

Comfortable Certainty

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Date: 13 November 2024

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the Providence Podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. Thank you so much for tuning in. Today we're going to cover a topic I thought I'd be preaching on last Sunday, and that is the issue of assurance in the book of Exodus.

Assurance in the book of Exodus. The title that I had had planned for that message was Comfortable Certainty, which comes from a section of Martin Luther's famous book, The Bondage of the Will, which a number of theologians have said is by far Luther's best work.

So we're going to talk about how a person who is a Christian can be assured of their salvation. And this is a topic that I had just picked up on in my reading, not only of the book of Exodus, but also I was reading through The Bondage of the Will and Erasmus' The Freedom of the Will, and I'll get into all that in a moment.

And up until, I guess, Saturday, I had planned on bringing this message to the pulpit last Sunday, and I just started growing uncomfortable with the connection to the text itself.

[1 : 28] It's a good topic. It's a good thing to talk about, but I just didn't feel like I was getting really at the heart of the text. And that happens to me a lot because I read a lot of things.

I read a lot of wide variety of sources, and I just have that kind of synthesizing mind where I see connections. And so it's pretty common for me to get halfway through the week and realize, you know, I've been doing all this work in this one direction, and yeah, everything here is true, but is it really the heart of the text that we have before us?

And so I abandoned this as the sermon for Sunday and talked about leadership instead, which I felt was the main point of that particular passage. But today I'm going to just walk through what I discovered as I was working on this issue of assurance and the issue of assurance of salvation in the book of Exodus in general.

Let's define assurance first of all. G.A. Carson's definition is helpful. A Christian believer's confidence that he or she is in right standing with God and that this will result in ultimate salvation. So assurance, according to D.A. Carson, a Christian believer's confidence that he or she is in right standing with God and that this will result in ultimate salvation.

[2 : 48] Now, there are three obstacles. This is an issue that comes up a lot. I've struggled with assurance in the past and I've certainly helped a number of people over the years figure out kind of where they stood with God and battling these issues of assurance.

And there are three obstacles that I've learned to see rather reliably manifesting when someone is struggling to get assurance, to get a confidence that they are indeed Christ and that they are indeed headed to heaven.

And the first one is just pride. We'll talk about this plenty, but there is a level of human centeredness in all of us that struggles to receive the gift of salvation apart from works and looks to some way of earning things as a way that feels more sure.

And so one of the things we'll talk about is pride. A lot of people just struggle with more pride than they realize, which, you know, is always kind of funny because it's obviously a huge issue. But one of the reasons why people sometimes struggle to be comfortably certain in their salvation is pride. The second one is one I don't hear about talked about at all, and I think it really needs to get discussed.

[3 : 57] And that is neuroticism. So I would say the first issue is spiritual pride. But the second issue is psychological, what I would refer to or think of as neuroticism.

Here's what I wish more pastors had said to me when I was younger and struggling with this. I wish that this was just a bigger part of the preaching on this subject. And that is something like this.

I wish pastors would say some of you have a dispositional disadvantage to gaining comfortable certainty. Some of you have a dispositional disadvantage to gaining comfortable certainty. I think it's very important to just embrace that older understanding of human nature that says that we don't all have equal access to all good things.

We're not given equal hands. I don't have equal access to a really great vertical jump, for instance. I could make my vertical jump better, but I'm starting at a certain place and have a certain kind of ceiling there.

[5 : 04] As it is with vertical jump or, you know, I've talked to a number of people who've excelled all the way to the edge of their mental hardware in the area of mathematics.

So they're really smart and they're really good at math. And then they hit a spot in their learning where they literally just lack the CPU processing to go any further.

So we all have dispositional disadvantages. And some people have a dispositional or psychological disadvantage to gaining insurance, to gaining insurance, to gaining assurance.

You may be more prone psychologically to neuroticism, to melancholy and so on and so forth. And I think in part because of the diet and the just there was a lot of, I think, physical strikes against the Puritans.

But they had well, they were very familiar with struggling through melancholy and depression. And it was Thomas Brooks, the Puritan Thomas Brooks, who said that if the eyes of the soul are tinted, then even the sun will appear darker than it really is.

[6 : 12] If the eyes of the soul are tinted, then even the sun will appear darker than it really is. And some people just have a disposition to melancholy. Sinclair Ferguson said it this way, An individual may have a strong faith, much grace, and rich evidence of fruitful service, yet lack full assurance because of natural temperament.

We are, after all, physiopsychological unities. A melancholic disposition, a melancholic disposition de facto, creates obstacles to the enjoyment of assurance, partly because it creates obstacles to the enjoyment of everything.

So one of the things I want you to know about assurances is it's not as easy to get for every single kind of person. There's a kind of person who has the eyes of their soul tinted. Everything seems a little darker than it really is.

A melancholic disposition will just create an obstacle to assurance, an obstacle to enjoying assurance because it creates an obstacle to enjoying everything.

It's going to be harder for some of you to have assurance than others, and that's partly just because of your own hardware. Now, some of you, and I put myself in this case as a young man, some of you have a double whammy.

[7 : 34] You are both prideful and melancholic. And so you've already got two strikes against you, and you're really going to struggle with getting assurance. And listen, man, I get it.

I honestly do. But here's my counsel as someone who has worked through a lot of this stuff in my own soul for the last 30 years. Here's what I would tell you.

Get to work on your pride. The melancholy is more rooted in your pride than you understand. I'm not saying it's entirely rooted there.

It is more rooted there than you understand. So do what you can to pursue humility. And I think you will see that like the tent on your, the eyes of your heart gets lighter.

I believe there is some connection, not an ultimate connection, but some connection between a perpetually depressed heart and a prideful heart.

[8 : 31] Not everybody that's prideful is perpetually depressed. Some people that are prideful are haughty and glib and, you know, assume the world revolves around them. But many people who struggle with pride, they do, that pride manifests itself in general unbelief and in a general sense that everything revolves around them only in a negative way.

And so I do believe that there are some people who have some limitations that are spiritual, pride. There's some that have some limitations, psychological, neuroticism. And then there's some of us who got the double whammy.

And we are both prideful and neurotic. And what I would tell you is, is that you need to work on your pride. The disposition will soften over time. You'll become less prone to neuroticism as you age.

That's just a pretty well-established principle. And one of the reasons for that is you'll learn to take yourself way less seriously. So that's two obstacles.

And the third obstacle, I would say, is theological. Theological. A lot of people struggle to reach comfortable certainty in their salvation because their theology really is preventing them from experiencing it.

[9 : 46] And that's, this is probably where I started thinking about this topic. As I was engaged in a number of conversations recently with people from different faith perspectives and different, you know, wings of Christianity, if you will.

And I was realizing that when they say assurance, they don't mean the same thing I mean. And I think I can place this in Exodus 32. But I also think, you know, the reason that I didn't preach it is I just don't think it's like the prominent theme.

But it'll be okay for a podcast to talk about this. When it comes to assurance and the theology of assurance, I think it's helpful to go back 500 years and pick two men with differing perspectives. The one would be a man named Erasmus. And the other would be a man named Martin Luther. So what we have represented in these two men are two wings of Christendom. Erasmus, in this area of assurance and salvation, because, you know, all that's kind of related.

Erasmus would actually represent Roman Catholicism very firmly. Erasmus was a Catholic with integrity, I think I would say. He was not in favor of all the indulgences and was sympathetic to some of the points of the 95 Thesis even.

[11 : 03] But he was not willing to walk away from the Catholic Church. So he wound up never becoming Reformed. There was some hope that maybe they could persuade him into that. But, you know, within seven years or so of the 95 Theses on the Wittenberg door, Erasmus became somewhat of an antagonist, respectful antagonist toward Luther.

So Erasmus represents his view of assurance would represent Roman Catholicism, but it would also represent Methodism, Nazarene, Assembly of God, Free Will Baptist, and so forth.

So when it comes to salvation and assurance, because, you know, when it comes to these things, it's funny how Methodism, Nazarene, you know, Assemblies of God, Free Will Baptists, and so forth, they all actually kind of have similar perspectives.

There's not as big of a difference there as you might think. So those are perspectives represented by Erasmus. And then you'd have Luther, and he would represent Presbyterianism, Reformed Baptist, you know.

For the last 40 years, the denomination we're a part of, Sovereign Grace. And I want to talk about these differences because I think a lot of people that struggle with assurance just don't understand that they probably are mixing schools of thought.

[12 : 36] They're probably more Erasmus-y than they realize, if not intellectually, you know, attitudinally and in their heart. So I'm going to talk about this through the lens of three questions that I think are revealed in Exodus 32.

And the three questions would be, what does God save us from, why does God save us, and how does God save us? Okay, so what does God save us from, why does God save us, and how does God save us?

And I'm going to walk through those three questions by comparing Erasmus' views, Erasmus' answers to those questions with Luther's. So Erasmus would say, in the question of what does God save us from, Erasmus would say that man has a tendency to sin, but also remains capable of obedience.

Luther, on the other hand, would say that man is not merely, you know, caught in a tendency to sin, but man is trapped in sin. So right from the beginning, when we asked the question, what does God save us from, Erasmus would say, God saves us from a tendency to sin that, if not interrupted, will eventually lead us to hell.

And Luther says that God saves us from, you know, being entrapped in sin. There's no other option. That's all we are. And that's reflected in the title of the two books that they wrote to each other, published, you know, as was the case, published publicly.

[14 : 04] But what they're doing is they're interacting over this question of the nature of human will in a post-lapsarian world. And in a world where sin exists, does the human will have the capacity to do anything good, or does it only have the capacity to do evil?

Well, Erasmus started this conversation by publishing his book, Freedom of the Will, and his arguments we'll get into in a moment. Luther responded to that book with his own publication called Bondage of the Will.

So this, again, this maybe is reflected, that's my thought anyway, this is reflected in this question, what does God save us from? For Erasmus, it's a tendency towards sin. And for Luther, it's far graver than that.

It's a literal kind of entrapment into sin. So what do we see in the Bible, and specifically in Exodus 32, and just in Exodus in general? Man, I think we see Luther's point made pretty clear.

I think we see a people who are fundamentally incapable of acting in their own self-interest, even. I think we see people where indwelling sin has marred their memories.

[15:15] It's affected their memories, which is an aspect of will, so that they are forgetful. Think of all that they had seen. Even if their memories had not been impacted by sin, they would have been able to remember and call to mind and apply all that the Lord had done for them prior.

But something about even their memories, their memories are marred by sin in some way. You know, by the time the golden calf thing happened, it had only been 40 days since they had sworn to obey all the law of the Lord.

And then, you know, just 40 days later, they are breaking all the commandments in one big feast. I think it's also marred their minds.

This is incredibly important, I think, to understanding the nature of sin. Sin is often prompted by a sense that God is holding out on us, which is itself illogical.

Let me see if I can explain this. So in the text, in Exodus 32, Aaron tells them, you know, they say, make us gods. And Aaron says, take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them to me.

[16:33] So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And you know what happened next. Where did the gold come from? Right. Right. It came from their either pillaging in Egypt or potentially they could have been, you know, slave rings as a part of their slavery, as an expression of their slavery.

Either way, in that moment when they chose to abandon God, they had to use God's gifts to abandon God. So essentially the whole scene is them using God's gifts to sin against God.

And the reason that they're comfortable sinning against God is they're claiming that God's holding out on them. And then they go and use all the gifts that God has given them to sin against him because he's holding out on them.

See how illogical and broken that thinking is? Where did the gold come from? They used the gold. They used the leader that God had gave them. They were in the land that God had led them to. You know, their bellies were full of the manna that God had provided and their lungs were full of the breath that God had provided. And they made a creature that God designed.

[17:47] So their disobedience is supposedly in response to God's distance. But all of the elements that they used to sin against him are evidence of God's nearness and his goodness.

So I would say it this way. The activity of sin refutes the basic claim of sin. Or the activity of sin refutes the basic justification of sin. God's holding out on me. That's the claim of sin.

And then the activity of sin always involves riddling the cosmic treasury. You know, raiding the cosmic treasury. Taking all the stuff that God has given us and refashioning it to a protest.

The fact that God hasn't given us anything. You know, there's just a massive problem with logic in this situation. If God is as bad as you claim, you wouldn't have any of the basic tools you need to sin.

You've never once committed a sin that didn't involve appropriating God's generosity. That's why I think it's really important to understand that, you know, when we...

[18:48] Oh, man, I'm afraid I might have lost my thought there. Let's see. When you raid the treasury... Well, gosh, I don't think I remember. Oh, yeah, yeah. It's important to understand that it is actually God's generosity that makes idolatry possible.

Without the generosity of God, without just his lavish outpouring of gifts, whether they're intellectual gifts or physical gifts or health or, you know, anything, freedom.

It is actually... Idolatry is this cosmic joke that we play on ourselves. Because we assemble all the evidence that God has been great to us and use it, in a sense, to charge that God has been holding out on us.

So Erasmus and Luther really differed in the respect of the will. And Luther was saying, no, we are really, really broken.

We are really trapped in sin. We can't think our way out of it. We can't remember our way out of it. The will is fundamentally broken as a consequence of sin.

[20 : 02] By the way, this does not mean that people are as sinful as they possibly could be. That's not the idea represented in total depravity. Just that man has no escape.

He can't exercise himself out of sin. Erasmus, on the other hand, believed that the commands in God's word were evidence of man's ability to obey them.

So he believed that God wouldn't have issued commands like the Ten Commandments if man didn't have the ability to obey them on his own. And so that became the main kind of question for Luther and Erasmus is what did God save us from?

Is God saving us from a tendency? Or is God saving us from being trapped in sin? Luther wrote, Okay, so that's what does God save us from?

And Erasmus would say from a tendency and Luther would say from being trapped. Now, why does God save us? Well, this is going to be related to the last point. Why does God save us?

[21 : 28] For Erasmus, it's pretty simple. The salvation of God is extended to man because he has performed works that warrant God taking the next step with him.

It is very much a partnership. It is synergistic. It's more than one force working for Erasmus.

Describing Erasmus' position, Garrett Erick writes, A man performs by his own strength, making him a fit subject for the gift of eternal grace.

That part is from a quote from Erasmus. A fit subject for the gift of internal grace. So, for Erasmus, the question is, has this person done enough good things to make him a fit subject for the gift of internal grace?

Garrett Erick continues, This work of man removes a barrier which had kept God from giving grace. The barrier removed is man's unworthiness for grace, which God gives only to those who are fit for it.

With the gift of grace, man can do works which he before could not do, and God rewards these gifts with salvation. Therefore, with the help or aid of the grace of God, a man merits eternal salvation.

[22 : 45] Well, for Luther, the salvation of God is not extended because we've deserved it. It can't—we need to be even careful.

Now, this is—I'm going to caution about some biblical language. So, I know that what I'm cautioning is clearly stated in the Bible, but I want to be clear about some need for caution.

If we were to say that God saves us because he loves us, that would be a biblical statement. Here's the problem. Your definition of love and my definition of love is almost assuredly connected, in one way or another, to the worthiness of the object that is being loved.

We do not have an easy time conceiving of love that isn't rooted in some goodness of the object being loved.

Even in those relationships that we have the most good, godly love in, like, say, for our wife or our kids, even in those situations, we are typically feeling love for those people based on something we perceive in them to be good or worthy.

[23 : 59] So, we need to be careful when we talk about God saving us because he loves us. Not because that isn't true, but because our definition of love has become so polluted that we're apt to fall back into this perspective of Erasmus, whereby God sees us as a fit subject for the gift of internal grace because of something we have done, something we have merited.

Now, what's the way to get around this and still stay biblical? Because the Bible does say that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and there are many other places as well where the love of God is, you know, important in the reason for God saving us.

Well, we can be self-conscious and understand that really love means pity. That is absolutely the case, and that's the love that the Bible talks about.

That's a pity. But another way to make sure that we don't get into this Erasmus and kind of trap of understanding why God saves us is just to look to all of those passages where salvation is extended by God for God's glory.

That's the way that we keep from getting into a situation where we think that people are saved because they deserve it or because God sees something admirable in them, is we just have to keep pounding this other biblical truth that is really spelled out and kind of undeniable, and that is simply that God saves us for the sake of his own glory.

[25 : 36] And we do see that in the text. You know, in verse 7, the Lord says to Moses, And the Lord said to Moses, So God doesn't, God's obviously not, you know, concerned about destroying all these people.

It's not as if his nature forbids it. He is a just God. It would be consistent for him to just give full destruction here. There's nothing in us, in the people, that warrants their salvation.

And so how does Moses approach this situation? He can't make the argument that these are people that deserve anything. They really obviously don't deserve it.

So what does Moses argue for? Well, look at verse 11. But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

Why should the Egyptians say with evil intent did he bring them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.

[27 : 17] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring and they shall inherit it forever.

And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. So the idea here is that the only argument Moses has for why he should save us, why he should save these people is because for the sake of his own glory, for the sake of his own name.

There's nothing in a person that would trigger God acting in a saving way. All of that motivation to save has to be rooted ultimately in God's decision to do it that way for the sake of his own glory.

And I read this quote on Sunday. I thought it worked in both applications. Mike Faberaz, the pastor, writes, While most people believe God saves people for people's sake because of his attraction to them and his inner compulsion to promote and honor them, Psalm 106.8 tells us that God is in the business of saving sinners for his own namesake, i.e. for his own honor, promotion, and glory.

In considering his grace and mercy toward his people, God repeats to the prophet Isaiah, For my sake, for my sake I do this. I will not yield my glory to another.

[28 : 43] So, you know, you can see how this is all sort of building this case toward what assurance is and what it isn't. You know, on the Erasmus side, what do we need to be saved from?

We need to be saved from a tendency to sin where we have a tendency toward sin but also have the capacity to merit God's favor. How does God save us under Erasmus?

Or, I'm sorry, why does God save us under Erasmus? God saves us because we take steps toward him. We furnish, we provide certain meritorious works, and then God saves us.

What about for Luther? How does he view all this? What do we need to be saved from? We are not just, we don't just have a tendency toward sin. We're fundamentally broken.

Our souls are in bondage. Our will is in bondage. We can only sin. We have a choice to the degree to which we sin. We have a choice. Think of, for Luther, think of sin as the autonomic nervous system or the involuntary nervous system.

[29 : 52] Think of it for Luther as like breathing. Thankfully, I don't have to think about breathing. I just breathe. Now, can I control my breath?

Can I choose to think about it? Can I hold my breath? Can I breathe different ways and so on and so forth? Yes. But fundamentally, even if I were to hold my breath and pass out, I would just resume back to my default settings of involuntary breath.

That's how Luther views sin. I think that's how the Bible presents sin. Do you have some control?

Can you sin a lot? Can you sin a little? Can you not sin for a minute?

So forth. Yeah. All of that is there. But beneath you, at the level of your will, you've been corrupted because of indwelling sin. And it's not so much, you know, the problem isn't just that you commit various sins, but that you are fundamentally, you have this involuntary sin nervous system that will just keep doing it.

Can you modify and adjust and restrain and so forth? Of course. Of course. But you will just sin. So for Luther, what do we need to be saved from? We need to be saved from this autonomic, you know, sinful nature.

[31 : 10] And how does God save us? Well, for Erasmus, it's we take a step. I'm sorry. Why does God save us? For Erasmus, it's because, you know, we kind of merit it. But why does God save us under Luther's system?

Just because he pities us. That's it. And pity is a great way to hold the two tensions of love, of God acting in love for us and God acting for the sake of his own glory.

That's, I think if you can capture that, that he doesn't save us because we merit it. He saves us because we pity. He pities us. That's key. Okay. So then we get to how does God save us? Well, for Erasmus, the way that God saves us is that we use some of the nature that hasn't been fully wrecked by sin to sort of work toward him.

And then together we, maybe you're contributing faith and he's contributing salvation, something like that. There's a, there's a basic sort of partnership there.

[32 : 18] Doesn't mean by any means that it's 50-50. You know, it just means that there is a partnership. What about for Luther? How does God save us? Well, for Luther, God saves us by just being a sacrifice to pay for the whole thing.

And that comes through in the Exodus passage. The next day, Moses, I'm in verse 30. The next day, Moses said to the people, you have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord.

Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. So Moses returned to the Lord and said, alas, this people has sinned a great sin. And later he says, he says in verse, in verse 32, if you will forgive their sin, but if not, blot me out of your book that you have written.

And in the Old Testament, the book is just those that are alive. It gets spiritualized in the New Testament, becomes the book of eternal life. But in the Old Testament, the book of the living is just those who are alive.

So what Moses is saying here is, kill me, kill me. If that would do anything to help you forgive them, kill me. You can see this mediatorial atonement sort of thing happening here.

[33 : 34] God isn't looking to, God isn't trying to save people because they have a partnership in their salvation. God needs, God is going to use an outside person who hasn't sinned to, to act salvation through that person.

And of course, Moses is not a sufficient mediator. God actually rejects this offer. He just says, you know, I'm going to visit my, I'm going to visit their sin upon them. And he sends a plague. But in the New Testament, of course, we have the Christ as the mediator and God takes up that offer.

You know, we talked about leadership last week. And, you know, this, this, one of the things that came through as I was studying all this mediatorial stuff is something R.C. Sproul said, where he says the first Adam says, don't blame me, blame my wife.

And then the second Adam, Jesus Christ says, don't blame my wife, blame me. And so that's salvation.

That's how salvation is affected under the, what I think is the biblical view. And it's, it's Luther's view. I think by the time we get to the New Testament, we see assurance emerge in a way it doesn't exist in the Old Testament.

[34 : 53] Because in the Old Testament, we don't have a clear view of the mediator, of the perfect mediator, the one who God will accept the terms of propitiation of atonement for, you know.

And by the time we get to John, you know, John 10 is one of the most profound, you know, assurance passages. It's John 10, 28, one of the most profound assurance passages in the New Testament.

I give them eternal life. They shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. That's John 10, 28. It's funny. Back when I was in my early twenties, I was a pastor in this small town. And one of the only people that I had that was kind of a friend there was this guy named Chuck. And he was the pastor of the Assembly of God Church. And we were kind of close in age, and we would, you know, talk and hang out and, you know, have dinner at each other's houses and so forth.

But, you know, like a lot of perspectives in that Erasmian strain, Chuck, as an Assembly of God guy, believed you did merit salvation. You had to offer some good work, whether that good work is just faith to be saved.

[36 : 01] And therefore, you could lose salvation, you know, if you stopped doing your part, so to speak. And I just remember he was offering all of these arguments for why that had to be the case.

And they were just all the classic ones about, you know, if grace is really that free, then what's to keep people from sinning entirely and so forth. And I just kept reading John 10, 28 to him.

I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. And John 10, 29, my Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. And I just kept saying that over and over again. And finally he said, okay, I do not have an answer for that verse. And I was like, okay, I'm glad because it's the only verse I know.

I'm 29. Anyway, Sam Storms on that verse writes, they shall never perish. He says, literally, we can translate this, they shall not by no means ever perish.

[37 : 06] This is an absolute, unequivocal, unassailable negative. Would Jesus have said this if in fact many of his sheep shall perish? If so, much as one true child of God can ever perish, Jesus has deceived us.

So, of course, Jesus has not deceived us. He went, as Sam Storms says, he went to an absolute, unequivocal, unassailable negative. They shall never perish.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. So I think that a lot of people that are struggling with assurance, I mean, some of them are just, you know, they're prideful. Some of them are kind of psychologically neurotic.

But a lot of it is just that they don't understand. There's the theology of the two streams, of Erasmus and Luther, has gotten really mixed. You know, there are whole conventions, like the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, in the world.

It's a blended denomination when it comes to this question. There are literally people, some churches, who ascribe to Erasmus' view of merited salvation, and there are people who ascribe to Luther.

[38 : 23] So it gets so mixed that when someone's struggling with assurance, I really think that even if they had the perfect answer and said, oh, no, I know, I know, I know, I don't earn my salvation, the chances of you having been influenced at some point by an Erasmus-type view, it's just high.

Now, what I would argue is that in truth, not going to bash anyone over the head for this, but in truth, people in Erasmus' line have no business even using the word assurance.

There's simply too much subjectivity involved to use the word assurance. Now, they'll use it, I just think you shouldn't, because it doesn't actually mean anything.

There are just too many questions left unanswered in their scheme or their plan of salvation. Too many questions remain sitting out there.

Did this person believe enough? How do I answer that question? How do I answer questions like that? So I don't really think they should even talk about assurance. I think the truth is that they just need to, truth in advertising, say, hey, this is our system for salvation.

[39 : 39] It does not include assurance. I think Luther agreed with that. Luther, one of the most powerful statements in *The Bondage of the Will*, he says this, I frankly confess that for myself, even if it could be, I should not want free will to be given to me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation.

Not merely because in face of so many dangers and adversities and insults of the devil, I could not stand my ground, but because even were there no dangers, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success.

That's why I would argue that all of those wings of Christianity shouldn't use the word assurance, because it doesn't really mean anything objective. There is no comfortable certainty.

And that phrase, comfortable certainty, comes from this quote from Luther, which I'll continue now. But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will and put it under the control of his and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to his own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that he is faithful and will not lie to me, and that he is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break him or pluck me from him.

Furthermore, I have the comfortable certainty that I please God, not by reason of the merit of my works, but by reason of his merciful favor promised to me, so that if I work too little or badly, he does not impute it to me, but with fatherly compassion pardons me and makes me better.

[41 : 20] This is the glorifying, this is the glory of all the saints in their God. And so for Luther, passages like Exodus 32 showed that what man needs to be saved from is bondage to sin.

And why he is saved is because God has chosen to save these people for his own glory. And how they are saved is because God offers a perfect mediator in their stead, not by them earning it, but by offering a completely different person as a payment for that.

Now, I'm hoping that just, you know, you may need to just think about this more and more and more and understand, my assurance is not based on theological truth.

My assurance is based on vibes. My lack of assurance is based on vibes, not theological truth. And understand that that's just something you've got to keep looking back to and say, well, there's only one kind of assurance that could possibly ever exist.

And that is an assurance that comes completely from God, not dependent any level on me.

Because the question will always remain, if it depends on me, have I done enough, whatever doing means, whether believing or whatever.

[42 : 34] And there's a reason why people like these works-based systems, which, you know, really all religions are, is because it provides a sort of false sense of security.

You're working through the steps, right? But here's the thing I would caution you about. It's like, I wouldn't want to raise my family. I wouldn't want to raise my kids in that environment.

Because as soon as you introduce questions of the heart, all that assurance just gets thrown out the window. So, and therefore, you have to kind of create a heartless world that is simply heartless standards of conduct.

No one's asking, like, what is really going on in your heart? That question can't be allowed in these systems of merit. Because as soon as you do, you lose all assurance.

Let me see if I can explain this to you. This is crystal clear in my head, but I don't know if I've ever talked about this. So, let's say that I'm raising my kids. You know, let's say that, you know, a number of years ago, they're all like preteens.

[43 : 42] And we are an Erasmus home. And so, we work a system. Let's say we are Catholic. And we do the sacraments, and we're working toward confirmation, and so on and so forth.

Well, we have our assurance based on the system. We're obeying the system. We're attending the Mass. We're doing, you know, we're taking the Eucharist, and so on and so forth.

That's what our assurance is based on. Now, if someone were to come into my Erasmus arrangement and say to me and to my family, but are you doing those things with a pure heart? Which is a reasonable thing to ask, right? All of my assurance is completely evaporated. Because how do you measure that? How do I know whether I've done these things in a pure enough heart? Am I capable of enough purity? And so, in all of these Erasmus systems, and plenty of you grew up in these environments, by the way, you need to understand this. The question of the heart has to be kicked to the curb.

[44 : 48] You can't admit the question of motives. You can't admit the question of the heart into that system. If you do, you break the whole system. And so, what that'll do in your home or in a church or even in a country, if that's the system, you have people who just do behaviors without really letting those behaviors, having those behaviors reflect, without pursuing a heart sincerity of those behaviors.

So there's a kind of a hypocrisy that emerges. And there's also a comparison that emerges. And this would be very concerning for me in my home or my church. If I'm working this Erasmus system where whatever assurance I get is just because I'm doing a system, but I just can't look too closely at the heart because then, you know, the whole thing gets blown up.

So I'm doing this system. Well, how do I know I'm winning in the game? Well, I've got to look to my left and my right and see people who are worse than me. And so I believe that actually culturally, this Erasmus type system is really going to produce a group of people that are very legalistic, hypocritical and a tendency towards spiritual competitiveness.

I think that they will mostly be defined by what they don't do than by what they do. I think they'll have a really high view of the sins of commission, things you shouldn't do, but they'll have a really low view of sins of omission.

They won't have category for love, sort of dominating and generosity and so forth. It'll always be the bare minimum for them. So that's why I wouldn't want to raise my family in that. That's why I wouldn't want to go to a church like that, so forth.

[46 : 26] I don't want a kind of assurance that is rooted in a routine because that is going to teach me certain bad habits for interacting with others.

And also, I mean, not to mention it's just false. So yeah, that's the sense of where I would say the theological issues related to assurance is the differences between Erasmus and Luther are really big and wide-ranging and really have affected homes, families, churches, so on and so forth.

You really want this other system, this objective system, in which my assurance does not come from me at all. That gives me freedom, by the way, to look at my own heart with a level of introspection that can upset me, make me feel convicted.

I can feel frustrated by my own sin, but I won't feel abandoned if I discover too much sin. I'm not disincantized to look under the hood in the biblical system.

I can look at my heart. I can see, you know, there's some stuff there that's not good, and I can work on it. God can give me grace to work on it without me feeling this existential dread of I've got to get all this figured out tomorrow, otherwise I'm lost.

[47 : 55] So anyway, that's, yeah, I'm glad I didn't preach on this. As I was talking about this whole time, I thought, yeah, this wasn't going to be a very good sermon. But I do, man, I'm so eager for some of you doubters to not doubt anymore.

And you really just do have to see that you are, before you're saved, you were just utterly trapped. You weren't going to merit anything.

God didn't save you because he saw some great potential in you or he saw something good in you. He saved you out of pure pity for his namesake. And he offered that salvation and keeps that salvation for you, not of anything you've done, but because he brought in a third person, Jesus Christ, to resolve the tension that you had between him and your sin.

So I really do want you to feel that and rest in that with what Luther calls a comfortable certainty. Let me actually just take a minute to just say a real quick prayer for anyone who's listening to this who is struggling with this issue of assurance.

Let's pray. Father God, we lift up anyone who's listening to this and is struggling to know for sure that they are in right standing with God.

[49 : 17] Carson's definition, confidence that he or she is in right standing with God and that this will result in ultimate salvation. And Lord, it is really actually pretty difficult to get rid of all of these sort of Erasmus and views.

I think of them as very natural, very much a natural way of thinking. Whereas the Luther views are very unnatural. They're very supernatural. And so I think that sometimes some people who are struggling, they just haven't figured out how to fit these pieces into their heart yet.

These ideas are so foreign to the way that basic human functioning works that it just doesn't stick as easy. So I just pray, God, that through your Holy Spirit, certainly not through the lack of eloquence today in this podcast, but through your Holy Spirit, you would bring people to a level of comfortable certainty, whether it be through a number of scriptures like John 10, 28, or simply, Lord, through your Holy Spirit, which it says in Romans 8, testifies that we are sons and daughters of God.

Lord, please, would you give them a sense of comfortable certainty that they are not their own, but were bought with a price. We love you, Lord. Thank you for even caring for us that we would have this.

It is kind of offensive, really, for us to doubt your word, but you are so patient with us. And I pray for anyone who's struggling that they would feel your fatherly concern for their doubt and also their fatherly kind of strength and assistance that you trust, that they trust you.

[51 : 01] Lord, thank you for loving us, saving us in Christ. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen.