

Worship (9) The Secret of Worship (4) - Assurance of Salvation

1 John 4:13-19

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love Him because He first loved us.

Imagine being a pagan, with your village right next to a volcano. You never know when it is going to overflow again. You keep an eye on it, but you live in a fair of amount of constant uncertainty. To appease the god of the volcano, a ceremony is sometimes held in which a virgin will be thrown down into the active volcano – and to the best of your knowledge – and there is no way to be sure – that should keep him happy, and the volcano away from your village. By ‘worshipping’ that god, you keep things okay for yourself.

Sadly, that is how many Christians exist. God is much like the volcano to them. They are uncertain if He may just explode on them. They have no assurance He won’t. They live in near constant uncertainty, and even anxiety, about where they stand with God. So they just keep trying to throw things into that big crater called God, hoping He likes it and that He will keep life relatively okay for them. That is their worship.

The fact is, no one can worship God effectively when they are not assured of His attitude toward them. A child cannot enjoy a relationship with his father if he has no assurance of his father’s love for him. And in the same way – one of the secrets of worshipping God is *assurance*.

John says, ‘*perfect love casts out fear*.’ Casts out fear of what? Fear of judgement. If we have assurance of His love, we have boldness in the day of judgement.

John uses this phrase, ‘*made perfect in love*’, to suggest having complete assurance. When you have assurance, you are not tormented by doubts and fears of God turning on you. If you have that kind of fear, John says, your love is not made perfect, you do not have assurance.

What happens to relationships marked by a lack of assurance?

There is **Distance**. If someone’s opinion of you is in doubt, if you think they dislike you, what do you tend to do? There is avoidance. There is a reluctance to approach such a person. If that is how you think of God, you will probably avoid Him until you absolutely have to speak to Him. You will be reluctant to go to Him, reluctant to speak to Him. Will you then be a lens for the glory of God?

There is **Unfamiliarity** and awkwardness. When you doubt someone’s goodwill toward you, because you don’t spend time with them, the relationship doesn’t deepen. And so, it remains on a very superficial level. There is awkwardness, not really knowing what to say, and not wanting to prolong contact. If you lack assurance of God’s goodwill toward you, you will be awkward around Him, wanting to not prolong contact.

There is **fear**. If you are unsure of the nature of another person, you do not want to trust them with too much information about yourself; you think ‘What will they do with it?’ They might exploit it, hurt us, or humiliate us. And when we do not have assurance, the truth is – we distrust God. We have fears about getting too close to Him.

The fact is, assurance is absolutely crucial to worship. *We cannot delight in Him until we have it settled that He delights in us.*

1 John 4:19 *We love Him because He first loved us.*

When assurance is not present, worship becomes a work to earn God’s favour, rather than a response to God’s glory. Worship is not appeasement of an angry God; it is enjoyment of a God who is pleased with us.

Verse 16 is perhaps one of the best verses in the Bible on assurance. It is perhaps *the* best definition of assurance. John says – *we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.* John says we have come to *believe* it objectively – God has said it and we hold it to be true. But we have also come to *know* it subjectively – we have experienced it. Assurance is when you have an inner certainty of God’s love toward you. And as such, you do not fear that He will turn on you, be cold toward you, run out of patience for you, be unkind toward you, be selfish, or despise you. You believe that He delights in you, wants to bless you, wants to do you good, provide for you, protect you, comfort you, help you, teach you, mould you – grow you.

On the other hand – assurance that God loves you and has accepted you, and that you are secure and complete in Him, produces a willingness to come. It produces boldness and a confidence to come. It produces a rest in God’s presence, and a growing intimacy. It frees you to delight in Him.

And the Bible insists we must find this assurance:

2 Peter 1:10 *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall;*

Now we don’t want anyone to have false assurance. For someone to be sure that God saves them apart from Christ is delusional and, in the end, deadly. We don’t want to get assurance for its own sake. To tell passengers in a plane that it is not going to crash, when you know it is, might assure them, but it is false and evil. No one needs to have assurance when they do not have grounds for assurance.

The Bible gives us four grounds for assurance that we are in Christ, and, as such, God loves us and delights in us.

How does God give assurance?

1. Through His Promises

God has promised us certain things; for example **John 3:16**, or **1 John 5:12**, or **John 10:28**.

1 John 2:25: *And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.*

Now how much is a promise worth? How much is a promise from the Devil worth? How much is a promise from an advertisement worth?

It is worth as much as the character of the person promising it. Who has made us these promises? God Himself has promised.

Titus 1:2 *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;*
2 Tim. 1:12 *For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*

We can have assurance because God Himself promised, and He cannot lie. He has made these promises based on the perfect life and death and resurrection of His Son.

Paul says in **2 Cor 1:20**: “*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*” God will honour His promises because they are made in Jesus. That is why we hold the truth of the cross central to us, like Paul did in **1 Corinthians 2:2** and **Galatians 6:14**. My assurance that these promises are valid is based on God’s character and on His Son’s work.

Imagine if someone promised to protect you and your family night and day – and you placed your whole security into their hands. But their promise to protect you was based on how much they liked you. And how much they liked you was based on how well you treated them. Now how much security would there be, if you could annoy them, and lose it?

God promises you these things based on His character, and on the righteousness of His Son; not based on your works.

Now you might say – ‘Well I see God has promised these things, and I am sure those promises are valid since they are made in Christ, and not because of man, but how can I be sure they apply to me? How can I be certain I am the recipient of these promises?’

Answer: If you believe them, it is proof that they apply to you.

Believing His Promises is a form of assurance in itself:

1 John 5:1 *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*

1 John 5:9-12 *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. ¹⁰He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

John says someone born of God believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Notice He does not put it the other way around. Notice the same order in **John 10:26**. They do not believe, because they are not His sheep. Jesus makes it very clear in **John 6** that believing in Him is something the Father grants (**6:36-37, 44, 63-65, 69**)

There is a test for colour blindness which involves viewing numbers among a field of dots. You can only see the numbers if you are not colour blind. A colour blind person

will not be able to see the numbers. Seeing the numbers amongst the dots is a sign you are not colour-blind.

Seeing the truth of the Gospel, and believing it, is a sign of salvation.

The bottom line is this – the millions of people who hear the Gospel you hear and do not believe it is evidence that, when you believe it, you have been singled out by God. God has chosen you – His nature is dwelling within you.

Faith is not just the *means* by which the promises become yours; it is the *evidence* that they are yours.

The first ground of assurance is His promises. God made them, and He cannot lie – they are made in Christ, so they are grounded in His righteousness, not ours, and if you believe them, then they are true for you.

2. Through His Work in us

The second way God assures us that we are His and that He loves us is by producing the fruit of His nature within us.

My son was already evidencing parts of my nature, when he was only six months old. My dog was not doing that, although we had had her for 18 months at the time. The reason is – the nature within.

The New Testament shows that a believer takes on God's nature. God implants in him or her His nature, by His Spirit. And as His Word abides in us, and as we yield to Him, that nature becomes more and more apparent. But it is a definite, inward change of life. You desire righteousness; to be like Him, to love like Him. Having new desires, new behaviour that comes from within, not because of external pressure, is assuring.

1 John is a whole book devoted to giving assurance, based on this criterion.

1 John 5:13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*

Four examples from the epistle of **1 John**:

i) When God's nature is within you, you do not desire to sin as a practice, but to do righteousness – **1 John 2:29, 3:9-10**.

When you see this work in you – you should stop and realise, this is not natural. The Bible says man delights in evil "*There is none good, no not one*". This is a source of assurance – God loves me, I am one of His.

ii) When God's nature is within you, you recognise false teaching as false - **1 John 2:20-21, 4:5-6**.

When you can sniff out false teachers, you should say 'Only His sheep can hear His voice, and a stranger they will not follow. This is a great source of assurance.

iii) When God's nature is within you, you love other believers – **1 John 3:14**.

Notice the immediate verses on assurance (**vs 19-22**). We see it again in chapter **4:7-8**.

When you have an almost natural affection for people so completely different from you in age, culture, income group, interests, or nationality – you should rejoice – yes! God's nature is within me!

iv) When the nature of God is within you, you pray according to the will of God, and receive answers - **1 John 5:14-15, 3:22**.

Specific answers to prayer are a great source of assurance.

God assures us, how you are, and what you now do, is not natural to the race of Adam - 'You are My sheep. You belong to Me.'

3. Through His use of Trials and Discipline

God uses an unlikely thing to assure us. Read with me in the Parable of the Sower in **Matthew 13:3-9, 20-21**. Notice the second group. These are the kinds of people who give you very quick responses – with joy! They will quickly begin attending, or walk an aisle or say they are saved. But then, in the parable, what did the Lord allow? The sun to come out – and because their faith is only skin deep, they wither. When tribulations come they show evidence that they were never saved to begin with.

Now consider the fourth type of soil and plant. Did it receive sun? It must have. But what happened to it? It grew.

The evidence of God's nature in you – is that, when suffering comes, you continue to trust. When you are shipwrecked, beaten, in hunger and thirst, neglected, misunderstood, are slandered, in continual danger, you say "I know whom I have believed". When you are scourged, spat upon, your beard plucked out, stripped of your clothes and your dignity, nailed to a cross, you say, "Father, forgive them".

God's nature within you responds to trials by saying, "I still believe".

Rom 5:1-5 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, {proven character}; and {proven character}, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

Paul says – we as believers not only rejoice in our standing, but in trials. Because trials produce proven character, which in turn fills us with absolute confidence that we are the children of God – His love for us is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit.

Believing when things place us under pressure is actually a form of assurance. As you look back on trials and problems and difficulties and tragedies and today say, 'But I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' that is a form of assurance.

Perhaps you ask, 'What about when it is not a trial but discipline?' What about when your conscience gives you no rest – you know this is because of sin in your life, and what you are going through is the rod of God correcting you – sometimes severely?

‘Where is my assurance of God’s love when He is giving me strong correction for my sin?’

Hebrews tells us the answer – from the NKJV: **Heb 12:5-8** *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

When enduring a hiding from God, it is a mark of ownership. God does not train those who are not His. Though painful, even tearful, it is motivated and done, in love.

If you are a believer, the chastening hand of God sets upon you and you have no rest or peace till you repent. God does not capitulate. God will wear you out if you don’t repent. But what that reminds you of, even in that miserable situation, is *‘I belong to God and He will not give up on me!’*

Just think believer – the most miserable experiences in your life are cause for joyful assurance! If it is a trial, and I find the faith within me still believing – it says *‘I am one of His, He loves Me!’* If it is discipline, it hurts, but whom He loves He disciplines.

These first three criteria are objective; our spirit aided by the Spirit using God-given logic sees and believes the promises, and sees what God has done in one’s life, and sees trials and discipline through the Word. But the final criterion is subjective. It is something the Spirit communicates to our spirit through His ministry of illumination.

4. Through His Spirit.

Gal 4:6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

There you see the Spirit cries in our hearts, “*Abba, Father*”. The Spirit teaches us intuitively – God is Father.

Now stop and ask yourself a question. Why does He not cry out “Creator, Lord” or “Master, Sovereign?” Because assurance is based on love. He cries out – “*God is Father. He loves you*”

He is like a mother who teaches her infant – she points at the child’s father and says ‘Dada’. Eventually, the child himself or herself knows – that is Daddy.

And soon, it is our spirits that join in with the Spirit and cry out “*Abba, Father*.”

Rom 8:15-16 *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

Consider that term ‘Cry out’.

When you have faced emergencies; or crushing burdens of sorrow or grief or heartache – what have you instinctively done? Do you not, without thinking about it, say, “Father.

How did that happen?” The Spirit has taught you, from day one – God is your Father. You are in a relationship with Him. He loves you.

And, beyond that, as we grow, the Spirit does a work of personally illuminating us. His Spirit does a work, whereby He teaches us intuitively – *God loves me. God really loves me!* As you submit your life increasingly to Him, He reveals God’s love to you.

We see it in **Ephesians 3:16-19** - *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

The Spirit will, as you yield to Him and allow Christ to ‘house-down’ in your hearts by faith, and live life grounded in love, reveal the love of Christ to you beyond knowledge, and fill you with all His fullness.

There is indeed a difference between a man saying to a group – ‘I love you all’, and him looking into the eyes of his wife and saying – ‘I love you.’

I believe this is one of the highest blessings of the Christian life, and certainly one of the strongest motivations to worship. This is a joy which the other three cannot give. One of the Puritans said “It is not a bare conviction that a man shall go to heaven; but God telleth him in part what heaven is, and lets him feel it’

It’s in many ways His best reward. Thomas Brooks said “*Assurance is a mercy too good for most men’s heart. God will only give it to his best and dearest friends. Assurance is meat for strong men; few babes, if any, are able to bear it, and digest it*”

And we don’t primarily delight in the fact God loves ME – because then the focus is not on God. We delight in the fact that GOD loves me. God LOVES me. This brings the joy, and the responses. But, as we grow, the assurance grows. And as the assurance grows – the worship grows. You get assurance objectively from believing His promises made in Christ, from beholding His work in your life, from believing in the midst of trials. But then what you get is subjectively, by His Spirit crying in your heart – God is your Father, and He loves you.