

July 2009

No doubt about it

It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian. Yet the glory of the gospel is not only *to be a Christian* but *to know for sure that you are a Christian*. This is the matter we call *assurance*: having absolute and continual certainty that it is well with your soul. Here true believers may vary a great deal.

Some believers seem to walk in perpetual sunshine in the life of faith, never entertaining a single doubt over their spiritual standing and condition. Some believers wax and wane, ebb and flow, experience 'high tides' and 'low tides', ups and downs, good days and bad days – part of the time basking in a refreshing sense of the love of God towards them and the smile of God upon them, and part of the time experiencing great anxiety as to whether or not the Lord Jesus Christ is truly theirs. Some believers never seem to have this assurance for themselves and can go through their entire Christian life without any assured 'joy of their salvation'.

It is in direct connection with assurance that 'the witness of the Holy Spirit' is so very important. Paul writes of it in Romans 8:16: 'The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God'. It is not that he makes our adoption (our being 'the children of God') itself more certain, but rather that he confirms (witnesses, testifies) 'with our spirit' that it is certain. He does this work through the word – there is 'no whisper of the Spirit distinct from the testimony of the Word', one has written.

He may shine graciously upon some promise of God and impress us, to our overwhelming joy, that 'this one's mine!'. *He may* give us such a precious sight (by faith) of the sufferings, humiliation and death of the Saviour as to leave us in no doubt that he is 'the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. *He may* remind us that in chastening and disciplining us the Father is taking the trouble over us that he only takes with his own children – he is dealing with us as sons. *He may* do it in the way in which he produces in us and draws forth from us the fruits of a regenerate life (as are pictured in the beatitudes or the fruit of the Spirit). *He may* assure us of our adoption as he gives us confidence that in prayer we have been heard by our heavenly Father – *or* in the sheer abundance of blessings which our God lavishes upon us – *or* by causing the reality of heaven to approach unusually near to our souls, assisting us to 'set (our) affections on things above, not on things on the earth'.

He may do it in endless ways, as pleases him, for he is God the Holy Spirit. But he does it! And how thankful we are.