

WHAT GIVES ASSURANCE

by

Andrew A. Bonar
(1810 – 1892)

Author of “Memoir of Robert M. M’Cheyne”

EDITED BY
Jon Cardwell
Scammon Bay Covenant Church
PUBLISHED August 2007

PREFACE

This little book (apart from the Notes) was originally a Sermon preached at Ferryden, during the awakening in the end of 1859. It was thought to be useful in disentangling the perplexities of some anxious souls; and this gave rise to the request for its publication. It is very interesting to notice how, in such times of awakening, the spiritual instinct imparted to the new-born soul by the Holy Ghost seek out the truth. One day, in a fisherman's house, we found two females sitting together, with the Assembly's *Shorter Catechism* in their hands. They were talking over the questions on "Justification" and "Adoption," and were comparing these with some of the "benefits which accompany or flow from them," namely, "*assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*" They were themselves happy in the calm assurance of the love of God; but a neighbour had somewhat perplexed them by insisting that they had no right to assurance until they could point to *sanctification* shewing itself in their after lives. On the other hand, those two souls could not see why they should wait till then; for if they had been "justified," and had a "right to all the privileges of the sons of God," they might at once have "assurance of God's love." This incident falls in with the strain of the following discourse.

GLASGOW, 10th February, 1860

WHAT GIVES ASSURANCE

By Andrew Bonar

MANY are the persons who have envied Isaiah, to whom personally the messenger from the throne said, “Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged” (Isaiah vi. 7). They are ready to say, “Oh, if we heard the same.” Many are the persons who have envied Daniel, to whom the Lord said, “Thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days” (Daniel xii. 13). Daniel was thus assured of the future; with him it was to be rest at death, and a lot, or portion (Joshua xv. 1, xvi. 1), in the inheritance of the saints on the morning of the resurrection of the just. And so also have such persons wished that their case were that of the man to whom, directly and personally, Jesus said, “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee,” (Mark ii. 5); and that of the woman in Simon’s house, whose ear heard the blessed declaration, “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke vii. 48); or even that of the thief, “To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise,” (Luke xxiii. 43). These sinners were all of them personally certified of pardon and acceptance, and we are ready to think that it would be the height of happiness for ourselves to have, like them, a declaration of our personal forgiveness sounding in our ear.

Now, ere we have finished our subject, we may be able (if the Lord, the Spirit, lead us into the truth set forth in the Word) to see that, after all, *we* may be as sure and certain of our pardon and acceptance as any or all of these as sure as Isaiah, Daniel, the palsied man, the woman-sinner, the dying thief, and, let us add, as sure of it as Paul was of Clement and other fellow-labourers having their names in the Book of Life (Philippians iv. 3). Nay, we may even discover that our certainty is in all respects higher than theirs was, being founded on something far better than one single announcement, which, in the lapse, of time, might lose very much of its distinctness, and of its power.

Oh, how blessed to be able to point heavenward and say, “It in mine!” —to point to the throne and say, “He is mine who sitteth there!” —to look back and find your name in the Book of Everlasting Love!” —to look forward to the opening of the Book of Life, knowing that your name is in it! —to be able to anticipate resurrection, and to sing

“I know that safe with Him remains
Protected by His power,
What I’ve committed to His trust
Till the decisive hour.

“Then will He own His servant’s name
Before His Father’s face,
And in the New Jerusalem
Appoint my soul a place.”

We begin by noticing that *Assurance is far oftener spoken of than sought for*. Many may be said, in a vague sense, to wish for it, who after all do not seek after it. Not a few of our communicants, men of knowledge and good attainment, men of high Christian profession, are rather disposed to evade the question, Are you sure of your salvation? They are content to go on in uncertainty. Some of these even spurn from them the idea of any one having *full Assurance*, branding the idea as *Presumption*. They quite mistake of *Presumption*, which is claiming what we have not been invited to, and are not warranted to take. They do not see that there can be no presumption in our taking whatever our God has invited us to accept; and that, on the other hand, if we decline taking what our God presents to us, we are assuming to ourselves a right to judge of the fitness and wisdom of His proceedings.

Such persons are not in right earnest about salvation and the favour of God. They take things easy. They admit that they may die to-day or to-morrow, and that they do not certainly know what is to become of them; and yet they are making no effort to ascertain. They admit that the favour of God is the soul’s real portion, and that they, as yet, cannot speak of that being their enjoyment; and yet they coolly go on day after day without anxious inquiry regarding it.

There are others who, from a wrong religious training, go on in a sort of doubt and fear, cherishing the idea that these doubts and fears are salutary checks to pride, and that they are, on the whole, as safe with the *hope* that all is right, as they would be with the *certainty*. We generally find that these persons are misled by confounding things that differ. They perhaps quote to you, “Happy is the man that feareth always,” (Proverbs xxviii. 14), not perceiving that the *fear* there is the “*fear of the Lord*,” in which there is “*strong confidence*.” (Proverbs xiv. 26). Or, perhaps, they quote the unhappy experience of some godly men who died without speaking anything about assurance not knowing that those godly men longed for certainty, and reckoned it so desirable that their very estimate of its preciousness made them jealous of admitting that they themselves might be partakers thereof.

But the truth is, in many cases, these persons do not care for the

close fellowship of God into which Assurance leads the soul. They do not wish to bask in the beams of divine love. They wish merely to be safe at last. But if you would see how entirely different is the effect of a merely hoped for impunity, from that of certainty in regard to divine favour, read these two passages, Deuteronomy xxix. 19, and 1 John iii. 3. In the former case the sinner says, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst;" in the latter he says, "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."¹

Once more, then, on this point let us ask attention to the fact that in the *New Testament* we have no encouragement given to doubts and uncertainties. The believers there are spoken of continually as having the joy of knowing the Saviour as theirs. No doubt there were in those days some believers who were not fully assured; but these were not meant to be any rule to us, now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen so gloriously; and, accordingly, no notice is taken of their case. On the other hand, we are ever meeting with such words as these, spoken in the name of all disciples, "*We know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God" (2 Corinthians v. i). "*We know* that we have passed from death unto life. *We know* that we are of God" (1 John iii. 14, and v. 19). "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy i. 12).²

¹ Let it be observed that in the New Testament the grace of hope does not imply doubt, but signifies the *expectation of the things yet future*. Hence, the hope in 1 John iii. 8, was thus stated in verse 2, "*We know* that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." Old writers used to quote a Latin saying, "Hope, as used of earthly things, is a word for a good that is uncertain; hope as used of things, is a word for good that is most sure."

² The late Dr. Sievwright, of Markinch, in a sermon upon Eph. i. 13, has remarked: "In those primitive times, an apostle could take for granted of a whole church that they all trusted. For, in writing to the Ephesians, does Paul make a *single allusion to their unbelief*? Or, does he employ a single exhortation in the way of persuasion to believe? Or, from beginning to end of his Epistle does he hint at such a thing as prevailing distrust? No; in those days Christian men no more thought of refusing to trust in the Saviour, than of denying the Word of Truth. But now, is it not a frequent case that a man shall go by a Christian name, and practice Christian duties, and receive Christian privileges, for years together, while he is so far from trusting in Christ with the confidence of faith, that he shall not only confess himself destitute of truth, but often express a fear lest full trust and confidence were an unwarranted and dangerous presumption? *How strange this would have sounded in the apostles time*, when to trust in Christ, and to trust fully and for all salvation, *was the very first exercise* to which they called those who were awakened to seek in earnest for eternal life, and received the record of God concerning the way. The remarkable trust of the first Christians gave a perfection to their character we now seldom perceive."

But it is time to speak of *what gives Assurance*. Of course, we understand that this blessing, like the other blessings of salvation, every one, is the free gift of a sovereign God. It is the “God of hope” who gives it “through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans xv. 13). But our present point of enquiry is, In what way does it please Him to give it to souls? All agree that Christ’s person and work furnish the materials and groundwork of a sinner’s acceptance, peace, assurance. “Peace” (says Isaiah xxxii. 17) “is the fabric reared by righteousness; yea, the office of righteousness is to give quietness and assurance for ever.” But there is a difference of opinion and practice as to the way of using these ample materials. We begin with speaking of what we may call,

First, THE INDIRECT, or LONG AWAY.

Those who try this way set themselves to ascertain “*What am I?*” They seek to make sure that they have the marks and evidences of being new creatures in Christ, or at least the marks and evidences of having, beyond doubt, believed in Him. Divines have been wont to call this mode of Assurance “*the Assurance of sense,*” because in it the person points to sensible proofs of his new nature, and thinks he may some time or other be able to shew such an experience of divine things, as puts it beyond doubt that he has believed and has found Christ. It is quite wrong, however, to apply the scriptural term, “*Assurance of hope,*” to this experimental sort of certainty; for Scripture means the *assured belief and expectation of things yet future*, by that expression. We may call it, for clearness sake, *Assurance got by seeing effects produced*. Divines often describe it as *Assurance derived from the reflex acts of the soul*.

(a) One form which this pursuit of Assurance in the *long, or indirect* way, takes is this, —it leads the person to put much stress on his *own act of believing*. In this case the person being much concerned about his state towards God, and fearful of mistaking the matter, says to himself, “I know that all assurance of salvation depends on my believing in Christ, and I think I believe; but what if I be deceiving myself as to my supposed believing?” Haunted by this thought, he sets himself to remedy the danger by trying to convince himself that he has believed. And in order to make himself sure that he has faith, he resolves not to be satisfied till he sees the full fruits of faith. He puts such stress on his own act of believing, that he will not be content until he sees, by such effects as hypocrites could not imitate, that his was genuine faith.

Now, we say to such— *You are not taking the best way to have real fruit*; for you are seeking fruit and effects from a selfish motive; you are not seeking holiness as an end, and for its own sake, but in order to use it as an evidence in favour of your sincerity. This kind of fruit is not

likely to be the best, nor the most satisfactory. We say again— *You are putting Assurance far off*. It can only be at some distant future day that you arrive at any certainty by your method; for such fruits as you seek cannot be visible very soon. But we say again— *You are by this method taking off your eye from Christ, to a great degree*. For you try to believe, and then you look into yourself to see if you have believed. You look up to the Brazen Serpent, and then you take off your eye to examine your wound, and to see if the bites are really healing, that you may be sure you have looked aright! Would a bitten Israelite have put such stress on his own poor act of looking? You are looking at Christ, and then looking away from Him to yourself. You are like a gardener who, after planting a tree or flower in rich soil, might be foolish enough to uncover the soil in order to see if the root had struck, and was really imbibing the moisture. Surely, better far to let the root alone, having once ascertained the richness of the soil, and allow the plant to spread out its leaves to the warmth of the sun. Keep looking on Christ, and the effects can not fail to follow.

(b) Another form that this same indirect method takes is somewhat similar. Those who adopt it do not expect Assurance at the outset, and say that it is presumption and pride in young believers to speak of being sure of their interest in Christ; for where is there time for them to have experience, or exhibit fruits? Such persons think that ripe, mature fruits of holiness alone entitle any one to say, “I know that I am in Christ.” If we might so speak, they do not allow the newly engrafted branch (though really engrafted by the Heavenly Husbandman) to say, “I am in the vine,” —no, they say, wait till you have borne fruit, and then when the clusters appear on your boughs, you may be entitled to say, “I am in the vine.” But not till then.

It is a favourite argument with such that in 1 John iii. 14, the Apostle John says, “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*” But this does not prove that this is the *only way* of knowing that we are passed from death unto life. It only shews that an aged and experienced saint, like John, thought it good some times to bring forward his own and his fellow believers’ brotherly love as a marked and unmistakeable feature of their Christian character. It is very much as if he had said, “We believers know each other, as having passed from death unto life, by the love that fills our hearts toward each other.” He is not speaking to the question, “Is this the first, or is it the only trustworthy way, by which you know your interest in Christ?” Surely, so far from that, being the case, John would at once

have said that he himself found rest in knowing *the love of Him who begat*, before he discerned in himself any love to those begotten of Him.

The truth is, this long and indirect way is properly the way by *which others ascertain your standing in Christ*. But there is another way for the person's self, of which we are yet, to speak. Also; this way is good even *for the person's self as confirmatory of the short and direct way*, of which we are yet to speak. But still we say, If it were the only way, then farewell to gospel-joy, except in the very rarest cases. For, the more a soul grows in grace, the more that the believing man rests in Christ and drinks into His Spirit, just the more dissatisfied does he become with all his fruits; his holiness does not please him; he finds defects in it; he finds it mixed and impure; and the longer he lives the life of faith, he gets more and more keen-sighted in detecting blemishes in his graces.³ So that it is difficult indeed to say when a growing believer, ever jealous of himself, will accumulate such a heap of this gold, such an amount of really holy living, as will put beyond doubt, *to his own mind*, that he is a man between whom and Christ there exists the bond of union. If good works or holiness must be waited for ere faith can be known to be genuine, when are we to expect to attain to an amount or quality sufficiently satisfying?

If this were the only way of Assurance, we could not wonder that many should speak of it as necessarily a very rare attainment, and even as all but impossible. This, however, is not the only way; and we now turn from this way to the other, quoting as we turn to it, the statement of the old Puritan writer, Brooks: —“Many of God's dear people are so taken up with their own hearts, and duties, and graces, that Christ is little regarded by them, or minded; and what is this but to be more taken up with the streams than with the fountain? with the bracelets, and ear-rings, and gold-chains, than -with the husband? with the nobles than with the king?⁴ And then he adds, “Dear Christian, was it Christ, or was it your graces, gracious evidences, gracious dispositions, gracious actings, that trod the wine-press of the Father's wrath? And once more: —“These persons forget their grand work, which is *immediate* closing with Christ, *immediate* embracing of Christ, *immediate* relying, resting, staying upon Christ.”

³ John Newton, in his sermon “Of the Assurance of Faith,” remarks— “If inherent sanctification, or a considerable increase of it, be considered as the proper ground of Assurance, those who are most humble, sincere, and desirous of being conformed to the will of God, will be the most perplexed and discouraged in their search after it. For they, of all others will be the least satisfied with themselves, and have the quickest sense of innumerable defilements.

⁴ *Brooks' Cabinet*, p.302

Let us turn, then, to the *Second*, THE DIRECT or SHORT WAY.

They who take this way, set themselves to ascertain “*Who and what Christ is.*” The Holy Spirit, we believe, delights very specially to use this way, because it turns the eye of the sinner so completely away from self to the Saviour.

What we call the *direct and short way*, is that in which we are enabled by the Spirit at once to look up to Christ, the Brazen Serpent, and to be satisfied in looking on Him. This simple, direct Assurance is got by what we discern in Christ himself; not by what we discover about ourselves. It is got by what we believe about Christ; not by what we know about our own act of faith. We may (like “Poor Joseph”)⁵ know nothing about our own soul’s actings in believing, and yet we may so know Him on whom we believe as to find ourselves altogether at rest. In a word, this direct and immediate Assurance is found by my discovering that Christ, God-man, is the very Saviour for my needs and wants, my sins and corruptions; while all the time I may never be once troubled about the question, Am I sure that I believe, and that my act of faith possesses the right quality?

I find it when the Spirit is taking the things of Christ, and shewing them to my soul; and I do not need to wait till He next shews me what is in me. Let us explain the matter more fully.

I have Assurance that God accepts me *the moment I see the fullness and freeness of Christ’s work*. My soul is enabled to see all the claims of justice satisfied at the cross; for there is completed obedience, there is the full penalty paid. At the cross there is room for any sinner, and the gospel invites me as a sinner among the rest to hear what the cross says. Does it not say to me, “God-man has provided an infinitely perfect righteousness, and made it honourable for the holy God to embrace the Prodigal Son. Yonder, in the work of God-man, is a *rock* for the sinner’s feet to stand upon —and this not a mere narrow point, hardly sufficient, but rather a wide continent, stretching out on every side.” Surely there is room for me there? I feel it is enough! Self is forgotten in presence of this marvellous scene. What could satisfy the

⁵ Some friends who came to see him wondered on hearing him always dwell on this, and this only, “*Joseph is the chief of sinners, but Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*” They said, “But what say you of your own heart, Joseph? Is there no token for good about it?” Have you closed with Christ by acting faith upon Him?” His reply was, “Joseph can act nothing. Joseph has nothing to say about himself but that he is chief of sinners; yet, since it is a faithful saying that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, why may not Joseph be saved?”

conscience better! What could speak peace like this! This is faith rising into Assurance while simply continuing to behold its glorious object.

And now, if any one try to disturb me by the suggestion, “How do you know that you are really believing what you recognise as so suited to your need?” —my reply is simply this, “How do I know that I see the sun when I am in the act of gazing upon him in the splendour of his setting?” That glowing sky, and that globe of mild but ineffable glory cannot be mistaken, if anything is sure to the human vision.

The believer’s own consciousness⁶ (quickened of course by the Spirit) is sufficient, in presence of the cross, to assure him that he a sinner, is most certainly welcome to the bosom of the Holy One, who, pointing to the “It is finished,” cries, “Return to me, for I have redeemed thee.” Just look at it again. Your soul hears that the Father is well pleased with the full atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. He condemns and rejects all your works, all your efforts, and your guilty person; but when His Son, our Substitute, appears, then His obedience and His suffering unto death are found most glorifying to the Holy One and His holy law. While you are pondering the Father’s delighted rest in Christ, who thus wrought all for us, your soul is “like the chariots of Amminadib;” in a moment, you feel your conscience has got rest, as if a voice from that atoning work had said, “Peace, be still.” Your sins, placed in God’s balance, were outweighed by Christ’s infinite merit; and if so, your sins in your own balance are no less surely outweighed by the same weight of immense merit. What satisfies God, satisfies you.

Thus faith, as it gazes on its object, passes on to full Assurance. And if now, again, any one seek to disturb your calm rest by asking, “Are you quite sure that you do really believe what is giving you such rest?” —what other reply could you give but this, “As well ask me, when I am enjoying and revelling in the glories of the setting sun, Are you sure your eye really sees that sun which you so admire?”

I sit down and meditate on such a passage as John iii. 16, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.” The Spirit enables me to see in these words, God testifying that no more is needed for my acceptance with God than what is found in Christ: and all that Christ has done becomes mine upon my believing in Him. Relying on God’s testimony, I ask no questions, I wait for nothing in myself

⁶ S Rutherford, in a sermon on Luke viii 2-2, says, “When I believe in Christ, that instinct of the grace of God stirred up by the Spirit of God, maketh me know that I know God, and that I believe, and so that I am in Christ, to my own certain apprehension.” He then adds, that “this does not hinder other inferior evidences.”

(such as love, sorrow, or other feeling), but I think on what is in Christ, as the ground of my peace. And when I so muse, the fire burns —my soul is at rest.⁷ And if, now, any one disturbs, or threatens to disturb, my calm enjoyment of my Father’s love by hinting, “You should first, ere ever you venture to rest, be sure that you are really believing the things that are making you so glad;” —my reply to such an unseasonable interruption might be somewhat in the style of a writer who uses the following illustration. Suppose a nobleman condemned for high treason, and the day has come when he must die. But that morning, a document is put into his hand; it is a pardon from the king, on no other terms than that he accept it. He reads; as he reads, his countenance is flushed, his eye glistens, and in a moment he is full of joy. What think you of any one arresting the current of his joy by the suggestion, “Are you quite sure you are accepting the pardon? Is your act of acceptance complete and thorough?” No; the man is engrossed with the certainties presented to his thoughts, viz., what the king freely gives to him; and these certainties convey their own impression to his soul, to wit, the certainty of his pardon.

Such is the *direct way of Assurance*. We called it a short and an immediate way. Is it not so? We said, too, at the beginning, that it might turn out that, after all, we had a way of knowing our pardon and acceptance, superior in many respects to that by which on one occasion it was conveyed to Isaiah, and on another to Daniel, and on another to the palsied man, and to the woman-sinner, and to the thief. We still adhere to our statement. For our way of knowing our acceptance, you see, is one that rests on *unalterable facts*, the significance of which cannot pass away or decay. If it decay from our souls for a time, we can revive it again by a renewed study of the facts that produced it at the first. Whereas the one utterance that assured Isaiah, Daniel, and those others mentioned, might in process of time be found to fade somewhat in its vividness; and then the individual might say to himself, “Ah, what if I have over-estimated the meaning of the utterance! or what if I have forgot it in part? or what if my subsequent unworthiness have cancelled the promise?” In a dull, self-reproaching mood of mind, such a partial obliteration from the mind or memory of a single, solitary announcement is quite a possible occurrence; not to refer to other abatements, such as that the person in a case like Isaiah’s might say to himself, “What if it

⁷ Halyburton (Mem. chap.2 p.3) says: “A sweet and comfortable hope and persuasion of *my own salvation* was answerable to the clearness of the discovery of *the way of salvation*. The hope rose in strength, or grew weak, as the discoveries of the way of salvation were more or less clear and strong.”

referred only to the past, but does not include what has happened since then?" But, on the other hand, our way of ascertaining now our pardon and acceptance rests on unchanging and unchangeable facts, —facts for ever illustrious, facts for ever rich in meaning, facts for ever uttering the same loud, distinct, full testimony to the sinner's soul. Yes, we have an altar, and the voice from that altar and its four horns may be heard distinctly from day to day as at first. Our altar is Christ; and this Christ died, rose again, went back to the Father, is interceding for us. These are the four horns of our altar! Let us take hold of any one of them, and lo! we see an accepted sacrifice before us, a sacrifice that speaks peace, that leads our conscience to rest, and makes our hearts leap for joy; for God is well pleased. We have God's word reiterating in manifold ways a testimony to be believed; and so we find security against Satan's whispered suspicions.

And should any one object, "Surely there have been many, very many, good men and eminent men of God, who did not take this *short and direct way*;" —let us remind such as may stumble at this fact (for it is a fact) of an anecdote which good old Brooks⁸ has recorded. A minister, who had great joy in Christ, said on his death-bed regarding his peace and quietness of soul, "That he enjoyed these not from having a *greater measure of grace* than other Christians had, nor from any special immediate witness of the Spirit, but because he had more *clear understanding of the covenant of grace*." Spirit of truth, give all Thy servants this clear understanding of the *covenant of grace*!

Nor must we fail to notice that this immediate, direct, way is that which specially honours God and His beloved Son, inasmuch as it magnifies free grace. Here is the Lord's free love manifesting itself as so exceedingly free, that he will not ask the price of one moment's waiting or delay. Behold the cross, and at once be at rest! The excuses of the delaying sinner are swept away. Why wait, since all is ready? and where is there room for the plea that God's time for favour, and so great a favour as that of making you sure of acceptance, may not have come? God in Christ waits for you,⁹ presenting and proffering to you an

⁸ *Cabinet*, p.113

⁹ It is very a very common mistake to allege that God sometimes counsels us to wait. But, if *wait* be used in the sense of delay, or putting off immediate decision, we assert there is no passage in the Bible to countenance such an idea. Some quote Psalms xl. i, "I *waited patiently* for the Lord," which is (see the margin), "In waiting, I waited," or "I eagerly waited." Now, not to insist on the fact that here the speaker is *Christ our surety*, we must remember that the Old Testament use of "*wait*," has not in it anything of the idea of procrastination, or delay, or *contented waiting* in our sense of the term. It always means *eager looking*, as

immediate welcome, immediate peace.

What say you then, *unassured sou*? Are you still content? Assurance may be got in beholding stedfastly the Lamb of God; and is there no sin in your refusing to behold Him stedfastly? Want of Assurance leaves you in the awful position of being, on your own shewing, possibly still a child of Satan! And can you remain thus without alarm? And the world is passing away. You are dying men. Christ is coming quickly, coming as a thief in the night, coming in an hour that you think not; and you are not ready to meet Him at His coining. There are not less than 80,000 of our fellow-men dying every day; 80,000 have died to-day, 80,000 more shall die to-morrow, and you may be one of that number whom the scythe of death shall cut down as grass and yet you are content to have only a vague hope! Content to be without Assurance! You are like the unhappy philosopher who said, "I have lived uncertain, I die doubtful, I know not whither I am going." Are things to continue thus with you any longer? Do the visions of an eternal hell never rise up before you? Are you never struck with cold fear lest hell be waiting for you? Mirth is most unsuitable for you; laughter is out of season; peace cannot take up her abode under your roof, for you are all at sea about your eternal interests! Yes, you may be almost past all the joy that you are ever to find! Will you not now stand still, and once more examine Christ crucified, Christ's finished work, to see if that cannot yield you the present and eternal peace which alone can satisfy the soul? We have sought to set all before you; and now we leave you, praying that the Holy Spirit may give efficacy to our words, knowing well that otherwise all is vain.

when a dog looks up to his master's table for the crumbs, or as when the people waited for the priest coming out of the Holy Place, or as in Job xxix. 23, the anxious, intensely anxious, looking out for rain in sultry weather. This is the meaning, Micah vii. 8, "I will wait for the God of my salvation." This is the meaning. Hab ii. 3, "Though it tarry, Wait for it;" that is, if you do not see these things come to pass at once, if you do not see at once the Lord appear in His glory to overthrow His foes, yet look out for it anxiously! Eagerly hasten on to that day. This is the way in which God's people "*wait*," spoken of in Ps. cxxx. 6, Isa. xi. 31. And so Lament. iii. 25, is the case of the desolate soul in affliction, earnestly looking up and looking out for deliverance, though calm and resigned. Scriptural *waiting* is not in the least like that of the careless easy-minded soul, that pretends it is unwilling to anticipate sovereign grace. And when God himself, in Isa. xxx. 8, is said to "wait to be gracious," the same idea of eager, earnest looking is implied. It is the intensely anxious waiting of the Prodigal's Father for the return of his son, for whose coming He is ever on the out-look. Most certainly, there is nothing in Scripture that countenances an unbelieving waiting for faith.

“Let all the promises before Him stand,
And set a Barnabas at His right hand,
These in themselves no comfort can afford;
‘Tis Christ, and none but Christ, can speak the word.”



When Thomas Scott, the eminent commentator, was on his death-bed, his mind was for a time involved in gloom, through the influence of physical disease. “Oh,” he said on one occasion, “to enter eternity without one doubt on the mind! *Eternity —eternity —eternity!*” —“People talk of assurance not being attainable in this world, nor perhaps much to be desired. They and the devil agree on this point.” “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”



A Brief Look at the Life of Andrew A. Bonar

And a commentary upon his work “What Gives Assurance”

by *Jon Cardwell*

The younger brother of Horatius Bonar, Andrew Alexander Bonar was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on May 29, 1810. He was the seventh son of James and Marjory Bonar. With the death of his father in 1821, his elder brother, James, helped Marjory Bonar to look after the family.

At Edinburgh High School he developed a love for the Greek and Hebrew languages, and the Rector of the school commented that Andrew was “the best Latin scholar” who had ever been there during the Rector’s time at the school.

Andrew began keeping a diary on August 21, 1828. His main complaint in the diary for the next two years was that he wasn’t saved. “I am still without Christ and without hope,” he wrote. “I have no hatred of sin; I seek Christ with little ardour, rather because not happy in the world than because of anything else.”

Finally, after reading William Guthrie’s *A Saving Interest*, he wrote to his brother, John, for counsel because Andrew came to the conclusion that he may now be redeemed, regenerated to have “believed on the Lord Jesus.” After examination in the faith by the Rev. Dr. Jones, Andrew A. Bonar was admitted as a communicant of the Church of Scotland on December 26, 1830 and had taken his first communion on January 9, 1831. Reflecting upon his salvation in the weeks before his death in 1892, Bonar said, “It was in the year 1830 that I found the Saviour, or rather, that He found me and laid me on His shoulder rejoicing, and I have never parted company with Him all these sixty-two years.”

Bonar began his studies at Divinity Hall in 1831 and started the “Exegetical Society” that same year with several others, including Robert Murray McCheyne. The group’s purpose was basically to meet together in prayer and also for the study of Scripture.

In 1835 Bonar completed his education at Divinity Hall and begins his pastoral work in Jedburgh, delivering his first sermon from Isaiah 55:1-3 on July 5th.

Andrew Bonar was a man well acquainted with Christ; not merely filled with a knowledge of the doctrinal Christ of the Scriptures, but a man with an intimate relationship with the Savior because he was a man well acquainted with the Lord in the closet of prayer. Bonar wrote,

“There is too much time taken up with active work for the Kingdom. Surely if God’s servants are to speak and preach in the power of the Holy Spirit they must again give themselves continually to prayer...”

Andrew Bonar wrote many fine books and booklets, expounding Scripture, such as “Victory Over Sin.” Among his most noted works were *Memoir of Robert M. M’Cheyne*, published in 1844; and editing *Asahel Nettleton: Life and Labours*, a work originally written by Dr. Bennet Tyler in 1845 after Nettleton’s death. Another very noteworthy work was his *Commentary on Leviticus*, which was sent to the press in late 1845.

There are so many things that could be said of the life of Andrew Bonar; that to pick out just a few accomplishments would certainly belittle this servant of God, and even more so, belittle the God by whom he was empowered. I believe Bonar’s life serves as an example of what the Lord Jesus Christ can do in a man that desires nothing more than to walk with His Savior. If one word can be used to describe the man, it would be “holiness;” and that, only because of the Holy One who dwelt in him.

On December 3, 1892, Andrew Bonar called his family to his bedside for prayer and quietly went to sleep, to wake up in the presence of his Lord, Master, and passionate Love, Jesus Christ.

Published from a sermon delivered in 1859, “What Gives Assurance” is an awesome gemstone in the treasury of our Christian faith.

In this work, Andrew Bonar makes the statement, “Now, we say to such— *You are not taking the best way to have real fruit*; for you are seeking fruit and effects from a selfish motive; you are not seeking holiness as an end, and for its own sake, but in order to use it as an evidence in favour of your sincerity. This kind of fruit is not likely to be the best, nor the most satisfactory.” Those who have listen closely to my sermons might take note that I teach that our personal prayer time in the “closet” with a “shut door” is for the purpose of meeting with the Person of Christ; that *He* is our end and goal; and that as a result of having spent time with the Holy One, we become holy; that as a result of having spent time with the Righteous One, we become righteous; that it is not about seeking to be holy but seeking to be with Him. There is no disparity or contradiction between what I have taught and what Bonar has taught. When Bonar said, “seeking holiness as an end, and for its own sake,” he, like his brother Horatius, like his friend, Robert Murray McCheyne, like his contemporary, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, like many others who exemplified a life of holiness and Christian piety, would never think of

holiness as a mere external condition, and a relationship with Jesus Christ being the way to achieve such an end. God forbid! We, in the early years of the 21st century, often tend to divorce what the Holy Spirit, and men such as the Bonar brothers, McCheyne, and Spurgeon, would never have done.

When Andrew Bonar speaks of “seeking holiness as an end,” he is certainly speaking of seeking Christ. He uses these words to illustrate his point with regard to Assurance of Salvation and consistent, with God’s plan and purpose for conforming His sons to the image of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 8:28-29).

