

### **The Unconverted “Believer” (17): Assurance of Salvation (2)**

Last Lord’s Day we began to address the very important subject of our personal assurance of salvation. If we were to reflect on the issues of greatest importance to each of us, grading them from the most important to the least, surely knowledge of the eternal state of our soul would top the list. In order to stress the importance of the soul’s salvation, our Lord posed the question, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). No more important matter could be before us than to secure our personal knowledge that we are the objects of God’s saving grace in salvation.

To begin this morning, let us turn in God’s Word to Peter’s second epistle in which we read of our responsibility to give diligence to assuring that we have salvation. We will read the passage at the outset, but then we will address several relevant matters before returning to explain and expound on the details of these verses. Here is 2 Peter 1:1-11:

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

<sup>2</sup>Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, <sup>3</sup>as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, <sup>6</sup>to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup>to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. <sup>8</sup>For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

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

We expressed last week that contrary to the teaching of many evangelical churches and the assumption of many professing Christians, assurance of salvation is not always easy to acquire or to retain. It is a fact that many, if not most evangelicals, are taught that assurance is simply a matter of “faith”. They teach that

“If you simply accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, if you really believe in Him, then you have salvation, regardless of how you live thereafter. You should not doubt your salvation, for it is based upon Jesus Christ alone and not upon any work that you do. You may be at peace that God has given you eternal life and you need not ever doubt that reality.

The problem with this position as stated, however, is that we have shown from the Scriptures that there are those who have “faith” in who Jesus is and what He did for sinners, who may even believe that they are the beneficiaries of His saving work, and yet they are still condemned in their sins. Their “faith” is not saving faith as taught in the Word of God. They have a false assurance of their salvation. They have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. They have “faith”, but that faith is unaccompanied by confirming works; therefore, it is not saving faith. As James commanded the readers of his epistle, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). And later he wrote, “

<sup>14</sup>What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?... <sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!  
<sup>20</sup>But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14, 19)

The Word of God tells us that saving faith is shown forth in the life of the true believer in that he no longer lives as he had lived before coming to faith. Upon believing in Jesus Christ the Lord, he begins to show forth new life in Jesus Christ. If there is no new life in Christ, there is no saving faith in Christ. Although *what* you believe about Jesus Christ is certainly a critically important element in obtaining a sound assurance of salvation, it is not all that is necessary.<sup>1</sup> The life must bear witness with one's profession of faith in order for that profession to be regarded as legitimate saving faith. One of the means of gaining assurance is how one lives out one's faith in Jesus Christ.

And so, to know that you are the recipient of God's salvation, to know that God is for you and not against you, is of great importance. It is the spring, the fountain, from which all peace and joy flow. It is also the source of legitimate motivation for living the Christian life. Much of what we do and much of how we react to situations in the world are born from our true knowledge that we belong among the people of God and that His favor rests upon us. The one who serves God without true assurance will often do so out of a sense of doubt and terror, and out of a sense of reluctant servitude rather than joyful love.

Thankfully true assurance in this life is not only greatly desirable, but it is biblically possible. And though there are true Christians who may not have full assurance, theirs is not the worst case. It is those who believe they have assurance but it is actually false assurance that are in a horrible spiritual condition. And so, the words of **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) are true,

The greatest blessing is to have true assurance of salvation. The second greatest blessing is to doubt your salvation, for the second will lead to the first.

But we might then add, the greatest curse is to have false assurance of salvation. Jesus said to some who were righteous in their own eyes, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Many people falsely think they are "well" in their relationship with God. We are to show them that they are not, so that they will seek Christ.

If we were to employ the matter of personal assurance of salvation as a basis of assessing people, we may conclude that people everywhere will fall under five different categories.

**(1) *There are those who have true assurance of salvation and they should have.*** This is because they examined the biblical teaching respecting these things, and have passed the tests in their own conscience regarding their condition. (I think these are much fewer in number as is generally assumed.)

**(2) *There are those who are true Christians, who do not have assurance of salvation, but they should have.*** This is very unfortunate, but actually it is not uncommon, especially among those who are reformed in their convictions, as we have previously shown. It is our desire to lead them into true, full assurance of their salvation.

**(3) *There are many in this world who have assurance of salvation, but they should not have.*** They have no legitimate biblical grounds for assurance, for God's Word says of them that they are without hope and without God. They are in need of the Lord to awaken them to their dreadful, damned condition. It is our desire and calling to shake them of their false confidence, their false assurance so that they might truly and fully turn to Christ for salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Faith alone is the means by which God justifies the sinner, but the life that faith exhibits is one of the means for having sound assurance that one's faith is true, saving faith.

*(4) There are those who are true Christians, who have assurance, but the basis of their assurance is faulty.* They may have a right to true assurance, but they are basing their assurance on wrong things. What commonly happens when they learn what the Word of God truly teaches about these matters, that their prior understanding of the basis of their assurance was not biblical, is that they may become troubled in their souls, doubting their salvation, until they see the biblical bases of assurance confirmed to them.

*(5) There are those who have assurance, but it is of a weak nature, sometimes they feel assured, but at other times they quite despair of their condition.* This is stated quite clearly in our confession of faith, which reads:

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers (different) ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted<sup>2</sup>; as by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light, yet are they never destitute of the seed of God and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are preserved from utter despair. (Song of Sol. 5:2f, 6; Psa. 42:5; 51:8, 12, 14; 116:11; 77:7f; 31:22; 30:7; 1 John 3:9; Luke 22:32; Lam. 3:26-31)<sup>3</sup>

This paragraph in our confession sets forth the reasons and ways that true Christians may struggle with their assurance of salvation. Let us consider these reasons that true believers may doubt their salvation.

#### **I. Reasons that true Christians may have their assurance of salvation weakened or lost for a time.**

First, we read that true believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, and intermitted "by negligence in preserving of it." There are things that we are to do as Christians. If we neglect or fail to do them, we may lose our assurance of salvation. No, we will not lose our salvation, for that is not possible. The true Christian is pardoned, righteous, sealed, preserved, protected, and prayed for by Jesus Christ Himself. And we know that He does not lose one whom the Father has given Him. Jesus Himself declared, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39). But though we cannot lose our salvation, we can certainly lose our assurance that we are saved by our "negligence of preserving" our assurance.

Secondly, true believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, and intermitted "by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit." The conscience is that faculty that every human being possesses that distinguishes between right and wrong resulting either in a sense of personal condemnation or exoneration. The human conscience identifies what is right and what is wrong, and as a result moves an individual either to feel guilty or not guilty about himself. God gave each of us our conscience. When we feel guilty, it is not simply because we have violated a human standard of our own, but we violate God's laws that were written on our hearts from creation (cf. Rom. 2:14, 15).

How does sin affect the conscience? When the Christian sins, he has a guilty conscience. If he does not address it biblically, it can result in damaging his conception how he thinks that he relates to God. He feels that God has withdrawn from him and he cannot get back to Him. God declared through His prophet, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). But sin also bars the heart from wanting to approach Him. One's guilty conscience prohibits him from feeling he can come into God's presence, for to do so, he fears that he would see himself as justly condemned by Him. And so, some will avoid or resist coming before God, lest they feel condemned by Him.

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<sup>2</sup> Intermitted: assurance is present at some times but is doubted at others.

<sup>3</sup> **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, article 18, paragraph 4.

Sin also may grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit keeps our conscience clear and clean. When we resist the Holy Spirit or refuse to yield to His leading us according to the Word of God, we may grieve Him. He may cease to bring to us a sense of conviction of our sin. We no longer are sensitive and desirous of holy thinking and living as we were formerly. We are no longer alarmed over our degraded spiritual focus or sensitivity. The grace that the Holy Spirit imparts to His people is weakened, which includes the comfort in the soul for salvation that the Holy Spirit gives to His people.

Thirdly, true believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, and intermitted “by some sudden or vehement temptation.” There may be an occasion when the world, the devil, or our own sinful flesh will pose a great temptation to us to indulge in a terrible, grievous sin. Perhaps it is a temptation to commit a sin of which you had never experienced a problem with in the past, but it comes upon you strongly in that you are drawn to that sin. This troubles your conscience: “How could I be a true Christian and be tempted to do such a thing?” That Christian might lose his assurance of salvation in a significant degree, especially if that temptation is long in duration or recurs frequently.

And fourthly, true believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, and intermitted “by God’s withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light.” God may at times purpose to withdraw a soul’s sense of well-being and security, which results in the Christian feeling that God has abandoned him. In doing so God may be testing our love for Him, our faith in Him, or our commitment to Him. Through these times we are to draw close to Him in faith and renew our commitment to Him as our Lord and Savior, even though we may not be enjoying the joy and peace of His presence with us. This is the instruction that we read in Isaiah that is referenced in our confession.

“Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?  
Who walks in darkness  
And has no light?  
**Let him trust in the name of the LORD**  
**And rely upon his God.** (Isa. 50:9)

Through these times we may learn many spiritual lessons and grow deeper in our desire to be close to Christ and to walk carefully and cautiously before Him. We learn experientially what David had learned,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
**For You are with me;**  
**Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.** (Psa. 23:4)

The result of our experience of that time of loneliness and barrenness makes us stronger, better equipped to face and endure greater trials that may lie before us. It may also equip us for more fruitful service in helping others when they encounter similar trials. An untried Christian is not a very strong Christian and will not be as fruitful as the one who has born the heat of battle and has come out the victor.

To obtain sound and certain assurance of our salvation requires serious and sincere self-examination of ourselves by the Word of God. No one is exempt. It is our responsibility as Christians to perform this work of introspection for the Word of God commands this of us. We are exhorted in God’s Word to test ourselves regarding our own salvation. The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:5,

**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.** Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified.”

Our confession of faith states the importance of our giving great attention to this matter. It states,

It is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.<sup>4</sup>

The language of this paragraph of our confession is taken directly from the passage to which we now desire to consider—2 Peter 2:1-11.

## II. Peter's exhortation to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:1-11)

### A. The epistle's greeting (1:1)

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,  
To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

It is interesting that Peter identifies himself with the addition of "Simon" to the name for which he was commonly known--Peter. Of course the Lord Jesus Himself had named him "Peter"<sup>5</sup>, as one of His apostles whom He set forth as a judge (leader), over the "twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). That Peter referred to himself here as "Simon Peter" suggests that he was placing his Jewish ethnicity forward before His readers. "Peter intends to emphasize his origin."<sup>6</sup>

Peter also identified himself as "bondservant", or slave, as well as "apostle" of Jesus Christ. He was asserting his authority as an apostle, but was doing so in a humble manner, acknowledging that he was but a slave, a committed servant of Jesus Christ. In this description of himself, he was putting forward the superior nature, person, and position of the Lord Jesus. By him identifying himself as a "slave" of Jesus Christ, he was placing himself on the same level as his readers, even while he was an "apostle" of Jesus Christ, having had spiritual authority conferred upon him by the Lord. As a slave, Peter used his authority while under complete submission to Jesus Christ His Master.

After Peter identified himself, he identified the recipients of his epistle: "To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." It may be that Peter was writing to Gentile Christians. If so, then his identification as an apostle who was Jewish was affirming his Gentile readers that they had joined with him in having "obtained like precious faith with us." The New Testament commentator, **Richard Lenski**, (1864-1936), wrote that the Greek grammar of these words reveal that Peter was holding up these Gentile believers as having the same faith of equal value as the Jewish believers in Jesus Christ.

With this dative he describes them as people who have obtained faith that is just as valuable and precious as that which "we" have obtained. Peter wants his readers so to regard themselves and their precious faith... We thus conclude that Peter refers to himself and to all Jewish Christians with ἡμῶν ("with us"); that he is writing to certain Gentile Christians to whom also Paul has written a letter (3:15). Peter says that their faith is just as valuable and as precious as our faith, i.e. that of any and of all Jewish believers. That, of course, applies to all Gentile Christians everywhere. This is what Peter intends.<sup>7</sup>

Peter wrote of the recipients of his letter as having "obtained" or "received" this like precious faith. Peter presents faith as having been received as a gift from God due to the grace of God. This may not be

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<sup>4</sup> **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, article 18, paragraph 3.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 16:17-19.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude** (Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 247

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249f.

referring to our subjective faith in Jesus Christ, but rather to the common “Christian faith” that we have all received, that body of doctrine or teaching of biblical Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

This “precious faith is described as having been “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Two points may be made regarding this expression. First, this is one of the clearest declarations of the deity of Jesus Christ in Scripture. Both words, “God” and “Savior” are applied directly to Jesus Christ. “Since one definite article (“the”) governs both nouns in the Greek (lit. “the God of us and Savior”), this phrase ascribes deity to Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup> The second point of emphasis are the words, “by *the righteousness* of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Here Peter was probably not referring to the gift of righteousness that is credited to believers in Jesus Christ; rather, Peter was declaring that Jesus Christ is Himself righteous for bestowing saving faith on all types of people, both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

## **B. Peter pronounces and promises blessing upon his readers. (1:2-5)**

<sup>2</sup>Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, <sup>3</sup>as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, <sup>4</sup>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.

Peter desired that the grace and peace of God be multiplied to them. They already were at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. And certainly they had been converted from their sin through the grace of God. But the initial grace and peace that they had received were in need of increase, even multiplied in them. That they could experience these blessings of God that was assured to them “*in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.*” The word, “knowledge” (ἐπιγνώσεως), is an important word and concept in this epistle. This word or related words are used 11 times in 2 Peter. The use of this word may be best understood when the purpose of this epistle is considered. Whereas in 1 Peter, the apostle was writing to new Christians in order to better prepare and equip them for increasing persecution due to their faith, Peter in this second epistle was equipping these Christians to be capable of recognizing and withstanding false teachers that would be found in the churches, who sought to corrupt the faith and life of the people of God. These false teachers that Peter addressed directly in chapter two, were probably ones who emphasized what is sometimes called, “esoteric knowledge” that would lead to and permit sexual immorality among the professing people of God. Their error would later develop into a full-fledged heresy in Christendom in the second century, which came to be known as Gnosticism, which is taken from the Greek word, γνῶσις (*gnosis*), for “knowledge”. Peter sought to prepare these Christians against the false or corrupt knowledge of these false teachers by reinforcing before them the true knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

The grace and peace of God may be multiplied to them through “*the knowledge of God.*” The true knowledge of God in the faith of Jesus Christ had brought them to salvation. And it would be through this same knowledge that they would grow and be better equipped to recognize and withstand the threat that they would face from these false teachers. Again to quote **Richard Lenski** regarding the word, “knowledge”:

This is one of the key words of this letter (1:3, 8; 2:20), to which add *gnosis* occurring in 1:5, 6, and in 3:18. The aim of this letter is to increase this knowledge in the hearts of the readers so that, when grace and peace are multiplied, they may abound in all godliness and be fully fortified against all libertinists and all libertinism when this sort of thing harass them. We have stated why we regard the genitive as a genitive of source. This true, full knowledge, comes to the readers “from our God and Lord

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<sup>8</sup> This, then, would be parallel with “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” referred to in Jude 3.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 2355.

<sup>10</sup> “This probably refers to Christ’s fairness and impartiality in bestowing the gift of faith upon all types of people, rather than the vicarious righteousness of Christ by which Christians are justified (Rom. 3:22; 4:6). Ibid.

Jesus.” So in verse 3 “all that pertains to life and godliness has been granted to us by means of this *epigenesist* (knowledge).<sup>11</sup>

In verse 4 Peter wrote of this knowledge, “*by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises.*” Knowledge of God in Jesus Christ is the source of all blessing from our God. **William Gurnall** (1617-1679) once wrote of the importance of knowledge in contrast to ignorance:

*Ignorance above other sins enslaves a soul to Satan.* A knowing man may be his slave, but an ignorant one can be no other. Knowledge doth not make the heart good, but it is impossible that without knowledge it should be good. There are some sins which an ignorant person cannot commit, there are more which he cannot but commit; knowledge is the key (Luke 11:52). Christ is the door (John 15). Christ opens heaven. Knowledge opens Christ.<sup>12</sup>

All of the promises of God are both assured to us and are acquired by us through the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

Peter then wrote of these promises of God, “*that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*” There has been much confusion and misunderstanding through the centuries regarding the meaning of these words. The Greek or Eastern Orthodox Church long ago went off into error in their interpretation of Christians having become “partakers of the divine nature.” They hold to the doctrine of *theosis*, that human beings come to have real union with God and become so like God that Christians actually participate or share in the divine nature. In short, they teach that Christians will be deified in some measure. But that is not what Peter was declaring. He was saying that Christians become like God in holy character. We are being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ the Son of God, becoming like Him in holiness, but not in essence. Peter declared that when we became Christians God had given to us all that we need to escape the sinful lusts that are in this world, and that these gifts of grace are given to us through the true knowledge of God in Christ.

When we were converted, we had become recipients or partakers of great gifts of grace whereby we could become like Jesus Christ in holy character. We were made new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We were born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). We died, and our lives are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). When we were converted our old man, that is, our life as we had lived before becoming Christians, had died. We are now ones who live new lives in Jesus Christ. He has given us holy aspirations, holy delights, and holy dislikes also. We were set free from having been slaves to sin and satan for we are now willing bondslaves of Jesus Christ. We have been adopted as the children of God with wonderful privileges and promises and with a glorious promised inheritance. We are promised power from God through the Holy Spirit. All of these blessings may be seen as having come to us and enhanced to us through the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

But after he assured his readers of the gifts and promises that were already theirs...

### **C. Peter pressed upon his readers to grow in their Christian life (1:6-9)**

Peter set before his readers the important task to grow in grace and knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, by becoming more consecrated unto God and experiencing greater degrees of God’s life-changing and life-empowering grace. We read in verses 3 through 6 these words,

<sup>6</sup>But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith **virtue**, to virtue **knowledge**, <sup>6</sup>to knowledge **self-control**, to self-control **perseverance**, to perseverance **godliness**, <sup>7</sup>to godliness **brotherly kindness**, and to brotherly kindness **love**. <sup>8</sup>For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

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<sup>11</sup> Lenski, p. 254.o

<sup>12</sup> William Gurnall, **The Christian in Complete Armour** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 161.

Peter lists seven, what may be called Christian *virtues*, that the Christian is to give all diligence to acquire and build up in his life. Faith is not one of these. Everyone begins having this faith, but then that faith it must be augmented with these Christian virtues.

Now this is not a chronological order or sequence of steps that the Christian is to work on, working upon one and after that is acquired to begin to work on the next virtue until you have accomplished acquiring them all. In other words, they are not stages of the Christian life, but rather, they are virtues to which we are always to be aspiring and building upon in our lives.

“Peter is using a rhetorical figure that builds a series of elements to a climax. The beginning and conclusion are significant, however. Early Christian virtue lists often begin with “faith,” the starting point of the Christian life, and end with “love” (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13), the preeminent fruit of the Christian life.. These reflect God’s character.<sup>13</sup>

Now if we had the time and you had the patience we could show how each of these seven Christian virtues listed in verses 5ff and following could be shown in contrast to seven contrary or counter sinful qualities of the false teachers of 2 Peter 2.

The list of seven is arranged with reference to the pseudo-prophets (2:1) and to the way in which they live according to their pretended faith. For praise they supply disgrace; for knowledge, blindness; for self-control, libertinistic license; for perseverance in good, perseverance in evil; for godliness, ungodliness; for fraternal friendliness, dislike of God’s children; for genuine love, its terrible absence.<sup>14</sup>

Peter is basically exhorting these Christians to prepare themselves to counter the error and false knowledge of false teachers that will be among them with the true knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

#### **D. Peter urged his readers to give all diligence to make their call of God and election certain.**

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

If you consider the words of verse 10 carefully, it conforms what we having been saying regarding the acquiring a sure and sound assurance of salvation. “***Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.***” This is the verse from which the drafters of our confession made their statement:

it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.<sup>15</sup>

Here it is confirmed for us that our assurance of salvation may be attained, retained, and enhanced through our own diligence. And so, assurance of our salvation is not only, or merely, based or acquired on what you believe, but how you live according to what you believe. This is why assurance of salvation can sometimes be rather difficult to acquire and often difficult to maintain. When we neglect or fail to be “more diligent” regarding these matters, it should be no surprise when we begin to have doubts and struggles regarding our assurance of salvation. It is not doubting Jesus Christ, rather, it is doubting whether or not we

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<sup>13</sup> R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 2355.

<sup>14</sup> Lenski, p. 266.

<sup>15</sup> **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, article 18, paragraph 3.



have an interest in Jesus Christ that is the source of the problem. And so it is, the more you grow in Christian knowledge, growing in the grace that comes through that knowledge, your sense of assurance will become more clear and stronger in certainty. Now the question we might ask of you is this: Have you been even more diligent to make your call and election sure? Let us consider how we might do this:

### **1. Making your call certain.**

This speaks of becoming convinced that God has called you effectually into this state of salvation. When we speak of God's calling, we must distinguish between the general call of God and the effectual call of God. The Word of God speaks of both of these kinds of calling of God.

#### **(1) The general call (or, universal or external Call) of God to salvation**

The general call of God is not restricted to God's elect, but it speaks of God calling everyone everywhere to turn from sin and believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. There is a universal call of all men to serve and worship the living God. This call is made by the understanding of God derived from *nature* and in the *human conscience*. This general call of God also comes through the message of the *gospel* to every one everywhere, inviting them to come to Christ and receive freely the salvation that is in Him. When we witness to others, or preach to others, we are extending a call to them to turn from sin and believe on the Lord Jesus. We offer free salvation to every and all sinners everywhere.

The general call of God to salvation is frequently rejected entirely. In fact, the general call of God, if alone, will always be rejected by sinners. Something more needs to be done than simply make a plan of salvation known. Sinners will reject Christ unless and until something more than an external invitation of the gospel is performed. This rejection of the grace of God in His external call may be seen in Jerusalem's rejection of Christ. The Lord Jesus declared their rejection of Him:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and *you would not!*” (Matt. 23:37)

This is always the response of fallen man to the invitation of the gospel. A few verses farther in John 3 we read, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). Men will not come to Christ because they love darkness and hate Christ.

Isaiah recorded God's words respecting Israel. “But to Israel he said, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” God had called to them through the prophets, but they would not hear. Proverbs 1:24 records the rejection of God who had called to people to respond to Him. “Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded.”

Again, as we stated, the grace of God in the general call of the gospel alone is insufficient to bring people to salvation. People need more than just hearing the gospel. The Holy Spirit must apply the gospel to an individual's mind and heart before salvation can take place. And so, the general call of God, if alone, will be rejected by sinners.

***The general offer of the gospel is insufficient to bring salvation apart from an inward work of grace by God leading and enabling a sinner to receive and respond to the gospel.***

**John Gill** wrote, “It (the general call) is always insufficient and ineffectual of itself unto real conversion, without the powerful and efficacious grace of God.” What is needed is more than a general call, an effectual, or inward call of God must bring a sinner to receive Christ in the gospel. This is an act of special grace whereby God applies salvation to His people.

#### **(2) The effectual (internal) call of God to salvation**

This is the call of the gospel that goes out to specific individuals. This is the call of God that is heard by them “who have ears to hear.” The Holy Spirit issues this effectual call to the elect through the general call of the gospel. This is the call described in Romans 8:30, “Moreover whom he predestinated, these He also **called.**” We read of this inward call in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14,

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth, **to which He called you by our gospel**, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. 2:13f)

Notice that Paul felt “bound” to thank God for their salvation. Why? Because they had been converted to Christ through God’s grace alone. God had chosen them “from the beginning” – He had elected them unto salvation. When the time arrived for them to begin to receive salvation to which they were destined, He “sanctified” them, that is, He set them apart from sin and the world. God had determined to save them through the work of the Holy Spirit in them so that they would believe the truth of the gospel. This work of bringing His chosen ones to Christ is described here as God’s action. Paul wrote that God had “called” the Thessalonian Christians through the means of the gospel.

This call of God is effectual, that is, it always accomplishes the purpose for which it was issued--the salvation of God’s chosen ones. Paul described his own experience of this effectual call of God:

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and **called me by His grace, to reveal his Son in me**, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. (Gal 1:15).

Now, we might identify more specifically to what we are called by this inward work of grace in our lives: First, God effectually calls sinners **out of great and gross darkness, into marvelous and surprising light.** Peter had written,

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him **who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**” (1 Pet. 2:9)

Second, God effectually calls sinners **out of bondage to sin into liberty.** Our bondage to sin is a far worse problem than Israel in Egyptian bondage. We are called from sin into liberty, even the glorious liberty of the children of God. “Brethren, **you have been called unto liberty**” (Gal. 5:1-3). **John Gill** (1697-1771) wrote of this effectual; call of God of the sinner unto salvation:

They were slaves to their sinful lusts and pleasures, and were brought into bondage by them, and held under the power of them, as in a prison; but in effectual calling, the shackles of sin are broken off, and the prison-doors opened, and they are bid to go forth and show themselves; they become free from the tyranny of sin, and sin has no more dominion over them: in their state before calling, they are under the power and influence of satan, the strong man armed, who keeps possession of them, by whom they are kept in bondage, and led captive by him at his will; but when effectually called, they are taken out of his hands, and are turned from the power of satan unto God, and are delivered from the power of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, where they are Christ’s free-men... They are called and allowed to make use of a liberty of access to God, through Christ, by one Spirit, and to enjoy all the privileges of the gospel, and the immunities of a gospel church-state, being fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Third, God effectually calls sinners **from fellowship with the men of the world, to fellowship with Christ.** “God is faithful, by whom ye were **called** unto the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). Again, **John Gill** wrote:

As Abraham was called out of his country, from his kindred, and his father's house; so saints are called to forsake their own people, and their father's house; to relinquish the society of their former companions, and to have no fellowship with ungodly men: not that they are to have no civil correspondence, commerce, and society with the men of the world; for then, as the apostle says, they must needs go out of it; but not to join with them in superstitious worship, in acts of idolatry, in a false religion, and in the observance of the commandments of men; nor in any sinful, profane, and immoral practices; and as much as may be, should shun and avoid all unnecessary company, and conversation with them; for evil communications corrupt good manners; and it is a grief to the people of God, to be obliged to dwell among them, and with them, as it was to Lot, to Isaac and Rebecca, to David, Isaiah, and others: the people of God, in effectual vocation, are called to better company, to communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit; to fellowship with one another; to converse with saints, the excellent in the earth, in whom is all their delight.

Fourth, God effectually calls sinners *to peace*. "God hath *called* us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15). Gill wrote further of God's effectual call:

...to internal peace, to peace of mind and conscience; which men, in a state of nature, are strangers to; for there is no peace to the wicked: but God calls his people to it, and blesses them with it; with a peace which passes all understanding; with peace in the midst of the tribulations of the world; with a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; and which arises from the blood and righteousness of Christ, and is part of that kingdom of God which is within them."

Fifth, God effectually calls sinners *out of a state of unholiness and sinfulness, into a state of holiness and righteousness*. Paul wrote of this, "For God has *not called* us unto uncleanness, *but unto holiness*" (1 Thess. 4:7). Peter, too, wrote of our calling unto holiness. "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who *called* us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

Sixth, God effectually calls sinners *into the grace of Christ*. It is an inward call of God to receive all of the promises and benefits of Christ for sinners. By this call the individual is given understanding and faith whereby he receives Christ, embraces Christ, professes Christ, and stand fast in Christ. God is the One "Who hath *called* you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12). We could multiply the number of verses that speak to the effectual call of God. Consider these verses:

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for *flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father* who is in heaven.'" (Matt. 16:17)

"For as the Father raises the dead and giveth them life, even so *the Son also giveth life to whom He will*." (John 5:21)

"All that which the Father giveth Me *shall come unto me*; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37).

"No man can come to Me, *except the Father that sent Me draw him*: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' *Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto Me*." (John 6:44, 45)

"To him the porter opens; and *the sheep hear His voice*: and *He calls* his own sheep by name, and *leads them out*." (John 10:3)

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must bring*, and *they shall hear My voice*: and *they shall become one flock*, one shepherd." (John 10:16)

“*My sheep hear My voice*, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.*” (Acts 16:14)

“And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him: and when he was come, he helped them much *that had believed through grace.*” (Acts 18:27)

“For the gifts and the *calling of God* are not repented of” (i.e. retracted by God). (Rom. 11:29)

“God is faithful, through whom *you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*” (1 Cor. 1:9)

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a *heavenly calling*, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, (even) Jesus...” (Heb. 3:1).

## **2. Making your election certain.**

This is actually much easier than the first, to be assured of your effectual calling by God. For once you can be assured that God has effectually called you, then you can be certain that you are one of God’s elect. We read in Romans 8:29f, “For whom He (God) foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined (elected), these He also *called*...” If you have been effectually called, you may know for certain that you are one of God’s elect. God had purposed from eternity to save you from your sin and to glorify you before Him in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

The promise of God that accompanies these responsibilities is a glorious one. The Word of God declares, “for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:10f). If you do these things you may be assured of your participation in the glorious entrance into our Lord’s eternal kingdom which will be manifest when He returns to this world.

Let us be busy to add to our faith in the manner that our Lord has set before us. Let us increase in our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ for it is through this means that all of the gifts of grace are given to us. You might respond, “But pastor, I have difficulty understanding the Scriptures?” We can help you with this problem; that is our calling and responsibility. But you might say, “But pastor, I just don’t have the desire, the motivation to be in God’s Word and work through these matters.” Well then, you indeed have a problem, but it is one with which I cannot help you. Do not let the Word of God gather dust on your shelf--to sit idle, unused, unread, unstudied. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). May God bless our desires and efforts.

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## I ASKED THE LORD THAT I MIGHT GROW

by John Newton

I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!  
But it has been in such a way,  
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,  
At once He'd answer my request;  
And by His love's constraining pow'r,  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,  
Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?  
'Tis in this way, the Lord replied,  
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,  
From self, and pride, to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou may'st find thy all in Me.

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