

Assurance of Salvation - #3

Assurance and the Fear of God

Introduction – The worship of the church and the lifestyles of so-called Christians evidence just what those who teach against the doctrine of assurance were afraid of. Our worship is trite, silly, and man-centered. Our lifestyles mimic the world, even if we go a little slower. All because ‘once-saved, always-saved’. What we are missing is an understanding of the fear of God; a fear that flows from true assurance. We are not simply missing an understanding. If there is going to be a true reformation, we must repent of our lack of fear.

Reconciling the Two – While assurance of salvation produces a rest in the finished work of Christ, it does not produce a presumptuous rest. True assurance produces a rest coupled with a godly fear. Remember again the story of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14). Who had true assurance? Who had false assurance? Who exhibited godly fear? It is certainly true that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), that is, a fear of condemnation. But there is another kind of fear. This godly fear does not take away from assurance, but rather goes along with assurance.

The Character of Godly Fear – Bunyan says “*I take this grace of fear to be that which softens the heart, and which makes it stand in awe of both the mercies and judgments of God.*”

It is a Grace – “*...let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*” (Heb 12:28). It is the fruit of God’s love upon His people (Jer 32:38-40). This kind of fear is not in opposition to your assurance, rather it strengthens your assurance. There is no way that you would have this kind of fear unless God had changed your heart (Rom 3:9-18)

It is the Beginning of Knowledge (Prov 1:7) - Godly fear begets knowledge, and motivates the new believer to know God even more. He seeks to work out his salvation not only with fear and trembling, but because he is afraid and trembling.

The Fear of the Lord is to Hate Evil (Prov 16:6) – It is not simply our thankfulness to God that instills obedience. The character of godly fear is to hate sin. At the same time, this fear is called a ‘fountain of life’ (Prov 14:27) for it causes us to constantly contemplate the holiness of God. How much do you think about something you are afraid of when you know it is right in your midst?

The Effects of Godly Fear – When this gift is given to a man, godly fear produces wonderful results.

Devout Reverence – “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints*” (Psalm 89:7). Our worship will emphasize piety and sincerity, not entertainment and triteness. This will also affect how we approach the Word of God (“*Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your Word*” - Ps 119:161). It will produce a great zeal for the glory of God over everything else. It will produce in us perseverance in prayer and acts of charity (“*Cornelius...a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always*” - Acts 10:2).

Watchfulness – “*I said ‘I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue’*” (Psalm 39:1). The one who fears the Lord is careful not to despise the work of grace.

Holiness in Your Vocation (Neh 5:15) – Godly fear produces honesty, hard work, lawful treatment of others, and a sense of doing everything unto the Lord.

Uncompromising Righteousness – Daniel in the lion’s den. David before Goliath. Paul before the Jews. All of these stories of great faith can be traced as well to their fear of God. Fear and faith go together “*...the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord*” (Ex 14:31). “*To fear the Lord is to tremble at the awareness of what a terrible insult it is to a holy God if we do not have faith in His future grace after all the signs and wonders he has performed...It’s this faith in future grace that channels the power of God into obedience.*” (John Piper)

Humility & Hope – “*Do not be haughty, but fear*” (Rom 11:20). There is no place for pride of any kind for those who fear the Lord. But this is not a pity-party either. True godly fear rejoices in the mercy of God (“*The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy*” - Psalm 147:11).

Assurance and Fear - Assurance without fear is pride, fear without assurance is despair; both joined together add sure confidence with deep humility to the mind. Thus the believer fears on account of sin, rejoices on account of grace, fears on account of his own infirmity and threatening dangers and anxiously uses all the means that he may not slip into carnal security. Still he rejoices with confidence in the divine aid promised to him that he may not rush into despair. We can “*serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling*” (Psalm 2:11) knowing that no one can bring a charge against the Lord’s elect.

If you have a godly fear, cultivate it deeply, for it will only strengthen your assurance and therefore your joy and hope. If you do not fear God, you have much to fear. Your assurance is false and your presumption and casualness towards the things of God will be your destruction. Cry out for the gift of godly fear.