

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS REGARDING ASSURANCE

Mark 9:17-24

For the last few weeks, we have considered the topic of assurance. Much of the information that was given has come from Joel Beeke's lecture series on that topic, and today I want to conclude our look at it. Two weeks ago we considered why we sometimes struggle with our assurance; last week we looked at ways to grow in our assurance; and tonight we will consider some practical applications regarding our assurance.

In Mark 9 we have an event recorded in the life of the Lord that is a tremendous help to those who struggle with assurance. As the chapter opens, we see Christ's Transfiguration and God the Father's commendation of His beloved Son. While He is there, we are given insight as to what is happening at the bottom of the mountain in regards to the disciples and their failure to cast out a demon from another man's son. When the Lord arrives, He engages the man in conversation and hears these words: "*If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us*" (v22). The man is troubled, desperate, and out of options. When he left his home that morning, he had hope for his boy, but that hope wavered as he watched the fruitless efforts of the disciples, and as he stood before Jesus, he was on the brink of despair. Ever been there? Plenty of God's people know that same feeling, and though we may not say the same exact words, sometimes our spirit well identifies with this man's anguish.

There is great comfort in what follows: *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*²⁴ *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief* (v23-24). In the recesses of his heart, this man has faith, but by his own admission, he has a large amount of unbelief as well. Yet in his exhausted weakness, he cries out for help and finds Christ's compassion despite his emaciated faith. We are given a similar lesson in Psalm 120:1 where another one of God's weary children says, "*In my distress I cried unto the Lord; and he heard me.*" These two passages provide this lesson to those who struggle with their assurance: **God hears the cries of His people. He takes the smallest faith and magnifies Himself through it.**

Maybe you are reading this article and you, too, have low faith. You do have faith, but at best, you would say it is a weak faith. My friend, there is encouragement and hope for you. Let me give a few practical applications to help you grow your confident assurance in God's knowledge of you, your situation, and His kind dealings in your life. Let me address what to do when you do not "feel" saved as I, personally, believe this is a very common problem with which most of God's people have wrestled at some point in their life. If this is your struggle, let these thoughts be a balm to your anxious soul.

1. If you are a true believer, God wants you to have assurance of your salvation. He wants you to know Him as your Father. He wants you to rejoice in Him and His adoption of you.
2. If you do not "feel" saved, another help is prayer. Ask God to grant you help to overcome these false feelings and to show you that you are indeed His child.
3. While you pray, incorporate a Bible Study that focuses on the promises of God in regards to salvation. Notice how He obligates Himself to save us as we confess our sins and turn from them (1 Jn 1:9). Do not pass too quickly over verses that reveal God's character as One that He cannot lie (Tit 1:2). Observe how He provides forgiveness to all who come to Him (Jn 6:37). And mark what we must do to receive Christ (Rom 10:9-10) and to grow in His grace and knowledge (2 Pt 1:5-11). In short, engage in a Bible Study that will help you see God and His commitment to our salvation. Give attention to the verses that have been an anchor for you in the past, and pray for the Lord to tether your soul to them again.
4. As you involve yourself in your Bible Study, remind yourself of the gospel. Jesus Christ left the splendor of Heaven in order to become your substitute. He and He alone paid your sin debt. While others may be willing, no one else was (or could be) qualified. As you consider Him who died, rest in His atoning work for you.

5. Another way to combat your feelings is to consider your heart. Is there any “hidden” sin? Are you so proud that you do not think you want (or need) Christ’s saving work? Is there any “known” sin that you refuse to confess and forsake? Sin is an awful master that will beat down and cripple your soul.
6. Considering your situation and circumstances is another weapon against false feelings. It has been said that we are only as sanctified as we are rested. How is your sleep? How is your health? Are you up against deadlines and/or other work-related stresses? Are you anxious over finances or family matters? In short, is there anything going on in your present situation that has your conscience bound and your spirit emotionally confused?
7. Are you living for this present world? Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God, but how many of His children drown themselves in the spirit of the age? How many are tied to the newspaper, the 6 o’clock news, the internet and other media outlets? The more we give ourselves to the cultural markets of this world, allowing them to cascade like endless waterfalls over our soul, the more our souls will be disquieted, distressed, and in doubt of *real* Truth. Sometimes the best antidote to feelings of spiritual discouragement is to turn off the worldly noise of the radio, the internet, and the television while we open our Bible to consider the sovereign control of Him who sits in the heavens and laughs (Ps 2).
8. Live with a purpose. Like those who live for this world, many seem to have no spiritual purpose in life. Many sporadically attend church services due to their work obligations. Others set their Lord’s Day priorities on pleasurable trips to the beach, the cabin, the sporting events, and other like places. And while there is nothing inherently wrong with those things, when we regularly forsake the assembling of ourselves together with God’s people, how are we any different from our lost neighbor who has no regard for God? When we have no spiritual purpose for which we live, is it any wonder why our souls struggle with us? God’s people should be spiritual pilgrims who are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ
9. Remember and reflect on God’s gracious provision and protection of you. He has always been better to you than you have ever been to Him. He has been faithful to you all of your life; why would He stop now? So, when your assurance wanes, let your mind reflect on God’s goodness to you and then ask yourself what the psalmist asked in Psalm 42:5: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.*”
10. Finally, as we combat anxious feelings of assurance, we should remember our real identity is found in Christ. Romans 6:11 says, “*Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.*” The word “reckon” means “to count, compute, calculate; to evaluate.” It is a mathematical term that sees our salvation as an objective, impartial truth instead of a subjective, emotional feeling. Paul tells us that when God saves us through Christ, we are made alive no matter how we feel.

In the end, life is an agony full of ups and downs, yet the Word of God gives us great help as we seek to anchor our soul to Christ our Rock. May He help us to serve Him with a heart full of eternal hope and full of great assurance.