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Teaching Notes

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Heaven on Earth

Thomas Brooks

“Assurance is a believer’s ark where he sits, Noah-like, quiet and still in the midst of all distractions and destructions, commotions and confusions.”

Preface: The Nature of Assurance

A. The Blessings of the State of Grace

“To be in a state of grace is to be miserable no more; it is to be happy forever. A soul in this state is a soul near and dear to God. It is a soul much beloved and very highly valued of God. It is a soul housed in God. It is a soul safe in the everlasting arms.”

B. The Additional Blessing of KNOWING You’re in a State of Grace

“The being in the state of grace will yield a man a heaven hereafter, but the seeing of himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter; it will render him doubly blest, blest in heaven, and blest in his own conscience.”

C. Definition of Assurance

“Now assurance is a reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious, blessed, and happy state; **it is a sensible feeling, and an experimental discerning** of a man’s being in a state of grace, and of his having a right to a crown of glory; and this rises from the seeing in himself the special, peculiar, and distinguishing graces of Christ, in the light of the Spirit of Christ, or from the testimony and report of the Spirit of God...”

D. Two Different Things: Justification and Assurance

“It is one thing for me to have grace, it is another thing for me to see my grace; it is one thing for me to believe, and another thing for me to believe that I do believe; it is one thing to have faith, and another thing to know that I have faith.”

“Assurance flows from a clear, certain evident knowledge that I have grace...”

E. The Blessedness of Assurance

“Now assurance is the beauty and top of a Christian’s glory in this life. It is usually surrounded with the strongest joy, with the sweetest comforts, and with the greatest peace. It is a pearl that most want, a crown that few wear.”

“Assurance is not the essence of a Christian. It is required to the *well-being*, to the comfortable and joyful being of a Christian; but it is not required to the *being* of the Christian. A man may be a true believer, and yet would give all the world were it in his power to know that he is a believer.”

NOTE: Some Christian speakers have said “Ninety-nine sure is one hundred percent lost.” Brooks disagrees!

I. Proofs that Assurance is Possible

A. The basis of assurance

Romans 8:32-34 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

It is clear that Paul intends his words of assurance to be generally for all Christians... not just for a special class of Christian

B. The purpose of Scripture is to help believers to obtain assurance

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Brooks: “It is the very drift and design of the whole Scripture, to bring souls first to an acquaintance with Christ, then to an acceptance of Christ, and then to build them up in a sweet assurance of their actual interest in Christ.”

Martin Luther: “I would not live in paradise without the Word, but with the Word, I could live in hell itself.”

Brooks: “In Scripture, God has given us His word, His oath, His seal, that our consolation may be strong, and that our salvation may be sure.”

CLEAR STATEMENT OF THE AGONY OF NO ASSURANCE: “It is not enough to raise strong consolation in my soul, barely to know that there are mines of gold, mountains of pearl, heaps of treasure, a land flowing with milk and honey, but it is the knowledge of my interest (i.e. ownership) in these things that raises joy in my soul. To know that there are such things, and that I have no interest in them, is rather a vexation than a consolation to me; to know that there is a feast of choicest delicacies, but not a taste for me; that there are pleasant fountains and streams, but I must perish for thirst in a wilderness; to know that there are royal robes for others, but I must die in my rags; to know that there is a pardon for others, but I must be turned off the ladder of life... such knowledge as this may well add to my vexation, but it will not add to my consolation.”

C. Many believers have obtained assurance

[Job] *Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

[Paul] *2 Corinthians 5:1 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

2 Timothy 4:8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

[Asaph] *Psalms 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

[David] *Psalms 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

D. God has promised assurance to His people

Psalms 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Ezekiel 34:30-31 Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD."

John 14:21, 23 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."... 23 "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

God keeps His promises! If He has promised to assure us of His love for us and of our grace in Christ, He will keep His promise!

2 Corinthians 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

E. The springs of assurance are in the saints

1. **Faith** is the spring out of which flows the river of assurance

Every true believer therefore has the well already opened up within them

Brooks: "Faith is an appropriating grace; it looks upon God and says with David, 'This God is my God forever and ever, and shall be my guide unto death.'" (Psalm 48:14) It looks upon Christ and says with the spouse, 'I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me.' (Song of Songs 7:10) It looks upon an immortal crown, and saith

with Paul, 'Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of glory.' (2 Timothy 4:8) It looks upon the righteousness of Christ and saith, 'This righteousness is mine to cover me.' It looks upon the mercy of Christ and saith, 'This mercy is mine to pardon me.' It looks upon the power of Christ and saith, 'This power is mine to support me.' It look upon the wisdom of Christ and saith, 'This wisdom is mine to direct me.' It looks upon the blood of Christ and saith, 'This blood is mine to save me.'"

2. So also **hope** is a spring of assurance... in its very nature
3. So also a **good conscience** is a spring of assurance

1 John 3:21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

Brooks: "A good conscience and a good confidence go together." "As an evil conscience is attended with the greatest fears and doubts, so a good conscience is attended with the greatest clearness and sweetness."

4. So also **love for the saints** is another spring of assurance

John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.

Sadly, we are thirsty for assurance and have these springs within us!! Like Hagar sitting by a spring while dying of thirst (Genesis21:15-19), so are we!

We have the "springs of water" opened up within us (John 4:14)... so let us drink!

F. The Spirit of God exhorts to assurance

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.

1. Greek word implies
 - a. all possible haste and speed
 - b. all manner of seriousness and diligence
2. Focus of command: be sure that you are called, be sure you are elect
3. Command implies assurance takes great effort

Brooks: "The riches, honors, languages, and favors of this world cannot be obtained without much trouble and travel, without rising early and going to bed late, and do you think that assurance, which is more worth than heaven and earth, can be obtained by cold, lazy, heartless services?"

"There are five things that God will never sell at a cheap rate: Christ, truth, his honor, heaven, and assurance."

Hebrews 6:11-12 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

G. Means to be used to obtain assurance

1. The fact that God gives MEANS to the end of assurance shows us He intends us to have it

2 Peter 1:5-8 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2. The commands to self-examination are a means to the end of assurance

1 Corinthians 11:28 *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

2 Corinthians 13:5 *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?*

H. The Lord's Supper as related to assurance

1. One of the main purposes of the Lord's Supper is ongoing assurance of the saints
2. In the Lord's Supper, Christ's people are reminded to look back to Christ's death and ahead to His return, and thus assure themselves that they are part of the body as the piece of bread they personally eat is part of the loaf

I. The relation of assurance to rejoicing in the Lord

1. Many Scriptures portray or command Christians to be lavishly rejoicing in their salvation

Matthew 5:12 *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Luke 10:20 *However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Romans 5:2 *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Philippians 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

1 Peter 1:3-6 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16 *Be joyful always*

2. These commands are impossible to fulfill without assurance of salvation

J. The clarity of Scripture on the difference between the righteous and the wicked

1. Scripture makes a constant broad difference between

seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the righteous and the wicked; saints and sinners; sons and slaves; sheep and goats; lions and lambs; wheat and chaff; light and darkness

2. These distinctions would mean nothing if it were impossible for people to tell which category they belong to

By all these ten arguments it is clear that it is possible for believers to achieve a solid assurance of their salvation

But...

K. Assurance is not for Arminians

1. The doctrine of free-will salvation leaves no possibility for assurance... it actually would plead AGAINST IT

2. Arminians (and semi-pelagians like Roman Catholics) feel a full assurance is HARMFUL to the Christian... making the Christian lazy and over-confident, leading toward freedom to sin

Brooks: "Arminians are not ashamed to say that God may crown a man one hour and uncrown him the next.

II. Weighty Propositions Concerning Assurance

A. Seven reasons why God denies assurance for a time to some believers

1. For the exercise of their grace

Brooks: "What use would there be of stars if the sun did always shine? Why, none. Why, no more use would there be of your graces, if assurance should always be continued; therefore the Lord, for the exercise of His children's faith, hope, patience, etc. is pleased, at least for a time, to deny them assurance, though they seek it by earnest prayer, and with a flood of penitent tears."

2. To keep them in the exercise of those spiritual duties which are most costly and contrary to the flesh and blood

[such as mourning, repenting, self-judging, self-loathing, self-searching]

3. To convince them more clearly and fully of the exceeding bitterness of sin

4. Perhaps they seek assurance more for themselves than for God's glory
5. To make assurance that much sweeter and more valuable, so they will more highly prize and protect it, and use it better for God's glory
6. That they be kept humble and low in their own eyes
7. That they may live clearly and fully upon Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ may be seen to be all in all

B. Words used in Scripture to express assurance

1. Persuasion

Romans 4:20-21 Yet [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

KJV Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

KJV 2 Timothy 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

2. Knowledge

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

1 John 3:19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence

1 John 3:24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

3. "Full assurance of understanding"

KJV Colossians 2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ

4. "Full assurance of hope"

KJV Hebrews 6:11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

5. "Full assurance of faith"

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

KJV 1 Thessalonians 1:5 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.

C. True believers are saved even though they lack assurance

1. Assurance independent of saving faith, but intimately connected to it
2. Assurance waxes and wanes based on holy obedience to God's commands

D. Six reasons why some do not attain assurance

1. An argumentative spirit, siding with the old man against the new, and with the flesh against the spirit
2. The exceeding littleness and weakness of his grace

Brooks: "The weakest Christian is as much justified, as much pardoned, as much adopted, and as much united to Christ as the strongest..., though he cannot make so much advantage and improvement of his interest and propriety as the strong Christian, who has a greater degree of grace."

3. The resurrection of old sins

Brooks: "Upon the risings of old sins, the soul begins to question all, and begins to expostulate the case: Surely my estate is not good, my pardon is not sealed... surely my repentance was not sound, my sorrow was not sincere; the blow, the wound I gave sin was not mortal.... Thus, these new risings of old sins keeps many a man's soul and assurance asunder."

4. Falling short of that perfection (maturity) which the Word commands and which older saints have attained

Brooks: "Ah! says such a soul, surely I have no grace! Oh how short do I fall of such and such righteous rules, and of such and such precious Christians!"

This comparison can lead some to discouragement and a loss of assurance

5. Fears and doubts caused by corruptions in the soul

The heart naturally doubts the word of God, and the imperfect sanctification of the heart can leave “smoke” of doubt smoldering in some ways, causing the soul to attack itself when God is not

6. Not searching, examining, “ransacking” his soul

Brooks: “There is gold in the mine, and men might find it, if they would but dig and search diligently after it. There is grace in the heart, and you might see it, if you would but take the candle of the Lord and look narrowly after it... What! Is there no sighing, no complaining, no mourning under the sense of sin, and the want of divine favor? Surely if you search, you will find some of these things; and if you do, prize them as jewels that are more worth than a world.”

E. God requires some believers to wait long for assurance

1. God gives this grace of assurance as He sees fit... and not in equal measure to all
2. Some believers have to go through much more suffering for the same level of assurance

Brooks: “Again, God delays the giving of assurance not because he delights to keep his children in fears and doubts, nor because he thinks that assurance is too rare, too great, too choice a jewel to bestow on them; but it is either because he thinks their souls do not stand at a sufficient distance from sin, or because their souls are too taken up and filled with creature enjoyments as that Christ is put in an outhouse, or else it is because they pursue not after assurance with all their might...”

F. Assurance may be possessed and afterwards lost

1. Justification and saving grace cannot be lost
2. However, assurance CAN BE

Brooks: “These two lovers, grace and assurance, are not by God so nearly joined together but they may by sin on our side, and justice on God’s, be put asunder.”

This explains why so many Psalms depict God as standing “far off”

Psalm 10:1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalm 27:9 Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.

Psalm 30:7 O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.

Psalm 38:1-6 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. 2 For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. 3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. 4 My guilt has overwhelmed me

like a burden too heavy to bear. 5 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. 6 I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.

Psalm 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Brooks: “Blessed Hooker lived nearly thirty years in close communion with God, without any considerable withdrawals of God all that while; and yet, upon his deathbed, he went away without any sense of assurance or discoveries of the smile of God..”

G. Assurance is a personal matter

“The certainty and infallibility of a Christian’s assurance cannot be made known to any but his own heart”

1. Vital to understand this... many are greatly disturbed theologically when some seemingly regenerate people “fall away”
2. Parents especially vulnerable to this problem... deeply desiring our children’s salvation, we can be easily deceived

“Assurance is that white stone that none know but him who has it (Revelation 2:17)”

H. Nine special seasons when assurance is enjoyed:

1. At conversion
2. Before engaging in hard or dangerous service
3. During times of waiting
4. During times of suffering
5. During “hearing and receiving” times
6. During times of personal afflictions
7. During seasons of prayer
8. Before conflicts with Satan
9. After conflicts with Satan

III. Hindrances to Assurance, and How They May Be Overcome

IV. Motivations for Christians to Seek Assurance

V. Ways and Means of Gaining Assurance

VI. The Differences Between True and Counterfeit Assurance

VII. Answers to Several Special Questions about Assurance