

1 John 2:3-6

INTRODUCTION: One of the most crucial issues a believer will face is the issue of assurance.

Many people seem to struggle with the issue of assurance of salvation.

ILLUSTRATION: The Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote a book on this issue of assurance and he titled it “Heaven on Earth”

He wrote: *“Assurance is glory in the bud, it is the suburb of paradise.”*

Fanny Crosby had the same idea in mind when she wrote the song, “Blessed Assurance Jesus is mine, Oh what a foretaste of glory divine.”

Do you have that in your life?

What is assurance?

It is a firm unshakable knowledge that you know you belong to Christ, that your sins are forgiven, that God loves you and you will enjoy everlasting life when you die.

It is a settled peace that you are in Christ.

Thomas Brooks wrote *“[It] is a reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious,*

blessed, and happy state: it is a sensible feeling, an experiential discerning of a man's being in a state of grace...assurance is a believer's ark, where he sits, Noah-like, quiet, still in the midst of all distractions and destructions, commotions and confusions."

Do you have that kind of assurance?

Three Preliminary Thoughts

1. It is possible to be saved and not have assurance.

ILLUSTRATION: Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say Christians are bent over like a question mark when they should be standing upright like an exclamation point."

Some believers seem to really struggle with this issue and never seem to get the matter settled.

Just know that it is possible to be saved and not have the assurance of salvation.

QUOTE: Charles Spurgeon said, *"Full assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to satisfaction. May you get it-may you get it at once. May you never be satisfied to live without it."*

Thomas Watson wrote:

"A child of God may have the Kingdom of grace in his heart, yet not know it."

The cup was in Benjamin's sack, though he did not know it was there."

William Gurnall wrote:

"We may have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves."

ILLUSTRATION: The Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up in 1646, distinguished faith from assurance. The Confession included this:

[CHAPTER 18] SECTION III .—This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it:¹

ILLUSTRATION: As a pastor I am encourage when I see a person wrestle with assurance because to me it is a positive sign of life.

The problem are people who never wrestle.

Those are the ones I wonder about.

Reasons people lack assurance

a. Strong preaching on God's holy standard.

¹MacArthur, J. 2000. *The gospel according to the Apostles : The role of works in the life of faith*. Originally published: Faith works. Dallas : Word Pub., c1993. Word Pub.: Nashville, TN

A pulpit that confronts people with their sin, that holds up a high standard of holiness, that calls them to a high standard of Christian living may lead some to lack assurance.

This is not a bad thing because the pulpit is suppose to create anxious hearts, it is suppose to provoke Christians to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith.

Apostles did that all the time in the NT.

b. Because they can't accept forgiveness.

They are tyrannized by their emotions, feeling too bad to be forgiven.

They are fixed on holiness and God's law and God's justice which knows no mercy.

They have an imbalanced view of God where they see Him only as a God of justice and wrath.

This is exactly what the devil would like.

He is the accuser of the brethren. He wants you to feel as if you have no hope of forgiveness.

QUOTE: Thomas Brooks wrote:

"Manasseh is saved, O despairing souls, the arms of mercy are open to receive a Manasseh, a monster, a devil incarnate. He

caused that prophet Isaiah to be sawed in the midst with a saw, as some rabbis say. He turned aside from the Lord to commit idolatry and cause his sons to pass through the fire and dealt with familiar spirits and made the streets of Jerusalem to overflow with innocent blood.

The soul of Mary Magdalene was full of devils and yet Christ cast them out and made her heart His house, His presence chamber. Why dost thou then say there is no hope for thee, O despairing soul?

Paul was full of rage against Christ and His people and full of blasphemy and impiety, and yet, behold, Paul is a chosen vessel. Paul is caught up in to the heaven and is filled with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. Why should you then say there is for you no help, O despairing soul?"

c. They fail to comprehend the gospel and plan of salvation.

They fail to comprehend the full sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross.

They fail to comprehend that the justice of God is fully satisfied.

They don't understand the extent of grace, the extent of God's mercy, the extent of forgiveness.

They feel that there is something more they must do instead of fully relying upon God's grace.

d. They don't know the exact time of their salvation.

They can't remember when they believed. They can't remember the moment of their salvation.

Because they can't remember when it was they don't know whether it was.

ARGUMENT: It is like saying because I can't remember my birthday, I'm not sure I am alive.

We have made such a fetish out of decisionism, we have so isolated and identified this little formula and this little prayer that you pray at some point as being the moment of salvation that if you don't have that little moment that you signed a card or raised your hand or walked an aisle or prayed your prayer or did your little formula thing, you can't identify when it happened, so many it never happened.

The question is not did you believe past tense but do you believe present tense.

Whenever "believe" is used in the NT regarding salvation is normally present tense (sometimes perfect).

ILLUSTRATION: I don't remember the exact moment I was saved I remember being convicted and praying and feeling sorry for my sins. But I can't honestly say that was the exact moment.

I wrestled like many people.

Even Jesus said that there is a mystery about it in John 3.

The source of your assurance should not be a stake in the ground but that you presently believe upon Christ.

It's a continuous action not a one time past action.

e. Because people still feel the flesh strongly and wonder if they have the new nature.

But you must remember you are a new creation incarcerated in unredeemed flesh, we are waiting for the redemption of the body.

The fact that you are more sensitive to sin and your own fallenness in your life is not a sign that you are lost, but saved.

Remember what John said in chapter 1 "If we say we have no sin..."

Believers become more acutely aware of their fallenness.

f. Because they don't see God's hand in their trials.

People say "How could God love me and let me go through this?"

"How could God love me and take me loved one..."

“How could God love me and not hear my prayer and not deliver me?”

“How could I be a Christian?”

ARGUMENT: “If you think like that you sentence yourself to a lack of assurance and you miss the very source of your assurance.”

The strongest proof of your assurance of salvation is that you go through a trial and you don't lose faith.

In fact one reason God allows us to go through the trial is so that we have a strong assurance when the trial is over that we are truly the Lord's

ILLUSTRATION: Job said “When he has tried me I shall come forth as gold.”

Meaning my faith will be found to be genuine, real, authentic.

^{ESV} **Romans 5:3** More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

^{ESV} **Romans 5:4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

^{ESV} **Romans 5:5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

That is hope translates immediately into assurance that we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

2. It is possible to have assurance and not be saved.

This is a most dangerous position to be in.

There are some people who have assurance that have no right to it.

It is a false assurance, people are self-deceived. Jesus said if your light be darkness how great is that darkness.

ILLUSTRATION: Like the old Negro spiritual said, “Everybody talking bout heaven ain’t going there.”

ILLUSTRATION: According to a recent poll 88% of all Americans are sure there is a heaven and they are going there.

ARGUMENT: This is why I try to hammer so hard on examining yourself. This is why I tell people don’t take it for granted be diligent to make sure.

^{ESV} **Matthew 7:21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

^{SV} **1 Corinthians 11:28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 13:5** Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

ARGUMENT: How do people get this false assurance?

Somebody gave them some information about salvation that was not true.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone said all you have to do is give a mental assent to Jesus just acknowledge who he is.

Pray this little prayer. You don't have to repent for all your sin just believe.

Just ask Jesus to forgive you. Then they write down the date give it to them and say now whenever you doubt just remember this decision you made on this date.

Meanwhile they never really change they go right back into the old life, they never go back to church but we have told them they are saved and they never have to worry about it.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a college student I was part of a church that supposedly won thousands of people to Christ every year.

They boasted about baptizing thousands every year. These converts would go right back into their old life nothing changed.

The pastor of the church said that does not mean they are not saved.

Preached a sermon on the ten lepers who were healed only one came back but they were all cleansed.

That is why people have a false assurance. We preach an easy believism where a person doesn't have to truly repent of their sins.

Others have a false assurance because they have misjudged their own spiritual condition.

3. It is possible to be saved and have full assurance.

Surprisingly there have been some who have taught that one cannot attain full assurance of salvation.

If they do it does not come but for a long time.

ILLUSTRATION: The Puritans for example carried their teaching on assurance to an extreme.

One writer noted:

They tended to become mystical on the issue, implying that assurance was something God grants supernaturally in His time and in special measures for select saints—almost like a heavenly vision one could be zapped with, or an added work of grace. Most of the Puritans taught that believers could not

expect assurance until long after conversion, and only after a life of extended faithfulness.⁷ They tended to make assurance dependent on the believer's ability to live at an almost unattainable level of personal holiness.²

They presented a standard for assurance that they themselves were unable to live up to.

Some scholars and faiths have taught that it is impossible to attain full assurance in this life.

BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES!

^{KJV} **Isaiah 32:17** And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

Wherever God imputes His righteousness He also brings with it quietness or peace and assurance.

Our text that we read tells us that full assurance is possible.

In fact that is one of the reasons John wrote this letter.

1 John 5:13

Here in 1 John 2:3. John says we can know.

⁷ John Owen's writings on assurance are a refreshing exception to this rule. Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 99–124.

²MacArthur, J. 2000. *The gospel according to the Apostles : The role of works in the life of faith*. Originally published: Faith works. Dallas : Word Pub., c1993. Word Pub.: Nashville, TN

Here he presents to us one of several tests of assurance for the Christian.

This is the test of obedience. – AN OBJECTIVE TEST!

There are subjective means of assurance – meaning inner or inward evidence that we are a child of God.

Subjective assurance is based on something within us, namely, the witness of the Spirit.

Whereas the former type of assurance is visible, the latter is invisible.

Our internal assurance is described in several passages in the New Testament.

(1) 2 Corinthians 1:12--Paul says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have behaved ourselves in the world."

Paul was saying, "I know what's going on in my life because of the testimony of my conscience. Something rings true in my conscience that my behavior is pleasing to God."

(2) 1 John 5:10--"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."

That indwelling witness who bears testimony to Christ is the Holy Spirit.

He attests to the validity of a believer's salvation.

(3) Romans 8:14-16--"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage [legalism] again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (vv. 14-15).

"Abba" is the equivalent to daddy, a very endearing term.

It implies that we can relate to God like a child talks to his loving father.

Verse 16 tells us that the indwelling Spirit gives us the confidence to enter God's presence: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

The internal witness of the Spirit in our lives is of little help to others because no one can read our hearts. But that kind of confirmation is helpful to us.

But there is also objective evidence.

Objective evidence is things outside of us. The things we do that manifest true salvation.

John here gives us one objective means of assurance.

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE: I want you to notice with me three parts to this test of assurance.

I. OBEDIENCE EXPRESSED - 2:3

A. The Assurance of Knowing

1. In chapter one we saw the phrase “walking in the light” here we see the phrase “know him.” These two are synonymous.

2. The Greek word “know” is “ginosko.” There are two words used commonly for “know.”

One is “oida” which is a knowledge gained by abstract learning.

The other is “ginosko” which is a knowledge gained through personal experience.

That is the word used here.

Notice it is used twice in verse three.

3. The first time the word “know” is used it is a present tense verb. The second time it is used it is a perfect tense verb.

4. Therefore we could translate it like this, “And this is how we continually know that we have already come to know Him.”

In other words here is how we continually have assurance that have already been saved.

5. “If we keep His commandments.” Obedience is one way of knowing that you are a Christian.

6. The word for “commandments” is not “*nomos*” which is the word used to refer to the law of Moses.

But it is the word “*entole*” which refers to the commands of Christ or the words of Christ.

So the way we come to continually have assurance that we have already been saved is by obeying the words of Christ.

So the question you must ask yourself is “Am I obeying the words of Jesus?”

Are you an obedient Christian if you are you are truly His child.

B. The Assurance of Keeping.

1. NOT LEGAL OBEDIENCE - Notice the word “keep.”

The Greek word translated “keep” conveys the idea of a watchful, observant obedience.

It is not an obedience that is the result of external pressure, which might cause someone to say, “I have to do this, because I’m afraid if I don’t, I’ll get whacked by the divine hammer!”

2. A LOVING OBEDIENCE - The term is more than just the act of obeying the commands. It is a holy desire to obey God because you love Him.

Rather than being a negative fear, obedience is inspired by love to become your heart's greatest desire.

You are to keep Christ's commands in the spirit of obedience.

Alford's Greek Testament defines "keep" as "guarding, as some precious thing" (Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, vol. 4 [Chicago: Moody Press, 1968], p. 434).

ILLUSTRATION: It was used by sailors in John's day who sought to navigate their boats according to the stars.

The didn't do it perfectly but it was the desire of their hearts.

Even so we will not obey perfectly but it should be the consuming desire of our heart to navigate our lives according to the Word of God.

3. The Christian can know that he knows God when the great desire of his heart is to guard his obedience.

The present tense implies that we are to continually keep His commandments.

The habitual moment-by-moment safeguarding of our obedience to the Word of God is a sign of our salvation.

^{ESV} **Psalm 119:6** Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

^{ESV} **Psalm 119:32** I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

I. OBEDIENCE EXPRESSED 2:3

II. OBEDIENCE EXAMINED - 2:4-5

A. Negatively: Love Professed

“truth” in verse 4 refers to the person of Jesus Christ.

The person who does not obey Christ’s commands doesn’t have Christ in his heart.

John’s point is that there are many who have are self-deceived.

ILLUSTRATION: This has to be understood in light of the Gnostic heresy that infiltrated the churches.

Gnostics believed the God who created the heavens and the earth was a lesser deity. There was a higher deity, the Supreme God.

This God of the Jews was seeking to prevent people from ascending to the higher spiritual plain.

Therefore it was their duty to disobey God's commands in the name of gaining wisdom.

In essence the Gnostics were still believing Satan's lie in the Garden, "God knows you will be as gods knowing good and evil.

That is why Gnostics venerated people in the OT that were disobedient.

They honored the serpent, Eve, Korah, Cain, Balaam etc.

They lived in willful disobedience yet said they had special knowledge of God.

The principle applies also to many professing Christians.

They profess to know him, but are living a life of disobedience and they are not concerned about Christ's commandments.

ILLUSTRATION: We meet people like this all the time out on visitation.

They are members of a church they can tell you a time when they went forward and made a decision for Christ. But they have not darkened the door of a church in years.

Then there are those who do attend a church regularly but that is all. They feel as though that is all they have to do.

They are not growing in Christ, in the Word, in prayer. They are not shunning sins of the flesh. They are not part of fulfilling the Great Commission.

THEY ARE NOT PERFECTING HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD!

^{KJV} **Luke 6:46** And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

^{ESV} **John 14:15** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

^{ESV} **John 14:21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

^{KJV} **Hebrews 5:9** And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

ILLUSTRATION: Notice: Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 7:21-23; 24-27

The story of the Wise and Foolish man is not the story of two kinds of believers!

Some have preached it that way!

It is the contrast between a true believer and a false believer.

Between the saved person and the lost person who makes a profession!

That is the context of Matthew!

Some call Him Lord but they don't do His will!

ILLUSTRATION: James 1:22-25

James is contrasting those who come and hear the Word and those who come hear it and do it!

Hearer – has been translated in some Latin texts as “auditor.”

ILLUSTRATION: In seminary a person could come and audit a class. That means they would come and just listen but did not have to take any tests or quizzes. They were not responsible nor held accountable for what they heard. They were just hearers.

God's true children are not auditors. We are accountable for what we hear. God does test us over the Word we heard.

Those who are just hearers are not true believers.

James says if you are a hearer only you have deceived yourself!

ILLUSTRATION: Exodus 24:1-8; 1 Peter 1:2

The sprinkling of blood in Exodus signified that they entered into a covenant of obedience!

The blood sprinkled on the people signified their consent to obey!

When we get saved we are signifying the same thing.

We entered into a covenant relationship where we are characterized by obedience!

We are saved from sin by the blood of Christ and we desire to obey Him.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:19** For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

^{KJV} **2 Corinthians 10:5** Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

^{ESV} **Hebrews 5:9** And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

B. Positively: Love Perfected 2:5

Obedience for God's Word is proof of our love for Him.

There are three motives for obedience

We obey because we have to, because we need to, or because we want to.

A slave – has to for fear of punishment

A servant – needs to for reward

A son – wants to because of love. The relationship between him and Christ is one of love.

Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commandments"

Whosoever is an important word because it refutes the Gnostic heresy that spiritual union was just for the elite.

Anyone who keeps the commands of Christ their love for God is perfected.

"love of God" is an objective genitive meaning we could translate it "love for God"

perfected- Greek word meaning accomplished. It is this love perfected that others can see in your life.

ILLUSTRATION: Not Pastor But Old Woman's Words

Dr. Alexander Maclaren used to tell of a man of great intellectual power whom he longed to win.

To do so the famous preacher preached a whole series of sermons dealing with intellectual difficulties.

To the doctor's delight, the man came shortly afterward and said he had become a convinced Christian and he wanted to join the church.

Overjoyed, the doctor said, "And which of my sermons was it that removed your doubts?" "Your sermons?" said the other. "It wasn't any of your sermons."

The thing that set me thinking was that a poor woman came out of your church beside me and stumbled on the steps.

When I put out my hand to help her, she smiled and said "thank you" and then added, "Do you love Jesus Christ my blessed Savior? He means everything to me."

I did not then, but I thought about it. I found I was on the wrong road. I still have many intellectual difficulties, but now He means everything to me, too."³

³Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

I. OBEDIENCE EXPRESSED 2:3

II. OBEDIENCE EXAMINED - 2:4-5

III. OBEDIENCE EXEMPLIFIED – 2:6

Jesus Christ is the pattern we are to follow. His life of obedience to the Father is the example for us.

Here John uses another term for salvation.

Being saved is “walking in the light” “knowing Him”

Now John uses the phrase “abiding in Him” same idea.

Verse 6 does not say we will be exactly like Him but we ought to try to be as much like Him as we can.

We ought to walk as He walked.

ILLUSTRATION: When the wife of the missionary Adoniram Judson told him that a newspaper article likened him to some of the apostles, Judson replied, “I do not want to be like a Paul...or any mere man.

I want to be like Christ...I want to follow His teachings, drink in His Spirit, and place my feet in His footprints...Oh to be more like Christ!”

ARGUMENT: Jesus lived his life completely submitted and obedient to the Father’s will and word.

If you are a believer you are going to do the same thing.

^{ESV} **John 6:38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

^{ESV} **John 8:29** And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

^{KJV} **John 10:18** No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

^{ESV} **John 14:31** but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

The kind of obedience that characterized Christ ought to characterize us.

Do you think that Jesus ever found it burdensome to do what the Father told Him to do?

No I think Jesus delighted in doing the Father's will because it was another opportunity to show His love to the Father.

CONCLUSION: On a wall near the main entrance to the Alamo in San Antonio Texas is a portrait with the following inscription: "James Butler Bonham—no picture of him exists.

This portrait is of his nephew, Major James Bonham who greatly resembled his uncle.

It was placed there by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom.”

No literal portrait of Jesus exists either.

But the likeness of Christ, the Son who died to make us free can be seen in the lives of his true followers.