

Blessed Assurance: “Jesus is Yours”

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Assurance.

It is a precious gift the Lord gives his people. As 1 John 5:13 says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” Yet, despite God’s promise of assurance, sometimes experientially our personal assurance wanes. There are many reasons for this—some caused by God’s sovereign and mysterious providence; others caused by spiritual neglect or worldly indulgence. Fortunately, salvation depends on God not our personal assurance. Nonetheless, assurance is a gift we should desire to possess and retain. Therefore, in seasons of doubt, it is worth asking:

- How can I grow in assurance?
- Why have I lost assurance of salvation?
- What means has God given to assure me of my salvation?

Typically, when we turn these questions over in our minds, they remain . . . in our minds. Trained in a culture of individualism and equipped with so much therapeutic self-help, we are primed to look within ourselves and ask:

- What sin or pattern of sins have I committed that are robbing me of assurance?
- What habits of holiness do I need to improve to increase my assurance?
- When did I last have assurance, and what can I do to get it back?

To be sure, self-examination is a healthy part of a Christian’s growth. Paul says we are to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:4), and part of preparation for the Lord’s Supper includes personal reflection and confession (1 Corinthians 11:28–32). But is assurance, if it is a gift from God, meant to be wholly preserved by ourselves? What if assurance is meant to be a team effort, a gift God gives you through the local assembly of believers who know and love you?

Baptism, Membership, and the Lord’s Supper

I believe Scripture gives at least three corporate means of strengthening assurance—baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Membership.

- In baptism the church baptizes a believer, affirming his or her profession of faith. While the baptized may enjoy subjective peace with God; the gospel-believing church bears public witness that this believer has objective peace with God. Through baptism, the church bolsters assurance by saying: “On the basis of our examination and with the authority delegated to us, we testify that this one going under the water is a son (or daughter) of God.”

- Then, in membership the congregation welcomes a baptized member into their family of faith. By baptism or by “transference of letter,” the congregation recognizes, affirms, and promises to encourage the faith of a follower of Jesus. In this way, membership doesn’t cause salvation or create assurance, but it does function as a God-given means of maintaining it.
- Finally, at the Lord’s Table we pass the bread and cup to brothers and sisters in Christ. Don’t miss this—to brothers and sisters in Christ. Communion is meant to preach the gospel to us and affirm all who partake that he or she is a welcome guest of Christ. But more than just being an individualized God-and-me moment, the communion meal is meant to affirm all who take: Jesus died for all of you

Today, we’ll just consider the Lord’s Supper.

Hearing God’s Word of Assurance to Me Requires People Who Know Me

The regular language of the Scripture is objective in nature: Jesus died for his sheep, his bride, his people, or his children. Only once does Paul say, “Jesus died for me” (see Galatians 2:20). More commonly, the language is universal in scope: Jesus died for sinners, for his enemies, for the weak. And the invitation is, “If you are a sinner, an enemy, or powerless, you can be assured that Jesus has a place for you. Trust in Christ, repent of your sin, and receive his free grace.” This is how the language of Scripture works.

Written for the world, Scripture addresses all humanity; the gospel is freely offered to all people. Yet, most of us long for a more personal word: “Jesus died for you . . . You are one of his.” In truth, we need a more personal word: “Jesus died for the world” needs to become “Jesus died for me.”

To meet this need, many well-meaning Christians try to make the Bible say something like this: “Put your name in John 3:16, ‘For God so loved [Sally], that he gave his Son . . .’” The trouble with this application of Scripture is that it misses the point. John 3:16 says Christ died for a sin-loving, God-hating world. “For God so loved the wicked, wretched, horrible world, that he gave his Son . . .” The point of John 3:16 is to affirm the sovereign grace of God to a sinful world (of which I am one), not to make it a verse to affirm individuals who may already believe the world revolves around them.

Here’s the point: We need to let the Word of God speak generally to all humanity, AND we need men and women filled with the Word to speak personally to us on the basis of their personal knowledge of us. I need brothers and sisters in Christ to look at my life and to say, “David, on the basis of your faith working out in love, you are one of his.” This doesn’t happen by myself, or when I am distant from church.

But it does happen when I live my life in fellowship with other Christians who affirm my presence at the Lord’s Table. Why? Because at the Lord’s Table, the family of faith sits together to remember Christ’s death and to affirm one another: You belong to us and more importantly, you belong to Christ.

“Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Yours”

To someone who has only thought of salvation in personal terms and the Lord’s Supper in a vertical way, this may sound strange—maybe even cult-like. But I assure you, it is far more biblical than our twenty-first century version of consumeristic Christianity.

The New Testament church was a household of faith (1 Timothy 3:15); the first followers of Christ saw themselves as brothers and sisters in communion with God and his family. When they came to faith, they left their families behind and joined Christ's family.

To them, it was never an individualistic choice to pick Jesus from a cast of religious idols; it was an individual-in-relationship-with-others who had to detach themselves from those "others" in order to follow Christ. Think about the severing that took place when James and John left their father to follow Jesus, or the social estrangement that came in Corinth for those who refused to eat the meat of idols. While faith is personal it can never be private.

Though our culture has changed, the call to be Christ's household has not. In the local assembly, we the members of Christ's universal church find solidarity. And at the Lord's Table we are inviting God's family to eat, and more than that, we serve as a means of assurance to doubting Christians.

In practice, this is not to say that we withhold the bread and cup from visitors, but we do explain that this meal is only for Christians. Moreover, we cannot say to visitors what we can to our family members: "Be assured, Jesus is yours." We can invite them to table, and call them to self-examination, but we can't give strangers the assurance that God intends and their souls need. And this, though often forgotten, is one of the richest parts of the Lord's Table—the ability to turn and look at men and women we know and say, "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Yours."

Brothers and sisters, the Lord's Supper is a vertical meal that reminds us of our relationship with Christ, but it is also a horizontal meal, one designed to assure the believer of his communion with Christ.

This Sunday, let us proclaim both, that according to the Scripture, Christ died for his church, and that according to our knowledge of one another in church, Christ died for us. May you and I both find this re-assurance as we come to the Lord's Table. I know I need this re-assurance, and I hope you do too.

Soli Deo Gloria,

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