

Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

Francis Roberts



Soli Deo Gloria Publications

... for instruction in righteousness ...

Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

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Soli Deo Gloria Publications

An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 26/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Roberts, Francis, 1609-1675, author.

Title: Believers' evidences for eternal life / Francis Roberts.

Description: Grand Rapids : Soli Deo Gloria Publications, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2021008179 (print) | LCCN 2021008180 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601788573 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781601788580 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Assurance (Theology)—Biblical teaching. | Bible. Epistle of John, 1st—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BT785 .R59 2021 (print) | LCC BT785 (ebook) | DDC 234—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008179>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008180>

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Biographical Preface

Francis Roberts (1609–1675) was an English minister and theologian best known in the seventeenth century for his helpful Bible study guide written for laymen and for his massive exposition of the doctrine of God’s covenants.¹ Born in Yorkshire to a common family, he received university training at Trinity College, Oxford, graduating with a BA in 1629 and an MA in 1632. He served as curate at St. Martin’s parish church in Birmingham and in 1644 was appointed by Parliament to the ministerial commission to examine candidates for ordination. During the civil war, he narrowly escaped with his life when the royalist forces of Prince Rupert of the Rhine assaulted Birmingham.

Roberts immediately moved to London to become the minister of St. Augustine’s on Watling Street. He published a detailed chart of all the branches and topics of systematic theology, *A Synopsis of Theology or Divinity* (1645), for his congregation. The fast sermon that he preached for Parliament in 1646 was published as *A Broken Spirit, God’s Sacrifices*. Though

1. On the biography and writings of Francis Roberts, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 47:153–54; Won Taek Lim, *The Covenant Theology of Francis Roberts* (Chungnam, South Korea: King & Kingdom, 2002), 24–29; Joseph Hill, *The Book Makers of Old Birmingham: Authors, Printers and Book Sellers* (Birmingham, England: Cornish Brothers Limited, 1907), 14–17.

serving in the Church of England, he was an advocate for presbyterianism, having subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant, and was a friend to and correspondent with the Scottish minister Robert Baillie.

In 1648 Roberts also published *Clavis Bibliorum: The Key of the Bible*, a practical guide to studying and understanding the Holy Scriptures, and *Believer's Evidences for Eternal Life*, which is presented in this volume. In typical Puritan fashion, he unpacked John's first epistle and other passages, showing how believers may grow in assurance of their faith by relying on God's promises and reflecting on the marks of grace evident in their life, corroborated by the word-based testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they are the sons and daughters of God. I highly recommend this book not only for those who struggle with assurance but also for assured Christians to be strengthened all the more in their most holy faith.

From 1650 to his death, Roberts lived in Somerset and served as the rector of the Church of All Saints in Wrington. He and his wife, Mary, raised their family there at Wrington. At his death he was survived by five daughters, two of whom were married and had families. At Wrington, he published *A Communicant Instructed, or, Practical Directions for Worthy Receiving of the Lord's Supper* (1651). Roberts was appointed in 1654 to serve with the commission to remove scandalous ministers under the Puritan regime of Oliver Cromwell. He also published his magnum opus, the 1,721-page *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum: The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible, viz. God's Covenant with Man* (1657), a magisterial study of God's covenant with Adam and His covenant of grace with Christ. In that year Roberts also preached the funeral sermon for Mary Jackson, wife of Joseph Jackson, alderman of Bristol, which was published as *The Checquer-Work of God's Providences*.

After the restoration of the English monarchy, Roberts conformed to the Church of England rather than be ejected from the pulpit. One historian criticized him for choosing “the comforts of this world” rather than remain consistent with his former commitments; another historian said that he was worn out and disappointed by contentions and rebellions. Whatever his motives may have been, he continued to perform his ministry at All Saints in Wrington. His funeral sermon for Alderman Jackson was published as *The Christian’s Advantage Both by Life and Death Discovered* (1662). He wrote an evangelistic book titled *The True Way to the Tree of Life* (1673), which opens with a letter to his children urging them to trust in Christ alone for salvation. In 1673 he was made chaplain to the First Earl of Essex, Arthur Capell, recently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and was awarded a doctor of divinity degree by the University of Dublin. Two years later Roberts passed from this world at the age of sixty-six to enter Immanuel’s sin-free land of glory.

Dedicatory Epistle

To the Right Honorable Henry, Earl of Kent, and to his Right Noble Consort, Amabella, Countess of Kent.

All confluence of blessings both for the life that now is, and for that which is to come, from the Father of mercies, and God of all consolations.

Right Honorable,

Of all people in the world, that's the only happy people whose God is the Lord (Ps. 144:15); the Lord being that supreme good (Matt. 19:16–17), in whom alone are concentrated all beatific perfections (Gen. 17:1; Matt. 5:48). No people can enjoy the Lord as their God, but by covenant in Christ Jesus, that only way to the Father (John 14:6). Covenant interest in Christ cannot actually be pleaded by any person, but only such as are actually seized of a gracious covenant state (Jer. 31:33–34), the grace of the covenant in us being the surest pledge of God's entering into the covenant of grace with us. So that to be in a gracious state is true happiness. But to know ourselves to be in such a state is true happiness double upon us.

Hereupon, that I might lend some help to true believers, for reading and discerning their own spiritual evidences of the state of grace, I have been persuaded to publish this bundle of believers' evidences for eternal life in the ensuing treatise.

Whereunto I have been the more inclined, that my lines might be of use:

1. To support the weak, and comfort the feebleminded (1 Thess. 5:14), who walk heavily and disconsolately in the paths of grace through want of assurance (Psalm 22, 77, 88). That they hereby coming in some measure to know the things that are freely given to them of God (1 Cor. 2:12), may lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12), and run with enlarged hearts the way of God's commandments (Ps. 119:32).

2. To confute really the enthusiastic fancies, the ignorant anti-scriptural opinions of some, who cry up (I know not what) imaginary raptures, revelations, and other dreams of their own as the only characters of election and justification, decrying as carnal all discoveries of believers' spiritual estates by marks and signs of sanctification. For this sweet epistle of John, the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), is full of such marks, as in this book is evident. Christ has taught us to judge of the tree by the fruits (Matt. 7:16, 18). And reason directs us to discover the cause by the effect.

3. To divert the distempered minds of men a little (if it be possible) from jejune, empty, perverse disputes (1 Tim. 6:5), vain janglings (1 Tim. 3:6), brainsick notions and speculations (the calamity of these crazy times), to exercise themselves upon that wholesome, necessary, practical business of making their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). We have laid out far too much for that which is not bread, for that which satisfies not (Isa. 55:2).

4. And finally to rouse up myself, and all sorts of Christians in this kingdom, in these slippery days (wherein both lives,

liberties, health, friends, wealth, pleasures, honors, crowns, scepters, and all sublunaries¹ are in such extremity of extraordinary uncertainties), to lay hold and make sure of eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12, 19). That in the midst of all terrestrial concussions and revolutions, we may have a celestial, unshaken foundation of true spiritual peace and consolation.

Your honors' noble respects, and undeserved favors heretofore manifested to me have commanded me to dedicate and present to you this small testimonial of my unfeigned gratitude. And wherein can I be more truly serviceable to your honors than in such sincere endeavors to promote your assurance of eternal salvation? Now the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10) fill your hearts with all the fruits of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 2:2) to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, and faith, and hope in this life (Heb. 6:11, 18–19; 10:22), and at last crown you both with ineffable glory in the life to come in the full enjoyment of Himself, who is the Heaven of heaven, and Glory of glory.

So prays your honors' humble and faithful servant in the Lord,

Fran. Roberts

Augustine's, London, October 9, 1648

1. *sublunaries*: things characteristic of or pertinent to this world.

The Preface, Touching the Saints' Assurance:

Succinctly Unfolding the Nature of It, the Trial of It,
the Way of Attaining It, and Inducements to It

No state on earth is so sweet and happy as the state of true grace bestowed on God's elect (Ps. 1:2; 144:15). Such were "darkness" but are "light" (Eph. 5:8); were "lost," are "found" (Luke 15:32); were "dead," are "alive again"; "had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy"; "were not a people, but are now the people" of the living God (1 Peter 2:10). They are newly "created" according to the image of God (Eph. 4:24). They partake of the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). They live the "life of God" (Eph. 4:18). The Father disdains not to count them His "sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:18). The Son "is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11), and the Holy Ghost is pleased to make them His holy temples (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:6). They are "called" effectually, "justified" freely, sanctified graciously, and shall be "glorified" eternally (Rom. 8:29–30). They are servants of God and Christ (John 12:26) to do His work; not only servants, but "friends" to know His secrets (John 15:14–15); not only friends, but "sons," adopted into the household of God (1 John 3:1–2); not only sons, but "heirs of God," to inherit His kingdom; not only heirs, but co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7), to reign together with Him for evermore. No good thing shall be withheld from them (Ps. 34:9–10). "No condemnation" shall befall them (Rom. 8:1). Nothing in the world shall separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:35–39). All things in

the world shall work together for their good (Rom. 8:28). All the surest promises are theirs, all the richest graces are theirs, all the highest privileges are theirs, all the noblest hopes are theirs (1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:20). What shall I say? Theirs is Christ, and in Christ all things (1 Cor. 3:22–23; Rom. 8:32). Oh happy, happy is that people, that thus have the Lord to be their God (Ps. 144:15)!

This sweet and blissful state of grace is rendered doubly sweet to the faithful when once they come to know themselves to be in such a state. Assurance of our state of grace is grace doubled. But in evil times (such as are come upon us), when we can promise ourselves no certainty of any sublunary enjoyment—pleasures being quickly drowned in bitterness (Prov. 24:13); riches taking to themselves wings (Prov. 23:5); honor’s wheel suddenly turning upside down; crowns toppling off the heads; and scepters dropping out of the hands of princes; “the pride of all glory” being stained (Isa. 23:9); and the strongest foundations and pillars of kingdoms being shaken; friends, liberties, life, and all we have, exposed to much hazard and jeopardy—in such seasons when we can be sure of nothing on earth, yet then to be sure of grace and glory is grace trebled and in some measure glorified.

To advance this spiritual happiness among the Israel of God, in the midst of our temporal miseries, this small ensuing treatise is published, spiritual certainties being the best antidote against temporal uncertainties. Though the platform of these evidences be confined to the compass of this “sweet epistle” (as Augustine styles it) of the sweetest apostle, yet the amplifications and demonstrations of the several particulars in much variety are borrowed from other Scriptures, and so far extended that they do amount to a large anatomy of the spiritual state of a Christian.

Before the perusal of particulars, be pleased to pause a little to take view of assurance in general, and herein of (1) the nature of it, (2) the trial of it, (3) the way of attaining and retaining of it, and (4) the inducements persuading to it.

Of the Nature of Assurance

Assurance or certainty is twofold, namely,

The Assurance or Certainty of the Object Believed

That God is true (Deut. 32:4; John 17:3), and what He has promised shall certainly and faithfully be performed (Rom. 4:21; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Cor. 1:20). This is not the assurance we inquire after, though certainty of the object be the ground and foundation whereupon certainty of the subject is primarily bottomed.

The Assurance or Certainty of the Subject Believing

This is the assurance we are to consider of. This assurance has several denominations in Scripture, namely, (1) *Pepoithēsis* (Rom. 8:38), “a persuasion,” rendered “confidence” (Eph. 3:12). *Pistis* (“faith”) has its name from “persuading,” because thereby the heart is “persuaded.” (2) *Emphanismos* (“a perspicuous manifestation”), namely, when Christ manifests Himself so to the soul who loves Him as not to the world (John 14:21–23). (3) *Eidēsis* (1 John 2:3, 5; 3:2, 14, 19, 24; 5:13, 19), “knowledge,” thus it is often styled. (4) *Parrēsia* (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12), “boldness,” so it is usually translated, importing an undaunted (yet humble and dutiful) looking God in the face, etc. (5) *Plērōphoria* (“full assurance”), when faith acts strongly, without staggering through unbelief (Rom. 4:19–21). This is sometimes called “full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2), sometimes “full assurance of hope” (Heb. 6:11, 18, 19), and sometimes “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). For knowledge, faith, and hope do all contribute their influence to the making up of full assurance.

Of this assurance or certainty of the subject there are certain kinds, or rather degrees, principally these three:

1. A certainty of adherence and application, when we certainly apply and adhere to the promise, and to Christ therein, peremptorily devolving and casting ourselves upon Him for salvation, though perhaps without evident and sensible comforts. This is receiving of Christ (John 1:12), cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart (Acts 11:23); if we must perish, we will perish believing. "Though he slay me," etc. (Job 13:15). This is the *minimum quod sic*, namely, the lowest step of assurance, and is so of the nature of faith that faith cannot be without it in the weakest believer. Every true believer has this assurance.

2. A certainty of evidence or experience, when by the reflection of conscience and faith upon themselves and their own acts, or by the testimony of the Spirit of God, we evidently see we are in a gracious state, experimentally discerning what God has done for us, and that upon such and such grounds, effects of grace, or other discoveries. As being new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), walking in the light (1 John 1:7), walking after the Spirit, not after the flesh (Rom. 8:1), loving the brethren, etc. (1 John 3:14). This some call assurance of internal vision. Augustine counts this a clear evidence, saying that "our faith is conspicuous to our own mind" and that "a man holds his faith by certain knowledge and attestation of conscience." And, says Ambrose, "He who has the sense of faith in his heart, knows that Christ is in himself." This assurance is usually attended with much comfort and sweet joy upon the soul that has it. Yet every Christian reaches it not, as the former, though all should contend earnestly for it. It seems to pertain rather to the well-being, than to the mere being of faith and grace.

3. An unstaggering certainty, or a full assurance, as when there's such a full persuasion that overcomes all doubts, fears, staggering of unbelief, as in Abraham the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:17–20). This is the *maximum quod sic*, namely, the highest pinnacle of assurance in this life, next unto celestial enjoyment, and very few attain it.

Of the Trial of Assurance

The trial of the truth of our assurance is of great importance and necessity. For, (1) many Christians have some degree of assurance, who think they have none at all. Let such be convinced of what they have, they are comforted. (2) Many have no true assurance at all, who yet pretend thereto most of all. Carnal men and hypocrites, as Israel (Hos. 8:1–3), Solomon's fool (Prov. 14:16), the self-justifying Pharisee (Luke 18:11–12), and the Laodicean angel (Rev. 3:17). Such should be convinced of what they want that they might be humbled and replenished. All graces, and so assurance, have their counterfeits. We had need try them, lest we take shadows for substances, copper for gold.

Try assurance by the (1) qualifications of the subject assured, (2) grounds or causes of assurance, (3) fruits or effects of assurance.

The Subject of Assurance

The subject of assurance must be duly qualified, ere he can be capable of assurance. Persons are previously and preparatorily qualified for assurance.

1. By kindly humbling of the soul, breaking of the heart, and troubling of the conscience, with fears about their natural condition. The spirit of bondage to fear goes before the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirit our sonship (Rom.

8:15–16 compared with Matt. 11:28; Isa. 61:1–2). More or less, thus God deals with all who come by assurance. Where's your true humbling?

2. By furnishing the humbled broken heart with saving faith. First we believe, then are after sealed with the Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13). Where's your true faith?

3. By giving them the Spirit. They must first have the Spirit of God, ere by the Spirit they can know the things given them of God (1 Cor. 2:12). Has God truly given you His Spirit?

The Grounds or Causes

The grounds or causes of assurance must not be (1) ignorance of our miserable state (Rom. 7:9; Rev. 3:17), (2) nor carnal confidence upon common things, namely, worldly prosperity (Hos. 12:7, 8), outward acts of religion (Matt. 7:22–23; Luke 18:9–13; Matt. 19:20; Phil. 3), or common inward gifts of the Spirit. Illumination, taste of the good word of God, etc. (Heb. 6:4–5), those and like are the false grounds of hypocrites. But grounds of true assurance, are either:

1. Divine testimony by audible voice. Thus Christ assured the man with palsy (Matt. 9:2, 5, 6; Luke 5:20–23) and the penitent woman (Luke 7:47–48) of pardon, and the converted thief of paradise (Luke 23:42–43). But this vocal testimony was extraordinary. To expect the like now, or else to reject other grounds of assurance, were to tempt God.

2. The lively exercise of faith, reflecting upon its own acts and seeing itself believing. Faith's acts are (1) direct, and these either (a) are receptive of Christ (John 1:12) or (b) operative from and by Christ received (Acts 15:9; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 5:6); (2) reflexive when faith returns upon itself, looks back upon its

own acts, thus receiving Christ, thus working, as Paul knew in whom he had believed (2 Tim. 1:12). Does your faith thus act?

3. The testimony of our own sanctified spiritual heart or conscience, according to the Word of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:19–21; 2 Cor. 3:12), of our good spiritual estate. The spirit of man is as the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly (Prov. 20:27), and knows what is in him (1 Cor. 2:10–12). This testimony of our sanctified conscience is usually absolved by ratiocination or discourse in a practical experimental syllogism, thus:

The *proposition* being taken out of the Word, namely, some eminent Scripture sign or character of grace (as in 2 Cor. 5:17; Acts 5:9; 1 John 1:7; and 3:14: *He that loves the brethren is passed from death to life*). This is dictated by the *syntērēsis*, namely, “the conservative treasury” of conscience treasuring up such principles.

The *assumption* is drawn from our own known state and experience in the things of Christ, etc., as, *but I love the brethren*. This is made by the *syneidēsis*, namely, “conscience, as conscious of a man’s state,” and frame of heart.

The *conclusion*, containing the heart’s sentence hereupon (*Therefore I am translated from death to life*) is made by the *krisis*, “judgment,” or “judiciary sentence” of conscience upon the premises. Does your conscience thus assure you by the Word?

4. The testimony of the Spirit of God, which is purposely given us to this end that we may know the things that are given us of God (1 John 3:24; 4:13; 1 Cor. 2:12). Now the Spirit becomes the author and ground of our assurance (1) as a seal, sealing us after we believe (Eph. 1:13), by His holy and heavenly impression; (2) as an earnest of our eternal inheritance (Eph.

1:14; Rom. 8:23), firstfruits of the true Canaan, or handsel¹ of heaven; (3) as a joint witness with our spirits and consciences (Rom. 8:16), both clearing up our spiritual evidences to our minds (1 Cor. 2:9–12, 14), and opening our minds to discern them as a teaching unction, enabling us to know all things (1 John 2:27). Do you have such a testimony from the Spirit of God?

The Fruits or Effects

The fruits or effects of true assurance, distinguishing it from counterfeit assurance, presumption, are these and such like:

1. True assurance, wherever it be, mightily incites to self-purifying, to accurate sanctification in heart and life. “Now are we the sons of God...but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him.... And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2). See this self-purifying hereafter more fully opened. Presumption encourages in sin and impurity (Deut. 29:18–19).

2. True assurance stirs up fervent desires and longings in such hearts after the gospel of Jesus Christ. They that once have truly tasted the Lord’s graciousness (pleasantness, goodness, etc.), they “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,” that they “may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2–3). But presumption or carnal confidence breeds rather disaffection, than true affection to the word (Ps. 50:16–17). Such either desire it not at all, or not the pure sincere word, or not in reference to their growth.

3. True assurance makes the soul incomparably to prize communion with God and Jesus Christ. When the church had

1. *handsel*: a first installment or earnest money.

obtained Christ's sweet embracements, and perceived herself lodged in the bosom of her dearest Love, and knew that her Beloved was hers, and she His, how jealous is she lest any should disturb Him, or drive Him from her. So earnest is she to be filled with His fellowship, and upon His withdrawing in any measure from her, how restless is she until His return (Song 2:6–7, 16–17 compared with 3:1–6; 5:2–10; 6:4)? David was a man of much heavenly experience and assurance. When his evidences were dimmed by his fall, how pathetically does he cry, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Ps. 51:8, 12). Presumption knows not what communion with Christ means.

4. True assurance notably engages those that have it to serve and honor God in their places to the uttermost. God assured Joshua that He would never leave him nor forsake him (Josh. 1:5), and Joshua resolves (whatever others do) that he and his house will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15). A sense of Christ's love constrained Paul to all zeal in his ministry (2 Cor. 5:14–15). David said, "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee" (Ps. 118:28). Presumption provokes and contemns God. "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?," etc. (Job 21:15).

5. True assurance singularly supports and comforts the heart in deepest tribulations, as is remarkably evident in Job (Job 19:25, etc.) and Paul (2 Cor. 1:12). Carnal confidence in such cases is a miserable comforter.

6. True assurance fills with joy in hope of glory (Rom. 5:1–5) after tribulation has done its worst. They that have no more than carnal confidence have indeed no hope of another world (Eph. 2:12).

Of the Way How to Attain and Retain Assurance

Having thus seen the character of true assurance, next we consider how to compass² and conserve it. To this end faithfully follow these and such like directions, namely,

1. Be much in self-examination, frequent in self-probation, that you may find where your evidence clearly lies. “Examine yourselves...prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13:5). If a man’s title of land be questioned, how will he search and examine his evidences, and take the best counsel upon them? A merchant who would exactly know his own state, he often examines and casts up³ his books. So should Christians be much in casting up and examining their spiritual evidences, that would obtain assurance of their good estate to God.

2. “Quench not” (1 Thess. 5[:19]), “grieve not the holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30), by any known corruption, but still entertain Him with all holy acceptableness. For the Spirit of God is therefore given us, that we by Him might be assured, and know the things given us of God (1 Cor. 2:10–12, etc.), and He assures us most convincingly, clearly, satisfactorily (Rom. 8:16; Eph. 1:13–14, with 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

3. Cherish and improve all your graces (for every grace has an evidence in it), but peculiarly your special assuring grace, namely, knowledge (Col. 2:2), faith (Heb. 10:22), and hope (Heb. 6:11, 18–19). By knowledge we discern ourselves. By faith we realize and appropriate to ourselves for present the things as yet not seen, and by hope we patiently wait for full enjoyment. All tend to assurance.

2. *compass*: achieve, accomplish.

3. *cast up*: perform arithmetical operations on.

4. Constantly exercise yourselves herein to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man in all the parts of well-doing (Acts 23:1; 24:16). A good conscience (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:18–21; 2 Cor. 1:12) and a gracious upright conversation⁴ (Isa. 32:17; Prov. 14:26) are singular grounds and helps to assurance. “To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God” (Ps. 50:23). And Christ says, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

5. Remember former experiences of assurance: the days of old, the years of God’s right hand. These will support and persuade our hearts against doubtings. God’s people have taken this course in their wants of assurance (Ps. 61:2–3; 71:5–6, 20; 77:7–10; 143:5–6).

6. Labor to get out of those conditions which are prejudicial and obstructive to assurance. These are four, namely, (1) the infancy of grace. Infants in nature, live, move, grow, etc., long before they actually know it. So, babes in grace have not their spiritual senses exercised to discern their condition (Heb. 5:13–14). Labor to be men in growth, both in grace and knowledge (1 Cor. 14:20; 2 Peter 3:18). (2) The spiritual slumber of sleep of security. In natural sleep our senses are so tied up that we discern not our natural or civil state. In the spiritual slumber of security, our assurance is suspended, our evidences sleep with us, as in the church in her spiritual security (Song 3:1–2; 5:2–3, 6). (3) The spiritual swoon of desertions. In a swoon, when our spirits and sense fail us, we discern not our natural life. In spiritual desertions, when God withdraws the light of His countenance

4. *conversation*: manner of living.

and sweet presence, we discern not our spiritual life (Ps. 22:1; 77; 88). Labor to remove desertions. (4) The conflicts of temptations, and other soul distempers. When the body is in deep distempers, has been astonished with dangerous falls, etc., it is not comfortably sensible of its corporal condition. No more is the soul in deep temptations, afflictions, especially relapses, apprehensive⁵ of its good spiritual condition. As in David upon his fall (Ps. 51:8, 12, etc.).

7. Diligently and skillfully improve those notable assuring ordinances, the Word, Lord's Supper, and prayer, to help on all the former directions in reference to assurance. (1) The Word was therefore written that believers might know they have eternal life (1 John 1:4; 5:13; John 15:11). Let it therefore "dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). (2) The Lord's Supper particularly and individually seals up remission of sins (Matt. 26:27–28), communion with Christ (1 Cor. 10:16–17), and interest in the new testament (1 Cor. 11:24–25). Be at the Lord's table frequently, but still manage it worthily. And (3) prayer not only spreads open a man's heart to himself, but pierces the heavens, creeps into the bosom of God, and often furnishes the doubting spirit with assurance in the very exercise of it (John 16:24). Therefore, labor to be mighty men in prayer; pray always and faint not. How often do the servants of God begin their prayer doubting and perplexed, but conclude assured and persuaded! David begins, "O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure," etc., and he ends, "The LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication" (Ps. 6:1, 8–9; 31:21–22; 13:1–2, 5–6).

5. *apprehensive*: conscious, cognizant.

By these and such like means, true assurance may be obtained by the people of God when they want it, recovered when they have lost it, and retained when they have got possession of it.

Inducements to Assurance

Non-assurance Is a Manifold Misery

Non-assurance of God's favor in Christ and of our true state of grace in Him is a manifold misery and prejudice to the dear children of God. For,

1. This is a bad sign. (1) Sometimes of the defectiveness and weakness of grace in such, that they are but babes, not grown men in Christ, because their spiritual senses are not as yet exercised (Heb. 5:13–14), so far as to discern the things of God in themselves (1 Cor. 2:10–12), and that they want very much of the anointing of the Spirit to reveal to them the things of the Spirit (1 John 2:27; 1 Cor. 2:11). Now Christians should strive to get out of their infancy and imbecility of grace, not still remaining children and babes in faith and knowledge, but laboring to become men in Christ, growing up to perfection (1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:12–17; 2 Peter 3:18). (2) Sometimes of the strength and prevailing of corruption and temptation. When David had relapsed, he lost the joy of God's salvation (2 Samuel 11 with Ps. 51:8, 12). Great falls astonish and amaze both corporal and spiritual senses. And it much concerns all Christians to wrestle against entangling temptations and recover themselves out of relapses. (3) Sometimes of spiritual desertions, that the Lord has in some measure forsaken the soul, and withdrawn Himself, as in the case of David (Ps. 22:1), Heman (Psalm 88), Asaph (Psalm 77), and the church herself (Song 3:1–2, 5–8). Now spiritual desertions are such overwhelming afflictions to the soul that has once truly tasted

of the sweetness of Christ's presence, that the gracious heart is wholly restless until it be again embraced in the dearest arms of love and favor.

2. This is one great cause of Christians' dejectedness and uncomfortableness, that though they are in a state of grace, yet they cannot discern themselves to be in such a gracious state. To be in the true state of grace is the happiest ground of comfort. But until there be some apprehension and knowledge of that our state, oftentimes we have small sense of comfort. As Hagar (when her bottle of water was spent, and her child ready to die), she sat down full of perplexity, and yet there was a well in the place. The well did not comfort her, although close by her, until the Lord opened her eyes to see it (Gen. 21:16, 19). How pensive and sad were the two disciples going toward Emmaus about Christ's death, though Christ risen from the dead was in their company and talked with them, while their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him (Luke 24:14–15)? How did Mary Magdalene stand weeping by Christ's sepulcher, supposing that His dead body was thence stolen away, though Christ revived and risen stood close by her (John 20:14–15)? And why? Christ was present, but she did not know Him. So, if we be close by the well of grace, if Christ be present with us, indeed in us, if yet we know it not, we are still in our discomforts, our tears and sorrows are still flowing. David was told by the prophet, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13), but because David had not the sense and apprehension hereof, he wanted the joy of God's salvation, and groaned still under his broken bones a good while after (Ps. 51:8, 12).

God Has Charged His People to Contend After Assurance

God has often charged his people to contend after the security and assurance of their spiritual state. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. 6:11).

Assurance Is Possible

It is possible that such as are in a state of grace may (if the fault be not their own) come to know and be assured they are in such a state. For, (1) many scriptures intimate this (John 14:21; Rev. 2:17; 1 Cor. 2:9–13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 3:2, 14, 19; 4:13; 5:13, 19). (2) The nature of saving knowledge, faith, and hope tend to this (Col. 2:2; Heb. 10:22; 6:11). (3) Many gracious persons have sometimes attained to this, though at other times not without their doubting and infirmities, as Job (Job 19:25–27), David (Ps. 22:1; 51:8, 12), Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3), Thomas (John 20:28), Peter (John 21:15–17), Paul (2 Tim. 1:12), and the church herself (Song 2:16; 7:10).

Assurance Is Worth All Earnest Endeavors After It

Finally, assurance of our gracious state is richly worth all earnest endeavors after it. They that once attain to it (as hereafter is manifested) find a jewel of great price and no stranger shall intermeddle with their joy (Prov. 14:10).