

The Truth about Assurance

Here is a quotation from a prominent person:

“[Editor] What are your greatest challenges as president?”

“[Reply] I see four basic areas: assurance of salvation, Global Mission, our youth, and effective church organization.

“The first on my list and most important is to emphasize assurance in Christ. I see that as a unifying force in the church . . .

“[Editor] After assurance of salvation, what comes next?”

“[Reply] Global Mission will not work unless you understand assurance in Christ. I believe the greatest hindrance to mission has been our confusion over the relationship of works to salvation. We say, officially, that we are saved by grace alone, but many act as if works are part of the basis of our salvation. If I don’t have peace of mind, I don’t have good news to share. ‘No assurance’ leads inevitably to ‘no witnessing.’ You can no more promote the church into witnessing, apart from the peace that comes from assurance in Christ, than you can push a wet noodle!”

The man who gave those replies in that article is our General Conference president, Robert Folkenberg.

It was not the worldliness nor rapidly-lowering standards in our church that concerned Elder Folkenberg. In his view, the crisis in our denomination is not sin and disobedience, but personal assurance.

This interview with the editor of *Ministry* magazine (printed in its

June 1992 issue) occurred only a short time after the interview of another prominent man was printed. Here is that person’s statement:

“Well, the genuine Adventist is challenged to share his faith. The great drawback is so many Adventists lack assurance of salvation; they’re not good missionaries . . . Here in the Australasian [South Pacific] Division, its administrators are trying to give the gospel its right place. I am pleased about that.”

That statement was made by Desmond Ford, in an interview by a secular television talk show host in Australia. It was printed a short time before, in the March 1992 issue of *Spectrum*.

When our General Conference president preaches the same message as the leader of a major Adventist offshoot, no one need be surprised that, since then, Desmond Ford has been invited back a second time to Sligo, our denominational headquarters church; there to speak in the 11 o’clock hour on Sabbath—and to receive a standing ovation! More of our General Conference and North American Division leaders attend Sligo, than any other local church in the world field.

A reflection of this teaching that so-called “assurance” is more important than obedience, was seen in Elder Folkenberg’s sermon to the students of Southern College, in Collegedale, Tennessee, a little over a year ago, when he ridiculed the idea that anyone on campus should be concerned about the wearing of jewelry and cosmetics. He told the faculty and student body that a re-

lationship with Jesus was what mattered; not adornment.

Why is “assurance of salvation” pushed so strongly to the front? We surely do not find that emphasis in the Word of God.

The truth of the matter is that, when so-called assurance is made the objective, nothing else is really important.

According to the new theology, it is assurance which counts. Once you have that, everything else is said to fall into place. —Yet, in reality, once an emotional feeling becomes the dominant concern, everything else falls out of place!

What is the easiest way to eliminate standards and doctrinal absolutes? —by elevating emotional feelings above them. Absolute beliefs, definite standards—disappear from the heart and life when the wishy-washy relativism of feeling good is placed as the highest objective of life’s pursuit.

According to this strange religious teaching, feeling must come first. Nothing else matters; forget about obedience and standards. Get assurance. Then, once you have it, keep thinking about it, lest you lose it. On the side, you might give some attention to clean living and helping others, but first must come feeling.

Yet such a religious experience is obviously a see-saw operation, with a special feeling the goal, whether you are having an emotional rise or an emotional fall.

How then should we relate our-

selves to assurance? My friend, I tell you: Forget about relating yourself to assurance, and determine that you will relate yourself rightly to God!

When you come to your heavenly Father, you are to repent of your sins and plead for His forgiveness and acceptance.

And you are to do more—you are to determine in your heart that you will not return to those sins.

And then the God of heaven gives you peace. He forgives your sins and you have peace of heart.

There is no peace for the sinner, apart from, by faith in Christ, renunciation of sin and obedience to God's commandments.

"As you found Him, so walk in Him." As you first came to God, stay with Him thereafter. You found Him because your focus was on getting rid of sin and surrendering your life to Him. Your concern was not on feeling, but on restoring a broken relationship with your God.

Arising, as a new creature in Christ Jesus, you walk thereafter by His side, as a little child, holding His hand.

But, is your concern henceforth to change to feelings and assurance? No. Now your concern is to please your kind Father in all things, because you love Him so.

Your focus now is on obedience by His grace to all that He asks of you in His Inspired Writings.

Your Christian experience began by obediently coming to Him; it continues by obediently walking with Him. All true obedience is by empowering grace, yet it is obedience nonetheless.

It is the sin/obedience issue which brought you to God; it is the sin/obedience issue which keeps you with Him. The breaking of God's law, through yielding to the temptations of Satan, takes you from God. The keeping of God's law, through His Son's enabling merits, keeps you with Him. Pleading with God for forgiveness of sin

and restoration to obedience by faith brings you back to Him.

So the search for "assurance" has very little to do with the salvation process. That is because the sense of assurance is not a cause but a result. It is a by-product of surrender and obedience; not the cause.

Actually, an effort to center the life around whether or not one has "assurance"—turns the Christian life upside down. Chasing after good feelings is a chaotic way to live. A life centered on "how one feels" is a life that is unproductive and worthless. It is a self-centered life. "My feelings, my assurance; that is my religion."

True assurance follows right thoughts, right choices, right actions. It does not precede them.

Then why do men want to elevate the need for assurance—feeling good—to the status of the highest objective of the Christian life?

There is a reason:

By doing so, they are able to lessen the importance of obedience to God's requirements. According to the new theology system of error, we were all saved at Calvary, and our salvation is already a thing of the past. Therefore, all we now need is to buoy up our hearts in this self-deceptive stance that "we are already saved." According to the theory, we need not worry about obedience any more; all we now need is to give our attention to having a feeling of assurance.

But the Holy Spirit continues to convict the heart of sin, and the individual begins to suspect that the new theology teaching may be in error. This frightens the religious leadership. In order to keep their people in subjection to the error of "already saved," the people are urged to ignore their conscience when it pleads with them to put obedience to God first in their lives. They are told that such leanings toward obedience to God's laws are just legalistic tendencies. Instead,

they are told to spend their time thinking they have "assurance." Then they will be happy.

According to this new formula, Christian experience is feeling good about yourself.

But, in reality, assurance is the effect of a genuine Christian experience; it did not initiate it! Seeking Christ and obeying Christ, we have assurance. Seeking assurance, we shut out Christ and center our lives around ourselves. We become self-centered.

Contrary to the teachings of Folkenberg and Ford, a genuine Christian experience of obedience by faith not only produces assurance, it also produces missionary fervor. In contrast, making "assurance" the goal to be reached—will stifle missionary work, because it turns the soul inward on itself!

Serving the great god of your own feelings, you become a desolated wreck, and rather quickly find yourself chasing after sinful pursuits as an outlet for your selfish craving for self-centered feeling. Serving selfish interests first, always leads to ever deeper falls into sin.

Now let us consider how, in the daily walk of the Christian, it is quite normal not to have continual feelings that everything is doing well. It is an aspect of life that is good for us, because it keeps us close to God.

The great sense of our need of God's help urges us to prayer and pleading with God for help. Because we do not receive answers right away, this strengthens our faith. Perseverance in prayer increases our determination to have the promised blessings. Having to wait and press our petitions more urgently at the throne of grace, enables us to better appreciate and use those blessings when they come.

And those blessings are needed, so we can help others. But if our

mind has been trained to think that seeking our own peace should be our chief pursuit in life, we will not be pleading for blessings to help others.

Indeed, those who focus on their own well-being—will be dissatisfied with life most of the time. In addition, they make themselves wide open for Satan to enter and tempt them.

Let us now look more closely at assurance of salvation alone.

As mentioned earlier, *when* we kneel and plead with God for forgiveness of sin, determined to put it away and obey His requirements,—we receive that assurance.

Then, rising to our feet, to the degree that we live in accordance with our prayers and, in the strength of Christ, resist temptation, obey God, and seek to bless others,—we retain that assurance!

It is as simple as that.

It is God's servants who have His peace,—and "serving God" means to obey Him.

But there is another issue in all this: Can we in this life have certainty—right now—that we will ultimately be saved? Here is the answer:

I can this moment have certainty that God accepts me just now. But I cannot have certainty that God will accept me tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year.

Why not? Because the teaching of "once-saved-always-saved" is a deceitful lie of the devil. There is no way I can know today that I will be finally saved. Life is a very real battle, and I must daily, moment by moment, cling to Christ if I am to overcome and be saved at the last.

Probationary life is very short—only a few decades at the most,—and throughout that short time, you and I must continually be on guard, or Satan will overcome us.

There is no safety in a false hope that you and I do not have to be

guarded, and cling to Christ.

The new theology short-cut leads to hellfire.

The new theology teaches two special errors which, mingled together, means ruin to the soul accepting them.

First, the new theology says you can know right now that you cannot be lost. Second, the new theology teaches that you cannot stop sinning in this life, and that the habits of cherished sin will be magically removed when Jesus returns.

Therefore, keep sinning and relax; you cannot be lost!

What a horrible lie!

Only the true Christian can have genuine assurance. Only he can have true peace with God. He is an obedient child of the King, and he rejoices in the fact.

Yet, amid that experience, he is not afraid of walking hand in hand with his Maker—in the darkness.

A lack of a generalized feeling that all is well is a stepping stone to deeper success in the Christian life.

The true Christian lives by faith, not by sight. Faith is the victory, not emotional feeling.

When one stops to think about it, it is the uncertainties of life which keep driving us back to Jesus! We should not fear problems, for they are good for us. They are to be surmounted in the strength of Christ.

In addition, there are those times when the soul will feel its deep unworthiness. The true Christian is not always on an emotional high, and should not expect to be. We must learn to trust Him in the darkness, as well as in the light.

We may be exhausted, we may be ill. A loved one may be in trouble; someone special may be dying. All kinds of problems can and do occur. Through it all, we keep walking forward by faith, holding tightly to the hand of Him who has promised not to let go. It is only by our own choice that we are separated

from Him. Much of our lives, we walk by faith and not by sight.

There there is the factor of humility. Christianity is a down-to-up experience. Continually the soul humbles itself before God and submits its life anew to Him.

But woe be to him who thinks that falling on the Rock is a crisis to be avoided, and that feeling good is all that counts.

The deepest Christian experience occurs at the feet of the Master, not standing on the mountaintop.

The true child of God bows in meekness before his Maker,—and God lifts him up, gives him peace of heart, and uses him in His work.

He does not live in continual fear, for perfect love casteth out fear. His eyes are on the Master, and He walks with Him daily.