

## **BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE**

*Edited from a message by Brother Merle Ruth given at the Valley View Mennonite Church.*

Some years ago before the coal mining industry was mechanized a passenger train was passing through a coal mining region, one of the passengers looked out the window and saw a large number of mules grazing in the fields and this aroused this curiosity so he turned to a fellow passenger to enquire the reason for this and this is what he was told; those mules were kept down in the mines working all week long and on Sundays they were brought up out of the darkness of the mine into the light of the sun, furthermore he was told that was necessary to keep them from going blind.

Maybe it is not proper to compare people with mules but nevertheless I see a parallel to our experience, to our circumstances. We too live amid conditions that exert a blinding influence, there are factors in our environment that threaten to destroy our spiritual perception, we'd like those mules need to be frequently exposed to the Light lest we go blind. How much exposure to the Light do you allow yourself? Some people try to get by with as little as possible and that is why their spiritual perception is so poor.

How is it with you? Are you allowing yourself to be exposed to the Light of life so that you don't become blind? Remember if they didn't expose the mules to the light they would have become blind. We too will suffer the same fate if we live in the dark and don't expose ourselves to the Light.

Years ago I heard in evangelists make this assertion he said there are four classes of people and he proceeded then to describe them in these terms:

- 1] Number one - those who are lost and know it,
- 2] Secondly - those who are lost and don't know it.
- 3] Thirdly - those who are saved and know it.
- 4] Fourthly - those who are saved and don't know it.

Now I don't suppose any of us would challenge the factuality of that statement but while admitting the existence of these four groups I would view them as very unequal in size. The smallest group in my opinion would be the latter, group number four, those who are saved and don't know it. And for the sake of clarity I would add this I would speak of them as those who are saved and don't know it for sure, they lack Assurance of Salvation.

I have now introduced my subject. It will not be a text but rather a topic and I have worded it this way: *The Biblical Basis for Assurance of Salvation.*

On this question of Christian Assurance there are two extremes.

1) On the one side are those who contend that here and now we cannot know with certainty our actual standing with God, we are somewhat in the dark we can't really know.

2) On the other side are those who are living in almost the same identical way as the non-professing Christian but because of a one-time decision for Christ somewhere in their past they claim to be a child of God with no possibility of ever being lost.

Those are the two extremes. Neither one is Biblical but in my opinion the second is the most dangerous. Being human we need to guard less we react too strongly against either of those extremes. Recognising that some people do entertain a false hope might incline me to take a dim view of assurance, the assurance that is available for the authentic Christian. I may almost conclude that this thing we call Assurance of Salvation is a wholly subjective seeing it as something that really can't be tested.

I would hope that none of us has actually arrived at that conclusion. An unbiased study of the Bible will never lead one to that conclusion and the Bible must forever be our Court of Final Appeal.

Those early New Testament saints were convinced of their acceptance by God and of their security in Christ, they had no doubt about either, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they taught and they wrote that this confidence can be the possession of every child

of God. It is part of the package that constitutes the believer's spiritual birthright privileges. It is something we are meant to claim; Assurance of Salvation.

As I have already implied Assurance of Salvation is the confidence that all is well between me and God and that I have been accepted into His redeemed family because of my response to the provision that He has made. It is the outgrowth of an intelligent faith, it is being at peace with God knowing that I have been justified, that my record has been cleared on the grounds of my repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The guilt feelings that once weighed me down have been removed.

As is stated in [Romans 8:1](#) There is therefore now **NO** condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus to walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

**NO** condemnation. Is that your experience this morning? Do you feel free before God? You can be, God wants you to be, He wants you to enjoy Assurance of Salvation.

God is no longer one to flee from but One to flee to. If that is the way it is in your life then you are enjoying this blessing. I now relate to God in a very warm manner, like the child relates to his parent, that is the meaning of that expression in [Romans 8:15](#): “We cry Abba, Father.” A real close intimate relationship with God. The same context indicates that the holy spirit has taken up residence in my body and various witness with my spirit that I am His child, and so Christian assurance can be defined as a holy spirit created impression, in that impression.

While it is true that Christian assurance is a part of our subjective experience it is not something that can be divorced from the external aspects of life.

In the [first epistle of John](#) the idea comes through repeatedly that we can know whether or not we are on good terms with God by what we do and by how we live. And so it is not wholly a subjective experience

it cannot be divorced from what we do and how we live. That belongs to the objective aspect of assurance.

Now there is another detail that ought to be added; Assurance relates primarily to current experience. It is my present state of being that I can be sure of. On the human level my future and your future is not wholly predictable, God alone knows for sure how you and I will live from this day forth, whether or not I persevere to the end is known to God alone. Assurance does however include the knowledge that throughout one's entire lifespan that God is able to keep me and I want Him to do that. But as I understand it Christian assurance relates primarily to current experience, it is my present standing with God that I can be sure of and I can also be sure that God is able to keep me until my dying day, I have no doubt whatever about God's ability to do that, that too is part of Christian assurance.

Well that was my attempt to define what we are talking about this morning; Assurance of Salvation.

Now very briefly let's note the Biblical indications that God does indeed want His saints to experience this blessing, in fact we will be noting that He wants us not just to have a little assurance but He wants us to experience full assurance. That very expression "full assurance" you will find in:

[Hebrews 10:22](#)

"Let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

Putting our faith in the work and Word of God yields full assurance.

In [Colossians 2: 2](#) you will find another aspect of this full assurance;

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the *full assurance* of understanding,"

Growth in spiritual understanding likewise leads to full assurance

For a third occurrence of this expression let's go back again to the book of [Hebrews 6:11](#)

"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the *full assurance* of hope unto the end:"

Here this full assurance is related to the Christian's hope. With God on our side the future looks bright and that bright outlook yields an assurance, there is real hope of perseverance to the end. Here then is a triple witness to the fact that God wants His child to experience not just a little assurance but full assurance.

You may turn now to first John chapter 5, very shortly I will be reading verse 13, but first let me inject this; perhaps you have had contact with people who reflect this idea: Saved today, lost tomorrow, never knowing where we stand. Some people live amid such uncertainty.

Well here is a statement that ought to settle forever this question: Does God want the saint to know for sure his standing with God?

Maybe in these three foregoing passages this idea did not come through clear enough to satisfy your desire. Well I think you will need to admit after listening to first John 5:13 that this fact could not be stated any more clearly that it is right here. Let's listen to verse 13:

#### 1 John 5:13

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

Here we are told that this entire epistle was written for the express purpose that persons who are saved might be able to know that they are saved. The goodness of our God is reflected in His obvious desire to supply the saints with a sense of security. We do have a built-in need for knowing that God accepts us and God has graciously through His Word met that need. We can know whether or not we are accepted by God.

The heart of what I wish to share this morning relates to the Biblical Basis for Assurance.

I'm going to approach this first negatively and then positively so we will touch now on what it is not, I am going to look at what is not the Biblical Basis for Assurance.

1] In the first place the Biblical Basis of Assurance is not any supposed arbitrarily made unconditional election on the part of God.

Some people base their assurance on the erroneous believe that some time around the dawn of time God took a forward look down through the corridor of time and from among the billions of people who He foresaw would be born He arbitrarily made a decree that certain ones irrespective of any thing on their part would constitute the elect and the rest of mankind would constitute the non-elect. According to this erroneous view if you are fortunate enough to be one of those elect then you have it made, you are eternally secure regardless, but this view is falsehood, it is not a part of the Biblical Basis for Assurance.

2] Secondly assurance is not to be based on any un-kept, out of date past commitment that one may have made.

I find in Ezekiel 18:24 unmistakable evidence that God keeps His accounts up to date and I am not apologizing for reading this passage although it was already read one time this week:

[Ezekiel 18:24](#)

"But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? (*Now comes God's answer!*) All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

That is the word of God. This verse raises the question and then gives God's answer. Undoubtedly God is still operating that way because God does not change ([Hebrews 13:8](#), [James 1:17](#))

There is more to Christianity than a one-time decision. That initial decision must be made but you cannot pack all of salvation into one experience. A life of Christian discipleship must follow that initial experience. The commitment of a lifetime requires a lifetime of commitment.

One man had such a sensational conversion experience that he wrote up an account of it and entitled it "My Blessed Experience" From time to time he frequently got out this paper and read his "Blessed Experience" to anyone who was minded to listen, we have no fault to find with that. There finally came however a day when he sent his wife upstairs to get his "Blessed Experience" so that he could read it to an acquaintance that had stopped by but to his dismay his wife came downstairs with the news that the mice had eaten up his "Blessed Experience."

When Christian experience gets in the past tense it becomes pretence. It does not provide a Biblical Basis for Assurance. One's experience must be up-to-date in order for it to be a part of the Biblical Basis for Assurance.

3] Thirdly the Biblical Basis for Assurance is not how much saved or under saved I may feel.

Our feelings lie very close to the surface and therefore they are very changeable. You may be as close to the Lord today as you were yesterday but you may not feel as close.

I have here two excerpts from the Journal of a New England pioneer circuit rider which I believe serves to illustrate this point.

The first entry is dated Wednesday night at bedtime: "Arrived at the home of Brother Brown late this evening hungry and tired after a long day in the saddle. Had a bountiful supper of cold pork and beans, warm bread, bacon and eggs, coffee and rich pastry. I go to rest but my witness is clear, the future is bright, I feel called to a great and glorious work in this place. Brother Brown's family are godly people."

The next entry is written late on Thursday morning and tells a different story. "Awakened late this morning after a troubled night, I am very much depressed in soul. The way looks dark. Far from feeling called to work among these people I am beginning to doubt the safety of my own soul."

I suppose we have all had similar experiences. We cannot base our salvation or our Assurance of Salvation on how we feel. There are some indications too that the devil works at making the sinner feel secure and at the same time works at making the saint feel insecure. So then don't consult your feelings to ascertain you're standing with God.

4] Fourthly the Biblical Basis for Assurance is not the possession of remarkable charisma or miracle working powers.

Speaking in tongues and suchlike is viewed by some as the most authentic mark of sainthood. But what is written in first Corinthians 13?

#### [1 Corinthians 13:1](#)

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." *I am nothing!*

And what did our Lord say was in store for people who glory in their ability to perform the supernatural? Why He said: Many will say to me, in that day of judgement, have we not prophesied in thy name? In thy name cast out Devils and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then I will profess unto them: I never knew you. ([Matthew 7:22-23](#))

Obviously they were basing their Assurance of Salvation on something less than the Biblical basis.

5] Fifthly we do not achieve a biblically based assurance on a proudly submitted high-performance rating.

Here we meet a man who handed in that kind of the report. I am beginning to read at verse 10 in Luke 18.

#### [Luke 18:10-14](#)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. [11] The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. [12] I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. [13] And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon

his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. (*Now note the words of our Lord about this second man*) [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:"

None of us will find acceptance with God on the basis of our good record. Submitting to God in a proud way our good performance rating will not get us to first base with God. God does not honour that kind of thing.

There are numerous other false foundations. Some no doubt suppose that being born into a Christian home guarantees God's favor upon them. It does not!

I venture the opinion that many a person born into a Mennonite home is suffering right now a foretaste of the pains of eternal hell.

What about church attendance? Sure you ought to belong to a biblically sound church and you ought to attend its services faithfully but simply having one's name on a church role affords in itself no sure foundation for acceptance with God.

I have now touched on a number of things that you do not constitute be Biblical Basis for Assurance of Salvation.

What then does it consist of?

I'm going to answer this in two parts because the Biblical Basis for Assurance has a God-ward side and a man-ward side.

I can be assured of salvation on the one hand because of what God has provided for me in the Lord Jesus Christ and on the other hand because of my obedient response to His plan and provision for lost sinners like me. On those two grounds I can have Assurance of Salvation.

I am ready now to enlarge on this two sided Biblical Basis for Assurance.

I have listed first four elements that constitute the God-ward side of this Biblical foundation.

Number 1: The atoning work of God on my behalf.

Christ died for us so that His blood could be appropriated by our faith to cover over our sin. Looking at it from another point of view Christ died so that God could justly justify the responding sinner and thus reconcile him to Himself.

We call this the finished work of Christ. It was done once and for all and its benefit is primarily for the remission of sins in the past at the time of one's conversion but it also provides the basis for our ongoing forgiveness as we walk in the Light. Although the saint is not perfect he has been supplied with a perfect standing before God. Praise God for that perfect standing. That is why we don't have to suffer any condemnation whatever.

Number 2: The interceding work of Christ.

This is sometimes referred to as the unfinished work of Christ. He who died to save us now lives to keep us. This aspect of His work is designed especially to meet our present and future needs. Christ rose to be our great High Priest. He entered the courts of heaven to appear in the presence of God for us. That is precisely the terminology employed in God's word. He entered the presence of God for us, not just for His own sake, for us.

If and when we sin we now have an advocate with the Father, it is declared that He is able to save them to the uttermost, they come unto God by Him, which means He is able to save us to the end of our earthly course because unlike the Old Testament priest Christ continues to live, He doesn't die. We can count on Him being our advocate until the end of our journey. ([1 John 2:1](#))

Number 3: The availability of God's power to keep and to enable.

The faithful believer is kept by the power of God for He is able to keep us from falling. To fail to believe that makes one guilty of unbelief. The Bible says He is able to keep us from falling. [Romans 14:4](#) puts it this way: "...God is able to make him stand."

That speaks of divine enablement, let's not limit God. Sure, we are weak stumbling mortals but God is omnipotent. We are assured too that our temptations are censored and those who stay close to the Shepherd

can claim that promise that no man is able to pluck them out, to pluck us out of our Father's, our Shepherd's hand, no man is able to pluck us from that place of security provided by God in Christ.

I'm of the opinion that God's hold on the believer and then the believer's can hold onto God. I glory in that truth. I trust that you do to.

Remember we are looking at elements in the foundation that God has provided for our assurance, that t foundation has a God-ward and a man-ward side and already we have looked at three of the elements that constitute the God-ward side.

1. The atoning work of Christ.
2. The interceding work of Christ and:
3. The availability of God's power to keep and to enable.

I have one more, this one I have labeled:

Number 4: The absolutely trustworthy Word of God.

God has given us exceeding great and precious promises. When you take your stand on any of those promises you have found the most secure place in all the world. In general His promises are conditional, they follow this pattern: If you will do this and this then you can surely count on that and that. That is the nature of most of God's promises, all of them relating to salvation.

Some of these promises have come from the lips of Jesus Himself: "He that heareth my word believeth on Him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, he has passed from death unto life. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved."

([John 5:24](#))

Other promises come through other channels.

Peter's word to the convicted sinners was: "Repent be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ([Acts 2:38](#))

Paul wrote to the Romans: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, shalt believe in thy heart that God has raised Him from the dead thou shalt be saved." ([Romans 10:9](#))

We now look at the God-ward side of the Biblical Basis for Assurance.

Two things stand out; The work of Christ and The word of God.

Assuming a favorable human response the work of Christ makes the believer safe and the Word of God makes the believer sure. We can be safe and we can be sure.

Now let's turn our attention to the humanly supplied elements in the Assurance Foundation.

These elements consist of a variety of divinely called for responses. Depending on how we respond to the gracious offer of God we either rob ourselves or we supply ourselves with a valid basis for assurance. Really salvation and Assurance of Salvation belong together in the same package. God offers them both on very similar terms. Those terms are the conditions we are to meet.

A very basic condition is repentance.

Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish were the words of Jesus. Some people when they supposedly come to the Lord detour around repentance and then wonder why don't I have assurance? Only the person who genuinely repents and maintains a repentant spirit has a valid basis on which to claim assurance.

Another very basic condition is a personal persistent and properly directed faith.

If you are trying to get to heaven on the faith of your parents you will have a problem with assurance and if I try to meet the challenges of today with yesterday's faith I too will have problems with assurance. It is significant that in the Bible the conditional terms that spell out the believers responsibilities are consistently in the present tense. Go through for example the book of John, notice those verbs and you will find that they are in the present tense. [John 3: 16](#). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that only a select few may believe and be saved? No! Whosoever believeth! Day after day, hour after hour, it is on that condition that we can claim Assurance of Salvation.

We jeopardize our assurance also if we confuse our faith with our Saviour.

That is if we make out of our faith a saviour, and it is possible to do that. Contrary to what is sometimes said it is not really our faith that saves us we are saved by grace through faith, ([Ephesians 2:8](#)) it is Christ not our faith that really says that. Faith is only the instrumental means of our salvation. In order to attain and maintain assurance my primary confidence must not be in my faith but in the object of my faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You probably heard about the sister who was once addressed as the woman with the great faith. No, she replied: "I am the woman with a little faith in the great God."

She had it right. She had the emphasis at the right point.

Another element that we must supply is an intolerant attitude toward sin.

Our claim to assurance is valid only if we heed the command of our Lord: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." You don't need to be perfect to claim assurance but you must by the grace and power of God break with the practice of sin. "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin." This is found in [first John 3:9](#) and it is speaking there not of a single act but rather the practice of God, Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. He doesn't make a practice of sinning.

We must comply with that requirement of God, we don't need to be perfect but we do need to be in tolerant toward sin, we dare not entertain it, we must hate it and by the power of God seek to overcome it.

Another element that we must supply is to confess Christ publicly and show a readiness to identify with Him in a life of discipleship.

Hiding one's light under a bushel, being ashamed of Christ, these are things that will rob one of the reality of assurance. ([Matthew 5:15](#))

Another of the necessary elements that we supply is stated by Peter in these terms: "Giving diligence to make your calling and election sure." ([2 Peter 1:10](#))

In that context Peter urges his readers to cultivate a number of Christian virtues, he then concludes with this promise: For if ye do these things ye shall never fall. Ye shall never fall if you give diligence to make your calling and election sure, if you don't become careless. Now this very definitely relates our security to things that we do, he tells us in that context to add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge and so on. We are to cultivate our Christian life, we are to cultivate our relationship with God, that too is part of what we supply for this assurance foundation. (read also [1 Peter 1:5-8](#))

And then in the epistle of first John God has included for our benefit what I am calling an assurance test. A willingness to submit to this test forms another part of the basis for assurance.

Do we love the brethren? And then according to this test in the first John's epistle we can know on that basis that we have passed from death unto life.

Do we keep His commandments? If we do, again we can thereby know that on that basis that we do know Him.

And so we have there a test that is so broad in its coverage, I just mentioned two points, it is so broad in its coverage by which any sincere Christian can have his assurance thoroughly validated, it can be thoroughly validated.

Now in relation to these conditions, these conditions that formed the basis of assurance I wish to share this observation.

These conditions lie within the reach of whosoever will. You don't need to be anyone special to possess Assurance of Salvation, you do not need to be a super saint. It is something that God wants every one of His children to have and He has put it within reach of every one of His saints.

I have here a paragraph that highlights the gracious way in which God provides for our assurance.

Suppose after the Ark was completed, suppose God had said to Noah: Now get eight great spikes of iron and drive them into the side of the Ark. And Noah got the spikes and did as he was told. Then the word came to him and said: Come thou and all thy house and hang on those

spikes and Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives each lay hold of a spike, the rains descended and the floods came and as the Ark was borne up on the waters their muscles was strained to the utmost as they clung to the spikes.

Imagine God saying to them: If you hang on until the flood is over you will be saved.

How different the simple Bible story is. ([Genesis 7:1](#)) "And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark;"

That is very different from holding on by their own effort. Only inside the Ark where they save.

Thank God we don't need to hold onto any kind of spikes but we do need to stay inside the Ark just as the Israelites needed to stay inside their houses behind that blood sprinkled door.

So then Christian security is obviously conditional and I make no apology for that claim. If it were not conditional why then has God given us so many warnings? If the danger of being lost again did not exist why would God prepare as though it did exist?

Some claim that if there is any possibility of one loosing out and being eternally lost then all ground of assurance is swept away they say. But really that is not even logical.

Consider for example these parallels.

I am well aware that suicide is a real possibility, a real option for me. Does that fill me with fear that I might take my life? Why no. That is one parallel.

Another parallel: The same can be said of marriage. It is possible for a marriage to break up, we see it on every hand, does that possibility cause me to fear and tremble that some time my marriage might break up? No. And every day young people are marrying without fear, they intend to stay together and they can stay together and many do but there is that possibility.

And so it is with salvation, even though that possibility of loosing out exists I can still enjoy Assurance of Salvation, and assurance of God's acceptance of me. And so then rejoicing in our God provided salvation let us as Peter says: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." That is our part and the foundation for Christian assurance.

How is it with you this morning my friend? Are you enjoying this blessing? Can you claim Assurance of Salvation?

If you have arrived at the age of accountability and have not yet committed your life to the Lord you obviously have no ground whatever for assurance of salvation or hope for the future.

The Bible says: (1 John 5:12) "He that hath the son hath life, he that hath not the son of God hath not life."

Can God state it any more plainly?

To live just one hour without the hope of heaven is a risk that no one should take. I hope there is no-one here that will go out of these doors and risk an eternity of hell when you could get right now with God!

As we give you that opportunity this morning we are going to sing number 303 in the Christian hymnal. (566 in the Church Hymnal) I'm going to extend the gospel invitation to whosoever will, to whosoever senses a need in his life that has not been met. This song reminds us that we are to come just as we are. Really there is no other way in which we can come.

Maybe for one reason or another you do not enjoy Assurance of Salvation. Maybe you have made a discovery this morning, maybe you have discovered why, maybe the spirit of God has laid His finger on something in your life that is preventing you from having Assurance of Salvation.

I suppose the most common reason for lack of assurance is failure to live in victory and if there is in your life any unconfessed sin that will prevent you from having Assurance of Salvation.

Now there are some sins that we can simply confess to God alone, there are other sins that need to be confessed to others beside God. I

don't know what your need may be, but if you have a need in your life, if you are longing for a peace that you do not have and are willing to take the steps that you know that need to be taken to get that peace or if you need help, or if you don't know we are here to help you. If you are willing to receive help will you show that by standing as the scene now this invitation.

Just as I am without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou biddest me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God I come, Come.

In Old Testament times there were God appointed cities of refuge. Men on whom the sentence of death pardon could be seen fleeing for their lives to those cities of refuge.

My friend the wages of sin is death. If you have never yet repented of your sin or if you have back-slidden the sentence of death hangs over you my friend but praise God there is a place of refuge for us too -it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you this morning in that place of safety? If you are not sure why don't you seek counsel. If you are willing to do that we give you one more opportunity whilst we sing stanza number two.

Just as I am and waiting not,  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God I come, I come.

Thank you for your prayers, your attention. I trust that this means that you are a rejoicing in the blessed assurance that Jesus is yours.

Once again a closing thought:

Happy is the person who lives so close to God that the devil cannot get between. That is the way to experience and maintain this great blessing of Assurance of Salvation.