

## *Appendix 6*

### *2 Peter 1:10*

[God's] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

The words in question are, of course: 'My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure' (2 Pet. 1:10).

What does Peter mean by 'sure'? And 'sure' to whom? He uses *bebaios*, 'stable, fast, firm, sure, trusty', 'certain' (2 Pet. 1:19), 'firm' (Heb. 3:14), 'in force' (Heb. 9:17), 'guaranteed' (Rom. 4:16). The question is, is Peter telling believers that they will know that they are called and elected once they have reached a certain standard of sanctification, and have made sufficient progress? I think not! For a start, I know of no other passage which says it. In any case, what standard will be sufficient?

So what is Peter saying? It is possible that he is telling believers that the only way to verify, to make sure, confirm and demonstrate to others the reality of their calling and election – the profession of

their calling and election – is by their sanctification.<sup>1</sup> That is one possibility.

Another possibility – and I think most likely right – the thrust of the apostle’s words is to do with the perseverance of the saints. Rather like riding a bicycle; if you stop pedalling, in time you come to a standstill and fall off! Keep growing in grace, therefore, until the day you die! This is the way to persevere.

Calvin, commenting on the verse, declared:

It is one proof that we have been really elected, and not in vain called by the Lord, if a good conscience and integrity of life correspond with our profession of faith. And [Peter] infers that there ought to be more labour and diligence, because he had said before that faith ought not to be barren... The meaning then is, labour that you may have it really proved that you have not been called nor elected in vain. At the same time he speaks here of calling as the effect and evidence of election.

What about assurance by sanctification? Calvin again:

Now a question arises: Whether the stability of our calling and election depends on good works, for if it is so, it follows that it depends on us. But the whole Scripture teaches us, first, that God’s election is founded on his eternal purpose; and secondly, that calling begins and is completed through his gratuitous goodness... Every [believer] confirms his calling by leading a holy and pious life... The matter stands thus: God effectually calls whom he has pre-ordained to life in his secret counsel before the foundation of the world; and he also carries on the perpetual course of calling through grace alone. But as he has chosen us, and calls us for this end, that we may be pure and spotless in his presence, purity of life is not improperly called the evidence and proof of election, by which the faithful may not only testify to others that they are the children of God, but also confirm themselves in this confidence, in such a manner, however, that they fix their solid foundation on something else.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?... Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... Faith without deeds is useless... A person is justified [in the eyes of others] by what he does and not by faith alone... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead’ (Jas. 2:14-26).

Calvin was right. Sanctification is both an evidence – a necessary evidence – to others, and a confirmation to the believer, of the reality of his profession. But Peter was not calling the believer to try to reach an elusive assurance by probing his sanctification. He was speaking of a life consistent with his profession, and, above all, of the necessity of growth in grace and perseverance in the faith. Consistency and growth – both are essential. As the apostle said in his final exhortation in this letter: ‘Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 3:18).

Sanctification is also, as I have said, the way of perseverance. Now the old (biblical) way of expressing this – ‘the perseverance of the saints’ – has too often been replaced by the notion of ‘the eternal security of believers’ or ‘once saved, always saved’. These two – perseverance and security – are chalk and cheese. The biblical way of speaking of this matter is in terms of saints (not believers) and their perseverance in godliness. And this is what Peter is calling for here: ‘My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Pet. 1:10). And we do this by producing the works of sanctification which he set out in the verses leading up to his command.

As Calvin went on to say in his comments:

At the same time, this certainty, mentioned by Peter, ought, I think, to be referred to the conscience, as though the faithful acknowledged themselves before God to be chosen and called. But I take it simply of the fact itself, that calling appears as confirmed by this very holiness of life. It may, indeed, be rendered: ‘Labour that your calling may become certain...’. The import of what is said is, that the children of God are distinguished from the reprobate by this mark, that they live a godly and a holy life, because this is the design and end of election. Hence it is evident how wickedly some vile unprincipled men prattle, when they seek to make gratuitous election an excuse for all licentiousness; as though... we may sin with impunity, because we have been predestinated to righteousness and holiness!...

[Peter’s] purpose was only to show that hypocrites have in them nothing real or solid, and that, on the contrary, they who prove their calling sure by good works are free from the danger of falling, because sure and sufficient is the grace of God by which they are supported. Thus the certainty of our salvation by no means depends on us, as doubtless the cause of it is beyond our limits. But with regard to those who feel in themselves the efficacious working of the Spirit, Peter bids

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them to take courage as to the future, because the Lord has laid in them the solid foundation of a true and sure calling.

He explains the way or means of persevering, when he says, an entrance shall be ministered to you. The import of the words is this: 'God, by ever supplying you abundantly with new graces, will lead you to his own kingdom'. And this was added, that we may know, that though we have already passed from death into life, yet it is a passage of hope. And as to the fruition of life, there remains for us yet a long journey. In the meantime we are not destitute of necessary helps. Hence Peter obviates a doubt by these words: 'The Lord will abundantly supply your need, until you shall enter into his eternal kingdom'.

I think this is very clear. Calvin did not regard 2 Peter 1:10 as a call to introspection. Not at all! Rather, Peter insists on sanctification as a demonstration and confirmation of inward grace – very much along the lines of Paul to the Ephesians: 'As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received... So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking' (Eph. 4:1,17). And, as he told the Philippians: 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27). And, although I have just quoted it, as Peter urged his readers: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 3:18).

Spurgeon, tackling those who think that expressing doubt about oneself is the highest form of spirituality, and those who encourage believers to think it, went for the jugular:

'Make your calling and election sure'. Not towards God, for they are sure to him: make them sure to yourself. Be quite certain of them; be fully satisfied about them. In many of our dissenting places of worship very great encouragement is held out to doubting. A person comes before the pastor, and says: 'Oh! sir, I am so afraid I am not converted; I tremble lest I should not be a child of God. Oh! I fear I am not one of the Lord's elect'. The pastor will put out his hands to him, and say: 'Dear brother, you are all right so long as you can doubt'. Now, I hold, that is altogether wrong. Scripture never says: 'He that doubts shall be saved', but: 'He that believes'. It may be true that the man is in a good state [that is, he is converted]; it may be true that he wants a little comfort; but his doubts are not good things, nor ought we to encourage him in his doubts. Our business is to encourage him out of his doubts,

and by the grace of God to urge him to ‘give all diligence to make his calling and election sure’; not to doubt it, but to be sure of it.

Spurgeon then directed his attention to the mere professor. Let me stress this – ‘the mere professor’; or, in Spurgeon’s words, ‘the hypocrite’. Spurgeon was clearly directing his remarks to the carnal man, not the doubting true believer:

Ah! I have heard some hypocritical doubters say: ‘Oh! I have had such doubts whether I am the Lord’s’, and I have thought to myself: ‘And so have I very great doubts about you’. I have heard some say they do tremble so because they are afraid they are not the Lord’s people; and the lazy fellows sit in their pews on the Sunday, and just listen to the sermon; but they never think of giving diligence, they never do good, perhaps are inconsistent in their lives, and then talk about doubting. It is quite right they should doubt, it is well they should; and if they did not doubt we might begin to doubt for them. Idle men have no right to assurance. The Scripture says: ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure’.

What about those who say they have heard voices or seen visions?<sup>2</sup>

Full assurance is an excellent attainment. It is profitable for a man to be certain in this life, and absolutely sure of his own calling and election. But how can he be sure? Now, many of our more ignorant hearers imagine that the only way they have of being assured of their election is by some revelation, some dream, and some mystery. I have enjoyed very hearty laughs at the expense of some people who have trusted in their visions. Really, if you had passed among so many shades of ignorant professing Christians as I have, and had to resolve so many doubts and fears, you would be so infinitely sick of dreams and visions that you would say, as soon as a person began to speak about them: ‘Now, do just hold your tongue’. ‘Sir’, said a woman, ‘I saw blue lights in the front parlour when I was in prayer, and I thought I saw the Saviour in the corner, and I said to myself: “I am safe”... And yet there are tens of thousands of people in every part of the country, and members too of Christians bodies, who have no better ground for their belief that they are called and elected, than some vision equally ridiculous, or the equally absurd hearing of a voice. A young woman came to me some time ago; she wanted to join the church, and when I asked her how she knew herself to be converted, she said she was down at the bottom of the garden, and she thought she

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<sup>2</sup> This, of course, is a million miles away from the witness of the Spirit.

heard a voice, and she thought she saw something up in the clouds that said to her so-and-so. ‘Well’, I said to her, ‘that thing may have been the means of doing good to you, but if you put any trust in it, it is all over with you’. A dream, yes, and a vision, may often bring men to Christ. I have known many who have been brought to him by them, beyond a doubt, though it has been mysterious to me how it was. But when men bring these forward as a proof of their conversion, there is the mistake, because you may see fifty thousand dreams and fifty thousand visions, and you may be a fool for all that, and all the bigger sinner for having seen them.

Spurgeon turned to the scriptural way:

There is better evidence to be had than all this: ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure’. ‘How, then’, says one, ‘am I to make my calling and election sure?’

In an extended passage, Spurgeon then spelled out the marks of grace – the things the apostle listed in verses 5 to 8; in other words, practical godliness, growing in grace, sanctification. This is the only way to prove to others that we are converted. A man may profess what he will, but his life must be consistent with it:

When you have got all these, then you will know your calling and election, and just in proportion as you practice these heavenly rules of life, in this heavenly manner, will you come to know that you are called and that you are elect. But by no other means can you attain to a knowledge of that, except by the witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with your spirit that you are born of God, and then witnessing in your conscience that you are not what you were, but are a new man in Christ Jesus, and are therefore called and therefore elected.

This is muddled. Scripture reverses these two and makes evidences a confirmation of assurance, and not its source. The new-covenant way of assurance is by the witness of the Spirit. But, on the whole, Spurgeon was thinking of evidence to others:

A man over there says he is elect. He gets drunk. Yes, you are elect by the devil, sir; that is about your only election. Another man says: ‘Blessed be God, I don’t care about evidences a bit; I am not so legal as you are!’ No, I dare say you are not, but you have no great reason to bless God about it, for, my dear friend, unless you have these evidences of a new birth take heed to yourself. ‘God is not mocked: whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap’. ‘Well’, says another, ‘but I think that doctrine of election is a very licentious doctrine’.

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Think on as long as you please, but please to bear me witness that as I have preached it today there is nothing licentious about it. Very likely you are licentious, and you would make the doctrine licentious, if you believed it, but ‘to the pure all things are pure’. He who receives God’s truth in his heart does not often pervert it and turn aside from it unto wicked ways. No man, let me repeat, has any right to believe himself called, unless his life be in the main consistent with his vocation, and he walk worthy of that whereunto he is called. Out upon an election that lets you live in sin! Away with it! Away with it! That was never the design of God’s word; and it never was the doctrine of Calvinists either. Though we have been lied against and our teachings perverted, we have always stood by this – that good works, though they do not procure nor in any degree merit salvation, yet are the necessary evidences of salvation, and unless they be in men the soul is still dead, uncalled and unrenewed. The nearer you live to Christ, the more you imitate him, the more your life is conformed to him, and the more simply you hang upon him by faith, the more certain you may be of your election in Christ and of your calling by his Holy Spirit. May the Holy One of Israel give you the sweet assurance of grace, by affording you ‘tokens for good’ in the graces which he enables you to manifest.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Peter is not calling believers to a harrowing self-examination over a considerable period of time (verse 8) to obtain assurance. Rather, he is calling them to be sanctified, in order to demonstrate, to verify and to confirm the reality of their experience of the gospel to others, and to make sure they, themselves, persevere to the end. Paul, at the close of his life, could declare: ‘The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’ (2 Tim. 4:6-7). Remember Christ’s words to the church in Smyrna: ‘Be faithful, even to the point of death’ (Rev. 2:10). ‘The perseverance of the saints’ means what it says on the tin! And being assured certainly helps in that essential perseverance! Living a life of fear (what a travesty of the gospel!) – fear under the law for sanctification, fear under sanctification by the law for assurance – has nothing – nothing – to do with the gospel as revealed in the New Testament.

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<sup>3</sup> Sermon number 123.