

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION
(SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020)

Scripture reading – Isaiah 61; Hebrews 10:19-23

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, we were blessed by the preaching of David Lovi. After his message, which I know encouraged this congregation, I wanted to preach a follow up message on assurance.

How do you truly know that Jesus Christ is your Savior?

How do you know you are saved when you still see so much sin and failure in your life?

How do you have assurance when it seems that you have been forsaken by God?

We live in an age that is promoting the destruction of the past.

We are told by some that believing in the inerrancy of Scripture is a white-dominated belief. We have to dispose of our beliefs in order to deal with racism.

This is insane!

What matters is the truth and in terms of man's writings how closely it matches with Scripture.

And why would we attempt to try to build everything from scratch again?

This is why we appreciate very much the WCF.

As a church we have made a few slight modifications.

We don't worship the Westminster Confession of Faith or think it is infallible, but we are thankful for those who were brought together to think carefully about Scripture.

When you consider the WCF, I think it is very significant that in light of how serious and theological it is, that they wrote such a pastoral document.

There is in it a great honesty and humility as well as a desire that God's people be challenged and encouraged in their faith.

Based on Scripture primarily and looking at the WCF, I want to encourage and challenge you in terms of the **doctrine of assurance**.

We will consider four main points.

1. GOD GIVES ASSURANCE IN THE GOSPEL AND WANTS YOU TO KNOW THIS ASSURANCE IN CHRIST

Let's look again at Hebrews 10:19-23.

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, **21** and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.

What are the key words in these verses in terms of assurance? Here are three:

Boldness (παρρησία) - verse 19

Full assurance of faith - verse 22

Assurance - 4x in the NT. Heb. 6:11; Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5.

Without wavering - verse 23

Wavering - 1x in the NT

To fully appreciate these verses, we have to think in terms of the Old Covenant and the tabernacle/temple.

Who could enter the holiest place, the Holy of Holies?

Only the High Priest and that just once a year.

What an incredible change has been brought to us through the sacrifice of our Lord.

This is what gives incredible boldness.

We enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus!

You are to draw near in **full assurance of faith**, because we know the cleansing that we have in Christ.

You must hold fast to this precious truth.

Assurance is found directly in the gospel. And God wants you to know this assurance in Christ.

1John 5:13 These things I have written to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God, that you **may know** that you have eternal life, and that you **may continue to believe** in the name of the Son of God.

1John 5:14 Now this is the confidence [boldness] that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Believe - you may know - continue to believe.

This is the basis for confidence and boldness in terms of coming before our God with our requests.

2Tim. 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know [same verb as 1 John 5:13] whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

2. SCRIPTURE COMMANDS HUMILITY AND SINCERITY, BUT NEVER DOUBT

True assurance is not arrogance.

Humility is not the same thing as doubt.

As I have mentioned before, in some Christian circles, doubt is celebrated as being good.

Clearly God knows all your weaknesses and frailties.

We are not to scorn those who are troubled. We don't go around thinking we are so special.

Listen to the following passages.

Matt. 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Matt. 21:21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not **doubt**, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done.

Doubters invert the metaphor and insist that they need faith as big as a mountain in order to move a mustard seed.

Webb B. Garrison

Doubt in this passage – to doubt; to judge; examine, 19x in the NT. Doubt is the right translation here in contrast with the faith.

The same verb is used in Rom. 4:20, translated as waver.

Rom. 4:20 He did not **waver** at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no **doubting**, for he who **doubts** is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Someone has said:

For too many Christians vagueness is the vogue; all they have is the courage of their confusions.

What a blessing to have assurance, to know that you have true peace with God and that it is not based on what you have done.

I have mentioned before the testimony of Martin Luther, who struggled to find assurance because he did not know the gospel message.

I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.

Luther had the opportunity to travel to the holy city of Rome one time.

It did not impress him.

He witnessed the incompetence, flippancy, and unbelief of a number of priests.

Luther was given the opportunity to climb on his knees the stairs that supposedly Jesus ascended as He stood before Pilate.

He was climbing Pilate's stairs on hands and knees repeating a Pater Noster for each one and kissing each step for good measure in the hope of delivering a soul from purgatory. Luther regretted that his own father and mother were not yet dead and in purgatory so that he might confer on them so signal a favor. Failing that, he had resolved to release Grandpa Heine. The stairs were climbed, the Pater Nosters were repeated, the steps were kissed. At the top Luther raised himself and exclaimed, not as legend would have it, "The just shall live by faith!" – he was not yet that far advanced. What he said was, "Who knows whether it is so?"¹

We love to remember the "start" of the Protestant Reformation on October 31, 1517.

Luther was not fully protestant or reformed at that time. He says so in his own words.

It was the next year in 1518, where we see more clearly Luther start to articulate the message of the gospel at the **Heidelberg Disputation**.

25. He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.

26. The law says, "do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and everything is already done.²

3. GOD HAS GIVEN IN THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF OUR SALVATION, THE GROUNDS OF ASSURANCE

In time, what are the three great works of God related to our salvation?

Answer: justification, adoption, and sanctification.

There are three aspects of assurance connected with the different aspects of God's work of grace in your life.

We begin properly with justification.

In justification, we have the promises of all that Christ has done for us.

Assurance is not a house that you build; it is the house that God builds that you are invited to move into.

¹ Taken from Roland Bainton's book, *Here I Stand*.

² <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#25>

Here we consider all the promises that Jesus gave found just in the gospel of John.

Jesus was the great preacher of true assurance.

Listen to a number of these promises from John.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3:15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. **16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 6:40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

Assurance, then, is anchored in the promises of the gospel. And the believer is called to continue in faith.

This is where we see the doctrine of assurance is also part of the exhortation given to the believer.

Heb. 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Heb. 6:12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The second work of God in salvation in time is your adoption.

Here we have the great work of the Holy Spirit in strengthening your conviction that you truly have been made a son or daughter of God.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” **16** The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Gal. 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”

What is the witness of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit confirms the truth of Scripture and the work of God in the believer’s life.

The Holy Spirit leads you then to cry out to the Father just as did your Savior, Jesus Christ.

The third aspect of God’s work in time is sanctification.

Is there a place for self-examination?

Of course.

It is not the foundation of assurance, but it cannot be ignored because Scripture commands it.

2Pet. 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

2Pet. 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; **11** for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now if you are honest, self-examination is often not encouraging.

You are certain to see your failure in doing what God has called you to do.

You are certain to find selfishness, spiritual laziness, pride, lust, and the like.

But there also should be the evidence of God's grace and work in your life.

- 1) Honest confession of sin and seeking to take responsibility
- 2) Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to grow
- 3) Fruit of the Holy Spirit

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

We have to be careful, but Scripture does speak of conviction or assurance connected with acting in the way we have been called.

1John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.

A. A. Hodge in his commentary on the WCF wrote about the difference between true and false assurance. There are two differences in its qualities and basis.

- (a) True assurance leads to unfeigned humility
- (b) True assurance leads to increased diligence in the practice of holiness
- (c) True assurance leads to candid self-examination
- (d) True assurance leads to constant aspirations after more intimate fellowship

In terms of the basis:

- (a) True assurance rests upon the infallible certainty of what God says
- (b) True assurance rests upon the evidence presented by the actual possession of those

graces

(c) True assurance rests upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit (132)

4. ASSURANCE CAN BE SOMETIMES ABSENT OR SHAKEN. WE MUST SEEK ASSURANCE ACCORDING TO THE MEANS OF GOD'S GRACE

Here as I pointed out earlier is where we see the rich pastoral spirit of the WCF.

Assurance is not identical to saving faith.

Assurance comes from saving faith.

Assurance can be shaken.

1) negligence

2) sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Holy Spirit

3) temptation

4) tests and challenges that God sends where you might wrongly conclude that God has forsaken you

Satan is the great accuser of the brethren.

Satan wants you to not have assurance – focus on yourself, delight in your sin, believe your doubts, think that your troubles mean God has abandoned you and cares nothing for you.

CONCLUSION

Luke 18:9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: **10** "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' **13** And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Seek the assurance found in Christ, in His Word, His grace, and the working of the Holy Spirit.

Heidelberg Catechism, Q/ A: 75

75. How is it signified and sealed to you in the Holy Supper that you partake of the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and all His benefits?

Thus: that Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup in remembrance of Him, and has joined therewith these promises: first, that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup communicated to me; and further, that with His crucified body and shed blood He Himself feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, as certainly as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, which are given me as certain tokens of the body and blood of Christ.

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 402

BENEDICTION - HEB. 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.