

Are You Assured?

Romans 8:18–39; Canons of Dort 5.9–10

Studies in the Canons of Dort #32

© 2016 Daniel R. Hyde

DOUBT is the new assurance. There was a faddish movement of churches a while back known as the Emergent Church and also the Emerging Church, and its leaders were so hip and *avant-garde*. One of its fresh faces at one point was Rob Bell, who has subsequently left his church to do spirituality shows for Oprah. In his book, *Velvet Elvis*, he asked whether our faith would fall if archeologists found the DNA of a guy named Larry, who happened to be Jesus' father. Now, Bell went on to affirm the virgin birth, but his point was that we shouldn't be so dogmatic about something that really doesn't change the way we live. Another leader was Brian McLaren, who, when asked, "What is the good news?" answered that it was better to be a Muslim peace activist than a Christian who debates theology.¹ The only assurance they preached was to doubt everything.

Can you and I have assurance that we are saved? That's the question I want to think through with you tonight. As we continue to meditate on the biblical teaching of the Christian life of perseverance in the fifth point of

¹ <http://michaelkrahn.com/blog/2008/09/21/brian-mclaren-what-is-the-gospel/>

doctrine in the Canons of Dort, we now enter a section of articles on assurance. If you turn with me in the back of your *Psalter Hymnal* you'll notice that articles 9–13 reflect upon assurance.

Its Possibility

In the first place, I want you to notice *its possibility* in article 9, which says,

Of this preservation of the elect to salvation and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers themselves **may** and **do** obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they surely believe that they are and ever will continue true and living members of the Church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

“True believers” not only “*may*” but “*do* obtain assurance” of their preservation and perseverance. Note well that its *true believers* who can have assurance. The church is a mixed assembly of people. As Paul states it in Romans 9:6, not all Israel—meaning, ethnic Israel—are Israel—meaning, truly Israelites. Not all in the church are of the church (see BC, art. 29).

It's this “assurance” that we “surely believe that [we] are and ever will continue true and living members of the Church, and...have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal” that Paul speaks of in Romans 8. **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (v. 1). That's assurance! **For I am sure that...[nothing]...will be able to separate us**

from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 38–39). That’s confidence!

“But I don’t have *that* kind of confidence! After all, Paul is an apostle.” Yes, he was, and he was assured. But he was assured by faith. And we have the same faith in the same Savior. That’s why our article speaks with the biblical phrase of assurance being “according to the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). For example, in Hebrews 5:13–14 the author contrasts spiritual babies in Christ with mature adults in Christ. Both have faith, and faith contains the element of trust, but an immature, childish believer doesn’t always exercise faith as a mature believer does.²

Assurance is a possibility for all of us although it may not be a possession yet. In fact, without this possibility of assurance I would say that you and I would go spiritually insane. As Canons 5.10 says. “And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.”

² Louis Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith: The Firm Foundation of Christian Hope* (1939; Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, reprinted 2004), 24.

Its Production

So assurance is possible. Where do we get it? Let's focus now on *its production*. Article 10 gives us the source, first, in terms of what it *is not*:

“This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God.” Why does the Canon say this? Listen to what the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 said:

If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end,—unless he have learned this by special revelation: let him be anathema (Session 6, Canons 16).

Rome says that Paul could speak as he does in Romans 8 because God gave him a special revelation that he was elect. But Paul who began saying, **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, goes on to say, **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died...who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to**

come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 31–32, 34, 35, 37, 39).

So how can you and I speak this way? Our Canon positively points us to three sources of assurance. And let me encourage you: these must be cultivated over your lifetime.

First and foremost is *God's promise*: "...but springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort" (5.10). Romans 8 is God promise to you!

Second, the *witness of the Spirit*: "...from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God" (5.10). Romans 8:16–17 says the Holy Spirit witnesses *to* our spirit through the promises of the Word and with our spirit as we believe those promises.

Third, the *good works* we do: "...and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works" (5.10). As 1 John 3 says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers...By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him (vv. 16, 19).