

BE EVEN MORE DILIGENT TO MAKE YOUR CALL AND ELECTION SURE

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Reformed Congregational Fellowship Pastors' Conference, April 17-19, 2012

Introduction:

In his classic work, "Holiness", J. C. Ryle wrote, "Many appear to think that, once converted, they have little more to attend to, and that the state of salvation is a kind of easy chair, in which they may sit still, lie back, and be happy. They seem to fancy that grace is given them that they may enjoy it, and they forget that it is given, like a talent, to be used, employed, and improved". Such persons have forgotten the many Scriptural directives as Ryle put it "to increase, to grow, to abound more and more, to add to our faith, and the like". And he added, "...in this little-doing nothing condition, this sitting still state of mind, I never marvel that they miss assurance".¹ Ryle's observation fell under his heading of "another common cause of the absence of assurance is slothfulness about growth in grace". He reminded his readers of the clear Biblical mandate for the believer to grow and mature, but he also directly linked one's sense of assurance to the level which one applies himself to the improvement of the grace which he has been given. Ryle continued, "If we have brought forth thirtyfold, we should seek to bring forth sixty; and if we have brought forth sixty, we should strive to bring forth a hundred".²

Clearly, the framers of the Savoy Declaration had this same truth in mind when they wrote, "This infallible assurance does not belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given to him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. *And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his call and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness*".³

Their incorporation of the Apostle Peter's exhortation to his readers to "be even more diligent to make your call and election sure"⁴ underscored their understanding of the believer's responsibility to make every effort to use God's given means of grace in order to obtain and enjoy the blessing of assurance. To do less would be to not only deprive oneself of a God given

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, p.143

² Ibid

³ Chapter XVIII, *Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation*, Paragraph III, *italics mine*

⁴ 2 Peter 1.10

gift, but to disobey what is in fact a clear command from God's word. The Apostle Paul similarly exhorted his readers, "we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become lazy, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises".⁵

Assurance and God's Sovereignty in Election:

In dealing with this aspect of assurance in being diligent to make your call and election sure, it's appropriate to address first things first. In particular, does Peter's exhortation in any way call into question the absolute certainty of God's sovereign call and election of His children? Is there anything His children could do, or not do, which could in any way negate God's sovereign purposes in election?

In answering these questions, it's helpful to examine the context of Peter's exhortation in verse ten of chapter one in his second letter as cited in the Savoy. Prior to it, in verse one, Peter began his letter with, "To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ". Lloyd-Jones commented on this introduction, "They have not created it, they have not generated it; they have obtained it, they have received it as a gift. The faith is something that we 'obtain', we 'receive'".⁶

God's call and election are in no way dependent on anything outside of God's will, purpose and sovereign power. From God's side, the call and election of a believer are unconditionally, utterly, and unreservedly sure from all eternity. Scripture very clearly bears this out. We read these plain declarations in God's word: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...", "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God", "for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son... moreover whom He predestined, these He called...".⁷

Peter reinforced his opening statement by writing; "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness..."⁸ It is only by God's power that this gift of salvation is graciously bestowed. Paul reminded his readers of the same truth when he wrote, "you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins".⁹

A dead person cannot make himself come alive. A person does not bring about his own birth. In the same way, a dead sinner does not regenerate himself or cause himself to be "born again". This is a sovereign and gracious work of God alone. Therefore, from God's side the call

⁵ Hebrews 6.11-12

⁶ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983, p.33

⁷ Ephesians 2.8; John 1.12-13; Romans 8.29,30

⁸ 2 Peter 1.3

⁹ Ephesians 2.1

and election of His children are absolutely sure. The elect are the object of God's Covenant of Grace which He entered into with His Son. This agreement between the Father and the Son was for the express purpose of bringing to pass the redemption of those fallen sinners on whom God had set His electing love. The Father, desiring a people for Himself from amongst fallen sinners, commissioned His Son, even before creation and the fall, to accomplish that which was necessary in order to bring this to pass. The Son willingly entered into this covenant, and it is in the context of that holy pact that Jesus declared, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me...".¹⁰ As such, the call and election are sure as to the intent of the Father. The outworking or completion of that call and election is insured because of the Jesus Christ's work of redemption on behalf of the believer as it is graciously applied by the Holy Spirit, in complete concert with the will of the Father and the work of the Son.

And so returning to the context of the exhortation to make one's call and election sure, Peter begins his letter by reminding his readers of what God does as regards their salvation. His gifts of their "like precious faith", "all things pertaining to life and godliness", and His "exceedingly great and precious promises"¹¹ are all of what God does. And it is these very things which God does that are the result of what Peter refers to as God's call and election. When Peter writes that his readers should make their call and election sure, therefore, he is making a distinction between what God in His sovereignty brings to pass, and what the believer is called to do in response. Lloyd-Jones put it this way, "The Apostle in his endeavor to help and encourage these early Christians has been emphasizing the importance of the two sides to the Christian life. In verses 1-4 (*of chapter one in second Peter*) he deals with the given side – what God does to us. In verses 5-7 he exhorts them in the light of that and because of that, to play their part and to work that out in practice".¹²

The believer's call and election are from God. They are supremely sure and fixed. If there were no call and election, there would be no forgiveness, no new life, and no salvation. Peter's exhortation therefore in no way calls the absolute certainty of God's sovereign call and election into question, but is an exhortation for the believer to be *assured* that indeed he has been called and is one of the elect. It's one of God's means of confirming the reality of one's salvation. As such, this means of assurance is a great source of comfort since the believer does "not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen".¹³ It's the very same concern the Apostle John expressed when he wrote regarding his epistle, "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".¹⁴

¹⁰ John 6.37a

¹¹ 2 Peter 1.4

¹² Lloyd-Jones, p.32

¹³ 2 Corinthians 4.18

¹⁴ 1 John 5.13, *italics mine*

What Is It To Make Your Call And Election Sure?

Prior to exhorting his readers to be diligent in making their call and election sure, Peter reminded them, as already noted, that God's divine power had given them all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him, who called them by glory and virtue, by which have been given to them exceedingly great and precious promises, that through them they may be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.¹⁵ He was clearly describing God's intention in the call and election of His people. They are to be ones who are radically transformed, ones in whom the image of God is being restored from its radically corrupted condition. The Apostle Paul put it this way; "If anyone is in Christ, he is *a new creation*; old things have passed away; behold, *all things have become new*", and, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren".¹⁶ Peter went on to write that God has entirely equipped His children to work to that end, to be conformed to Jesus Christ, to be partakers of the divine nature. As such, this transformation is not something which is passive on the part of the believer.

Therefore, Peter then went on to then exhort, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ".¹⁷ This, as Lloyd -Jones put it, is what it is for believers to "play their part". This is the believer's active response to God's purposes in election. This is essentially what sanctification is all about.

But this "playing of one's part" as a believer raises an important question. Is this call and election of God on the one hand, and the believer making his call and election sure on the other, merely a matter of simple cooperation? That is to say, is it merely a kind of give and take interaction where the believer and God enter into some sort of mutual accommodation? The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling", but he added, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good purpose".¹⁸ This working out of one's salvation is essentially the same as making one's call and election sure. It's an exhortation to live out the Christian life, to give experiential evidence of a true calling and election.

But there is plainly a hierarchy as regards the order of operation in a believer between what God does and what the believer does in response. The working out of salvation and the making of one's call and election sure are utterly impossible tasks apart from the inward working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus comforted the disciples

¹⁵ 1 Peter 1.3-4, *italics mine*

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5.17; Romans 8.29, *italics mine*

¹⁷ 1 Peter 1.5-8

¹⁸ Philippians 2.12-13

with these words; "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him".¹⁹ This is the great blessing of regeneration that God Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit dwells within the believer. And as Paul wrote, it is God who powerfully acts on the heart to not only *enable*, but to make the believer *willing* to respond to the enabling work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the "all things that pertain to life and godliness" include not only the "great and precious promises" of God's revealed word, but also His inward work of renovation of His image which was so radically corrupted from the fall. This inward work of God is so thoroughly transformative that Paul described his personal experience of it with these words, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me".²⁰ Thus, that which is the believer's part in the making his call and election sure is one which may be described as a "dependent responsibility".²¹ It is a duty and yet it is an impossible duty apart from the divine inward work of the Holy Spirit. Richard Sibbes wrote, "God knoweth we have nothing of ourselves, therefore in the covenant of grace He requireth no more than He giveth, and giveth what He requireth, and accepteth what He giveth".²²

This responsibility of "doing" in the Christian life is described elsewhere in Scripture. We read, "Do you not know that as many of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life", "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh", "...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called", "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light", and "Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God".²³ It is not only the believing, but also the doing which results in a strengthening of one's faith and sense of assurance. Lloyd-Jones wrote, "Do not just sit in contemplation of Christ, but go out and practice the Christian life. It is a remarkable thing, but the more we do for Him the more certain we are of Him... That is the rule for the Christian life – believe and do. Act and practice; and as we do these things we shall make our calling and election sure".²⁴

Paul wrote to the Romans, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God".²⁵ As such, there is a two-fold testimony as to our adoption as children of God. The one witness is the believer's spirit and the other is the Holy Spirit along with the spirit of the believer. Commentator Robert Haldane wrote, "The Holy Spirit enables us to ascertain our sonship, from being conscious of, discovering in ourselves, the true marks of the renewed

¹⁹ John 14.23

²⁰ Galatians 2.20

²¹ A phrase coined by Jerry Bridges of Navigators

²² Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, Banner of Truth Trust, 2001,I,58

²³ Romans 6.3-4, Galatians 5.16, Ephesians 4.1; 5.8, Colossians 3.1-3

²⁴ Lloyd-Jones, p.40

²⁵ Romans 8.16

state... the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit in a distinct and immediate testimony, and also with our spirit in a concurrent testimony... *(He) witnesseth with our spirit, graciously shining on His own promises, making them clear, assuring us of their truth, enabling our spirit to embrace them and to discover our interest in them. He witnesseth with our spirit in all the blessedness of His gracious fruits, diffusing through the soul love, and joy and peace. In the first method of His witnessing with our spirit we are passive; but in the last method there is a concurrence on our part with His testimony. The testimony of the Spirit, then, is attended with the testimony of conscience, and is thus co-witness with our spirit. It may also be observed, that where this exists, it brings with it a disposition and promptitude for prayer. It is the testimony of the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father;' it disposes the soul to holiness*".²⁶ In this way, God provides the underlying motive for sanctification through the assuring work of the Holy Spirit as regards our adoption. This assurance naturally results in increased love for God and a desire to please Him.

And it is this progressive advance in sanctification as experienced by the believer which provides a further sense of assurance of salvation. The Apostle John pointed to this means of assurance when he wrote, "There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one".²⁷ As regards the witnesses John refers to on earth, Thomas Goodwin wrote, "I accord with those who, first, by blood understand the work of justification on a poor sinner...secondly, by water I understand sanctification, both in the habits and fruits of it; for who Christ's blood justifies, it also doth cleanse and sanctify, and washeth away the filth of sin... the third witness, the Spirit, is the Holy Spirit who comes down from heaven and dwells here on earth in the heart of a believer, and so takes part with him, and joins his witness to these other two, His testimony being the greatest, the clearest of all the rest...". Referring again to the second witness, he wrote, "The second witness is the work and workings of sanctification, water. The believer finds that the closing thus with Christ changeth him, renews him, washeth him from the power of sin, puts a new spirit or principle into him, clean opposite to sin, so as he cannot sin; he finds a new spring of gracious dispositions in him, still bubbling naturally up, and cleansing and working out corruption". Goodwin went on to write, "he says not only such dispositions are in God's children, but he presents them to them as signs whence they might know they have eternal life, it being his scope to help believers this way".²⁸ Several instances in this letter bear out Goodwin's assertion. These include, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments", and "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren". A believer making his call and election sure in the pursuit of holiness is a sign of new life. John wrote, "everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure".²⁹ And in this way, the believer is assured by "doing his part", or by the fulfilling of his "dependent responsibility", thus making his call and election sure.

²⁶ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle To The Romans*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996, 363-4, *italics mine*

²⁷ 1 John 5.7-8

²⁸ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works Of Thomas Goodwin*, The Banner Of Truth Trust, VIII, 361-2, 364

²⁹ 1 John 2.3; 3.14, 3

Why Should The Believer Make His Call And Election Sure?:

Firstly, the believer is to make his call and election sure because it is presented as a command. It is not a suggestion. It is not a passing thought, an 'O by the way'. In fact, it is accompanied by the exhortation to be diligent in this duty. It's a repeating of what Peter wrote in verse 5, "for this very reason (*that God has provided all the believer needs*), giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, etc..." In rebuking the Pharisees on one occasion, Jesus said, "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it".³⁰ In commenting on this verse, the puritan Matthew Henry wrote that what Jesus was saying was, "Now that the gospel is preached the eyes of the people are opened, they press with a holy violence into the kingdom of God. Those that would go to heaven must take pains, must strive against the stream, must press against the crowd that are going the contrary way".³¹ The puritan John Owen was perhaps contemplating this same saying of Jesus when he wrote regarding assurance, "Are you in depths and doubts, staggering and uncertain, not knowing what is your condition, nor whether you have any interest in the forgiveness that is of God? Are you tossed up and down between hopes and fears, and want peace, consolation and establishment? Why lie down upon your faces? Get up, watch, pray, fast, meditate, offer violence to your lusts and corruptions; fear not, startle not at their crying or importunities to be spared; press unto the throne of grace by prayers, supplications, importunities, restless requests. This is the way to take the kingdom of heaven. *These things are not peace, they are not assurance; but they are part of the means that God hath appointed for the attainment of them*".³²

In his work "*Practical Christianity*", A.W. Pink dedicated one of his chapters to what he termed 'Heart Work'. He presented this work as one where the believer strives to keep his conscience tender, is watchful over his thoughts and takes care over the workings of the heart. This 'heart work' is essentially what Peter wrote about in these verses under consideration. It's the diligent pursuit of holiness, the work of progressive conformity to Jesus Christ. In regards to this 'heart work', Pink wrote, "The true comfort of our souls much depends on this, for he that is negligent in keeping his heart is generally a stranger to spiritual assurance and the sweet comforts flowing from it. God does not usually indulge lazy souls with inward peace, for He will not be the patron of any carelessness. He has united together our diligence and comfort, and they are greatly mistaken who suppose that the beautiful child of assurance can be born without soul pangs. Diligent self-examination is called for: first the looking into the Word, and then the looking into our hearts, to see how they correspond. It is true that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, but He can not be discerned by His essence; it is His operations that manifest Him, and these are known by the graces he produces in the soul (*diligence, virtue,*

³⁰ Luke 16.16

³¹ Matthew Henry, *The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament*, Bethany House Publishers, 1983, p.448

³² Owen, VI,567-8, *italics mine*

etc.); and those can only be perceived by diligent search and honest scrutiny of the heart. It is in the heart that the Spirit works".³³

Secondly, after his exhortation to be diligent in adding to faith virtue, knowledge, etc., Peter wrote, "For if these things (*virtue, knowledge, etc.*) are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ".³⁴ To be 'barren' or 'unfruitful' is to be idle, inactive and ineffective. It is essentially a faith which is not accompanied by works. James wrote, "...faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead".³⁵ This is not just a call to be busy in some kind of general way for the sake of being busy. Peter's positive encouragement here immediately followed what was fundamentally his exhortation to be like Christ (virtue, knowledge, etc.). The active Christian life is one with a distinct goal. It's a life in pursuit of holiness. If a believer is focused on becoming more and more like Christ, he must of necessity be a believer who is not idle or unfruitful. It is this life lived in pursuit of a Christ-like character which God uses as a means of attracting and drawing unbelievers to the gospel. It is not a means of conversion, but it is a means of placing on display God's grace in the life of a believer, which is attractive to those whom God is calling. Jesus taught, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven".³⁶ And the life of Christ exemplified this to the fullest. He went about doing good, and those who were outcasts, publicans, sinners, and the distressed were drawn to Him because they saw the beauty of God's grace in His life.

Thirdly, Peter then proceeded to warn, "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins".³⁷ In this statement, Peter essentially said that one who is *not* diligent in making his call and election sure is one who has entirely lost sight of what the Christian life is all about, its purpose. The Christian is one who has been delivered by God from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love. His nature is not a patched-up version of his old, but he is an entirely new creature in Jesus Christ where "old things have passed away", and "all things are new". The whole purpose of Christ's redemptive work in the giving of Himself was to "save His people from their sin", to "redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works". He "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed".³⁸ To be lax in this duty is to have lost sight of the ultimate goal of the Christian life, which is to see God, to spend eternity in His holy presence and enjoy Him forever. It's to live a life that is chiefly taken up with that which is temporal and temporary. As Lloyd-Jones put it regarding the man in verse nine, "He is a man who claims to have set out on a journey, but he has forgotten where he is going; he has forgotten why he started out, and the purpose he had in starting out... He is utterly inconsistent with himself. He says he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ in

³³ Arthur W. Pink, *Practical Christianity*, Guardian Press, 1974, p.111, *parenthetical insert mine*

³⁴ v.8

³⁵ James 2.20

³⁶ Matthew 5.16

³⁷ 2 Peter 1.9

³⁸ Colossians 1.13; 2 Corinthians 5.17; 1 Peter 2.24; Titus 2.14

order that he may be delivered from his sin, and yet he continues in sin".³⁹ To live in this manner is to live a life of contradiction, and brings the surety of one's salvation into serious question. It is potentially an indication that no regenerative work has taken place in the life of the professor of faith.

Fourthly, Peter added this positive motivation for making one's call and election sure. He wrote, "...if you do these things you will never stumble; for an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ".⁴⁰ In this way, Peter brought before his readers the ultimate reality of their departure from this life. He was saying that the way a believer faces old age and finally death is very much related to the diligence one applies to the making of their call and election sure. If one is 'shortsighted' as regards this pursuit, then it's the pursuit of what is temporary in this world that tends to dominate in one's life. This is what Jesus was speaking of when he said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".⁴¹ When the so-called treasures of this earth predominate in one's shortsighted mind and affections, then old age and death are seen as barriers to the enjoyment of these things. And then, when old age begins to creep in, that one sees himself as deprived of what made him happy in this life. His strength and faculties start to fail and he's frustrated with a sense of helplessness.

In these first eleven verses of this chapter one in Peter's second letter, he basically outlined the whole of the Christian life. The believer has obtained a "like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ", as such they have all they need to live the Christian life and therefore should be diligent in adding virtue, knowledge, etc., and then comes a glorious end to life. It's ultimately how one thinks of and deals with the ultimate reality of death which serves an indicator of the worth of one's faith.

The Apostle Paul's life was one in which he laid up his treasures in heaven. He didn't see old age and death as something to be dreaded. Quite the contrary, he wrote while in prison, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain".⁴² Paul lived in the light of the bigger picture of what God was doing in His redemptive purposes. He knew he was no longer his own, but that he had been purchased at a great price, even the shed blood of Jesus Christ. His whole life after his conversion on the road to Damascus can be summed up by his response to his encounter with his Savior and Lord; "Lord, what do you want me to do?".⁴³ All of his energies were consumed in serving Christ. And he knew that his service included his own personal diligence in making his call and election sure. He wrote, "not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. Brethren, I

³⁹ Lloyd-Jones, 44,46

⁴⁰ vv. 10-11

⁴¹ Matthew 6.19-21

⁴² Philippians 1.21

⁴³ Acts 9.6

do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". He was therefore able to say near the time of his death, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith".⁴⁴

Rather than bemoaning the giving up of any pleasures of this life at the time of death, he saw his departure from this world as entering into pleasures beyond imagination in the presence of God. Further, his anticipation of seeing His Lord and Savior and the receiving of that "crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day" made his service, sufferings and sojourn in this life a joy, and provided the greatest motivation for wholehearted obedience and service. He had, as the Savoy puts it, a "heart... enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance".⁴⁵ Paul described his mindset when he wrote, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead".⁴⁶ To know the power of Christ's resurrection is exactly what Peter was writing about, for it's only the true believer who can attain to this growth in grace because of a new heart, a transformed mind and the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit within.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "Doubts and fears have power to spoil much of the happiness of a true believer in Jesus Christ...", but the pursuit of making one's call and election sure "enables him to feel that the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts, and works are then by comparison small. In this way assurance makes him patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings, in every condition content, for it gives him FIXEDNESS of heart. It sweetens his bitter cups; it lessens the burden of his crosses; it smoothes the rough places over which he travels; it lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes him always feel that he has something solid beneath his feet, and something firm under his hands – a sure friend by the way, and a sure home at the end."⁴⁷

An Obstacle to Making One's Call and Election Sure:

Reformed theologians don't all agree as to whether personal assurance of faith is part of the essence of saving faith. Some see this assurance as a 'superadded work' of the Holy Spirit. The puritan Thomas Goodwin wrote, "Assurance comes in but to confirm and seal to what pure faith hath done, and therefore follows upon faith, and so all expressions that express assurance

⁴⁴ Philippians 3.12-14; 2 Timothy 4.7

⁴⁵ XVIII, III

⁴⁶ Philippians 3.8,10

⁴⁷ Ryle, 132-3

imply: as when it is called establishing or confirming and giving in earnest, and a witnessing, all these suppose an act of faith already passed... the first act of faith doth not include prevailing assurance in it, but after men believe then comes in sealing".⁴⁸ This was Goodwin's understanding of Ephesians 1.13 where we read, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise". Goodwin continued, "...that light which causeth assurance of faith is a distinct thing, and superadded to faith; and the Scripture speaks of it as a thing distinct from faith (though it doth coalesce with it, and they both make one), and may be separately considered, and is called sense as so considered; for it is by a reflex act upon grace in a man, and then it is experience (as the apostle calls it⁴⁹) which breeds this hope, or by an immediate discovery of the Spirit with joy unspeakable, which hath sense and sight in it; and therefore Job, though he believed afore, yet when this light broke in afresh, 'I heard of Thee,' says he, 'by hearing of the ear; but now my eyes have seen Thee,' Job 42.5".⁵⁰

John Owen's understanding of the sealing of the Spirit in Ephesians 1.13 differed from that of Goodwin's and a number of the other puritans such as Cotton, Sibbes, and Baxter. He wrote "It hath been generally conceived that this sealing with the Spirit is that which gives assurance unto believers, - and so indeed it doth, although the way whereby it doth it hath not been rightly apprehended; and, therefore, none have been able to declare the especial nature of that act of the Spirit whereby He seals us, whence such assurance should ensue. But it is indeed not any act of the Spirit in us the ground of our assurance, but the communication of the Spirit unto us. This the apostle plainly testifieth. 1 John iii.24, 'Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.'"⁵¹ Owen based his understanding of the believer's sealing by the Holy Spirit on the sealing of Christ by the Father; "God the Father has set His seal upon Him".⁵² He wrote, "This sealing of the Son is the communication of the Holy Spirit in all fullness unto Him, authorizing Him unto, and acting His divine power in, all the acts and duties of His office, so as to evidence the presence of God with Him... wherefore, God's sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit is His gracious communication of the Holy Ghost unto them, so to act His divine power in them as to enable them unto all the duties of their holy calling... the effects of this sealing are gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in and upon believers".⁵³

But Owen continued, "it may be, the sense of these words (*'by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us'*) may be, that the Spirit which God gives us doth, by some especial work of His, effect this assurance in us; and so it is not His being given unto us, but some especial work of His in us, that is the ground of our assurance, and consequently our sealing".⁵⁴ By writing this, Sinclair Ferguson observed that, "What Owen has done, it is now clear, is to remove the suggestion of any theology of subsequence from his doctrine of the

⁴⁸ VIII, 345

⁴⁹ Goodwin was referring to 1 Peter 1.8 (*...yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*) and its context.

⁵⁰ VIII, 346

⁵¹ IV,405

⁵² John 6.27

⁵³ IV,403-4

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 405

Christian life, without destroying the element of progression and development in experience of God... He seals the believer by His personal indwelling. But the recognition and enjoyment of His presence is a matter concerning which no rules may be prescribed in terms of a single identifiable experience".⁵⁵

Although, Owen and Goodwin disagreed on whether assurance was part of original saving faith or subsequent to it, they would have agreed that a true believer may be fully justified before God, and yet not have 'the recognition and enjoyment' of the presence of the Holy Spirit resulting in assurance of grace and salvation. One very clear reason for this lack of assurance is a less than diligent pursuit of it as presented by Peter in the text we have considered in this paper. Alexander Nisbet wrote, "The more of these a Christian attains to, the more shall be his clearness and certainty that he was from eternity chosen to life and is, in time, effectually called..."⁵⁶

But another significant reason for a believer's lack assurance is the tendency for him to measure his justification by his sanctification. He becomes like Peter who began to sink into the sea when he took his eyes off of Jesus. They forget that although a true believer is redeemed, justified and renewed, he is also a sinner, and remains a sinner as long as he is in this present world. Justification is a finished work which requires no effort or contribution on the believer's part. There are no degrees of justification. The weakest believer is as fully justified as the strongest saint. Sanctification, however, is a life-long process, an incomplete and imperfect work. Christians who measure their acceptance by God by their perceived level of personal sanctification "appear to expect that a believer may at some period of his life be in a measure free from corruption, and attain to a kind of inward perfection. And not finding this angelic state of things in their own hearts, they at once conclude there must be something very wrong in their state. And so they go mourning all their days – oppressed with fears that they have no part or lot in Christ, and refusing to be comforted... if any believing soul desires assurance, and has not got it, let him ask himself, first of all, if he is sound in the faith, if he knows how to distinguish things that differ, and if his eyes are thoroughly clear in the matter of justification. He must know what it is simply to *believe* and to be justified by faith before he can expect to feel assured".⁵⁷

The Apostle Paul was in possession of assurance of grace and salvation as evidenced by his proclamation that for him, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain... For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ".⁵⁸ And yet, there appeared to be times when in looking at himself he could only say, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells... for the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995, p.123

⁵⁶ Alexander Nisbet, *An Exposition of 1 & 2 Peter*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995, p.231

⁵⁷ Ryle, 142-3

⁵⁸ Philippians 1.21,23

⁵⁹ Romans 7.18,19

process of sanctification for the Apostle was a spiritual battle, a true conflict against the remnants of sin that remained in his 'body of sin'.

He went on to answer his own question by writing, "I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit".⁶⁰ Having just written what he did in the preceding verses of chapter seven, he was not implying that by being in Christ Jesus, he therefore never walked according to the flesh. He was an ongoing sinner and he knew it. He was essentially stating that his new life in Christ Jesus was such that he knew he was justified, and that another feature of his new life in Christ Jesus was his sanctification whereby he was able to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, to be diligent in making his call and election sure, and to walk according to the Spirit, because God was working in him both to will and to do for God's good pleasure. Paul was able to see that his justification and his sanctification were two inseparable yet distinct features of his new life in Christ. By faith, he embraced Jesus Christ for pardon from sin, but he knew his Christian experience of sanctification would be one of spiritual conflict and struggle with all of its ups and downs.

Peter's exhortation to his readers to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, etc., was not with a view to setting an expectation that these characteristics would be perfectly realized in this life. His concern was that true believers not rest satisfied with only the beginnings of these graces. He was urging them to diligently exercise and improve them. He wrote, "Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you..."⁶¹ This experience of the emergence and increase of these graces would serve to increase their confidence that they were true recipients of grace and salvation. However, one must, like Paul, be aware that the attainment of these graces in this life is at best incomplete, imperfect and often accompanied with sinful failure. One must not rely solely on a satisfactory self-examination for one's confidence. We must be careful when we are only looking to the *subjective* evidence of our works and the fruit of the Spirit for certainty of grace and salvation. Christ is the *objective* basis for assurance. John Calvin wrote, "Indeed, if we should have to judge from our works how the Lord feels toward us, for my part, I grant that we can in no way attain it by conjecture. But since faith ought to correspond to a simple and free promise, no place for doubting is left. For with what sort of confidence will we be armed, I pray, if we reason that God is favorable to us provided our purity of life so merit it?"⁶²

Conclusion:

Whether a believer's assurance of grace and salvation is part of original saving faith or subsequent to it, clearly God has so designed the Christian pilgrimage to be one of an active pursuit of it. Further, there is a connection of this pursuit with a believer being conformed to

⁶⁰ 7.19-8.1

⁶¹ 2 Peter 1.13

⁶² Institutes, 3.2.38

Jesus Christ. It is this conformity to Christ that Peter was referring to when he exhorted his readers in 2 Peter 1.5-11 to be diligent in adding to their faith virtue, knowledge, etc. And it is this diligent pursuit which God blesses with a felt sense of the assurance of grace and salvation. In referencing this passage, Jonathan Edwards wrote, "It is not God's design that men should obtain assurance in any other way than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercises of it. And although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected, yet it is not the principal means by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action. The Apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way, even by 'forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those things that were before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.' And it was by this means chiefly that he obtained assurance: I Cor. 9:26, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.' He obtained assurance of winning the prize, more by running than by considering. The swiftness of his pace did more towards his assurance of a conquest than the strictness of his examination."⁶³

The Christian life is not one of smooth progression. It is a fight with the world, the devil and the remnants of the old sinful nature. And so, although the grounds of a believer's salvation are absolutely assured, which is the truth of the gospel, there will be times when the certainty one has as to the possession of salvation will be questioned. Times of measuring one's justification by their perceived sanctification can result in the absence of assurance, but certainly it is laziness and carelessness in being diligent in making one's call and election sure that will ultimately result in a loss of any felt sense of assurance of grace and salvation.

But it must be finally said that "There are some who are true believers, and yet weak in faith. They do indeed receive Christ and free grace, but it is with a shaking hand; they have, as divines say, the faith of adherence; they will stick to Christ as theirs. But they want the faith of evidence; they cannot see themselves as His. They are believers, but of little faith; they hope that Christ will not cast them off, but are not sure He will take them up".⁶⁴ It is here that we must bow to God's ordering of His church in the dispensing of His graces. Paul wrote, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith".⁶⁵ And all for His glory.

⁶³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1991, p.123

⁶⁴ John Durant, preacher in Canterbury Cathedral, 1649, as quoted by Ryle in *Holiness*, p.154

⁶⁵ Romans 12.3