

Assurance Possible; Suspense Unbearable.

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ASSURANCE POSSIBLE ;
SUSPENSE UNBEARABLE.

UNDER certain conditions *suspense* becomes almost unbearable.

One day you find a friend pacing the platform of a railway station, evidently in deep thought. As his face indicates considerable agitation, it is with sympathetic hesitation you address him. The secret is soon out. For he says, I have just heard that the *ship* has gone down !

What ship ?

My own! cargo and all ! And, worst of all, my only son was on board. As I have no certain tidings of him, I am now on my way to the port to make enquiries of his safety. All I have heard is, that *some* of the passengers were rescued ; but that the captain and a few others, not thinking her

state hopeless, refused to abandon her, and sank with her!

Now suppose you had suggested that he should hope for the best, and quietly wait until he had heard more news.

Do you think it would have relieved his mind? No. "*I must KNOW!*" he would say. If nothing could *compensate* him for his loss; nothing could *satisfy* but the assurance of his safety.

This is only by way of illustration.

YOU HAVE A SOUL! Can anything satisfy you but the assurance of its safety? Can you rest while the smallest doubt remains?

The loss of the finest ship afloat, with all its costly cargo, might be "covered" by marine insurance. But *who will compensate you for the loss of your soul?* The living Saviour in glory knows its real worth; and thus has He spoken,—

"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give

in exchange for his soul ? ” (Mark viii. 36, 37).

But some reasoner may ask, What do you mean by a man’s soul ?

It is that part of every human being which is *responsible to God*, with *conscience the abiding witness*. It was by the Creator’s in-breathing, that man became a “living soul” (Gen. ii. 7). Men may “*kill the body*,” Jesus said, but “*they are not able to kill the soul*” (Matt. x. 28). The soul will exist ETERNALLY—“SAVED” or “LOST.”

God takes pleasure in man’s *salvation*, and in giving him the *knowledge* of it. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared” (Tit. ii. 11). “He will have all men to be *saved*; and to come to the *knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. ii. 4).

Though assurance of salvation is God’s desire for all, it is to be feared that there are countless thousands in so-called Christian lands who are absolute strangers to the comfort of it.

Three distinct classes are to be found in the various circles of *profession*,

WITHOUT SETTLED ASSURANCE.

1. Those who have *no desire* for it.
2. Those who own the *desirability*; but *doubt the possibility*.
3. Those who believe *the possibility*, but *lack the comfort of having it*.

1. THOSE WHO HAVE NO DESIRE FOR IT.—These make it sadly evident that they have never experienced real soul-awakening. They have never truly been brought to “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts xx. 21). Glad enough to be regarded as respectable “*church members*,” they are, in reality, only *religious unbelievers*, strongly opposing anything like settled assurance.

The secret of their dislike is not hard to find. Satan is behind it: and he hates the possibility of “the full assurance of faith.” It makes too much of

Christ, too much of the grace of God, to please the enemy; it is too closely bound up with the secret of holy living to serve *his* ends. So, wherever he can find a willing ear, he whispers, 'Don't *you* be such a Pharisee as to say you know for certain! It is only bare-faced hypocrites who talk like that! Take a more commonsense view of things, and you will be quite as well off as they are in the end'!

Hence the creed of many is something like this:—

If *one* man may know,
Then why not another?
But if *no* man can know,
You're on par with your brother.
So be kind to your *neighbour*,
For this is the test;
Make sure of *his* favour,
And leave all the rest.

This plausible lie—the devil's gospel—has done much for his cause in this world; and is still doing it. It ignores two great facts,—

That God's most favoured creature has wilfully *sinned* against his Creator.

That the great Ruler of the universe has the right to deal with sin as *He* deems fit; and that a guilty creature's notions of *how* He should act cannot bind HIM!

But this is not all; the devil's gospel ignores two other great facts.

1. God has already spoken His mind about the *way* sin must be dealt with. Righteous judgment, worthy of His holy abhorrence of evil, must be executed upon it.

2. God has made known, from the beginning, that sin may be dealt with in a *Substitute*. One, Who is Himself *perfectly sinless*, may take the place of the *utterly sinful*, and bear his condemnation.

This has been done. *God has acted*. A Holy Sinbearer has been found. God found Him in His own bosom; and according to His Own great love, has sent Him on mercy's marvellous

errand. JESUS HAS DIED. " Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God " (1 Pet. iii. 18). " God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us " (Rom. v. 8).

If you can deny God's right to judge sin ; if you can ignore the necessity of Christ's death as meeting sin's penalty and expressing God's love ; if you can claim the right to stand before God in your *own* righteousness, the devil's gospel may suit you admirably. But if, because of *God's holiness* and *man's sinfulness*, a divinely accepted Substitute was a righteous necessity, then, with one stroke, the possibility of man's ability to meet his own case is swept away for ever.

Moreover, if God has declared His love in sending His beloved Son ; if Christ has died ; if for every believer He has already accomplished redemption through the shedding of His pre-

scious blood ; if God has expressed His satisfaction in that atoning sacrifice ; if He has, in the plainest possible terms, declared the present and future blessing, of *all who believe in Him*,— who shall stand up in the presence of such witnesses, and laugh to scorn the possibility of *assurance* ?

Such men, alas, *are* to be found, and found *to-day*. But as the LORD GOD once said of a gainsaying people by His prophet Jeremiah, “ They shall know whose words shall stand, *mine* or *theirs* ” (Jer. xlv. 28). And the higher a man’s position as a religious leader, the deeper the condemnation of his unbelief at the coming day of reckoning (read Luke xii. 47, 48 ; 2 Kings vii. 19).

2. THOSE WHO REGARD IT DESIRABLE BUT NOT POSSIBLE.—Those of this class have much in common with the next. Both believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ; both recognize that the only ground of peace for a guilty conscience,

the only refuge from the wrath to come, is to be found in His precious death and resurrection. But both mistake the true ground of *abiding assurance*. *They rightly look to CHRIST for ultimate salvation, but wrongly at THEMSELVES for present assurance.*

An individual in this class, thinks that *full assurance* means *full satisfaction in his own christian attainments*. In other words, that a believer gradually *grows* into it. The result is, that the more he examines his own progress, the more he is convinced, that, for himself, assurance is *impossible*, and that, when others claim to have it, it can only be *presumption*. He will tell you, that he considers it would be taking far too much upon *himself* to speak with positive certainty on such a subject; that for *him* to do so would be positively hypocritical !

Now under *such* conditions it would indeed be presumption, but under other conditions the presumption

would *not* be on the side of him who speaks with certainty, but on his who speaks with *hesitation* !

Take one or two illustrations from Scripture.

Previous to Hezekiah's sickness (Isa. xxxviii. 1), even in the days of his most buoyant feelings of health and vigour, it would have been audacious presumption to say, "*I am certain I shall live one year longer !*" It would have been far more becoming to say, "Surrounded by disease, beset with dangers as I am, I cannot, with any certainty, speak of being alive to-morrow !" But after his illness, there would *not* have been the least presumption in saying, "*I now know for certain, that I shall live fifteen years longer !*" Since *God* had spoken to that effect it would have been daring presumption to say anything less.

Take another case. If the dying robber (Luke xxiii.) had spoken with certainty of reaching heaven when the

soldiers first placed him on the gibbet, it would have been unwarrantable presumption indeed. Yet a little later, even after he had crowned his life of wickedness by reviling the beloved Son of God, to say that he was certain of going to Paradise that very day, and in company with "the Man that had done nothing amiss," would not have been presumption at all ! He had the "verily" of Jesus Himself for this assurance.

Be careful, therefore, before branding a man with the charge of pharisaical presumption, that the *foundation* of his assurance be ascertained.

If a man tells you he is going to the bank to draw £1000, and you have known him for years as only a poor man, often in great straits with his large family, you might hastily regard what he tells you as empty pretension. But when you learn *why* he was expecting to draw such a sum ; not because of what he had been personally

able to lay by, but because he was the bearer of a cheque for £1000 made out to himself, and signed by his wealthy master, you would quickly reverse your hasty conclusion, and say, O I see! It is, then, only a matter of what *his Master's name* stands for at the bank!

And when you hear a man speaking of the assurance of salvation as being *impossible* to reach, because no man can be sure of having *attained* to such a state of personal merit as will make him certain he is fit for heaven and ready to die, you may at once agree with him. For on this ground assurance is utterly impossible! Such a man is trying to rest in *self-satisfaction*; that is, on his *own estimate of his own merits*; and when God says, "There is none that doeth good, no not one," this is presumption indeed.

The first step to salvation is *repentance*, that is, *self-condemnation*, the very opposite of self-satisfaction. The

repentant soul rests on *God's estimate of the merits of Christ*. He believes what *God says* of all who do trust in Christ, and what He says of all who do not: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou shalt be saved*" (Acts xvi. 31); "He that believeth not *shall be damned*" (Mark xvi. 16). Where can you find a shadow of uncertainty on either side ?

3. THOSE WHO BELIEVE ASSURANCE POSSIBLE, BUT LACK THE COMFORT OF IT.—This is a much disappointed class, however sincere. They think that "*full assurance of faith*" means *full satisfaction in their own spiritual feelings*. They believe in Christ as the only Saviour of sinners. They have felt their personal sinfulness, and freely confess their need of Him; but their only thought of *assurance* seems to consist in being *satisfied with what they experience of the work of the Spirit in themselves*.

THEY ARE SEEKING FOR PEACE BY A CHANGE WITHIN; WHEREAS IT IS REALLY THE CHANGE WITHIN WHICH MAKES THEM SEEK FOR PEACE.

The mistake is this, that while the work of the Spirit is an absolute necessity, the Spirit does not direct an awakened soul to its own conflicting experiences *as the ground of peace*, but to CHRIST. The Spirit came to glorify *Christ*; He came to testify of *Him*; and it is of the *value of Christ's perfect sacrifice for us* that the Spirit bears witness (Heb. x. 14, 15).

Assurance of fitness for the "holiest of all"—"*the full assurance of faith*"—rests on what has been done and finished, once for all; even the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus for our sins. It rests on what *was done ON THE CROSS, entirely outside us*; and *not on what is now being done by the Spirit WITHIN US*.

The Spirit's work will not be finished until our bodies are conformed to

Christ's image in glory, at His coming again. Not till then shall we be *able to look at ourselves with peaceful, perfect satisfaction*. It is only as we look away to CHRIST IN GLORY, in the light of HIS FINISHED WORK ON THE CROSS, that our hearts are kept in joyful satisfaction now.

THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH IS THE FULL ASSURANCE OF GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST FOR US, AND OF THE UNCHANGING TRUSTWORTHINESS OF HIM WHO DID IT. THIS IS ASSURANCE WITHOUT PRESUMPTION.

You must turn your back on the sun in order to get a good look at your own shadow ; and when your face is turned towards the sun, your shadow is out of sight behind you.

“ They looked unto HIM, and were lightened ; and their faces were not ashamed ” (Ps. xxxiv. 5).

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