

“OUR BASIS FOR ASSURANCE”

(Synopsis of Opening Discourse below by A. G. Wakefield, Asbury Park, Assurance Day, July 1, 1914 Convention Report, Page 222.)

It would be difficult for us to find a more interesting subject this morning than “Our Basis For Assurance.” We remember the Master’s parable in the Sermon on the Mount, about the two men who built houses, one on a rock, and one on the sand. Even if both houses were built good and strong, yet, one would certainly fall when the storms and flood came upon it, because it did not have a good foundation. We all desire to have, as it were, a touchstone, by which we can determine our position before the Lord—so that we may not build our hopes of a reward from Him on the sands of uncertainty, but on a solid foundation.

In Rom. 8:16, we have the words, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Unless we have this witness of the Spirit we cannot have the peace of God which cometh only with the assurance that we are pleasing to Him, and that His care is over us. However, many are greatly perplexed when thinking of this subject. Not knowing what the witness of the Spirit is, they cannot know whether they have it or not. Some, more full of self-confidence than of knowledge, claim that they have the witness of the holy Spirit, and refer to their happy feelings as the evidence. The difficulty with a witness of this kind is that it fails in the time of greatest need. When friends are numerous, health is good and business prosperous, they are happy, but when adversity comes their assurance is gone, and they are plunged into the anguish of despair. Misled by their feelings, they think themselves drawing nearer to God at a time when really they are under the adversary’s leading, going straight into temptation. This accounts for some of the frequent and sudden falls from grace which some experience, and which astonish both themselves and their friends. Deceived by an unreliable witness, they felt secure, were off guard and fell an easy prey to temptation at the very time they felt “so happy in the Lord.” Again, the trials and disappointments of life designed to draw us nearer to our Father, and to make us more appreciative of our Savior’s loving sympathy and care, are partly lost upon this class; because, losing the witness of their feelings, which they falsely consider the witness of the Spirit, they feel so bereft, and so hungry and thirsty for a return of the good feelings, that they lose many precious lessons obtainable only when leaning confidently on the Lord’s bosom and communing with Him whilst passing through life’s Gethsemanes.

Another class of Christians, learning the unreliability of the witness of feelings, seem to conclude that God has denied to them any reliable evidence of His favor—any sure witness on the subject of their acceptance as members of His family. Their thoughts are expressed in the well known hymn:

“’Tis a point I long to know—
Oft it causes anxious thought:
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His or am I not?”

The Spirit Not a Person

Much of the difficulty in understanding the Spirit’s witness is due to a misconception of what the Spirit is. In the early days of Christianity, certain ones came into power in the church who were ambitious. In their endeavor to curry favor with the Greeks who had many gods, these sought out a scheme whereby they would have three gods. Thus they placed the Father, Son and holy Spirit on a parity, and thought of three persons equal in substance and power. Then, to satisfy those who still held to monotheism, they claimed that the three gods were one god. This idea did very well for the time when mysteries were worshiped instead of unravelled, and thus came into very general acceptance. It has been taught for centuries, having been incorporated into the creeds of practically all denominations. For this reason although no one ever really believed it (for the reason that it is impossible to believe such an absurdity), yet it has been so generally accepted as to becloud all Scriptures which speak of the holy Spirit and its work. To add to the confusion, the translators of the Authorized Version have used the term “Holy Ghost,” where the correct translation would be “Holy Spirit.”

What, then, is the Spirit mentioned in our text? The Greek word used here is *pneuma*, the primary or root meaning of which is *wind*. However, the holy Spirit is not simply a holy wind. As a wind is a great unseen power, so this word gradually came to signify any invisible power. The holy Spirit may then be understood as being “the Divine will, influence or power, exercised any and everywhere, and for any purpose in harmony with the Divine will.”

Since the Spirit is invisible, how can it witness to us? The Spirit, being the mind of God, witnesses to us through the Bible, which is the Word of God. St. Peter tells us that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy Spirit.” Therefore, the things which they wrote are the testimony of the Spirit. With respect to the writers of the New Testament the same is true. Although our Lord had assured His Apostles of plenary power, yet on the eve of his ascension, He enjoined them, “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be imbued with power from on high.” When they received this power through the impartation of the holy Spirit which was shed forth upon them on the day of Pentecost, they were fully qualified to speak the testimony of the Spirit. Thus it is through the inspired writers of the Bible that we receive the witness of the Spirit. In other words, the testimony or witness of God’s Spirit is given to us in the Word, for the Bible is the expression of God’s will.

Servants, Friends, Sons

The Scriptures reveal that the Jews under the Law Covenant were the servants of God, St. Paul stating that Moses was faithful as a servant over his house. (Heb. 3:3) As the servants of God, they were required to live in harmony with certain laws, and when they broke these laws, they were to be punished. Being imperfect, none of them could keep the law, and were in bondage. However, by performing sacrifices year by year continually, they maintained their relationship with God as servants. As the servants of God, they were under His protection and care to a certain extent, and had the privilege of coming to God and petitioning Him for such things as a servant may expect of his master. They did not, however, have the opportunities of fellowship which would be accorded to friends or sons.

There is also a class mentioned in the Bible as living before the first advent who enjoyed a relationship with God on account of their faith. Abraham stands out prominently amongst these, and of him it is testified that he “believed God, and it was accounted unto Him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.” As the friend of God, Abraham’s position was a very favored one. His relationship was so close that when God was about to destroy Sodom, He revealed it to Abraham in advance, and on his intercession, promised that if there were ten righteous men in Sodom, the city would be spared. Later on we find the singer of Israel described as “a man after God’s own heart.” Elijah furnishes a still further example of this class who because of their strong faith enjoyed a very favored position in the sight of God. In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, St. Paul mentions a number of these faithful ones of past ages who were the friends of God, and who, on account of their loyalty, are promised a better resurrection.

But it is of neither of these classes that the Apostle speaks in our text. Both of these were under condemnation, and it was only through the sacrifices of the servant class that they maintained their typical relationship with God. It was only because of the Ancient Worthies’ continual manifestation of faith that they continued as the friends of God. In the first verse of Rom. 8, we read, “There is therefore now no condemnation of them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Explaining this matter further, St. Paul shows that it is only because Jesus has died for us, that it has been made possible for the law to be fulfilled in those who walk according to the direction of the Spirit. It is indeed a wonderful evidence of grace, that we may have this privilege of passing from under condemnation through the blood of Christ. But this is not the end of God’s grace to us, for in the 14th and 15th verses we read that “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” All mankind, including even the favored classes prior to the days of Jesus were under more or less bondage, but those who come now unto God through faith in Christ are not given again the spirit of bondage or fear. Ah, no! The great Jehovah adopts them as His

sons, bestowing upon them His Spirit. No longer are they in fear; they are now the sons of God; and as the little child cries out to a loving parent for protection and care, so we may look upon God as our Father, remembering the prophet's words, "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear [reverence] Him." (Psalm 103:13.)

What Is the Spirit Testimony?

But can we be sure that we are sons of God? Yes. Our assurance is in our text, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, *that we are the children of God.*" How does the Spirit witness to us? through whisperings? through feelings? No! it does not witness in any such ways as this. God's Spirit witnesseth through the Word of Truth which He has given us. Through the Word, the Spirit shows certain experiences which will be the portion of the children of God, and every son will have some or all of these experiences. These experiences are so many and varied that it would be impossible to examine them all, but I have listed ten points which cover in a general way the entire Christian life, which we will now examine.

The Spirit *first* testifies that before we can become sons of God, we must turn from sin, and come unto God through Christ, asking the forgiveness of sins. If our spirit or mind can testify that this has taken place, that we love righteousness and hate iniquity, then we may look for the *second* point of the Spirit's testimony. It is to the effect that God holds out the offer of sonship to such as are willing to give up the earthly hopes which would naturally accrue from the Ransom, and take up the cross to follow in the Master's footsteps. St. Paul has presented this matter of consecration in a very direct way in Rom. 12:1, saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service." Truly it is a reasonable service! Nothing less would even approach that which is reasonable. The Lord Jehovah had created our first parents in Eden and surrounded them with everything for which heart could wish. Furthermore, they had the privilege of enjoying Edenic condition throughout eternity, on the condition of their obedience—but they rejected His love. They turned their backs on His provision. Not only so, but with the exception of a few noble souls in all ages, the whole world has continually gone contrary to God's will. Yet, even under these circumstances, God so loved the world that He gave the dearest treasure of His heart, His only begotten Son, the One who had served Him faithfully from the very day of His creation, that He might come into the world and die, to redeem those who were continually going contrary to the Divine will. Truly has the poet written:

"God loved the world of sinners lost,
And ruined by the fall;
Salvation full at highest cost,
He offers free to all.
O! 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,

The love of God to me;
It brought my Savior from above,
To die on Calvary.”

It is when we thus come to consider our Father’s great love to us that we are able to appreciate the subject of consecration. It is in this light that we can understand so pointed an expression as the Master’s words in Luke 14:33, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.” When we discern that we really have nothing aside from that which is of God’s grace, and that all of our hopes are dependent upon His love and mercy, we perceive that in justice we belong to Him. Nevertheless we are treated as free agents in the matter. The Lord freely gives us all that we are and have, even though as members of the fallen race we did not deserve anything, and then He tells us that if we will devote ourselves to Him, He will call it a sacrifice, and give us a share in the glory of Christ’s Kingdom; that we may be “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Thus we see that the presenting of ourselves is not a work of such transcendent merit; that it is really a great privilege which has been extended to us.

Do we then discern the Spirit’s testimony on this subject? and does our spirit respond in the words of the Master, “Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God?” Do we gladly respond to the Spirit’s invitation, and present our bodies a living sacrifice, recognizing that in view of the wonderful mercies of God, nothing less would be a reasonable service? Are we thus being led by the Spirit? Then we have the assurance that “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). In the following verse, the Apostle speaks of the means which is used, saying “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The Spirit of God so operates in such as present themselves to Him that they are begotten to a new life; they are adopted into His family. Therefore, all who have responded to the Spirit’s testimony on these two points, justification and consecration, have the witness of the Spirit with their spirit, that they are the children of God: “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Every true child of God must have this witness, for no one can attain this position who has not consecrated himself to the Father’s service.

Spiritual Discernment

The Spirit’s testimony, however, does not stop here. We come to our *third* point. There are many features of God’s plan which the world cannot possibly understand. Neither could any perfect human being understand these. St. Paul assures us (1 Cor. 2:14) that the “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth [margin] all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” The Spirit thus testifies that the sons of God will be enabled to understand some

of the mysteries of the Kingdom. Have these deep spiritual truths relative to the philosophy of the Ransom, the Hidden Mystery, the Covenants, etc., been gradually unfolding before us since we gave ourselves to the Lord? If our spirit answers that this is true, then we not only have the assurance that we are sons of God, but that we are growing. If we do not have this witness, then we may have reason to doubt if we have properly used the privileges of the Father's table. St. Paul spoke of such a class in Heb. 5:12, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and have become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." There are some good hearted souls today associated with the I.B.S.A. classes who seem to have learned from their study of the Truth that the hell of the Bible is not the hell of the creeds, and have been so overjoyed with that, that they cannot think of anything else. Truly, it is a great blessing to such to get their eyes opened on this point; but do not stop with that. Rather, as the Apostle exhorts in the next verse (Heb. 6:1), "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." Let us diligently apply ourselves to the deeper things. Let us partake, sparingly at first and in larger measure gradually, of the strong meat of the Word, that we may grow thereby.

The Heavenly Treasure

Our *fourth* point is concerning our affections. In Matt. 6:19-21, the Master exhorts that we lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven, and in Col. 3:1-3, St. Paul, expressing a similar thought, says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth, for ye are dead, and your life is hid in Christ by God." (Diaglott) Thus the Spirit witnesses that it is God's will that we transfer our affections from things temporal to the things which are eternal. Those who rely on the witness of feelings would not be able to understand these passages; for it is only when things are going well with them from the standpoint of the flesh that they feel contented. However, as the true child of God studies the Word in the light of the holy Spirit, he discerns therefrom with ever-increasing clearness that the special favors of God—the glories of the heavenly Kingdom—are only for those who cross their natural desires, and follow in the Master's footsteps. Of these it is written that they shall share the glories of the Anointed; that "they shall be priests unto God and unto Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). As more and more we compare these future prospects with the beggarly elements of the world, and discern their transcendent value, surely we will "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth." If, then, we find our love for earthly things diminishing, and our longing for the heavenly portion increasing, we have this further evidence that we are progressing in the Christian way. In harmony with this, St. Paul remarks in Phil. 3:21, "For our conversation is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ." If our affections are really on the heavenly treasure, then it will be the subject of our conversation on every suitable occasion. It is for this

reason that we have assembled here in convention—that we might have the opportunity of talking together of the better things.

It is left for St. John, however, to give us the climax of the argument on this point. His words are (1 John 2:15), “Love not the world, *neither the things which are in the world.*” Do we love the world—the present order of things? No! There is too much evil connected with it. We earnestly desire a change. Do we love the things which are in the world? Perhaps we have labored long that we might secure a nice home. Perhaps we have devoted much time to it, and really have a very comfortable, homelike place. Surely it would be nothing but natural that we should love it. True enough! It would be the most natural thing. But if we would be the sons of God—if we would make our calling and election sure—the Apostle says, “love not the things which are in the world.” Does this mean that we are not to appreciate any of the good things of the world? that we are not to appreciate our home? There is a difference between appreciating these things, and loving them. It is proper for the natural man to love any good thing of the earth, but not for the Christian. The children of God occupy an unique position in the world, in that while they are outwardly much the same as other people, really they are merely tabernacling in the flesh while they are waiting for their heavenly inheritance. While we can appreciate the cave which would protect from a sudden storm, we would not love it as we would the comforts of home. So the Christian appreciates his tabernacle, but longs for his eternal heavenly home. Do we find then, that our love for the heavenly things is growing stronger, while our love for the things of the world is gradually decreasing? Then our spirit being in harmony with the witness of the Spirit gives us additional testimony that we are progressing in the Narrow Way.

Activity

The *fifth* point on which we desire to examine the Spirit’s testimony is activity. There are those who seem well content with taking one or two steps toward God, and who do not seem to realize that anything further is necessary. They think that all that is necessary to their salvation is that they accept Christ in a rather half-hearted way, and unite themselves to some church organization. They sing, “I left it all with Jesus, long ago,” and sit down content. Faith in the all-important work which our Saviour has done, yea, and is now doing for us, is indeed essential to our salvation, but the Spirit testifies that we have also a part in working out our own salvation. He who has taken the steps which we have already examined, will find such an appreciation of the Lord’s mercy in his heart, as that he will be impelled to activity in the service of God. He will desire to show his faith by his works. If we will read in the second chapter of James’ epistle (2:14-26), we will see how forcibly the Spirit witnesses on this point. He who hears the Spirit’s testimony on this point will search for some indication as to what works will best serve to demonstrate his faith. The Spirit answers, “This is the will of God concerning, you, even your sanctification.” In 1 Cor. 9:26, 27, St. Paul shows that it is necessary for the Christian to

wage a continual warfare against the natural instincts of his flesh. Let us, then, be ever on the alert lest we grow weary in well-doing. In His prophecy of present day conditions in the Church, the Master pointed out (Rev. 3:15), that a spirit of lukewarmness would be the general disposition of professed Christians. We have seen this prophecy fulfilled. We have seen the great church systems spewed out. The Lord now is dealing with individuals. If these also become indifferent, shall not their fate be the same as that of the systems? What is the influence upon us of the spirit of indifference which we see? Does it tend to cool our ardor, or can we see it in its true light, so that it would rather serve to increase our love and zeal? Let us ever remember the Master's pointed statement, "I would thou wert hot or cold."

Obedience and Loyalty

The *sixth* and *seventh* points are closely related to the foregoing. In order that our works may be pleasing to the Father, they must be along proper lines. We must earnestly seek for the mind of the Spirit as to what we shall do, and then implicitly obey. This becomes a test of our consecration. He who is fully consecrated to God does not wait for a direct command. The slightest expression of the Father's pleasure concerning him is his law. With the Savior he can say, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." He who attains this attitude of heart is truly pleasing to God, and he who maintains it is assured of a share in the Kingdom. Of such it is written, "Be thou faithful [loyal] unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

Persecutions and Chastisements—Submissiveness

The *eighth* point of the Spirit's witness has to do with the severe experiences through which the Church is called to pass. Chastisements are of two kinds—those given as punishment for wrong-doing, and those which are for the polishing of our characters. While the punishments do not give evidence that we have been specially pleasing to the Lord, yet they do demonstrate that we are still His children (Heb. 12:7). Those chastisements or tribulations which are intended for the polishing of our character, however, are a real cause of rejoicing, for we gradually learn from them lessons which are essential to the development of the character of Christ. So St. Paul testifies, "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy Spirit which is given unto us." Then if we are enduring chastening, it becomes a further basis for assurance that God is dealing with us as sons.

If we receive these disciplinary experiences it is evidence that God is dealing with us, but if we are able to submit to them joyfully, it becomes an evidence that we are more and more becoming copies of the Master, who submitted patiently to the persecutions which were directed against Him. Thus our *ninth* point is submissiveness. It is when we realize

that “All things [even persecutions when rightly received] work together for good to them that love God,” that we are able to show forth this quality of submission. If we will remember when going through some fiery ordeal that it is permitted by the Lord for our good, it will help us to submit to it, and receive the blessing intended.

Character Development

As our time is limited, we will not discuss our *tenth* point at length, but will be content with reading St. Peter’s treatise thereupon, (2 Pet. 1:5-11). “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue [fortitude]; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” Do we desire to have the assurance that we will never fall? The Apostle in this passage tells how we can secure it. It is by doing these things.

Let us then, dear brethren and sisters, examine ourselves to see if we have the Spirit’s witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and if we are progressing in the Christian way. If this is true, then St. Paul says, “Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised.” “Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.”—Heb. 10:19-23, 35.