

Faith and Assurance

by J.C. Ryle

Faith is necessary for salvation, but assurance is a sign of a strong faith and brings peace and confidence in salvation.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 11:21, Job 19:25, Matthew 14:30, Mark 9:24, John 6:37, Acts 4:12, Romans 8:33-34, Romans 10:9, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 11:1

Topics: "Assurance", "Faith"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical distinction between faith and assurance in his sermon 'Faith and Assurance.' He explains that while all believers possess faith in Christ, not all experience the assurance of their salvation, which can lead to anxiety and doubt. Ryle encourages listeners to seek full assurance, as it brings peace and joy in their spiritual journey, contrasting the trembling faith of a new believer with the confident assurance of seasoned saints. He reassures that even a small amount of faith can lead to salvation, but full assurance enriches the believer's experience of God's grace. Ultimately, Ryle urges the faithful to cultivate their faith and seek the flower of assurance for a more profound spiritual life.

Transcript

If you are a thoughtless, careless man about your soul, you will take no interest in the subject of this tract. Faith and assurance are mere names and words to you: they are neither land, nor money, nor horses, nor dress, nor meat, nor drink: like Gallio, you care not for them. Alas, poor soul! I mourn over you. The day will come when you will think differently.

Reader, if you really desire to go to heaven, and to go there in the Bible way, you will find the subject of this tract of the deepest importance. Believe me, your own comfort in religion, and your peace of conscience, depend exceedingly on understanding the matter about which I am going to speak.

I say then, that faith in Christ, and a full assurance of being saved by Christ, are two distinct things.

A man may have saving faith in Christ, and yet never enjoy an assured hope, like the Apostle Paul. To believe, and have a glimmering hope of acceptance, is one thing; to have joy and peace in our believing, and abound in hope, is quite another. All God's children have faith: not all have assurance. I think this ought never to be forgotten.

I know some great and good men have held a different opinion: I believe that many excellent ministers do not allow the distinction I have stated; but I desire to call no man master. I dread as much as anyone the idea of healing the wounds of conscience slightly; but I should think any other view than that I have given a most uncomfortable gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep souls back a long time from the gate of life.

I would not desire to make one contrite heart sad that God has not made sad, or to discourage one fainting child of God, or to give a soul the impression that you have no part or lot in Christ, except you feel assurance.

I do not shrink from saying, that by grace a man may have sufficient faith to flee to Christ,^¾really to lay hold on Him,^¾really to trust in Him,^¾really to be a child of God,^¾really to be saved; and yet to his last day be never free from much anxiety, doubt, and fear.

"A letter," says an old writer, "may be written which is not sealed; so grace may be written in the heart, yet the Spirit may not set the seal of assurance to it."

A child may be born heir to a great fortune, and yet never be aware of his riches,^¾live childish, die childish, and never know the greatness of his possessions.

And so also a man may be a babe in Christ's family; think as a babe, speak as a babe, and, though saved, never enjoy a lively hope, or know the full privileges of his inheritance.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ a man must have, beyond all question, if he is to be saved. I know no other way of access to the Father: I see no intimation of mercy excepting through Christ. A man must feel his sins and lost estate,^¾must come to Jesus for pardon and salvation,^¾must rest his hope on Him and on Him alone. But if he only have faith to do this, however weak and feeble that faith may be, I will engage, from Scripture warrants, he shall not miss heaven.

Never, never let us curtail the freeness of the glorious gospel, or clip its fair proportions. Never let us make the gate more strait, and the way more narrow, than pride or love of sin have made it already. The Lord Jesus is very pitiful and of tender mercy. He does not regard the quantity of faith, but the quality^¾He does not measure its degree, but its truth. He will not break any bruised reed, nor quench any smoking flax. He will never let it be said that any perished at the foot of the cross. "Him that cometh unto Me," He says, "I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37).¹

Yes, reader! though a man's faith be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, if it only brings him to Christ, and enables him to touch the hem of His garment, he shall be saved: saved as surely as the oldest saint in paradise; saved as completely and eternally as Peter, or John, or Paul. There are degrees in our sanctification: in our justification there are none. What is written is written, and shall never fail: "Whosoever believeth on Him,"^¾not whosoever has a strong and mighty faith,^¾ "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. x. 11).

But all this time, I would have you take notice, the poor soul may have no full assurance of his pardon and acceptance with God. He may be troubled with fear upon fear, and doubt upon doubt. He may have many a question and many an anxiety,^¾many a struggle, and many a misgiving,^¾clouds and darkness,^¾storm and tempest to the very end.

I will engage, I repeat, that bare simple faith in Christ shall save a man, though he may never attain to assurance; but I will not engage it shall bring him to heaven, with strong and abounding consolations. I will engage it shall land him safe in harbour, but I will not engage he shall enter that harbour under full sail, confident and rejoicing. I shall not be surprised if he reaches his desired haven weather-beaten and tempest-tossed, scarcely realising his own safety till he opens his eyes in glory.

Reader, I believe it is of great importance to keep in view this distinction between faith and assurance. It explains things which an inquirer in religion some times finds it hard to understand.

Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root; but it is no less certain you may have the root and not the flower.

Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press and touched the hem of His garment (Mark v. 25). Assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 56).

Faith is the penitent thief crying, "Lord, remember me" (Luke xxiii. 42). Assurance is Job sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job xix. 25). "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job xiii. 13).

Faith is Peter's drowning cry as he began to sink: "Lord, save me!" (Matt. xiv. 30). Assurance is the same Peter declaring before the Council, in after times, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 11, 12).

Faith is the anxious, trembling voice: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 24). Assurance is the confident challenge: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34).

Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone (Acts ix. 11). Assurance is Paul, the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know Whom I have believed," "There is laid up for me a crown" (2 Tim. i. 12; iv. 8).

Faith is life. How great the blessing! Who can tell the gulf between life and death? And yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy, painful, trying, anxious, worn, burdensome, joyless, and smileless to the very end.

Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, and beauty.

Reader, it is not a question of saved or not saved that lies before us, but of privilege or no privilege; it is not a question of peace or no peace, but of great peace or little peace; it is not a question between the wanderers of this world and the school of Christ, it is one that belongs only to the school; it is between the first form and the last.

He that has faith does well. Happy should I be if I thought all readers of this tract had it. Blessed, thrice blessed are they that believe: they are safe; they are washed; they are justified. They are beyond the power of hell. Satan, with all his malice, shall never pluck them out of Christ's hands.

But he that has assurance does far better; he sees more, feels more, knows more, enjoys more, has more days like those spoken of in Deuteronomy, even "the days of heaven upon the earth" (Deut. xi. 21).²

Reader, whoever you may be, I exhort you never to be satisfied with anything short of a full assurance of your own salvation. With faith, no doubt, you must begin,^¾with simple, child-like faith: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But from faith go on to assurance. Rest not till you can say, "I know Whom I have believed."

Believe me, believe me, assurance is worth the seeking. You forsake your own mercies when you rest content without it. The things I speak are for your peace. It is good to be sure in earthly things; how much better is it to be sure in heavenly things!

Make it then your daily prayer that you may have an increase of faith. According to your faith will be your peace. Cultivate that blessed root more, and sooner or later, by God's blessing, you may hope to have the flower. You may not perhaps attain to full assurance at once: it is good sometimes to be kept waiting; we do not value things that we get without trouble. But though it tarry, wait for it. Seek on, and expect to find.

FOOTNOTES

1 "He that believeth on Jesus shall never be confounded. Never was any; neither shall you, if you believe. It was a great word of faith spoken by a dying man, who had been converted in a singular way, betwixt his condemnation and execution: his last words were these, spoken with a mighty shout^¾'Never man perished with his face towards Jesus Christ.'^¾Traill.

2 "The greatest thing that we can desire, next to the glory of God, is our own salvation; and the sweetest thing we can desire is the assurance of our salvation. In this life we cannot get higher than to be assured of that which in the next life is to be enjoyed. All saints shall enjoy a heaven when they leave this earth: some saints enjoy a heaven while they are here on earth."^¾Joseph Carlyle. 1658.

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