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Teaching Notes

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## **Heaven on Earth, Session 2**

**Thomas Brooks**

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

#### A. The despairing of obtaining mercy

##### 1. BUT despair is a terrible state to be in

“Despairing thoughts make a man fight against God with his own weapons; they make a man cast all the cordials of the Spirit against the wall, as things of no value; they make a man suck poison out of the sweetest promises...”

“Despair makes every sweet bitter, and every bitter exceeding bitter; it puts gall and wormwood into the sweetest wine.”

##### 2. Brooks reasons hard with despairing people: despair is a GREAT sin

“Is not despair an exceeding vile and contemptible sin? Is it not a dishonor to God, a reproach to Christ, and a murderer of souls? ... It does without a doubt proclaim the devil a conqueror, and lifts him above Christ himself. Despair is an evil that flows from the greatest evil in the world; it flows from unbelief, from ignorance, from misapprehensions of God and His grace...”

##### 3. Despair is the special work of the devil

“[Despair] flows from Satan, who, being forever cast out of paradise, labors with all his art and might to work poor souls to despair of ever entering paradise.”

##### 4. Despair was Judas’s damning sin

Manasseh, a monster, was forgiven... but Judas, filled with despair perished and was lost

##### 5. Consider all the vile sinners who have been saved (like Saul, the persecutor)

##### 6. Consider the freeness of God’s grace... given to sinners apart from what they deserve

##### 7. Consider the perfection of God’s love... totally grounded in Himself, not in the sinner

##### 8. Consider the primacy of God’s mercy

“God’s mercies are above all His works, and above all ours too. His mercy is without measures and rules. All the acts and attributes of God sit at the feet of mercy.”

9. Despair is a great insult to the precious blood of Christ

“Again, tell me, O despairing souls, do you not do infinite wrong to the precious blood of the Lord Jesus?... Does not your despair proclaim to all the world that there is no such worth and virtue, no such power and efficacy in the blood of Christ, as indeed there is? Oh! How will you answer this to Christ in that day wherein His blood shall speak...?”

10. Consider also that God has brought others out of the gulf of despair

**[Asaph] Psalm 77:7-9** *"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? 8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? 9 Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"*

**[Jonah] Jonah 2:4** *I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'*

“O despairing souls, despairing souls, you see that others, whose conditions have been as bad, if not worse than yours, have obtained mercy. God has turned their hell into heaven; He has remembered them in their low state; He has pacified their raging consciences, and quieted their distracted souls; he has wiped all tears from their eyes, and has been a well-spring of life to their hearts.... Therefore, remember who is your rest, and kick no more, by despair, against the wooings of divine love.”

B. The disputing about things too high for our thoughts

1. Specifically, disputing with Satan about the eternal decrees and counsel of God
2. Also disputing with the devil directly

C. The lack of self-examination

**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?*

1. In some cases self-examination (“morbid introspection”) can hinder assurance
2. But in some cases self-examination can be a great cause of assurance, when we see all that God has done in us by grace
3. The key is in learning to identify what could only have been done by God, and then when you see it in your souls, you can rejoice!!

“O you staggering, wavering souls, you tossed and disquieted souls, know for a certain that you will never come to experience the sweetness of assurance, till your eyes be turned inward, till you live more at home than

abroad, till you come to discern between a work of nature and a work of grace, till you put a difference between the precious and the vile, between God's work and Satan's work. When this is done, you will find the clouds to scatter, and the Sun of righteousness to shine upon you and the daystar of assurance to rise in you."

4. This is not a quick, light searching... but a thorough probing of the heart
5. Not every "spiritual movement of the soul" is truly a work of grace... but some are!!

#### D. The entertaining of mistaken views about God's work of grace

"The way to remove this impediment is wisely and seriously to distinguish between renewing grace and restraining grace, between common grace and special grace, between temporary grace and sanctifying grace."

**The Nature of True Grace** [from Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, p. 155ff]

- 1) True grace transforms the whole person, making them entirely new inside and out
- 2) True grace enables a person to be conversant about the highest and best objects, the most precious objects of our faith... not merely the low objects that are within easy reach of reason.
- 3) True grace enables a Christian, when he is himself, to do spiritual actions with real pleasure and delight, not as a grievous burden under which he chafes.
- 4) True grace makes a man most careful and most fearful about his own heart, constantly examining it concerning its progress.
- 5) True grace will work a man's heart to love and cleave to the strictest and holiest ways and things of God, for their purity and sanctity, in the face of all dangers and hardships.
- 6) True grace will enable a man to step over the world's crown, to take up Christ's cross; to prefer the cross of Christ above the glory of this world.
- 7) True grace (sanctifying, renewing grace) puts the soul upon spiritual duties from spiritual and intrinsic motives, not from external earthly motives.
- 8) True grace (sanctifying, renewing grace) will cause a man to follow the Lord fully in the desertion of all sin, and in the observation of all God's precepts... to the hatred of all sin and to the true love of all righteousness.
- 9) True grace leads the soul to rest upon Christ as his highest good, his ultimate aim and goal.
- 10) True grace will enable a soul to sit down satisfied with the naked enjoyment of Christ... Christ without honor, Christ without riches, Christ without health, Christ without success... Christ alone is enough.

#### E. The grieving of the Holy Spirit by the believer

1. By not hearkening to His voice, by refusing His counsel, by stopping the ear, by throwing water upon the fire He kindles in their souls, and by falsely attributing to the Spirit what is to be attributed to men's own passions and distempers (and those of the devil)
2. True assurance very much comes from "keeping in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:26)

“Ah, doubting souls! If you would ever have assurance, you must observe the motions of the Spirit, and give up yourselves to His guidance; you must live by His laws, and tread in His steps; you must live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit; you must let Him be chief in your souls.”

#### F. The judging of spiritual matters by mere feelings or by human reason

“Reason’s arm is too short to reach this jewel of assurance. This pearl of price is put in no hand but that hand of faith that reaches from earth to heaven.... To make sense and feeling the judges of our spiritual conditions, what is it but to make ourselves happy and miserable, righteous and unrighteous, saved and damned in one day, ay, in one hour, when sense and reason sit as judges on the bench?”

“...Let all differences and controversies that arise in your hearts be ended by the Word... If you are resolved to make sense and feeling the judge of your condition, you must resolve to live in fears and lie down in tears.”

#### G. The indulging of laziness and carelessness

1. Men are so active in pursuing after the world! But how lifeless in pursuing exercises of grace

2. Promises of assurance and comfort are not made to lazy people:

“Remember this, that the promise of assurance and comfort is made over, not to lazy but to laborious Christians; not to idle but to active Christians; not to negligent but to diligent Christians.”

“The lazy Christian has his mouth full of complaints, when the active Christian has his heart full of comforts.”

3. ALSO our service to Christ should be hot with passion and zeal, not lifeless and listless

***Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.***

“Be fervent (or seething hot) in spirit, serving the Lord. That service that has not heavenly heat, that has not divine fire in it, is not service, it is lost service. A lazy spirit is always a losing spirit. Remember that he that will find rich minerals must dig deep, he that will be rich must sweat for it, he that will taste the kernel must crack the shell, he that will have the marrow must break the bone, he that will wear the garland must run the race, he that will ride in triumph must get the victory. So (therefore) he that would get assurance must be active and lively in duty.”

“My advice to you, lazy Christians, is this: cease complaining of the lack of assurance, and be no more formal, slight, and superficial in religious services, but stir up yourselves, and put out all your might and strength in holy actions, and you shall experimentally find that it will not be long before you shall have such good news from heaven, as will fill you with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

#### H. The neglect of duties ordained by God

1. Such as prayer, confession of sin, Bible intake, the Lord’s Supper, fellowship, the hearing of the preached word, etc.

2. These ordinances are great means of grace for assurance... the neglect of them results in loss of assurance

#### I. The love of the world

1. Earthly riches are a great burden to spiritual growth... hard to bear successfully
2. So also the pleasures and enjoyments of this world

“Solomon got more hurt by his wealth than he got good by his wisdom. Such a fire rose out of his worldly enjoyments, as did even consume and burn up his choicest spirits and noblest virtues; under all his royal robes, he had but a thread-bare soul.”

“Sicily is so full of sweet flowers that dogs cannot hunt there, the scent of the sweet flowers diverts their smell. And ah! what do all the sweet delights and contents of this world, but make men lose the scent of heaven, but divert men from hunting after assurance, and from running after Christ, in the sweetness of His ointments.”

“Worldly Christians, remember this: you and the world must part, or else assurance and your souls will never meet. God will not give the sweetness of heaven to those that are gorged and surfeited with the delicacies of the earth.”

#### J. The cherishing of secret sins

“The secret cherishing and running out of their hearts to some bosom, darling sin...”

“Ah! how many be there that dally and play with sin, even after they have put up many prayers and complaints against sin, and after they have lamented and bitterly mourned over their sins. Many there be that complain of their deadness, barrenness, forwardness, conceitedness, censoriousness, and other forms of baseness; and yet are ready at every turn to gratify, if not to justify, those very sins that they complain against. No wonder that such people lack assurance!”

### IV. Motives to Provoke Christians to be Restless till they have Obtained a Well-grounded Assurance of their Eternal Happiness and Blessedness

Eleven motives why Christians should earnestly seek after a well-grounded assurance:

1. Many have been lost who thought they were saved

“Many are now dropped into hell that have formerly presumed of their going to heaven.”

2. The world is full of deceivers

“There be a great many soul-flatterers, soul-deceivers, and soul-cheaters in the world. The devil has put his angelical robes upon many of his chief agents, that they may the more easily and the more effectually deceive and delude the souls of men.”

**2 Timothy 4:3** *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*

3. Assurance delivers from the burden of cares, fears, and doubts
4. Satan labors to keep Christians from assurance
5. A well-grounded assurance is of great value to a believer... bringing great joy and delight
6. Worldlings labor hard to secure the things of this life; saints should show equal ardor for better things

“What riding, running, plotting, lying, swearing, stabbing, and poisoning is used by men of this world, to make sure of the poor things of this world, that are but shadows and dreams and nothings! ... Oh then be ashamed Christians, that worldlings are more studious and industrious to make sure of pebbles, than you are to make sure of pearls; to make sure of those things that at last will be their burden, their bane, their plague, their hell, than you are to make sure of those things that would be your joy and crown in life, in death, and in the day of your account.”

7. Assurance renders burdens light

“The apostles went through many weaknesses, sicknesses, wants and deaths; they had nothing and yet possessed all things; they had burden upon burden cast upon them by the churches, by false apostles, and by an uncharitable world, and yet they cheerfully bore all burdens without them being a burden, through the power of a well-grounded assurance.”

**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 Corinthians 6:8-10** *through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

8. God urges Christians to get assurance

**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?*

**NASB Hebrews 6:11** *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,*

9. Christians are seriously injured by the lack of assurance

“By living without assurance, you lay yourselves open to all Satan’s snares and temptations; yea, you do instigate and provoke Satan to tempt you to the greatest neglects, to tempt you to the strangest shifts, and to reduce you to the saddest straits.”

You lose the following by lack of assurance: comfort and joy, peace and contentment, boldness and confidence in service

10. Ten advantages which accompany assurance:

a. assurance produces heaven on earth (within your hearts)

“An assured soul lives in paradise and walks in paradise and works in paradise and rests in paradise; he has heaven within him.”

b. assurance sweetens life’s changes

“While a man lives in the sense of unchangeable love, no outward changes can make any considerable change in his spirit. Let times change, let men change, let powers change, let nations change, yet a man under the power of assurance will not change his countenance, nor change his master, nor change his work, nor change his hope. Though others under changes turn, like the chameleon, into all colors to save their little all, yet the assured soul under all changes is always the same.”

c. assurance keeps the heart from desiring the world

***Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.***

d. assurance sweetens communion with God

“Assurance of a man’s interest (inheritance) in God sweetens every thought of God, every sight of God, every taste of God, and every good word of God. God is as sweet to the assured soul when He has a sword in His hand as when He has a scepter...”

e. assurance preserves from backsliding

***2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall***

Assurance cuts off backsliding before it really begins... as soon as one sin occurs, the assured believer comes boldly to God for forgiveness and restoration, certain of welcome and forgiveness; backsliding is cut off

f. assurance produces holy boldness with God

“It will make a man divinely familiar with God; it will make a man knock boldly at the door of free grace; it will make a man come boldly before the mercy-seat; it will make a man enter boldly within the holy of holies.”

g. assurance prepares a man for death

“**Assurance will make a man sick of his absence from Christ.** It made the martyrs to brave it out with lions, to dare and tire their persecutors, to kiss the stake, to sing and clap their hands in the flames, to tread upon hot burning coals as upon a bed of roses.”

“The assured soul knows that death shall be the funeral of all his sins and sorrows, of all afflictions and temptations, of all desertions and oppositions. He knows that death shall be the resurrection of his joys...”

h. assurance make mercies taste like mercies

i. assurance gives vigor in Christian service

“Assurance will make a man fervent, constant, and abundant in the work of the Lord, as you may see in Paul. The assured Christian is more motion than notion, more work than word, more life than lip, more hand than tongue. When he has done one work, he is a-calling out for another. ‘What is the next, Lord’ says the assured soul, ‘What is the next?’”

j. assurance leads to the soul’s enjoyment of Christ

11. A well-grounded assurance will keep a Christian from being deceived by counterfeits

“There is a great deal of counterfeit knowledge, counterfeit faith, counterfeit love, counterfeit repentance in the world, so there is also a great deal of counterfeit assurance in the world.”

“Many there be that talk high, and look big, and bear it out bravely that they are thus and thus, and that they have such and such glorious assurance, whereas, when their assurance comes to be weighed in at the balance of the sanctuary, it is found too light; and when it comes to withstand temptations, it is found too weak, and when it should put the soul upon divine action, it is found to be but lazy presumption.”

## V. Ways and Means of Gaining a Well-grounded Assurance

### A. Be active in exercising grace

“If ever you would have assurance, stir up the grace of God that is in you; blow up that heavenly fire; raise up those noble spirits; never cease believing nor repenting, until it be clearly given into your bosoms that you are as sure that you do believe, and that you do repent, as you are sure that you live.”

### B. Assurance is obtained by obedience



“Assurance is heavenly wages that Christ gives, not to loiterers but to holy laborers. Though no man merits assurance by his obedience, yet God usually crowns obedience with assurance.”

***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.” Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" 23 Jesus replied, "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.*

C. Follow diligently the instructions of the Holy Spirit

“To gain assurance, the Christian must be kind to the Spirit, hear His voice, follow His counsel, live up to His laws.”

“As ever you would have assurance, beware of Him and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for if you do so by willful transgressions, He will neither comfort you nor counsel you; He will neither be a sealing nor a witnessing Spirit to you; nay, He will raise storms and tempests in your souls; He will present to you the Father frowning, and your Savior bleeding, and Himself as grieving. And these sights will certainly rack and torture your doubting souls. The Spirit of the Lord is a delicate thing, a holy thing, a blessed guest, that makes every soul happy where He lodges. “Therefore grieve not the Holy Spirit of God’ (Ephesians 4:30)”

D. Be diligent in attendance upon ordinances

E. Pay particular attention to the scope of God’s promises of mercy

1. Absolute promises do not describe *to whom* salvation and all eternal blessings are going
2. SO labor to see those particular things within you that are gifts of God’s grace
  - a. faith: your sincere willingness to believe is your faith, and this gift brings you within the compass of the promise of eternal happiness and blessedness
  - b. waiting patiently on God: the ability to wait patiently on God for His promises is a direct gift to your soul
  - c. hungering and thirsting after righteousness: a constant yearning for righteousness is not natural to the soul and is a great evidence of God’s work in you
    - i) earnest and vehement hungering and thirsting
    - ii) arising from spiritual and heavenly considerations
    - iii) resulting in the soul becoming lively after righteousness (it makes you active)

***Isaiah 26:9*** *My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.*

“A thirsty man will not only long for a drink but endeavor with all his might to get one!”

- iv) satisfied only by spiritual things

F. Six matters in which Christ's true followers are distinguished from all others

1. True Christians labor in all duties to be approved and accepted **by God**, caring very little about human opinion
2. True Christians labor to get up to the very top of holiness; they labor to live up to their own principles
3. True Christian: Is not your greatest desire and endeavor that your sin may be cured rather than covered?
4. True Christian: Is not your soul taken with Christ as chief above ten thousand, as altogether lovely and desirable?
5. True Christian: Are not your greatest and hottest conflicts against your inward pollutions, against those secret sins that are only obvious to the eye of God and your own souls?
6. True Christian: Are you not subject to Christ as your Head?
  - a. willingly, gladly, sweetly subject to Christ as Head
  - b. universally subject in all His commands, not just occasionally or partially
  - c. constantly and unweariedly

TEST YOURSELF BY THIS LIST!! DO YOU DO THESE THINGS???

If you can say... "Yes! We do these things; we should belie the grace of God should we say otherwise. These things the Lord has worked in us and for us!!", then know

- 1) Your estate is good; you certainly have a blessed interest (inheritance) in Christ; for none can do these things but those in union with Christ
- 2) It is no iniquity but your duty to suck sweetness out of these honeycombs, and to look upon these things as infallible pledges and evidences of your everlasting happiness and blessedness.

G. Seek to grow in grace

***2 Peter 1:5-8 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 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.***

These qualities are to be linked together and all of them growing... if so, you will have a strong assurance

H. Seek assurance when the soul is in its best frames

1. When your soul is in its best and most spiritual frame God-wards, heavenwards, holiness-wards
  2. Times of temptation and desertion are praying times, hearing times, mourning times, and believing times... but not seasonable times for seeking assurance immediately
- I. Ascertain whether you have the things that accompany salvation: notably Knowledge, Faith, Repentance, Obedience, Love, Prayer, Perseverance, and Hope

***Hebrews 6:9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation.***

1. The things that accompany salvation: **Knowledge**
  - a. It is operative: it acts powerfully on both the heart and the head
  - b. It is transforming: it transforms the soul “from glory into glory”
  - c. It is experimental: it gives an active taste and sense of heavenly things
  - d. It is heart-affecting: see above
  - e. It is world-despising: it causes the heart to despise the world by comparison
  - f. It is soul-humbling: it makes a man very low and little in his own eyes
  - g. It is appropriating: it says of spiritual things, this is *mine*
  - h. Knowledge has attendant graces: thirsting for more, desire to teach, zeal for God
2. The things that accompany salvation: **Faith**
  - a. The objects of Faith:
    - i) The person of Christ
    - ii) The righteousness of Christ
    - iii) The promises of God
    - iv) The future glory
  - b. The properties of Faith:
    - i) It promotes vitality: it gets a man active and energetic in things of God

- ii) It grows: it has a dynamic and increasing nature
- iii) It belittles the glories of the world: it makes us seem like strangers on earth
- iv) It purifies the heart: it has a cleansing quality, purging us of sin
- v) It melts the soul: it makes us yield gladly and softly to God, to weep for sin
- vi) It overcomes the world: it conquers the traps the world sets

c. Strong Faith and Weak Faith

3. The things that accompany salvation: Repentance:

a. Repentance: its properties

- i) It effects a change in every part of a man
- ii) It is a turning from all sin
- iii) It is a turning to God
- iv) It strikes particularly at the sins to which a man was formerly most prone
- v) It is comprehensive in its scope
- vi) It has appropriate attendants
- vii) It is a continued act

4. The things that accompany salvation: Obedience

- a. It is hearty
- b. It seeks to perform all God's will
- c. It flows from faith
- d. It is ready, free, willing and cheerful
- e. It is resolute
- f. Its aim is the divine glory
- g. It is constant
- h. It is passive as well as active

5. The things that accompany salvation: Love

a. The qualities of Love

- i) It is superlative
- ii) It is obedient
- iii) It is sincere
- iv) It is vehement
- v) It is permanent
- vi) It is abounding
- vii) It cannot be hid
- viii) It delights to see the divine image in fellow-believers
- ix) It enables the soul to receive Christ's rebukes
- x) It laments over dishonours done to Christ
- xi) It keeps the heart for Christ alone
- xii) It delights in secret communion with Christ
- xiii) It longs for the full assurance of Christ's love
- xiv) It enables the believer to commit his all to Christ

6. The things that accompany salvation: Prayer

- a. The requisites of prayer as a form of divine worship
- b. Prayer betters the whole man
- c. Eight differences between the prayers of the godly and those of the ungodly

7. The things that accompany salvation: Perseverance

a. The properties of Perseverance

- i) Perseverance appertains to a holy profession
- ii) It appertains to holy and spiritual principles
- iii) It is an abiding in the doctrine of Christ
- iv) It is a continuance in gracious action

8. The things that accompany salvation: Hope

- a. The nature of Hope
- b. Hope expects and waits patiently for promised good
- c. The properties of Hope:
  - i) It raises the heart to live above
  - ii) It strengthens the soul against afflictions and temptations

- iii) It makes the soul lively and active
- iv) It gives the believer great quietness
- v) It causes the soul to wait patiently for delayed mercy
- vi) It purifies the soul
- vii) It never dies

## VI. The Differences between a True and Counterfeit Assurance, between Sound Assurance and Presumption

A. A well-grounded assurance bears these following marks:

1. It is attended by a deep admiration of God's love and favour in Christ
2. It causes the soul ever to seek a fuller enjoyment of God and Christ
3. It is usually strongly assaulted by Satan
4. It makes a believer bold
5. It makes a believer seek the happiness of other men
6. It strengthens a believer against all sin
7. It is attended by love, humility, and joy
8. It springs from the witness of the Holy Spirit

B. The characteristics of the Holy Spirit's witness:

1. It is inward and secret
2. It is gained in holy ways
3. It is clear, full, and satisfying
4. It is not operative in all believers
5. It is a sure testimony
6. It is always accompanied by the testimony of our own spirit
7. It is always according to Scripture
8. It is holy
9. It is only bestowed on renewed hearts

## VII. Answers to Several Special Questions about Assurance

- A. Nine methods whereby assurance may be strengthened and maintained
- B. Six methods whereby souls which have lost assurance may be kept from fainting
- C. Five methods whereby souls which have lost assurance may recover it

#### D. Conclusion