

## **Make sure your calling and election**

WCF 18:3& 4; 2 Peter 1:1-11 (10&11)

Here in this letter Peter is addressing the church believers in our Lord Jesus Christ Christians. They share the same faith and are clothed with the same righteousness as Peter and the apostles. As believers Peter greets them with the familiar words, “Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.” These words are true for us too. We hear them every Sunday. They reassure us time and time again that for those who have the same faith, God’s grace and peace rests upon us. We need not doubt that.

However we don’t always feel grace and peace. The confession speaks of the fact that true believers can have their assurance of salvation shaken, lessened and interrupted in different ways. So we need to a) consider how that can happen and then b) what steps need to be taken to avoid suffering a loss of assurance of salvation and then c) what the result of taking positive steps towards a strong assurance are. So three points to the sermon this afternoon;

1. The causes of a loss of assurance,
2. Steps towards a greater assurance and
3. The results of a strong assurance of salvation.

**1.** We begin by considering those **things which can cause a loss of assurance.** Following his greeting, Peter reminds his readers that they and we have divine power; i.e. a new ability to live obedient lives to the glory of God. We can do that because we are ‘partakers of the divine nature.’ We share some of the moral excellence of the life of Christ now and we’ll participate in Christ’s glory later. This is true for all who are united to Christ by faith.

However assurance and faith are not one and the same thing. Faith is the root. Assurance is the fruit. And Peter says that the list of virtues in verses 5-8 which make us useful and fruitful can become diminished due to neglect or ignorance. And also in verse 9, “The man who lacks these things (that is Christian virtues) is blind or short sighted.”

How might that look?

One example of such short sightedness is failing to realise that there is a spiritual war on. We can be fooled into thinking that all is well with the world, at least here in New Zealand and that that the unbelievers we mingle with are nicer people than the some people in the church. Well such naive thoughts can leave a Christian, especially younger less experienced Christians, wide open to temptation which can lead to sin. It’s already happened plenty of times in our own circles, Sin, as the confession says, wounds the conscience and grieves the spirit with a resulting loss of assurance.

Indolence can also contribute to a loss of assurance as it happened with King David. Instead of being at work with his men leading them in battle David stayed home. David had time on his hands. He was probably bored as well and one day as he was gazing out of the window of his house his eyes alighted on Bathsheba and he was beset with a strong temptation. David never lost his faith but his assurance was badly shaken as we see by his plea in Psalm 51, “Do not cast me from thy presence Oh Lord, Do not take your Spirit from me!

Lack of assurance can also come about due to a failure to pray. When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples were sleeping, Peter included. Peter's subsequent denials of Christ caused him a great deal of anxiety and regret. He didn't lose his faith because Christ had prayed for him but his assurance was badly shaken because Peter himself relied on his own strength and had failed to pray.

Here are other things that can bring on loss of assurance such as suffering. We can think of Job whose suffering caused him to question God and even wish he had never been born.

Or the Psalmist of Psalm 88:14 whose adverse circumstances made him think God had abandoned him. This is seen in his prayer, "why O Lord do you reject me and hide your face from me."

There are times when matters of faith seem irrelevant because of the busy circumstances of life or when God seems remote during times of illness when it seems (as the confession puts it) "God has withdrawn the light of his face and had allowed even those who fear him to live in darkness and have no light." Well I can imagine that the Christian who lives with depression can have those kinds of experiences.

So there are a range of things that cause loss of assurance and much of it has to do with our own short sightedness and neglect. Leaving ourselves open to temptation, failing to pray, giving little attention to the word of God or the means of grace available to us, ignoring spiritual disciplines and being overly engrossed in worldly concerns.

But remember assurance of salvation is the fruit and not the root. The discouraged believer must and will at some point turn to God. Thomas made sure he was there was in the room when Jesus appeared and Jesus showed doubting Thomas the nail marks in his hands and where the spear was thrust into Jesus side. Or think about the discouraged psalmist also prostrate before the Lord saying, "O Lord God hear my prayer. Where ever there is a root of faith God's seed remains in that person.

We've looked at some of the causes of a loss of assurance let's think now about the steps we can take to strengthen our assurance of salvation.

**2. What Peter writes next is designed to do just that; encourage readers and us to **take steps to strengthen our assurance of salvation.****

In verse 10 Peter wrote, "therefore, be all the more diligent to make certain His calling and election of you."

Now we know that election comes from God alone as does God's call on our lives, and so does regeneration. These steps in the order of salvation are entirely God's work on us. But what follows in our lives is the visible proof of our election and so Peter urges Christians to work on the things that show we are elect so as to strengthen our assurance of salvation.

Now let's just think for a moment about the historical context of Peter's letter. There were false teachers in the churches. These were the false prophets mentioned in chapter 2 who introduced destructive heresies, denied the person and work of Christ, indulged in the flesh, despised godly authority, greedily exploited the weak and maligned the gospel!

Now these false teachers boasted of their own divine calling and election and made that an excuse for licentious behaviour as though they had permission to sin with impunity because of their claim to be predestined.

Well they may have claimed to be elect and called by God but not all who hear the divine call make progress in Christian conduct. Because you see the divine call has two sides to it. There is the outward call of the gospel and then there is the inner call otherwise known as the effectual call which brings about the proof of one's election and being united to Christ.

Those who have received the inner call, who have as Peter puts it in verse 3 become "partakers of God's divine nature" will practice the virtues listed in verses 5-7.

These include the diligent exercise of your faith. That means actually living out your faith so that it's not just an intellectual thing but an experiential faith. An experiential faith is a faith that trusts and works. It's seen in the regular worship of God, prayer and serving the Lord in whatever way you can. It includes striving for moral excellence rather than thinking, "well since I'm saved any way and I can't do anything to make God love me more than he already has I may as well do as I please, or I'll just risk this bit of sinful behaviour.

Rather than saying that, the person who partakes of the divine nature will strive for moral excellence, study God's word and exercise self-control brotherly kindness and love.

The last of the virtues listed there is significant because it expresses love. Love is the word Jesus used to summarise the Ten Commandments with saying, "love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself."

This is the very virtue which was absent among the false teachers mentioned in 2 Peter 2. They didn't love their brethren in the church but exploited them and tried to corrupt them. On the other hand as Michael Green puts it, "those who are partakers of the divine nature who are born again will show their royal birth in royal behaviour towards other children of the king whatever their differences in class or culture or custom might be."

And Peter says "be all the more diligent." This virtue of love has to be worked at. It involves bearing each other's burdens, refusing to participate in gossip and prejudice and the like.

Paul also says that the greatest of the virtues is love. "There is faith hope and love and the greatest of these is love".

John says "God is love and if we are loved by God then we will also love."

When assurance of salvation at a low ebb then Peter provides the steps we can all take to strengthen our assurance. For example the regular habit of prayer and diligence in the practice of Christians virtues, especially love. We have the power to do it.. Consider again verse 3. His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

**3. Do that and two results** will follow. Verse 10 finishes with the words, "you will never fall." I don't think that that means we will never stumble along the lines of James 3:2 which says "we all stumble in many ways" But what Peter meant is that the Christian who is diligent in practicing the Christian virtues and especially love, will be spared a disastrous coming to grief, as David did when he dropped his guard or Peter because he failed to pray.

Well who wants to fall like that? We have the power to avoid it Be diligent in practicing Christian virtues and the promiser here is that you won't fall but you will be will be firmly established, unmoved and certain of your salvation.

The second result is seen in verse 11. "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you". When we think of the words "entrance into the kingdom" we can think of the Lord Jesus entry on Palm Sunday into Jerusalem where he was hailed as a king of the Jews. Or we can think of the honour a successful athlete receives when he returns to his home town wearing his wreath of victory and being cheered on by crowds of people lining the street. This is the image that Peter uses here to describe the kind of entrance into God's eternal kingdom which the loving and obedient receive. There are two things that Peter says about this kingdom.

The first is that it is an eternal kingdom. Now we know that Jesus ushered in his kingdom with power from the time of his ministry onwards and that this kingdom has both a present and future aspect. The preaching of the gospel, conversion of sinners and progress of the church are evidence of the coming of God's kingdom with power in this age. But what is actually in view here in 1 Peter 2 is the future aspect of the kingdom. Like Abraham the Christian today is to called to press on towards that "better city whose foundations, builder and maker is God."

The other thing to note is that this kingdom belongs to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So, all who are in a relationship with him by grace through faith .will enter that kingdom.

However, what Peter is impressing on his readers and us is this. That while heaven is entirely a gift of God's grace and is neither earned nor deserved, there will be degrees of reward in heaven. And the degree of reward depends on how faithfully we have built a structure of love and obedience on the foundation who is Christ.

And so the challenge for us is this. Why enter the kingdom like a bedraggled sailor who just managed to make it to shore after his ship was wrecked?

Or why enter the eternal kingdom like a man who has just managed to escape with his own life from his burning house while all his possessions and everyone else in the house perished?

The picture Peter paints for us is that through diligence in practicing Christian virtue you will have an abundant entrance into the heavenly city. You will be welcomed like a victorious athlete. That is the kind of reception the apostle Paul anticipated when he said "there is in store for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day. "Not only to me but all who long for his appearing."

Does every Christian long for Christ's appearing with the same eagerness as Paul or those who have been diligent in making their calling and election sure?

No. While every believer will be saved, not every believer has the same level of assurance of salvation or the same longing for Christ's appearance for all the reasons mentioned above.

Well we are urged to cultivate that assurance and longing. Make every effort. Look back on the great privileges you have in Christ and then walk worthily of those privileges.

Amen.

