MUCH ASSURANCE

~Other Speakers G-L: Harry Ironside:

When reminding the Thessalonian believers of the work of God in their city, as a result of which they were saved, the apostle Paul says: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia."

This is a very striking declaration, and all the more so because it stands out in such vivid contrast with much that goes under the name of evangelical testimony in our days. It is not too much to say of perhaps the majority of sermons preached in our myraids of churches, that one who was in deep spiritual trouble might listen to them year in and year out and be left in as great uncertainty as ever. They give no assurance to the hearers, whereas Paul's preaching was of such a character as to produce much assurance.

Consider the people addressed. Only a few months before at the most, they were for the greater part pagan idolaters, living in all kinds of sin and uncleanness. They had never been trained in Christian truth. A few among them were Jews, and had some knowledge of the law and the prophets. But the great majority by far were ignorant heathen, given to superstitious and licentious practices, and who were without any understanding of the way of life.

To them came Paul and his little company of itinerant preachers - men of God whose lives evidenced the power of the message they proclaimed. In dependence on the Holy Spirit they preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They bore witness to His resurrection and present saving power, and they declared He was coming back some day to be judge of the living and the dead. It was the same missionary message which has ever proven to be the dynamic of God unto salvation to all who believe. Paul's hearers were convicted of their sin. They realized something of the corruption of their lives. They turned to God as repentant sinners, and believed the gospel they heard preached. What was the result? They became new creatures. Their out-ward behavior reflected the inward change. They knew they had passed out of darkness into light. They did not simply cherish a pious hope that God had received them. They knew He had made them His own. They had much assurance! Could anything be more blessed?

Is it not strange that so much that passes for gospel preaching today fails to produce this very-much-to-be-desired result? Surely something is radically wrong when people can be church-goers all their lives and never get farther than to live in hope of receiving "dying grace" at last!

The Woman Was Dying

An aged woman was reported to be dying. Her physician had given up all hope of her recovery. Her minister was called to her bedside to prepare her for the great change. She was in much distress. Bitterly she lamented her sins, her coldness of heart, her feeble efforts to serve the Lord. Piteously, she besought her pastor to give what help he could that dying grace might indeed be hers. The good man was plainly disconcerted. He was not used to coming to close quarters with dying souls anxious to be sure of salvation. But he quoted and read various scriptures. His eye fell on the words, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).

As he read the words with quivering voice, the dying woman drank in their truth. "Not by works, but justified by his grace!" She exclaimed, "Aye, minister, that'll do; I can rest there. No works of mine to plead, just to trust His grace. That will do. I can die in peace." He prayed with her and left, his own heart tenderly moved and grateful, too, that he had been used to minister dying grace to this troubled member of his flock. He hardly expected to see her again on earth, but was comforted to feel that she would soon be in heaven.

Contrary to her physician's prediction, however, she did not die but rallied from that very hour, and in a few weeks was well again, a happy, rejoicing believer with much assurance. She sent once more for the pastor, and put the strange question to him: "God has given me dying grace and now I am well again; what am I to do about it?"

"Ah, woman," he exclaimed, "ye may just claim it as living grace and abide in the joy of it."

It was well put, but what a pity his preaching throughout the years had not produced assurance long before in the mind and heart of his anxious parishioner.

The Thessalonian believers did not have to wait until facing death in order to enter into the positive knowledge of sins forgiven. Their election of God was a reality to themselves and to others, who saw what grace had wrought in their lives.

And it was what Paul calls "our gospel," and "my gospel," that produced all this. We are not left in any doubt as to what that gospel was, for he has made it very clear elsewhere. He had but one message, that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The import of this
received in faith destroyed doubt, banished uncertainty, and
produced much assurance.

Of course, back of the witness borne by the lips was the witness of the life. Paul's deportment among them was that of a man who lived in the atmosphere of eternity. A holy minister of Christ preaching a clear gospel in the energy of the Holy Spirit is bound to get results. Such a man is a tremendous weapon in the hand of God for the pulling down of satanic strongholds. But it was not the piety of the messengers that gave assurance to those early believers. It was the message itself which they received in faith.

It is a great mistake to attempt to rest one's soul upon the character of any preacher, however godly he may appear to be. Faith is to rest, not in the best of God's servants but in His unchanging Word. Unhappily, it often transpires that impressionable folk are carried away with admiration for a minister of Christ, and they put their dependence upon him, rather than upon the truth proclaimed.

"I was converted by Billy Sunday himself!" said one to me, in answer to the question, "Are you certain that your soul is saved?"

Mr. Sunday would have been the last of men to put himself in the place of Christ. Further conversation seemed to elicit the evidence that the person in question had been carried away by admiration for the earnest evangelist and mistook the "thrill of a handshake" for the Spirit's witness. At least, there seemed no real understanding of God's plan of salvation, which Billy Sunday preached, in such tremendous power.

Then it is well to remember that some vivid emotional experience is not a safe ground of assurance. It is the blood of Christ that makes us safe and the Word of God that makes us sure.

Queen Victoria Decides the Question

There is an apparently authentic story told of the great Queen Victoria, so long ruler of Britain's vast empire. When she occupied her castle at Balmoral, Scotland, she was in the habit of calling, in a friendly way, upon certain cottagers living in the neighborhood. One aged Highland woman, who felt greatly honored by these visits and who knew the Lord, was anxious about the soul of the queen. As the season came to a close one year, her Majesty was making her last visit to the humble home of this dear child of God. After the good-byes were said, the old cottager timidly inquired, "May I ask your gracious Majesty a question?"

"Yes," replied the queen, "as many as you like."

"Will your Majesty meet me in heaven?"

Instantly the royal visitor replied, "I will, through the all-availing blood of Jesus."

That is the only safe ground for assurance. The blood shed on Calvary avails for all classes alike.

When Israel of old were about to leave Egypt, and the last awful plague was to fall on that land and its people, God Himself provided a way of escape for His own. They were to slay a lamb, sprinkle its blood on the door-posts and lintel of their houses, go inside and shut the door. When the destroying angel passed through that night, he would not be permitted to enter any blood-sprinkled door, for Jehovah had said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Inside the house, some might have been trembling and some rejoicing, but all were safe. Their security depended, not on their frames of mind, or feelings, but on the fact that the eye of God

beheld the blood of the lamb and they were sheltered behind it. As they recalled the Word that He had given concerning it and truly believed it, they would have much assurance.

So it is today! We cannot see the blood shed so long ago for our redemption on Calvary, but there is a sense in which it is ever before the eye of God. The moment a repentant sinner puts his trust in Christ, he is viewed by God as sheltered behind the blood-sprinkled lintel. Henceforth his security from judgment depends, not on his ability to satisfy the righteous demands of the Holy One, but upon "the blessed fact that Christ Jesus satisfied them to the utmost when He gave Himself a ransom for our sins, and thus made it possible for God to pass over all our offences and justify us from all things.

That Dreadful Night in Egypt

Imagine a Jewish youth on that night in Egypt reasoning thus: "I am the first-born of this family and in thousands of homes tonight the first-born must die. I wish I could be sure that I was safe and secure, but when I think of my many shortcomings, I am in deepest distress and perplexity. I do not feel that I am by any means good enough to be saved when others must die. I have been very willful, very disobedient, very undependable, and now I feel so troubled and anxious. I question very much if I shall see the morning light."

Would his anxiety and self-condemnation leave him exposed to judgment? Surely not! His father might well say to him, "Son, what you say as to yourself is all true. Not one of us has ever been all he should be. We all deserve to die. But the death of the lamb was for you - the lamb died in your stead. The blood of the lamb outside the house comes between you and the destroyer."

One can understand how the young man's face would light up as he exclaimed, "Ah, I see it! It is not what I am that saves me from judgment. It is the blood and I am safe behind the blood-sprinkled door." Thus he would have "much assurance." And in the same way, we now, who trust in the testimony God has given concerning the atoning work of His Son, enter into peace and know we are free from all condemnation.

Perhaps some one may ask, "But does it make no difference to God what I am myself? May I live on in my sins and still be saved?" No, assuredly not! But this brings in another line of truth. The moment one believes the gospel, he is born again and receives a new life and nature - a nature that hates sin and loves holiness. If you have come to Jesus and trusted Him, do you not realize the truth of this? Do you not now hate and detest the wicked things that once gave you a certain degree of delight? Do you not find within yourself a new craving for goodness, a longing after holiness, and a thirst for righteousness? All this is the evidence of a new nature. And as you walk with God you will find that daily the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit will give you practical deliverance from the dominion of sin.

This line of truth does not touch the question of your salvation. It is the outcome of your salvation. First, get this settled: you are justified not by anything done in you, but by what Jesus did for you on the cross. But now He who died for you works in you to conform you daily to Himself, and to enable you to manifest in a devoted life the reality of His salvation.

The Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven." The moment they turned to Him they were saved, forgiven, justified, set apart to God in all the value of the work of the Cross and the perfection of the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus. They were accepted in the Beloved! God saw them in Christ. Believing thus, they had much assurance.

This matter settled, they then yielded themsleves unto God as those alive from the dead, to serve Him who had done so much for them, and they waited day by day for the coming again of Him who had died for them, whom God had raised from the dead and seated at His right hand in highest glory.

Acceptable service springs from the knowledge that the question of salvation is forever settled. We who are saved by grace apart from all self effort are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Not Saved by Good Works

Notice, we are not saved by good works, but unto good works. In other words, no one can begin to live a Christian life until he has a Christian life to live. This life is divine and eternal. It is imparted by God Himself to the one who believes the gospel, as the apostle Peter tells us: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of

man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Pet. 1:23-25).

The new birth, therefore, is by the Word - the message of the gospel - and the power of the Holy Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." These were our Lord's words to Nicodemus. The one thus regenerated has eternal life and can never perish. How do we know? Because He has told us so.

Weigh carefully the precious words of John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life"; and link with this verse John 10:27-30, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

Observe that in the first of these passages there are five links, all of which go together: "Heareth" - "Believeth" - "Hath" - "Shall not" - "Is passed." Study these terms carefully and note their true connection. They should never be dissociated. In the longer passage pay careful attention to what is said of Christ's sheep:

a - They hear His voice;
b - They follow Him;
c - They possess eternal life;
d - They shall never perish;
e - None can pluck them from the hands of the Father and the Son.

Could there be greater security than this and could any words give clearer assurance of the complete salvation of all who come to God through His Son? To doubt His testimony is to make God a liar. To believe His record is to have "much assurance."

Do you say, "I will try to believe"? Try to believe whom? Dare you speak in this way of the living God who will never call back His words? If an earthly friend told you a remarkable tale that seemed hard to credit, would you say, "I will try to believe you"? To do so would be to insult him to his face. And will you so treat the God of truth, whose gifts and promises are never revoked? Rather look up to Him, confessing all the unbelief of the past as sin, trust Him now, and thus know that you are one of the redeemed.

Some years ago in St. Louis, a worker was dealing with a man who had expressed his desire to be saved by going into the inquiry room upon the invitation of the evangelist. The worker endeavored to show the man that the way to be saved was by accepting Christ as his Saviour and believing the promise of God. But the man kept saying:
"I can't believe; I can't believe!"
"Who can't you believe?" replied the worker.
"Who can't I believe?" said the man.
"Yes, who can't you believe? Can't you believe God? He cannot lie."
"Why, yes," said the man, "I can believe God; but I had never thought of it in that way before. I thought you had to have some sort of feeling."

The man had been trying to work up a sense of faith, instead of relying upon the sure promise of God. For the first time he realized that he was to take God at His word, and as he did so, he experienced the power and assurance of salvation.

"Not saved are we by trying;
From self can come no aid;
'Tis on the blood relying,
Once for our ransom paid.
'Tis looking unto Jesus,
The Holy One and Just;
'Tis His great work that saves us -
It is not 'try' but 'trust'!

"No deeds of ours are needed

MUCH ASSURANCE

To make Christ's merit more:
No frames of mind or feelings
Can add to His great store;
'Tis simply to receive Him,
The Holy One and Just;
'Tis only to believe Him -
It is not 'try' but 'trust'!"