

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 80

Halifax, 10 May 2009

Q. 80 Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?

A. Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.

Introduction:

This week we continue to look at the communion we have with Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace.

- When we use the word *communion* in this way, we speak of the things He gives us as we live in covenant with Him...
 - the primary blessings are justification, adoption, and sanctification.
 - Justification is His perfect righteousness, given to us, so that we are received as those who are fully pardoned and have done all that God requires.
 - He *communicates* His righteousness to us.
 - Adoption is reception into God's family as His own sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. He is God's Son, and we are made God's sons through faith in Him.
 - He *communicates* sonship to us.
 - Sanctification is the new life that He imparts to us by which we become more and more holy—living the beautiful lives God calls us to live.
 - He *communicates* a holy life to us.
- Now this communion in grace with Christ is obviously a most marvellous and desirable thing!
 - The more you know about it, the more precious it becomes to you...
 - It becomes more and more important to you to know that this communion in grace will continue...
 - And not only that it will continue, but that you have it in truth...

- Last week, we saw that the Scripture teaches that once we have true communion with Christ, we will continue in it.
 - The main reason for this is because the LORD Himself who established that communion is the one who keeps us by His own power.
 - We entered this communion by His working in us and so we will continue in it by His working in us.
 - 1 Peter 1:3 says that those who truly believe are
 - **“kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”**
 - And Jeremiah 32:38-40 says:
 - **Jer 32:38-40: ‘They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.’**
 - This is what we call perseverance in grace.
 - It is the certainty that once we are truly in Christ, He will keep us in Him forever more.
- But this naturally leads those who understand how important and precious communion in grace is to ask a second question...
 - They would say something like this,
 - “I see that those who have true communion with Christ will continue, but how can I know that I have this true communion in the first place?”
 - “How can I know that my relationship with Christ is a genuine saving relationship and not a relationship such as Jesus describes in the parable of the sower that does not last?”
 - “Is it possible for me to be sure of my relationship with Him?”
 - This is what we want to look at today...
 - This is often called the doctrine of assurance.
 - You see how Question 80 is worded:
 - **Q. 80: Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?**
 - And you see the answer that is given:
 - **A: Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God’s promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the**

promises of life are made, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.

Now I want you to notice several things that are brought out here.

- 1) First, that the assurance spoken here is only something that pertains to true believers.
 - It is very important to establish from the start that when we speak about assurance, we are not talking about **how** a person is saved...
 - we are talking about how a person can **know** he is saved.
 - We are not talking about **what** saves us, but what **assures** us of salvation.
 - If you are not looking to Him and His saving work for your salvation, you don't have any salvation to be made sure of.
 - I hope that is very clear to you from the outset.
 - You are not saved by obedience or by loving others or by sensing God's love to you or any such things...
 - You are saved by resting in Jesus Christ and in the work that He did for you on the cross.
 - Assurance is only for those who truly believe in Christ.
- 2) Secondly, I want you to see that assurance is only for those who "walk in all good conscience before Christ."
 - If you are in rebellion against the LORD, you have no right to assurance.
 - The Lord does not give assurance of salvation to those who are rebelling against Him—
 - by that, I mean, those who are not subject to Him but are living as if He is not their Lord.
 - Assurance is not for you unless you are sincerely following Him.
- 3) Notice thirdly that you do not have to have extraordinary revelation to have assurance...
 - It is not that the LORD comes to you in a vision in the night or that He gives you a warm feeling inside to tell you that you are saved.
 - The main purpose of extraordinary revelation was not to confirm individuals of their personal faith or of God's love and acceptance of them personally,
 - but rather to confirm those who were speaking His word.
 - The signs that were given were called the signs of the apostles.
 - The fact is, a person like Judas can perform miracles and not be saved.

- 4) Fourthly, you see what assurance is grounded upon...three things...
- First, faith in God's promises...
 - for example, in the promise that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will have eternal life...
 - and the promise that He who began a good work in you will complete it.
 - Second, the Spirit enabling you to discern in yourself those graces (things like faith, love, obedience) to which salvation is promised...
 - In other words, you look at yourself to see if you have what God says a person who is saved has—saving faith, love, obedience, repentance, etc.
 - Third, the Spirit of God bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.
 - that is, He enables you to look to God as your Father who is reconciled.
 - This is a sense of His acceptance of your person and services through Christ, and an awareness that He is at work in you and receives you and that He hears you when you pray.

That is a summary of the answer to question 80.

- Now let us to turn to a book in the Bible that is written especially for the purpose of assuring us who believe that we truly do know God...
 - Do you know what book that is?
 - It is the First Epistle of John—First John.
 - In a way, I would like to read the entire book,
 - but in the interest of time, I am only going to read a portion of one chapter in which John explains that he has written this letter to give us assurance,
 - and then I am going to preach from the entire book...
 - Hear now as I read to you from God's holy Word:
 - READ> 1 John 5:1-13.
 - You see here how John states his purpose for writing in verse 13...
 - **1 John 5:13: These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.**
 - This book is given to give those who believe assurance...
 - Once again, we see that it is not for those who do not believe, but for those who do.

TRANS> I want you to see first of all that

I. To have assurance, you must have faith in the promises of God concerning Christ and salvation.

A. You have to believe, as John puts it in verse 10, the “testimony that God has given concerning His Son.”

1. And that testimony is a very simple one...

- It is expressed in verse 11-12:

- **1 John 5:11-12: “And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”**

- This is also expressed in the first verse (of chapter 5) where it says:

- **1 John 5:1: Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”**

2. If you are unsure of what God has spoken about the way of salvation, you will obviously be unsure about your salvation...

- Indeed, if there is a problem at this level, it may even be that you don't have salvation...

- For example, if you think that eternal life is obtained by your own works, or that there is no salvation, then you don't even have any salvation to be made sure of in the first place!

- because, as it says, he who has the Son has life—

- and you “have Him” by faith—

- so if you don't believe, you don't have salvation to start with.

- You can't be made sure of something you don't even have.

- But it is possible that you may indeed have true saving faith—you may truly trust in Christ in a saving way...

- but you may yet have doubts concerning Him and what God has promised.

- In other words, you may not be totally sure or you may have been confused by bad teaching...

- And if that is the case, it will hinder your assurance.

B. John has some interesting things to say about God's testimony to us concerning His Son...

1. He says it is a testimony we have in ourselves, and that if we do not believe it, we make God a liar...

- You can see that in verse 10...

- But how can you *have* it and not believe it?

- You can have it as a member of the visible church—the testimony of God is then given to you—it is in your mouth and in your heart...
2. God bears witness to us by His Spirit, by baptism, and by the Lord's Supper.
- These three are mentioned in verse 7 & 8.
 - Much of the content of these two verses as they appear in the NKJV do not appear in the majority of the manuscripts...
 - Properly the verse should read:
 - **1 John 5:7-8: For there are three that bear witness: [omit to the end of verse 8] the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.**
 - Probably this refers to God's Spirit as given to the church as a whole, to baptism, and to the Lord's Supper.
 - Each of these testifies to us of God's promise in Jesus Christ...
 - The Spirit was visibly poured out on the church by Jesus Christ in the beginning and continues to work in the church today...
 - Baptism displays to us in a visible way God's promise of cleansing through Jesus Christ...
 - And the Lord's Supper testifies to us of Christ's body broken for us and of His blood shed for the remission of our sins.
 - Every church member has this witness in himself,
 - but it is possible to have God's witness (in this way) and not believe.
 - That is why it says that those who do not believe make God a liar because they do not believe the testimony God has given concerning His Son.

TRANS> Assurance begins with believing the witness that God has given concerning His Son—that whoever believes in Him has eternal life.

- What comfort there is in having such a promise and believing such a promise as that which comes from God!
- But more is needed for personal assurance than this...
 - True saving faith will produce in you fruits...
 - Those who truly believe know God and live according to that knowledge.
- And so it is that in 1 John, John repeatedly stresses that our assurance comes from knowing the Father as revealed in Christ in such a way that it changes the way we live.

II. You may have assurance if you have faith that transforms the way you live.

- Genuine faith always produces works.
 - As James says, faith without works is dead—it is not true saving faith.
 - John shows you various ways in which faith—that is, knowing God through Christ—will affect your life...
 - We will look at three...

- A. First, John shows that you must know God as light through Christ in such a way that you live an enlightened life.
 1. He speaks about knowing God through Christ as light in chapter 1.
 - a. In 1 John 1:5, he says that
 - **“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”**
 - Now this is one of the things that we learn in a fresh way when we truly come to Christ.
 - For God opens our eyes—he turns the lights on in our lives—so that we begin to see things as they really are and who God really is!
 - b. One of the first things we see is that we are sinners and that God is holy...
 - We see this because we come to understand the gospel,
 - and the gospel tells us that we are so defiled in God’s sight that God’s Son has to die on the cross to atone for our sins!
 - As it says in 1 John 2:2,
 - **“He was made a propitiation for our sins”—**
 - a propitiation is that which appeases the wrath of God against us as a judge—
 - We see that sin angers God and that we are only accepted of Him through the extreme means of Christ crucified.
 - c. Once you see this, you stop playing games about your sin...
 - You stop being evasive and trying to justify yourself...
 - John makes it clear that those who walk in the light are not those who do not sin so much as those who **recognise** their sin...
 - The light exposes it so that you confess it...
 - He even says that if you say you have no sin, you make God a liar!
 - He sent His Son because He says that we are all terrible sinners!

- Jesus came because of that and when we see that, we see just what sinners we are!
 - And we look to Jesus for the cleansing of our sins!
 - In 1 John 2:1, John says that Jesus is our advocate with the Father,
 - As an advocate, He is our lawyer who presents our case to God so that we can obtain pardon...
 - But His advocacy is not based on our goodness—
 - He does not plead for our pardon on the basis of our innocence!
 - He pleads on the basis that He has shed his blood to atone for our sins and is the propitiation for our sins.
2. Now when you really believe that God is light through Jesus Christ,
- It obviously has a huge effect on your life!
 - John shows the effect it has on your life!
 - a. First, you confess your sin freely—no longer hiding in the darkness—because you know that Jesus cleanses it—
 - You want to bring it all out before God because you know that Jesus is able to secure your pardon and to change you...
 - In 1 John 1:8-10 he says:
 - **1 Jn 1:8-10: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**
 - In other words, if you are not coming to Christ with your sin, it indicates that you just don't know Him!
 - b. And not only that, but you also begin to live differently—
 - That is, you begin to obey God's commandments.
 - 1 John 2:4 says:
 - **1 John 2:4-5: He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.**
 - This is inevitable when you come to the light revealed in Christ because now you see sin for what it is...
 - What you used to disregard as trivial you now see as most heinous and deplorable.

- John shows that when you are in the light, your obedience will be seen especially in loving your brothers:
 - **1 John 2:10-11: He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**
- Until you come to God through Christ, you just don't see your sin because the darkness blinds you.
 - But once your eyes are opened—your whole life changes!

TRANS> So you can know that you know Christ in a saving way if you have come to God as light in such a way that you confess your sin and turn from it.

B. Second, John shows that to have assurance you must know God as Father through Christ in such a way that you live as God's son.

1. When you truly believe, you receive an anointing with the Holy Spirit...

- That is what John calls it in the second half of chapter 2...
- An anointing with the Spirit is the outpouring of the Spirit upon you so that you are born again—born of God.
 - That means that you now have God as your Father and have a new nature—a new heart—that desires to please Him.
 - When God adopts children, He restores His own image in them—morally and spiritually—so that they are like Him.
 - As a son, you begin to take on His characteristics.
 - And not only that, but you have a new sense of His love and acceptance of you.
 - You come to rest in the fact that He has adopted you, taking you into His house as His Son so that you know Him and live in communion with Him...
 - You come to Him in prayer and He answers you.
- In 1 John 3:1, John says,
 - **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God. Therefore the world does not know us because it does not know Him.”**
 - There has been a radical transformation—new life implanted in you as one born of God—born a second time.

2. Now if such a radical occurred in you, you will be changed!

- Look at some of the changes John speaks of...
- a. In 1 John 2:29, he says that we practice righteousness as those born of Him.
 - **1 John 2:29: If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.**
 - You can tell a person has been born again (and that you have been born again) because he practices righteousness.
- b. In 1 John 3:9: he says that we cannot sin...
 - **1 John 3:9: Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**
 - Of course he does not mean that we do not continue to struggle with remaining sin—
 - We have already seen that the new life is characterised by admitting our sin and confessing it for cleansing and pardon...
 - but this is talking about sin the sense of apostasy—
 - of rejecting God as our Lord after we have been reconciled to Him—as ceasing to follow Him and be His servant—
 - This is something that the child of God cannot do because the new life remains in him forever.
 - It is a characteristic of this new life that it is a life that remains.
- c. In verse 10, John goes on to explain that we not only practice righteousness, but also love our brothers...not like Cain who was a murderer...
 - **1 John 3:10: In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.**
 - You see how he shows that this is what distinguishes the child of God from the child of the devil!

TRANS> This is how you change when you have been anointed by God's Spirit.

3. John is very concerned to show that this anointing of the Spirit is something that permanently attaches us to our Father...
 - a. We have already seen how he says that seed remains in us so that we cannot reject the Father.
 - but in 2:18-27, he shows that this anointing also secures you from being deceived by substitute Christs—
 - Antichrists who try to get you to follow them
 - If you are truly born again—if you have the anointing of the Spirit—you will be kept...

- You will not believe the lies, but will continue in Christ.
- b. John explains that the reason people abandon Christ is because they were never truly his...
 - We saw this last week when we looked at perseverance...
 - John says:
 - **1 John 2:19: They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**
 - John then contrasts the true believer—the one who is entitled to assurance—in verse 20 with these ones who went out...
 - They went out...
 - **1 John 2:20-21: But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.**
 - John makes it clear that the characteristic of the true believer is that he does not go for the deceptions that are presented to him...
 - **1 John 2:25-27: And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.**
 - Having been born of God, he continues in the truth.

TRANS> So now we have seen two of the ways your life is transformed which show that you are genuine...

- First, that you know God in Christ as light and so confess your sins and shun them...
- Second, that you have God in Christ as Father and so have a new nature that stays true to the Father and will not accept lies that deny His Son.
- And now...

C. Third, John shows that if you want to have assurance, you must know God as love through Christ in such a way that you love.

1. John says in no uncertain terms, that the person who does not love simply does not know God.
 - a. He emphasises love as one of his main points throughout this epistle—
 - If you know God in a saving way—you will love God and love others...

- If you do not love, then it is clear that you do not really know God.
 - If there is no love, there can be no assurance.
- b. Look at several examples where John says this...
- **1 John 3:14: We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.**
 - **1 John 4:7-8: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**
 - **1 John 4:20-21: If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.**
- c. You see that nothing could be plainer than this fact that those who truly know Christ in a saving way love each other.
2. Now this only makes sense, because if you have received Christ you have a growing appreciation for God's great love to you in sending His only Son for you!
- You have a whole new understanding of what love is—a whole new standard—and it will have its effect on you.
- a. John mentions this connection between God's love and our love repeatedly...
- In 1 John 3:16, he says:
 - **1 John 3:16: By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.**
 - This has given us a whole new definition for love!
 - God Himself—God the Son—has laid down His life for us!
 - Love had never yet been seen until Christ, the strong and the mighty, made Himself weak and debased for us...all for us...that we might be pardoned.
 - There is no love like this, nor will there be love like this again...
 - Therefore John concludes the verse by saying:
 - **1 John 3:16: we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**
 - Though we do not do this perfectly, the high standard stretches us upward...
 - In 1 John 4:9-10, John says again:
 - **1 John 4:9-10: In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live**

through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- We were under the wrath of God (most desperate),
 - but then God send Jesus to come under His wrath for us—to be a propitiation for our sins...
- There was nothing in us moving Him to do such a thing—nothing deserving in us—nothing in us to draw forth His favour to us...
 - It was all because of God’s free love—it originated from His own pure love within.
 - So John says,
 - **1John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**
 - When you have been loved like this, what else can you do but love?
- b. You see the connection that John makes here...
 - A true believer has seen and experienced the love of God in Christ...
 - and this cannot but have a powerful effect on him...
 - Having been the recipient of God’s great love, it is impossible for him to go on without imitating such love...
 - If you don’t have this love, it can only be that you are not a Christian.
 - I don’t mean to say that you have it to the same degree as Christ has it...that would be impossible...
 - but the Scripture shows that you must have it or you have no reason to think you are a Christian...
 - In fact, you have every reason to think you are not.
- c. John explains that for those who come to Christ, God’s commandments are not burdensome...
 - We are so delighted with our Lord Jesus that we yearn to be like Him...
 - We desire that the life of God will fill every part of us...
 - We long to love as He loves and that love is seen in the way we treat one another.

Conclusion: So my friends, do you have these marks that you are God’s child?

- Do you have the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ as the way of salvation?

- And having that,
 - do you know God as light in such a way that you confess your sins and turn away from them?
 - and do you have God as your Father such that you continue in His truth and have the new life that does righteousness...
 - and do you know God as love in such a way that you love your brother in tangible ways?
- If you do, then you have all that you need for assurance...
 - Next week we will see that assurance is sometimes hindered for various reasons...
 - But if you have the things that John speaks of here that characterise those who know Christ,
 - you have every reason to be confident that you know Him—to know that you know Him.
 - **“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,”**
 - John says,
 - **“that you may know that you have eternal life.”**