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Assurance of Faith and Possession of Salvation
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What we need to possess, above every other good, is *peace of mind, contentment of heart*. In whatever condition man may be, from the monarch to the peasant, he seeks this happiness, and as long as he is deprived of it he is not at rest.

And yet man never attains it as long as he believes that *contentment of heart* is the result of any earthly good, of the satisfaction gained by worldly success, prosperity or renown, or by wealth and its luxuries.

Hence everywhere—in the palace as well as in the cottage—complaints are heard of the insufficiency, the emptiness, and the deceitfulness of what once had been considered as able to satisfy the soul; until by God's mercy the heart sees and feels that indeed, as the Scripture[†] says, "the world is vanity; that it is passing away with its lusts; that it is a vapor; that riches take to themselves wings; that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses; and that he will be forever miserable if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul."

But when a man is so happy as to see and feel this—when he looks to God, and no longer to the world for *true happiness*—immediately everything is changed in his view. This life and its concerns appear in their true light—subordinate, finite, and transient, while the unseen life—a future, infinite, eternal existence—is to him the *true good*, sure and perfect.

This peace of mind and contentment of heart everyone knows and possesses who receives them from God by the power of the Holy Spirit and the word of truth, and who finds them by faith in the

treasure of treasures: "in Him whose name is above every name—in Jesus Christ, the well-beloved Son of the Father, the Prince of peace, Eternal Life."

So that to be truly "a disciple of Jesus Christ," or a Christian," is to know and possess this *peace of mind*, which he justly values more than every other good.

But however sure may be this new life imparted to everyone whom the Holy Spirit unites to Jesus by faith, and however real the peace of mind resulting from it, this should always be perfect, never mingled with doubt, discouragement, or fear.

Yet it is not uncommon to meet Christians who, while professing to believe in perfect justification and peace imparted by faith in the Son of God, are *not sure of their own salvation*, and who even regard such assurance as presumption—as a dangerous illusion! "How," they say, can a man be sure of being saved, while he is here below, where he cannot be satisfied with the obedience he renders to God; nor that he lives the Christian life, which alone proves his belief unto salvation—his union with Jesus?"

But this very complaint, well-founded as it may be, implies faith in the Lord Jesus, for it is the sighing of a soul conscious of not being wholly submissive to the Savior.

I say, then, sincere faith in the Son of God being the essential mark of the Christian, the *assurance of faith*, or the *full certainty of being now one of God's elect* is the completion or perfection of this faith. However, this *assurance* is not essential to faith, and often many doubts and struggles occur before it is established in the heart of the child of God.

I repeat, this complaint of lack of assurance shows a desire for sanctification. Though those who make the complaint do not understand that sanctification does not begin in a soul until, after having believed in the Father's love toward it, this soul possesses by the Spirit of adoption that peace imparted by the grace of God; and that in proportion as this person is sure of being a child of God, does he exercise that filial obedience which the Gospel requires, the Word of God guiding him, and the Holy Spirit enabling him to fulfill its requirements.

The truth of this remark will appear in the following authentic narrative* :

On a visit to Scotland, (says a minister of the Gospel,) I called on an elderly woman in the neighborhood, confined for several years to her bed with dropsy. I was accompanied to her house by a lady whose servant she had been, and who told me that this poor woman was troubled by doubts of her salvation—that she did not *have peace of mind*.

I was affected on seeing the poor woman oppressed with pain, and her emaciated face told that her sufferings had continued for a long time.

After some consolatory words, I asked her if she dreaded the coming of the Lord, who seemed to be fast approaching and to be already summoning her to leave this world.

"I shouldn't dread His coming," she replied calmly, "since I hope that He will receive me to His rest, because He is a merciful God."

I asked her why she said that she *hoped to be* received, instead of saying simply that she *would be* received.

"Ah!" she replied modestly, "it isn't fitting for a poor sinner like me to have such confidence. Though I am sure that Jesus Christ is the Savior, yet I wouldn't dare to say that I'm now saved, and His salvation is mine.

"Why?" I said to her. "Would you doubt God's veracity?"

"I don't doubt it," she said eagerly. "God forbid! But how can such a miserable sinner, whose heart is so corrupt, dare thus declare that she is saved? Is there anyone on earth that believes himself so pure that he could present himself fearlessly before the Holy of holies? Ah, sir! Far from me be such pride!"

I perceived that she did not view the Savior's sacrifice in its fullness, but that she regarded redemption as *conditional* and not as *the full and free gift* of God.

Then I tried to direct her faith to the Savior's death, and to show her that since Jesus is a perfect Savior, He has accomplished in Himself the complete salvation of His Church; and that consequently the Church has nothing to do *in order to save herself*, though she has much to do, *because she is saved*.

But I will relate our conversation. And may God bless it to the good of any who are similarly situated!

"Do you think," I said, "that there is any presumption or pride in being sure of being saved?"

Woman. "Yes, because every man, however religious he may be, is guilty of some sin every day. How then can he think himself worthy of heaven?"

Minister. "But since you have submitted to the Savior, don't you believe that the Lord Jesus *bore our sins in His own body on the tree*, that He was *'wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities,'* that *'the chastisement for our peace was upon Him,'* and that *'by His stripes we are healed'*? (1 Pet 2:24; Isa 53:5)."

Woman. "Yes indeed! I believe all this, because it is written in the Bible."

Minister. "Well, this same Bible says: *'for the transgressions of My people He was stricken'* (Isa 53:8), and that Jesus thus, *'by the offering He made of Himself, has perfected forever those who are being sanctified, 'and has redeemed from the curse of the law His Church, for whom He was offered a propitiatory sacrifice* (Heb 9:28; 10:14; Gal 3:13; Rom 8:3)."

The sick woman appeared surprised. After reflecting for some moments in silence, she said to me: "Will you repeat the passage which speaks of the offering which the Son of God made of Himself? There is something in it I don't understand."

I repeated it, pointing her to the forcible expression *"Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many"* (Heb 9:28). I dwelt on the word *once* to make her feel that by this single offering of the Son of God, the Church has been wholly redeemed; the penalty His people would have suffered in hell being placed entirely on the Savior *"as [on] a lamb without blemish and without spot, ... foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet 1.19-20)."*

The woman was still more surprised, and said to me, hesitatingly:

"Isn't this the reason why the Apostle Paul says, *'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus'* (Rom 8:1)."

I was glad to hear her quote such a pertinent text. Continuing my explanation of this fundamental truth, that Jesus has truly by Himself saved His Church, and is therefore called *Savior*, I said to her: "The Church's salvation has been effected and finished once for all by our kind and almighty Savior. Recollect what is said of this Church, that *Jesus . . . became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption'* (1 Cor 1:30), that is to say, our whole

salvation. We must, then, believe what the Bible says about Him, namely, that He is 'Chief or Head of His Church, which is His body'; that in Him this Church has eternal redemption—entire and perfect salvation."

Woman. "Does this mean that the Son of God has achieved, alone and by Himself, the whole redemption of all sinners, and that thus no sinner has anything to do to be saved?"

Here had been the great error of this weak believer.* She didn't reject the Savior's righteousness or *merits*, but she didn't comprehend the power, or especially the extent of this righteousness. Then I quoted to her the passages where it says that Jesus offered Himself a ransom for *His people*; that He was a priest and victim; that He bore the wrath and curse of God *in place of His people*; and that thus He acquired, forever, by Himself, salvation and eternal life for "*as many whom the Father has given Him* (John 17:1-2)."

The woman listened attentively. This word of truth pleased her; and she said to me, with tears in her eyes: "The Savior has done more for us than I had believed! I thought that His death had only partly redeemed us; as if, for example, we were thereby freed from the bondage of sin and put in a state to *gain* our salvation."

"If that were so," I replied, "His death would have been either useless or unjust. If the Savior had died only as a martyr to attest the truth of His doctrine—"

"Stop!" said the sick woman, reaching out her hand, "I was once misled by that falsehood, but I have rejected it. Jesus died *for us*, and not for *Himself*,"

Minister. "Well said. Therefore whatever benefit results from His death must be ours. God did not strike Jesus unjustly, but justly."

Woman. "I don't understand you. Could Jesus have died unjustly?"

Minister. "He did so die as regards men, but not as regards God. He would have died unjustly, and especially He would have been *cursed* unjustly (Gal 3:13; Isaiah 53), if there had not been laid on Him *the just cause* of such a fearful penalty."

Woman. "But didn't He take our sins on Himself? Because it says that He '*was delivered up because of our offenses*' (Rom 4:25)."

Minister. "True, and I wish you to see it clearly. The Lord Jesus was loaded down with the griefs and sorrows which the Church would

have had to bear, because God *'made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us'* (2 Cor 5:21)."

At this last expression the sick woman said to me with surprise: "What! Was Jesus made sin?"

"So the Scripture says," I replied. And I showed her the text. It is also said that Jesus *'was manifested to take away our sins'* (1 John 3:5). Having taken them upon Himself, His soul bearing the burden of them, as if the sins were His own, He has abolished them justly, that is to say, by bearing the punishment due to these sins.

"If so," said the sick woman, "this good Savior has truly done all for His Church, and has redeemed it by Himself alone—by that great sacrifice which He offered on the Cross!"

Minister. "Do you think, if it were not so, that the Savior would have exclaimed on the Cross: *'It is finished'?*"

Woman. "Then has this good Savior really achieved, by Himself, the whole salvation of His Church?"

Minister. "So this text, addressed to the Church, declares: *'You are bought at a price'* (1 Cor 6:20); and this other, in which the Apostle reminds the Church that *'they were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, but with the blood of the Lamb'* (1 Pet 1:18-19). Do you understand these words?"

Woman. "Yes, I think I understand them. They mean that when the Savior bore the curse on the Cross, He bore it for His Church; and that He removed it wholly from His people in taking it completely upon Himself."

Minister. "Then tell me how many curses this Church of the Savior's ought to bear for her sins?"

The sick person was surprised at my question, and answered: "Should she bear more than one? And is not this curse hell—the pains of damnation which the Savior calls *everlasting fire*? There is but one hell, I think. There can't be two or more hells."

Minister. "No, and I ask you this question, so that you may tell me where you think is now the curse deserved by this Church, for whom the Son of God was offered up!"

The sick woman took long looking for an answer. At last she said: "If the Savior indeed took upon Himself the curse which His Church should have borne, it is plain that this Church has been

delivered from it. Otherwise the Savior has died in vain, and the Church still has to save herself from the curse.

Minister. "You can now understand why the Church continually exults in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, as you see in the Prophets, and as is related in the Revelation of St. John. The Church attributes to Jesus her entire exemption from the curse which she would have had to bear, and which He took upon His body and His soul. Therefore she rejoices."

Woman. "She has great reason to rejoice, because it is an eternal salvation."

I was now about to propose the most delicate question, one which would touch the sick woman's conscience, and I was anxious to see the effect of it. "You don't think, then," I said, "that the Church regards herself as achieving her own salvation, when she thus rejoices?"

"Not at all!" she replied, with an earnestness that gave me pleasure. "The Church receives everything from God. She well knows that *she hasn't* procured this great salvation, but that her Savior has done it Himself *entirely*. She rejoices as a person rejoices in a gift received, and not as in a reward which has been earned. Here all the glory is the Savior's, and to the Church belongs only the bliss of being thus redeemed by Him."

I was happy to see the truth penetrating the soul of this very ill woman, which was so soon to take possession of this eternal salvation. To what she had said I added: "So, you believe that if the Church should not rejoice—if she should doubt this blessing bestowed upon her, or should think she had no right to claim it, but must first deserve it by her obedience and holiness—"

Woman. [Interrupting me] "That would betray infidelity or pride. Since the Savior of the Church was offered up for her, and has redeemed her from condemnation, by taking her condemnation upon Himself, the Church, if she believes Him, must rejoice. Also, the more firmly she believes, the more she will rejoice and give praise to the Lord Jesus. Yes, as a prisoner rejoices before the benefactor who has paid his ransom."

Minister. "Then you compare the Church to prisoners whose ransom has been wholly paid?"

Woman. "So do the Prophets, I think, and particularly in a passage which our good Savior quotes; namely, that *God sent Him to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*"

Minister. "This is in Isaiah chapter 61:1; and in chapter 35:10, it is said that He (the Lord), having paid the ransom, the freed captives return, and *come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy.*"

Woman. "It couldn't be otherwise. Every prisoner thus redeemed from slavery, that is to say, every soul saved-every child of God-must leap for joy before his Savior!"

Minister. "Why so, I ask you?"

Woman. "Because he is redeemed, ransomed from this slavery, by the Savior's sacrifice. Why shouldn't he rejoice? No cause of joy can be compared to this."

Minister. "But might not the captive be accused of pride and presumption, if he boasted thus of being no longer in slavery?"

Woman. "No, because the captive does not boast of having redeemed himself. On the contrary, he attributes all to the Redeemer who has paid the ransom for him."

Minister. "Then what would you think of one of these captives who, while saying, 'I believe that our king has himself paid my ransom,' would not be sure that he is redeemed, and who should say, 'I am not yet thankful enough to dare to be sure that my ransom is paid'?"

At this question, which was a direct appeal to her conscience, the ill woman put her face in both hands, and remained silent for some time. I thought she had begun to see her error, but I didn't know how far she saw it. Also, I was preparing to question her further, when she said with emotion and surprise: "Have I mistaken till this day what the Lord Jesus has done for my soul? Is it possible that I have so poorly understood the sacrifice of this loving Savior, and that I have fancied I saw pride and presumption where there was only the deepest humility, and where the glory belongs wholly to the Lord? I feel indeed reproached!"

Minister. "What do you mean, if you please?"

Woman. "When I told you just now that I regarded it as evidence of pride for a person to believe himself now saved, and that for myself I couldn't say it, not being holy enough, I plainly forgot, or rather was

ignorant, that salvation has been procured by the Savior, and that those who have received it must rejoice. Because (how new this is to me!) if they do not rejoice, it is because either they do not *believe* it, or they think that they must procure it *themselves*."

Minister. * "The Word of God says repeatedly, that the captives thus freed, that is to say, the children of God—the disciples of Christ—ought to *rejoice* and glory in their Savior. The Lord Jesus calls this joy *perfect or full*, and the Apostle Peter calls it inexpressible and full of glory John 15:11; 16:24; 1 Pet 1:8). But who possesses this joy, the timid child or the child who believes and confides in his father's word?"

The woman was more and more affected, and said: "I'm afraid I have been in error till this day."

"How?" I asked her.

Woman. "I'll tell you. I believed indeed that salvation is by grace—is the gift of God, and not given in reward for our works of righteousness. I also believed that Jesus has redeemed us by shedding His blood. But I'm afraid I mingled my works or feelings with the grace of God, because I viewed this redemption only as a means to testify to my faith, and induce me to apply the Savior's merits to myself. It seemed to me that I couldn't appropriate to myself the gift of salvation which is in Jesus Christ, until I had more self-renunciation, more humility and holiness, more consecration to the Lord."

Minister. "Shouldn't we have this holiness?"

Woman. "Certainly we should. But I didn't place it right. I can't express what I mean, but I'm sure my mind was confused on this subject. And when I said that I believed that Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the curse, I didn't really believe it, because the thought was constantly in my mind that I ought to conduct myself so as to gain salvation, or to avoid final condemnation."

Minister. "That isn't your thought now?"

Woman. "No, indeed! It seems to me that I perceive a new hope not known to me before, and that God offers me a finished salvation, of which I had no idea before."

She then explained the notion she had up till now formed of the salvation obtained for us by the Savior, the purport of her words being this: That Jesus had merited our salvation, without actually

accomplishing it by Himself. This salvation had seemed to her to be only a privilege procured by the Savior for men, and of which a man must make himself worthy by his good conduct; so that the sinner who didn't fulfill the conditions of this *bargain* between God and man couldn't partake in the joy of the privilege.

This was a great error, for she thus denied that the Savior suffered the wrath of God in place of His beloved Church. Also, she took away from the death of the Son of God its expiatory character. Hence, pious as she otherwise was, she viewed with a sort of horror the expression of their faith and joy made by enlightened and humble Christians professing to be redeemed from the curse by the propitiatory Victim who so loved them as to offer Himself up for them; thus giving the glory of their salvation to the One who has really achieved it all. Such joy might appear arrogant and boastful to her while she fancied that she must only *hope* for this salvation, and that none but glorified saints rejoice in it.

I wished to know on what Bible texts she had relied to support these errors. She replied that all the Gospels and the Epistles inculcated the necessity of good works of sanctification, in order to *acquire* salvation. I showed her that these exhortations to holiness were addressed to the *children of God*, to those who, *knowing that they belonged to Jesus, who has redeemed them by His blood*, should from then on, from gratitude and love, live devoted to Him who loved them. I showed her that all these commands to be holy are founded on this motive: *the love of Christ, the mercy of God in Christ, the price of their redemption*, the gift bestowed on them of reconciliation with God their Father, etc.

I quoted some striking passages. For example, I said to her: "When a Christian prays, it is to *his Father* he says, '*Our Father in heaven*., He does not address a judge whom he *hopes* one day will be his father; nor to one who, *perhaps*, is his father; but to Him whom the Spirit of adoption teaches him to call by the endearing name of "Father." And to Him he says, like a child, '*Forgive me my trespasses*,' thus asking to be treated, not like a condemned criminal, nor even like a stranger, but like a reconciled and adopted *child*, a beloved *son* or *daughter* in Jesus, and that God would act towards him as a good father towards his wayward child."

This remark on the Lord's Prayer affected the ill woman, who said to me: "I hadn't thought that this petition of the Lord's Prayer was to be offered with such a feeling of peace and love. I had supposed that it related to punishment in the world to come, and that the Christian was asking for forgiveness so that he might not be finally lost."

Minister. "Then you hadn't observed that the prayer is addressed, as I told you, to a *Father* and not to *judge*?"

Woman. "I see it now, and I feel an indescribable joy!...But the Savior says: 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you.' It's possible, therefore, that they may not be forgiven, and so may not be redeemed."

Minister. "Here you are confounding *the forgiveness of sin in a child* of God with the *salvation of a sinner* still far from Jesus. You also forget that a father may punish his beloved child, and still not cease to be his father. He doesn't disown him as his son, although he does punish him."

Woman. "I understand. It's the sins of his household which are meant here."

Minister. "Yes, the sins of the household, not of strangers or servants. Hence the Apostles of the Lord Jesus, addressing the brethren of this *Elder Brother* on the subject of sanctification, implore them, as the *beloved of God*, to behave themselves reverently, as children towards their father, not with a servile fear, but with a respectful confidence towards a Benefactor who is exalted, indeed, above them in rank, and yet is their Friend (Eph 5:1)."

Woman. "Sweet thought! What a difference it makes in all our conduct! Because it's no longer from fear of punishment that a child of God acts, but from filial fear—from apprehension of displeasing his *Father*, his loving Savior."

Minister. "So the Apostle Peter expresses himself when speaking to believers: 'Since you are regenerated, and by faith are now already saved, so that you call God your Father, be *obedient* children. Forsake the world and its lusts. And as God, though a Father to us, is also a Judge in His house and punishes His own children, pass the time of your stay here in fear; for you have been bought with a price, namely, the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and

without spot' (1 Pet 1:13-23). This is the beautiful and comforting language of the Apostle."

Woman. "You remind me of a passage of Paul's which seems to me to have the same meaning and which has caused me much pain, for it is this which kept me in bondage. He tells Christians *that they must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12). Doesn't he mean that they must beware of being assured of their salvation?"

Minister. "Not at all; for notice, first of all, that Paul is addressing *saints in Christ* (Phil 1:1) of whom the Apostle is persuaded that they possess the favor and peace of God, who will complete His good work in them (vv 2-6). So then, he isn't talking to unbelievers still outside of salvation, but to those who possess it already, and who, because they are *Christ's and bought at a price*, must *glorify this beloved Savior in their bodies and in their spirits, which are God's* (1 Cor 6:20).

"But these believers, these redeemed, these persons received into favor, these children of God, are still carnal, having disputes, quarrels, and contentions among themselves. The Apostle says to them: 'I implore you, by the consolations which are in Christ, that you be like-minded. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, instead of pleasing Himself, humbled Himself. Imitate Him, you His beloved; not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out this salvation which is given you, not proudly and presumptuously, but with a humble distrust of yourselves. Because it is not you who work, but *God your Father, who according to His good pleasure works in you to will and to do. Therefore, let all things be done among you without complaining and disputing, that you may be the children of God without rebuke*' (Phil 2:2-15)."

Woman. "This meaning is clear, but how different from what I had thought! The Apostle speaks here only of the humble diligence with which a child of God should serve his Father. How easy it is to make the Scriptures say precisely the opposite of what they intend!"

Minister. "The Apostle's reasoning is easy to follow: Since God works in you, His children, to will and to do every good work, you ought not to be proud, but, on the contrary, to do the works which belong to your salvation, with fear and trembling as regards yourselves, since you are only feebleness."

Woman. "I understand. And yet, I ask you, why was Paul, though he was certainly a child of God, afraid of being a castaway* in the end? Because he does say so somewhere."

Minister. "Not so! Never could this Paul, to whom God *had shown mercy*, and who knew and believed that the *Son of God had loved him and given Himself for him* (1 Tim 1:16; Gal 2:20), never could this believer even think *that height or depth, things present or things to come, could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:38). But Paul, though assured *that the crown of righteousness was laid up for him by the righteous judge* (2 Tim 4:8), knew also that the child of God must be holy, and especially that every minister of the Word must exemplify in his life the virtues he prescribed to his brethren. And such is the meaning of the passage in question. It is found in 1 Corinthians 9, one of the most affecting portions of all Paul's Epistles. The Apostle earnestly expresses the condescension he had used towards the churches. He reminds the Corinthians that *to the weak he became as weak, to the Jews as a Jew, and all things to all men, that he might gain some*. Then comparing the labors he must endure in exercising this love, to the austerities and hardships to which wrestlers in the public games are subjected, who are not admitted to contend unless they are properly trained, he declares that he imitates these men, that he also disciplines *his body and brings it into subjection*; that he may also share the rewards of victory in this evangelical combat; and that thus his work be not confined to preaching, which would be fruitless, and would expose him to the censure of his brethren, if his preaching were not followed by practice. He says to the Church: "See and imitate what I do. I subject myself to self-denials. I strive against the flesh, that it may not be said of me that *I lay burdens upon others which I would not move with one of my fingers* (Matt 23:4), and that thus I be *disqualified* and rejected by you as a false disciple who says to others, '*Be sober and watchful,*' but who neglects to do so himself."

Woman. "I thank you; and I bless the Lord for showing me now what I never saw before, namely, that it is in the peace of adoption that the Christian aims to be holy. Oh, how I have misunderstood the Gospel up to now! How far I have been from seeing that the obedience of a true disciple of the Savior is produced in him by the Spirit of grace, by whom he is sealed!"

Minister. "How simple and natural it is will appear if you consider the difference between a filial and a servile disposition. I am a father. But suppose I have brought up one of my sons as a servant, thinking this a wise step to humble the haughty heart of the child. He doesn't know that he is my son, and he serves me as a domestic serves a good master. When he commits a fault he is afraid of being punished and dreads me as a judge. Suppose I tell him this very morning (for he couldn't know it on his own) that he is my son, and I show him the affection of a father. The result is a great change in his feelings, his present relation to me being so different from what it was before. Now he feels a reverential love, a confidence and intimacy. He feels peace, joy, tenderness, a sincere desire to submit to my commands. And if he forgets them (because he won't willfully *transgress* them any more), his repentance is *filial*, his tears are those of a *son*, and it is from his *father*, and not from his *master*, that he asks forgiveness. But tell me, first, could this child serve me as a son before he knew that he was one? And secondly, when he found this out, could he respect me and seek to please me only as his master?"

Woman. "No, indeed! A child's heart is not that of a hired hand. Oh, I repeat it, I have understood the Gospel very little! How little I have understood and known what the *adoption of the children of God* is."

Minister. "You have not understood what is said of *not grieving or quenching* the Spirit either (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19)."

Woman. "I think I have *not*, because I've regarded these new acts of disobedience only as provoking God's wrath and curse anew.

Minister. "God doesn't curse anyone *He has sealed with His Spirit. There is no more condemnation to those who are justified by faith* (Rom 5:1; 8:1). But just as in a family a child grieves a good father when he doubts his love or despises his counsel, and as by such hardness of heart he incurs the father's displeasure, so the child of God can't resist the influences of the Spirit of adoption by which he is sealed. Nor can he act contrary to these influences without feeling shame and self-reproach, which are the marks of his heavenly Father's displeasure, whose kindness he has abused."

I added to this interpretation that of some other similar passages. And by the grace of God the Christian woman to whom I thus spoke received the truth as a humble servant of Christ and assured me that I

had given her great consolation, removing as I had by the Word of God the false notions she had entertained of salvation.

I didn't leave her till she expressed to me her sincere faith in God's testimony, which she desired might be increased.

Her words were these: "Now I can depart in peace, because my soul has seen God's salvation. I confess in His holy presence that I sincerely believe in Jesus His Son, *who has Himself purged the sins of His Church*. Also, I believe that I am part of this Church, since God says that every sinner who sincerely believes in Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior, is one of His sheep, and has eternal life (John 3:36; 10:28; 1 John 5:1, 12). Jesus alone has Himself fully paid the ransom of every soul whom He has loved, so that I am sure He has given Himself for me. I know that He has given Himself for me because God says that those who believe on Him have Him for their Savior.

"So then I no longer think that there is pride in believing what God has said concerning His Son and the perfect salvation of those who sincerely believe in His name. I think, on the contrary, that there is pride in doubting it. Because thus a person shows that he is not looking to Him nor to His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins, but has regard for his own worthiness or unworthiness.

"If I live, then, it will be by the grace of my Savior, and by His efficacious Spirit in me, to consecrate myself to Him who loved me first. Or if I die, it will be to go to Him who has redeemed me forever for Himself, and by whose Spirit I am sealed. Whether I live or die, I belong to Jesus, who has saved me; and of this I am sure, because God has said it.

Thus did God bless this conversation, which, though abridged, is here faithfully reported.

It took place in the month of August, 1826. Two years later I saw this servant of the Lord again, and I found "*the grain of mustard seed had become a great tree* (Matt 13:32)."

Two long years of suffering and conflict had elapsed, during which her faith had been proved; and I was anxious to observe in her the faithfulness of the Lord, who "*does not forsake the works of His hands* (Ps 90:17)."

She was in the same room and afflicted with the same disease as when I saw her before. But how different her spiritual condition! The

light, whose dawn on her path I had hailed, "*was shining ever brighter unto the perfect day* (Prov 4:18)."

"Come," she said to me, "give thanks with me to our heavenly Father, '*who has done great things for His servant.*' Oh! how good, how merciful, how faithful, ever since that happy day when He sent you to me with His message of peace! Let my soul praise Him, and you rejoice with me!

"My soul," she said with emotion, "has been guarded as by a wall and bulwark, behind which I have been secure from the attacks of the enemy, though '*the roaring lion has prowled about it.*' Yes, I say it adoringly, *I have abided under the shadow of the Almighty*; and in the midst of my affliction [for her pains of body were great] *when the drought has come, I have found 'the Lord a stronghold in the day of trouble, a shade in the daytime from the heat, a shelter from storm and rain'* (Isa 26:1; Ps 91:1; Nah 1:7; Isa 4:6)."

Minister. "Your foot has not slipped in this new path? You have never doubted that the Lord loved you nor that you were His child?"

Woman. "Ah! sir, *the Lord has held me by my right hand; He has guided me with His counsel, and I have been continually with Him* (Ps 73:23-24). I have had no doubts, and my consolation has been strong, because the promise and the oath of God cannot fail (Heb 6:17-20). Every day the Lord seems to say to me, as formerly to Gideon: '*I am with you. Go in the strength which you have.*'" And she added with a smile: "I have also built under the oak of promise an altar *to the God of peace* (Judg 6:24)."

Thus did this simple Christian, relying on the "testimony of God" magnify the Lord's faithfulness, and show that indeed the Comforter is sent to the one who *believes the promise of God in Jesus*, and that He impresses more and more deeply on the heart an assurance of the peace of God and of salvation."

"Sometimes," she added, " I have said in my sufferings, *the Lord has 'wounded me with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one'* (Jer 30:14), but He has also spoken to me these comforting words: '*Whom I love I chasten, and I scourge every son whom I receive*' (Heb 12:6). Oh, how His goodness has helped me, and what assurance He has imparted to my soul!"

"And I think," I said, "that in thus assuring you of your election and of the impossibility of your being lost He has made you desire to love this faithful Savior and to serve Him more and more earnestly."

"Ah!" she replied devoutly, "the only wish of my heart is to be daily less conformed to this world and more like Him who loved me and gave Himself for me! My soul, which He has justified—as I know full well—desires no other life than that of her Savior. *'Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me'* (Ps 119:175)."

So spoke she who before she was *assured* of her salvation was bowed down and went groaning under the heavy yoke of the law. But *after believing God* and receiving the seal of the promise, she had learned that there was now no condemnation for her, and that it was impossible to *snatch her out of her Shepherd's hand* (John 10:29), *because He who had graciously called her to the fellowship of Jesus was faithful and would confirm her to the end, that she might be blameless in the day of Christ* (1 Cor 1:8, 9). She had seen at once both her assured part in the incorruptible inheritance and also that the Spirit of adoption *unites the heart of the redeemed sinner to fear the name of the Lord, and to the commandments of the Son of God* (Ps 86:11; John 14:21).

"No," she told me, "I can't agree with those who are afraid that a person may be *too* assured of his salvation—'lest,' they say, 'he should become remiss in his obedience!' It must be that those Christians have *never tasted how good the Lord is*, nor known the joy of the Spirit of adoption. Because if they had felt, even for an hour, what it is to possess this peace of God, and to be able to thank Him for His salvation, they would have no fear lest this unspeakable joy and this deep gratitude should be turned into revolt and contempt of the commands of Jesus. No, such disciples have never believed with all their heart in the grace of God; and I may tell them so, because such was my own sad experience.

"But," I said, wishing to ascertain her views more fully, "they will tell you that they believe, perhaps, but that they are not sure; and that their doubts about the nature of their faith lead them to fear that they may backslide."

"Well!" replied this happy Christian woman, "let these disciples know that they are not true to the Lord—that they are neither humble

nor upright, perhaps; but they retain some secret idol in their hearts, some passion, some sin which leads them captive. For the 'testimony of God' is so simple that we can easily know whether we believe it or not. Whoever renounces his own righteousness knows that he renounces it; and if he believes that salvation is the free gift of God in His Son, he knows, too, that he believes it, and that he is at peace. And then he will as plainly know *that he loves Him by whom he has been loved first*, and that *to love Him is to keep His commandments*. So at least He has told me, and so I believe in my heart, and hence I am *at once happy* and desirous to be more obedient."

Persons honestly intent on their eternal interests may see here that their doubts concerning their possession of salvation spring from unbelief of heart. For instead of believing what God says of the propitiation made by Jesus for the sins of the Church, they regard the death of the Savior as only a first step, and as made in vain, if the sinner does not render himself worthy of salvation by his own holiness. Let me add another remark, to which I invite your attention, dear reader. Some pious people, not discriminating *between justification and sanctification*, place the last first, and so expect to bear abundant fruit, before having planted the tree! Let me explain:

The more I am assured that God is appeased towards me—that He has received me into His favor, and adopted me as His child in Christ—the more also the love of God, poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit, will urge me to love this God and Savior and to consecrate myself to Him, whom *I will love because He loved me first*. If, then, I am sure that I am now justified before God, I am at peace (Rom 5:1), and in this peace I work out, as a child sealed by the Spirit of adoption and under the guidance of this powerful Spirit, the work of sanctification laid upon me by my heavenly Father.

If, on the contrary, I doubt whether I am now received into favor, and if I think that a proper humility requires me to remain in this doubt, not only do *I make God a liar*, which is a great sin (1 John 5:10), but, further, I immediately take away all motives to filial obedience and leave only the motives to servile obedience—that is to say, I prevent all sanctification, because sanctification works only *by love*, and not *by fear* (1 John 4:18).

Also, dear reader, notice what is said in the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9). This tree had produced no fruit for three

years, and the owner of the vineyard ordered it to be cut down. But the dresser of the vineyard, who wished to preserve the tree, asked for delay. And then wisely judging that the tree failed to have fruit because it lacked sap, he didn't busy himself with the branches, but with the root. "I will dig around it and fertilize it, and if it bears fruit, well." And we can believe that the branches, receiving sap from a well-cultivated trunk, bore that fruit which their former dryness could not produce.

So is it with the soul of man. First let faith abound in it by the word and the unction of the Holy Spirit, and this soul will produce fruits of holiness. But let the Christian begin by *increase of faith*, and not by *more fruit*, by *more holiness*, since these are only *the product* and *consequence* of living faith.

Strange that it should be so difficult to make these simple elements of faith understood by those who profess to be Christians, and that thus, on the one hand, truly pious persons try in vain to produce fruits of holiness, because they lack simple and sincere faith in the promises of God in Jesus; and that on the other hand, some persons, equally serious, accuse of presumption and pride the simple and humble children of God who *rejoice in Him their Savior*.

Suppose two unhappy criminals are being led out to punishment. Their king proclaims their pardon. One of the criminals *believes* his declaration, and makes known his joy. The other, on the contrary, doubting the truth of the message, remains trembling and afraid, reproaching his companion for being too glad. And yet the one who believes and is glad is the truly humble criminal. The happier he is, the more he honors the king who pardoned him and the messenger who brought him the pardon. At the same time the one who doubts insults them both and suppresses the gratitude which he would have felt if he had simply and freely believed his sovereign's word.

Footnotes:

* Cesar Henri Abraham Malan, D.D. (1787-1864) was an eminent Swiss Reformed pastor of the nineteenth century. On account of his conservative stands on original sin, the effects of grace in the regenerate, the dual nature of the Person of Christ, and predestination, he was deposed from his state church ministry in 1828. Malan's views of faith and assurance often came under the censure of his Reformed colleagues, both in America and abroad. After his deposition from the state church, he began an independent chapel in his Genevan residence which later grew into a church of significant proportion, L'Église du Temoignage. Malan traveled

extensively throughout Europe and Great Britain as an itinerant preacher. He also penned a number of theological treatises, tracts, and popular hymns. The English translation of this article was published as a pamphlet in New York City in 1856 by the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, now the Reformed Church in America. Dr. Malan wrote this article in French. The translation was rather stilted in style and archaic in vocabulary. For the sake of greater usefulness to today's readers I have taken the liberty of updating, but not condensing, the text. The content and meaning are not changed in any way. Ed.

† The author frequently paraphrased his Scripture quotations in this article, apparently from a French version. The English translation generally made these conform more or less to the King James Version. In modernizing these quotations I have retained Malan's paraphrases, but have updated the language, often making it conform to the wording of the New King James Version. Ed.

* If the dialogue recorded here appears contrived and not representative of current Reformed thought, it needs to be remembered that the account was written against the backdrop of the covenantal scheme of Scottish Federalist theology. For further discussion, see M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*, Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985. Ed.

* She may have been a confused believer (one who came to faith and then became confused), or an unbeliever who never had understood the finished work of Christ. The latter seems more likely in light of the ensuing story (see, for example, pp.43-44). Ed

* The translated pamphlet labels this paragraph "S." for "Sick Woman," but this is evidently a typographical error. The text and context indicate the Minister. Ed.

* The KJ translation "castaway" in I Cor 9:27 is most unfortunate. Apparently the old French version was similar. The Greek word *adokimos* means "disqualified," as for an athletic prize, as the context suggests. Rewards, not salvation, are in view. Ed.