

CHAPTER VIII

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

FROM the testimony of the Scriptures, a Christian should know that he is saved. There is abundant Biblical witness on this point, and it can hardly be deemed commendable to be in doubt on this vital question; yet to many it may seem to be presumptuous in the extreme for one to be assured of his own salvation. Where there is a lack of assurance there is usually an impression that so long as the daily life is quite imperfect (and how immodest it would be to claim that it is otherwise) it is unreasonable to do any more than hope that through some special exercise of mercy on God's part it will not be as bad in the end as it might otherwise be. Unwittingly such attitudes of mind disclose the appalling fact that persons who hold such views have never turned from dependence on their own works and merit to a dependence on the all-sufficient work and merit of Christ. If salvation depends in any degree on personal goodness, there could not be even a saved person in the world, and therefore no ground in it for assurance. Salvation is not offered to those who have purposed to be good, or religious, nor is it guaranteed to those who hope God will Himself be good and gracious in the end. It is offered to all meritless, helpless sinners who are willing to believe that God has already been good

in that He has provided, in Christ, not only what they need now, but all they need in time and for eternity. This, too, is believed on no other evidence than that God has said it in His Word. In looking away from self and one's failure to Christ and His saving grace, one will find adequate grounds for a God-honoring certainty as to position and destiny in Christ Jesus. No life would ever be good enough to merit anything but condemnation from a holy God if judged on the grounds of moral equity. On the other hand, no sinner has fallen so low, or is so weak in himself, that he cannot find absolute rest and assurance of his salvation in looking away to Christ and the finished provisions of His grace. The attitude one may hold on the question of assurance may thus become somewhat of a test as to whether he has really believed on Christ, although it should not be assumed that such is invariably the case.

There are certain general facts about Christian assurance which may well be stated. The evidence underlying a positive conviction, or assurance as to personal salvation, is primarily the fact of the faithfulness of God as revealed in the Word. When God has made an unconditional declaration of His faithfulness, it is hardly becoming in one of His children to entertain any uncertainty in those things which He has promised. He has promised to save and keep all who put their trust in Him. Having put one's trust in Him for salvation, one must either believe Him to do what He has said, or in the measure

in which one fails to do so suppose Him to be untrue.

At this point a doubt is sometimes expressed as to whether one has really believed in the saving way. As a matter of fact, such a doubt is still one in regard to himself rather than of God. This, of course, is another question altogether; but one so important that nothing else can be undertaken or determined until it is settled. The only cure for this uncertainty is to end it with certainty. Let such an one face his own utter sinfulness and meritlessness with the revelations of the cross and discover, as he must, no hope in himself, and then and there, once for all, appropriate the provisions of divine grace for every need of a sin-cursed soul. If need be, note the very day and hour of such a decision and then believe in the decision itself enough to thank God for His saving grace and faithfulness, and in every thought, act and word thereafter treat the decision as final and real. It is the crying need of a multitude of religious people that they bring themselves to some final dealing with the Son of God with regard to their sins and His salvation. They should be positive enough in this matter to face the eternal question before Him as to whether they choose to stand in His grace alone, or in something within themselves, even in the slightest degree. No very deep conviction of assurance can grow in any heart where the mind is still wondering whether it has really believed in a saving way, and where no impressions of certainty are allowed to take root. Confidence

in the faithfulness of God will not thrive when one is constantly singing hymns which have been written to voice the position of the unsaved, such as the hymn in which one is assuming to be "coming to the cross." Let that issue be sealed and past, so far as salvation is concerned, and rather let one be occupied with those blessings which are vouchsafed to those who have believed. It would be much more reasonable to sing "In the cross of Christ I glory."

Assurance is born of confidence in Christ. He has said: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Having come, there is but one question remaining: "Has He cast me out?" This, it will be noted, is a serious question involving the very trust-worthiness of Christ. To doubt salvation at this point is not modest or commendable: it is the sin of distrusting God, or making Him untrue. Without faith it is impossible to please God. On the other hand, it is quite possible for one in facing this question to seal his confidence in God by a faithful "Amen" to every word God has spoken as to His plan and purpose in salvation. Who can look at the cross of Christ and not be convinced that God's love has been manifested toward us and that He Who paid such a price to redeem us will not instantly receive any soul that trusts in Him?

The word of Scripture becomes the title deed, or official writings, as to the certainty of the transaction. "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."

Such wonderful knowledge, therefore, is to be gained through the things written. The written things are His exceeding great and precious promises; but these promises can be of no avail to the heart that will not believe Him, or take Him at His word. Normal Christian experience and the joy and peace that results from believing can never even begin in the heart until God has been trusted to the extent that the record of His saving grace has been believed and received.

There is a normal Christian experience. There are new and blessed emotions and desires. Old things do pass away, and behold all things do become new; but all such experiences are but secondary evidence, as to the fact of salvation, in that they grow out of that positive repose of faith which is the primary evidence. There is very much Scripture about the results that are sure to appear in a transformed life. True salvation must result in just such realities. It is inconceivable that Christ should come to live in a human heart and its experiences remain unchanged. There must be, under such conditions, a new and vital relationship to God the Father, to fellow-Christians and to Christ Himself, a new attitude toward prayer, toward the Word, toward sin and toward the unsaved. This is the view-point of the Apostle James when he contends so earnestly for works that will justify. It must be remembered, however, that James is here concerned with the appearance our professions make to the outside world, rather than of our acceptance before God. Men can judge only by the outward appearance,

and works alone can justify the Christian profession in their sight. God looks on the heart and before Him no works can avail. Before God man must be justified by faith alone. This, James clearly asserts to be true as illustrated in the case of Abraham (Jas. 2:23).

The First Epistle of John is full of references to the outward evidence of the inward fact of the newly imparted divine life. This little book, standing near the end of the Bible, may be taken, in one sense, as an examination of the believer. "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (there is no reference here to the commandments of Moses); "In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil: whoso doeth not righteousness is not of God (cf. Jno. 6:28, 29), neither he that loveth not his brother"; "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"; "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother"; "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us"; "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"; "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3).

Such a precious experience as is described by these passages may become clouded by sin or lost in the depression of some physical weakness, and were we depending upon the experience as pri-

mary evidence that we are saved, all grounds of assurance would be swept away. The primary evidence is clearly stated in the same Epistle as the final word of testing here given and the final grounds of confidence: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life. These things (about having the life) 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" (1 Jno. 5:9-13). The possession of the indwelling Son of God is the abiding fact of the newly created life in Him, and should never be confused with some imperfect and changeable experience in the daily life. He is received by faith. His presence most naturally leads to blessed new realities in experience. Certainly experience never leads to the realities of the presence of the indwelling Son of God.

The Bible use of the word "assurance" will be found in several passages: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). This is the confidence that grows out of a repose of faith in the faithfulness of God

that He will fulfil every word He has spoken. "And unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2). This is the breadth of confidence that grows as one increasingly enters into the vastness of God's revelation of His grace in Christ Jesus. Some are so limited in spiritual vision when they believe that their first step in faith is centered on one promise alone. To such there will be a growing understanding and a corresponding increase of confidence and assurance as other promises and facts of grace are apprehended. "And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence of the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. 6:11). Here is a reference to that assurance which is the full conviction that every promise and revelation concerning the future will be surely fulfilled. This, like all assurance, is simply the result of believing God.