

# Thoughts on the Assurance of Faith

by Augustus Toplady

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The deep things which relate to personal experience of the Holy Spirit's dealing with the soul ought to be matters of prayer, not of disputation.

It has long been a settled point with me, that the Scriptures make a wide distinction between faith, the assurance of faith, and the full assurance of faith.

1. Faith is the hand by which we embrace, or touch, or reach forward, the garment of Christ's righteousness, for our own justification.— Such a soul is undoubtedly safe.

2. Assurance, I consider as the ring which God puts upon faith's finger.— Such a soul is not only safe, but also comfortable and happy.

Nevertheless, as a finger may exist without wearing a ring, so faith may be real without the superadded gift of assurance. We must either admit this, or set down the late excellent Mr. Hervey (among a multitude of others) for an unbeliever. No man, perhaps, ever contended more earnestly for the doctrine of assurance than he, and yet I find him expressly declaring as follows: "What I wrote, concerning a firm faith in God's most precious promises, and a humble trust that we are the objects of his tender love, is what I desire to feel, rather than what I actually experience." The truth is, as another good man expresses it, "A weak hand may tie the marriage knot; and a feeble faith may lay hold on a strong Christ.

Moreover, assurance after it has been vouchsafed to the soul may be lost, Peter no doubt lost his assurance, and sinned it away, when he denied Christ, He did not however lose the principle of faith; for Christ had before-hand prayed, concerning him, that his faith may not fail: and Christ could not possibly pray in vain.— A wife may lose her wedding-ring. But that does not dissolve her marriage-relation. She continues a lawful wife still. And yet she is not easy until she find her ring again.

3. Full assurance I consider as the brilliant, or cluster of brilliants, which adorns the ring, and renders it incomparably more beautiful and valuable. Where the diamond of full assurance is thus set in the gold of faith, it diffuses its rays of love, joy, peace and holiness, with a lustre which leaves no room for doubt or darkness.— While these high and unclouded consolations remain, the believer's felicity is only inferior to that of angels, or of saints made perfect above.

4: After all, I apprehend that the very essence of assurance lies in communion with God. While we feel the sweetness of his inward presence, we cannot doubt of our interest in his tender mercies. So long as the Lord speaks comfortably to our hearts, our affections are on fire; our views are clear, and our faces shine. It is when we come down from the mount, and when we mix with the world again, that we are in danger of losing that precious sense of his love, which is the strength of saints militant, and the joy of souls triumphant.

But let not trembling believers forget that faith, strictly so called, is neither more nor less than a receiving of Christ, for ourselves in particular, as our only possible propitiation, righteousness, and Saviour: John i. 12.— Hast thou so received Christ? Thou art a believer, to all the purposes of safety.— And it deserves special notice that our Lord calls the centurion's faith

“great faith;” though it rose no higher than to make him say “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” Matt. viii. 8. 10.

The case likewise of the Canaanitish woman is full to the present point. Her cry was, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David!” And, a little after, “Lord, help me!” Jesus at first gave her a seeming repulse: but her importunity continued, and she requested only the privilege of a dog. *Viz.*, to eat of the crumbs which fell from the master’s table. What were our Saviour’s answer and our Saviour’s remark? An answer and a remark which ought to make every broken sinner take down his harp from the willows:— “O woman, great is thy faith.” Mat. X. 22-28.

5. The graces which the blessed Spirit implants in our hearts (and the grace of faith among the rest) resemble a sun-dial, which is of little service except when the sun shines upon it. The Holy Ghost must shine upon the graces he has given, or they will leave us at a loss (in point of spiritual comfort), and be unable to tell us whereabouts we are. May he, day by day, rise upon our souls with healing in his beams! Then shall we be filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Romans. xv. 13.

6. Are there any weak in the faith who come under the denomination of bruised reeds and smoking flax? Let them know that God will take care of them. The former will not be broken: the latter shall not be quenched. Bless God for any degree of faith; even though it be as the smallest of all seeds, sooner or later it will surely expand into a large and fruitful tree.— However, stop not there; but, as the apostle advises, covet earnestly the best gifts: and the gift of assurance, yea, of fullest assurance among the rest. The stronger you are in faith, the more glory you will give to God, both in lip and life. Lord, increase our faith! Amen.

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