

THE BASIS OF ASSURANCE

By

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“Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in Heaven.” Psalms 119:89

A century ago Henry Lyte wrote, “Change and decay in all around I see.” Nowhere is change more evident today than in man’s religion and morals.

Religious change is nothing new. When Adam attempted to thwart the plan of God, to leave his first estate and ascend to the position of law-maker (“knowing good and evil” Gen. 3:5), it was the first attempt to change the purpose of God. It amounted to rebellion against the Creator, and its penalty was not only the loss of Adam’s high and privileged state of fellowship with God but eventually death.

The building of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4) was another bold attempt of man to usurp the power of God, to carve out for himself his own rules, and thus his own religion. It resulted in a division of men into different languages and eventually different races. After the creation of National Israel, which was a type of the kingdom of God, there was a continual attempt to change the order as revealed by God. First there was the rejection of God’s orders to enter Canaan and take the land by faith. The people, including the leadership, save Moses, Caleb and Joshua, did not believe they could conquer by God’s power, and were too weak to do it on their own, therefore they simply refused to obey God’s command and to possess the land. This was a clear rejection of God’s grace, for it was by grace that God intended to give them the land, providing they would rise up and take it. The refusal to obey God in claiming salvation, that is, to repent and be baptized, is the rejection of God’s grace also.

Dissatisfied with the unadulterated (simple) plan of God, the Israelites borrowed the pagan rites and customs and “sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29) in their attempt to change the order of life as given by God. Especially appealing to them were the spectacular public rites of Ashteroth and Baal. These ceremonies were accompanied with music that stirred the emotions, giving the participants the sensation of a great religious experience. In the frenzy of the music, the singing and the “emotional high” of the religious festival, parents passed their children through the priest and into the fire in honor of the pagan deity. Some idea of the tremendous appeal of these priests and their ability to sway the emotions of the people may be seen in the fact that the Israelites, who were familiar with their own history of deliverance from Egypt by the miracle of crossing the Red Sea, and who had the evidence of God’s grace all around them such as the fallen walls of Jericho, could be so emotionally stirred by false religious zeal as to sacrifice their own children in the fire. No doubt this was considered to be a great experience not easily forgotten.

The prophets’ role was never to bring about a “new” concept of God but always to call people back to the revealed truth God had already given. David extolled God’s written word showing it had sufficient instructions for all of man’s life, his morals, his personal joys, and the right relationship to God (Psa. 119). The covenant made with Moses was fulfilled when it had served its purpose but it was never changed. All attempts

to change it were actually rebellion. The law was “a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” It was a type of shadow of the new covenant which God has given in Christ. But as long as it stood, it could not be changed.

The new covenant was sealed in Christ’s death (Matt. 26:28) and all the instructions concerning it are given by Christ and the apostles. In keeping with the ancient “type” it provides our salvation by grace and we claim that salvation by receiving God’s grace according to His instructions. Grace is not for everyone. Jesus “gave his life, a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28), and it is only a remnant of every people that receives God’s grace. But everyone who receives it, receives it by the same instructions.

Changes have taken place in the church since it began. Paul wrote that he was amazed that the Galatian churches were already following a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). In Revelation the churches then existing in Asia are reprimanded for changes which they had allowed and are exhorted to return to the original (Rev. 2:5, 3:3, 18, 19).

The Reformation of the 16th century was a gigantic movement to abolish changes wrought by men and to return the church to the apostolic doctrine and pattern. The Restoration Movement of the 19th century was an effort to unite churches by restoring the apostolic pattern of faith and policy. Both of these movements had great influence in their times but gradually the pressure to hold to God’s revealed truth gave way to the pressure for something new and different.

Within a score of years, many major changes have been made in the majority of churches. Creeds and confessions have been rewritten and new groups have sprung up claiming to have found the key to real Christian faith. All these changes have one thing in common: the movement from the objective truth revealed in the Bible toward a subjective faith based on religious feeling and experience. People want to “feel” good about their religion and if they capture the good feeling they put their faith in **it**. To get this **good** feeling, churches of all brands are experimenting with emotion-stimulants. Emotion can be manipulated a thousand ways. A skilled song leader can create an emotional atmosphere completely apart from truth and Christian faith. So can a professional evangelist. The “Christian experience” resulting from such manipulated emotion is little different from the religious experience of pagan rites and ceremonies. Neither is based upon God’s truth yet both give the worshipper a false sense of satisfaction.

Youth camps are especially vulnerable to the manipulation of emotion. Camp leaders utilize hidden singing groups, burning crosses, sound effects, special lighting, and a nostalgic sweet sorrow of parting on the final day to bring the emotion to a high pitch and give the young people that final push into the emotional experience. For many this experience forever negates any further seeking of a true conversion. The feeling is the thing. Often, they try to recapture it in their home church and when they cannot succeed they become drop-outs.

Those who trust their feelings seldom search the Scriptures for real enlightenment. Often when the experience fades and the feeling is dead, so is their faith.

True Christian faith is established on truth which does not change. No matter how one feels, it remains. That means that when I put my faith in that which God reveals it will remain the same faith, no matter how I feel. There are times of joy and times of sorrow, times of lightheartedness and times of depression. But the faith is not established

on anything inside of me, but on that which is totally outside of me: the word of truth which God has revealed.

That truth embraces the fact of Christ's death for me and the means whereby I have received the benefit of it, by believing in it and by being baptized into it (Rom. 6:3–7). These facts do not change with the different moods or feelings that come over me. At time the thought of these facts may fill one with joy that makes him shout, but the emotional zeal does not add one ounce to the truth believed. It is believed because it is of God. The emotional feeling is the result of the truth, not the cause of it.

The truth of salvation reveals God's grace. It is by grace that God imputes our sins to Christ and accounts the penalty as paid by Christ's death. It is the grace in His heart, not any grace in my heart or yours, that makes salvation possible. Churches are seeking to change this and make salvation attainable by a personal experience. Instead of relying upon God's word one relies on what he feels. Instead of being saved by the grace which is in God, he looks inward for a grace in himself. To this end he seeks an experience, and many churches have changed their programs to help give the experience people are looking for. Think of a new gimmick that stirs emotions and you will have the preachers beating a path to your doorstep to borrow it. Contests, magic shows, "touching" sessions — as Oral Roberts has said, "Now let us touch someone while we pray." And we doubt not that he knows how to put the touch on!

It's no use excusing the new faith of emotionalism by pointing out that the church is legalistic and dead. Certainly a church may claim to hold to the scriptures ("Where the Bible speaks, we speak") and be as dead as last year's tomato vine. We cannot deny this. Many who always talk about "restoring the church" have a very limited idea of the church. They want a certain order of worship and loyalty to certain Bible colleges and that is supposed to be a church restored to the Apostolic order. No wonder the church is dead. God's word contains more than an order of worship. Many people know the order of worship as given in Acts 2:42 but know nothing of the One they worship. What they need is to consider the attributes of God: His power, His sovereignty, His goodness, His knowledge, His justice, His holiness and His love. They need to study His commandments, to know His mind! It is the knowledge of God that inspires the godly. Instead of this, men think to lift the congregation by emotional manipulation. What a shame and tragedy!

A shift from faith in God's expressed word to man's experience of subjective faith has resulted in a loss of respect for the words God spoke. Along with the switch to the emotional experience came a flood of so-called translation of the Bible. For centuries men studied the original languages of the Bible in order to translate it right, so as to know what God actually said. Now comes a generation which cares not what God said but demands a Bible that is easily understood, without study. Instant spiritual maturity, without the time and mental labor of studying!

Give us a paraphrase — it may not be what God meant, but it is easy to understand! Why not, since it is one's feelings and experiences he relies upon and not God's truth.

Still the word lives and is the only means of assurance. It is better to have one promise of God than to have a thousand experiences upon which to place our hope. Jesus said, "My word shall not pass away"... "The words I speak, the same will judge you in the last day." Paul wrote that Christ will destroy those who "obey not the Gospel."

However one may “feel” in response to his experiences the acid test is in his response to Christ’s word. It is Christ who will come to raise the dead and give immortality to those who believe Him — not to those who trust in themselves.

God’s truth is unchanged. That which Christ bound through the apostles is still binding. Preachers need to forget new methods, new gimmicks and new appeals to the experience-orientated and start digging into the ancient Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, in order to feed the starving flock of God. This is the experience the church desperately needs.

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