

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Virtue and Assurance, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:8-11

Code: 61-12

Tonight we have the opportunity and the great privilege of returning to 2 Peter, chapter 1, verses 5 through 11, our study of the assurance of salvation, this being part 8, if you will, in that wonderful series. And as we have been looking at 2 Peter, chapter 1, verses 5 through 11, we've been learning through this long study that God wants His beloved children to enjoy the assurance of their salvation. He wants them to enjoy full assurance. In fact, Peter writes this marvelous section in order that believers may experience the assurance that God desires for them. Given the fact that the enemy, the devil, is the accuser of the brethren, and always wants to hit us with blows of doubt to make us doubt our salvation, God, on the other hand, wants to affirm our spiritual condition and our assurance.

Assurance, in fact, is a vital theme in this brief letter. And let me just remind you of how it kind of fits in to the whole picture. The major theme of 2 Peter is false teachers. That theme is carried primarily in the second chapter. The second chapter deals specifically with the false teachers. But that key section, chapter 2, with regard to false teachers, is surrounded by other teaching directed at the issue of successfully defeating the attack of false teachers. To fight off the deluding deceptions, the believer must know - knowledge is the key to dealing with false teachers. They cannot deceive you if you know the truth - the truth about doctrine, the truth about your spiritual condition. Where there is knowledge, there can be no deception.

So he tells us that, first of all, we must know our sanctification. That he deals with in chapter 1, verses 12 through 21. Then in chapter 3, he says you must know your sanctification, and we'll get to that. And here in our text, chapter 1, verses 1 through 11, you must know your salvation. If you know your Scripture, and you know your sanctification, and you know your salvation, you have set your defense against the deception of false teachers. Now, we're dealing with this whole matter of knowing your salvation. It began, really, in verse 1, and runs all the way down to verse 11. In verse 1, we looked at the source of our salvation; in verse 2, the substance of our salvation; in verses 3 and 4, the sufficiency of our salvation; and now in verses 5 through 11, the certainty of our salvation.

We must know our salvation if we're going to be dealing with false teachers effectively and not succumb to their deception. So we have been examining the great matters of revelation that regard our salvation, and particularly the certainty of it. As we came to verse 5, I noted for you the effort prescribed. There is an effort involved in being certain about your salvation. Notice verse 5: "Now for this very reason applying all diligence" - all diligence - "in your faith supply" - and we'll stop right there. If you're going to be certain of your salvation, it involves a diligent pursuit - it involves an effort.

The fullness of assurance is the product of zealous effort to tap the full supply of God's gracious provision.

Then secondly, we noted it not only involves the effort prescribed, but the virtues pursued. You go from attitude there to action. And in the second part of verse 5, and running through verse 7, we noted some virtues that are pursued. He says in verse 5, you must supply "moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love." These are the pursuit, the moral pursuit, of the one who would experience assurance. You must add to your faith, moral virtue. You must add to your moral virtue, practical wisdom.

You must add to your practical wisdom, internal self-restraint. You must add to that internal self-restraint, perseverance through trials. To that you add a God-conscious reverence. To that you add brotherly friendship, brotherly kindness. And to that you add the all-pervasive love toward God and everybody else. Where you pursue those virtues, you will experience assurance. So assurance involves an effort prescribed, "applying all diligence," and virtues pursued. Then in point three, down in verses 8 and 9, which we come to tonight, there are two options presented. In order to enjoy assurance I must consider the options presented, verses 8 and 9. And here you have two options, and you can go either way, accepting or rejecting the pursuit of these virtues and the effort that is prescribed. Peter makes the results of these two options very, very clear.

First of all, let's look at the positive option. If I'm going to experience assurance in my life, I take the positive option, verse 8. "If these qualities are yours and are increasing" – that's the first option, that you are pursuing these options. If you want to enjoy assurance in all of its richness, here is the means, by pursuing these qualities. If you do that and you find them increasing in your life, "they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now, you're going to have to follow me closely, because this is a rather intricate argument that Peter gives us.

A little phrase "if these qualities are yours," these seven virtues that he has mentioned, if they belong to you; and by the way, the Greek verb denotes property which someone really owns. The Greek verb denotes an abiding possession. The expression is very strong. If you really have these virtues and they are on the increase - the verb there is *pleonaz*, which means to have more than enough, to have more than necessary, to have too much. If you see these virtues in your life – moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love – if you see those virtues in your life and you see them on the increase, he says, again back to verse 8, "they render you" - that is, "they make you" – "neither useless nor unfruitful."

Let me just speak about those two terms. "Useless" means literally "out of work, inactive, idle." It is used eight times in the New Testament. It always means "indolent, unserviceable, inoperative,

inactive,” such as in Titus 1:12, that interesting phrase, “idle bellies.” By the way, in James 2:20 to 22, it’s translated “dead,” “dead.” If you pursue these virtues you won’t be inoperative, inactive, and useless. You won’t be, in one sense, dead in terms of your effectiveness. And then he adds “nor unfruitful.” That means basically the same thing, “unproductive.” That is used seven times in the New Testament, and usually it is used of trees.

It is used of unregenerate apostates in Jude 12, who are like trees without fruit. It is used in Ephesians 5:11 of unfruitful works of darkness. It is used in Matthew 13:22 of unfruitful, superficial believers. It is used in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 even of a true believer who is unfruitful. So he is saying when your life does not manifest these things, these virtues, you are useless and unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if they are in you and they’re on the increase, you are not useless and you are not unfruitful. Your life is increasingly fruitful. Where they are not there, you are indistinguishable from an apostate, you are indistinguishable from an evildoer, you are indistinguishable from a superficial believer.

Now, look at the phrase at the end of verse 8, because it’s important. He says you “neither are useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That phrase “in the true knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” shows us that he is referring here to true Christians. He is saying you possess the true knowledge as opposed to a false knowledge. You are a real believer. Now, a real believer has the capacity to produce these virtues. They are inherent within the new nature, because God says to the believer, through Christ you are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies” Ephesians 1:3. You have all things that “pertain to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him” 2 Peter 1:3.

So the germ, the seed, the potential for all these virtues, is there in the true believer. So Peter is saying a true and genuine believing Christian who sees these things on the increase in his life is not useless, is not unproductive, but enjoys fruit and usefulness in his life. Now, that is option number one: pursuing these virtues, pursuing them with all diligence, according to the effort prescribed, and seeing in your life the increase of these things, and the consequent usefulness and fruitfulness – that’s option number one. Now, look at verse 9 for option number two.

“He who lacks these qualities” – What qualities? - these same seven virtues. If he looks at his life and he doesn’t see moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, he doesn’t see it, doesn’t see it increasing in his life, if he’s not pursuing those things, it says he “is blind and short-sighted.” By the way, those are really synonyms, just like “useless” and “unfruitful” are synonyms. He is saying, literally, “he is blind, being short-sighted.” This is another way he can’t see far enough to discern spiritual condition. If a person – now follow this thought – if a person pursues these virtues, he will be useful and fruitful. If he is useful and fruitful, he will be able to identify his spiritual condition, right, because he can see the fruit of God’s work in his life. He will know his spiritual condition.

If, on the other hand, these virtues are not on the increase, a person is blind and short-sighted and cannot see his true spiritual condition. So if you want to enjoy assurance, you take option number one. Now, follow again in verse 9: “The one who lacks these virtues and qualities is blind, being short-sighted” – now, watch this thought – “having forgotten his purification from his former sins.” What does that mean? Well, the word “purification” is *katharismos*, from which we get *catharsis*, which means “a cleansing.” He’s forgotten that he’s been cleansed. What does that mean? The salvation event – he’s forgotten that he was saved from his former sins, his old sinful life.

What Peter is saying here is a person who has been saved, who has gone through a salvation event in which he was purified from his old sinful life, but he has forgotten it, he can’t any longer remember it, because he is not seeing in his life the increase of these virtues. Let me put it to you simply. Where you have the increase of moral virtue, you have the evidence of salvation. Get that? Where you have the absence of the increase of moral virtue, you have the lack of assurance of salvation. One’s assurance of salvation is directly related to what’s going on in his life. Those people who do not see the virtues on the increase in their life will not remember that they have been purged. The phrase “having forgotten” literally is “to receive forgetfulness” or “to incur forgetfulness.”

And so summing it up, the failure to diligently pursue spiritual virtues produces spiritual amnesia. The failure to pursue moral excellence in one’s life, the failure to pursue these seven virtues, will dim one’s vision of his own spiritual condition. And there will be no memory of salvation at some point, and one will not know whether he’s really saved. Oh, he may remember some external activity that he might have gone through at the moment that he was saved, but he will not have the confidence of salvation. The commentator Bauckham, writing in *The Word Biblical Commentary*, says this: “The knowledge of Jesus Christ recorded at conversion came as illumination to those who were blind in their pagan ignorance. But Christians who do not carry through the moral implications of this knowledge have effectively become blind to it again,” end quote.

Now mark this – that kind of forgetfulness leads to repeating the old sins. So there you have two options, two options. A believer who has these qualities and virtues increasing will enjoy assurance, because he’ll see the fruit and the usefulness in his own life, and he’ll see that he’s in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, a believer who does not pursue these virtues and lacks these qualities increasing will forfeit assurance. So the effort prescribed, the diligent pursuit, the virtues pursued, he lays out the very essence of the virtues that must be increasing in our life, and the options presented.

Finally, is the benefit promised. In order to pull his argument together and to make it compelling, Peter develops the benefits in verses 10 and 11. This is really where the whole argument comes to its great climax. Notice verse 10: “Therefore, brethren” – now here the word “therefore” ties everything up, on the basis of everything I have said. “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make

certain about His calling and choosing you” – stop at that point. Obviously, because of what he has said, you should be compelled to make your calling certain. Because of the tragedy of option number two, you want to avoid it, so verse 10 calls for you to move toward option number one.

And verse 10 sounds an awful lot like verse 5 – pursue this, apply all diligence. In fact it’s almost an identical phrase – “be all the more diligent.” Make an even greater effort – uses the same word as in verse 5. The word carries urgency and it carries eagerness. To do what? To make certain. One of the middle voice verbs - to make certain for yourself; to make certain for yourself; to make firm; secure; sure; to certify; to attest; to confirm; to affirm. The word is used in a legal guarantee.

There’s nothing worse, frankly, than to fear you’re not saved. Grief and despair result from that kind of uncertainty – doubt and fear. So Peter says be spiritually diligent to make sure for yourself – that’s a very important point, middle voice verb – for yourself “about His calling and choosing you.” “Calling” and “choosing” again are synonyms. The calling here is not merely an invitation, but a sovereign command, coupled with a sovereign selection in eternity past. Make sure for yourselves that God has called you and chosen you to salvation.

Now, obviously, you’re not making sure to God; God knows, right? God doesn’t have any doubt about it. God knows because He chose you. But you need to make sure for yourselves. He knows the elect. He knows whom He has chosen. He knows whom He has called. But do you have that assurance? Do you have that confidence? Be diligent to make certain that you do. How do you do that? Follow along, verse 10: “For as long as you practice these things.” In other words, as long as you pursue these moral virtues, as long as you diligently pursue these increasing virtues, as long as you pursue a holy life - reducing it down to the simplest terms - as long as you pursue spiritual growth, you will guarantee by demonstration that you were called and you were chosen. I’ll tell you, that is a wonderful, wonderful confidence to have.

Notice the word “practice” there. “As long as you practice these things” – present active participle, the pattern of daily conduct. As long as the pattern of your daily conduct is to pursue moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, as long as that is your daily pursuit, he says – look at the end of verse 10 - “you will never stumble.” You will never stagger, stumble, fall into doubt, despair, depression, grief, fear about your spiritual condition. You’ll never stumble. You’ll always have confidence. You’ll always have assurance. Why? Because your calling and election will be sure in your mind. Why?

Because you’re pursuing these virtues; you see them on the increase; you know God is producing them in your life. And because you can see it, and it’s visible, and it’s evidence, you know your spiritual condition, you know you’ve been saved, you know you’ve been called by God, you know you’ve been elected before the foundation of the world. And in the confident knowledge of that, you enjoy the fullness of assurance. My, that is such a rich, thrilling blessing. Beloved, what Peter is

saying, and what I'm saying to you, is that assurance is directly tied to how you live your life.

Everybody would like to be sure about their salvation; nobody wants to live their life in doubt. And yet I would guess that many, if not most, Christians do live in doubt. Some people say, "Well, all you have to do to be assured is to go way back to some point in time when you signed on the dotted line; that's all the assurance you ever need." That's not what the Scripture says. If you want to make your calling and election sure, you're going to make it sure by virtues that are visible in your life, produced by the Spirit of God as you pursue those virtues. And as you pursue those things, and you see that you are useful to God and fruitful, and these are increasing in your life, you'll never stumble into doubt, despair, fear, and questioning.

In verse 11, he says it as directly as it could be said. "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." This verse needs careful thought. In verse 11, he says, first of all, "for in this way" – What way? By diligent pursuit of these virtues and the blessing they bring, the blessing of assurance and the blessing of perseverance, as you pursue this diligently, he says – now notice it again – "the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." What's he talking about? What's he saying here?

He's saying in the future, when you enter in to the eternal kingdom, you will receive an abundant reward. That is to me the simplest and most direct understanding of this statement. Here is another feature of his promise. If you pursue virtue in your life, you'll not only enjoy assurance here, but you'll enjoy reward in the life to come. The entrance into the eternal kingdom looks at our hope in the future. Now, we have already entered the kingdom at salvation. We've passed from death unto life, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. We are now living in the present form of the kingdom; we are under the rule of Christ, and we are in the kingdom in that sense. Christ is King and He rules over His people.

But we are still looking for the future fulfillment, the eternal kingdom – the eternal kingdom is associated with rewards. This part of the kingdom in which we live now is associated with salvation. We have entered into the kingdom by way of salvation. We receive blessing upon blessing upon blessing. The eternal feature of the kingdom, that which comes into full fruition in the future, is the blessing of eternal reward. It is beyond time. It is beyond space. It is in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Savior. And at that time, there will be an abundant supply to us, because we have diligently and faithfully pursued these virtues.

And that, by the way, beloved, is the goal of our pilgrimage. Some people would lead us to believe that you can come to Jesus Christ and believe in Him at a moment of time and then live any way you want. Some people might even say it's nice if you decide to pursue moral virtue, but if you don't you'll still get into the kingdom. That's true if you're truly a Christian, and you opt out for option number two,

and you do not diligently pursue moral virtue. You will live in doubt, and you will live in depression, and you will live in fear, and you will live in despair, and you will worry about your spiritual condition, and you will wonder if you're really saved because you're not seeing the increase of those moral virtues.

And beyond that, while in the future you will enter into the kingdom, you will find that you are not going to receive an abundant supply of reward in that day. You will receive praise from God, but it will not be to the degree that it might have been if you had pursued virtuous things. It seems so basic that we live our Christian lives in the light of an eternal reward; that we are endeavoring to lay up treasure in heaven, that we are pursuing the virtuous things of gold, silver, and precious stones, and not the lesser things of wood, hay, and stubble. For those who have diligently, faithfully pursued holiness, their reward will be abundantly supplied.

Now, I agree that every one of God's children, when they go to heaven, will receive an abundant supply. But I think Peter here is trying to say there is a magnanimous sense of reward for those who have pursued virtue diligently. And while I believe all Christians bear some fruit, it is apparent that there is an option that some Christians choose, and that is to make a minor effort at spiritual virtue, while some make a major effort at it. Scripture does say that God gives richly to all the saved. Scripture does say that He gives them all things richly to enjoy. Scripture does say that all believers are forgiven according to the riches of His grace which has been lavished on us.

Scripture does say that God intends in the future ages to come to show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward all the saved. Scripture does say that according to His mercy, He poured out His Spirit richly on us in the new birth. Scripture does say there are riches of the glory of His inheritance in all the saints. Scripture does say that all the saved have the riches of the glory of His mystery, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory. Scripture does say that He is abundant in riches to all believers, Jew and Gentile, who call upon Him for salvation. Scripture does say that He has supplied all the saved with the Holy Spirit, and all manner of manifold grace.

So since He has lavished upon all believers such enormous generosity, and rich grace and blessing, since all believers will have some faithfulness and some fruitfulness, they will all experience some blessing and some abundance in glory. Though all of that is true, I cannot resist the compulsion of this verse, in this context, that seems to me to be saying as you diligently supply the virtues of Christian character in your life, God will reciprocate by continuing to increase the abundance of the supply which you receive when you enter into His eternal kingdom. I believe there are, then, degrees of reward which God will give to His beloved children, based upon their faithful, diligent pursuit of righteousness. Abundant sowing should mean abundant – What? – reaping.

Rewards of grace in eternity will correspond to the work of grace in time. Let me say that again. The rewards of grace in eternity will correspond to the work of grace in time. And there will be degrees of

reward in glory, proportionate to faithfulness in this life. At salvation, the matter of entrance into the kingdom was settled, but not the manner of entrance. At the moment of salvation, the fact of our entrance into the eternal kingdom was settled, but the manner of that entrance was not settled. How grandiose our eternal reward is is related to how diligent the pursuit of virtue. So summing it up, for those who pursue virtue in this life diligently, they receive two things: here and now, the assurance of salvation; then and there, abundant blessing.

The promise of God is that if I pursue virtue in this life, I will enjoy the best of life, which is to be assured of my eternal home; and I will enjoy forever and ever and ever the greater reward because of my diligence by the Spirit of God's power. For the diligent Christian, two promises: assurance in this life, abundance in the life to come. That's it; assurance in this life, abundance in the life to come – What a marvelous promise. Beloved, I know you along with me and certainly every believer wants to enjoy assurance. It's not enough, as I said at the very beginning of this series, to tell somebody that their assurance is based upon some past act. You can tell them that, but they may not believe it.

They probably won't believe it where there is an absence of increasing moral virtue, because no matter what you might say to them to convince them they're Christians, if they don't see the evidence in their life, such verbal convincing falls on deaf ears. How can I know that I'm really saved? One: 'cause I see my usefulness and my fruitfulness as a result of my diligence in the pursuit of holy things. And if I doubt, and if I question, and if I live in fear that I might not be saved, it's because those things are not increasing in my life. So we have answered the question, I trust, in great detail, and brought it to a climax in the words of Peter.

Let me summarize, as we just wrap it up, with the words of a noble biblical theologian, Benjamin Warfield, who years ago wrote this: "Peter exhorts us to make our calling and election sure, precisely by diligence in good works. He does not mean that by good works we may secure from God a degree of election. He means that by expanding the germ of spiritual life which we have received from God into its full effervescence, by working out our salvation, of course, not without Christ, but in Christ, we can make ourselves sure that we have really received the election to which we make claim. Good works become thus the mark and test of election. And when taken in the comprehensive sense in which Peter is here thinking of them, they are the only marks and tests of election.

"We can never know that we are elected of God to eternal life except by manifesting in our lives the fruits of election – faith and virtue, knowledge and temperance, patience and godliness, love of the brethren. It is idle to seek assurance of election outside holiness of life. Precisely what God chose His people to before the foundation of the world was that they should be holy. Holiness, because it is the necessary product, is therefore the sure sign of election," end quote. A person who is at all conversant with the spiritual life knows as certainly whether he indeed enjoys the light of God's countenance or whether he walks in darkness as a traveler knows whether he travels in sunshine or in rain.

Look at your life – you don't see moral virtue, you don't have any evidence to verify your salvation. Look at your life – you see these things in your life, not obviously in perfection, but there, and increasing, and you know you walk in the light. In closing, let me pose some things to you, practical application. Why all this about assurance? Well, first of all, it's in the Bible; that compels us. But why all this, weeks and weeks, and message after message? What are the benefits of assurance? Is it so important? Is it worthy of such an extensive concern? The answer is yes. Let me give you why. A few reasons; might want to jot them down.

Number one: the doctrine of assurance and the experience of assurance is important, first of all, because it makes us love and praise God. It makes us love and praise God for saving grace, for eternal promise. I mean if I know I'm saved, I'm going to be praising God for that. If I know I'm secure forever, I'm going to be praising God for that, and loving God for that. If I am not sure that I am, I can't praise God for it, right? That's very practical implications. How can I be filled with gratitude, how can I be filled with loving praise, if I'm not even sure I'm saved?

Secondly, it not only makes us love and praise God, but it drops joy into all our earthly duties and trials. If I know I'm saved, no matter what happens in this life, it drops joy into the midst of it. Why? Because no matter what comes temporally, I know I'm saved, and I therefore know what my eternal destiny is, right? So assurance allows me to rejoice in any difficulty.

Thirdly, assurance makes us zealous in obedience and service; it makes us zealous in obedience and service. If I know I'm truly saved, and if I know I'm truly headed for heaven, then I know my responsibility is to obey my King. Assurance doesn't breed apathy; doubt does. It breeds industry. Doubting discourages service; assurance encourages it. Thomas Watson wrote, "Assurance will be as weights to the clock to set all the wheels of obedience running." I love that. Assurance is the weight that pulls the wheels of the clock and makes everything operate. If I know I am saved, and I don't have any doubt about that, and I know that I belong to God, and I know my eternal destiny, that moves me to obedience and service. If I'm not sure of that, then I'm apathetic, then I'm indifferent, and as Peter says, I'm useless and unfruitful.

Fourthly, assurance gives us victory in temptation; assurance gives us victory in temptation. Let me tell you why. Because in the midst of the strongest temptation, I know I belong to God. And therefore I know that "there's no temptation taken me but such is as common to man, but God is faithful who will not allow me to be tempted above what I am able, but has with the temptation made a way of escape." If I know I belong to God, then I know He has given me the power to overcome the temptation.

Secondly, in the midst of that temptation I don't despair, because even though it's a strong temptation, I not only know I have the power for victory, but I know my future is secure in heaven, and

that temptation cannot change my eternity. On the other hand, if I have no assurance of my salvation, then temptation discourages and depresses me, and I wonder if I'm able to even deal with it, and I wonder if it is not going to damn me when I fall victim to it. No, if I have assurance, it causes me to love and praise God. It drops joy into all my earthly duties and trials. It makes me zealous in obedience and service. And it gives me victory in temptation.

Fifthly, if I have assurance, it makes me content, though I have little in this world; if I have assurance, it makes me content, though I have little in this world. If I have assurance of salvation, I am confident that I have riches in the world to come. And I have confidence that "my God will supply all my needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." So, if I am assured of my salvation, it matters little what happens to me in this world. But if I'm not sure I'm saved, then I'm grasping for everything this world has to offer. And if I'm not sure there is an eternal reward for me, then I want to fill up this life with all I can get. And when things don't go right, I feel cheated all the more.

Sixthly, very much like the fifth one, if I have assurance of my salvation, it causes the suffering heart to endure with patience. If I have assurance, it causes the suffering heart to endure with patience. If I am undergoing suffering in my life, but I'm assured of eternal salvation, then I can endure it.

Number seven: if I have assurance, it pacifies a troubled conscience; it pacifies a troubled conscience. Even when I feel guilty, even when I feel unworthy, even when I feel sinful, and wicked, and dirty, and wretched, my conscience is comforted in the assurance of my eternal salvation. That's a great truth – that is a great truth, because Satan wants to accuse you through your conscience. But if I'm assured of my salvation, it pacifies my troubled conscience.

Number eight, and finally: if I have assurance, it removes the fear of death; if I have assurance, it removes the fear of death. If I know I'm a Christian, then I can face death in full confidence that I'll go from this life into the world to come, where Jesus Christ will greet me. But if I'm not sure I'm saved, I am frightened of death, right? What is the practical application of assurance? It makes me love and praise God; it drops joy into all my earthly duties and trials. It makes me zealous in obedience and service. It gives me victory in temptation. It makes me content, though I have little in this world. It causes the suffering heart to endure with patience. It pacifies a troubled conscience, and it removes the fear of death. Would you say that's a practical doctrine?

God didn't have to give us assurance. You remember what I told you in the first lesson? Some people say that to think you have assurance of salvation is blasphemy. What a thought. The Roman Catholic Church says that, that if you are so brash as to assume that you can know you're saved, you have blasphemed God. Those who have an Arminian view of Scripture, that says you can lose your salvation, also would say it is brash for you to assume that your salvation is eternal. But God says you can make your calling and election absolutely sure, and you never need to stumble into doubt and despair; all you have to do is pursue these virtues.

And out of the evidence of a godly life comes the confidence of eternal salvation, which provides for you all of the benefits I've listed. My prayer for you is that you will enjoy to the fullness the assurance of your salvation.

Father, thank You for this great gift of assurance. May we press it to our hearts, embrace it, pursue it, that we might enjoy it, that we might praise You and love You, because we know You love us and have saved us; that we might experience joy in all our earthly duties and trials; that we might be zealous to obey and serve the One who truly saved us; that we might have victory in temptation, because we know that You've given us power and the promise of heaven, and we can never ultimately lose.

That we might be content, though we have little in this world, because we know we have much in the world to come. That we might suffer patiently; that we might not allow our troubled conscience to accuse us, because we know we belong to You; that we might never fear death. Lord, that's the way we want to live, in order that we might be useful and fruitful for You. Father, we know this: that if we know our salvation and we are confident, we will not be deceived by the enemy and His representatives, the false teachers, who would make us doubt the truth of Christ's salvation. Give us that true knowledge as we pursue these holy things, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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