

# The Duty to Pursue Assurance

*Guest Speakers*  
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I love what Todd said about marriage and the Lord. I love what somebody else said, he said the end, the story of the Bible is the battle of good and evil, and at the end, the hero kills the dragon and gets the girl, gets the bride, and that's why we as humans, we all love a good book or a good film that shows the battle of good and evil when good wins in the end because that's exactly God's word and God's plan for all of history and his purpose. So that was great.

Turn to 2 Peter 1. 2 Peter 1. The title of this message is "The Duty to Pursue Your Assurance." The duty to pursue assurance of salvation. Recently I had the privilege of teaching two different groups of Iranians in Turkey, this is in May, and I met a whole new group in a different city of 60 Iranians, and it was really great and I taught the book of 2 Peter in Farsi. It sounds like this. Anyway, that's how it sounds in Farsi, the second letter of Peter. And they had a lot of questions and it was so, it's such a blessing to meet all these former Muslims who have fled Iran, they come to Turkey and they've been fleeing Iran for the past 40 years, and Turkey is also a Muslim country but the Turkish government doesn't really care what we do with the refugees. So we have had a lot of freedom to preach the Gospel and share the Gospel and Iranians are so disillusioned with Islam that they come open and they have lots of questions and it's an opportunity for the Spirit of God to use his word, especially there are a lot that are just kind of open and seeking and interested and God is in the process of drawing many of them, some of them, and it's a great opportunity to do evangelism.

So thank you for your support all these years and we've been really blessed. Connie and I are going to Texas in October and I'm supposed to preach four times there and we're gonna have a big question and answer time, and I've been doing this for three or four years, I can't remember, and so a lot of Iranians from all over Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, are coming. Many of them go to American churches now so it's their opportunity to hear the word in their language and grow in their heart language. Many Iranians, many other Muslims too and I'm sure many other cultures, they learn enough English to work and go to the grocery store and talk to people on a surface level, but former Muslims really need the Gospel and teaching in their heart language so they can grasp what we're talking about, and so thank you so much for supporting us and praying for us.

Now let's look at 2 Peter 1. The main text is verse 10, the main text for this morning.

Let's just pause and pray.

*Father God, again, we worship You and praise You. Thank You that You are our heavenly Father, You're a perfect Father. Thank You for creation. Thank You for Your love that You poured out through the grace in Jesus Christ, Your only eternal Son. Thank You for His atonement. Thank You for the resurrection. And thank You for Your Holy Spirit who lives within us, who sanctifies us, who guides us, who convicts us. And Lord, we ask that Your Spirit work today, work in every believer's heart to conform us more to Your image and if there's anyone here that doesn't know You yet, I pray that You will bring life, that You will bring regeneration, that You will shine Your light into their heart just as the Scripture says, just as God said, "Let there be light. Light shall shine out of darkness," in Genesis, so also God has shone the light of the Gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ to those who believe. Thank You that You have awakened us, those of us that know You, and we pray You'll do that for others, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Okay, 2 Peter 1:10.

10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

This is the main text and we're gonna look at the context. Basically I want to give you ahead of time three main points from this verse. Number one is the basis of the command or the duty to pursue your assurance of salvation; number two is the duty itself; and number three is the reason why you should make it your duty to pursue your assurance of salvation if you're a Christian.

Now the title of this message, I didn't come up with this myself, it was actually the late R. C. Sproul who gave me the idea for this. As I was thinking about this, at first I was gonna show you a chart of 2 Peter and how it looks in Farsi, but it would probably have been all too complicated for Sunday morning, but he makes the point that this verse tells us, exhorts us that it is our duty to pursue assurance of salvation. Be all the more diligent to make certain or the NIV and the ESV says be all the more, be diligent to make his calling, to confirm your calling and election.

So what this passage shows us is that it is our duty to pursue assurance. It's very interesting to me and I want to begin as sort of an intro, to ask 11 questions that all relate to the whole book of 2 Peter, and I want to challenge you later to read the book of 2 Peter and ask yourself these questions as you study the whole book because we don't have time to do the whole book in one sermon, but ask yourself question 1, these are tests of true believers, tests of true believers.

1. Do you put forth effort and diligence and discipline to grow? Do you put forth effort and diligence and discipline to grow?

2. Is there any fruits of change and growth in your life? Do you have the fruits of change and growth in your life?

Question 3, when you sin, do you hate your sin so much that you want to repent and do repent and you want to change and you want to keep going, and you also rejoice in what Christ did for that sin?

Question 4, do you hate your own sin? That is related to number 3. Number 3 is about repentance. We're constantly challenged in the New Testament to continually repent. The epistles of Paul, especially Ephesians and Colossians, says put off the old self and put on the new self. Ephesians says put off the old self and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self. Do you repent? Do you hate your sin?

Number 5, do you love the word of God? Do you love the written word of God? Do you desire to read it, understand it, study it, meditate on it? Do you have a concern for sound doctrine? The whole book of 2 Peter, the whole chapter 2 is about false teachers and false doctrine and the false teachers and their characteristics. That brought up a lot of questions that the Iranians had. When I mentioned some of the false teachers that unfortunately other people are translating some of the false teachers into Farsi, and so it gives us a great opportunity to teach people sound doctrine.

So when you read through the book of 2 Peter, notice the emphasis on the written word of God. Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ, an eyewitness, the main disciple who's always speaking up and kind of the leader of the 12 in the Gospels, the most bold, and yet Peter says in chapter 1 from verses 12 to 21, basically he says, "I'm writing this so that when I die," because he knows he's gonna die, he knows his death is coming, he was executed by Nero around the year 67 AD and he says, "I'm writing this so that you'll have something to stir up your mind and remember the truth." It's interesting that Peter did not say, "I'm the first pope and the guy after me, the bishop after me, just look to him." He didn't say that, he said, "I'm writing this because I know I'm gonna die as the Lord told me, and when I die then you'll have the written word to look toward." That's what the passage after this emphasizes. He didn't say anything about succession of bishops or pope or anything like that, and that's one of the great proofs to me that the Roman Catholic Church is wrong on that issue because of what the Apostle Peter says here.

Do you love the word of God? Do you love the written word? In chapter 3, verse 1 he says, "This is the second letter I am writing to you to stir up your sincere minds, to remember the truth."

Question 6, has your nature been changed? Has your character been changed? Was your heart changed? He says in chapter 1, "We are partakers of the divine nature." That's another way of saying we have the Holy Spirit and God has changed us, but that we are growing and being conformed to the image of Christ and the Spirit has sanctified us at

conversion but also we are in the process of being sanctified. Has your nature been changed?

Question 7, are you growing in knowing God? Question 7 is about knowledge. Are you growing in knowing God and his character and will and the spiritual principles in his word?

Question 8, do you genuinely love people? Do you love other believers? And do you love unbelievers? One of the great teachings of Jesus is love your neighbor as yourself and Matthew 5:43-48 is an amazing passage, love your enemies Jesus said, even those that make us angry because of their evil. And we can pray for justice to be done against evil people, we can pray for God to take care of them. I was thinking about Star Wars and Emperor Palpatine, "He will take care of you, sir." Anyway, we can pray for justice but we also need to pray as long as someone is alive God could change a heart. The Gospel and God and his Spirit is powerful enough to change people.

Question 9, do you have a heart for evangelism and missions? Which flows right out of that which is what chapter 3 is all about. 2 Peter 3 is all about the Second Coming of Christ and until that time, he says live holy and godly and be busy in evangelism and missions because the reason Christ has not returned yet is because there are elect people out there who have yet to hear, who are going to hear, and they're gonna be saved. Not everybody, but some from every nation and people and tribe and tongue are out there, which is what Revelation 5 and Revelation 9 says, and several passages say, for example, 2 Timothy 2:10, the Apostle Paul says, "I do all things for the sake of the elect in order that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus." They haven't, if they haven't heard yet, they cannot be saved, Romans 10 tells us this. That's why evangelism and missions has no contradiction to sound, biblical, Reformed theology. There's no contradiction between what we call Calvinism and evangelism and missions, and the reason why the Lord hasn't come back yet is because he wants to save others.

Question 10, are you looking for and longing for the Second Coming of Christ? That's also chapter 3, 2 Peter.

And question 11, are you persevering? Are you determined to not give up? Are you enduring?

So those are just questions to think about as we think about this issue of pursuing our assurance.

Now back to 2 Peter 1:10. There's the basis of this exhortation or command or duty, there's the duty itself, and then there's the reason. The whole book of 2 Peter, the theme is growing in knowing God. At the very end of the book, he says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," chapter 3, verse 18, and all through the book he talks about knowing the Lord and growing in knowing God.

The basis of our assurance, point 1, where he says, "Therefore," back to chapter 1, verse 10, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." The basis is everything that came before this verse, verses 1 to 9, which I'll now read.

"Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that," verse 3. I'm reading from the New American Standard which I think is the best translation because a lot of translations don't have this little, they don't translate this little Greek phrase here, Greek word here, "seeing that," or because, the reason why grace and peace can be multiplied to us in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, because "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these," the promises, "He has granted," for by these, sorry, his glory and excellence, his character, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises." So the promises of God in his word are based on God's character, that God cannot lie. Always go back to that. When you're struggling and when you're going through trials, the word of God is based on his holy and perfect character. "For by these," his own glory and excellence, his goodness, his perfection, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

So we see here the basis of our assurance when he says therefore or consequently in verse 10, it is based on verses 1 to 9 where he talks about we who are believers, he says, he's writing to people who have the same, they have received a faith of the same kind as ours. That's an amazing statement that every Christian has the seed of the same faith that the apostles had. Many of the Iranians will say to me whenever I teach on suffering and the book of Job or 1 Peter or other places, the Apostle Paul and the thorn in the flesh that he had, they will say to me, "Well, I'm not Job. That's too high. He was too amazing and I'm not Paul and I'm not Peter." And yet here the Bible says if you're a believer, if you're a Christian, you have the same faith in you that the apostles had, and Peter wants to exhort you. If you have understood you're a sinner, you understood the holiness of God, that your sin was taking you, was causing you to, you were in the process of perishing, of going to eternal hell, you understood that and if you repented of that and turned on the inside to Christ to trust him, who Jesus is and his atonement and his resurrection, and

that's something that happened to you and you believe in Christ by faith alone, not by your own good works, not by any merit or any conditions, and you understood the Gospel and you turned to him, you have that kind of faith like the apostles based on the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Here's a clear verse on the deity of Christ. He calls Jesus Christ "our God and Savior." That's how the structure is. He's not saying our God meaning Father God and then our Savior Jesus Christ, he's saying this righteousness that Jesus was sinless and went to the cross in our place and took the wrath of God against our sin, he's saying that Jesus is our God and Savior by his righteousness and we have this faith. And it says that God's divine power has given us life. That includes eternal life, salvation, and the abundant life, John 10:10. The abundant life does not mean what the false teachers and the word of faith people say and people like Joel Osteen and Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar. It doesn't mean that, that God wants you rich and have success all the time. The abundant life means knowing the true God and that he will give you, he will be with you, he is the good shepherd, the context of that in John 10 is that Jesus is the good shepherd and he will protect you from the evil one, from Satan. That is knowing the true God. John 17:3, Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You," God the Father, "and Jesus Christ who You have sent." Knowing the true God and having a relationship with him is eternal life.

And Peter says we, God's divine power, verse 3, "seeing that His divine power has been granted to us for everything we need for life and godliness," and he gives us power to live a godly life, to be disciplined. This speaks of our devotional life. One commentator said it means much more than that, it's also about our duty in life. He gives us the power to do our duties. Growing up, not growing up but as our children were growing up, I used to say, "Duty first, then delight. Duty first, then delight." If you obey and do your duty, then you can have fun and have your delight. It's very important.

This passage also shows us God's promises based on his character, which I've already mentioned, and the purpose of God's promises. He says we are partakers of the divine nature. That does not mean we're little gods. That does not mean that we can call things into existence that are not, only God can do that. Only God has the power of Genesis 1. It does not, the Mormons use this passage to talk about their doctrine that all the men evolve into gods and they're gonna eventually get a planet and have multiple wives and procreate another planet. That's what Mormonism has always taught. It's a false religion. It is not Christianity.

So partakers of the divine nature, it also doesn't mean what the Eastern Orthodox Church says of theosis, becoming like God, what it means is that we have the Holy Spirit, we have a new nature, our old self was crucified with Christ, Romans 6:6. The bondage and the slavery to sin was broken and that we have the Holy Spirit and we can grow in being conformed to the image of Christ; that we grow in holiness the rest of our life.

So that's the basis of our assurance is all of these blessings from verses 1 to 9 before he says "Therefore," consequently. Secondly, the duty and the command to pursue

assurance. The duty and the command. He says be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. Now this is an amazing passage. I remember as a young Christian, the church that I grew a lot in and was disciplined in, they never touched on verses that talked about election or effectual calling, and I remember reading my Bible privately, when I would run into a verse like this, I'd go, "Oh, wow, it's talking about divine election, God chooses us and our calling," and when you study the idea of calling, he does not mean just inviting you. Now the Lord did invite people and the New Testament invites people and there's what's called the external call, that's evangelism, Jesus said, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden." Jesus and John the apostle said, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Jesus said, "If you're thirsty, come to Me and drink." There is an external call. Matthew 22:14 says, "many are called," invited, "but few are chosen." But here and in other places, when he says make your calling sure, he's talking about an effectual powerful calling that where the Spirit of God reaches into your heart and draws you all the way to salvation and is going to cause you to grow and persevere until the final day.

Where do I get that from? John 6:44, look at it. He, Jesus describes it in another way. This is the powerful effectual calling. Jesus said in John 6:44, "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." And look at what it says after that, "And I will raise him up on the last day." A lot of people don't notice. So everything in between the drawing when you're converted and saved until you're raised up on the last day at the Second Coming of Christ, the judgment when we're glorified, everything is in between that Jesus guarantees for his elect, for the called ones.

R. C. Sproul, again, has a really cool book called, "Now, That's a Good Question!," and this has been translated into Farsi. It needs some work. I use it. It's a long story. The guy that translated it in Iran lost his job because of his faith and his English is okay. I met him, I taught him in 2004 and he went back to Iran. But he lost his job and so a group hired him to translate R. C. Sproul's book, "Now, That's a Good Question!." Well, R. C. Sproul talks about John 6:44 and he says there are some biblical scholars and Christians who think this drawing just means persuasion or wooing or pleading or enticing, and yet what Jesus is really saying is, "People, if left to themselves, are not going to seek Me out." Romans 3:11 says no one seeks for God. What that means is no one in his human capacity in their unregenerate state is gonna seek God, and if people truly do seek God, that means God is working to bring them to himself spiritually and mystically behind the scenes.

We cannot see the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is invisible. That's why Jesus said, "The wind blows wherever it wishes and you hear the sound of it and you see the trees moving and you see the wind blowing the leaves, so it is with all who are born of the Spirit of God," John 3:8. The Spirit of God is the same way. We are to tell people the Gospel, to talk to them, to relate to people, to invite them in our homes, to reach out to people, to pass out tracts, to preach the Gospel, but we're also to trust the Spirit of God on that point when he works in the people's hearts to draw them.

Well, Sproul, R. C. Sproul was talking about, he was talking to a New Testament professor who admitted to him that the use of this word "draw" is used for in the ancient, in the first century in the ancient times when a person was coming up to a well of water, they would have to send an animal skin down or a bucket down all the way and get that water and draw it up to themselves. He says here you don't just stand up at a well and go, "Here, water. Here, water. Here, water," like, "Come on, Spot." No. You have to go down there and draw it up. And when God changes our heart, it's not force, it's not forcing people kicking and screaming to be saved. When God changes your heart from a heart of stone, Ezekiel 36:26-27 says, he takes out the heart of stone and he gives you a soft malleable heart of flesh, he gives you a new nature, he gives you a disposition and he draws you.

And then it says, "and I will cause them to walk in my statutes." Everyone who's ever been saved never says, "I don't like what he did. He forced me." No, you go, "Thank you!" Like a blind person who gets healed, "Thank you, wow!" Like somebody who's drowned and they're dead for a minute or two and they pull them up out and they breathe into them and they do CPR on them and they cough up that water, they go, "Ah, thank you for saving me! Thank you for giving me new life!" It's not force, it is God's grace.

And this word "drawing" is also used in Acts 16:19 and 21:30 where it says they dragged Paul and Timothy before the court and before the marketplace and then into prison. They dragged them. It's a powerful word. You have to go down with your bucket and get that water and so Sproul says the force of this verb is to say that we are in desperate need of the assistance of God to come to Christ and we will not come unless the Father brings us to him.

That's why Jesus said to Peter when Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood," a human being, "didn't tell you this but My Father in heaven revealed it to you." Behind the scenes the Father revealed that to Peter, the truth of that.

This is the calling. It's used this way, the powerful effectual calling in 1 Corinthians 1:24 and chapter 1, verse 18. Let's turn there and notice, 1 Corinthians 1:24. Be all the more diligent to make your calling sure. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 24, "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." It was the power of God that called you and drew you. It's the wisdom of God that he uses the message of the cross which seems foolish and idiotic to unbelievers.

I was watching a debate between the famous atheist who died a few years ago, Christopher Hitchens, versus John Lennox. John Lennox is a very delightful Irishman who's actually the uncle of Kristyn Getty. I didn't know that, I just found this out. And he was a great blessing to me listening to him online during the Sing! Conference. Connie and I were in Mississippi and we were able to catch some of it online and then I went to John Lennox's debates and Christopher Hitchens, wow, he really blasphemed a lot and it



was amazing his attitude toward the Gospel and the Lord and the message of the cross, the message of the Gospel.

Look at verse 18 which shows us the parallel, "For the word of the cross," meaning the message about the cross of Christ, the message about the atonement and within all of that is the fact that we cannot save ourselves, the eternal Son of God had to come as the God-man, fully human, fully God, and save us on the cross and rise from the dead, the message of this atonement "is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Now notice the parallel. So in verse 24, "to the called" is the same parallel as "to us who are being saved." It is the power of God. This effectual calling is very clear.

In Romans 8:28-30 which Brother Todd Friel preached a few weeks ago on the assurance of our salvation, he says that everyone who's been predestined is called and everyone who's called is justified. So when you believe in Christ and you're justified, you were called, you were drawn, you were powerfully made alive and drawn to Christ and you believed, you repented and believed, and then it says all those who are justified are glorified. So everything between justification and glorification when we get to heaven is the growth in holiness and perseverance, being conformed to the image of Christ, Romans 8:28 and 29.

The called. Revelation 7:14 he says, I'm sorry, Revelation 17:14, he says everyone who is with the Lamb, all of us who are with Jesus, we side with Jesus, we're with the Lamb are the called, the faithful and the chosen. It's a powerful effectual calling here.

Let's think about this word "make certain" or "confirm your calling." Look at Hebrews 3:14. What is, here's another passage where he uses that word. Hebrews 3:14, "For we have become partakers of Christ," past tense. It's actually the perfect tense which means we've already become partakers of Christ and that past reality is ongoing now. We have become partakers of Christ, "if we are holding fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." There's that word "assurance" and "firm." The same word in 2 Peter 1:10. If you are holding on, if you're persevering, if you're holding fast. Actually it means he's holding us fast like we just sang a few minutes ago. But if you are, you became a partaker of Christ at the moment you were converted, so your works confirm, your change confirms your salvation, your justification, not makes it in order that it would come about in the future.

Another passage, Romans 4:16 where this word is used. This is an amazing passage, Romans 4:16. After he explains justification by faith and not by works, not by the merit of works, not by the preconditions of works, in verse 16 of Romans 4 he says, "For this reason it is by faith," for this reason salvation and justification is by faith, "in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants," and he goes on, both Jews and Gentiles, people who have the faith of Abraham. That word "guaranteed" is the same word "make your calling and election sure" or "confirm, sure, confirm, assurance, guaranteed."

Then he, Peter uses it later in chapter 1, back to 2 Peter where he says, "Because I'm writing to you, not only did I experience, I was an eyewitness with Jesus. I was there. I saw Him transfigured. He became white like light, like the brightest launderer of that day could make clothes white," Mark 9 tells us. Peter said, "I was there. I was an eyewitness. I was on the holy mountain with Him." And then he says, "Because I'm writing this to you," and he's probably hinting at the fact that Mark wrote all of his action sermons down. You see, Peter didn't have time for writing. He wasn't an office kind of guy. He wasn't what we'd call a white-collar office worker. He was a rugged outdoorsman, a fisherman. He didn't have time for writing. That's why Mark wrote his Gospel for him. That's why Sylvanus wrote 1 Peter for him at the end of 1 Peter 5, you'll see that. And that's why probably somebody else wrote 2 Peter for Peter because they spoke in Aramaic and the Greek speakers had to polish it up. He says, "We have the word of prophesy made more sure because it's written down."

What about his choosing us, his electing us? Notice the passage 1:10 does not say make yourself elect. We cannot do that, only God can do that. It doesn't say save yourself or choose yourself or make yourself elect, it says make your election and calling sure or confirm it. So we cannot elect ourselves, we cannot make ourselves be one of the elect, but we can grow in our duty and growing in our assurance that we are one of the elect.

Ephesians 1:4-5 is very clear on the doctrine of election. The Apostle Paul says we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:13, he says that we were chosen for salvation from the beginning. 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." What a powerful passage on election.

Acts 13:48 it says, "as many as who were appointed to eternal life believed." So they were already elected and appointed to eternal life, then they believed in history as they heard the Gospel.

John 15:16 says, Jesus said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." What Jesus is saying is, "You did choose Me but you only chose Me because I chose you first." We do exercise our will but we only do that because God first works in our heart and changes us and gives us the ability to repent and believe. Many passages in the New Testament speak of repentance being granted to unbelievers, Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

So that's the duty. Then he says it is our duty and he exhorts us to make our calling and election sure, and then lastly is the reason and he says this, that word "for" there in 2 Timothy, I'm sorry, 2 Peter 1:10, the reason. "for as long as you practice these things," so sanctification involves practicing, doing, serving, getting up and reaching out, as long as you practice these things, adding to your faith goodness or virtue and adding to that knowledge. And let me say just a word about knowledge. Knowledge is very dangerous but knowledge is necessary. The Bible tells us we have to grow in knowledge.

1 Corinthians 8:1 says that knowledge puffs up. Knowledge makes us arrogant but love edifies, and that's why when he says add to your faith and your goodness knowledge, he also says be balanced and be godly, and within that passage there in 2 Peter 1, he talks about brotherly kindness and love and I think within godliness and self-control and brotherly kindness and love is humility. We have to constantly learn the lesson of humility and love.

So we have to stand firm on sound doctrine but also balance it with love and humility and we're learning that lesson until the day we die. He says if you practice these things, you will never, and he uses a double negative, never, never, no ever stumble, meaning stumble so as to fall, and what Peter is referring to is stumbling and showing yourself that you were never a believer, which is what the end of chapter 2 is about.

This is one of the hardest passages. The Iranians ask me all the time, two big questions that always come up, one is, "Why does God allow evil and sin and suffering?" And every time I go, we have several sessions on that issue and it's really a challenge to communicate that in Farsi. And then the other big question that the Iranians have, who are believers, who are young believers, because they heard a different theology in their evangelism, usually the other question is, "Can a true Christian lose his salvation?" And I remember one lady said, "Okay, give us the three best verses. We're not dumb, we know there's verses that seem like it says you can't lose your salvation and then there's other verses that says it seems like you can lose your salvation." So she goes, "Give me the best three on each one and then let us decide." And I said, "Well." So I went through the three that seem to say a believer can lose his salvation but then I went through all of them and pointed out and showed how it really doesn't teach that, and she and other people went, "That wasn't fair because you didn't show how the other ones, you know, that say you will never be lost, you can't lose your salvation, you didn't show how they could be shown to go the other way." I said, "Because you're wrong." I had to do it the very Iranian and Eastern way. I said, "I'm sorry, but that's what the Bible teaches us."

So the key to this passage which 2 Peter 2:19, 20 and 21, by themselves are very scary. By themselves it seems like the Apostle Peter is saying that people can lose their salvation but verse 22 is key where he says, I'll start in verse 19, the false teachers are "promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." Verse 22 is key, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'" What verse 22 is saying is this shows that that person who claimed to be a believer, who claimed to be in the church, who was sort of living a moral life and being with the moral environment with the other believers, they were learning head-knowledge about Jesus our Lord, but their nature was not changed. They were not born again.

This is a very powerful passage for Middle Easterners because dogs are dirty street animals and, of course, now modern Iranians are starting to domesticate dogs and the young people are bringing them into their homes and the grandparents and the parents do not like that. When we lived in Turkey, no one would ever have a dog in the house. The Muslims would say, "Oh, the dog, you have to train him. He doesn't know what to do unless you train him. But the cat, he is clean. The cat knows what to do. If you give a litter box, the cat knows what to do." But the Muslims go, "Oh, the dog, oh, eck, terrible! And we don't like the poop, you know?" And so then pigs, sow, hogs, those are very nasty for the Middle Easterners, and I remember Connie's parents who were here sent us when we lived in Turkey, they sent us a calendar and each month had a cute pink pig on it, but do you know what the language teacher that was teaching my wife, Connie, she said, "No wonder you guys eat pigs because they're all nice and clean and pink." She said, "The ones in Iran are black and dirty and nasty and, you know, kilometers away you're like ack." She said, "Man, I've never seen a pig look so nice."

So their nature was not changed and I'll never forget emphasizing this and they said, "Ah, yeah, you got us on that one. That's what it seems to say."

So practice means doing good works, diligence, effort, striving, a good kind of striving. Colossians 1:29, Paul says, "I labor and strive according to the power that works within me." Discipline, study, practicing the character qualities of verses 5 to 9, growing in faith. You know, we're constantly growing and a couple of verses have really meant a lot to me in the past two years since we lost our son Blake, where in Mark 9:24, the guy says to Jesus, "I do believe. Help my unbelief. I do believe. Help my unbelief." Sometimes trials and circumstances are so hard all we can do is wake up and say, "I do believe You, Lord, but help my unbelief. Help me!"

I love how John Piper is so transparent and he says, "Sometimes I have to get up and go, 'Help!'" That's me, and that's why I like, that's why I asked James to read Psalm 28. Verse 7 has sustained me many days over these past two years where he says, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him," my heart trusts in Him, and then it says, "and I am helped," which is really an and of, result or a therefore. My heart trusts in Him, therefore I am helped. When we trust the Lord and keep going, he helps us, his Spirit helps us. When we add, when we serve, when we reach out, when we share our faith, when we get involved in discipleship, we are practicing these things and we will not fall away.

Now to close, I wanted to read a couple of quotes from John MacArthur in his book, "The Gospel According to the Apostles." Faith works, that is, true faith works. Good works are the result of true faith. True faith will work. If you're a true believer, you want to do right and when you sin, you hate your sin and you stay in church and you take the Lord's Supper, you confess your sins, you search your heart, and you again go back to the once-for-all atonement of Christ for your sins.

I read this book a long time ago, "The Gospel According to the Apostles." John MacArthur says true assurance of salvation always goes hand-in-hand with an awareness of our sinfulness. In fact, the more certain we are of salvation, the deeper our awareness of our sin becomes. We know we are sinners. We agree with God about that. We are not surprised to discover sin in our lives but nevertheless we hate it. We know we are forgiven and cleansed and that Christ is our Advocate. Far from using that knowledge to justify our sin, however, we see it as a motivation to mortify sin, that is to put it to death, all the more. "I am writing these things to you that you may not sin," 1 John 2:1. We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous who is at the right hand of the Father praying for us, and John says, "I write these things to you that you may not sin."

Then later, MacArthur says those with true faith will fail and in some cases frequently, but a genuine believer will as a pattern of life confess his sin and come to the Father for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9. Of course, Christians sin. They disobey. The reason I'm reading this is when you think about all that, sometimes we can get overwhelmed with the temptation, the feeling that we have to be perfect and that is not what the New Testament teaches. We disobey sometimes, we fail many times, we all fall short of perfection in this life, MacArthur writes, Philippians 3:12-15, we all stumble in many ways, James 3:2 says, even the most mature and godly Christians see in a mirror dimly, 1 Corinthians 13:12, our minds need constant renewing, Romans 12:2, but that doesn't invalidate the truth that salvation in some real sense makes us practically righteous. The same epistle that describes the Christian's hatred of sin and the battle with sin in Romans 7, first says that believers are freed from sin and slaves of righteousness in chapter 6. The same apostle, John, who wrote if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, 1 John 1:8, later wrote no one who abides in him constantly continuously sins, chapter 3, verse 6. In one place he says if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us, 1 John 1:10, and in another place he says no one who is born of God constantly practices sin because his seed, the nature of God, abides in him, 1 John 3:9. It means no one who is born of God constantly sins without conviction, remorse and eventually repentance and turning back to Christ.

So all of this, MacArthur says, speaks of direction, not perfection. I love that. The New Testament speaks of the test of your assurance is what direction are you going. Are you growing. It's kind of like three steps forward, two steps back, but at least you've progressed once, one step. This speaks of direction, not perfection. People who are in bondage to perfectionism is a heavy bondage. That's why the Gospel is so wonderful.

I was counseling a man recently who seems like he cannot grab hold of forgiveness. He's been a Christian many years and he regrets secret life, he regrets his sin, and I was trying to help him. I said, "The fact that you hate your sin, the fact that you're worried, the fact that it bothers you shows that you're a true believer." But he was struggling to really grab hold of that.

So I want to close with Hebrews 9:12-14. He was focusing on all the defilement of his sin and yet the Gospel, I love what Roy Hession would say, he wrote a book called, "The Calvary Road." He always said the Christian life is constantly repenting but also rejoicing

in the forgiveness and the cleansing of true repentance. Repenting and rejoicing.  
Repenting and rejoicing.

In Hebrews 9:11, "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves," so he's referring to all those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, "but through His own blood, [Christ] entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." What a powerful phrase, having obtained eternal redemption. "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh," verse 14, "how much more will the blood of Christ," how much more will the atonement of Christ, how much more will the death of Christ who took the wrath of God, who took the punishment for us, who stood in our place, who voluntarily willingly came and allowed himself to be crucified, how much more will the blood of Christ, the sinless eternal Son of God, "who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God," how much more will the atonement of Christ, "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

So let us take heed and let us grab hold of the duty to pursue our assurance of salvation. If you're a believer, keep on pursuing your assurance and the result is in verse 11 there where he says in this way you, the entrance to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you which is like in Matthew 25 Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master."

Let's pray.

*Father, thank You for this passage. I pray for every believer, that You would help them to be diligent to confirm their calling and election, to make it sure, to grow in their assurance, and that that would produce more fruit, more service, more good works, more love, more evangelism, more discipleship, more holiness. And Lord, for anyone here who doesn't know You, Lord, I pray that they would meditate on that, that the blood of Christ, the bloody, violent death of Christ on the cross in the sinner's place cleanses our conscience from dead works and guilt. Thank You, Lord, that You clean, You cleanse us, You wash us clean and You give us a new nature. In Jesus' name. Amen.*