

LD 7 Saving Faith as Assurance QA 21-22 part 2

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My Only Comfort

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We read the Holy Scripture this morning in the first chapter of Peter's second epistle. 2 Peter 1. The word of God then at 2 Peter 1:1,

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. 13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; 14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. 15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. 16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to

him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. 19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

There ends our reading of the Sacred Scripture this morning. May the Lord bless our reading of his holy word.

On the basis of this, and all of scripture, is found the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. One more time we turn to Lord's Day 7 reading again Questions and Answers 21 and 22.

Q. 21. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Q. 22. What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

A. All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, endow thy servant with thy Holy Spirit, granting unto him the ability to speak thy word in boldness and in truth for the edification of thy people, and by that same Spirit, soften their hearts, illumine their minds, and grant them the ability clearly to understand thy word and to apply it to their own walk of life. Keep us from sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you live in the assurance of your salvation? Does it live in your heart that God is your Father, and that Christ Jesus is your elder brother, that the Holy Spirit indwells you, has regenerated you, given you the gift of faith, has united you to Jesus Christ? Do you know yourself to be a son or a daughter of God and have the confidence that no matter what befalls you, you have a heavenly Father who will never allow anything to harm his children, will work all things, all things together for your good? Do you have the assurance of this Lord's Day that not only to others but to me

also, me also has been given the gift of salvation, righteousness in Jesus Christ, the assurance of preservation in salvation? Do you enjoy personally the comfort of the very first Question and Answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, that you belong to the faithful Savior Jesus Christ, that God will never allow anything to separate you from him? Do you live in the assurance that for life or for death you belong, belong to that faithful Savior?

This is the assurance of the people of God according to God's own will. God wills that his people enjoy the assurance of their salvation. It is not only his will to save us so that at the end of our earthly pilgrimage at the moment of death, we're translated into his presence, into the joys and glories of heaven, there to reign with Jesus Christ eternally, but also the assurance here and now before that moment arrives, that we are his people, know ourselves to be his people, live day by day in the assurance of faith. This is God's will because God is our heavenly Father. What father here this morning does not will that above everything else his children have the confidence that he loves them. Not that he will provide for them, not that he will put food on the table, give them a warm bed to sleep in, an education in a good Christian school, but that he loves them. That's the assurance that God, our heavenly Father, wills for us, his spiritual children.

This belongs to the distinctively Reformed view of faith. It belongs to the distinctively Reformed view of faith, that faith is the gift of God, that faith is worked in us by God and by God alone, is not due to the work of God in cooperation with our free will. Not that, exclusively the gift and the work of God. But it is also the distinctively Reformed doctrine of faith that faith is assurance. Jesus Christ did not only die so that I might have faith. He did. It's one of the most outstanding benefits of his cross. Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ." The meaning there, the intent of the apostle at the very end of the verse is, "like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God who is our Savior Jesus Christ." The precious faith that we alike enjoy is the gift and the work of God through, on account of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

But that faith is assurance. Assurance distinguishes true faith from every form of false faith, hypocritical faith. There are always unbelievers mixed in with the church. They claim to be believers, they claim to have faith, and probably for a little while, maybe even for quite a while they are able to fool us. The hypocrite can't fool two people, though, he can't fool himself and he can't fool God. But what the hypocrite does not enjoy in distinction from the true believer is the assurance of faith. The assurance of faith.

I call your attention this morning to saving faith as assurance. Let's notice three things together. First of all, what it is, what is faith's assurance. Secondly, how it is worked in us. And finally, the fruit that it produces.

Assurance belongs to the essence of faith. This is what faith, true saving faith is. It includes assurance. Of the two elements of saving faith that are identified in Lord's Day 7, it is this element that stands on the foreground. Now that other element is important, it

has its own unique place, it's first in order and it must be first, that's the knowledge of faith. And faith's knowledge is referred to frequently in the chapter that we read this morning, 2 Peter 1:2-3, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." And again in verses 5 and 6, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance." Nonetheless, of the two elements of saving faith, it is assurance that stands on the foreground in Lord's Day 7. That comes out already when in describing the knowledge of faith, the 21st Answer speaks of that knowledge as "a certain knowledge." That doesn't mean a certain kind of knowledge, that's true, spiritual knowledge in distinction from mere intellectual knowledge, but certain knowledge is assured knowledge, knowledge that you are absolutely certain of. True faith is certain knowledge but then especially when the Answer goes on to speak of faith as "an assured confidence." That's really a redundancy, an assured confidence, a confident confidence, but so strongly would the Catechism emphasize to us that faith is assurance.

That assurance of faith also comes out in the 22nd Question and Answer which introduces the Apostles' Creed to us with these words, "the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith." Undoubted, that's putting it negatively. We must not doubt. We ought not to doubt. The articles of our faith are sure and we must be sure.

As I said, this is God's will for us. The opening verse of the second epistle underscores that, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." It's very plain there that as much as it was the will of God that Christ Jesus our Savior should die for us and should accomplish for us a perfect righteousness, the faith that is grounded in his cross must be a certain faith.

That's partly why that faith is so precious. There are other things. Faith is precious for a number of reasons but one reason is that faith is assurance and gives to the people of God confidence in their daily walk through this sin-cursed world. That comes out in verse 3, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." We may know that. The apostle knows that. We may know that. We ought to know that and we ought to live in the certainty of that, that God has called each one of us to glory and to virtue.

Then in the 10th verse when he addresses us, "Wherefore the rather, brethren," brethren, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure." More about that in a bit, but now just that address. Brethren. Brothers and sisters we are in the family of God. That address itself, brethren, bespeaks the love of God that has made you and has made me a member of his covenant family.

Faith is assurance. This assurance is personal. Of course it is, or assurance would not be assurance. In the nature of the case, assurance is personal. Since election is the source and

the cause of our salvation, faith's assurance is the personal assurance that I am an elect child of God. I know that about myself. I have the assurance of that through faith in Jesus Christ. This belongs too to the doctrine of election, not just that God chooses some people unto eternal salvation but that God assures those whom he has chosen, assures them here and now, assures them in this life, assures them personally and individually as much as if your names were written in the pages of Holy Scripture. He identifies you as one of his elect, that's the personal assurance of faith.

As election is the cause of our salvation, the cross of Jesus Christ is the ground and foundation of our salvation. That too is the assurance of faith, the personal assurance of faith. Not just that there was a man who lived some thousands of years ago, born in Bethlehem's stable, lived and taught in Palestine, suffered and died on a cross, rose again from the dead, is ascended into heaven, but that that Lord Jesus Christ is my Savior. He was born in Bethlehem's stable for me. He suffered and died for me. He obeyed the will of God perfectly on my behalf. I am united to him by a true faith. He is my Lord and my Savior.

As election is the cause of salvation and the cross of Jesus Christ the basis for salvation, so it is the Holy Spirit who actually works salvation within the child of God, who applies to the believer all the blessings of salvation earned by Christ on his cross, who does that first by regenerating the elect believer, bringing him to faith, to conversion, and that too is the personal aspect of the assurance of faith. Not just that there is a Holy Spirit who works the work we call sanctification and who preserves the elect unto eternal salvation, but that that Holy Spirit lives in me, in my own heart and in my life. That Spirit who works in me the desire to keep God's commandments, sorrow of heart when I do not keep God's commandments, breaks me so that I confess my transgression unto the Lord and beseech his forgiveness. Me, the work of the Spirit in my heart.

The Holy Spirit who brings salvation to us, also keeps us in salvation, preserves us in salvation. It isn't simply that he brings us to salvation and then leaves us to our own devices, but he brings us to salvation and every moment thereafter, every day of our lives, keeps us until we breathe our last and we are brought into the presence of God in eternity.

The assurance of that is personal and is individual. It isn't just the assurance of the preservation of the saints, that God keeps his own elect, those redeemed in the blood of his Son Jesus Christ, but faith's confidence is that he will preserve me through all of the troubles and sorrows of earthly life, even through my own sins, my own falls into sin and temptation, will preserve me in order in the end to present me faultless before the throne of his grace. That is the assurance of faith.

Are you living in that assurance? Is that the confidence that you will have this week no matter what happens to you, to your child, to your spouse, to some other member of the congregation? Are you assured this morning with the assurance of a true faith that since God is your God, nothing, absolutely nothing can ever separate you from him? And does that persuasion motivate you to live the Christian life?

Scripture and the Reformed Confessions teach that though faith assures of salvation, that faith is confirmed by a life of good works. The fruits of faith and the fruits of grace. These evidences of God's grace in our lives are not the basis nor cause of our assurance. Faith is assured of salvation, the problem is my faith is weak, and my faith often falters, and especially in the storms of life, my own falls into sin are the distressing circumstances that God may bring into my life. My faith is weak and the doubts and the fears rise up and the devil whispers in my ear, "You're not, you're not a child of God. Not really. This is all a show."

Then, of course, the answer is faith in Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ. But in his goodness, God stoops to the weakness of our faith and God himself uses the fruits and evidences of faith and of election in order to confirm our assurance. Are those fruits evident in your life? The Canons of Dort refer to these confirming fruits of election, of faith and of salvation in several places. If you're reading the Standard Bearer, as I hope you all are and do, you will notice that I have begun a series of articles on assurance and good works, relating them. Just a beginning but there are numerous references in our Creeds. One of the most outstanding is Canons V, Article 10.

"This assurance," the assurance of preservation in our salvation to the end, the assurance of our election, the assurance that we are the children of God, all of those aspects of assurance, "This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises," faith, "which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit," working within us, "that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16)," among other passages, "and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory and of this infallible pledge or earnest of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable."

Are the evidences of true faith present in your life? Do you love the Lord God and his Son Jesus Christ? Are you his servant, his willing and obedient servant in the place in life in which God has set you? Do you strive to live the kind of life that the Apostle Peter describes in this first chapter of his second epistle, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." If these fruits and evidences of election and of faith are present in your life, be assured, confirmed in your assurance that you are an elect child of God.

Ask yourself the question further, if the fruits of the death of Christ manifest themselves in my life? Do I trust in him and him alone, not at all in my own worth or works for my standing before God? Do I repent of my sins, sincerely repent of my sins? Do I hate them

and do I flee from them, and do I fight against them? If you do, be assured with the assurance of a true faith that you are an elect child of God and that Christ the Savior has died for you, even for you.

Are you living with the fruits of the Spirit manifest in your life, observable by others around you at school, on the job, in the congregation, in your family life? Are spiritual things your meat and your drink, that attitude toward spiritual things such that they take preeminence over your own pleasure, sports, entertainment? Is your attitude that you love the things of the kingdom of God? Then know, know with the assurance of a true faith that you are a child of God.

Ask yourself: are the fruits of preserving grace evident in my life? Do I pray to God for my preservation in the faith? Do I make that prayer to God for my children and for my grandchildren? And do I make use of the means of grace for the preservation of faith? Then be assured, live in the assurance that you are an elect child of God.

How is this assurance worked in us? How does God work and preserve in us this blessed assurance? We must be clear this morning not only of what faith is assured but we must be clear how, how this assurance is worked by God in the believer. We mustn't make our peace with doubts and with fear. We mustn't suppose, "Well, that's just the way it is," or, "That's just the way I am, and it's going to be that way the rest of my life and there's really nothing that I can do about it." Not so. We may not make peace with our doubts and with our fears. The question is: how then, how do I enjoy the full assurance of faith? What must be emphasized at the outset is that assurance is the work of grace, God's grace. We mustn't suppose that God gives us the gift of faith and that somehow we manufacture thereafter on our own the assurance of faith, maybe follow some steps, push some buttons and there you have it, presto, we have the assurance of faith and now we'll live out the rest of our days in that assurance. Not so. God is a God of means, the God who graciously gives us and works in us faith and faith's assurance is a God of means.

The means, of course, outstandingly is his word. Right now at this very moment, one of the great works of God through the preaching of his word is that he is strengthening, he is confirming your and your and my assurance of faith. Through the gospel and the preaching of the gospel, he draws us closer to himself and to his Son Jesus Christ. Under the word, he dispels the doubts and the fears that so often trouble us and with which we wrestle. Here, beloved, is where we must go with our doubts and with our fears. We do not make peace with them, we bring them to church with us. Under the preaching of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, not only does he work faith but he works faith's assurance in us. How important then in our spiritual lives, in the lives of our children, is going to church, being faithful in our church attendance, being members of a true church of Jesus Christ where the grace of the gospel is proclaimed and maintained? God uses the sound preaching of his word for the strengthening and for the assurance of faith.

Although God works the assurance of faith under the preaching of his word, we are active in this whole matter of the assurance of faith. God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us and now we have it forever, can never be taken away from us, and we have nothing

to worry about as regards this matter of the assurance of our faith, but God's people are active, busy in this whole matter of the assurance of their faith. That's 2 Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence," give diligence, "to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Make your calling and election sure. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

We make our calling and our election sure by doing those things which the apostle himself has just described, the things that he mentions beginning at verse 5, "giving all diligence, add to your faith," there's that same word "diligence" that comes down at the end of the list again in verse 10, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity," love. "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's how we make our calling and election sure.

What he is describing is the Christian life, the living of the Christian life. What he is describing is a life lived out of love for God and love for the neighbor. What he's describing is a life lived in obedience to God's 10 Commandments. God uses that in order to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation. When we cultivate the fruits of faith in our life so that these fruits of faith manifest themselves so that others are blessed by the fruits of faith that we exhibit in our lives, then in that way we are making our calling and our election sure.

This assurance in the life of the child of God produces a good fruit. It's really the assurance of salvation that establishes the whole Christian life. What is the Christian life? The Heidelberg Catechism puts its finger on it. One of the greatest aspects of the instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism, you children know it. What is the Christian life? It's gratitude. It's thankfulness. But how can you be thankful, truly thankful if you don't know that for which you should be thankful, don't know the one who has bestowed these abundant gifts upon you so that you can thank them? Gratitude, the whole life lived in obedience to God and in service of our brothers and sisters in the church is grounded in the assurance of our election and our salvation. Doubt is absolutely destructive to the Christian life. That's exactly what the devil wants. He wants us to be consumed with doubts because then he's put us on the shelf and we're not living the Christian life to the glory of God and the well-being of our neighbor.

Assurance energizes the Christian life. The assurance of salvation also produces patience. That's one thing that's mentioned. You can't say a lot about all the things that are mentioned there but patience. 2 Peter 1:6, patience isn't just enduring or bearing with somebody who's annoying but patience in the Bible is enduring suffering, reproach, persecution. That's patience, that we endure, that the trials and hardships of earthly life, that the persecutions that are brought to bear on us exactly because we're living out of the faith that God has worked in us, that's the fruit of the assurance of our salvation. Then we're able to bear up. Then no matter what the devil, the wicked world, or the false

church does to us, we do not lose the blessed assurance that we are the people of God. Then we have that patience, the assurance that the light afflictions that now we endure are working for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Is that how you are looking at the sufferings and persecutions in your life?

The assurance of salvation also produces peace and joy in the Christian life. Verse 2, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." Yes, the Christian life is not only a life of gratitude, it's a joyful life. They're mistaken to suppose that Christians walk around with long faces, are always in the doldrums, gloomy, the glass is always half empty. That's not true. That's not the Christian life. The Christian life is a life of joy, joy in the Lord but joy nonetheless, unspeakable joy, and it is that because we live and have at all times what can never be taken away from us, the assurance of our salvation.

Not only does the assurance of salvation energize the Christian life, it enables us to die. That too. We're all going to die. Everybody here this morning is going to die. That's the reality of life in a sin-cursed world. What a horror. I've tried myself to imagine it. I can't. To face death without the assurance of salvation, to face the horror of leaving this life in order to enter into hell, eternal hell where the wrath of God is visited unending, we cannot imagine. But the assurance of salvation, the child of God not only lives thankfully and joyfully but the child of God also dies. Peter, the Apostle Peter, crucified. That's how he ended his life, upside down because he did not, he said to his persecutors, possess the honor of being crucified as his Lord was crucified. Upside down, but that didn't take away his assurance as he died of salvation and eternal life, the assurance of faith. Amen.

Father in heaven, bless thy word unto our hearts this morning. We thank thee for it, for the blessed assurance of salvation so that we live and we die.