

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 18.-*Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation.*

III. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true beleever may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it¹: yet, being inabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary meanes, attain thereunto². And therefore it is the duty of every one, to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure³; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the holy Ghost, in love and thankfullnes to God, and in strength and chearfullnes in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance⁴: so farre is it, from inclining men to loosenesse⁵.

Question 1.—*Does this infallible assurance belong to the essence of faith?*

Answer.—No. Acts 16:31; Rev. 22:17; John 6:37. That this infallible assurance is not of the essence of saving faith is affirmed over and over again in our Standards, and is true. Assurance, in one degree or another of it, is of the essence of faith, because just in proportion to the strength of our faith is our assurance of the truth of that which we believe; but since true faith exists in very various degrees of strength, and since its exercises are sometimes intermitted, it follows that the assurance which accompanies true faith is not always a *full* assurance. (*Conf. Faith*, ch. 14., s. 3; *Lar. Cat.*, q. 81.)

Besides this, the phrase full or “infallible assurance,” in this chapter, does not relate to the certainty of our faith or trust as to the truth of the object upon which the faith rests—that is, the divine promise of salvation in Christ—but to the certainty of our hope or belief as to our own personal relation to Christ and eternal salvation, *cf.* 1 John 2:3. Hence it follows that while assurance, in some degree of it, does belong to the essence of all real faith in the sufficiency of Christ and the truth of the promises, it is not in any degree essential to a genuine faith that the believer should be persuaded of the truth of his own experience and the safety of his estate, *cf.* 1 John 5:2. Theologians consequently have distinguished between the assurance of faith, Heb. 10:22—that is, a strong faith as to the truth of Christ—and the assurance of hope, Heb. 6:11—that is, a certain persuasion that we are true believers, and therefore safe, 1 John 3:19. This latter is also called the assurance of sense, because it rests upon the inward sense the soul has of the reality of its own spiritual experiences, 2 Cor. 10:7. The former is an assurance that God is presently giving Christ, with his salvation to us, in the free offer and promise of the gospel; the latter is an assurance that Christ and his salvation are already ours in real possession and enjoyment, John 18:37. The first is of the essence of faith, and terminates directly upon

¹1 John 5:13; Isa. 50:10; Mark 9:24; Ps.88; Ps. 77:1-12.

²1 Cor. 2:12; 1 John 4:13; Heb. 6:11,12; Eph. 3:17-19.

³2 Pet. 1:10.

⁴Rom. 5:1,2,5; Rom. 14:17; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 1:3,4; Ps. 4:6,7; Ps. 119:32.

⁵1 John 2:1,2; Rom. 6:1,2; Tit, 2:11,12,14; 2 Cor. 7:1; Rom. 8:1,12; 1 John 3:2,3; Ps. 130:4; 1 John 1:6,7.

Christ and his promise; and hence is called the *direct* act of faith, Heb. 11:13. The latter is not of the essence of faith, but is its fruit; and is called the *reflex* act of faith, because it is drawn as an inference from the experience of the graces of the Spirit which the soul discerns when it reflects upon its own consciousness, 1 Pet. 1:20, 21. God says that whosoever believes is saved, John 3:15—that is the object of direct faith: I believe—that is the matter of conscious experience: therefore I am saved—that is the matter of inference and the essence of full assurance, 2 Tim. 1:12.

Question 2.—*May a true believer wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he is a partaker of it?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 John 5:13. Thus Antinomians err maintaining that the assurance of salvation is faith itself, and that faith is nothing else but the echo of the soul answering the Spirit, my sins are forgiven me. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the sealing of the Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance, is given to believers after they have believed, Eph. 1:13,14. 2.) Because believers may sometimes not know that they have eternal life, 1 John 5:13. And he that fears the Lord, obeying the voice of his servant, may walk in darkness, Isa. 50:10. 3.) Because if this assurance which takes away all doubting, as the Antinomians affirm, were of the essence of faith, there should not be any degrees of faith, contrary to Mark 9:24; Matt. 8:10; 15:28. 4.) Because there are examples in Scripture of the saints, such as faithful Heman, Ps. 88. And also, faithful Asaph under a very sad exercise, Ps. 77:1-12.

Question 3.—*May a true believer being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Cor. 2:12; 1 John 4:13; Heb. 6:11,12; Eph. 3:17-19. This is incumbent upon believers by the command of God, and it is necessary to their own comfort, but not to their safety.

Question 4.—*Doesthis assurance of salvation incline men to looseness?*

Answer.—No. 1 John 2:1,2; Tit. 2:11,12,14; 1 John 1:6,7. Thus do the Papists err maintaining that the doctrine of the assurance of salvation is of its own nature hurtful to true piety, and inclines men to sin and wickedness. They are confuted because: 1.) The apostle Peter argues the contrary, 1 Pet. 1:17-19. 2.) Because the apostle Paul, who was certainly persuaded of his interest in Christ, rejects and abominates that conclusion with indignation and wrath, Rom. 6:1,2. 3.) Because from the promise that God is the Father of believers, the apostle exhorts the Corinthians by consequence, to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Cor. 7:1. 4.) Because they who are in Christ, to whom there is no condemnation, and are assured of it, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, Rom. 8:1,12,38,39. 5.) Because a believer knowing God to be merciful, concludes that God ought to be feared, Ps. 130:4. 6.) Because whosoever has that hope purifies himself, 1 John 3:2,3. 7.) Because it is evident from the example of those who were persuaded of their salvation, who yet lived piously and holily, as Paul, Rom. 8:38,39 compared with 2 Cor. 11:2. Or Abraham, Gen. 17:1 compared with Rom. 4:18-20.