

A POSITIVE ASSURANCE

By

Curtis Dickinson

“These things have I written unto you, THAT YOU MAY KNOW that you have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

The world concludes that since man cannot know everything, therefore he cannot know anything for sure. All is relative, men say; there can be no absolute right or wrong, true or false. (And how can they be *absolutely sure* of that?)

This deception has destroyed morals and the foundations of society. It also destroys the peace and joy which Christians should have and it abolishes the Christian witness.

YOU CANNOT SHARE WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE. Recently a preacher urged a group of boys to go out, find some other boys, and share with them their Christian faith. One of them piped up, “You mean go out and invite them to church?”

“No, I don’t mean go and invite them to church,” the preacher said. “I mean for you to simply tell them what Christ has done for you, what He means to you in your life.” But the young man was puzzled. He could talk about attending church services, but he had no real personal faith to share.

One of the reasons for such a lack of testimony is the traditional idea that salvation depends upon the amount of righteousness a man can show, and thus his salvation is always in doubt, and will not be assured until the judgment. He considers it presumptuous, as if bragging of his own goodness, to speak with assurance of his hope or to say he is saved. He speaks of the day he “came into the church” or that he “hopes to be worthy of eternal life”. If one has no more assurance of salvation than this it is useless to suggest that he testify of the “great salvation” to others.

THE SCRIPTURES TEACH THAT WE CAN KNOW. When the disciples came rejoicing over their victories, Jesus said to them, “... rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). He expected them to know. The absence of JOY in Christendom today is due largely to the absence of this assurance: that one’s name is written in the Lamb’s book of life. But in the apostle’s writings it is obvious that they expected the Christians to KNOW that they were redeemed. Hear Paul: “But having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore also we speak; knowing that he that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor. 4:13-14). This full assurance by the man who said that he was “chief of sinners”, who cried out, “O wretched man that I am”, and who plainly said that he had NOT obtained perfection, but who KNEW that he would be raised up at Christ’s coming to be with Jesus.

The Bible abounds in positive statements of assurance: “We know that we know him”; “We know that we have passed from death unto life”; “We know that we are of the truth”; “We know that we dwell in him”; “We know that we are of God” (1 John 2:3; 3:14, 19; 4:13; 5:19).

HOW DO WE KNOW? We do NOT know it on the basis of our own deeds and righteousness. Paul writes that the man who thinks his salvation is earned by his own deeds is cut off from Christ (Galatians 5:4). One who trusts in himself, even partially, is not trusting in Christ, who alone can save.

Men teach that in judgment they will be measured as to their relative righteousness. The ones who are the most righteous will be saved, and the rest lost. If this were true, then Christ died for nothing (Gal. 2:21). Many, who claim Christ as their Savior, still hold to this idea of a judgment based on their relative goodness, and therefore they go through life with no certainty of their salvation. But if they do not believe Christ fully saves them, they simply haven't believed the Gospel, hence are actually unbelievers.

To believe the Gospel is to believe that Christ died for our sins. Once a man has sinned he has incurred the death penalty, for “the wages of sin is death” and the “soul that sins shall die” (Rom. 6:23, Ezekiel 18:4). No amount of good deeds will change that fact. Our relative goodness does not erase the sins. The Scriptures teach that only the righteous - those with absolute perfection can be raised up to immortality to dwell with God in “the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness.” One cannot return to a state of absolute righteousness by his good acts, for they do not erase the sins. Nor can one ever become absolutely righteous by growth after becoming a Christian. The best Christian among us will admit that he is not perfect. Then how can one be saved? Only by the fact of Christ's death, as a substitute dier for the sinner, taking upon Himself the death penalty.

When a man accepts this truth - that Jesus took his punishment for sin by dying - and applies the means of appropriating this death for his own benefit, that man stands righteous in the sight of God. If it is true that sin is judged worthy of death, and if it is true that Jesus “His own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24), then we may rest assured that we do not have to face the sin in judgment. It is not a matter of guess-work, unless the whole Bible is guess-work. Note that “he (Jesus) when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he hath PERFECTED FOREVER them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:12-14). “Sanctified” refers to the one committed to Christ, who makes us “perfected forever.”

This “perfection” is the righteousness imputed to us, given to us through faith in Jesus, just as the righteousness of Abraham is an imputed righteousness as a result of his faith. “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). So it is with us, who are called the children of Abraham. God promised that at the first coming of Christ he would “finish transgression, to make an end of sin, and to make

reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in EVER-LASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Daniel 10:24). Now if we believe God, we believe that in Christ’s death he “finished transgression” for every true believer, for he paid the penalty of death for sin. Therefore he brings in “everlasting righteousness” for those who appropriate that death. This appropriation is made by our complete turning to God in faith and submission to baptism in faith. “We who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death” and “he that has died is justified from sin” (Rom. 6:3, 7). One cannot cancel sin by his own goodness. The death penalty must be met. But, thank God, it is met in Jesus Christ, so that by His meeting the demands of justice we stand justified before God.

Hence we can say with Paul “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). This is the depth and assurance of BELIEF. One who says he believes the Gospel, accepts Christ as Savior, and at the same time doesn’t have assurance of being saved is contradicting himself. Either Christ died for ALL his sins, and gives him perfect righteousness, or else he died for none of them and he stands condemned. To doubt that the ransom — the death penalty — has been paid is the same as unbelief.

DOES THIS MEAN THAT one cannot be lost? No, it doesn’t mean that at all. To know that one is saved NOW is not the same as knowing he will still be saved 20 years from now. If a man gives up the faith in Christ he will be back where he started and the entire penalty for all his sins will be exacted in judgment. While one may KNOW his name is written in heaven, he must also recognize that God will blot it out if he doesn’t hold fast the faith. Paul wrote that it is the Gospel by which we are saved IF we maintain our stand in it and hold it fast. (I Cor. 15:14) Genuine faith results in loving obedience, for having been saved by Christ. When he ceases working for perfection and practices evil works, he will soon abandon the faith and lose all its benefits — the righteousness and the assurance of resurrection to immortality. God wants a race that trusts HIM, and that recognizes that it is HE who perfects man and gives him life. So the Bible says, “take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF, in falling away from the living God ... for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our CONFIDENCE firm unto the end” (Hebrews 3:12, 14). It is possible to fall from grace, but it is also possible to REMAIN IN GRACE and thus have the positive assurance of eternal life.

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JUST FOR YOU-TH

There appeared in the newspaper a letter from a youth who said that he was one of those who thought he had to have the approval of “the crowd” in everything he did, and thought it was smart to be just like everyone else. Then he said he read a poem, which changed his life. Here is the poem:

How absurd to be different from the crowd.
Not too loud. Not too proud.
Not too flashy. Not too brassy.
Keep it cool.

Not too mousey. Not a creep.
Not too long hair. Play it safe, Man.
Take it easy.
Not too smart. Keep it breezy,
Don't take the rap. Why be a sap?
Who wants to lead. And maybe bleed?
Don't stick your neck out, Silly Boy.
Keep still and safe and miss the joy of
Knowing who you are.
Douse the flame.
Let everyone be the same.
Without a name.

Being a Christian means being different. It means you have stuck your neck out. You stand with Jesus, who took the rap and was called a sap for doing so. You stand with Paul who dared to be called a fool for Christ's sake. You do it because your hope is set on the purpose of God, and know that "the crowd" is headed for destruction, but all who keep faith with God will "inherit the earth" for eternity. It may cost something to have the name "Christian", but the gain is worth whatever the cost.

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