

Full Assurance of Understanding

by Harry Ironside

The full assurance of understanding is the confidence and certainty that comes from knowing the truth and being guided by the Holy Spirit, and can be experienced through regular and systematic Bible study, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and yielding to God.

Scripture: Psalm 119:130, Romans 6:11-12, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 2:1-3, Colossians 3:1-4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Topics: "The Importance of Scripture", "Assurance in Faith"

Description

Harry Ironside emphasizes the importance of having a full assurance of understanding in the Christian faith, as expressed in Paul's letter to the Colossians. He explains that believers will face doubts and struggles due to their dual nature, but through diligent study of the Scriptures, they can find clarity and strength. Ironside shares anecdotes, including the story of an Irishman who found joy in reading the Bible for himself, illustrating the necessity of personal engagement with God's Word. He encourages Christians to recognize their identity in Christ and to seek spiritual growth through the truth revealed in Scripture. Ultimately, he reassures believers that their life is secure in Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God.

Transcript

WHEN writing to the Christians at Colosse, who had been saved largely through the ministry of Epaphras, that man of prayer and devotion, the apostle Paul said: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:1-3). The expression I desire to draw particular attention to is found in the second verse: "the full assurance of understanding."

The initial question of salvation having been settled, one is not to suppose that there will never arise any further doubts or perplexities. The child of God is a stranger and a pilgrim passing through an unfriendly wilderness-world, where he is beset by many foes who will seek in every way possible to impede his progress. He still has an enemy within: the old fleshy nature which is in constant warfare with the spiritual nature imparted in new birth.

Then outside, our adversary, the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We are called upon to resist him, being steadfast in the faith. He knows he can never destroy the life hid with Christ in God, but he will do everything that satanic ingenuity can suggest to hinder the believer's progress

in spirituality and retard his growth in grace. By fiery darts of doubt and incitements to carnal pleasure, he will endeavor to hinder communion with God and so to destroy the Christian's happiness and annul his testimony. Therefore the need of being built up on our most holy faith and nurtured in sound scriptural instruction. "Through thy precepts," says David, "I get understanding."

As soon as one knows he is saved, he should begin, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, a careful, regular, systematic study of the Word of God. The Bible is our Father's letter to us, His redeemed children. We should value it as that which reveals His mind and indicates the way in which He would have us walk. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16,17). The study of the Word will instruct me in the truth, it will show me what needs to be rectified in my life and walk, it will make clear how I may get right with God, and it will guide me in paths of uprightness. No Christian can afford to neglect his Bible. If he does, he will be stunted and dwarfed in his spiritual life, and will be a prey to doubts and fears, and may be carried about by every wind of doctrine.

The Newborn Irishman

As newborn babes require milk, so the regenerated soul needs to be nourished on the Word. I wonder if you have heard the story of the Irishman who was converted through reading the New Testament. Rejoicing in his new-found treasure, he delighted to pore over its sacred pages whenever opportunity permitted.

One day the parish priest called to see him and found him perusing the precious volume that had brought such blessing to his soul.

"Pat," he asked sternly, "what book is that which you are reading?"

"Sure, yer riverance," was the reply, "it's the New Testament."

"The New Testament! Why, Pat, that's not a book for an ignorant man like you to read. That is for the clergy who go to college and learn its real meaning and then give it to the people. But unlearned folks like you will get all kinds of wrong ideas from it."

"But, yer riverance," said Pat, "I've just been reading here, and it's the blessed apostle Peter himself that says it, 'As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,' and sure it's just a babe in Christ I am, and it's the milk of the Word I'm afther, and that's why I am reading it fer meself."

"That's all right, Pat, in a way, but the Almighty has appointed His priests to be the milkmen, and when you want the milk of the Word you should come to me and I will give it to you as you are able to bear it."

"Oh, sure, yer riverance, you know I kape a cow o' my own out there in the shed, and whin I was sick I hired a man to milk her fer me, and I soon found he was shtearin' half the milk an' fillin' the bucket up with wather. But whin I got well I discharged him and took to milkin' me own cow, and now it's the rich cream I'm gettin' all the time. And, yer riverance, whin I depended on you fer the milk of the Word, man it was the milk an' water stuff ye gave me, so now I'm milkin' me own cow in this case, too, and it's the rich cream o' the Word on which my soul is feedin' every day."

Nothing will make up for lack of this diligent study of the Bible for yourself. You cannot get the full assurance of understanding without it. But as you search the Scriptures you will find truth after truth

unfolding in a wonderful way, so that doubts and questions will be banished and divinely-given certainty will take their place.

Discouraged Christians

Many uninstructed believers become discouraged because of their own failures and Satan takes advantage of these to inject into their minds doubts as to whether they are not deceiving themselves after all in supposing they are Christians. But a knowledge of the truth as to the believer's two natures will often help here. It is important to understand that sin in the flesh, inherent in the old nature, is not destroyed when one is born again. On the contrary, that old sin-principal remains in the believer as long as he is in the body. What takes place at new birth is that a new and divine nature is communicated. These two natures are in conflict with each other.

But the Christian who walks in the Spirit will not fulfil the desires of the flesh, even though at times those desires may be manifested. In order to so walk, one must take sides with God against this principle of evil which belongs to the old Adamic nature. God reckons it as executed at the cross of Christ; for the Lord Jesus died, not only for what we have done but for what we are by nature. Now faith accepts this as true, and the believer can exclaim, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh (that is, in the body) I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20)

Carefully consider what is taught here: I, the responsible I, the old man, all that I was as a man in the flesh, including my entire sinful nature, - "I have been crucified with Christ." When was that? It was when Jesus died on Calvary's tree nineteen hundred years ago. He was there for me. I was there in Him. He was my representative, my substitute. He died the death I deserved to die. Therefore in God's eyes His death was my death. So I have died with Him.

Now I am called upon to make this real in my personal experience. I am to reckon myself as dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God (Rom. 6:11). The old nature has no claim upon me. If it asserts itself and endeavors to bring me into bondage, I am to take sides with God against it. He has condemned sin in the flesh. I must condemn it too. Instead of yielding to it, I am to yield myself unto God as one alive from the dead, for I have been crucified in Christ's crucifixion, but I live anew in His resurrection. I am quickened together with Christ, who Himself lives in me. He then is my new Master. He is to take charge of me and to control me for His glory. As yielded to Him, I am freed from sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). The sweet, constraining power of grace leads me to present my body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, my intelligent service (Rom. 12:1).

Actually, I am still in the body, but I belong to the new creation of which the risen Christ is the Head. It is only the failure to recognize and act upon this that will keep me from a life of victory.

Paul was eager for the Colossian and Laodicean believers to realize their place and responsibility in this new creation. He tells them that he literally agonized in spirit that they might apprehend this truth, and so by heart occupation with Christ find complete deliverance from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He shows them that Christ Himself is the antidote for human philosophy, legality, ritualism, and asceticism, to all of which man is prone to turn when seeking deliverance from the power of sin, but none of which are of any real use against the indulgence of the flesh.

It is occupation with a risen, glorified Saviour, our exalted Head in heaven, that gives the victory we crave. As risen with Him, we are exhorted to seek the things which are above, where Christ sits on God's right hand. "For ye died, and your life (your real life as a new creature) is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3, R.V.).

Another Irishman Shouts "Glory"

I have told of one Irishman who found his joy in the Word of God. Let me tell you of another who got the full assurance of understanding when he learned the truth I have been trying to unfold. He had been soundly converted. He knew he was saved and for a time was filled with joy thereby. But one day the awful thought came, "What if I should sin in such a way as to lose all this, and be lost myself after all?" He felt it would be unspeakably dreadful to have once known the Lord and then to fall from that high place of privilege, and so be overwhelmed in eternal woe. He brooded on this day and night, and was in great distress. But one evening in a meeting he heard the words read from Colossians 3:1-4, to which I have referred. I give them in full here: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

As these precious verses fell on his ears and he followed them with his eyes, something of their blessed certainty gripped his soul, and forgetting he was in a public gathering, he shouted aloud to the astonishment of those about him, "Glory to God! Whoever heard of a man droundin' wid his head that high above water!"

You may smile at his apparent crudity of conception, but he had seen the truth that gives the full assurance of understanding. He realized his union with Christ, and saw that since his Head was already in heaven he was eternally secure. Oh, what a soul-delivering truth this is! How it frees from self-occupation and how it glorifies Christ!

The practical outcome of it is seen in the verses that follow (Col. 3:5-17), where we are exhorted to mortify (that is, to put in the place of death, practically) our members which are upon the earth, judging every unclean and unholy propensity as having no place in the new creation, and therefore not to be tolerated for a moment as that which is ignoble and base. Then we are told what habits and behavior we are to put off, as discarded clothes that are unworthy of the new man; and we are directed what to put on as properly characteristic of a man in Christ. Please read the chapter for yourself.

The Lord Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." How necessary then for His redeemed ones to study His Word in dependence upon His Holy Spirit, that they may be delivered both from the fears that are the result of ignorance of His truth and the pride that is a result of self-confidence. The liberating Word alone will give to the honest, yielded soul who searches it prayerfully, in order that it shall have its sway over his life, the full assurance of understanding, for it is written: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."

Go On! Go On! Go On!

And so as one goes on in the Christian life, and various problems and perplexities arise, it will be found that the Word of God will give the answer to them all, so far as it is His will that we should understand them down here. There will always be mysteries beyond our comprehension, for God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. But the trusting soul learns to be content with what He has

revealed, and so to quietly leave the rest to be unfolded in that coming day when we shall behold Him as He is, and in His light shall see light, and know even as we ourselves are known of Him.

"When I shall wake in that fair morn of morns,
After whose dawning never night returns,
And with whose glory day eternal burns,
I shall be satisfied."

"When I shall meet with those that I have loved,
Clasp in my arms the dear ones long removed,
And find how faithful Thou to me hast prov'd,
I shall be satisfied."

Until then, the Word is to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, whereby we walk safely and securely through a world where sin and sorrow reign, and where there are inscrutable mysteries on every hand, unsolvable by human intelligence, knowing that all is well for those who are known of God and are the called according to His purpose of grace as revealed in Christ Jesus. Enough has been set forth in His Word to give our hearts rest, and to keep our souls in peace as we enjoy the "full assurance of understanding." The rest we can leave to Him who doeth all things well, and who loves us with an everlasting love.

"I am not skilled to understand
What God hath will'd, what God hath plann'd;
I only know at His right hand
Is One who is my Saviour!"
"I take Him at His word indeed:
'Christ died for sinners,' this I read;
For in my heart I find a need
Of Him to be my Saviour!"

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