

Making our calling and election sure

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2 Peter

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In verse 10 we are told, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Our theme then is, "Making our calling and election sure." Making our calling and election sure. We've seen that this epistle is addressed to professing believers, people with a God-given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faith of a true believer is a faith which develops and grows and manifests itself in holy living because in Christ God has given to us all things in provision and promise that pertain to life and godliness.

Now the heart of this section is verse 10, "make your calling and election sure," and I want to begin there and then look at the rest of the passage. First of all then, the importance of making your calling and election sure. The importance of making your calling and election sure. In verse 10 we read, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Give diligence. This is something of importance. It's something that matters a great deal. It is of immense moment and importance that we should make our calling and election sure. There are other things in our lives that we treat as important but they're not really important and they're certainly not important compared with this, make your calling and election sure.

By calling is meant the effectual call of God. As our Catechism puts it, it is effectual calling, "It is the work of God's Spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel," Answer 31. In other words, it is when God causes us not only to hear the gospel but to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and this calling takes place in time. It takes place within the lives of men and women in this present life, but it is the result of God's election or choice, and God's choice is something that is from eternity, eternity past. And so God has chosen who shall be the heirs of salvation in eternity past and as a result in due time, at God's appointed time in their lives in this world, they are effectually called. Their hearts are changed so that the gospel, whether they've heard it many times before or they hear it for the first time, nevertheless that gospel that comes to them at that time when their

hearts are changed by the Spirit of God, they believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and we are to give diligence to make this calling and election sure.

Now the first thing under this main heading we should address is: in what sense can it be made sure by us? The apostle tells the Christians that they must make this calling and election sure, now what does that mean? In what sense can it be made sure by us? It cannot be made sure as to the fact of it which is settled in the decree of God. We cannot make ourselves elect. It is not that the apostle is saying that we must take steps to make ourselves one of the elect of God. That is absolutely and utterly beyond our power. Election is a sovereign initiative by God, not a response of God. In Romans 9:11 the apostle says that "the purpose of God according to election stands, not of works, but of him that calleth." It stands. It is fixed. God's choice is fixed from everlasting. It is not a response to anything. It is a sovereign decree of God originating independently and entirely in the mind of God. It is of him that calleth. Election has its source entirely in God and it is not a response to anything in or foreseen in the creature, in man.

Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." The source of election is the will of God, the good pleasure of his will. It is not based on anything that is in one person as opposed to another. It is not a divine response. It is a divine initiative, absolutely free, independent and sovereign. And the calling of God, this effectual calling, is the outworking of this fixed independent choice of sinners to salvation. The purpose of God according to election stands of him that calleth. The God who calls is the God who has elected and that choice is sovereign and free and comes to effect in that call in due time.

So in Romans 8:30, "whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is God's sovereign election and predestination that is the cause of effectual calling. So we cannot secure this election of God by any activity on our part. We either are or are not elect of God. That is unalterable. God has a fixed decree from eternity and he has chosen without being subject to any modification or alteration, he has chosen unalterably who will be the heirs of salvation and they and they only are effectually called in due time.

So what does the apostle mean then when he says "make your calling and election sure"? It is our knowledge of whether we are chosen and called that is to be made sure. The fact cannot be altered but we are to seek to ascertain and to know whether we are one of the elect of God and that should be a matter of the utmost importance to us, hence we are to give diligence to ensure, be sure in our minds whether we are one of the elect of God. We cannot make ourselves elect but we are to give diligence to know whether we are one of the elect of God.

And we must also say under this first heading: election is only knowable by calling. Election is only knowable, as far as we are concerned, by calling. God's election is from eternity before the world began. Calling takes place in time. So election is eternal and calling takes place in time as the outworking of that election. God has chosen the heirs of

salvation from eternity and he calls them in time. In that sense, we may say that the order is election first, calling as a result, but in terms of our knowledge of being one of the elect of God, it must come in the reverse order. We must know whether we are called if we are to know whether we are elect, whether we are chosen of God. It is impossible to know we are one of the elect of God other than by knowing that in time we have been effectually called. Prior to that calling there is no difference discernible to man between the elect sinner and the non-elect sinner. Absolutely none. The Christian prior to being quickened and brought to faith in Christ, he was a child of wrath even as others. He had his conversation in this world and walked after the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

So there is no difference discernible to man between the elect sinner and the non-elect sinner prior to that elect sinner being effectually called. In fact, there is no difference between the two except in the mind and purpose of God towards them. So whether we are one of God's elect cannot be known other than by answering the question: am I called? Have I been effectually called? Am I a real Christian? Hyper-Calvinism in the proper sense of the word, the word is used as a general term of abuse towards those who accept biblical Calvinistic doctrine and practice and it's used by those who do not against such, but in the proper sense of the term hyper-Calvinism in the sense of those who deny that the gospel is to be preached to all men and that all who hear it are obliged to believe it, those who deny these things are hyper-Calvinists and they therefore endeavor in some way to address the gospel only to the elect. But you know, neither the preacher nor the hearer can know their election other than by knowing that they are effectually called and have been brought to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but in their attempt to confine the gospel as addressing only the elect, they tend to fall into mysticism inevitably and for this very reason, that the knowledge of one's election of God becomes essential, in their view, in order to have a warrant and a right to come to Christ. You see on the hyper-Calvinist view you have to know whether you are elect to know whether the gospel is addressed to you. In actual fact, the real warrant that a sinner has regarding the gospel as being addressed to him is the command, the invitation and the promise of God which is addressed to all sinners. But the hyper-Calvinist says he has to find that the gospel is addressed to the elect and therefore he tends to want to try and find out if he is one of the elect of God in order to assure himself that he has a warrant for believing that the gospel is addressed to him, and so he ends up seeking some mystical sign that he is one of God's elect, some mystical sign or experience to tell him that he is one of God's elect, a sign or experience that is tantamount to direct personal revelation from God outside of scripture. And that is why hyper-Calvinism in the proper sense and mysticism tend to go together because they are seeking to know that they are elect prior to effectual calling. But the warrant of faith is not in some direct personal revelation from God in advance of conversion that we are one of God's elect. The warrant of faith is in the promises of the gospel addressed to sinners indiscriminately. "O everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, yea come buy wine and milk without money and without price." Whether we are elect can only be known by knowing that God has changed our hearts so that we have been made willing to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, that's the importance of making our calling and election sure but then, secondly, how to make our calling and election sure? What is the apostle telling us to do?

In verse 5 he says, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue," and so on. And then in verse 10 he says, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." The meaning then is that what is required in verse 5 to verse 9 is essential because what is required in verse 10 is essential. We make our calling and election sure by doing what is required in verses 5 to 9. So verse 10 summarizes what is given in verse 5 to 9. It is by doing the requirements of verse 5 to 9 that we fulfill this obligation to make our calling and election sure.

Now verse 5 says, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." The word "add" here means supply in the sense of something lacking. Now in what sense are these things lacking if they are absent and we are being told to supply these things, to add these things to our faith? We are justified by faith in Christ alone. As the confession of faith says, "Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness is the lone instrument of justification. But though we are justified by faith alone, such faith is never alone, real saving faith is a faith that worketh by love, it is a faith that is shown and evidenced and shown to be present in the fruit of a holy life." And so the apostle is saying that if their faith is this genuine, God-given faith, this life-precious faith with us, then it must show itself in these things.

Now I don't think he's saying that we have to add these things in the order given. He's not saying add virtue first, then knowledge, then temperance, then patience, then godliness, but what he is saying is, the evidence of genuine faith is that it shows itself in these things and he's painting a picture bit by bit of the various elements that make up an all-round Christian character and these things are the evidence of genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because they are the proper fruit of that faith.

And so he says, first of all, add to your faith virtue. We've come across this word before. It sometimes can mean power, the idea of excellence, but sometimes in the sense of power or energy, and here it seems to be used in the sense of courage and boldness, in following Christ wholeheartedly, in following Christ with energy and courage, even when it is costly to do so. As the apostle says in another context, we were bold in our God.

Then he mentions knowledge, that is, knowledge of the word as it applies to various circumstances of life, that true godly wisdom that knows what the word of God requires in given situations. A Christian should evidence boldness, but there should be a profiting that is evident to all as his knowledge of the word increases, not just so he can show how much he knows, but so that he knows how to follow the word of God in all the variety of circumstances that come to us in this present world.

It then mentions temperance. Temperance, we tend to use it in the sense of restraint, keeping back from excess in the use of alcohol particularly, but it means more than just keeping from drunkenness. It means such a state of heart that has a deeply rooted self-control in the use of all things, not carried to excess thoughtlessly, but controlled in the use even of lawful things. In other words, the temperate man is not devoted even to any

lawful thing. He's not devoted to leisure, to recreation. He may engage in it for his well-being, but for the temperate man a hobby is just a hobby, it's not a craze. He doesn't live for his hobby, it's still only a hobby and no more. He doesn't live for money, though he works for a living rightly. He doesn't live for a good name amongst men, though if his name is wrongly defiled, he defends it for the honor of his God. But he doesn't live for these things. He is temperate in all things.

Then the text mentions adding to this patience or endurance, it's endurance in following Christ through good report and evil report, following Christ when it's relatively inoffensive to do so, but following Christ when it infuriates other people to do so. Endurance, constancy.

And then godliness, godliness, a constant right thinking towards God himself, governed by the fear of the Lord, by what pleases this great God whom he thinks rightly of. You might be surprised that godliness here stands sort of in the middle, but it stands there between those graces of personal behavior before it and those of behavior towards others after it, brotherly kindness and charity.

Brotherly kindness refers to kindness or love specifically to the brethren, whereas charity is evidently broader in scope. We are to do good unto all men, especially the household of faith.

And the apostle is saying by adding these things to our faith, by pursuing these things in dependence upon God and that provision that is in Christ Jesus and the promises in him, we make our calling and election sure. That brings us thirdly: why these things make our calling and election sure? Why these things make our calling and election sure? Why is it that as we follow after these things, we become assured of our calling and election? What's the connection? This pursuit of all-round Christian character, in dependence on the gracious provision of God in Christ and the promises, is the way to make our calling and election sure because these things are the inevitable fruit of genuine saving faith. These things are the legitimate and inevitable fruit of the true use of the knowledge of Christ.

Verse 8, "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The knowledge of Christ is the gospel made known and understood, and when it is truly embraced, it is this fruit that it yields. In Titus 1 we read of the truth which is after godliness, the truth which leads to godliness, the truth when rightly received, it results in a godly life. It always does, without exception, and that means that the absence of these things means someone is barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever he knows of Christ, it isn't so received as to bring forth the genuine fruit and the absence of these things means there is no ground for assurance. Verse 9, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Which we take to mean that the man who neglects the pursuit of holiness cannot be assured of his interest in Christ. He cannot see clearly his part in the

redeeming work of Christ. He cannot see clearly that he is a beneficiary of Christ's redeeming work.

Now not all lack of assurance is due to backsliding, but a backslider will not have assurance. You know that. You know that, don't you? When you've been backsliding, when you've been neglecting the truth of God and the worship of God and the things of God, perhaps giving up a minimal outward show, but you've been neglecting prayer and the word, and you've been indulging sin, and you've gone on in sin, and you know that such a state is incompatible with assurance of salvation because God has made it to be so. And so there is this blindness, this inability to be assured of forgiveness in Christ, and so the regenerate backslider loses assurance, though not his safety. A born-again man may backslide and wonder, but he will inevitably lose assurance in that state. He will be brought to repentance. He will be brought back into the pursuit of these holy virtues in due time in Christ Jesus. But in that state, he cannot see. He cannot understand. He cannot be assured.

And the false professed Christian becomes evident in the irreversible neglect of these things. You see, it says in verse 10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." And the course, whatever fluctuations there may be, the course of the genuine Christian's life will be one of adding to his faith, virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, to patience of godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. This is the overall course of a Christian's life. There will be fluctuations, but as one has said, the Christian life is one of going up and down upwards. And where there is a total absence of this pursuit of Christian character and holiness of life, it exposes the professed Christian for the hypocrite that he is. Where there is an irreversible neglect of these things, then such a person will fall but he says if you do these things, you shall never fall because if you do these things, you're a real Christian and a real Christian will not fall. He will be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed. And this holy pursuit is the means God uses in order to keep his people from falling. He causes them to persevere in the faith, that faith which causes the Christian to pursue after holiness. And so he never falls. He is kept.

And in verse 11, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." He doesn't fall. He doesn't apostatize because there's a genuine work of grace in his soul and there is this God-given faith, which inevitably results in the pursuit of these godly characteristics. So he doesn't fall and there is ministered unto him an abundant entrance. This pursuing, this pursuit of godliness through faith in Christ Jesus, is the mark of all who enter the eternal state of the kingdom of God. In this world, the outward form of the kingdom of grace is mixed. There are those professed servants who do not serve, like in the parable of the talents. There are those without the wedding garment mixed in the outward form of the kingdom in this world. But when they appear before the King, they are cast into outer darkness. For the genuine people of God, those who are born of the Spirit because they were chosen in Christ before the world was made, and who have a God-given faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ, a faith that is accompanied inevitably by this fruit of pursuing these godly characteristics, they never fall. They have an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom.

Well then, make your call and election sure. Amen.