

# FULL ASSURANCE

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that the doctrine of assurance of salvation is at the center of the debate between Reformed and Arminian theologies on one side and Free Grace (FG) theology on the other. When stating the Grace Evangelical Society's *raison d'être*, this affirmation was included:

The assurance of eternal salvation is based only on the promises God makes in His Word that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone possesses eternal life. Good works, which can and should follow regeneration, are not necessary to a firm assurance of eternal life even though they may have a secondary, confirmatory value.<sup>1</sup>

This formulation of the doctrine of assurance is a hallmark of FG theology. If this formulation is abandoned, the entire theology collapses. Thus FG proponents have clarified and defended this crucial doctrine even when besieged by Reformed or Arminian scholars.

To this point the debate about assurance has been largely confined to questions about the grounds of assurance<sup>2</sup> and how assurance intersects


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<sup>1</sup> Arthur L. Farstad, "An Introduction To Grace Evangelical Society And Its Journal" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 1:1 (Autumn 1988), 7.

<sup>2</sup> When reduced to clear and simple propositional statements, Reformed theology posits sanctified living as the grounds of assurance. The position is more nuanced than that, of course. Those who defend the Reformed position will assert that the regenerate believer will *necessarily and without fail* manifest the regenerate nature in sanctified living. Sanctified living is proof of a regenerate nature and, *ergo*, evidence of God's elective intent. Arminianism posits sanctified living as the means by which our salvation is preserved. While there is a distinction between the two views the Reformed position sees sanctification as *proof* of salvation whereas the Arminian position sees it as *preservation* of salvation there is no material difference. Only those who persevere in sanctified living have any grounds for assurance of their salvation.

faith.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between assurance and sanctification has received less attention.<sup>4</sup> This is unfortunate because assurance is a rich doctrine with broad implications beyond certainty about the believer's eschatological fate. Assurance intersects doctrines as diverse as boldness in prayer,<sup>5</sup> confidence to approach God,<sup>6</sup> courage in the face trial,<sup>7</sup> and perseverance motivated by hope.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, assurance is a significant component in the believer's sanctification.

This paper will argue that there is a *fuller assurance* all believers may acquire subsequent to salvation; it is in addition to the *initial assurance* all believers experience in justification.<sup>9</sup> Colossians 2:1-3 and 4:12 will be examined in support of this argument.

In this paper the term "full(er) assurance" will not indicate greater intensity or degree of faith. It will indicate either additional information which is believed or additional evidence which confirms faith. In the first case, the one possessing full assurance believes *other things* in addition to the promise of salvation. In the second,  certainty rests on additional evidence learned after believing. Both cases increase the likelihood of continuing in sanctified living.

## II. FULL ASSURANCE IN COLOSSIANS

The translations of Col 2:2 and 4:12 use the expression "full assurance."

### A. COLOSSIANS 2:2

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,<sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being

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<sup>3</sup> The FG position has been an echo of Calvin's view that assurance is of the essence of faith. Assurance and faith are both seen as synonyms for *certainty*.

<sup>4</sup> This is no doubt due to the fact that FG proponents find themselves waging a pitched battle over the doctrine in its relationship to justification.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:22.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:21, compare Exod 3:5.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Eph 6:10.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 6:11.

<sup>9</sup> I have chosen the phrase "that all believers experience" carefully. It reflects my view that assurance, conviction and faith are either essentially synonymous, or that their fields of meaning are largely convergent in the matter of the faith that results in justification.

knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Before focusing on the phrase “all riches of the full assurance of understanding”<sup>11</sup> in order to explore its relationship to sanctification, we must first observe the immediate context.

### *1. Paul sought full assurance for the Colossian believers.*

By beginning verse 1 with the word “for,” Paul transitions from a general statement about his apostolic ministry (1:24-29) to his struggle on behalf of the Colossian believers. Verse two states that the purpose of the struggle was to strengthen their hearts.

Paul struggled so that the Colossian believers would be strengthened. This is the meaning of the phrase “that their hearts may be encouraged.”

<sup>12</sup> When translating the Greek verb *parakaleō* modern English Bibles prefer the word “encouraged” while earlier translations prefer “comfort.”

<sup>13</sup> It is doubtful that Paul had either comfort or encouragement in mind. There is no mention that the Colossian believers were subject to persecution which would have called for comfort. Nor is there any suggestion that they were discouraged, which would have called for encouragement. Dunn’s comment is convincing.

Given the train of thought running through to 2:5, there is probably an implication that with such “full assurance” in their understanding of this mystery, the attractiveness of the “seductive speech” of other religious philosophers (2:4) will be all the less.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted all quotations will be from the NKJV.

<sup>11</sup> Concatenative genitives can be somewhat complicated. Each succeeding genitive depends on its predecessor, making for a sometimes convoluted analysis.

<sup>12</sup> “Being knit together” (Gr. *sumbibasthentes*) is usually treated as an adverbial participle of means, modifying the verb *parakaleō* because it does not agree in gender with “heart” (Gr. *kardia*) or in case with “their” (Gr. *autōn*). Grammatically it might be a nominative *ad sensum*, stating an additional purpose of Paul’s struggle.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek verb *parakaleō* in the passive voice (as here) often has the idea of *giving comfort* (KJV, ASV) or *encouragement* (so NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV).

<sup>14</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 131.

In light of Paul's warnings "lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4) and "let no one cheat you of your reward" (2:18) and his admonition "as you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (2:6), it appears Paul was concerned lest they be fooled by false teaching and led into behaviors unfitting for believers. Abbot says, "It was not consolation that was required, but confirmation in the right faith."<sup>15</sup> Paul wanted to make sure that they continued in sanctified living based on correct biblical doctrine.

After establishing the fact that he struggled to strengthen the Colossian believers in sound doctrine and sanctified living, the apostle then explains how this strengthening would occur.

The Colossian believers would be strengthened by gaining "riches." The intricate phrase "*attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding" is subordinate to Paul's statement of purpose; it explains what must happen in order for them to be strengthened. The NKJV translators inserted the word "attaining" to clarify a prepositional phrase which indicates movement.<sup>16</sup> We are strengthened as we move toward "riches" (*ploutos*).

The riches are "full assurance." The prepositional phrase "of the full assurance" can be understood as describing the "riches" in several ways, but two interpretations are most likely. It either describes the *source* of the riches ("the riches which *come from* full assurance") or it *specifies* the riches ("the riches which *are* full assurance").<sup>17</sup> Since either option makes good sense in the context, syntax does not determine the correct interpretation. Given the relative rarity of the genitive of source, the

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<sup>15</sup> T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 238.

<sup>16</sup> The Gr. preposition *eis* here probably retains a spatial nuance, suggesting direction toward a goal, EDNT 1:389. The goal is often a state of being, BAGD, 229. This tells us that "full assurance" is a goal toward which believers move. It is thus different from and in addition to the initial assurance which is a component of saving faith.

<sup>17</sup> Here the expegetical infinitive "of the full assurance" gives a specific example of the larger and somewhat ambiguous head term, "the riches." In other words, certain riches are available to the believer, among which is "full assurance." To possess full assurance is to possess "riches."

epexegetical genitive is preferred.<sup>18</sup> The riches Paul wanted for the Colossians are “full assurance.”

Full assurance arises from insight into God’s mystery. Reading the phrase “of understanding” as reference to the source of full assurance makes good sense in this context. Full assurance comes from understanding (Gr. *súnesis*) or comprehending<sup>19</sup> God’s mystery.<sup>20</sup> Concerned for their sanctification, Paul adjures these believers to seek the wealth of conviction that results from greater insight into God’s mystery.<sup>21</sup>

The question naturally arises as to what Paul may have meant by his use of the term *mystery*. Mystery is probably not a technical term always pointing to the same referent.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere it pertains to a “joint-body” comprised of Jews and Gentiles<sup>23</sup> who share in the inheritance on an equal basis (Eph 3:3-6); to Israel’s partial hardening in this dispensation (Rom 11:25-26); to the summation of all things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10); to the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:32); to the Rapture of the Church (1 Cor 15:51); and to other previously unknown truths. The mystery in Col 2:2 probably looks back to the earlier use of the term in 1:26-27, which refers to the resurrected Christ dwelling with the

<sup>18</sup> According to Wallace the genitive of source is relatively rare in the New Testament, but his test of supplying the paraphrase “derived from” seems to work nicely in this verse. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, electronic edition (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Louw-Nida 32.6. EDNT suggests that the word, which appears 7 times in the NT, usually refers to God-given insight.

<sup>20</sup> This is an objective genitive.

<sup>21</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1982), 93.

<sup>22</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, “Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians Part V: The Minister of the Mystery” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:475 (Jul – Sep 1962), 231-32 may be friendly to the notion that the term isn’t a technical term but one whose specific referent is defined by context. He observes that *mustērion* is simply a truth which is unknowable apart from divine revelation. The content of the revelation, the mystery, is determined in the context. I find myself resisting the temptation to load the term with theological freight drawn from other texts which were unavailable to the Colossian readers.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Ryrie, “The Mystery in Ephesians 3” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (Jan-Mar 1966), 127.

believers.<sup>24</sup> If so, Paul was urging the believers to obtain the wealth of conviction that comes from understanding that Christ dwells with them. This was *additional information* they were to incorporate into their faith subsequent to having believed in Christ for salvation. By doing so, they would improve their chances of persevering in sanctified living.

This brief analysis of Col 2:2 results in several preliminary conclusions. First, this passage has sanctification in view. Second, sanctification is strengthened by gaining full assurance. Third, full assurance stems from understanding Christ's presence among believers. Fourth, full assurance attenuates the likelihood of being defrauded and increases the likelihood of continued sanctified living.

Before pressing on to Col 4:12 let's briefly examine the lexical meaning of the noun "full assurance" and its related verb "to be fully assured" and then observe their usage in biblical contexts to see if they can bear the weight that the argument in this paper places on them.

2. "*Full assurance*" points to "*certainty*" and "*evidence which justifies certainty*." The noun "full assurance" is relatively infrequent, appearing in only three other verses outside of Colossians.<sup>25</sup> The verb "to fully assure" appears only six times in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup>

Let's first look at the uses of the noun "full assurance" (*plērophoria*). The semantic range for the noun encompasses the concepts of "fullness" and "certainty."<sup>27</sup> The lexicons favor "full assurance" and "certainty" as the primary dictionary definition. BAGD lists this first yet concedes that "the meaning fullness is also possible."<sup>28</sup> "Complete certainty" is listed as the only semantic domain for the word in Louw Nida.<sup>29</sup> Although the dictionaries and lexicons provide a helpful starting point, context is always the final arbiter of word meaning. The challenge in each context is to determine which semantic field the author had in mind when using the word.

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<sup>24</sup> The "in you" here probably means "among you" or "in your midst," cf. BAGD, 258. This verse vaguely echoes the exhortation of Heb 6:11 to persist in sanctification until our hope is realized.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Heb 6:11, 10:22.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 1:1; Rom 4:21, 14:5; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 17.

<sup>27</sup> EDNT, 3:107.

<sup>28</sup> BAGD, 670.

<sup>29</sup> LN, I:370.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 employs the term to refer to evidence that accompanied the gospel proclamation: “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in *much assurance*, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” The Holy Spirit’s power was supplemented with “much assurance.” This “much assurance” was the godly conduct of Paul and his cohorts. Their godly lives offered the Thessalonians additional grounds of certainty.<sup>30</sup>

Hebrews 6:11 reads “we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the *full assurance* of hope until the end.” This text comes at the end of a lengthy exhortation that began at 5:11, urging the readers to remain confident in Christ.<sup>31</sup> The readers are being urged to manifest diligence in sanctified living until their hope is fully realized.<sup>32</sup> Here the word conveys the sense of “fullness” or “fulfillment” rather than “certainty.”

Hebrews 10:22 exhorts us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Because our High Priest mediated the New Covenant for us (9:15), entered the Holy Place with his own blood to obtain our redemption (9:12), and cleansed us for service (9:14) once and for all (10:11-14), we enter the presence of God boldly (10:19) with unwavering steadfastness (10:23). This is a direct application of our High Priest’s sacrifice to the believer’s daily life. A clear understanding of what our High Priest accomplished provides the ability to remain loyal to him regardless of circumstances.<sup>33</sup> In this context the word shares the same meaning Paul had in mind when he wrote Colossians 2:2. It points to

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<sup>30</sup> “In full assurance” is a metonymy of the effect where the effect (certainty) is put for the cause (the evidence). Chapter 2 outlines Paul’s conduct which gave them *additional reason* to believe the gospel claims thus constituting a “fuller assurance.” The adverb *kathōs* may be understood in one of two ways here. It may bear a causal force to indicate that their knowledge of Paul’s character (“what kind of men we were”) increased their certainty about the truth of his message. It might also serve a comparative function to indicate a direct relationship between their degree of knowledge of Paul’s character and their certainty about the truth of his message.

<sup>31</sup> William L. Lane *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 145.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews - Part 3: The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 #579 (July - September 1988), 327.

<sup>33</sup> W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 286.

certainty based on keen understanding that increases the likelihood of continued sanctified living.

The verb “to fully assure” (plērophoreō) also has two primary fields of meaning. “Fill (completely)” is listed as the first definition in the lexicons.<sup>34</sup> “To convince fully” or “to be convinced” is listed as an additional definition. Again, the challenge is to determine which meaning is indicated by the term in its contexts.

Either definition makes good sense in Luke 1:1, and both find support among the commentators. The NKJV’s “inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which *have been fulfilled* among us” is accompanied by an alternate reading of “*are most surely believed.*” The perfect passive participle is easily understood as pointing to the achievement of prophetic events in accordance with God’s plan. Read in this way, Luke’s use of the perfect tense signals events that have been brought to a successful conclusion.<sup>35</sup> The passive voice suggests that God has been at work in these events.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, Luke was primarily concerned with events that Jesus began<sup>37</sup> and continued to push forward through time through the Church<sup>38</sup>, it is most likely that this text refers to the fulfillment of prophecy.

There is less support for the alternate meaning which reads this as a reference to the disciples’ settled conviction<sup>39</sup> that the facts purported about Jesus are true.<sup>40</sup> The Wycliffe Bible Commentary notes that “the phrase may mean ‘things fulfilled,’ but has the sense of ‘things that are taken for granted as true,’ or ‘the acknowledged facts of the case.’<sup>41</sup>

Romans 4:21 is very helpful when trying to understand the meaning of *plērophoreō*. Speaking of Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of many descendants, it reads:

<sup>34</sup> BAGD, 670; EDNT, 3:107; Liddell and Scott, 647.

<sup>35</sup> John Noland, *Luke 1-9:20*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 7.

<sup>36</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 41.

<sup>37</sup> Note his emphasis in Acts 1:1 on “all that Jesus began to do and to teach.”

<sup>38</sup> Darrell F. Bock, *Luke, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 56.

<sup>39</sup> So the perfect tense.

<sup>40</sup> This is within the semantic range of the term.

<sup>41</sup> C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962).



<sup>19</sup> And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being *fully convinced* that what He had promised He was also able to perform. <sup>22</sup> And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Romans 4:3 says Abraham "believed God."<sup>42</sup> He accepted God's promise as true.<sup>43</sup> But Abraham's certainty was challenged by the facts at hand. Although God had promised innumerable descendants (Gen 12:2, 15:5), his wife was barren, he thought himself incapable of fathering children, and he had no heir. Had Abraham focused<sup>44</sup> on these facts, his faith may have "weakened," allowing doubt about God's promise. But he refused to dwell on these things. As a result, Abraham's faith was "strengthened."<sup>45</sup> Because Abraham refused to give way to doubt, God met his faith with a gracious gift of greater confidence.<sup>46</sup> This introduces the idea that faith waxes and wanes, depending on which facts are the object of our focus. Conviction weakens when we focus on facts that seem contrary to God's promises. It strengthens when we focus on the God who promises.

Romans 14:5 expands the field of meaning of *plērophoreō* to the issue of Christian liberty. Once again the verb means "to be convinced." The weak in faith were regenerate believers who believed the gospel promises for justification, but they were not convinced that Jesus had delivered them from dietary and calendar laws.<sup>47</sup> Although their salvation was secure, their sanctification was in jeopardy because they lacked knowledge which would have produced fuller assurance.

<sup>42</sup> *Pisteuō* plus the dative.

<sup>43</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 196.

<sup>44</sup> "Consider" (Gr. *katanoēō*) conveys the idea of careful observation, often accompanied by thoughtful consideration. BAGD, 415.

<sup>45</sup> The aorist passive here conveys the idea of "being caused to have ability." Louw-Nida 74:6.

<sup>46</sup> Abraham was made strong because of his faith, but it was God who made him strong. See Morris, *Romans*, 212; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 221; Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked* (Springfield, MO: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2005), 96. The point is helpfully illustrated in Gen 18:14. There the Lord asks Abraham, who once again voices his doubt about a male heir, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Then the Lord affirms his promise once again.

<sup>47</sup> Marshall, *Romans*, 477.

Second Timothy 4:5, “fulfill your ministry” and 2 Tim 4:17, “that the message might be preached fully through me” use the word to refer to complete accomplishment. Paul instructed Timothy to complete all his ministry duties (v 5) and finds comfort in the fact that he had been faithful in completing his.<sup>48</sup>

Several conclusions about the word group and Paul’s meaning in Colossians 2:2 are evident. This brief survey justifies the conclusion that “certainty” and “evidence which justifies certainty” are attested fields of meaning. In Heb 10:22 this certainty rests on a clear understanding of the work of Christ. Abraham’s certainty (Rom 4:21) was based on his knowledge of God’s ability to keep his promises in spite of circumstances. The Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 1:5) found additional certainty in Paul’s sanctified life.

Thus, it is fair to say that Col 2:2 teaches that believers are more likely to persevere in sanctified living if they gain full assurance by increasing their understanding of God’s mystery.

#### B. COLOSSIANS 4:12

Paul again posits “full assurance” as the source of sanctified living, rather than vice versa, in Col 4:12: “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”<sup>49</sup> Epaphras “struggled” in prayer in behalf of the Colossians just as Paul did (2:1). The desired end<sup>50</sup> of his prayer was that they might be “made to stand”;<sup>51</sup> that is, they might be established and therefore fixed in place.<sup>52</sup> The place in which they stand is signaled by the prepositional phrase “in all the will of God,” suggesting that sanctification is in view once again. The adjective “perfect” (Gr. *teleios*) and the participle “complete” (Gr. *plērophoreō*) probably function as object complements, defin-

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<sup>48</sup> The “fulfillment” in 2 Tim 4:17 probably refers to the fact that Paul had been commissioned with the task of appearing before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel with the gospel (Acts 9:15) and had faithfully discharged that task. See George King, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 470.

<sup>49</sup> The NKJV “complete” is unfortunate; it should probably read “fully assured.”

<sup>50</sup> *Hina* + subjunctive signals the purpose or goal of his prayer.

<sup>51</sup> The passive voice indicates that the “making to stand” is accomplished in them by God.

<sup>52</sup> BAGD, 382.

ing or describing what kind of people those who are made to stand become.<sup>53</sup>

The first complement, “perfect,” is the easiest to understand. The term appears in Col 1:28 where Paul states that his goal was to present every man as mature. McDougall observes, “If Paul in Col 1:28 used *teleios* to depict ‘maturity’ as a goal of his ministry in each person’s life, it is arguable that he would use it the same way in Col 4:12 as he expresses in prayer his [sic] prayer for them.”<sup>54</sup> Like Paul, Epaphras was solicitous of their sanctification.

“Complete” is an unfortunate word choice by the NKJV translators. Mention of Epaphras’ labor (*agōnizomai*) reminds the reader of Paul’s conflict (*agōn*) in their behalf (2:1). We preserve Paul’s careful parallel between his ministry and that of Epaphras by maintaining related fields of meaning for the verb in 4:12 and the cognate noun in 2:2.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Col 4:12, like 2:2, establishes a causal connection between full assurance and sanctification. Mature believers who are fully assured stand firm in God’s will. Colossians 2:2 explains that greater knowledge about Christ’s relationship to them is the source of full assurance.

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<sup>53</sup> I offer this observation tentatively because the syntax is far from lucid. We have an adjective (“perfect”) and a nominative, passive participle (“complete”) which could be a predicate nominative construction, but for the lack of an equative verb. Wallace notes that in the passive voice certain transitive verbs may function in that capacity and *EDNT* observes that Paul often uses *histēmi* as the functional equivalent of a stative verb, but stringing two bare possibilities together doesn’t inspire a lot of confidence. Even though the syntax may barely allow *teleios* and *plērophoreō* to function as predicate nominatives, it is hard to see how they might equate with the implied subject of the verb. But there is also risk in reading this, as I do here, as an object complement. The problem, of course, is that the participle is in the nominative case rather than the accusative. But functionally this seems to make the most sense to me. As object complements, they tell what the believer who has been made to stand become – mature and fully convinced.

<sup>54</sup> Donald G. McDougall, “Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12” *The Masters’ Seminary Journal* 14:2 (Fall 2003), 203.

<sup>55</sup> Contra O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 254 and Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, 133-34.

## II. CONCLUSION

If these observations in Col 2:2 and 4:12 are correct and if the survey of how the salient terms are used in biblical context is accurate, then we can feel confident in the following conclusions.

First, full assurance does not refer to a greater intensity or higher degree of faith than initial assurance but rather to a broader field of things believed. Faith does not come in degrees; one is either persuaded that biblical assertions are true or not. Second, initial assurance is believing the promise of salvation, but full assurance is believing additional truths. As our understanding of Christ grows, our assurance becomes fuller because we become certain of more biblical truths. Third, full assurance is not guaranteed. It is obtained through study and reflection. In this regard, it differs from the initial assurance that all believers experience. Fourth, since full assurance was a serious apostolic concern, the ministry of prayer and doctrinal teaching is a grave pastoral responsibility.

### A. AN ILLUSTRATION

Luke 7:36-50 illustrates the distinction between assurance and full assurance. In this story the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a penitent sinner who approaches the Lord at a banquet. Her gestures of public humiliation and loving attendance upon his feet reveal her faith in Jesus. She recognizes that Jesus is her savior.<sup>56</sup> Since Luke builds his story on the principle that faith in Jesus is required for the forgiveness of sins, we are safe in presuming that this woman's sins were forgiven *before* she approached the Lord. Furthermore, she was already assured that her sins were forgiven because she was convinced that the promise of forgiveness was true.

And yet the Lord granted her fuller assurance in the form of an additional reason to believe. Not only had she heard his preaching to the crowds and believed the general promise of forgiveness promised to all who believe, now she had the words of Jesus spoken directly to her.

The knowledge of her forgiveness was hardly equal, however, to direct assurance that her sins had been forgiven; here is the value of Jesus' personal word to the woman at v 48. This personal word of Jesus to the

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<sup>56</sup> John J. Kilgallen, "Forgiveness of Sins (Luke 7:36-50)" *Novum Testamentum* 40 (April 1998), 108.

woman represents a degree of clarity, assuredness about her state which excels the knowledge she had by trusting; now she most clearly knows!<sup>57</sup>

#### B. THE FINAL WORD

Assurance is the possession of all believers who are convinced that the gospel promise is true. Full assurance is reserved for those who gain a deeper understanding of Christ or who gather additional reasons to believe. Those who are fully assured are more likely to remain steadfast in their daily walk with Christ.

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<sup>57</sup> Kilgallen, 110.