first, he was in a very low condition at the gates of death. From the gates of death, he says, gates of death, that is, the power of death: "The gates of hell shall not prevail" that is, the powers of hell shall not prevail; so here, the gates of death, that is, the powers of death will not prevail over the believer.

David was under the power of death, at the gates of death, and now in this condition he prays to the Lord for mercy, that the Lord would lift him up; but why does he pray this way? Mark his conclusion. At verse 14: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, consider my trouble." Why? "That I may show forth your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion." O Lord, bring me from the gates of death, that I may praise you in the gates of the daughter of Zion, not for my own comfort, Lord, but that I may praise you. Well, but what inference does he make of this? See what follows in the latter end of verse 14: "I will, or shall rejoice in your salvation;" O Lord, my heart has been upright in this petition, and now I know that you will grant my prayer, I will, I shall rejoice in your salvation.

When believers can praise God for what they have, although their condition is very sad; God will give them more and give them a better condition. "If God shows mercy", says one, "or gives a blessing, and I praise God, I pay my debt; but if my case be low and sad, and I praise God, then God is pleased to be called my debtor, and he will certainly pay his debt".

If the Lord is the health of your countenance, you shall have the assurance of your salvation in due time, though now you lack it. In this way the Psalmist reasons in the text, "Wait on God, or hope in God, for I shall yet praise him". Why? "For he is the health of my countenance." But when is God said to be the health of our countenance? When his smiles make us look cheerful and his frowns make us look sadly. If I look well when God smiles, though

everyone else frowns and I look ill when God frowns, though everyone else smiles; then God is the health of my countenance.

Now I appeal to you, beloved, you who lack assurance, hasn't this been like this with you? Don't you earnestly desire assurance, yet are content to stay, wait, and go without it if God will have it so? Hasn't the Lord shown wonders for your soul when you have been in a wilderness condition, in preserving and keeping you from doing evil to yourself; and haven't you been upright in the matter of your assurance, saying it like this: "O Lord, give me assurance of your love, not that I may have comfort only, but that I may be more fit to serve you"? And haven't you praised the Lord in your sad condition for what you have and hasn't the Lord been the health of your countenance, so that when the Lord has smiled upon you, then you have looked well; and when the Lord has frowned upon you, then you have looked ill?

Surely you cannot do anything else except say, "I must not deny these things. I cannot be faithful to my own soul if I should deny them. Yes, Lord, you know and my soul knows it, that you have done wonders for me when I have been in a low, desert and bewildered condition. And, O Lord, you know I desire assurance of your love, not for my own comfort only, but that I may be more fit to praise and serve you".

"And, Lord, you know I have praised you in some measure for what I have. Yes, Lord, you are the health of my countenance. When you smile upon me, then I look well; and when you frown upon me, then I look ill. I may say in truth, The Lord is the health of my countenance". Well, then, I say to you from the Lord, go in peace and be of good comfort though you do for the present lack comfort and assurance of your salvation, you will have it in due time.

And if all these things are true, oh, you who are the people of the Lord, have you any reason to be discouraged? Certainly you haven't: therefore why should you not check yourselves, as David here, and say, "Why are you cast down, oh my soul; and why are you anxious within me?"

Only, by the way, let no one misapply this doctrine, saying, If we should not be discouraged, although we do lack assurance, then I will neglect the getting of my assurance.

Beloved, you see into what times we are now fallen, times of war, and rumours of war, times of blood; these are dying times: and is this a time for any of you to lack assurance of God's love?

When your hay lies in the field in the summer, and you see a shower coming, you say, "Get to it! Get to it! I would to God you might not see showers coming, and yet your evidences for heaven lie at random; wherefore, in the name of the Lord, get to it!

And you who have false assurance - for you have heard that a man may think his condition is good, when it is bad. Yes, that he may die with that attitude too, look carefully into your condition, and consider your condition duly. This is no time to have false assurance. Labour, then, to get true assurance; and you who have assurance, labour to grow up more and more into it and the riches associated with it.

"But suppose for the present I lack assurance. I confess, indeed, I ought not to be discouraged although I lack assurance, as I have heard; but it is a difficult thing to bear up one's heart against all discouragements in the lack of the assurance of God's love. But suppose I lack it for the present, what shall I do now that I may bear up against discouragements in this condition?"

I will give some few things by way of direction here, and so I conclude this argument.

Do you lack assurance of God's love and of your own salvation? Labour more and more for to put to sea; I mean to the sea and ocean of God's love and the deeps of Christ's merit and satisfaction. When you are at sea in a storm or stress of weather, you desire sea room and if you have sea room enough you think all is well. It may be there are some passengers in the vessel or ship and they say, "For the love of God set us ashore. We are not able to ride out this storm. Oh, set us upon some land or other." But the skilful mariner says,



“No, but still ride it out at sea; if you go to the shore we are undone, we are all lost creatures”.

So in this case the time of the lack of your assurance is a storm time. It is a time of great stress upon your soul and if you not skilled in the methods of Christ, you will say, “Oh, now set me upon some spiritual involvement upon the coast of my own righteousness, or my own holiness”. But if you are skilful in the way of the gospel, you will rather cry out, and say, “O Lord, keep my soul in the ocean of your free love. Sea room, sea room, and all is well enough”. Now there is sea room enough in the ocean of God's free love and of Christ's merits and satisfaction. But if you touch upon your own righteousness, you only endanger your soul and sink your own heart into more despairing doubts and fears. Stand off therefore, now, from your own shore and stay out to sea, even that great sea of God's love and Christ's merits.

If you lack assurance, be careful that you don't give attention to any outcome of a religious activity contrary to the comfort which the Lord speaks to you in your involvement in the religious activity. You involve yourself in an activity, and there the Lord begins to comfort you, so you go away and you are satisfied and your souls are refreshed; but then afterwards you sit down and parley with Satan and with your own souls; and you lose everything and doubt again, turning God's wine into your own vinegar and are unsatisfied again.

But suppose a father should give an estate of land to his child and make it over to him with the best conveyance that the law can provide. Then this son having conducted his conveyance negligently in some aspects, a cunning lawyer (that he may get money from him) should come and write on the back of this conveyance, “For such and such reasons this conveyance is defective”, the son should do well in response to say, “My father has done nothing for me. I have been deceived all this time. My father has given me nothing”. Was this fair dealing with his father? And if he should run this course, should he ever have any firm assurance of his land in his own thoughts?

Now, this is the same with you who are the people of God. The Lord has given to you a fair inheritance. Heaven is your inheritance and it is the fairest

and best inheritance. The Lord has given it you under hand and seal and sometimes you think your evidence is clear and you file it away. Then Satan comes and scribbles on the back of it and he says, "It is defective", and you believe it; then you doubt again, and you are unsatisfied again. Is this fair dealing with God? Surely not.

Then where do you lack assurance? The way to get it and the way not to be discouraged in the lack of it, is this: take heed that you never pay attention to anything from a religious activity contrary to the comfort which you have received in that activity.

Be careful that you are not discontented with your condition. Discontentment breeds discouragement. But do you lack the assurance of God's love? Say this with your own soul: "However it is, yet I will wait on God. When the Lord pleases he will give me assurance. I will only labour to be contented with my condition". But if you are discontented, you will certainly be discouraged.

If you lack assurance of God's love, and of your own salvation, take heed that you don't say, "I shall never be assured". Take heed you don't say, "I shall never have a promise". Take heed you don't say, "I shall never be comforted". Take heed you don't say, "I shall never have the testimony of the Spirit bearing witness with my spirit that I am the child of God". Don't say, "I shall never be helped. I am in a sad condition and I shall never be better. I am in an uncomfortable condition and I shall never be comforted. I lack assurance and I shall never have assurance".

Beloved, you cannot say this, for who knows what God will do, whose ways are in the deep and whose footsteps are not known? You know how it is with a sick person. If the doctor comes and tells him there is hope of life, then his heart doesn't die; but if the doctor says to him, "Sir, you are in a serious and dangerous fever and I would wish you to settle your affairs and look out for comfort for your soul, for the truth is, you will never be recovered". Then his heart dies.

So here, take a poor soul who lacks assurance. If he says, "There is hope that I may be assured", he isn't discouraged. But if he says, "I have no assurance

and I shall never have it” then he is quite discouraged. It is this word “never” that discourages: “Oh, I shall never be encouraged and I shall never have assurance. I shall never have the testimony of God's Spirit”. Take heed that you don't say, “I shall never be assured”. This is a temptation. Be careful of the word “never” in this case.

Carry this for a rule with you and remember it much; that the less assurance you have, the more precious your obedience may be and the more kindly God may take it at your hands. It is no great matter for a believer to write and to work by day light, or artificial light; but for a man to write or to work in the dark, is difficult.

So here, it is no great matter comparatively for a man to pray and to work spiritually, while he is in the light; but for a poor soul to pray and to work towards God and to be obedient when he is in the dark and has no assurance of the love of God, is something more difficult. The more assurance you have, your obedience will be more complete, but the less assurance you have, your obedience may be more child-like. I say again: the more full is your assurance, your obedience will be more full and large. But the less assurance you have, your obedience may be more child-like.

To explain: every child will serve his father for his portion and for his inheritance. But when a child doubts his father's love; yes, when a child shall conclude and say, “I know that my father will disinherit me. I know that my father will bestow nothing upon me, yet I will serve him because he is my father”. When anyone hears this they will say, “Here is trustfulness indeed in this child”. So between God and you, it is good for a Christian to be obedient at all times, and the more assurance you have, the more you are bound to obey. But does your soul fear that God will disinherit you? And in spite of that do you say, “However it is, I will obey God, for he is my Father. Though I cannot see him, yet I will serve him; and though I have no comfort from God, yet will I be obedient to him, for it is my duty. He is my Father”.

The Lord will take this kindly at your hands and what you lacked in the largeness shall be made up in the trustfulness of your obedience. Wherefore, then, do you lack assurance of the love of God? Comfort yourself with this, and say within your own soul, “Well, though I lack assurance, I hope, through

grace, I am in some measure obedient, and the less assurance I have, the more kindly God takes my obedience at my hand and therefore why should I be discouraged or cast down?"

Think and think often of this rule and it will help you to be obedient and bear up your hearts also in the lack of assurance.





# The Gospel Faith Messenger

Equipping for Leadership in the Nations through the Power of the Holy Spirit



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Paul Christensen

This magazine's purpose is to build up the faith of believers.

I am an elder of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove, Auckland NZ. At present, I am assisting with the ministry of the church along with the other elders and very capable preachers as part of an elder-run church.

I am including articles from recognized, effective pastors and ministries that have proved themselves in having the Holy Spirit work with them in the conversion of sinners, effective and powerful impact that they have on believers, and in the growth of their churches. I think that it is important for the members of the congregation to have a range of ministry outside of their usual one-person ministry that has been the norm for a number of years before our current minister recently resigned.

You will notice that I have included jokes and humorous pictures in this magazine. I am a strong believer in humour as a healing resource. I believe that the business of sharing the Gospel is serious, but some become so serious that they are dour and humourless. I don't think that these people are a good advertisement if we want our church to grow and be filled with believers who are passionate for Christ and who approach their faith with joy. "In His presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11), and good, clean humour is an important part of that.

All articles are printed with the kind permission of the authors, who believe that it is important that the message of the Gospel gets out there, and the importance of walking with God in love and faith, along with unity among Christian believers.

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Once you have read this, pass it on to someone else who might be encouraged by reading it.