

In the Lord's Service--Assurance--Our Shepherd

by John Newton

True solid assurance of salvation comes from repeated conflict and experimental proof of God's power and goodness to save, and it is obtained by trusting simply to the word and power of God, beyond appearances.

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Assurance Of Faith"

Description

John Newton preaches about the Christian's journey of faith, highlighting the trials and battles faced both externally and internally, emphasizing the need for patience, meekness, and faith to be developed through various experiences. He encourages believers to embrace the spiritual warfare they are called to, reminding them of the victory that is assured through Christ and the eternal reward awaiting the faithful. Newton urges the congregation to be thankful for even the smallest signs of grace and to trust in God's provision and timing for spiritual growth. He emphasizes the importance of obedience as a demonstration of love for Christ and the assurance that comes from repeated experiences of God's faithfulness.

Transcript

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My dear Madam,

Your welfare I rejoice in; your warfare I understand something of. St. Paul describes his own case in few words, "Without were fightings, within were fears." Does not this comprehend all you would say? And how are you to know experimentally either your own weakness, or the power, wisdom, and grace of God, seasonably and sufficiently afforded, but by frequent and various trials? How are the graces of patience, resignation, meekness, and faith, to be discovered and increased but by exercise?

The Lord has chosen, called, and armed us for the fight; and shall we wish to be excused? Shall we not rather rejoice that we have the honour to appear in such a cause, under such a Captain, such a banner, and in such company? A complete suit of armour is provided, weapons not to be resisted, and precious balm to heal us if haply we receive a wound, and precious ointment to revive us when we are in danger of fainting. Further, we are assured of the victory beforehand; and, O what a crown is prepared for every conqueror, which Jesus, the righteous Judge, the gracious Saviour, shall place upon every faithful head with his own hand! Then let us not be weary and faint, for in due season we shall reap.

The time is short; yet a little while, and the struggle of indwelling sin, and the contradiction of surrounding sinners, shall be known no more. You are blessed, because you hunger and thirst after righteousness; He whose name is Amen has said you shall be filled. To claim the promise is to make it our own; yet it is becoming us to practise submission and patience, not in temporals only, but also in spirituals. We should be ashamed and grieved at our slow progress, so far as it is properly chargeable to our neglect and miscarriage; yet we must not expect to receive every thing at once, but wait for a gradual increase; nor should we forget to be thankful for what we may account a little, in comparison of the much we suppose others have received. A little grace, a spark of true love to God, a grain of living faith, though small as mustard-seed, is worth a thousand worlds. One draught of the water of life gives interest in, and earnest of, the whole fountain.

It becometh the Lord's people to be thankful; and to acknowledge his goodness in what we have received, is the surest as well as the pleasantest method of obtaining more. Nor should the grief, arising from what we know and feel of our own hearts, rob us of the honour, comfort, and joy, which the word of God designs us, in what is there recorded of the person, offices, and grace of Jesus, and the relations he is pleased to stand in to his people: Psal. 23:1; Isa. 54:5; Cant. 5:16; John 15:15; I John 2:1; John 15:1; Jer. 23:5; I Cor. 1:30; Matt. 1:21-23.

Give me leave to recommend to your consideration Psal. 89:15-18. These verses may be called the Believer's Triumph: though they are nothing in themselves, yet having all in Jesus, they may rejoice in his name all the day. The Lord enable us so to do! The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people: whereas unbelief makes our hands hang down, and our knees feeble, dispirits ourselves, and discourages others; and though it steals upon us under a semblance of humility, it is indeed the very essence of pride. By inward and outward exercises the Lord is promoting the best desire of your heart, and answering your daily prayers.

Would you have assurance? The true solid assurance is to be obtained no other way. When young Christians are greatly comforted with the Lord's love and presence, their doubts and fears are for that season at an end. But this is not assurance; so soon as the Lord hides his face they are troubled, and ready to question the very foundation of hope. Assurance grows by repeated conflict, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord's power and goodness to save; when we have been brought very low and helped, sorely wounded and healed, cast down and raised again, have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety; and when these things have been repeated to us and in us a thousand times over, we begin to learn to trust simply to the word and power of God, beyond and against appearances: and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of assurance; for even assurance has degrees.

You have good reason, madam, to suppose, that the love of the best Christians to an unseen Saviour is far short of what it ought to be. If your heart be like mine, and you examine your love to Christ by the warmth and frequency of your emotions towards him, you will often be in a sad suspense whether or no you love him at all. The best mark to judge, and which he has given us for that purpose, is to inquire if his word and will have a prevailing, governing influence upon our lives and temper. If we love him, we do endeavour to keep his commandments: and it will hold the other way; if we have a desire to please him, we undoubtedly love him. Obedience is the best test; and when, amidst all our imperfections, we can humbly appeal concerning the sincerity of our views, this is a mercy for which we ought to be greatly thankful. He that has brought us to will, will likewise enable us to do, according to his good pleasure. I doubt not but the Lord whom you love, and on whom you depend, will lead you in a sure way, and

establish and strengthen and settle you in his love and grace.

Indeed he has done great things for you already. The Lord is your Shepherd; a comprehensive word. The sheep can do nothing for themselves: the Shepherd must guide, guard, feed, heal, recover. Well for us that our Shepherd is the Lord Almighty. If his power, care, compassion, fulness, were not infinite, the poor sheep would be forsaken, starved, and worried. But we have a Shepherd full of care, full of kindness, full of power, who has said, I will seek that which was lost, and bind up that which was broken, and bring again that which was driven away, and will strengthen that which was sick. How tender are these expressions, and how well fulfilled! His sheep feed in the midst of wolves, yet are preserved safe; for, though they see him not, his eye and his heart are upon them.

Do we wonder that Daniel was preserved in the lion's den? Why, it is a common case. Which of God's children have not cause to say, "My soul is among lions?" But the Angel of the Covenant stops their mouths, or only permits them to gape and roar, to shew their teeth, and what they would do if they might; but they may not, they shall not, bite and tear us at their own will. Let us trust him, and all shall be well.

As to daily occurrences, it is best to believe that a daily portion of comforts and crosses, each one the most suitable to our case, is adjusted and appointed by the hand which was once nailed to the cross for us; that where the path of duty and prudence leads, there is the best situation we could possibly be in at that juncture. We are not required to afflict ourselves immoderately for what is not in our power to prevent, nor should any thing that affords occasions for mortifying the spirit of self be accounted unnecessary.

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