

# Sanctification and Assurance

by J.I. Packer

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*J.I. Packer's sermon explores the Puritan understanding of assurance, emphasizing its significance, dangers, and the need for a genuine pursuit of faith.*

**Duration:** 1:14:05

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:1-35

**Topics:** "Assurance Of Faith", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, Dr. Gray discusses the topic of assurance in the Christian faith. He contrasts the modern approach of giving assurance based on a quick profession of faith with the Puritan approach. The modern approach relies on a bare profession of faith, while the Puritan approach emphasizes a tested faith that has been proven through life. Dr. Gray also highlights the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in providing assurance and making evangelistic preaching effective.

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## Transcript

My title this morning, friends, is Assurance and Conduct, the third study in our series on the Puritan view of sanctification. James Denney, whom we know as the author of one of the great books on the New Testament, *Witness to the Atonement*, once said this, that the test, the acid test of any version of Christianity is its attitude to assurance, some regard it as presumption, some regard it as a duty. The New Testament, says Denney, proclaims it as a fact.

In fact, at the time of the Reformation also, assurance was being proclaimed as a fact. And the connection between faith, saving faith, and assurance, and Christian joy, was being emphasized by Luther and Calvin and their successors. In the Puritan period, assurance was proclaimed as a duty, because the Puritan pastors recognized that many Christians weren't entering into the experience of their Reformation forebears.

What does this mean? Not, I think, and let me say straight away, that the conception of Christianity had radically changed between Calvin and the Puritans. Some scholars have argued this, I think it's demonstrably untrue. But it meant, rather, that the Puritans coveted for their congregations the same experience of the Holy Spirit in their own hearts and lives, as they knew that some of the pioneers of the Reformation movement had had.

So that their preaching of assurance as a duty, and at the same time as a gift from God, was simply a way of exhorting their congregations to seek God regarding assurance, and deal with God, and let God deal with them regarding assurance. And this thought is our lead in. The Puritans were supremely concerned that Christian men should know the blessing of assurance.

Right from the start of the Puritan movement in England, in the later years of Elizabeth's reign, this was a central concern for the Puritan preachers and pastors, because they found themselves, right from the start, overwhelmed with a certain type of pastoral problem that recurred again and again. They referred to it as the problem of the afflicted conscience, or of the people who were troubled by melancholy. Those actually are two distinct or related things, we shouldn't quite equate them.

Melancholy is a state of depression, spiritual depression, which, as the Puritans understood it, had at any rate some physical root. When they spoke on the other hand of the afflicted conscience, they were thinking of a state of spiritual trouble and depression which didn't have roots in the physical constitution, but was created wholly by trouble about the truth of God and its application to the life of the individual. But yet, many people who had afflicted consciences had their condition complicated by melancholy.

So the two things, the two classes of troubles in fact merged into one as the Puritans viewed it. And constantly, at the end of the 16th century and on from that time, the Puritan pastors were, one might almost say, besieged. This is the right word, besieged, by many, many people who were troubled in this way, who knew that these Puritan ministers could cope with such trouble, and they came literally from miles and they queued up at the pastor's houses to try and get help and relief for their troubled conscience.

And the Puritans, faced with this cluster problem, sought to lead those with whom they dealt not simply into the reality of saving faith and repentance, but also the reality of assurance. And they often preached about assurance and they often wrote about assurance and some of the great Puritan treatises have to do directly with this subject of assurance. That little book which John Owen commended, I think a little extravagantly, but this was Owen's honest judgement, he commended it as having more divinity in it than in all the folios that he'd written.

That's a little book by Thomas Guthrie entitled *The Christian's Great Interest*, that is a work about assurance. And one of the books recommended by the tireless Mr. Riesinger at this conference, Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, is subtitled *A Scriptural Discourse Touching a Well-Grounded Assurance*. Note, by the way, that word well-grounded.

As anxious as the Puritans were to lead men and women into the reality of Christianity, they were terribly, terribly anxious not to lead them into the disastrous bypass meadow of what they used to call assurance, which was not, as they would have said, soundly bottomed, not firmly grounded, not therefore an assurance that will stand when the great day of testing comes. False assurance, the Puritans believed, was a real danger. This was one of the ways in which the deceitfulness of sin and the deceitfulness of the fallen human heart expressed itself, men are prone to false peace.

Men are prone to indulge themselves in groundless assurance. Or putting it in the theological way in which the Puritans put it, men are prone to speak peace to themselves when God does not speak peace to them. Why is this? Well the Puritans analysed it in great detail.

It's due to the temper and the propensities which indwelling sin has imparted to the human heart, the human mind, in the realm of spiritual things. Arrogance, conceit about one's own spiritual condition leads to false assurance. Obstinance in believing that because you've been in the church all these years it's just not possible that you shouldn't be a Christian.

Unwillingness to rethink the matter, unwillingness to change one's mind, unwillingness to admit that there might be a reason for doubting one's security, this too leads men into false peace and anchors them there. So does ignorance, said the Puritans. If men don't understand the gospel, if they don't know what faith and repentance and new birth are, well they're in great danger of supposing that they're right with God when they're not right with God.

Equally, sloth and sleepiness, as habits of the fallen human mind, betray men into false peace. They will not seriously apply to themselves the things that they may hear preached very well and very fully and very clearly concerning what faith and repentance and new birth and the set of a regenerate heart really are. They hear these things but they won't apply them and they never realise therefore that these things, if applied, would expose them but for want of that realisation, they go on in their false peace.

Similarly, fallen man is prone to legalism. He's prone to suppose that if he's got a form of the practice of godliness, of whatever sort, he's all right. And many people in the churches of the Puritans, and it's surely as true today as it was then, they've got the form all right.

They do all the correct things. They go through all the right notions. And so they're quite sure that they're right with God as truly Christians as anyone else and they've got assurance.

They're quite sure they're all right with God. As they beam, the smile is on their faces, they rejoice at it. But it's false peace, the Puritans would say.

And if people who come in that category are ever to be saved, then somehow or other, that false peace has got to be taken away from them. And they've got to learn to rest their life on a better foundation than yet they found. And the Puritans highlighted in their preaching the danger of false peace.

Man is prone to it, and when man falls into it, they said, it's utterly disastrous and ruinous for his soul. They knew men are prone to pharisaism. They knew men and women are prone to what we might call Ananias and Sapphiraism.

They knew that men and women are still prone to fall into the mistake into which Eve was entrapped. They say, if you look at a man's thoughts and if you look at his life and if he's willing to expose himself to you so that you can see what manner of person he is, well then it will become obvious that he's not converted from the way that his mind's working, from the way that he's living and you'll be able to show him. But the tragedy is that so many people will not expose themselves to you.

You ask them questions, you probe, and they simply get offended and won't reply. And so you can't effectively expose to them the groundlessness of their hope and the falseness of their peace. Well this is how the Puritans saw the problem of false assurance.

Self-deception and the fallen human heart at this particular point. And so you see the Puritans had a double problem here. On the one hand, they were desperately anxious that men and women coming into faith should also be led into the fullness of assurance.

On the other hand, they were desperately anxious that no one should be allowed to remain in a state of false peace or encouraged to slump into a state of false peace. A double problem then. A sower and a charybdis of error both to be avoided.

And the Puritans sought to lead their congregation between these two extremes of error into true faith and true assurance. And they stressed the high privilege of assurance. And they stressed the assurance of the transforming blessing.

And they stressed the assurance that its fullness might often come quite late on in a Christian's life. And that it was a blessing which he would need to seek for specifically from the Lord very often before it came to him. And they sought to explain this and to encourage men to seek the fullness of true assurance.

They were in fact a little distrustful if the transports of rapture that accompanied a man's first profession of faith were too late. When they saw a young convert or a professed convert just budding over they didn't immediately write him off but it did occur to them to wonder whether he'd really become acquainted with the depths of sin in his own heart. They looked to see the roots of humility self-abhorrence going with that overflow of joy and they were a little hesitant and a little anxious when they couldn't clearly see it.

They never forgot you see that it was the stony ground hearers in the Lord's parable who received the word with such notable and exuberant joy and they didn't last. True, sound, thorough converts said the Puritans may start like that but not always, not even usually. Full assurance they said is a rare blessing even amongst adults.

It's a great and precious privilege which God doesn't bestow indiscriminately. I quote from Brooks from their treatise which I've already referred to Assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts. Right Brooks? God will only give it to his best and dearest friends.

And he writes again Assurance is the beauty and top of a Christian's glory in this life. It's usually attended with the strongest joy with the sweetest comfort and with the greatest peace but it's the crown that few wear. Or again he says Assurance is meat for strong men.

Few babes if any are able to bear it and digest it. And the Puritans went on to say Full assurance in the sense in which they're speaking of it isn't usually enjoyed except by those who first sought it from God and served God faithfully and patiently for a time without it.

Yes this was their doctrine I quote Brooks in this time Assurance comes in as a reward of faith writes Goodwin A man's faith must fight first and have a conquest and then assurance is the crown and the triumph of faith and what tries faith more than temptations and fears and doubts and reasonings against a man's own estate and that triumphing assurance or Romans 38 Romans 8 37 and following comes after a trial as none are crowned till they have striven so the Puritans believed it generally was assurance in its fullness would come after faith and you'd need to seek it from God as a special blessing and it might well be that you'd have to travel some distance and some distance over before God brought you to the point where triumphing assurance in its fullness Assurance in its fullness you

see as the Puritans understood it is not Brooks says it's a faith beneath it it's well being rather than it being it is an aspect of faith if you like a development of faith which normally appears only when faith has been tested when faith has been tried when faith has grown that was their point of view now before we go any further let's just contrast that with the point of view regarding assurance which I suppose is shared by most

of us certainly which is shared by the majority of 20 we too believe that assurance is a privilege a duty a gift of God something which a Christian ought to have but we approach the whole subject don't we in quite a different way from that in which the Puritans approached it we are used I suppose most of us to the counselling room routine of holding forth the

word of scripture like John 1 12 as many as received him for them gave and we say to the man who a moment ago was signing a decision card well now you see the promise do you believe it and the chap says yes and we say well now have you believed on his name the chap said yes that's what I was signing the decision card for and then we say well don't you see this means that you've become a child of God there's your assurance now you can get the job of giving assurance finished in five minutes if you do it that way but you see how different it is from the Puritan approach for the moment all I ask you to do is to observe just how different it is we can make the evaluation later just at the moment here is assurance giving given on the basis of a bare profession of faith perhaps only a few

minutes old certainly a profession of faith that hasn't been tested by life here again is assurance being given on the basis of a bare inference you hold up a text of scripture major premise of the syllogism you remind the man that he has believed that he has made a profession of faith minor premise of the syllogism and then you draw the inference if it's true that everyone who receives Jesus Christ and believes on his name becomes a child of God and if it's true that you have professed to receive Jesus Christ and believe on his name then conclusion you have become a child of God and this is assurance given on the basis of a bare inference not necessarily confirmed by the Holy Spirit and at this point the differences I want to underline are that the Puritans required both the things that

we don't require they require that of and they were slow to give those with whom they dealt assurance about their assurance and similarly the Puritans were concerned that assurance should be directly a gift of the Holy Spirit directly a matter of spiritual experience and not just something of which the pastor or the counselor assures you by carrying through this kind of reasoning from scripture now as I say we can draw the inferences and make the evaluations later for the moment all I want to say is that quite evidently the Puritans required more before they gave assurance before they gave assurance about assurance than we do and the question is well which really is the more scriptural the more wise the more fruitful line of pastoral procedure we don't of course have to assume at this

stage that the Puritans were right in everything they did that differed from what we do and that we're necessarily wrong in everything we do that they didn't we can't take that for granted we have to reason it through well that perhaps we'll be able to do for the moment though all I'm asking you to do is to know and to consider with me the questions which are inevitably raised in us how great this difference is now questions of this sort must be answered is to think it through from scripture with Puritan references and illustrations rather than to think it through historically and that's how I'm going to lay this exposition out and I invite you therefore first to consider with me from the scriptures the nature of assurance and then we'll think about the value of assurance and then about

the work of the Holy Spirit in assurance and then about pastoral problems concerning assurance think with me first then about the nature of assurance to answer this question I take you again as I did on Monday night to the 8th chapter of the epistle to the Romans which Charles Hodge and many other commentators regard as the classic New Testament statement of Christian assurance a rhapsody on assurance is Hodge's way of describing it here Paul lays out in its fullest sum and substance by just going through in sequence all the things of which the Christian is assured we are asking what is the nature of assurance

from Romans 8 I suggest two things in answer to this question first, assurance is a conviction a conviction for which reasons can be given as distinct from just a feeling of joy and

all rightness for which no reason can be given the Puritans distrusted emotions which came upon one and yet couldn't be justified by reason or irrational or non-rational states of feeling William Ames once said that Arminian universal grace that the conviction of Arminian universal grace could simply be the result of a good dinner and the Puritans were well aware that moods and states of feeling and states of you so they were insistent that assurance as Romans 8 presents it is a conviction for which reasons can be given and not a feeling for which no reason can be given I am persuaded says Paul in Romans 8:38 I am persuaded by reasons I can give reasons for my conviction it is a rational conviction and this conviction appears in the 8th chapter of Romans as an aspect and a quality of

self-conscious instructed faith here is Paul in this chapter confessing his faith it starts as a confession of faith very personal the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death verse 2 and then he extends and speaks in terms of us himself and other true believers with him but what he is doing you see throughout the whole chapter the mere layout of it shows is confessing going through sequentially the various things that are true of us who have been set free from the law of sin and death us who have been brought out of the state of sin and the state of spiritual darkness despair by the grace of Jesus Christ and he rises to this final expression of conviction I am persuaded that nothing in heaven or earth is able to separate us from the love

of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord it's then a conviction which is an aspect of self-conscious and it is in fact a double conviction and this is how the certain gospel facts as being truths as being facts and not fictions and secondly it's a conviction of our own personal interest to use the Puritan word in those facts that all these facts apply to me what are the facts well there's a whole series of godly blessings reviewed in the 8th chapter of the Romans promises of the covenant of God elements in the salvation of Christ no condemnation the blessing of justification verses 1 and following the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell verses 9 and following the gift of adoption whereby one becomes the son and heir of God verse 15 and following the knowledge that all circumstances work

together for one's good verse 28 and the knowledge that God will see that they do so that if one's afraid circumstances will overwhelm one one has immediately the answer to that fear God will never let it happen God is in charge of circumstances and he'll see that nothing is given you that's too hard for you but that everything that is given for you is for your good because it will have the effect of strengthening your faith and leading you on step by step closer to Christ and closer to glory similarly in the last paragraph of the chapter as we were considering Paul elaborates and develops the whole thought no blessing can be withheld from us Christ's love is upon us and nothing in time or eternity can ever alter that it starts with no condemnation it ends with no separation nothing able

to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord now these are the gospel facts which are true of everyone who is Christ there is such a reality of justification there is such a gift of the indwelling spirit there is such a thing as adoption into God's family there is such a thing as particular providence there is such a thing as the special help of God and the personal love of Christ these things are not fictions they're facts they're reality and the basis of the conviction which we call assurance is the certainty that these things are facts they are realities heaven and earth may pass away but these things abide they are God's facts nothing can ever change them the Puritans knew the reality of temptations to atheism to Sicilianism to unbelief of the Christian facts

you mustn't suppose that because it was a day a day of Christian culture when you didn't have organized forces of sect and in ordinary social life in the way that you have today you mustn't suppose that on that account everybody was quite clear and quite persuaded that Christianity was true and that there was no problem of doubt and the temptation to unbelief and the denial of the faith just because sin is sin and Satan is Satan men are always tempered in every age to deny the gospel and to deny the reality of God and the Puritans had to cope with this and they wrote a good deal about it and they preached a good deal with a view to relieving men and helping them to strengthen their faith by argument so that their doubts about the truth of the Christian text might be resolved things are

nothing like as different in this 20th century as compared with the 17th our problems were their problems and at point after point they've gone through the mill and they in my judgment have found the answer here then is the first element in the conviction that constitutes assurance conviction that the gospel facts are true and then the second element the conviction of one's own interest in those facts the conviction that one is included in the us and the we of Romans 8 the conviction that all these good things which Paul and those for whom he spoke enjoyed are mine by the gift of God I'm included in this blessed circle I'm one of these blessed people this salvation has come to me that's assurance the gospel is true and I'm in it these are God's facts and they're my blessings that's the

first thing that Romans 8 shows us then about assurance it is a conviction and this is the content of it the second thing Romans 8 shows us about assurance is that assurance is the gift and work of the Holy Spirit that's quite clear in verse 16 the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God that's the explanation of I am persuaded in verse 38 the fact that in verse 16 the Spirit bears witness with our spirit it's the spirit given assurance that Paul is confessing in that last sentence of the chapter and this was a Puritan point too inferential assurance bare inferential assurance is not really what the New Testament means by assurance said the Puritan assurance is more than that assurance is a God given conviction of one standing in grace stamped on the

mind and heart by the Holy Spirit supernaturally in just the same sense in which the truth of the gospel says was stamped on the mind supernaturally in the days when faith was born and assurance spirit given assurance of the Puritan carries with it the same immediate certainty as does this initial conviction this inescapable conviction which comes to all those who are brought to living faith that the gospel facts really are true and they're inescapable and I must face them and I must respond to them and the Christ of the gospel is real and I must have dealings with him for he is speaking to me so Brooks writes assurance is the 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 and an experimental

discerning of a man's being in a state of grace operative words here are sensible and experimental what Brooks means is that this is assurance an assurance that is conscious an assurance that is accompanied by feeling because it's an assurance stamped on the heart by the Holy Spirit it won't exist until it pleases God to give it the young convert's position as the Puritans understood it is this as he believes and obeys in the light of his spirit given conviction that the facts of the gospel are true he will certainly know a measure of peace and joy because real believing will at once bring an element of real comfort as Goodwin says in his quaint way no man looks upon Christ but cometh off more cheerly or as Sibbes put it there's a voice of God's spirit speaking peace to his people upon

their believing there is then a measure of assurance right from the start and the young Christian may think and hope and with some warrants that he is a child of God but he can't this is the Puritan point that he

cannot say in the unqualified sense of John's first epistle in the unqualified sense of Romans 8-16 that he knows his sonship until the spirit has set this certainty home on his heart and this normally will be after believing perhaps some time after rather than at the moment not necessarily so but commonly so this is a distinct work of the spirit and after all Paul dealt with the entry into saving faith as long ago as Romans 3 until the spirit has set assurance home well he hasn't yet he hasn't yet entered into the fullness of it as Romans 8 describes it still he says or

sometimes he says as he reads Romans 8 oh I wish I were there and it's something which normally comes after conversion well there's the nature of assurance according to Romans 8 and according to the Puritans a conviction of one's interest in the gospel faith given by the witness of the Holy Spirit in a man's heart we may find it difficult to get the full point of this I wonder if we do I think some of us have an assurance as I called it that we've just never thought of assurance as being the positive radiant exuberant thing which Romans 8 declares it to be and which the Puritans knew it to be are we perhaps defining the word assurance as something less wonderful than the New Testament shows it to be are our stripes high enough let's ask ourselves that question as we go along we'll come

back to it a second to some of course in Christian history assurance has always appeared the Puritans meant assurance in the full Romans 8 sense including assurance in the love of Christ and Arminians for instance have always said that this is bad because no man here and now can guarantee that he will persevere to the end in the love of Christ it depends on him but Rome of course had always carried this line of reasoning one stage further and said that assurance and confidence is positively sin and to be discouraged where you find it but you only have to read through Romans 8 once to see that this is not in fact the apostolic one you only have to read through Romans 8 once to see that assurance is in truth the main spring of peace and hope in their positive Christian sense the sense in

which indeed our sermon last night was pointing us to it you know where you stand with God the grace of Christ has come to you you see what it means you see it means that you're safe you're secure you're with God in his love an air of his glory and nothing can ever change that and it so thrills you and your whole life now really is bubbling over and bubbling over for good reason somebody asked a question yesterday weren't the Puritans too preoccupied with sin I answered as I'd been told to answer in a sentence no they weren't it was suggested to me afterwards that the Puritans had their sights trained and most of them lived in the joy of assurance and what if we were to use this word preoccupied them with not sin though they certainly knew that one would be very unwise not to face the

reality and the pervasiveness of sin the glory of God's grace they lived their life in the joy and the delight of knowing that this grace was theirs I think perhaps when we read their sermons you know we miss this partly because we don't recognize it when we see it this kind of assurance is such a strange thing these days shining through Brooks shining through Thomas Watson shining through Richard Sibbes I mention those three particularly shining through Bunyan as well shining through Owen too but not perhaps quite so brightly as in those writers and we rise from our reading and say weren't they preoccupied with sin we just can't see what's there Amen The peace, the hope, the joy that assurance brings to the heart is just unspeakable it's not they said an incentive to slackness any more

than Paul's assurance as set out in Romans 8 was an incentive to slackness in his life the very thought with him is absurd and so is the absurd and so Christian said the Puritan knowledge of how much God has loved you doesn't make you slack in serving him what it does is to make you love him more and make you more responsive in spending and being spent in doing his will just as in holy matrimony to keep saying to

each other I love you doesn't make the other partner indifferent but has the opposite effect said the Puritans God's grace and assurance whereby repeatedly he says to the soul I love you doesn't make us indifferent and presumptuous and careless but rather it thrills us the more and makes us the more responsive and so the Puritans wrote that when supernatural assurance in its

fullness dawns it transforms a man's whole Christian life it's a new conversion says Goodwin it will make a man differ from himself in what he was before in that manner also almost as conversion just before he was converted there's a new addition of all a man's graces it sounds startling but Goodwin means what he says and he goes on to develop the thought assurance he says increases faith faith in its phrase receives a new degree and this invigoration of faith which said the Puritans is the mother grace from which all other this invigoration of faith results in a new release of spiritual energy at every point in a man's Christian life in the first place it deepens his communion with the triune God in meditating on what Goodwin calls the plot the plan of redeeming love and so Goodwin

writes in assurance a man's communion and converse is sometimes with the Father then with the Son then with the Holy Ghost in which the heart is drawn out to consider the Father's love in choosing and then the love of Christ in redeeming and so the love of the Holy Ghost that searches for these things of God and reveals them to us and takeeth all the pains with us and says Goodwin we should never be satisfied until we've attained this until all three persons as it were as we sit in the midst of them while they all manifest their love to us this is John's communion 1 John 1 4 our communion is with the Father and this is the highest it is last sermon John 14 when you remember he says that the Father and He would come to the soul of the man who loved Him and kept His commandments and the

Father and the Son through the Spirit and with the Spirit would manifest themselves to Him this is a favourite passage with Goodwin who often develops this thought so incidentally does John Owen read his treatise of communion with the Father Son and Holy Ghost in volume 2 of his connected works only 48 dollars a set only 3 dollars a volume and that isn't all says Goodwin the coming of assurance also quickens the spiritual understanding by its quote the eye of the soul is strengthened to see further into God's truth and all God's truths are more clearly known by this also assurance makes a man bold and powerful in prayer about what he was before and it makes him holier quote Goodwin again all assurance that is true assurance makes a man holy and Brooks writes nothing makes the heart more

in the love, study, practice and growth of holiness than the glorious testimony of the Holy Spirit furthermore assurance makes a man tireless in Christian service writes Goodwin when once the love of God is shed abroad in a man's heart it makes a man work for God ten times more than before the Puritans are sometimes accused of having not been strong enough somebody said this to me in this conference surely the Puritans weren't strong enough on the duty of individual witness and soul winning well here's Brooks assuring a man upon the winning of others a soul under assurance is unwilling to go to heaven without company and finally assurance brings with it the joy unspeakable and full of glory of 1 Peter 1.8 which is one of Goodwin's favorite texts in this connection so you see the kind of

assurance that Paul talks of in Romans 8 and that the Puritans speak of as full assurance it doesn't encourage presumption and laziness it is in fact the strongest possible incentive against sin because its possessor knows that if he sins he'll jeopardize his assurance by prompting God to withdraw it and there's nothing that he's more anxious to avoid than that herein are the fruits of assurance from this we see the value of assurance in assurance let's put this on a broad base and go right to it from the start the work of the spirit in general said the Puritans is to witness to spiritual realities so that we become persuaded that

they are indeed realities thus the Holy Ghost's business is to bring conviction and he does at different levels first illumination as the theologians call it

Calvin's inner witness of the Holy Spirit to the scripture as the word of God and to scripture teaching as the truth of God this is the reference when in 1st John 2 the spirit is spoken of as an unction that teaches this is the reference when in Matthew 11 Christ praises the Father for revealing these things the things that is concerning himself and his saviourhood to babes hiding them from the wise and foolish revealing them unto babes this is the reference to when in 1st Corinthians 2 4 Paul speaks of preaching the word in demonstration of the spirit and power all these passages have reference to the work of the spirit witnessing to the objective reality of spiritual things convincing men that they are so evangelistic preaching effective whenever a person comes out of unbelief in the

faith and then secondly following on from this the Holy Spirit's second work is his work of effectual calling which is illumination plus it's illumination plus that work of renewal in the heart that prompts a man to close with the gospel promises to respond to the gospel invitations as we say to come to Christ as the Puritans said too to come to Christ and to close with Christ that was one of their phrases and to commit himself wholeheartedly to the mercy of Christ in the gospel and we've already seen the Puritans acknowledge that when the spirit of God brings a person to conscious trust in those facts he's now convinced then there is inevitably a measure of confidence a measure of assurance the man knows what he's doing and as he's persuaded that these things are true and that God is

true and keeps his promises so he cannot put his trust in Christ and the promises without some measure of conscious confidence even though there may be all kinds of problems with his spirit visiting him from time to time at this stage and for a time he may not know where he is like John Wesley the day after he feels his heart strangely warmed he may find doubt flooding in again and it may take him a time after his conversion to settle his equilibrium but this isn't the whole story says the Puritans full assurance of which we are speaking is something more than this and the spirit of God leads on before Jesus and proves their love by keeping his commandments as he requires John 14 you remember the spirit leads such on to full assurance in the Romans 8 sense and this is a third stage in the

work of the spirit giving assurance the inner witness to the Christian that he is in truth a child of God in truth an heir of glory and this is witnessed with our spirit that we are the children of God it is a distinct work says the Puritans how did they expand it well in detail they differed among themselves but when you stand back and assess their differences you realize that the differences don't in fact amount to very much because in one way or another they were all of them saying that in this work of the spirit that we are the children of God there are two elements they differed as to how exactly the two elements were related we needn't go into that because they were agreed that the two elements must go together and in full assurance they must both be there and here they are element

number one the spirit confirming to our consciousness to our conscious awareness that God really has wrought savingly in us bringing us to real faith bringing us to real repentance really changing our nature really renewing our hearts really taking us out of the old path of sinful living and bringing us into the new evangelical path of obedient righteous living the spirit as the Puritans put it enables us to see our graces and of course they are not ours this is simply seeing and recognizing and not being able any longer to doubt that God has wrought in one a real change that one's profession of faith that one's profession of repentance isn't empty that one isn't self deceived but that God has changed one's heart God has brought one into a new way altogether and so Goodwin writes the

spirit writes first of all graces in us by renewing our nature and then teaches our consciences to read without the spirit's aid a man doesn't recognize the spirit's handiwork in himself writes Goodwin again if he do not give in his testimony wisdom your graces are no witness at all this is a special work of the spirit enabling you to see that really God has transformed you and made you a new creature that's one element and in the phrase the spirit bears witness with our spirit some of the Puritans insisted that our spirit there is our conscience our reason consciously judging ourselves with regard to morals and that the phrase refers first and foremost to this work of the spirit making us aware as we review our life examine ourselves see how we're living that God has indeed transformed

us and we're not what we were he's set our feet on the rock he's made it our nature and our desire supremely to walk in his ways this is his mercy this is his saving grace we are new creatures in Christ and if so now this is the reality of God's work in us and to draw the inference you see, in that manner but then there's a second element over and above that which others lay particular emphasis on underlining the phrase the spirit himself bears witness this is a direct and immediate sense of God's fatherly love given as a kind of immediate communication like God saying I love you to my son like a father saying I love you to his child as a good father sometimes does so with God and his children the spirit who comes in as the spirit of adoption mediates to us these high moments this

thrilling realization that God is as it were saying to my son I am thy salvation I am your father I love you this is the other aspect of the spirit's work and so one finds that people like Sid say this besides witnessing with our graces the spirit has a distinct witness by way of enlarging the soul which is joy in the apprehension of God's fatherly love the spirit does not always witness by force of argument and comfort without help of discourse there's a twofold and similarly Goodwin says there's a twofold assurance of salvation two elements that come in to make up the reality of assurance the one way is discursive a man gathering that God loves him from the effects that is the marks of regeneration just as we gathered up their fire but then the other is intuitive it's the kind of

knowledge perhaps the thought that it's self-evidencing and immediate and indubitable when it comes there is light that cometh says Goodwin light that cometh and overpowers a man's soul and assures him that he is God and God is his and that God loves him for everlasting and so the theorists go on to analyse this the second element in the work of the Holy Spirit of conscience assurance some of the Puritans expounded this from a text which I think all modern expositors and some of their own number would say doesn't teach it and Sibbes popularised this exegesis where Paul speaks of Christians who after that they believed were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise who is the earnest of our inheritance Sibbes popularised the exegesis which understands this sealing of the work specifically of

giving full assurance and expands the phrase by the spirit of promise and instrumentally that is expanded as meaning that this sealing is a work wrought by the spirit the spirit is the agent who does it ye were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise the Holy Spirit wrought in you to give assurance well John Owen knew and made the point clearly that this in fact does violence to the Greek and as an exegesis it won't stand writes Owen and surely correctly that I quote Owen it is not said that is grammatically by strict exegesis it is not said that the Holy Spirit seals us but that we are sealed with him he is God's sealed rock and so it expands the text as modern commentators do as meaning that the gift of the Holy Spirit to perform all the fullness of his promised ministry that in its

totality is the seal which God sets on us it is by giving us the spirit that God seals us for himself and so in Ephesians 4.30 2nd Corinthians 1.21 where this same phrase is used well it seems to me that Owen is

entirely right in dissenting from this exposition which would relate the phrase specifically to the bestowal of assurance um but that's not to say and Owen didn't mean to say that this particular work of the spirit in giving immediate and direct and full assurance in this double manner is not after all a reality Owen insists as strongly as any of them that it's very much a reality and he writes about it like this he's speaking of the supernatural joy which the awakening and the soul of the light of the knowledge of God's love creates and he says of this joy there is no account to

be given but that the spirit worketh it when and how he will he secretly infuses and distills it into the soul prevailing against all fears and sorrows filling it with gladness exaltations and sometimes with unspeakable raptures of mind that's direct assurance that he's talking about it may not be taught in this text but it's taught in others and Owen was insistent on any as any as to the reality of it another mistake which the Puritans sometimes gave countenance to by the way that they talked the analytical way that they talked about assurance but which a mere re-reading of Roman date 16 will suffice to correct and which indeed the Puritans themselves in their own teaching often in effect corrected is this the supposition that this work of the spirit is a single isolated experience that

particular exposition of the seal texts from which John Owen John Owen dissented does rather encourage the notion that assurance is an isolated experience something that happens once for all at a particular time the Puritans in fact knew that it wasn't the spirit beareth witness Greek present tense continued activity this is something which is prolonged something which goes on and is something also we may say we must say which admits a degree the Psalms show that sometimes the Christian who enjoys it has more of it and sometimes by comparison the Christian who enjoys it has less of it and if he gets slack in his Christian life well he'll have less of it and if he's giving himself wholeheartedly to God ordinarily and let other factors enter in he'll have more of it and when we expound the

reality of assurance this connection I think must be clearly stated it's a quality of faith as raised by the spirit to its highest degree that is the degree of self-conscious assurance and the more there is in the way of response to that which we've already known of the love of God the stronger our continued assurance of his mercy and his favour will be so the Puritans in many passages expounded the matter they didn't in fact mean us to understand even though occasional phrases of theirs would give countenance to it to understand this witness as being a single isolated experience it's the same thing which the Christian ought to live in the joy of all his days you see that Dr.

Gray proved a true prophet here I've nearly had my hour only one two minutes left to go very briefly section four pastoral problems regarding assurance I simply throw these out in the form of questions isn't it true that there are three classes of pastoral problems isn't it true to start with as the Puritans would have said that some people have a and isn't it true that what we've got to do with such people is to lead them as the Puritans led them to measure their lives by the tests the tests laid out for us very conveniently in 1 John the ethical tests and the spiritual tests which enable you to distinguish the unbeliever that is the man whose profession is false from the man whose profession is true equally the tests which I myself must constantly measure my own life by are the tests if

I would assure myself that this that I'm not deluded about my assurance that indeed this sense of God's favour and love is true and I have a right to receive it as from God at any point said the Puritans you can be self deceived even the heights and raptures of full assurance be careful it's only when your life passes the tests of 1 John that you can be confident that those joys and raptures are from the spirit of God and what are the tests of 1 John spiritual tests he that is begotten of God believeth that Jesus is the Christ

Romans 1 John 5 verse 1 and he that believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God this is a sign of it well to believe on believe in that Jesus is the Christ in the thought of 1 John includes a lot understanding of the gospel acquiescence in the gospel

approving it as God's way of life not quarrelling with it's doctrine not objecting to it as being unreasonable unreasonable or unkind on God's part and then hope in Christ willingness to be saved God's way concern only to follow in the path that God marks out when he leads men into obedience and universal holiness love for spiritual things love for Christ love for the gospel love for the scriptures in which the gospel set forth all this the Puritans said in their exposition is implied in this compendious phrase believing that Jesus is the Christ in it's context in 1 John where all these particular issues you see have come up this is the fourth world of 1 John and it's all focused in the first and these are the spiritual tests whereby a regenerate man knows his own regeneration and whereby

a pastor is able to detect the regenerateness or unregenerateness of those with whom he has to do then there are ethical tests strictly ethical tests as well he that is begotten of God does not commit sin habitual doesn't make a practice of sin anymore doesn't continue in sin he can't do it it's not in his nature that's what regeneration has done for him he that is begotten of God doeth righteousness this is 1 John 3.9 1 John 2.29 is there are works of righteousness there and righteousness remember under the gospel means not simply doing the right thing but doing it from the right motive not to earn salvation but to please and glorify God and to show love to the one who has loved you and saved you so the puritans would put in the probe to see whether the people with whom they dealt were

showing the ethical fruits of regeneration and when they found people confident and even joyful that they were God saying cheerfully I am his and he is mine forever and yet not showing these fruits not understanding the gospel not clear as to the meaning of faith and repentance not doing the right thing from the right motive they would labor to disabuse such people and say look you're confident you've no right to confidence I don't care whether or not you went into an inquiry room and signed a decision form and then were argued into assurance out of what got a right to that assurance that you profess to have now weren't they right to deal with people that way don't we have to do it too well that's question number one second question isn't it true that some people lack assurance who ought

to have it that we often find ourselves dealing with troubled souls in whom we can see true repentance and true faith and yet our perplexity with them is that they can't see it how do we help them one great way to help them the Puritans would have said did say is tell them to wait on God in the preaching of the word and then let the minister in his preaching of the word dwell on the great things the great object effects the glorious effects of Roman dates gospel truths and display these things and hold these things up and dwell on the wonder and the glory of them and often by ways perhaps which the person the troubled soul himself won't understand as he sits under that kind of preaching which dwells on the glory of gospel facts so he'll find more things are changing for him and he's

coming to believe even despite himself that these glories are true of him this is one of the ways in which the Puritans expounded that thought which some of you queried when I introduced it two days ago downgrading private meditation on the scriptures I was upgrading preaching upgrading it to the level at which the Puritans put it and this is what they would have said as the first bit of advice to be given to these troubled souls do them a little private exposition of Roman dates but tell them in addition to wait on God in the preaching of the gospel this is his way and this is under the preaching of the gospel so the Puritans believed the preaching of I mean of gospel facts as well as to the sinners that Christians would be led into

ever increasing degrees of assurance and then finally

third question you might like to consider this isn't it true that some people have assurance who misrepresent the thing they have I will put it to you may this not be the truth about some of these people who talk of a second blessing and say they've received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and certainly they can point to something that happened to them in quite a different way and they were in some ways different after it they will often tell you that it's an experience of sanctification well I can't get that from the New Testament they may say it's the promised gift of tongues I can't get that from the New Testament but something's happened and there are men in the Methodist tradition in the Pentecostal movement in the Higher Life movement the Ketik movement to whom something did happen

at some time what happened to them may it not have been that what really happened to them was that God in His mercy and goodness quite suddenly perhaps gave them a strong experience of Romans 8.16 assurance the spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they were the children of God certainly if one reads the records of these experiences one finds that often without realising what they're saying those who record them do put in as part of the testimony my sense of the love of God and my sense of the love of it was an experience of assurance that's what happened to them unhappily they then misunderstood it then misrepresented it and produced out of this types of teaching which to me at any rate seem to be the very reverse of edifying and the very reverse of scriptural but this I suggest

is what happened in these cases and this is how we should understand if so if not this seeking Christians who will tell you that they got a blessing through some of these out in the past years were greener and more nourishing out into ways of faith and life which are more scriptural and more deeply edifying we're not asking them to deny their experience we're asking them to understand it and to acknowledge the mercy of God in giving them what he has given them and just to go on along what proves now to be the really scriptural road of assurance and sanctification and service forgive me over running again but I wanted to say those things before I finish shall we pray our hearts overflow with joy as we contemplate the riches of thy grace we thank thee for what we have tasted of assurance

that these things include us that we have an interest in thy saving mercy that we are children of God oh increase this blessed witness of the spirit in us more and so make us holier and more fruitful in our own lives and make us better pastors and better spiritual guides to those hungry souls and we thank thee that in these days there are some hungry souls whom we seek through the word to lead on in the ways of God so bless these meditations to us we beseech thee in Jesus name Amen

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