

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 80.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #80. *Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?*

A. Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before him,¹ may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made,² and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God,³ be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.⁴

Question 1—*What is the nature of assurance?*

Answer—Assurance is opposed to doubting, which is inconsistent with it, 1 Thess. 1:5. He who has attained this privilege, is carried above all those doubts and fears respecting the truth of grace, and his interest in the love of God, which others are exposed to, and by which their lives are rendered very uncomfortable, 2 Pet. 1:10. It may be considered also as containing something more than our being enabled to hope that we are in a state of grace, Heb. 3:6, 14; for though such hope affords relief against despair, yet it falls short of assurance, which is sometimes called a full assurance of hope, Heb. 6:11, 12.

Question 2—*What is the attainableness of assurance?*

Answer—From the goodness of God, we can deduce that, if the knowledge of other things which are less important be attainable, such as he has given us sufficient means to lead us into the knowledge of things which respect our comfort and happiness in this world, Matt. 6:31, 32; and, that he may encourage the faith of his people, gives them assurance that they shall not be faced with extraordinary temptations, 1 Cor. 10:13; then, may we conclude that assurance of those things which concern their everlasting salvation may also be attained, Heb. 6:18.

Some have attained the privilege of assurance, 2 Tim. 1:12; and therefore it is not impossible for others to attain it, for thus the apostle argues, 1 Thess. 5:9. Our Saviour has promised his people the Spirit to perform what is necessary for carrying on the work of grace in all ages, John 14:26. Furthermore, he says that this Spirit brings to that necessary knowledge regarding salvation, 1 John 2:20; even the privilege of assurance of that salvation, 1 Cor. 2:12.

Furthermore, that without an extraordinary effusion of the Spirit or some extraordinary revelation, those who are admitted to such privilege may possess an infallible assurance that they are in a state of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation, 1 John 5:13.

¹ 1 John 2:3.

² 1 Cor. 2:12; 1 John 3:14, 18, 19, 21, 24; 4:13, 16; Heb. 6:11, 12.

³ Rom. 8:16.

⁴ 1 John 5:13.

Question 3—*What is the character of persons who enjoy assurance?*

Answer—Those only, who truly believe in Christ, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before him, have ground to expect this privilege, 1 John 2:3. It is the assurance of our having the truth of grace that we are considering, which supposes a person truly to believe in Christ, Rom. 10:9. Accordingly, it is distinguished from that unwarrantable presumption whereby many persuade themselves that they shall be saved, though they are not sanctified, Job 8:13, 14. What we are speaking of is a well-grounded hope, such as is accompanied with and supported by the life of faith, Isa. 35:8; so that we are first enabled to act grace, and then to discern the truth of it in our own souls, and accordingly reap the comfortable fruits and effects which attend this assurance, Rom. 15:13. An unbeliever has no right to this privilege, for it is preposterous for a person to be assured of that which in itself has no reality, Gal. 6:3. If faith is necessary to assurance, it follows, that they who have attained this privilege walk in all good conscience before God thereby making evident the sincerity of their faith, 2 Cor. 1:12.

Question 4—*What are the means of attaining assurance?*

Answer—The means whereby men might attain unto this infallible assurance of grace and, ultimately, salvation, is by faith founded upon the promises of God, 1 John 4:13, 16. It is true, God occasionally intimated, by immediate revelation, that he would save some particular persons, by a special and extraordinary instance of divine condescension, Phil. 4:3; but this was not designed that others should expect to attain the privilege of assurance in the same way. Faith, grounded on the truth of God's promises, enables believers to discern in themselves those graces which accompany salvation, 1 John 3:14, 18, 19, 21, 24. This, together with the testimony of the Spirit, brings that assurance which can only flow from those who hold the truth of grace, Rom. 8:16. Therefore, we must understand:

First, in order to our attaining assurance, it is necessary that we exercise the duty of self-examination, which is God's ordinance for this end, Ps. 139:23, 24. As inquiry is the means for our attaining knowledge, so looking to ourselves is a means of attaining self-acquaintance, 2 Cor. 13:5. The duty of self-examination ought to be performed with great diligence, so as to arrive at a knowledge of ourselves, and the secret working of our hearts and affections in what respects heavenly things, Ps. 77:6. We are to inquire whether sin has dominion over us to such a degree that all the powers and faculties of our souls are enslaved by it, John 8:34; or whether sin is loathed, avoided and repented of, 2 Cor. 7:10.

Second, we must consider those marks by which a person may safely conclude themselves to be in a state of grace, Heb. 6:19. There are those graces which accompany or flow from true faith, Gal. 5:6; 1 John 5:4. Such worked in Moses, Heb. 11:24-26; and in others, who confessed themselves strangers, and desired a better country, Heb. 11:13, 16; and those whose conversation was in heaven, Phil. 3:20. Such faith has a tendency to purify the heart, Acts 15:9; and excites to a universal obedience, Rom. 16:26; and a carefulness to maintain good works which proceed from it and evidence the truth of the faith, Tit. 3:8. These arise not from a slavish fear and dread of the wrath of God but a perception of the excellency and loveliness of Christ, 1 Pet. 2:7.

Third, we must have these marks by the witness of the Spirit made to evidence to ourselves that God has called us by his grace, and granted us hope of eternal life, Eph. 1:18. This testimony of the Spirit is no extraordinary revelation but that necessary work to attain peace and joy, Rom. 15:13; whereby we are said to have our hope established, Eph. 1:13.