

ASSURANCE – SECOND PETER 1:3-11

Assurance of salvation is so necessary, and yet so often missed. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, once estimated that 50% of genuine Christians have zero assurance of their salvation. They believe the Gospel, they trust in Christ, they follow Him as Lord, and yet lack genuine assurance of their salvation.

When we talk about assurance it's of the greatest importance to recognize that God initiates salvation for each person. He identified the problem in the first place: sin and death. He created the solution before the problem ever existed, in eternity past. He brings up the problem to us through the Law and the condemnation of our own conscience. He reveals the solution to us through the preaching of His Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His Spirit convicts us, persuades us, causes us to be born again, gives us faith and repentance. Salvation is God's idea from beginning to end.

That being said, our response to salvation must not be theoretical. We are in an election year, and we frequently hear about "approval ratings." Beloved, I hope that we all realize that God is not interested in His approval ratings. He doesn't stay up all night worrying that our lack of giving might reflect a drop in the believer confidence index. He doesn't adjust the annual miracle rate in order to regulate spiritual inflation. In any case, the kind of response that God desires from us is not found in op-ed pieces in the New York Times, or ranted about in social media.

The Lord wants a real response from us – obedient faith – based upon the real things that He has done. Second Peter 1:1-11 gives us a substantial list of things that the Lord has done for us, and also a substantial list of how we are to respond. Would you turn there with me?

2 Peter 1:1-11 (ESV) – 1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

WHAT HAS GOD DONE?

FAITH

The Lord has, by His own righteousness, granted us a faith that is equal to that possessed by His apostles (v. 2). Our faith is not inferior to the faith of those who have preceded us in Christ.

GRACE AND PEACE

The Lord has granted us grace and peace through intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 2). Grace and peace are amazing things – we’ve barely scratched the surface of the grace of God in spite of the months we’ve spent studying it. The peace of God is equally amazing.

EVERYTHING NEEDED FOR LIFE AND GODLINESS

The Lord has, according to His divine power, granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness (v. 3). There is nothing that your spiritual life that is not available to you as the Holy Spirit applies the Scriptures to your life.

TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF HIMSELF

The Lord has granted us true knowledge of Himself (v. 3). God has manifested Himself in His Word in a unique way, so that as we read and study it the Holy Spirit doesn’t simply convey information, but the very heart of God.

EFFECTUAL CALLING

The Lord has called us according to His own glory and excellence (v. 3). His calling is an effectual calling; that means that it is not merely an invitation, like a spam you find in your email inbox. Romans 4:16-17 describes this call very well. Speaking of salvation, Paul writes,

Romans 4:16–17 (ESV) — 16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, “**I have made you the father of many nations**” — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who **gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.**

Prior to salvation, no one has spiritual life. It is God who gives life to the dead, and that is a direct parallel to “calls into existence the things that do not exist.” The effectual call of God means that God gives life to dead sinners, calling them into an existence that they did not have before.

PRECIOUS AND MAGNIFICENT PROMISES

The Lord has, by His own glory and excellence, granted to us His precious and magnificent promises (v. 4). It should not come as a surprise that when God manifests His own nature and magnificence He does so by way of promises. He loves to engage His children in a dynamic, powerful relationship.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The Lord has granted that we would be partakers of the divine nature (v. 4). Let's not speculate beyond what we are told in the Word. More evil enters the church through vain speculations than through any other source. We are partakers of HIS nature; it is not, and never becomes, our nature. John writes, Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is (First John 3:2). Those who partake in the divine nature get all of God they can possibly hold, and that's very, very good.

ESCAPE FROM EVIL DESIRE

The Lord grants us escape from the lust which has corrupted the world (v. 4). Beginning with the fall evil desire is at the root of what's wrong with our world its inhabitants. Every sin ultimately reflects evil desires – lust. Escaping the power of that desire is a fundamental blessing of salvation.

So, to summarize it, the Lord has granted us the same faith, grace and peace, everything pertaining to life and godliness, knowledge of Himself, a divine calling according to His own nature, precious and magnificent promises, the blessings of His nature, and escape from the self-deification that brings about death and destruction.

HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND?

What, then, is our real, substantive response to be?

FAITH IS ASSUMED

Do you see that faith is assumed? We are not told to build our faith, or increase our faith, or make sure that our faith is sufficient. Faith is a gift from God, given to those whom He has called into spiritual existence in Christ.

DILIGENCE

First, I want you to notice that we are to be diligent about adding these things to our faith, and the basis for that diligence is what God has already done to make us spiritually successful. There are actually two words that are combined to form the word diligence, and the sense of the phrase is to make every effort, or to do one's best. God has granted us faith. That faith provides the foundation for our lives in Christ, and we are to build upon that foundation as God directs here.

VIRTUE – TRANSFORMED CHARACTER

We are to add virtue to our faith. God is known for His excellence; it is obvious to any who look for it. Man is made in the image of God, and we who are saved are specifically being formed into the image of Christ. So, we need to make every effort to be praiseworthy and virtuous in our lives and conduct.

KNOWLEDGE – TRANSFORMED THINKING

We are to add knowledge to our moral excellence. This refers to the content of our knowledge, the facts and truths of the gospel and doctrines of Scripture. Peter has already written of the act of knowing God. We are also to be well aware and well versed in the Scriptures.

SELF-CONTROL – TRANSFORMED LIVING

We are to add self-control to our knowledge. Knowledge of the Word of God without self-control is hypocrisy. We are to make sure that our knowledge is not limited to theory, but has a practical and real outworking in our lives.

PERSEVERANCE – TRANSFORMED COMMITMENT

We are to add perseverance to our self-control. Perseverance is one of my favorite words in the Bible. It describes what one writer called “a long obedience in the same direction.” It means digging in for the long haul, and remaining faithful to Christ regardless of what happens.

GODLINESS – TRANSFORMED PURPOSE

We are to add godliness to our perseverance. The very purpose of our lives is to be to glorify God in all that we do. There are many who live according to specific values, but only someone who the Lord has actually called into existence as His child can live for His glory.

BROTHERLY KINDNESS – TRANSFORMED AFFECTIONS

We are to add brotherly kindness to our godliness. Brotherly kindness is the affection part of love. Let’s take a little poll – which is more meaningful to you, the words “I love you,” or the words “I like you.” Brotherly kindness says to another person, I like you, you are a blessing to me, I enjoy who you are.

LOVE – TRANSFORMED SACRIFICE

And, we are to add to love to our brotherly kindness. It’s common for people to say that they sacrificed, but most of the time in our world, they sacrificed for their own benefit. “I sacrificed so that I could go to college” or “I sacrificed in order to buy that new car.” Love means sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others.

These are the things we need to add to our faith. Why are we to add them? The Scripture tells us:

2 Peter 1:8–9 (ESV) — 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

AN EFFECTIVE, FRUITFUL LIFE

First, if we possess them in increasing measure, we will be both effective and fruitful in the kingdom. Those who are ineffective accomplish nothing; this word implies that they are ineffective because of inactivity. Being effective begins with being active, and being active in the right way. The world is full of people who are running like hamsters on the little wheels of life, burning themselves out as quick as they can.

God won't use you because of your capacity, but rather because of your character. When your life is a combination of Christ-like character, and quality training and preparation, you will be useful and powerful in the kingdom of God.

I have met many who possess incredible potential because of their knowledge, training, personal drive, and intensity. I've looked at those people and thought to myself, "What a powerful impact that man or woman could have on this fallen world." And yet they lacked Christ-like character, and so did nothing in the kingdom but make a lot of noise.

I've also met many who lacked in-depth training, and were used by God in powerful ways. It is unquestionably worthwhile to be trained to study and teach and preach and counsel. But those things are less in the hands of God than a willing, humble heart.

When the Word of God implanted fails to grow, where does the fault lie? It's not with the seed; it's with the soil. Farmers spend vast amounts of time preparing the soil. How much time do they spend preparing the seed? Virtually none. They buy, they load it into the hopper, they go through the field in the planter, and they are done. It's the soil, not the seed, that takes all the work. Of course, the seed has to be the right seed. I sure don't know the right kind of seed to plant in sandy, alkaline soil, but I do know that the right seed for your heart is the Word of God. If you are fruitless in your life, the problem is not the seed, but the soil.

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

Those who lack these qualities are blind, short-sighted, myopic. They've somehow forgotten that they are sinners saved by grace. Have you ever met someone with the attitude, "Well, of course I'm saved – why wouldn't I be?" That person has forgotten that they were a sinner, that Jesus suffered and bled and died for them, and that their salvation is not a foregone conclusion, but rather a wonderful and unexpected gift of God to be received in humility and gratitude. They assume that they are already Christ-like, or at least as good as they need to be.

Beloved, if we ever stop growing in Christ, there's something wrong. We do experience different seasons, spiritual deserts as well as spiritual rain-forests. But if the passion dies, and growth disappears, we should be concerned enough to ask why, and address it before the Lord.

For centuries sailors suffered from scurvy, a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C. Scurvy is easily prevented – fresh fruits and vegetables were all that was necessary to eliminate it. I hope that you understand that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The preventative for spiritual blindness is simple:

2 Peter 1:10–11 (ESV) — 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our diligence to add to our faith is not simply spiritual busy-work, as though the Lord just wants us to be occupied. Rather, our growth and increasing Christ-likeness brings assurance and confidence. We trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see the results of that faith growing in our lives. I want to be clear about this: doing these things will not save you; salvation is gift of God that cannot be earned. We need to have the right math. It is not “Salvation = faith + works,” but “Assurance = faith + works.” Those works are the real life evidence that God has called us into existence as His children, that we have been born again by the Holy Spirit, given a new nature, made alive in Christ.

Peter is saying is that we can – and should – have assurance of salvation in this life. Many will come to the throne of Jesus at the moment of death, and that will be the first time they ever experience assurance. That’s sad. Salvation isn’t a gamble. It isn’t a matter of doing your best, and hoping things work about. Salvation is an absolute promise of God for His people. He will not fail to save even one of the elect. And the assurance of that salvation comes through the transformation of our lives. Do you want assurance of your salvation? Then be diligent about having faith that is obedient faith, and let your own transformed life provide the evidence that your heart desires.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let’s begin at the beginning – do you have assurance of salvation today, and know that an abundant entrance has been prepared for you? If you have no assurance, then there are only two possibilities. The first is that you are not saved; you have never repented of sin and put your faith in Jesus Christ. The second is that you are a Christian who has been living in disobedience or apathy toward the things of God, rather than living with obedient faith.

If you are not saved right now then you face an eternity in hell, apart from God. Maybe you've heard that Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven – have you ever heard that? Well, I've looked into it, and you know something? It's not only untrue, it's grossly untrue. The words "hades" and "hell" occur 19 times in the Gospels, but "heaven" appears over 100 times.

If you don't know Him, please, for the sake of your soul, turn away from your sin, and cry out to Jesus Christ!

If you are a Christian, and have been living without the assurance of salvation, then you need to do a couple of things. One, you need to determine that you will not let the sun go down today without taking this before the Lord. It is not His will for any of His children to live in doubt of their salvation. It is certainly not His will for us to live with uncertainty. Two, you need to purpose to examine your life in such a way that you will see what the Lord wants you to see. Now, you are probably going to have to be accountable to someone through this process. It's a risk, and can be painful and embarrassing, but it is a greater blessing that you can possibly know. The Holy Spirit will work through that relationship and bless your socks off.

If you know that you lack the assurance of your salvation that the Lord desires you have, then I urge you to make today a turning point in your walk, a day when you commit yourself to learning God's love language of obedient faith.