



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 9

August 7, 2022

No. 32

## *Assurance of Salvation*

Lawrence Kelley

There is such a thing as a well-grounded assurance of salvation and there is also such a thing as ill-founded presumption. One of the primary goals of the Apostle John in the letter of 1John is to instill confidence in genuine believers that they are right with God and need not fear His judgment. Consider some of the signs of life given to us in 1 John that help answer the question of "Where do I stand with God?"

The first sign of life is that we are **walking in the light** – 1 John 1:6-7. Light & Darkness are typically used in scripture with reference to moral uprightness or perverseness respectively. The faithful walk (their general manner of life) in light. They habitually prefer the pure to the impure; clean to dirty. The presumptuous may speak of a commitment, but they love the darkness. You regularly find them skulking about in dark alleys.

Second, is an **awareness of sin** – 1 John 1:8,10. The more time spent communing with God, the more glaring our sin becomes to us. The real believer knows that if sin were blue, everything he did, thought or said would be in some way shaded blue. By contrast the falsely assured become increasingly convinced that their sins are actually virtues. "I'm not gossiping, I'm just concerned about how sister Molly is doing with her alcohol problem."

Third is **obedience** – 1 John 2:3-5; 3:7-8,10. True assurance knows that salvation is by grace through faith, but that it is a faith that is revealed in specific acts of obedience. False assurance says that it is legalistic to worry about obedience. Obedience grows in the faithful. Excuses grow in the presumptuous.

Next is a **genuine longing to see the Lord** – 1 John 3:2-3. Do you love theology and the discussion of issues? Nothing wrong with this, but it is possible to imagine we love the Lord, when we are actually in love with ideas and doctrines. Do you ache to see His face, hear His voice, touch His hand? Do you long for the day when you will be perfected and never have another sinful thought or action? If so you will be striving in the present to become what you are destined to be in eternity.

Last is **love for the brethren** – 1 John 3:14; 4:12-5:3. This is the proof John is most adamant about. The problem with the test of love is that, everyone thinks they are a loving person, but John reminds us that love is not "whatever I define it to be," but love is seen in God's sending His Son to take away our sins. In other words, love is actively seeking the best interests of others. Love is not just a pleasant attitude or empty words, but involves emptying ourselves in order to fill others. Love calls for the sacrifice of time, energy and money. In order for our love to give us confidence and assurance in the most frightening place imaginable - before the judgment seat of God - our love must parallel His love. So the question is clear. Do you love others? Are you sure? What deeds and actions are there to prove it?

This kind of evaluation always reveals shortcomings to the genuine soul searcher. Interestingly, the more you are troubled over your lack of holiness, the greater your assurance will be. This is because the one who finds himself regularly in need of the blood of Christ is the one who is daily pursuing Christ. If you find nothing in this article that convicts you or if your shortcomings do not bother you, then you have a deadly serious problem. The characteristic of the falsely assured are three: they are smugly confident that they are lacking in nothing, or they are angry that someone has pointed out their fault, or worst of all they see their errors, but don't care.

So, let me exhort you to be a confident Christian. As the Apostle said, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13). Do you believe in the name of the Son of God? Are you trusting in Him alone to save you from your sins? Have you been joined to Him in Baptism? Are you striving to show your love for Him by the obedience of your faith? Then stop doubting and rejoice that your sins are forgiven and your name is written in His book.

## “Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires”

Devan Harber

Smokey Bear, (not to be confused with Yogi Bear) coined the above phrase that all have come to know and love. He is the iconic spokesmen-bear for the US Forest Service. I can't hear about forest fires without thinking of the brilliance of James' epistle. Maybe that's where Smokey got it!? (Probably not...) *“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell”* (James 3:5-6).

Far too often we are careless with the most powerful muscle we possess. They say, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” but the tongue empowers the pen. How many have been invigorated into overwhelming odds on the battlefield because their captain spoke words of courage? By contrast, how many have been cut deeper than any blade by someone they love? Words are powerful tools for building up or cutting down (*“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers”* Eph. 4:29; “edification,” NKJV — “building up,” ESV).

In 2007, a 10yo boy in southern California was playing with matches and accidentally started a fire that went on to consume 38,000 acres. With a few sticks — that are less than 1/10 of an inch in width and only 2 1/4 inches in length — he struck a blaze that consumed 38 *thousand* acres... James said this 2,000 years ago. A careless word flippantly spoken can start a raging, inferno that devours everything in its path. Words cut, no matter the source; in the above example, the boy was 10 years old. We must instill a desire for caution in our communication. A ten year old boy can say something hurtful. While it may not scorch you the same as someone who maliciously tongue lashes you, it can still burn. This is perhaps why Paul admonishes the Colossians, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). It matters what you say and how you say it.

We have to do away with the attitude that says, “this is just who I am,” or “they know my heart.” It isn't just about *what* you say, it is about *how* you say it. To some degree (pun intended!), you won't be able to remove the blow completely. When the time comes to say, “that is sinful” to a friend, it may not matter *how* you say it; it may still burn. But, to whatever *degree* (yes, I did it again), you can — be cautious and careful. You can start a fire that rages and consumes; or, you can cool down and comfort (while not softening the truth at all!). “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Pro. 15:1). They still need the “answer,” but you don't have to be “harsh” in giving it to them.

You can't control what everyone else does, you can only control you. To quote Smokey, “only you can prevent forest fires.” Are you doing everything you can to prevent kindling a fire that defiles the body and harms the hearer?