

Assurance in Contemporary Counseling Theory

Testing yourself to see if you are “in Christ” and entitled to the promised inheritance of God for eternity is one of the most important tests you will ever take. Assurance is something we should seek after. It will be “heaven on earth” if we get assurance through biblical tests and accurate self-examination. Assurance has a very practical purpose too: those who have assurance *know and enjoy* the conscious awareness that they are pleasing to God and use that knowledge and joy to confidently enjoy fellowship with God (Heb 13:15-6; 10:19-22; 11:1, 6; 4:14-6; 12:20-4).

We must also beware of an overly scrupulous, imbalanced introspection that leads to despair. Some leave the church because Christianity “just doesn’t seem to work.” Each person can be encouraged to know that failing the “assurance test” is not necessarily final (you can return to the Lord in faith and repentance and seek balanced fruits of the Spirit) and that your perception of failing is not always accurate (you can be deceived in your criterion for assurance or in analyzing your own religious experiences). Nor can today’s assurance guarantee that tomorrow’s assurance will be accurate, balanced or felt. Assurance that “I am pleasing to God” can be lost or dimmed. Like everything else in life, a biblical, Holy-Spirit-prompted assurance must come from God and be strengthened by God through his Word.

However, false assurance of salvation based on either inaccurate criterion or inaccurate self-analysis has snared many people in every generation. At the Last Judgment this will be one of the most devastating pronouncements against the falsely assured who felt they did lots of things for God: “I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!” (Matt 7:23) One of the Devil’s tactics is deceiving the people of the earth and giving unbelievers a false assurance of salvation. People’s pride leads them into temptation. People expect favoritism from God without any biblical basis for their opinions.

Telling others that they are entitled to assurance of salvation is an even weightier matter, involving a complex assessment of biblical and experiential data. First, we must admit the dangers of telling others they are true Christians. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and his human servants masquerade as servants of righteousness too (2 Cor 11:4, 13-15). Second, we must be careful not to unnecessarily discourage true believers by using extra-biblical (legalistic) criteria as grounds for assurance or by expecting complete holiness before assurance can be admitted. Third, historically we also have seen imbalanced criterion for giving others assurance of salvation. Some have said that “You must surely be a Christian if you speak in tongues,” while others make detailed doctrinal criterion a test of assurance (such as “You must be a 5 point Calvinist or you cannot be a Christian”). Fourth, we know it is impossible to give certain, infallible, future-tense assurance to professed believers except by observing the fruit of their lives as the future unfolds, according to the parable of the Sower and the seed on four types of soil in Matthew 13:18-23. Present-tense assurance statements can be made based only on the present-tense evidences. In this fourth case, counselors cannot be sure of which type of “soil” their counselees are like in one or two office sessions (assuming the relationship began as a counseling session), especially if this counseling takes place outside knowledgeable relationships and life-style evidence displayed within the local church fellowship. Has Satan snatched the Word from the counselee’s heart? Is he or she forsaking God in times of suffering? Are cares of this world choking out fruitfulness? Thus when the some of the most popular Evangelical counseling theories are training counselors to use “new-identity-in-Christ” assurance-of-salvation counseling methods with complete strangers, it is inevitable that some counselors will be encouraging false assurance for at least some, if not many counselees.

What types of counseling situations might distort the biblical use of *new-identity-in-Christ* assurance? Consider the gambling situation that Jack had to face. Jack was lethargic about dealing with his sin by all appearances. He went for four years with a lottery addiction, hiding it from his wife and the church, while continuing to serve with the church ministries. He was a church member who was taking communion each time it was served, showing a general ease about his condition as a “Christian” with no alarming fear for his own salvation and never privately repenting of his behavior during that time. Jack came reluctantly for counseling because his habit was uncovered by his wife after the \$20,000 worth of hidden credit card bills were discovered. This counseling was required by the church session if Jack wanted to avoid the next step of church discipline.

Now match up Jack with a “new-identity-in-Christ” counselor (ala Neil Anderson’s style of *freedom appointment*¹). The standard prescription calls for Jack to renounce his old alliances with gambling and any occult influences he’s had in the past and now really start believing that in Jesus Christ he has a new identity as a child of God and as a co-heir with Jesus Christ. In other words, the typical counselor trained in this system tells Jack that his problem basically stems from unbelief that he is *already* a new creature in Christ.² The methodology has

¹Neil Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura: Regal 1995) 275-97.

² So Michael Bobick defines sin as the “failure to believe who you are in Christ.” Michael Bobick, *From slavery to sonship: A biblical psychology for pastoral counseling* (Westminster Discount Book Service, PO Box 125H, Scarsdale, New York, 10583: By the author 1989) p. 177.

an assurance-of-salvation message built into its goal for change. Matching Jack up with a counselor who defines “assurance of salvation” with only its faith aspect³ has potential to give Jack false assurance or at least imbalanced assurance. Even if this method doesn’t produce false assurance, we will see how it lacks the more balanced approach to assurance that we find throughout the New Testament.

So why does *new-identity-in-Christ* have such an appeal in the churches today as the key to helping people change? First of all the terminology is biblical. “In Christ” phrases and metaphors for the “new-identity” are found frequently in the New Testament, especially Paul’s epistles. Second, this theme blends well with the Protestant church emphasis on justification by faith alone in Romans 4:25 and 10:9-13: “I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead; therefore, I am justified, and I have a claim to the titles of my new-identity in union with Christ.” Third, the application of the *new-identity* theme with only evidence of a professed *faith-aspect* corresponds well with a doctrinal tradition that wants to link full assurance with *professed faith alone* in an effort to “safeguard” the purity of salvation by faith alone.⁴ Fourth, this theme seems to fit well with the theological concepts of *indicative-imperative* popularized in Herman Ridderbos’s study in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*.⁵ Fifth, this theme seems to give a Christian response to secular psychology’s common maxim that low self-image is a major source of many personal and relational problems. Sixth, this theme has been popularized by many trusted evangelical Christian leaders and groups: Larry Crabb, Neil Anderson, Robert McGee & RAPHA, World Harvest Mission’s *Sonship* training program, Jerry Bridges, Richard Lovelace and integrated into Westminster Theological Seminary’s counseling program in a required textbook of Michael Bobick’s D.Min. thesis.⁶ Seventh, this theme fits well in the cultural milieu of counselees seeking confidential counselors in a professional office context outside the context of the church. Since the new-identity formula is currently used based on a confession-of-faith aspect alone, it is unnecessary to really know if the counselee evidences faith, hope and love in any balanced fashion in his life.

New-identity-in-Christ is basically short hand for all the declared blessings that belong to the believer by faith-union with Christ. In biblical language, this means that because I believe in Jesus and am united to him by faith, I now have new-identity as his child, his field, his building, his soldier, his bride, his branch, his citizen, his servant, his star shining in the universe, his living stone, just to name a few of the metaphors that define the new relationship we have with God in Christ. Using this short hand phrase, this formula may capture some of the logic of new-identity-in-Christ as a popular change method (to be analyzed in a later section of this article).

³ The *confessional-declarative* faith aspect of assurance is basically assurance of sins forgiven because I have confessed my sins and believe God’s promise that he will forgive me (1 John 1:9). Both my confession and God’s declaration bring this type of assurance: I confess my faith and repent, God declares me justified (Luke 18:13-14). Here, I am not implying that free grace always leads to abusing grace. I am only pointing out that assurance of salvation needs biblical balancing with other complimentary aspects to justify the conclusion that a person is *already* new in Christ.

⁴ Assurance is part of the debate in the recent Lordship-controversy where Charles Ryrie in *So Great A Salvation* (Wheaton, Victor 1991) maintained against John MacArthur that insistence on Lordship evidence (*love-aspect*) for salvation destroyed the possibility of granting assurance of salvation to newly professed believers. See also a very similar doctrinal controversy 200 years earlier against a bare faith-alone type justification, which directly affected their views on assurance in D.M. Lloyd-Jones *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, a chapter on “Sandemanianism” pp. 170-190, especially p. 187. In ignorance of the context of 1 John, *Evangelism Explosion* and many other evangelism training programs and tracts apply 1 John 5:13 to the person who has just prayed a sinners prayer: “These things are written so that you may know that you have eternal life.” *Evangelism Explosion* even has an opening survey question which assumes that all Christians should have assurance of salvation, and that this assurance can be obtained by the evangelist reviewing the theology of faith in Christ and repentance from sins, then leading the unassured in a prayer of assurance

⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1985) pp.253-58. “Indicative” means a verb tense that defines who a person is in union with Christ. “Imperative” means the new obedience that flows out of who we are in Jesus Christ. Romans 6:2-10 could be described as *indicative* statements about the believer; Romans 6:11-21 could be described as *imperative* statements about living the Christian life because of the *indicatives*. Romans 12:1 also can be understood as using this *indicative-imperative* structure.

⁶ Lawrence J. Crabb, *Effective biblical counseling: A model for helping caring Christians become capable counselors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Neil T. Anderson, *Helping others find freedom in Christ: Connecting people to God through discipleship counseling* (Ventura: Regal, 1995). Robert S. McGee, *The search for significance*. (Houston: Rapha 1987). *Sonship* (World Harvest Mission Leadership Training Program Series. 222 Pennsylvania Ave, Oreland, PA 1988). Jerry Bridges, *The disciplines of grace: God’s role and our role in the pursuit of holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress 1994). Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of spiritual life: An evangelical theology of renewal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1979). Michael Bobick, *From slavery to sonship: A biblical psychology for pastoral counseling* (Westminster Discount Book Service, PO Box 125H, Scarsdale, New York, 10583: By the author 1989).

*Gratitude to God for his blessings motivates change & obedience.
New-identity-in-Christ teaching produces gratitude to God.
Therefore, new-identity-in-Christ should be central to motivating change.*

Biblical Grounds for New-Identity Assurance in the New Testament

The indiscriminate application of new-identity counseling to all types of counseling situations does a disservice to the New Testament biblical evidence. Each church receiving an apostle's letter had circumstances that required different emphases on the aspects of assurance in those letters. Counselors also must wrestle with the uniqueness of every counselee's situation and translate God's truth into practical, day-to-day application points. If counselors try to apply new identity counseling to everyone, the *uniqueness* of each pastoral care situation will be ignored. The biblical writers address assurance from a number of perspectives depending on the church situation they were facing.⁷

Further, I think Scripture gives a more comprehensive criterion for using *new-identity* self-statements. This leads me to a very important question which some of you may be thinking. Is the *faith aspect* of assurance seen in counselees a sufficient ground for "new-identity-in-Christ" pronouncements by counselors? In other words, if counselees say, "I believe; therefore, I am justified," can counselors say, "therefore you have a claim to all the titles of your new-identity in union with Christ"? While the terminology of being "in Christ" is biblical, is the current use of the *new-identity-in-Christ* counseling technique consistent with its use in Scripture?

New-identity pronouncements in Scripture are *not* based on profession of faith in Christ *alone*. These statements are balanced with other aspects of assurance: love & hope. Here I think the new-identity message as used in current counseling techniques reveals its fragmentation from the context of Scripture. In the New Testament the new identity assurances rest solidly on a triad of observed faith, hope and love in those churches and Christians to whom these assurances were given.

John's gospel notes that by believing on the name of Christ we have the right to become the children of God (John 1:12). Yet this promise occurs in a context of a gospel that emphasizes hearing the voice of Jesus, following him, abiding in the vine, loving one another, loving God and hoping for the future return of Christ (John 10:25-30; 15:1-16; 14:1-4; 17:24). John's Gospel links the triad of faith, hope and love as aspects of a healthy assurance. This triad links with John's purpose statement for writing the Gospel—so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ and have *life* in his name (John 20:31), that is a *life* of love and hope through faith.

Hebrews develops love and hope aspects as grounds for assurance (Heb 6:9-12). The writer notes that the Hebrews show the things that accompany salvation in their case: work, love and help for the saints, continuing in faith, hope and patience to the end. They were persecuted and stood their ground, sharing in suffering with God's people who also suffered (Heb 10:32-34). Hebrews 11 lists many who held faith, hope and love to the end of their lives. By faith, they hoped and loved and so received their inheritance. Our hope in Christ is not ineffectual, for He is the anchor of our salvation who has entered into the Holy of Holies for us (Heb 6:18-21). On these grounds the writer affirms their stable grounds for assurance of salvation to date. From a divine perspective, Christ knows his people and ever lives to intercede for them (Heb 7:25). Yet from a human perspective, this assurance cannot remain strong in the future if they fail to look to Jesus and turn back to unbelief (Heb 12:1-4; 10:35-39; 3:14). The Hebrews are warned not to get lazy or turn back to the old ceremonial traditionalism of unbelief in Christ, but to continue in faith, hope and love. The writer of Hebrews does use *new-identity in Christ* terminology both as general descriptions of all believers (*brothers* 2:11; *children* 2:13; *Abraham's descendants* 2:16; *people of God* 4:10; 7:27; 8:10; 13:12; 11:25; *teachers* 5:12; *infants* 5:13; *land* 6:7-8; *house of Israel*, *house of Judah* 8:8; *my righteous one* 10:38; *aliens and strangers on earth* 11:13; *witnesses* 12:1; *son* 12:5; *the church of the first-born* 12:23), and also uses *new-identity* terms to define the recipients of the epistle with first and second person plural pronouns (*holy brothers*, who share in the heavenly calling 3:1; *we are his house* if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast 3:6; *brothers* 3:12; 10:19; 13:1, 22; *sons* 12:5, 7, 8).

Ephesians 1:13-15 notes faith, hope and love aspects as qualifying them for assurance of all these "in-Christ" blessings (Eph 1:3-12; 2:19-22): we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ, chosen, predestined to adoption, we have redemption through Christ's blood, we are fellow citizens, God's dwelling. Further Paul notes that those who are immoral, impure, or greedy (thus being idolaters) have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph 5:5). Thus Paul sets limits on the assurance granted to the Ephesians and even seeks to crush false assurance that has no love aspect.

Colossians 1:4-8 lists faith, love and hope aspects as grounds for all Paul lists later in regard to their "in-Christ" standing of being God's chosen people, dearly loved, raised up with Christ, and their lives now hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1-3, 12).

First Thessalonians chapter 1 runs through these same three (faith, love and hope) aspects as the grounds

⁷ See D. A. Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance" in *Westminster Theological Journal* (54:1, 1992) 1-29, especially pp. 26-29.

for all his new-identity in Christ pronouncements within the epistle. These three aspects are linked to perseverance as the continuing grounds for their assurance and of Paul's assurance that they are Christians (1 Thess 3:2-8). So Paul can publicly assure the Thessalonians that they "are not in the darkness . . . [but] are all sons of the light and sons of the day," (1 Thess 5:4-5). Paul said, "We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you," based on his observance of faith, love and hope as aspects of his grounds for assuring them of their new-identity (1 Thess 1:4).

First John lists faith, hope and love and grounds for knowing that they are children of God and have eternal life (1 John 3:2-3, 23-4; 5:13).

James also notes that profession of faith alone, without love is useless and not true faith at all (Jas 2:14-17). Demons believe that there is one God, but are not saved (Jas 2:19). True believers have wisdom from above shown in their purity of heart and godly attitudes, speech and behavior (Jas 3:13-18). Anyone who considers himself religious who does not control his speech or care for the orphans and widows has a useless religion (Jas 1:26-27). One reason James writes his epistle is to crush false "profession-of-faith-alone" assurance that has no love aspect.

Even Galatians, which gives such a strong case for justification by faith apart from works of the law, is just as clear on the necessary triad of faith, hope and love to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:5-6, 13-25). Paul, in this pastoral situation, shows that faith enables us to hope and faith works through love (Gal 5:5-6). We see a primacy to faith, a foundation for assurance, but not the completed, healthy assurance until we are living by the Spirit and crucifying the sinful nature (Gal 2:20; 5:16, 24). If the Galatians lose their faith-foundation and seek righteousness through the laws of circumcision and observance of religious days, they have fallen away from Christ and all their assurance of being "in Christ" should be lost, based on Paul's *faith-aspect* criterion for giving them public assurance (Gal 5:4; 4:11, 17-19; 3:1; 1:6-10). If the Galatians continue to show the acts of the sinful nature, then based on the *love-aspect* criterion, their assurance should be lost, as would Paul's confidence to give them any public assurance of being God's children (Gal 5:15, 21; 6:8; 4:19).

Romans combines faith, hope and love. We are reminded that the righteous will live by faith, as Abraham modeled for us, and a hearing of the Word produces faith (Rom 1:17; 4:1-25; 10:17). Romans 8 lists the Spirit's work in leading us to put sin to death (*love aspect*-evidential assurance) and assuring us of our new identity as God's children. "If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" . . . "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" . . . 'the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom 8:13-16). Romans 8:18-25 also lists the *hope-aspect* assurance that the Spirit works in us in response to the suffering we must endure in this world. Romans 12:1-2 tells us to be transformed by renewing our minds and no longer be conformed to this world as a way of presenting our bodies to God as living sacrifices. This is *love-aspect* assurance.

This brief survey gives ample evidence that the *faith-aspect* of assurance is the foundation for assurance (particularly Galatians & Romans). The evidence also reveals that the *faith-aspect* is insufficient as the sole ground for the "new-identity" pronouncements of the New Testament epistles. This conclusion calls for rethinking the whole *new-identity-in-Christ* counseling technique which largely accepts a *faith-aspect* of professed allegiance to faith in Christ as the only necessary ground for counselor pronouncements of assurance of the new identity.⁸

Outlining Aspects of Assurance

Let me begin with an outline to guide this exploration of assurance of salvation as it relates to various doctrinal categories. I admit that the definitions and supporting verses in each category are not clear-cut in every case and that the boundaries for each category overlap somewhat.

Definition of Assurance: knowing that *I am pleasing to God* because the Triune God is working in me what is pleasing to him, namely, enduring faith, hope and love, to the praise of his glory (Heb 2:4; 9:14; 10:6-9, 38; 11:6, 25; 13:15-16, 21; Rom 8:8; 12:1-2; 14:18; 15:1-3; 1 Tim 5:4; Phil 4:18; 2 Cor 5:9; Gal 1:10; 6:8; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 4:1). The categories below could be seen as a cyclical renewal-testing pattern. We look for the aspects of

⁸ For further research on the biblical grounds for assurance see Joel Beeke, *Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch "Nadere Reformatie."* From Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640-1760) (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary PhD dissertation 1988) available from UMI <www.umi.com> 1-800-521-0600; Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin: The Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith*, vol.8 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1985 reprint); Thomas Brooks, *Heaven On Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1982 reprint); Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Saved in Eternity: The Assurance of Our Salvation: Studies in Jesus' Prayer for His Own-John 17:1-5* (Westchester: Crossway 1988); J. I. Packer "The Witness of the Spirit in Puritan Thought" in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway 1990); John Gerstner, "Perseverance and Assurance" in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* vol III (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries 1993); Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections: A Christian's Character Before God* edited by James M. Houston (Minneapolis: Bethany 1996).

faith, hope and love, see sin/blindness and repent, see some grounds for joy and rejoice in the changes God has brought, and return to the faith foundation of assurance for clearer sight of God's glory.

Faith Aspect

Doxological Assurance: born again with new delight in the person of the Triune God

In the heart

I come to God "believ[ing] that he is (Heb 11:6): Father, Son & Holy Spirit
I have new affections for the Triune God himself (1 Pet 1:8, 2:4-7; Ps 27:4; Rom 4:20; 1 John 1:3)
I believe Jesus is the "I AM", the Lord (John 8:24, 28, 58; Rom 10:9)
I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31; 1 John 5:1)

In the church & in witness to the world

"I [publicly profess to] know whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1:12)

Historical-Redemptive Assurance: see the glory of the Triune God in his redemptive work

In the heart

I believe that the Bible is God's inerrant revelation of himself through his works (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 3:7-11; 6:13-18)
I believe that the blood of Christ is the punishment-price for my sins and that God demonstrates his love and justice through Christ's death on a cross (Rom 3:25-26; 5:8)
I "believe in my heart God raised [Jesus] from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 1:4; 4:24-5; 8:9-11; 10:9-10) demonstrating God's power to do what he promised (Rom 4:21)
I believe that all the covenant promises of God are "yes" and "Amen" in Christ (2 Cor 1:20)
I know that I have sinned against God; I am unrighteous, justly condemned and without hope except in God's mercy (Ps 51:4; Rom 1:18-32; 3:10, 23; Eph 2:12-13)

In the church & in witness to the world

I 'confess with my mouth Jesus is Lord' (Rom 10:9-10)
I repent for my blindness to the glory of God in Christ and plead for mercy (2 Cor 4:4; Acts 2:36-38; Luke 18:13-14; Acts 20:21; 1 John 1:8-10; Heb 4:16)

Confessional-Declarative Assurance: confess my faith in who the Triune God is and what he has done

In the heart

I am declared justified (Luke 18:13-14; Rom 4:24-5:1; Luke 23:42-43)
My condemnation is removed (Rom 8:1)

In the church & in witness to the world

I am baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit & a member of an evangelical, Bible teaching church (Matt 28:19)
I am entitled to share in rights and privileges of the visible church.

Love Aspect

Evidential Assurance: faith working to show my love to the Triune God by actively imaging his glory

In the heart

I have a heart attitude of love for all the saints, without hypocrisy (Rom 12:9)
I hate sin, am quick to repent, resist temptation, and humble myself (1 John 2:15-17; Jas 4:7-10)
"If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" . . . "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God". . . 'the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' Rom 8:13-16

In the church & in witness to the world

I eagerly seek the fellowship of believers, serve in the church with my gifts, show God's character in the fruits of Spirit, and declare God's glory to all men (Heb 10:25; 1 Pet 4:10-11; Gal 5:6, 22-23; Ps 96:3)
I submit to the correction of others, prevent others from sin, endure suffering in faith (2 Cor 7:10-13; Gal 6:1; Jas 5:20; 1 Pet 1:7-9)

Hope Aspect

Confessional-Future Assurance: fix my hope on dwelling eternally in the glory of the Triune God

In the heart

I am filled with the Holy Spirit, who is the pledge guaranteeing my inheritance (Eph 1:13-14)
I pursue holiness to prepare for the day when my declared identity will become complete reality, when I can perfectly glorify and enjoy God forever (1 John 3:2-3; Ps 16:11; 2 Cor 1:20; 1 Pet 1:13)

My fear of eternal judgment is cast out (1 John 4:17-18; Rom 8:15)

In the church & in witness to the world

I profess that he is able to keep that which I've committed to him until that Day (2 Tim 1:12)
I profess my hope that God will give me a resurrection body and eternal justification, and delight in his presence (1 Cor 15:42-45; Matt 25:34; Ps 16:11; Ps 27:4)

I profess my hope that I will rejoice in the judgment of God upon the wicked (Rev 18:20; Ps 76:10; Rom 9:22-23)

Summary Conclusion:

New-Identity-in-Christ is publicly affirmed when faith, love and hope aspects are publicly observed (1 Thess 1:3; Heb 6:9-11; Gal 5:5-6; 2 Pet 1:1-11). Justification by faith is not the sum total of assurance in Scripture, though it is part of the faith-aspect and starting point for assurance. While we can find verses that declare the *new-identity-in-Christ* with a faith aspect only (John 1:12; Gal 3:26; Also John 3:16; 6:27 list the reward of faith—eternal life), the contexts of these verses clearly link the triad of faith, hope and love for a healthy assurance.⁹ Also each category in the chart has a put-off/put-on component. Put on faith, put off unbelief, unrenewed thinking and false teaching; put on love put off the works of the sin nature; put on hope, put off losing heart and turning away from God in despair.

Warnings Against a False Assurance

Jonathan Edwards gets even more specific on the problems with granting people assurance of salvation without any holiness of life based on scriptural evidences, such as Second Peter 1:3-11 where assurance is attained by evidences [holy frames] of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

[False assurance] is much more immovable than a gracious assurance; a true assurance is not upheld, but by the soul being kept in a holy frame [attitudes and behaviors], and grace maintained in lively exercise. If the actings of grace do much decay in the Christian, and he falls into a lifeless frame, he loses his assurance: but this confidence of hypocrites will not be shaken by sin; they (at least some of them) will maintain their boldness in hope, in the most corrupt frames and wicked ways; which is a sure evidence of their delusion. . . .

They therefore directly thwart God's wise and gracious constitution of things [that when we love God, assurance grows and fear of damnation and lusts decrease], who exhort others to be confident in their hope, when in dead frames; under a notion of *living by faith*, and *not by sight*, and *trusting God in the dark*, and *living upon Christ and not their experiences*; and who warn them not to doubt of their good estate, lest they should be guilty of the dreadful sin of unbelief. It has a direct tendency to establish the most presumptuous hypocrites, and to prevent their ever calling their state in question, how much soever wickedness rages—reigns in their hearts, and prevails in their lives—under a notion of honouring God, by *hoping against hope*, and confidently trusting in God, when things look very dark. And, doubtless, vast has been the mischief that has been done this way.¹⁰

. . . But as to what you say, or seem to intimate, of a person's being confident of his own good estate, as being the way to be delivered from darkness, deadness, backsliding, and prevailing iniquity, I think, whoever supposes this to be God's method of delivering his saints, when sunk into an evil, careless, carnal, and unchristian frame, first to assure them of their good estate and his favor, while

⁹ Though not summarized and categorized in the same way, Jonathan Edwards' *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1986 reprint) gives most of these same principles as signs of true conversion and thus grounds for solid assurance. Also Jonathan Edwards' *Charity and its Fruits* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1996 reprint) has an excellent chapter on the mutual dependence of faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13 entitled "All the Graces of Christianity Connected" pp. 268-284.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "Great Confidence is no Certain Sign that Affections are Right" in *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, part II, sect. 11 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1974) pp. 258, 260.

they yet remain in such a frame, and to make *that* the means of their deliverance, does surely mistake God's method of dealing with such persons. Among all the multitudes I have had opportunity to observe, I never knew one dealt with after this manner. I have known many brought back from great declension, that appeared to me to be true saints, but it was in a way very different from this. *In the first place*, conscience has been awakened, and they have been brought into great fear of the wrath of God, having his favor hid, and they have been subjects of a kind of new work of humiliation, brought to a great sense of their deserving of God's wrath, even while they have yet feared it, before God has delivered them from the apprehension of it, and comforted them with a renewed sense of his favor.¹¹

Much counseling theology is drawn from this same style of *faith-aspect assurance* teaching that Edwards critiques in that assurance of "new-identity in Christ" is granted to all who say "I believe in Jesus." Neil Anderson's¹² counseling approach assumes a similar approach to assurance of salvation and defeat of sin by making a "freedom appointment" of 3-5 hours where a person is led through seven steps to freedom in Christ, including self-statements which grant assurance of this new-identity to the one who recites these steps, prayers and verses, *apart from any testing for evidence of holiness or love for the glory of God*. "I believe that I am now a child of God (1 John 3:1-3) and that I am seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6)."¹³ This approach is particularly problematic when counselors use the method on complete strangers in a first-time office visit, outside the informed context of a local church fellowship, where time and trials have tested counselees for fruits of faith, hope and love.

The written counseling theology in the *Sonship Training Program*¹⁴ centers on justification (*my* declared identity in Christ) as the foundation for sanctification (*my* changed behavior in Christ): "The redeemed sinner grows in his sanctification as he learns to rely ever more self-consciously upon Christ and His work of justification. . . . Sanctification, then, is strengthened as the believer relies only on Christ's justification and his union with Christ." What emerges in the students of *Sonship* is a theology of *assurance of justification* as the foundation of sanctification. The gospel is defined in terms of the things given to the believer: declared righteousness, death and resurrection with Christ, children of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. These new identity gifts must be 'preached to yourself' even when you are constantly sinning. In other words, reassure yourself that you are in fact justified, even when you don't feel like you are justified or see evidence that you are justified.¹⁵ The *Sonship* material is reacting against legalism using Galatians and tries to move people away from works-righteousness. *Sonship* seems to have its best results with cultural Christians who *live* as if Christianity was a system of rules that enable people to earn the favor of God, even though they may formally acknowledge that salvation comes by faith in Christ. But the *Sonship* emphasis on faith as the only ground for new-identity statements goes further than the biblical data will allow, even in Galatians. The believer is trying to transform himself by preaching the assurance of the benefits of salvation to himself. The *Sonship* theological system essentially uses a partial *faith-aspect alone* as grounds for the initial *new identity* statements in the pattern. In the earlier proposed chart of *Aspects of Assurance*, *Sonship* theology grants assurance based on *historical-redemptive* and *confessional-declarative* aspects alone. *Sonship* theology will tend to create imbalanced assurance since the grounds for the initial *new identity* statements are not based on the New Testament triad of faith, hope and love. Further the model for sanctification seems to fit the example that Edwards criticized above: the way to recover from sinful habits is to never question your salvation, but instead to assure yourself that you are saved regardless of evidence to the contrary.

Modern counseling literature is also redefining sin as "the failure to be who you are in Christ."¹⁶ This definition may create a dangerous precedent: a counselor must assume the counselee is a Christian before his definition of sin and method of change applies, while simultaneously observing the counselee involved in sinful behavior, giving evidence to negate the counselee's Christian assurance if not his profession of faith. This may produce a system that encourages false assurance of salvation in unconverted people, or at least negates the biblical pattern linking firm assurance with both declarative promises of God and evidential tests for holy living. As sin's grip grows, assurance should rightly decrease; as sin's grip loosens, assurance should increase.

Much modern evangelical counseling theology seems to have missed the goal of *knowing Christ*, and instead

¹¹ John Gerstner, [Letter of Rev. J. Edwards to Rev. Gillespie] in "Perseverance and Assurance" in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* vol III (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries 1993) p. 359.

¹² Neil Anderson, *Helping Other Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura: Regal 1995) 275-97.

¹³ Anderson, 284.

¹⁴ *Sonship* (*World Harvest Mission Leadership Training Program Series*. 222 Pennsylvania Ave, Oreland, PA 1988) p. 108.

¹⁵ *Sonship*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁶ Bobick, p. 177.

has shifted to knowing our *justification by faith for a better self-image*. Justification becomes the focus—my new identity based on benefits gained by Christ for me—missing the heart of the biblical center of the gospel focused on Christ himself! *Justification* becomes more attractive and more motivational than Christ himself. New-identity techniques in counseling need some radical rethinking about the theology of assurance implied or overtly assumed in the methodology, especially since counselors are often counseling people whose lives are bearing the fruits of sin rather than holiness.

David Brainerd¹⁷ writes in a letter to his brother convicting our man-centered age about the selfish use and the biblical use of justification by faith:

Value religious joys according to the *subject matter* of them: there are many who rejoice in their supposed *justification*; but what do these joys argue, but only that they *love themselves*? Whereas in *true* spiritual joys the soul rejoices in God for what he is *in himself*; blesses God for his holiness, sovereignty, power, faithfulness and all his perfection; adores God that he is what he is, that he is unchangeably possessed of infinite glory and happiness. Now when men thus rejoice in the perfections of God, and in the infinite excellency of the way of salvation by Christ, and in the holy commands of God, which are a transcript of his holy nature; these joys are divine and spiritual.

Now we can consider the short hand formula that may capture some of the logic of new-identity-in-Christ as a popular change method.

Gratitude to God for his blessings motivates obedience.
New-identity-in-Christ teaching produces gratitude to God.
Therefore, new-identity-in-Christ should be central to motivating change.

The problem with the formula, in part, is that reciting our blessings in Christ may indeed motivate gratitude, but will not produce real heart change until the glory of God is seen in the blessings. It is sight of the glory of God (that is, *faith aspect-doxological assurance*: we see his beautiful attributes and relations within the Trinity) that is revealed in his blessings that has power to change us into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18-4:6). Every unregenerate person is capable of gratitude (Luke 6:32-4). Gratitude is not something peculiar to Christians alone. The five thousand people whom Jesus fed were grateful, but most of them didn't really change or follow Christ. Blessings alone are insufficient to motivate change. Mankind has received the providential blessings of God since creation, and still many do not repent of their love of the things in the world and turn to love God their Creator and Provider. In fact the nature of sin is to worship the blessings God gives, rather than loving the Blessing-Giver for his own glorious holiness (Rom 1:18-25; John 6:26-7; 2 Cor 4:4-6).

We could make a chart of the false assurance system prevalent in modern counseling theology as follows. Note that the first element of professed faith in this chart represents only fragments of the earlier detailed outline of the aspects of assurance: only parts of the *historical-redemptive* & *confessional-declarative* sections, completely omitting the *doxological faith aspect*, the *love aspect* and the *hope aspect*.

Professed faith in my justification	= inadequate grounds for <i>new-identity</i> statements	false assurance motivates obedience to <i>imperative</i> commands
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Further, note that the New Testament apostles give assurance to believers in the context of epistles to the churches where elders are shepherding the flock. By contrast with today's too familiar counseling context, the chart shows that dispensing new-identity assurance to counselees is not the job of individual counselors disconnected from the context of local church fellowship and local church discipline. Dispensing assurance is not the biblical responsibility or privilege of an individual professional Christian counselor who is unaware of the reality of each counselee's church membership status and submission to the teaching and discipline of the local church. Coupled with the "lone-ranger" professional Christian counselor problem is the added pressure of embarrassed counselees who want to keep their counseling a secret from church leaders and members. These public aspects of assurance (*in the church and in witness to the world*) are strong arguments for keeping a biblical new-identity counseling method closely connected to the corporate observations and conclusions of the local church leaders and members. An imbalanced new-identity method is especially problematic in foreign missions contexts where some missionaries, trained in *Sonship* or who use Anderson's *Freedom Appointment* style, serve as roving counselors in many different churches and fellowships without knowledge of each counselee's church status and reputation.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 2 "David Brainerd's Journal" (Carlisle: Banner of Truth 1974) p. 439.

New-Identity Assurance Tested Through the Faith-Love-Hope Triad

What would it look like if I tried to apply *the complete triad of faith, hope and love tests* to my Christian life or to the lives of people I counsel? The next quote from Brainerd (Edwards 1974, 2:378-9) condenses and applies the biblical triad to see evidence of a healthy assurance in his own life. It seems to be one of the best statements of self-examination for this triad that I have ever read. Brainerd also rebukes a false assurance that claims a verse of Scripture that “God loves me” without an evidence of true conversion (delight in the glory of God).

And as I saw clearly the *truth* of those great doctrines, which are justly styled the *doctrines of grace*; so I saw with no less clearness, that the *essence* of *religion* consisted in the soul’s *conformity to God*, and acting above all selfish views, for *his glory*, longing to be *for him*, to live *to him*, and please and honour *him* in all things: and this from a clear view of his infinite excellency and worthiness *in himself*, to be loved, adored, worshipped, and served by all intelligent creatures. Thus I saw, that when a soul *loves* God with a supreme love, he therein acts *like* the blessed God himself, who most justly loves himself in that manner. So when God’s interest and his are become one, and he longs that God should be *glorified*, and rejoices to think that he is unchangeably possessed of the highest glory and blessedness, herein also he acts in *conformity to God*. In like manner, when the soul is fully *resigned to*, and rests satisfied and contented *with*, the divine will, here it is also *conformed to God*.

I saw further, that as this divine temper, whereby the soul exalts God, and treads self in the dust, is wrought in the soul by God’s discovering his own glorious perfections *in the face of Jesus Christ* to it, by the special influences of the Holy Spirit, so he cannot but have *regard to it*, as his own work; and as it is his image in the soul, he cannot but take *delight* in it. Then I saw again, that if God should slight and reject his own *moral image*, he must needs *deny himself*; which he cannot do. And thus I saw the *stability* and *infallibility* of this religion; and that those who are truly possessed of it, have the most complete and satisfying *evidence* of their being interested in all the benefits of Christ’s redemption, having their hearts *conformed to him*; and that these, these only, are qualified for the employments and entertainments of God’s kingdom of glory; as none but these have any relish for the business of heaven, which is to ascribe glory to God, and not to themselves; and that God (though I would speak it with great reverence of his name and perfection) cannot, without denying himself, finally cast such away.

The next thing I had then to do, was to inquire, whether *this* was *my* religion: and here God was pleased to help me [remember the past few years.] And although I could discover much corruption attending my best duties, many selfish views and carnal ends, much spiritual pride and self-exaltation, and innumerable other evils which compassed about me, yet God was pleased . . . to show me that I had, from time to time, acted above the utmost influence of mere self-love; that I had longed to please him and glorify him, as my highest happiness, & c. . . . I felt now pleased to think of the glory of God, and longed for heaven, as a state wherein I might glorify God perfectly, rather than a place of happiness for myself: and this feeling of the love of God in my heart, which I trust the Spirit of God excited in me afresh, was sufficient to give me full satisfaction, and make me long . . . to be with Christ. I did not now want any of the *sudden suggestions*, which many are so pleased with, “That Christ and his benefits are mine; that God loves me,” &c. in order to give me satisfaction about my state: no, my soul now abhorred those delusions of *Satan*, which are thought to be the *immediate witness of the Spirit*, while there is nothing but an *empty suggestion* of a certain fact, without any gracious discovery of the *divine glory*, or of the *Spirit’s work* in their own hearts.

Here is application of *faith, hope and love aspects of assurance* to daily Christian experience. Particularly, Brainerd emphasized the *doxological faith aspect*. Brainerd believed with Jonathan Edwards that the truly converted love God for the beauty of his holiness, and delight in the excellencies of his divine glory in the face of Christ Jesus by the power of the Spirit. Saints draw their assurance of salvation from the fact that this delight in God’s glory is the work of saints in heaven and God cannot turn away those who have his image stamped on their souls. Saints reject any notions of assurance that would claim verses of Scripture as their promises without some evidence of delight in glorifying God for his excellencies.

When can a counselor affirm the *new-identity* assurance to motivate a counselee to obedience? *New identity* assurance, legitimately based on observed faith, hope and love, can motivate sanctification. We see this pattern used in what is called the *indicative-imperative* structure of the Bible. This structure links the healthy triad-based *new-identity* assurance with commands to live a holy life. After defining the grounds for the Colossians *new-identity* because he observed their faith, hope and love (Col 1:3-5), Paul tells them to live in the reality of their *new-identity*: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ [*indicative new-identity* statement], set your hearts on things above [*imperative* statement here and examples following], where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. . . . Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature . . . Do not lie to each other . . . forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another,” (Col 3:1, 5, 9, 13).

We could make a simple chart of the biblical pattern in this way, where in this chart faith, hope and love are representative of the detailed aspects of assurance listed in the earlier outline:

Faith				
Hope	=	Biblical grounds	+	Motivation for obedience
Love		for <i>new-identity</i> statements		to <i>imperative</i> commands

Theological Reflections on Assurance

Biblical assurance is based on both *faith-hope aspects*—that God will be merciful to repentant sinners—as well as *love aspects*--the imprint of God’s holiness on the soul whereby we love God in his glorious holiness and evidence the holiness of his character (Lk 18:13-14; Heb 12:14; 2 Pet 1:3-11; I John 3:2-3; 4:17). *The Westminster Confession of Faith* chapter 18 is a concise statement on assurance of salvation based on faith, hope and love (my italics highlight faith, hope and love themes).

Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation; which hope of their shall perish; yet such as truly *believe* in the Lord Jesus, and *love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him*, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the *hope of the glory of God*; which hope shall never make them ashamed.

This certainty is . . . an infallible assurance of *faith*, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the *inward evidences* of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which *Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance*, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

What is the standard text for understanding the biblical doctrine of assurance of salvation? J.I. Packer¹⁸ writes a concise overview of two aspects of assurance of sonship from Romans 8:16, one of the key texts for understanding assurance. The Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit in a distinct and immediate testimony of our sonship and our own spirits bear witness to the reality of conversion by the evidence of a renewal after the image of the Triune God. Usually the two witnesses (the Holy Spirit and our spirits) together confirm salvation and increase assurance. Where either witness is lacking, assurance of salvation should not remain stable or increase. Because the heart is so easily deceived, assurance must be tested by the doctrinal and ethical criteria of Scripture—1 John lists many (1 John 2:3, 29; 3:6-10, 14, 18-21; 4:7-8, 15-16; 5:1-4, 18).

Even as modern counseling theology focuses on saving faith, this focus is not a complete foundation for faith. Popular counseling theology focuses on the *faith-aspect historical-redemptive assurance* alone which only sees the isolated truths to be believed without seeing the *faith-aspect doxological assurance*, that is, the glory of God in and behind those doctrines (see earlier outline on aspects of assurance). Truth is believed, but there is not an apprehension of spiritual beauty in God displayed in the truth. “Devils are fully capable of wanting to escape hell and believe that someone died to make a way for them. But they are not capable of believing this out of delight in the holiness and mercy of God that brought about this redemption.”¹⁹ False assurance of salvation that “Jesus died for me” lacks any delight in the beauty of God’s glory; there is only a fragmented, self-focused use of doctrine.²⁰ True saving faith is linked with other affections toward God: trust, love, fear, hope, waiting, crying out, humbled, drawing near, delight, taking refuge, and keeping his covenant.²¹ So in the promises of God, “it is not merely the *security* of the promises that frees us from motives to sin; but also the *sweetness* of the beauty of God in the promises.”²² Also the threats of God free us from temptation and sin when we savor the justice of God in the threats.²³ We must see the faithfulness of Christ in justification, delight in him, and show how this delight in Christ is the faith that works through love.²⁴ This faith-delight transforms the heart by

¹⁸ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press 1993) pp. 226-7.

¹⁹ John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Portland: Multnomah 1995) p. 203.

²⁰ Piper, 203, 325.

²¹ Piper, p. 252.

²² Piper, p. 204.

²³ Piper, p. 205.

²⁴ Piper, p. 281.

being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus, draining the power of fear, guilt and greed, bringing in a new passion to enjoy God's grace and express God's grace in loving actions.²⁵ "Saving faith is not merely believing *that* you are forgiven. Saving faith means tasting this forgiveness as part of the way God is and experiencing it (and him!) as precious and magnificent."²⁶

Discerning Differing Pastoral Applications of Justification by Faith from Applications of Assurance

What then is the difference between justification by faith and assurance?²⁷ Put simply, justification by faith is what God does for believers through the act of resting and relying on his promises. God justifies believing sinners because of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 4:24-5:1). Justification is the pardoning, reconciling work of God in which he imputes Christ's righteousness to a believer's account, removing his condemnation under the curse of the law and justice of God (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21). Assurance is a conscious, Spirit-testifying-with-my-spirit awareness that I am pleasing to God, normally attained by evidence of his Spirit conforming me to the image of God, working faith, hope and love in me (2 Pet 1:3-11; 1 Cor 13:13).²⁸ The *Aspects of Assurance* chart indicates that justification is a subset of the *faith aspect* of assurance. Assurance is based on faith, love and hope, all of which are the gifts of God by his Holy Spirit. Healthy assurance is not guaranteed to every believer and it wavers under conditions of doubt, sin, despair, or unwillingness to repent. Thus we can promise people that God is a sin-pardoning God, and upon repentance and confession of sin, that 'God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). However, based on the biblical teaching about healthy assurance, or parables like the seed and soils (Matt 13:3-23) we would be wise counselors to tell sinners who have just repented or made a first-time commitment to Christ that they appear to be like tender sprouts needing to grow, but facing many immediate dangers of suffering or the cares of the world, but only time will tell if they will grow to bear fruit for God. Counselors can promise people that God is faithful to forgive sins, but individual counselors, especially those who are outside of the church context, cannot promise people that they are entitled to full assurance of all the names and titles of the *new-identity in Christ* based on bare profession of faith. Assurance requires faith, hope and love believed in the heart, confessed in the church, and declared in the world.

If God imputes the righteousness of Christ, then does he not also impute the *new-identity* names and titles of Christ to a believer? God does this also! Then does this invalidate this whole point of this article that the *new-identity* names and titles of Christ should be used more cautiously based on the triad evidences of faith, love and hope? On three grounds the caution and critique still stand. First the modern evangelical counseling *requirement of faith* lacks the doxological foundation of loving God as beautiful in himself, which is part of saving faith, such as the John 1:12-14 reference would clearly include—a saving faith which sees the glory of Christ, full of grace and truth.²⁹ Christ must also be precious and lovely to the eye of faith (1 Pet 1:8; 2:4-7; Heb 11:6). Profession of faith in historical redemptive truths alone is insufficient to grant the titles of the *new identity*—the demons believe as much and are not saved (Jas 2:19).³⁰ The demons are incapable of treasuring and loving the holy Triune God they believe exists. Second, the previous examples of New Testament use of the *new-identity* names shows a balanced evidence of the triad of faith, love and hope in the church before the apostle uses them, and a very infrequent use of the *new-identity* names with faith alone (for example, John 1:12; Gal 3:26).³¹ But even in the case of *new-identity* names used with faith alone, that faith is never *alone*—the contexts also show hope and

²⁵ Piper, pp. 282-4.

²⁶ Piper, pp. 269.

²⁷ See also *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 77 on the difference between justification and sanctification.

²⁸ See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (Kingway: Eastbourne UK, 1985) pp. 33-80 for a view that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was an extraordinary Spirit-worked assurance of the love of God and assured hope in the glory of God additional to and superior to the normal evidences of faith, love and hope (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:19).

²⁹ See also a very similar doctrinal controversy 200 years earlier against a bare faith-alone type justification divorced from love for God and love for the truth (John 5:42; 8:42; 2 Thess 2:10; Rom 4:20; 1 Pet 1:8; 2:4-7), which directly affected their views on assurance in D.M. Lloyd-Jones *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, a chapter on "Sandemanianism" pp. 170-190, especially p. 187.

³⁰ See *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 2 (Banner of Truth: Carlisle 1974), "True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils" pp. 41-50.

³¹ Though beyond the scope of this article, it would be helpful to explore the contextual and pastoral implications for these infrequent *new-identity* statements linked to faith.

love aspects. Third, the biblical examples applying justification to believers in the New Testament do not validate the *new-identity* method as it is popularized in modern evangelical counseling. These biblical examples must be considered in greater detail.

Consider some of the biblical applications of the doctrine of justification. Paul used the doctrine of justification to reveal the righteousness of God (Rom 1:17; 3:25-6; 10:3). Paul used it to encourage those who felt their sins were too great to be forgiven, who felt they were still under the condemnation of God even after repenting of repeated sins (Rom 7:7-8:1). Jesus used it with sinners who commonly measured themselves against the religious people of their day and felt unworthy to approach God in comparison to those who appeared to be saints (Luke 18:13-4). Paul used it to restore repentant believers (who had been under church discipline) to full communing status (2 Cor 2:5-11; 5:16-21). Paul and Jesus used it to encourage believers weakened by the burden of suffering, accused by Satan or his servants of being unworthy of God's mercy; these weak and heavy-laden sinners God wants to refresh by the love of God in pardoning their sins, lest they feel separated from God's gracious love (Rom 8:18, 28-39 in context; Matt 11:28-30). The writer of Hebrews used it to encourage people to draw near to God through Christ for grace and mercy to help them in time of need, guilty-feeling people who feared that a holy and righteous God would not accept sinners except through the Old Testament sacrificial system (Heb 4:14-6; 10:19-22). Paul used the doctrine of justification to warn against legalism—we cannot obtain salvation by works, but by faith in Christ (Gal 2:16-21; Rom 10:3-4).

How do we use this doctrine of justification in pastoral counseling? These examples indicate that if we want to use the *new-identity* names in counseling based on a profession of faith alone, we ought to limit their uses to those who fit within the biblical and pastoral applications above: encouraging those with weak faith to come to God in assurance that he forgives sins and will have mercy on those who repent. Based on the range of examples in the paragraph above, the doctrine of justification as the imputation of the *new-identity* names can be explained to counselees as the truth of the gospel, but should not be used by counselors to guarantee that a particular counselee is assuredly entitled to these names and titles. If counselees do not have a humble heart, do not fear God, or believe in their heart Christ is raised from the dead or confess with their mouths "Jesus is Lord" or do not have a faith that considers Christ as precious and lovely, then these are further evidences that no such assurances can be given that these names and titles belong to that counselee. Even within the *faith-aspect*, the names and titles of the *new-identity* contain the seed of assurance and should be tested for more than a bare profession of belief in truth to use them appropriately. Counselors should see evidence of *doxological, historical-redemptive, and confessional-declarative aspects of faith* to use the *new-identity* names and titles in Christ with counselees (see the earlier chart listing these categories).

However, one key problem with modern *new-identity* application is that counselors are *confusing* the pastoral applications of the doctrine of assurance with the applications of the doctrine of justification. *New-identity* metaphors in the New Testament seem to be more closely linked with assurance than with justification by faith, as noted in a previous section of this article. Assurance is the result of faith, hope and love working in healthy cooperation. Assurance is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are God's children (Rom 8:16). If counselors are using the *new-identity* technique in ways popularized by Neil Anderson, Robert McGee or *Sonship* as justification by a bare confession of belief in doctrine, not only are the grounds for assured justification imbalanced, but also the technique is trying to carry the weight of the pastoral applications that should be reserved for the healthy doctrine of assurance.

Consider the example of Jack, with his gambling problem, mentioned earlier in this article. Given Jack's currently visible behavior and lack of evidence of repentance or motivation to change and submit to church discipline, counselors would be foolish to use the *new-identity* technique popularized by Evangelical counseling. Counselors should not be starting with a pastoral application for the doctrine of assurance with a man who should have lost a good deal of his assurance, or at least showing some fear of God and humility of heart. Telling Jack that he should stop doubting his salvation and that his real problem is that he doesn't believe who he is "in Christ" would be destroying the biblical pattern for assurance linked to healthy faith, hope and love.

Furthermore, in Scripture these *new-identity metaphors are given to the visible, corporate body of Christ*. Paul uses the *new-identity* metaphors with *churches* he knows or has received an accurate report about. The modern *new-identity* counselors following Neil Anderson's methods³² generally apply these metaphors to individual believers in a *freedom appointment* separated from church body life, often with counselees who are not known prior to a counselor's office visit. Counselors ought to be building up a body-of-Christ image in counselees, more than a privatized self-image booster.

Counselors ought to show counselees that if their faith does not already contain love for God, then it is no certain sign of true religious affections if they have gratitude for blessings supposedly given to them in the gospel, since the modern counseling application of truth encourages them to first love the gifts then the Giver. Pasting the *new-identity* names and titles on someone who is not converted may produce a sort of unregenerate gratitude (Luke 6:32-4), but it will not produce change until Christ himself is precious and lovely to them (1 Pet

³² Neil Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura: Regal 1995) 275-97.

1:8; 2:4-7). The point here is that the *new-identity* is an entitlement of a person who loves God for who he is, not simply for what God gives. Since the *new-identity* technique is being used primarily to show a “believer” who the “believer” is, the whole direction of application leads to self first, then to God as an auxiliary to self-image boosting.

Some may object here that emphasizing this triad of graces will make salvation into another form of works righteousness. But because love and hope are also gifts of God, we will not do injustice to the God-centered application of the gospel. I am not proposing a new type of works righteousness. Faith, love and hope all come from God by the Holy Spirit’s work. Healthy assurance will be founded on a more careful evidence of the image of God reflected on, in and through a person.

